



REFLECTIONS

Theological Focus

Does the Bible Teach that the Earth is Flat?.....1

Theological Focus

The True Christ.....7

Scripture Applied

Lessons from Matthew 9.....13

News

News from the Work of the BRI.....16

Index to Reflections.....19

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Does the Bible Teach that the Earth is Flat?

by Kayle B. de Waal

There has been a recent resurgence in the belief that the earth is flat.¹ Television documentaries, internet posts, and entire websites are devoted to the idea.² This article examines the purported biblical evidence brought forward to support this view.³ We will provide a brief history of the idea and a brief outline of principles of interpretation, present the evidence, critically engage with it, and present our findings.

Brief Historical Background

The sixth-century Greek philosopher Pythagoras is acknowledged as the first person to contend that the earth is a globe.⁴ By the fourth century BC, a spherical Earth “became widely accepted among educated people.”⁵ How far this acceptance may have trickled down to the formally uneducated majority is uncertain. Aristotle (384–322 BC) provided evidence for the spherical shape of the earth on empirical grounds by around 330 BC. The Hellenistic world generally acknowledged that the earth was spherical in shape.⁶ Randall Younker and Richard Davidson study the primary and secondary sources related to the Babylonian, Greek and Jewish literature and conclude that none of these ancient peoples believed in a flat earth with a solid dome or vault.⁷

As history marched on, views about the shape of the earth were questioned. Daniel Boorin states, “A Europe-wide scholarly amnesia . . . afflicted the continent from AD 300 to at least 1300. During those centuries Christian faith and dogma suppressed the useful image of the world that had been so slowly, so painfully and so scrupulously drawn by ancient geographers.”⁸ However, in spite of this, the scholarly consensus is that during the high Middle Ages (twelfth to thirteenth century), “all educated people throughout Europe knew the

earth’s spherical shape and its approximate circumference.”⁹

By the time of Columbus, his fellow sailors and even his critics understood that our world is a globe.¹⁰ This had been an established fact for centuries. The popular astronomy textbook *On the Sphere of the World*, published over 250 years before Columbus sailed, contends, “That the earth, too, is round is shown thus. The . . . stars do not rise and set the same for all men everywhere but rise and set sooner for those in the east than for those in the west; and of this there is no other cause than the bulge of the Earth.”¹¹

The belief in a flat earth, however, gained serious momentum when the Flat Earth Society was established in the United States in 1956. In contemporary society, the “Flat Earth” movement has seen a recent resurgence, with Twitter and YouTube acting as incubators for this view.¹² More importantly, some Christians also believe the Bible teaches that the earth is flat because they interpret some passages of Scripture rather literally. It is to that concern that we now turn.

Principles of Interpretation

It is important to have sound principles of interpretation that emerge from Scripture itself. Here are some to consider for this study:

1. We must study the Bible in its literary context as well as in its ancient historical, religious, social and cultural context.

The Bible was not written with twenty-first-century concerns or questions in mind. The Bible was written in Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic to ancient peoples who lived in the wider Mediterranean society.

2. Since the Bible explains and interprets itself, difficult passages of Scripture must be studied in the light of clearer passages of Scripture.

The Bible is the self-revelation of God to human-kind (2 Tim 3:16). In other words, without the Bible we would not know anything about God. The Bible explains itself in relation to every teaching.

3. God's creation is the blueprint for our understanding of later passages that say anything about creation.

The biblical creation story declares the unrivalled might and incontrovertible power of God. God who is eternal, infinite, and supernatural created this world ex nihilo (Rom 4:17; Heb 11:3; Ps 90:2; Isa 44:24; 48:12–13; 45:18).¹³ Yet despite His eternity, God acts in a temporal way—in human history—through sequential acts intended to bring about His purposes.¹⁴ According to Jacques Doukhan, “the importance of creation in the Bible can be seen through the extensive and numerous references within the Hebrew Scriptures” (Exod 15:8, 17; Isa 40–55; Jer 4:23–26; 31:35–57; Ps 29:2; 95:1–6; 139:13–14; 145:15; Dan 7–8; 12).¹⁵

4. We must determine what genre we are reading in the Bible.

The genre¹⁶ of Scripture is important to understand and derive the correct meaning from Scripture. If we misunderstand the genre of a passage, we can misinterpret that passage. This can help decide whether statements in Scripture should be taken literally or as figures of speech or symbolisms.

5. We must take a God-centred perspective when we interpret the Bible.

The Bible's main (though not sole) concern is to reveal the character of the triune God. As the Bible unfolds, a distinct portrait of the Lord emerges. God remains greater than the portrait. We never learn all there is to know about God, but we do learn about God.¹⁷ This principle is important since God is the creator of the earth.

Evidence and Evaluation

The alleged biblical evidence presented for a flat earth is fourfold and includes 1) the firmament, 2) the waters and the heavens above, 3) the earth being immovable, and 4) specific texts that supposedly refer to a flat earth.¹⁸ The evidence is often simply posted on various web pages without any explanation. This article will present the evidence by placing similar ideas from different verses together, and by presenting accompanying assumptions as well as a biblical evaluation. The evaluation will draw from a range of scholarship to minimize bias.

Firmament/Vault Texts

• “And God said, ‘Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.’ So God made

the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault ‘sky.’ And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day” (Gen 1:6–8, 14).¹⁹

• “Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies” (Ps 148:4).

• “But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water” (2 Pet 3:5).

• “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in” (Isa 40:22).

• Other verses that support the notion of the heavens like a tent or canopy include Psalms 104:2–3, 19:4–5, 18:16 and 2 Samuel 22:16.

The resulting assumption of misguided interpretations of these texts is that the earth has a dome, vault, or canopy surrounding it; there are waters above the skies; and there is a circle above the earth.

Biblical Evaluation

The Hebrew word *rāqia'*, translated “firmament” or “vault,” means “expanse.” There are a number of scholars who articulate this view. Kenneth Mathews contends “that God created an expanse to create a boundary, giving structure to the upper and lower waters (Gen. 1:6–7). The expanse is the atmosphere that distinguishes the surface waters of the earth (i.e. the waters below) from the atmospheric waters or clouds (i.e. the waters above).”²⁰ The expanse is also the place where the sun and moon are placed (Gen 1:15, 17) and the birds fly (Gen 1:20). In a similar vein, Hugh Ross claims that the “expanse” in Genesis 1:6–8 refers to the troposphere and the “waters above” are water vapour. He contends that “God's ‘separation’ of the water accurately describes the formation of the troposphere, the atmospheric layer just above the ocean where clouds form and humidity resides.”²¹ Younker and Davidson reach the same conclusion when they state that the water above the expanse in Genesis 1:7 refers to clouds.²²

Importantly, the term *rāqia'* is given a name in Genesis 1:8—*šamayim* (“sky”).²³ The Hebrew word *šamayim* can be translated in English as “heaven” and as “sky.” But here the meaning “sky” is intended because of the context.²⁴ Later uses of the term *rāqia'* in the Old Testament provide no suggestion that the sky is a solid dome.²⁵ It is argued by some that the Hebrews believed there were literal windows or doors in the firmament. But a careful study of Scripture can help us interpret Scripture. Psalm 78:23 can assist us in understanding Psalm 148:4 as it refers to “windows” and “heaven.” Psalm 78:23 reads, “Yet He commanded the clouds [*šēhāqīm*] above and opened the doors of heaven.” The term “the doors of heaven” is explicitly

associated with clouds by means of poetic synonymous parallelism. Old Testament scholars Keil and Delitzsch acknowledge that in Hebrew thought “according to the Old Testament representation, whenever it rains heavily, the doors or windows of heaven are opened.”²⁶ Thus this term does not describe literal windows in heaven, but is used in a poetic, figurative way to express that it was heavily raining from the clouds. No wonder Van Gemeren states, matter of factly, that the waters above the heavens in Psalm 148:4 are various forms of precipitation.²⁷

In 2 Peter 3:5 Peter states that the heretics intentionally failed to remember that the heavens came into existence by the Word of God. Peter is alluding to Genesis 1:6–10 with the phrase “out of water and by water” (Gk. *ex hydatos kai di’ hydatos*). God separated the water from the land, so the first part of the phrase “out of water” is straightforward. The phrase “and by water” is more difficult. It refers, in all likelihood, to the fact that the water was the means by which the earth appeared. In other words, as the water receded the earth appeared.²⁸

In relation to Isaiah 40:22, the word “circle” is the Hebrew word *hûg* (חוג). The same word is used to refer to both a circle and the horizon in Job 22:14 and Proverbs 8:27.²⁹ Other texts like Isaiah 66:1, 1 Kings 8:39, and Psalm 2:4 teach that God abides in the heavens (*hûg*).³⁰ For example, Isaiah 66:1 reads, “This is what the LORD says: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?” We must read all the Bible verses on a matter to discern the divine mind and learn what truth is. After consulting the other texts, we learn that *hûg*, which refers to the circle above the earth in Isaiah 40:22, also refers to the heavens as horizon in a range of other texts. Therefore, Psalms 104:2–3, 19:4–5, 18:16, and 2 Samuel 22:16 must be understood figuratively. Just as the sun is not a bridegroom coming out of his chamber (Ps 19:5), so there is no literal tent around the earth.

