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Music in the Presence of a Holy God: Principles for Religious Music based on the Biblical Concept of Holiness

By Carlos A. Steger

It is no secret that music—particularly religious music—is one of the most debated topics in Christianity. Faced with such a complex and difficult-to-resolve issue, it is essential to study Scripture and Ellen G. White’s writings to look for guiding principles to determine how our worship music should be.

The topic is increasingly relevant as we approach the final crisis of this world’s history. According to Revelation 13 and 14, worship will be the focal point that will define every human being’s destiny.¹ We will have to choose between worshipping the beast and its image or worshipping God. In addition, worshipping the true God is as important as worshipping Him the right way.² Could it be that even with the best intentions, by using inappropriate music many Christians are worshipping the true God but in the wrong way?

The Bible does not provide a definition of worship, but rather gives abundant examples of people who worshipped God and reports the reasons why they did so. Based on this information, we may define worship as “the attitude of humility, reverence, honor, devotion, and adoration”³ of created beings toward their Creator, in recognition of His attributes (Ps 99:9; Rev 15:4) and His works of creation (Rev 4:10; 14:7), redemption (2 Kgs 17:36; Rev 5:9), and providence (Pss 59:16; 118:21). This inner disposition is specifically manifested

through actions such as bowing and kneeling before God (Exod 4:31; Ps 95:6) and singing praises to the Lord (Pss 28:7; 146:2). True worship leads believers to a life of joyful and grateful obedience to God (Deut 10:12; 1 Sam 15:22) and loving service to others (Isa 58:6–10). Worship is a personal experience, but it is also a family and community activity.

Our understanding of God determines how we approach and worship Him.⁴ Our adoration is affected by who God is to us and what we believe about His attributes. “The quality of worship in every religion is determined by the worshippers’ conception of the nature of their deity.”⁵ Therefore, it is essential to know who God is according to the Bible. Of all the divine attributes recorded in Scripture, God’s holiness stands out as essential to the divine nature. Hence, without denying the importance of other divine attributes for this topic, we will focus on God’s holiness and its implications for worship and religious music, both in a private dimension as well as in family and church settings, whether instrumental, vocal, or a combination of both.

God’s Holiness

The Bible describes different instances in which God was worshipped by both humans and angels. After the fall of Adam and Eve, adoration rendered by human beings was tainted because sin had affected us all.

Not so the angels, who have not fallen into sin. They constantly praise God in heaven with a pure and holy heart. Therefore, let us examine the inspired account of the worship angels offer God in order to understand pure worship to God and find guiding principles for worship and religious music.

One of the most instructive passages about celestial adoration is Isaiah 6,⁶ “the biblical key text on worship.”⁷ Early in his ministry, the prophet went to the temple to pray, and there he had a vision of the worship that angels render to God in heaven. He saw the Lord sitting on His throne, surrounded by seraphim chanting, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isa 6:3).⁸

Holiness is a “very basic and important dimension of God’s nature. God’s holiness is emphasized throughout the whole Bible, but especially in the Old Testament depictions. Its importance is seen in both the number of times it is referred to and the emphasis with which it is taught.”⁹ The fact that God is holy means that He is morally pure, completely free from any selfishness and pride, the opposite of any wickedness or evil. “There is no attribute so essential to God as this. It is for his holiness, more than for anything else, that his creatures worship Him.”¹⁰ In Isaiah’s vision, the seraphim repeat the holiness of God three times. While there are a few other Old Testament passages in which a word is repeated three times for emphasis,¹¹ “none of all the divine attributes is so celebrated in Scripture as this is. God’s power was spoken twice (Ps. 62:11), but His holiness thrice.”¹² In this Sanctus, the seraphim proclaim God’s “essential being. God is by definition ‘holy.’ . . . ‘Holy’ denotes God’s innermost nature.”¹³

This scene influenced Isaiah so deeply that he never forgot it. “Throughout his long and arduous mission he carried with him the memory of this vision.”¹⁴ The entire book of Isaiah shows evidences of the impression made by this vision. “The favourite name of God in the mouth of the prophet viz., ‘the Holy One of Israel’ (kedosh Yisrael), is the echo of this seraphic Sanctus.”¹⁵ This name (including minor variants) occurs thirty times in the book of Isaiah.¹⁶

The triple repetition of the holiness of God at the beginning of the seraphim’s song is the foundation for the worship they offer to God. The same reiteration is seen in the book of Revelation, which presents a very similar vision of heavenly adoration. John saw four living creatures around the throne of God, each having six wings, “saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’” (Rev 4:8). As in the book of Isaiah, by a threefold repetition, “God’s holiness is stressed as a foundational divine quality.”¹⁷ “This hymn is the first not only of the five sung by the heavenly choirs in chapters 4–5 but also of a number of others in Revelation,”¹⁸ which are built upon the underlying principle of God’s holiness.

God’s Holiness and His People

The fact that God is holy requires that His children be holy too. The problem is that instead of being holy,

we are sinners by nature—unable to cleanse ourselves of our defilement and inclined to evil. As soon as we realize that God is holy, we feel utterly unworthy of being in His presence because of our own shameful sinfulness. This is what happened to Isaiah (Isa 6:5), Peter (Luke 5:8), and others in the Bible when they saw the Lord.