In sum, the cumulative evidence from our study of these four verses informs us that the Bible does not teach that the earth has a dome or vault around it. Rather, the Bible teaches that there is an expanse in which the clouds and the sun and moon are placed (Gen 1:15, 17) and the birds fly (Gen 1:20). There are no literal windows or doors in the expanse. Rather, the open windows or doors refer to raining, when the clouds “release” rain.

Foundation Texts

- “In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands” (Ps 102:25; see also 104:2; 93:1).
- “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S, and he hath set the world upon them” (1 Sam 2:8, KJV).

- “Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together (Isa 48:13; see also Zech 12:1).

The resulting assumption of misguided interpretations of these texts is that the earth has a foundation and therefore is flat, and that there are pillars upholding the earth.

Biblical Evaluation

The concept of “foundation” points to God’s establishment of the earth (Ps 78:69; 104:5; 119:90; 148:6).³¹ This becomes clearer when we see the parallelism in Psalm 78:69, which reads, “He built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth that he established forever.” It refers “pictorially to the firmness and stability of God’s creation.”³² The notion of foundation or establishment refers, therefore, to God’s unchangeable control over everything, good and bad, and hence God’s uniqueness (Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10; 48:12).³³ By carefully comparing Scripture with Scripture, we can move away from a literalistic reading of the idea of “foundation.”

The “pillars of the earth” are mentioned in 1 Samuel 2:8. This expression must also be understood in its wider biblical context, and not taken literally.³⁴ To help us better understand this verse, let us look at Job 26:7, which reads, “He stretches out the north over empty space; He hangs the earth on nothing.” It would appear that these verses contradict each other: how can the earth rest on pillars and at the same time hang on nothing?

The context of each passage leads us to realize that the biblical authors are using figurative language when they speak about the “pillars of the earth.” Hannah speaks the words of 1 Samuel 2:8 during a prayer, after dedicating her son Samuel to the Lord. Job speaks the words of Job 26:7 while talking with his friends about man’s weakness in light of God’s supreme power. This sort of poetic imagery—namely, pillars and foundations—is commonly used in Scripture to describe how God upholds and maintains the world. Douglas Stuart and Gordon Fee remind us that wisdom literature, which is what Job and the Psalms are classified as, is often misunderstood because of the use of figurative language.³⁵

For example, consider what the Lord says to Job: “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone?” (Job 38:4–6). The idea that the ancient Hebrews and Mesopotamians believed in a simplistic four-cornered earth has been disproven by the discovery of a Mesopotamian tablet showing that the four “corners” actually refer to the four cardinal directions within the circle of the earth.³⁶ In Isaiah 11:12 and Ezekiel 7:2, the two key Hebrew phrases that describe the corners of the earth literally speak about “four wings” (*kān·pôl’*). It would be a

mistake to assume that four literal ninety-degree angled corners are intended. When the ancient Hebrews wanted to describe an object with literal ninety-degree angled corners, such as the corners of a house, the corner of a street, or the corners of an altar, the common term employed was *pinnah* (“corner”). God uses the figurative language of foundations and a cornerstone to convey something about His person—He is the mighty Creator. In the same way, animals do not talk and laugh, yet God also tells Job that the horse “laughs at fear” (Job 39:22, ESV).

When we interpret Scripture, we strive to find the author’s intended meaning. Seeking to understand what genre of literature is being used is also very important. Just as we use figurative language today, so also the writers of Scripture often used figures of speech—especially in the wisdom literature. The easier texts that introduced this section point to the foundation as God’s establishment of the earth and must be used to interpret difficult texts like 1 Samuel 2:8.

Immovable Texts

- “And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hastened not to go down about a whole day” (Josh 10:13).
- “Fear before him, all the earth: the world also shall be stable, that it be not moved (1 Chr 16:30, KJV).

The resulting assumption of misguided interpretations of these texts is that the earth is immovable.

Biblical Evaluation

As with other biblical passages, we are concerned with finding the author’s intention as we study the text—rather than reading our ideas and presuppositions into the text. Meaning is defined by the text. The principles outlined at the beginning of this article will help us engage in this task. The God-centred principle of Scripture means that we approach the text as believers. The text points to the activity of God—His divine, supernatural activity in history.

Joshua 10:13 is sometimes listed without explanation, to posit an earth-centred model of the universe. The text does not state that the sun is moving around the earth. Oftentimes Scripture portrays natural events from the perspective of the observer, but this does not mean that this perspective reflects every aspect of reality—it only tells us what we realize with our senses, without using other tools of investigation. The sun having stood still and the dial on the sun clock not moving does not necessarily mean that the sun circles around the earth. It seems as if the author of this text is not so much fixated on our contemporary concerns—the sun standing still or the moon stopping—but rather on the fact that God answered Joshua’s prayer (Josh 10:14).³⁷ The lengthening of the day provided the extra time for Israelite soldiers to destroy their enemies. The miracle demonstrated the

power of Yahweh over and against the Canaanite gods Baal and Ashtoreth. These sun and moon gods were subservient to Yahweh and His servant’s command.³⁸

Our human perspective limits God’s power and ability. We seek naturalistic explanations and scientific evidence. Job affirms that God’s “wisdom is profound, his power vast. He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted” (Job 9:4, 10). The truth is we cannot use natural reason to explain Joshua 10:13–14. If we could, it would cease to be a miracle. We cannot explain how God performed the miracle of Joshua’s long day any more than we can explain how Jesus called Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38–44) or walked on the Sea of Galilee (Matt 14:22–33). The inexplicable nature of these events is what makes them miracles.³⁹

Literal Flat Earth Texts

- “And upon Elam will I bring the four winds from the four quarters of heaven, and will scatter them toward all those winds; and there shall be no nation whither the outcasts of Elam shall not come” (Jer 49:36, KJV).
- “Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says to the land of Israel: “The end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land!”” (Ezek 7:2).
- “And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree” (Rev 7:1; 20:8).

The resulting assumption of misguided interpretations of these texts is that the four corners of the earth indicate that the earth is flat.

Biblical Evaluation

The phrase “the four corners of the land” was a common phrase in the ancient world, just as the phrase “the four points of the compass” is today.⁴⁰ In regards to the phrase in Ezekiel 7:2, it simply refers to Israel (see Ezek 7:1). The phrase in Revelation 7:1 and Jeremiah 49:36 is a metaphorical expression that geographically refers to the whole earth. The Greek word for “corners” in Revelation 7:1 is *gonia*, which means “angle” or “division.” It is more closely related to the modern divisions known as quadrants. It does not imply any shape or form of the earth.⁴² James Holding notes that the Hebrew word most often translated “earth” in the Old Testament is *’erets*, which is used to refer to the earth but also designates some specific nation or territory, like the “land of Havilah” (Gen 2:11), or it refers to a defined plot of land, like the one purchased by Abraham (Gen 23:15).⁴³ Moreover, those who believe in a flat earth claim that there are no verses in the Bible teaching that the earth is a round spinning ball orbiting the sun. The silence of the Bible does not prove or disprove this.

Conclusion

This article has examined the texts used by those who believe the earth is flat to support their claim. It has also examined the notion that there are pillars under the earth, that there is a vault or dome around the earth, and that the earth is immovable. After an examination of the biblical texts, it is our conclusion that the Bible does not teach that the earth is flat, or that it has a literal vault or dome, or that there are pillars under the earth. The claims for a “flat earth” are made more on presupposition than responsible exegesis. The internet sites that use these texts as evidence often provide no explanation for them. Further, and with all due respect to the bloggers who promote the “flat earth” view, they use these texts out of context, without a contextual reading. They take these texts literally, based on faulty assumptions and with a predetermined outcome in mind. False assumptions lead to false conclusions; even if based on a range of texts, they will not lead to biblical truth. We cannot take texts, no matter how many, out of context to make an apologetic case for an idea or doctrine. This leads to faulty doctrine. Biblical truth must be grounded in the clear, consistent teaching of Scripture that takes seriously the historical, literary, cultural, and social context. Each text must be considered in its context. We must also consider the genre of the passage, as this determines how we read and make meaning from the text.

One of the assumptions that some make is that the ancient Hebrew people were indebted to other ancient peoples in Mesopotamia for their worldview, and therefore, texts that refer to a “flat earth,” a “dome/vault around the earth,” and “pillars” holding up the earth reflect ancient Hebrew views as well. Based on our study, this view is untenable. Herman Bavinck contends that “the creation stories in Genesis and that of Babylon are very different on all points.”⁴⁴ Gordon Wenham declares that “though Genesis shares many of the theological presuppositions of the ancient world, most of the stories found in these chapters are best read as presenting an alternative world-view to those generally accepted in the ancient Near East.”⁴⁵

Moses, therefore, conveys an alternative worldview based on God’s revelation, which at several points is at odds with the ancient worldview of the ancient Near East.⁴⁶ For example, humans are an afterthought in ancient Near Eastern texts, while in Scripture humans are the pinnacle of God’s creative power.⁴⁷ The ancient Hebrew culture was not superior to other cultures; rather, Yahweh simply chose to reveal Himself to this people to be a light to the surrounding nations (Gen 12:1–3).

Truth is grounded in a deeper revelation of God and His great redeeming love (John 3:16; 1 John 4:8). A God-centred contextual reading of Scripture actually points to God’s indescribable power and sovereign control of the earth. The creation event and what is described there provides a framework for our appropriation of later texts (Job 38:8–11; Ps 104:5–9).⁴⁸ For Israel, and for us, the God of creation is the God of the journey of life with all its joys and perplexities. In the

ancient world there was no divide between the supernatural and the natural. God was actively involved in every minute detail of the world. That is something we need in our contemporary world.⁴⁹



Kayle B. de Waal, Ph.D.
Postgraduate Course Convenor
Avondale University College
in New South Wales, Australia.

¹ Christine Garwood, *Flat Earth: The History of an Infamous Idea* (London: Macmillan, 2007) and Eric Dubay, *The Flat-Earth Conspiracy* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2008).

² For some samples of how flat-earth representatives conceive the shape of the earth, see “Maps,” The Flat Earth Society, <https://theflatearthsociety.org/home/index.php/featured/maps> (accessed December 16, 2019).

³ The flat earth theory is often promoted by a very literalistic interpretation of certain biblical passages. For some resources that try to respond to the flat earth theory on a scientific level, see Robert Carter and Jonathan Sarfati, “A Flat Earth, and Other Nonsense,” Creation Ministries International, last modified December 26, 2019, <https://creation.com/refuting-flat-earth> (accessed December 16, 2019) and Nikk Effingham, “How to Reason with Flat Earthers (It May Not Help Though),” April 25, 2018, The Conversation, <https://theconversation.com/how-to-reason-with-flat-earthers-it-may-not-help-though-95160> (accessed December 16, 2019).

⁴ Garwood, *Flat Earth*, 19–20.

⁵ Ibid. See also Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, Institutional and Intellectual Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Grant, *Physical Sciences in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Grant, *Much Ado About Nothing: Theories of Space and Vacuum from the Middle Ages to the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Grant, *God and Reason in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Grant, *Science and Religion, 400 B.C. to A.D. 1550: From Aristotle to Copernicus* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004; Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2006); and Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy from the Ancient World to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶ See “Greek Evidence for the Earth’s Shape and Spin,” Institute of Physics, <http://practicalphysics.org/greek-evidence-earths-shape-and-spin.html> (accessed March 12, 2018).

⁷ Randall W. Younker and Richard M. Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome: Another Look at the Hebrew עֲרָבָה (‘raqia’),” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 49, no. 1 (2011): 1–25.

⁸ Daniel Boorin, *The Discoverers* (New York: Random House, 1983), 100–101.

⁹ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Inventing the Flat Earth: Columbus and the Modern Historians* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 2; David Lindberg, *Science in the Middle Ages*, *The Chicago History of Science and Medicine* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press Books, 1980). According to Stephen Jay Gould, “The Late Birth of a Flat Earth,” in *Dino-*

saar in a Haystack: Reflections in Natural History (New York: Three Rivers, 1997), 38–50, “there never was a period of ‘flat Earth darkness’ among scholars (regardless of how the public at large may have conceptualized our planet both then and now). Greek knowledge of sphericity never faded, and all major medieval scholars accepted the Earth’s roundness as an established fact of cosmology.” Historians of science David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, “Beyond War and Peace: A Reappraisal of the Encounter between Christianity and Science,” *Church History* 55 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 338–354, point out that “there was scarcely a Christian scholar of the Middle Ages who did not acknowledge [Earth’s] sphericity and even know its approximate circumference.” The depiction of the earth as a globe can also be seen in the Globus Cruciger (the cross-bearing orb) that depicts the earth as a globus. As early as AD 215, a coin with the Roman Antoninianus Carinus shows him holding pilum and globe in his hands. Similar depictions are well known from other Roman and European emperors. See the images in “Globus Cruciger,” Wikimedia Commons, last updated September 21, 2019, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Globus_cruciger (accessed December 17, 2019) and “Globus Cruciger,” <https://www.ancient-symbols.com/symbols-directory/globus-cruciger.html> (accessed December 17, 2019).

¹⁰ Russell, *Inventing the Flat Earth*, 4–6, 15–17.

¹¹ Johannes de Sacrobosco, *Tractatus de Sphaera* (“*On the Sphere of the World*”), trans. Lynn Thorndike, (ca. early thirteenth century; translation published 1949), <http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/sphere.htm> (accessed July 1, 2019).

¹² See Matthew Dunn, “The Flat Earth Theory Has Seen a Resurgence, with People Trying to Prove Our Planet is Not a Sphere,” *News.com.au*, June 1, 2017, <http://www.news.com.au/technology/science/space/the-flat-earth-theory-has-seen-a-resurgence-with-people-trying-to-prove-our-planet-is-not-a-sphere/news-story/0bd1226fbc2e2bc819ec12733591e8c9> (accessed March 1, 2018).

¹³ See the discussion in Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 33–38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xxi, 6.

¹⁵ Jacques B. Doukhan, *Genesis*, Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary (Hagerstown, MD: Pacific Press, 2016), 39.

¹⁶ A genre is a literary type distinguished by its content, particular style, or compositional form of writing. The subject matter, structure, and style are taken into account when identifying genre. Genre is important to understand the communicative nature of texts and helps the reader understand the text’s particular intentionality.

¹⁷ See Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, (Waco, TX: Word, 1976), 2:9.

¹⁸ See “Religious References,” Flat Earth Society, <https://theflatearthsociety.org/home/index.php/featured/religious-references> (accessed December 17, 2019).

¹⁹ All biblical quotations are from the NKJV, unless otherwise indicated.

²⁰ Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 150. See also Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 62.

²¹ Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998), 34, 199, 201. See also Ross, *The Fingerprint of God* (Orange: Promise Publishing, 1989), 165–8; Ross, *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 236; John L. Wiester, *The Genesis Con-*

nection (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 202; Alan Hayward, *Creation and Evolution: Rethinking the Evidence from Science and the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1985), 179–81; and H. Donald Daae, *Bridging the Gap: The First Six Days* (Calgary: Genesis International Research, 1988), 56–68. ²² Younker and Davidson, “Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome,” 1–25.

²³ John Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *Expositor’s Bible Dictionary: Revised Edition*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 1:59. The Hebrew *šamayim* has a plural form.

²⁴ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 150.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1:53–54. See further Younker and Davidson, “Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome,” 22.

²⁷ William A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 872.

²⁸ Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2006), 270.

²⁹ Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1976), 4:247.

³⁰ Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 149.

³¹ VanGemeren, “Psalms,” 649. In the New Testament, the expression “from the foundation of the earth” refers just to the time from the creation of the earth (Matt 13:15; 25:34; Luke 11:50; Rev 13:8; 17:8). The same is true for “before the foundation” (John 17:24; Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20) and for “since the foundation . . .” (Heb 9:26).

³² Ronald F. Youngblood, “1 & 2 Samuel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 581.

³³ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 286–87.

³⁴ Ralph Klein, *1 Samuel*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 2008), 10:18.

³⁵ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 226.

³⁶ See the depiction of the tablet *BagM. Beih 2 no. 98* and the discussion of its meaning in Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 195–206.

³⁷ Various proposals have been put forward to explain this passage. For a brief overview, see the discussion in Gleason L. Archer, *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 161–162 and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Peter H. Davids, and Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 186–188.

³⁸ Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 2:226.

³⁹ Michael Youseff, *Joshua: Leading the Way Through* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2013), 150.

⁴⁰ Joan S. Morton, *Science in the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1978), 138, 141. See further Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 254.

⁴¹ See Logos Bible App, Revelation 7:1 (Accessed December 18, 2019).

⁴² Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1999), 181.

⁴³ J. Holding, “The Legendary Flat-Earth Bible,” *Christian Re-*

search Journal 36, no. 3 (2013): 1-5.

⁴⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 477.

⁴⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 1:xlvi.

⁴⁶ Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cos-

mology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): 81-102.

⁴⁷ Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 17.

⁴⁸ See further Gerald A. Klingbeil, ed., *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015).

⁴⁹ John H. Walton, *Job*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 191.

The True Christ

by Ekkehardt Mueller

Anyone who visits the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in Washington, DC, would notice the variety of depictions and statues of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She comes in different forms and shapes—with a fair complexion or with different shades of skin color, slim and tender or as a robust figure. Different cultures have received her as their own, and although she was a Near Eastern youth, she has been made an African, Asian, Caucasian, or Hispanic lady, being incorporated into these respective settings. For some people Mary is simply the wonderful and extraordinary mother of Jesus. For others she is the mother of God, a resurrected and ascended heavenly queen who intercedes for human beings and at times seems to understand the human plight better than the Son of God Himself. For still others she is even a kind of female deity in the pantheon of gods—an idealized woman.

The Human Situation

The example of Mary's adaptation to different settings and life experiences indicates that as humans we see what we want to see—what we are used to, or what we expect to encounter. We may block out what is foreign, strange, or at first sight unacceptable. In other words, our environment, our upbringing, and the ideologies and philosophies that we encounter and consciously or unconsciously embrace—in short, our respective worldviews—condition us to shape a person in such a way that he or she fits our longings, ideals, and desires. If we do not make deliberate and informed choices, we will follow these strong influences uncritically, reflect and defend them, and may never be able to attain a more objective understanding of reality.

A myopic and culturally conditioned perspective is also applied to God. Brent Laytham has published an interesting book about God with the provocative title *God Is Not . . . Religious, Nice, "One of Us," an American, a Capitalist*.¹ In this volume, readers are confronted with human fabrications of the deity. As indicated, we tend to project on God our own life with its challenges and victories, and our presuppositions.² Thus, God easily becomes something like the Great Magician—good or evil—Santa Claus, or the Superman of all supermen.

While we are created in God's image, we tend to make God into our own images—a new golden calf—disregarding the second of the Ten Commandments. It is difficult for us to let God be God, who is not only immanent but also transcendent, not only approachable but also in some sense mysterious and unintelligible for limited human beings. But God is God and must be understood—as far as He has revealed Himself—and respected as such. "We long for a nonthreatening, usable deity, one who will boost our self-esteem and our sense of wellbeing (if not our golf handicap or our stock portfolio)," writes Laytham. "Church leaders—pastors and denominational leaders alike—give us exactly what we want: the nice god, a smiling, malevolent hybrid of the Grand Inquisitor and Mickey Mouse."³

Portrayals of Jesus

Our worldview and presuppositions also determine how we see and understand Jesus. Jesus Himself raised the question of who the Son of Man is. The disciples' answer revealed that the masses understood Him basically as a prophet (Matt 16:13-14). While this was not completely wrong—He was also a prophet—it was not correct either because they missed the major point: Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God (Matt 16:16). Thus they had an insufficient and therefore false view of Him, which influenced their decisions and their lives.

Here are some contemporary voices about Jesus: Jesus "formed a political faction, was concerned with Israel alone, and spoke only of the God of Israel in typical ethnocentric fashion."⁴ Jesus was a "collectivist person." Therefore, "we can make no assumption that Jesus possesses self-knowledge."⁵ Jesus' strenuous commands of "non-resistance, love of enemies, giving to all who ask, forgiving an infinite number of times"⁶ are exhortations of wisdom sayings, not to be taken literally but to be understood as an "ethic of intention."⁷ One writer discusses the following portraits of Jesus: 1) "Jesus as Reasonable Visionary," 2) "Jesus as an Atypical Bandit," 3) "Jesus as Spirit Person," 4) "Jesus as Fatherless Son," 5) "Village Healer," 6) "Jesus as Utopianist," and 7) "Jesus as Homo Religiosus."⁸

But even if we do not subscribe to a negative critical view of Jesus that questions His incarnation, His

divine nature, His resurrection, and the truthfulness and authority of New Testament books describing Him and His message, we still may be affected by such an attitude. For instance, we may consider current scientific knowledge or popular philosophy more important than the Word of God, as the following quotation shows:

What has changed, of course, is our understanding of human nature. Science has shown human beings to be in certain important respects different from what used to be thought. . . . Human beings who can control the incidence of childbirth, mitigate the sterility of a partner in marriage, detect deformity or disability in a foetus four months before birth or, at the other extreme cause the destruction of thousands of human beings and irreparable damage in the environment by a single detonation, cannot be governed by exactly the same moral rules as were in force when none of these things was possible. . . . If our understanding and expectations of human nature have changed, so must the moral principles which we have traditionally based upon it [sic].⁹

And even if we would be careful not to go so far, we still may get it wrong with who Jesus was and still is. “We are much more powerfully influenced by the guiding images, ideas, and shifting values of the society in which we live than we even begin to suspect. And that very naturally shapes how we perceive Jesus.”¹⁰ Ellen G. White notes, “Many who suppose they are going to heaven, are blindfolded by the world.”¹¹ The bombardment by traditional and social media, pushing for the acceptance of their agendas, puts us under pressure. In the end we may think that truth and advancement of humanity is decided by certain loud voices or by the majority of society. We may become convinced these voices are correct; on the other hand, we might know they are wrong, while also being unwilling to be accused of political incorrectness or even hate by taking a biblical position.

Given the influence of society, it is quite logical that Matthew Richard presents *twelve false christs*—that is, portraits of Jesus found in various cultures and in part contradict the biblical portrayal of Christ.¹² But as previously stated, a partial understanding of Jesus and the omission of other elements of His life and teachings result in a distorted Christ. Lies or false doctrines typically contain elements of truth. Therefore, they are deceptive.

One of the examples Richard lists has to do with the pursuit of pleasure. In general, happiness can be appreciated—under the right conditions. However, the equation “what causes personal pleasure is good and what causes pain is evil” does not work and is unrealistic. It may even be dead wrong. Being happy, for instance, for having successfully robbed a bank contradicts not only God’s will

but also society’s value system. Pleasure can be wrong, and pain may help us to heal or grow, even though we do not like pain. Nevertheless, for many people the meaning of life and their ultimate goal seems to be the “pursuit of pleasure. . . . When ethical hedonism infiltrates Christianity, it sounds something like this, ‘God wants my life to be about success and happiness. As long as I do not hurt anyone, my choices are my choices.’ . . . ‘Everyone has the right to be happy without feeling guilty.’”¹³ The pleasure approach is a this-worldly approach, focusing on the well-being of people in the here and now and not taking into account the transcendent dimension. In this case, Jesus is the one to guarantee happiness and does not challenge anyone, supporting only or mainly a worldly dimension of life.¹⁴ This pleasure approach is related to what Richard calls “the Giver of Bling”—that is, the Master of Health and Wealth according to the prosperity gospel.¹⁵

In conjunction with the pleasure approach comes also the notion that personal experiences matter most. A subjective spiritual or even non-spiritual experience is taken as superseding the Word of God.¹⁶ The living Christ, who supposedly speaks to us, is understood as possibly wiping away whatever He taught before in Scripture.

Another distorted view of Jesus is that He is mainly interested in social justice. Jesus addressed the issue of justice repeatedly either by using the respective terminology or by referring to the concept. “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen . . . I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles . . . a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory” (Matt 12:18, 20).¹⁷ He challenged the scribes and Pharisees to pursue “justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matt 23:23). At the end of time, the wicked will be separated from the just (Matt 13:49), and there will be a resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14). Jesus Himself is recognized as a just/righteous man (Matt 27:19). Jesus describes His earthly ministry in the following terms, quoting from Isaiah 61:1–2: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18–19). While there is a significant social dimension to Christ’s ministry, Jesus cannot be limited to a “social justice warrior.” There is much more to the ministry of Jesus, such as providing the correct representation of God and bringing eternal salvation to humankind.

A favorite “Jesus” among some secular people and many Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, is the loving Christ. This Christ accepts everyone, loving and supporting everyone unconditionally. He does not care, or at least, does not care much about sin and truth. He does not care for biblical doctrines,¹⁸ the divine law, and a moral lifestyle. He does not call for repentance and change. He does not insist on doing the will of God or respecting the boundaries that God has set for hu-

manity in order to live in harmony with Him and each other and experience peace and joy. He is absolutely tolerant and does not judge. Such a Christ is promoted not only in the public media but also by theologians. In this case, the question is how “love” and “sin” are defined. It also seems that the pendulum has swung all the way from a misguided, legalistic theological approach in the past to a so-called “cheap grace” approach now.¹⁹

While these are just some misrepresentations of Jesus, they are enough to show how we can be influenced by society around us. We now turn to Jesus in Scripture and take a brief look at how the Gospels and Revelation present Jesus.

Jesus in Scripture

Jesus and Love

It is no secret that Jesus is overwhelmingly associated with love. So we will focus on this theme for a moment. The following incomplete list contains love terminology.

1. *Jesus loves*
 - Jesus loves the heavenly Father (John 14:31)
 - Jesus loves His friends Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and John (John 11:3, 5, 16; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20)
 - Jesus loves His disciples and the believers (John 13:1, 23–34; 15:9; Rev 1:5)
 - Jesus loves His churches (Rev 3:9, 19)
 - Jesus also loves people who do not follow Him (Mark 10:21)
2. *Jesus teaches and commands love*
 - Love toward God (Matt 6:24; 22:37; Luke 11:42)
 - Love toward Himself (Matt 10:37; John 8:42; 14:15, 21, 23–24; 21:15–17)
 - Love toward the neighbor (Matt 19:19; 22:29)
 - Love within the community of believers (John 13:34–35; 15:12, 17)
 - Love in general (Rev 2:5, 19)
 - Love toward enemies (Matt 5:43–44)
3. *Jesus proclaims God’s love*
 - God’s love toward His Son (John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 17:24, 26)
 - God’s love toward Jesus’ disciples (John 14:21; 16:27; 17:23)
 - God’s love toward the world (John 3:16)

Jesus’ love is also revealed in His interest in people as a group and as individuals—their well-being and eternal salvation (Matt 9:1–7, 18–37; Luke 19:2–9). He blessed the children (Matt 19:13–1). He associated with sinners (Luke 15:1–2). He touched the leper and healed him (Matt 8:1–3). He broke down barriers between people (Mark 7:24–30; Luke 10:30–37, John 4:7–30). He revealed to us God the Father.

Jesus and the Law

Jesus love, however, did not cause Him to be silent on the will of God as expressed in God’s law—and especially the Ten Commandments. He indicated

that He did not come to do away with the law (Matt 5:17–19 and the rest of chapter 5). At various times He pointed to the Decalogue as binding for His followers (Matt 19:16). In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7), He laid out the principles of the kingdom of God, also interpreting the law. In this case, He heightened the Ten Commandments and other moral laws, rather than downplaying them. In the conflict with rabbinic traditions He opposed human commandments (Matt 15:9) but reinforced and defended God’s law (Mark 7:8–13). For Jesus the law was not something negative to be avoided. He was clear: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). The saints will “keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (Rev 14:12). Love and law are not contradictory elements; they go hand in hand if rightly understood and practiced. “We cannot understand the assurance of Mount Calvary unless we have heard the thunder of Mount Sinai.”²⁰

Jesus and Sin

Jesus was as serious about sin as He was about the law, and it is the law that reveals sin and makes us seek salvation. One of the reasons for Jesus’ seriousness about sin is that in spite of His love we may not be saved.

In Scripture sin is first of all separation from God. Sin separates and destroys relationships. Sin is to not believe in Jesus—that is, not being committed to Him completely (John 16:9; cf. 1:11). “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am He you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Furthermore, sin is defined as transgression of the will of God, as missing the mark set by the Lord, as iniquity, and lawlessness (e.g., 1 John 3:4). It is associated with the devil (1 John 3:8), and the followers of Christ do not live a life of sin (1 John 3:6).

Sin is a serious problem. “If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell [Gk. *gehenna*]” (Matt 5:30). If people do not come out of Babylon, they will “take part in her sins” and experience her plagues (Rev 18:4). Jesus does not support or condone sin. He does not reinterpret sin. “Sin can come to be regarded in exclusively relational-therapeutic or social justice terms. This makes nonsense of sin as offensive to God apart from any this-worldly harm it causes human beings.”²¹

Jesus was not afraid to address the Pharisees and scribes and pronounce woes on them (Matt 23; Luke 11:52). In fact, He felt obligated to cleanse the temple (Mark 11:15–18). Jesus was not the “nice guy” in the sense that He tolerated everything and did not draw boundaries. He was not afraid to let the rich ruler go, although He loved him. He was not afraid to talk about sexuality and what could go wrong with it, about power and how it could be misused, about money and how it could become an idol and an oppressive tool. But still, even His harsher sayings and more forceful actions were driven by love. Jesus calls for a change of mind

and action, for not being content with the status quo. He even calls for church members who sin to be placed under church discipline if change does not take place (Matt 18:15–20). This is to be done so that they may not get lost. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17). “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Rev 3:19). Jesus loves. He loves with a love that surpasses all of our love. But His love is not a spineless love.

Fortunately, Jesus came to “save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). He “came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt 9:13). The good news is that through Jesus sins can be forgiven (Matt 9:6). We are free and saved. However, after this has happened, Jesus says, “Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you” (John 5:14). “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11). According to the New Testament, love “does not rejoice at wrongdoing (unrighteousness), but rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor 13:6). “Love is a Christian virtue that tolerates no evil while it rejoices in true goodness.”²² Sin is unacceptable. The sinner must be loved, but that does not necessarily mean that he or she is saved and can be part of the people of God.

Jesus and Judgment

Jesus’ love can also be seen in announcing God’s judgment in unambiguous terms. He wants people to be saved. Therefore, He has to speak up. This judgment may happen here and now. The final judgment will happen in the future. “I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment” (Matt 5:22). “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak” (Matt 12:36). “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?” (Matt 23:33). “Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth” (Rev 3:16; see also 2:5).

Behold, I am coming soon . . . to repay each one for what he has done. . . . Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” (Rev 22:12, 14–15).

Jesus even serves as judge (John 5:22; Rev 19:11). However, “even Jesus’ highly critical confrontations with religious leader do not fall outside his loving solidarity with all people: they were the only way he could bring home to such people the character and demands of God’s love as it impinged on their particular situation.”²³

On the other hand, there is good news. Jesus tells us that we have a choice and through faith in Him can receive everlasting life. “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God”²⁴ (John 3:18; see also

Mark 16:16). “Those who have done good [will be raised] to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29). Forgiveness of sin and avoidance of condemnation are possible. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more” (John 8:11). One scholar clarifies that “Jesus could not preach the reign of God without speaking of judgment. And that Jesus, who spoke with absolute certainty about the reign of God, also [spoke] with utter seriousness about judgment is something that . . . can no longer be doubted.”²⁵

Jesus and Salvation

There is more than this world and the seemingly important things that drive us. There is more than pleasure and temporary satisfaction here and now. There is communion with the God of love who satisfies all our deep longings for meaning, fellowship, and life in His eternal kingdom. But for salvation to be realized Jesus had to deal with our sins and the just demands of the law. Therefore, He died for us.

If Jesus would have gone the way of tolerance, he would not have gone to the cross but would have left us in our sins. . . . But because of His great love for us and His rich mercy, Jesus could not tolerate our sin. Indeed, the Son of God could not tolerate our sin, so He was compelled to the cross—in love—to do something about it.²⁶

This is the highest dimension of love. Says Jesus, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again” (John 10:17). “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). This is what Jesus did. He died for us on the cross, and this changes the believers’ outlook on life.

Jesus and Discipleship

Those who truly believe in Jesus are His disciples. Disciples love their Master. They are intrigued by His philosophy of life and His extraordinary teachings, which are the only ones that make sense—not only in the worlds untouched by sin, but even in our sinful world and our crooked societies. They have been tested by some and proven true. Disciples are intrigued by Jesus’ moral and absolutely consistent life. They are again and again surprised by His loving care for them, even here and now. They love His character and have gotten involved in His cause as His ambassadors.

But Jesus did not promise them only pleasure and no pain. Quite to the contrary! “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24). No hedonism but self-denial; no crown in this life but a cross; not acceptance, praise, and honor but persecution, betrayal by friends and rel-

atives, possibly martyrdom and hate (Luke 21:12–18)! “To take up the cross and follow Jesus meant embracing Jesus’ utterly risky vocation—to be the light of the world in a way the revolutionaries had never dreamed of. It was to follow Jesus into political danger and likely death.”²⁷

The Jesus who never challenges us, who fulfills all our wishes and looks away when we live a life of sin, is not the biblical Jesus. True followers of Him love Him more than their own lives and are willing to sacrifice what needs to be sacrificed, because they have understood Him and are no longer lords of their own lives but servants and friends of the Lord of lords and King of kings. Ellen G. White writes,

Love must be the principle of action. . . . And love will be revealed in sacrifice. . . . If we love Jesus, we shall love to live for Him, to present our thank offerings to Him, to labor for Him. . . . For His sake we shall covet pain and toil and sacrifice. We shall sympathize with His longing for the salvation of men. . . . This is the religion of Christ. Anything short of it is a deception. No mere theory of truth or profession of discipleship will save any soul. We do not belong to Christ unless we are His wholly.²⁸

A Comprehensive Picture of Jesus

We are ill-served with a truncated view of Christ. Instead of limiting Jesus to something He never was, we must accept the full picture of Him as presented in the New Testament and as briefly and partially outlined in this study. A Christ adapted to our culture and understanding of well-being, satisfaction, pleasure, and a painless life as the product and outcome of the gospel message does not serve us well. It means to serve two masters—and sitting “between two stools.” It may boost our egos but does not solve our deepest needs and longings.

Following the True Jesus

To always feel good, never to suffer disadvantages or challenges in life, to bring no sacrifices as followers of Christ but have only so-called success from a cultural perspective, does not reflect the religion of Christ. It describes a life centered on ourselves—a hedonistic attitude. True, it is easy to let our views on sexuality, marriage and divorce,²⁹ violence, termination of life, material possessions and the means to accumulate them, truthfulness, individualism versus community, tolerance, political correctness, and even the role and authority of Scripture be determined by society and culture. But we are followers of Christ as He is attested in Scripture.

To declare that Jesus is love, and therefore does not challenge us and does not care much about the divine law means to avoid to speak about judgment and sin and ultimately sanitizes Him into a culturally acceptable person who is more or less dispensable, a servant

of our lusts and pleasures. But such a Jesus misses our deep lostness. Because if God’s will is immaterial and sin is no longer sin, cross and salvation become irrelevant, and the meaning of life gets lost.

At present we run the deadly risk . . . of accommodating Jesus to the thinking of our own time and watering down his demand. . . . Jesus is rendered irrelevant when his preaching of judgment, which makes up a significant portion of the gospel tradition, is ignored and there is talk only of the loving and tender Jesus. Jesus is tamed when there is no more preaching about his sharp words against the rich. . . . Jesus is tamed when it becomes taboo to speak of his celibacy. . . . Above all, Jesus is tamed and rendered irrelevant when he is presented only as a sympathetic rabbi, a prophet mighty in word and deed, or a gifted charismatic—or as the first feminist, a radical social revolutionary or a gregarious social worker. All that conceals his true claim. In all these categories Jesus is shrunken, distorted, twisted into shape, planed smooth, disempowered, accommodated to our secret desires.³⁰

But true love does not allow all things to happen; it is not constantly silent, nor does it support whatever people have in mind. Jesus was and is love, and this love is not complacent to evil and false decisions. Jesus’ love for us took seriously our sin, takes seriously the law and judgment, and still saves us by His grace—if we allow Him to do so. The salvation experience leads to a walk with Him, following His footsteps as His disciples. Discipleship has been explained by the true Christ. It is not for us to define it.

Ekkehardt Mueller, Th.D., D.Min.
Associate Director
Biblical Research Institute



¹ D. Brent Laytham, ed., *God Is Not . . . Religious, Nice, One of Us, an American, a Capitalist* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004).

² Matthew Richard, *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? 12 False Christs* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2017), 4, defines presuppositions: “Presuppositions come from a lot of different places and circumstances such as political allegiance, emotional state, religious experience, psychological dysfunctions, physical environment, theological heritage, language, social conditioning, gender, intelligence, and culture values—to name a few. For example, if a person presupposes that good and evil are tied solely to pleasure and pain, then a person would view things in life that produce pain as evil and things that produce pleasure as good.”

³ Laytham, *God is Not*, 16–17.

⁴ Bruce J. Malina, “Social-Scientific Methods in Historical Jesus Research,” in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. W. Stegemann, B. J. Malina, and G. Theissen (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 15.

⁵ Richard L. Rohrbaugh, “Ethnocentrism and Historical Questions about Jesus,” in *Social Setting of Jesus*, 38.

⁶ A. E. Harvey, *Strenuous Commands: The Ethic of Jesus* (London: SMC, 1990), 92.

⁷ Harvey, *Strenuous Commands*, 202.

⁸ Donald Capps, *Jesus: A Psychological Biography* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2000), 7, 23, 36, 147, 165, 221, 260.

⁹ Harvey, *Strenuous Commands*, 199.

¹⁰ Gerhard Lohfink, *No Irrelevant Jesus: On Jesus and the Church Today* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 3.

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915), 350.

¹² Richard, *12 False Christs*, xxiii, calls these false portraits “the Mascot, the Option among many, the Good Teacher, the Therapist, the Giver of Bling, the National Patriot, the Social Justice Warrior, the Moral Example, the New Moses, the Mystical Friend, the Feminized, and the Teddy Bear.”

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9, notes that this false Christ “will never confront the sinful nature with God’s Ten Commandments; he will never call for repentance, and he will never talk about hell and damnation. Indeed, he will never condemn, correct, or criticize, which means that he waters down the Word of God to avoid unnecessary conflicts. He is an all-around nice guy who encourages his followers in their pursuits of pleasure and happiness.” Therefore, “a person can eat, drink, and be merry with no limitations, no guilt, and no shame. Pleasure can reign supreme” (*ibid.*, 10).

¹⁵ In this case, Jesus is perceived as a grand miracle worker who enables His followers to perform mighty signs and wonders and be blessed with prosperity, wealth, and health. Poverty is seen as a curse. Jesus is used to gain these material blessings and physical health. *Ibid.*, 76, states, “What the prosperity gospel teaching fails to realize is that sometimes, instead of solving our problems and giving us our wildest dreams, the Lord may allow our problems to remain. He may choose to have us suffer hardship for a time, even as He provides us with the power to stand. See 2 Corinthians 12:7–9. This also is the Lord’s loving care.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5–7, reports a Christian lady who had premarital sex. She felt this was a good experience. “When something is good, I just know with every fiber of my being that it is not sinful. . . . there are certain things I can no longer believe. There are certain things that I know Jesus would never support. The Jesus that I know is not like these other people’s Jesus” (*ibid.*, 5–6). The sixth commandment “she deemed . . . as repressive and wrong because it caused her to feel judged and feel emotional pain” (*ibid.*, 7).

¹⁷ All biblical quotations are from the ESV.

¹⁸ Richard, *12 False Christs*, 24, suggests, “To lose sight of Christian doctrine is to lose the pillar of our faith and summon troublesome alternatives.”

¹⁹ *Discipleship* is a book by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, considered a classic of Christian thought. One of the most quoted parts of the book deals with the distinction which Bonhoeffer makes between “cheap” and “costly” grace. According to Bonhoeffer, “cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 44.

²⁰ Richard, *12 False Christs*, 13. He also states, “A false Christ without the Law of God who speaks pleasantries into ears only perpetuates the narcissistic epidemic of self-saturated persons” (*ibid.*, 15).

²¹ David J. Hamstra, “The Christian Debate on Same-Sex Marriage and Taylor’s Immanent and Transcendent Goods: Lessons from Adventist Approaches,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 57, no. 1 (2019): 187.

²² Richard, *12 False Christs*, 27.

²³ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 144.

²⁴ Believing in Jesus, according to John, is more than mentally acknowledging that He is the Messiah. It is accepting Him as Lord and Savior and following Him as a disciple. Leon Morris, *Jesus is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 186, stresses that “faith has content.”

²⁵ Marius Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 302. He continues that “the goal his preaching is intended to achieve [is]: repentance of individuals and of the whole nation, consisting in turning to him and the resolute performance of his works. For only through that repentance is it possible to avoid the inexorably approaching judgment. We must therefore presume that from the beginning the proclamation of judgment was a fixed, and for Jesus a very important, part of his preaching” (*ibid.*, 322).

²⁶ Richard, *12 False Christs*, 27.

²⁷ N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 47.

²⁸ Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 49–50. In White, *Gospel Worker* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915), 183 she points out, “The question that Christ put to Peter was significant. He mentioned only one condition of discipleship and service. ‘Lovest thou Me?’ He said. This is the essential qualification.” Consequently, “obedience—the service and allegiance of love—is the true sign of discipleship” (White, *Steps to Christ* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1892], 60).

²⁹ E.g., Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 110, addresses this issue: “By forbidding divorce and remarriage, in appeal to the creation stories of the solidarity of husband and wife, Jesus was reinforcing the marriage bond as the essential core of the fundamental social form of the family.”

³⁰ Lohfink, *No Irrelevant Jesus*, 12, 17–18.

Lessons from Matthew 9

By Clinton Wahlen

Matthew 9 concludes the two-chapter sequence of miracle stories. The chapter begins with the healing of the paralytic, but the story is more about forgiveness than healing (Matt 9:1–8). It is followed by the call of Levi (Matt 9:9) and three parables of Jesus illustrating His kingdom-based ministry (Matt 9:12–13, 15, 16–17). These parables were given in response to two questions, the first directed to the disciples and the second directed to Jesus Himself (Matt 9:10–11, 14). Then, in quick succession, Matthew narrates the raising of a ruler’s daughter from the dead and the healing of a woman with a flow of blood (Matt 9:18–26); the giving of sight to two blind men (Matt 9:27–31); and the casting out of a demon from a man unable to speak, which leads to the charge that Jesus casts out demons by the ruler of the demons (Matt 9:32–34). The chapter closes with Jesus preaching to large crowds who are as sheep that have no shepherd, and His instructing the disciples to pray for more laborers to be sent to gather the harvest (Matt 9:35–38).

Interpretation of the Chapter

1. Verses 1–8 (Healing of the Paralytic)
 - The trip by boat from Gergesa on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum on the western shore is about six miles. The paralyzed man had to be carried to Jesus. The recognition of “their” faith may suggest that the man’s friends encouraged him to seek healing from Jesus.
 - The assurance to the man that his sins were forgiven is highly significant as indicative of Jesus’ divine claims. Some of the scribes considered this statement to constitute blasphemy because Jesus was arrogating to Himself a prerogative belonging only to God (Mark 2:7).
 - Jesus calls the scribes’ thoughts “evil” (Matt 9:4),¹ showing openly that He knows the heart. All four Gospels describe Jesus as having such knowledge that normally would be known only to God (Matt 12:25; Mark 12:15; Luke 9:46–48; John 1:48). Implied, perhaps, is that Jesus could also read the paralytic’s heart and thus be aware of this deeper need.
 - Any doubts about Jesus’ authority to forgive sins should be dispelled by His ability to heal the man, seemingly harder than for Jesus to assure him of forgiveness. The latter, though, implies a change of heart that Jesus would have been powerless to accomplish without the man’s consent.
2. Verses 9–17 (Call of Matthew and the New Wine)
 - As the Son of Man, Jesus’ authority to forgive is predicated upon His coming sacrifice on the cross and His subsequent ministry as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 9:14–15, 23; 1 John 1:9; 2:1; cf. Dan 7:13–14).
 - Throughout Matthew 8–10, the Greek word translated “power” is *exousia*, which indicates that Jesus and the disciples not only are able to heal, but have authority to do so as emissaries of the kingdom of heaven. In both word (Matt 5–7) and act (Matt 8–9), Jesus demonstrates His divine authority (cf. Matt 7:29; 28:18).
 - In the other Gospels, the tax collector called to be one of the twelve is named Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). Several people in the New Testament have more than one name (e.g., Simon Peter, John Mark) and so this apostle has traditionally been known as Levi Matthew.
 - While Matthew appears in the other listings of the twelve (Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13), only here is he called “the tax collector” (Matt 10:3). Probably, he collected customs duties for Herod Antipas on goods transported into Galilee and Perea. The reality that Rome controlled Israel’s borders and levied taxes was a sore reminder of their lost independence. Unsurprisingly, tax collectors like Matthew were despised as traitors and apostates (cf. Matt 5:46; 18:17).
 - As in many cultures, eating together in Israel was deeply significant. The Pharisees were scrupulous about eating meals in a state of ritual purity, but those in attendance would probably not care about this. The real concern, then, in Jesus’ eating with them meant that He also disregarded these traditions (Matt 15:2; cf. Mark 7:1–4).
 - Jesus, responding to why He would eat with such people, likens Himself to a physician. Placing this dialogue among the many healing miracles underscores their role of illustrating Jesus’ work of salvation in calling sinners to spiritual healing.
 - Having been acknowledged as Teacher (Matt 9:11), Jesus now addresses the Pharisees as students needing more study. He says, “Go and learn,” quoting Hosea 6:6, which prioritizes the knowledge of God and His merciful character over burnt offerings (Matt 9:13). Thus He implies that He knows God better than they do.
 - Pious Jews in the time of Jesus fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12; cf. Matt 6:16–18), and also

at other times in remembrance of the exile. But these fast days were to be turned into days of “joy and gladness” at the time of Israel’s restoration (Zech 8:19). Jesus may be alluding to this time of fulfillment in His parable of the bridegroom (cf. Jer 31:13).

- John the Baptist likens Jesus to a bridegroom and says this was to be a time of rejoicing (John 3:26–30). The feasting that Jesus took part in, as well as His reference to foreigners sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matt 8:11–12), points to the messianic banquet that God “will make for all people” (Isa 25:6).
 - The connection between the parables of the new patch and the new wine is obscured in many Bible translations. In both, Jesus contrasts the gospel of the kingdom, which is new and fresh, with the “old” Pharisaic traditions that carry no divine authority and, like old clothes, should be discarded.
 - The word *oinos* can refer to both fermented wine (Matt 27:34; Eph 5:18) and unfermented or “new” wine—that is, fresh grape juice. Jesus’ message, bringing the fulfillment of new covenant promises (Luke 22:20; cf. Jer 31:31–34), is like new wine that cannot be put in old wineskins because it cannot be received by the Pharisees whose traditions were at odds with it.
3. Verses 18–26 (Healing a Woman’s Flow of Blood and Raising a Dead Girl to Life)
 - Matthew’s account of these two miracles is forty percent shorter than Mark’s, and highlights the role of faith. The ruler’s faith is shown first by the description of his falling down at Jesus’ feet as an act of worship (Gk. *prosekynēi*). Also, Matthew begins his account after the girl has already died, and describes the ruler as confident (perhaps in view of 1 Kgs 17:17–24; 2 Kgs 4:32–37) that all Jesus needs to do is touch his daughter and “she will live” (Matt 9:18; cf. Mark 5:35–36; Luke 8:49–50).
 - Jesus’ describing the girl as “sleeping” is in harmony with death’s representation throughout the Bible (1 Kgs 2:10; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor 15:20) as a state of unconsciousness (Ps 146:4; Eccl 9:5–6, 10) from which a person can be “awakened” back to life by the power of God (e.g., Matt 27:52; John 11:11–14; 1 Cor 15:51–52).
 - Regarding the woman with a flow of blood, Matthew specifies that she touched the *hem* of Jesus’ garment (Matt 9:20). This seems to refer to the blue tassel that served as a sign of redemption, holiness, and obedience (Num 15:37–41). Her touching this symbol of redemption seems to show faith in Jesus as the Redeemer of Israel.
 - Jesus, by drawing out the woman’s testimony,
 4. Verses 27–34 (Healing Two Blind Men and a Mute Demon-Possessed Man)
 - The Greek word translated “made well” (*sōzō*) is first used in Matthew with reference to Jesus’ work of salvation (Matt 1:21). Because the woman’s malady rendered her ceremonially unclean and thereby excluded from worship in the temple and the synagogue, Jesus’ healing touch would enable her to rejoin Israel’s religious life. This effect, together with Jesus’ reference to His work as a physician for “sinners” (Matt 9:12–13), suggests these healings as parabolic of Jesus’ work of “healing”—that is, saving people from sin.
 - The title “Son of David,” by which the blind men addressed Jesus, shows their faith in Him as the messianic King of Israel (cf. its only previous occurrence in Matt 1:1 and also later in Matt 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15; 22:42). Persistence in following Him into the house is further evidence of their faith—as is their affirmative answer to the question of whether they believe, and their address of Jesus as “Lord” (Matt 9:28).
 - The wording of Jesus’ response, “According to your faith let it be to you,” recalls the language of the Genesis creation account with its frequent use of the imperative form of *ginomai* (“come into being”). The other two times that Jesus heals by using this command is at a distance, which emphasizes even more strongly the power of His word (Matt 8:13; 15:28).
 - The healing of the mute and demon-possessed man is unique to Matthew, but the charge that Jesus casts out demons by means of the ruler of the demons will be repeated (Matt 12:22–24) in connection with a story found also in Mark (3:20–22) and Luke (11:14–16). Reference to a supernatural “ruler” over the demons suggests the existence of a rival kingdom to the kingdom of heaven being proclaimed by Jesus.
 5. Verses 35–38 (Workers Needed for the Harvest)
 - The two summaries of Jesus’ work, showing it centered in preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing (Matt 4:23; 9:35), bracket the chapters that describe these two elements in detail (Matt 5–7; 8–9) and show that Jesus ministered to the whole person (spiritually, mentally, physically, and emotionally).
 - The description of Jesus having compassion on the multitudes, because they were “like sheep having no shepherd,” is similar to Moses’ plea that God appoint someone to succeed him as Israel’s leader. At God’s direction, Moses laid hands on Joshua (Num 28:17–23), who as a prophet “like” Moses prefigured Jesus (Deut

18:15–18), the New Testament “Joshua” (their names are the same in Greek; cf. Heb 4:8–11).

- Jesus prepares the disciples for their upcoming mission by directing their attention to 1) the plentiful “harvest” of those in Israel ready to follow Jesus. 2) the shortage of workers, and 3) the need to “pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest” (Matt 9:38, ESV) for additional workers.

Application of the Chapter

Important lessons contained in this chapter include:

1. It is just as important to act on our faith as it is to believe. Thus we may encourage others’ faith, just as the paralytic’s friends did. Furthermore, if we fail to act on our faith we might legitimately question the strength of our faith and even whether we, in the biblical sense, really believe at all.

2. Since Jesus already knows our thoughts, we should not hesitate to share them honestly with God in prayer and trust in His willingness

to help us be of greater usefulness in His service.

3. In light of Jesus’ gentle rebuke to the Pharisees for not knowing the Scriptures well enough, what might He say to us as pastors, teachers, or church members regarding our knowledge of God and the Bible?

4. Jesus’ ministry to the whole person is an example for Adventists to follow His method in all aspects of our labor for Him, whether in pastoral, medical, educational, or other lines.

5. Jesus encourages us not only to pray for the lost but also to pray for additional ways of reaching out to them, both as a church and as individuals.

Clinton Wahlen, Ph.D.
Associate Director
Biblical Research Institute



¹ All biblical quotations are from the ESV, unless otherwise indicated.

***No man can have the spirit and mind
of Christ without being rendered bet-
ter by it – in all relations and duties
of life.***

Ellen G. White, 4T 347

News from the Work of the BRI

In 2019 members of the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) were active in a number of Bible conferences and theological symposia around the world. While the following list of activities in no way exhaustively depicts the varied work of BRI, it nevertheless gives a little glimpse into some important activities BRI has been engaged in.

From March 13–16, 2019, members of BRI, together with other speakers from the General Conference and theologians from West Africa, gave presentations at a Bible conference at Valley View University in Ghana on the theme of ecclesiology.



Artur Stele presenting on the subject of ecclesiology at Valley View University



Kwabena Donkor, BRI, presenting on the subject of ecclesiology at Valley View University



Participants at the Bible Conference at Valley View University

From May 26–28, 2019, a member of BRI participated in the spiritual retreat for pastors of the Swedish Union in Västerårg, Sweden.

From June 19–22, 2019, members of BRI, together with other speakers from Andrews University and the Inter-European Division, gave presentations at a Bible conference at the Seminary Villa Auroa in Florence, Italy, on the subject of the Trinity.

From July 3–6, 2019, members of BRI, together with other speakers from Central-America and South America gave presentations at a Bible conference at Montemorelos University in Mexico, on the topic of the sanctuary.



This is a picture of the main SDA church on the campus of Montemorelos University

From July 31–August 4, 2019, members of BRI, together with other theologians from South America, participated and spoke at XIII Biblical-Theological South-American Symposium in Peru on the theme of “Discipleship: Theology and Praxis.”



The beautiful church at Universidad Peruana Union (UPeU)



Participants at the International Bible Conference at Rusangu University in Zambia



Participants at the XIII Biblical Theological South-American Symposium in Peru



Elias Brasil de Souza speaks at Rusangu University



Speaker at the XIII Biblical Theological South-American Symposium in Peru



Participants at the International Bible Conference at Rusangu University, Zambia

From September 10–14, 2019, members of BRI—together with other speakers from the General Conference, the Ellen G. White Estate, and various schools in Africa—spoke at the first International Bible Conference of the Southern Africa Indian Ocean Division in Zambia. The theme of the Bible conference was “Reflections on Adventist Theology and Practice in the Southern Africa Indian Ocean Division Context.” On the beautiful campus of Rusungu Adventist University in Zambia, several hundred pastors and church leaders from the various countries of the division attended plenary presentations and numerous workshops.

From October 25–26, 2019, members of BRI, together with other speakers from Loma Linda, participated in the VII Bible Conference on the Spirit of Prophecy at Montmorelos University in Mexico.



Pastors and Speakers at the VII Bible Conference on the Spirit of Prophecy at Montmorelos University



Frank Hasel speaks to Pastors at Montemorelos University



Valley View University, 2019

From November 27–30, 2019, members of BRI, together with other speakers from the Ellen G. White Estate and Korea, gave presentations at Shamyook University, South Korea, for a symposium on the Spirit of Prophecy.

Beyond the active participation in various international bible conferences and theological symposia, members of BRI participate in many Biblical Research Committees (BRC) on the division level around the world. Here, articles for the revised Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary are written by scholars from the different divisions and are discussed and approved. Several division BRCs also work on various book projects that serve specific needs in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (for instance, the BRC of the Inter-European Division recently published the book *Adventists and Military Service: Biblical, Historical, and Ethical Perspectives* [Madrid: Editorial Safeliz, 2019]; the BRC of

This list is not an exhaustive list of all the work in which members of BRI are involved. It illustrates, however, that BRI is making a valuable contribution to the world field in being a resource for the church and supporting various theological needs in different parts of the world. By aiming to promote the study and practice of Adventist theology, BRI encourages and facilitates important dialogue with the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist theological community and endeavors to foster theological and doctrinal unity in the world church.

Our happiness comes not from what is around us, but from what is within us; not from what we have, but from what we are.

Ellen G. White, ML 185

Index to *Reflections*

The first issue of *Reflections* was published in January 2003. Since then, we've published many articles.

While it's possible to use Acrobat to simultaneously search all past issues of *Reflections* for one word or phrase, some readers have asked for a formal index. From now on, you will find a pdf index at the end of each newsletter that you can download.

If you wish to search simultaneously all past issues of the newsletter for one word or phrase in

Acrobat, you must download from the BRI website <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/newsletters> all of the *Reflections* issues PDF's to one folder.

Open any issue in Acrobat, and then press Shift+Command+F (Shift+Ctrl+F on Windows). In the Search window that appears, be sure that you click the radio button that says, "All PDF Documents in," and in the dropdown menu below that, choose the folder in which you placed your *Reflections* issues.

Click here to download the Index

Reflections seeks to share information concerning doctrinal and theological developments among Adventists and to foster doctrinal and theological unity in the world church. Its intended audience is church administrators, church leaders, pastors and teachers.

Editor: Frank M. Hasel
 Production Manager: Praveen Pedapudi
 Editorial Committee:
 Elias Brasil de Souza
 Kwabena Donkor
 Ekkehardt Mueller
 Clinton Wahlen

Manuscript Policy

Articles important for Adventist theology are written at the invitation of BRI and should be sent by email attachment to the editor at brinewsletter@gc.adventist.org

Permissions

Material may be used for preaching and public presentations and may be reprinted by official entities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church if the Biblical Research Institute is indicated as the source. Translated articles should be reviewed by the appropriate Biblical Research Committee prior to publication.

Copyright © 2019
 Biblical Research Institute
 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®
 12501 Old Columbia Pike
 Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA
 Phone: 301.680.6790
 Fax: 301.680.6788
adventistbiblicalresearch.org