However, sincere and humble acknowledgement of our sinfulness allows God’s grace to intervene. One of the seraphim came to Isaiah with a live coal taken from the altar, touched his mouth with it, and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged” (Isa 6:7). By God’s grace, Isaiah was instantly forgiven and stood in the presence of the Lord as if he had never sinned. Now he was ready to obey and serve Him (Isa 6:8).

When we repent from our sins and confess them to God, He accepts us as His children, forgives our sins, and declares us holy—that is, He sets us apart for Him (see 1 Cor 1:2; 6:11; Heb 10:10). What God did for us at that moment is “a completed action in the past which has continuing results in the present.”¹⁹ This new status enables us, through faith in Him and by His grace, to grow in the process of sanctification, which is the work “of a lifetime”²⁰ (Rom 6:19, 22; 1 Thess 4:3).²¹

Israel’s experience is a good example of these two dimensions of sanctification: 1) being set apart as God’s holy people and 2) growth in holiness. After bringing them out of slavery, God set them apart from all the nations to be “a special treasure” to Him, “a holy nation” (Exod 19:5–6). In an instantaneous act, He graciously shared His holiness with them. After that, He gave them the Ten Commandments and patiently instructed them so that they could become like Him in character. Their new relationship with God enabled them to grow in the process of sanctification. “For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:45). In other words, now that you are My children, I want you to become like Me. Echoing this ideal, Paul exhorts us to “pursue . . . holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14; see also 1 Thess 3:13). “The whole of the Jewish and Christian understandings of God and his relationship to his people is summed up in the command, ‘You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy’ (Lev. 19:2; cf. 1 Pet. 1:15).”²²

A holy God, who graciously grants a holy status to His children and commands them to grow in moral holiness throughout their lives, also requires that everything related to worship be holy, be it in private life, at home, or in the church.

God’s Holiness and Worship

Wherever God reveals Himself to human beings, His presence sanctifies the place and demands reverence from them. When Moses approached the burning bush, the Lord said to him, “Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground” (Exod 3:5).

The need for holiness is particularly emphasized in the sanctuary and its service. The high priest was to bear

a crown on his forehead with the inscription “Holiness to the Lord” (Exod 28:36; 39:30). “Everything connected with the apparel and deportment of the priests was to be such as to impress the beholder with a sense of the holiness of God, the sacredness of His worship, and the purity required of those who came into His presence.”²³ The Lord declares, “By those who come near me I must be regarded as holy” (Lev 10:3).

Unfortunately, Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, disregarded God’s holiness. For “each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord” (Lev 10:1). This was “strange fire” that they had kindled, not fire taken from the altar. This autonomous and rebellious action was so serious that “fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord” (Lev 10:2). After this incident, God gave further instructions to Aaron and the priests so that they “may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean” (Lev 10:10). Israel failed to maintain this distinction and in the end was taken into Babylonian exile, which came upon them because the priests “have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean” (Ezek 22:26). It was God’s plan that the priests would teach the people “the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean” (Ezek 44:23).

“To Jewish piety the ultimate human dichotomy is not that of mind and matter but that of the sacred and the profane.”²⁴ In the Bible, “sharp lines divide the sacred and profane.”²⁵ The apostle Paul exhorts believers to keep the same distinction between the sacred and the profane that we find in the Old Testament.

What agreement has the temple of God with idols? . . . Therefore “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.” . . . Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor 6:14–7:1)

Holiness should characterize our lives, our worship, and our music. In fact, “music is acceptable to God only when the heart is sanctified and made soft and holy.”²⁶

Every Christian knows that we have an inner conflict between our old self and our new life in Christ, and Scripture exhorts us to die to sin every day and follow the Lord (Luke 9:23; Col 3:1–3). This includes the need to be very careful in selecting the music we listen to, sing, or perform, knowing that “music is not morally and spiritually neutral.”²⁷ Sadly, it has been observed that Christians “frequently dishonor God and their faith by their frivolous conversation and their choice of music. Sacred music is not congenial to their taste.”²⁸ Instead, “frivolous songs and the popular sheet music of the day seem congenial to their taste.”²⁹ This worldly

kind of music “excites, but does not impart that strength and courage which the Christian can find only at the throne of grace.”³⁰ “It prepares the participants for unholy thought and action.”³¹

God’s Holiness and the Music of Angels

The biblical reports of the worship rendered by angels to God in heaven “are the best resource to study as to what pleases God in music. They praise God continually and glorify Him through song.”³² In particular, the song offered by the seraphim choir (Isa 6:3; see also Rev 4:8) is a model we should follow when making music in the Lord’s presence. “Music forms a part of God’s worship in the courts above, and we should endeavor, in our songs of praise, to approach as nearly as possible to the harmony of the heavenly choirs.”³³

The song of the seraphim teaches us that worship music must be God-centered. The lyrics of the songs, the music of the songs, the musicians’ attitude, their appearance and performance, and the way the music is conducted should all focus on God. It is true that believers worship God with all the “baggage” of their personal experience, needs and problems, worries and accomplishments, joys and sorrows. Nevertheless, even in presenting them to the Lord through music, they do so by fixing their attention on Him, not on their own experiences.

In addition, the angels’ canticle of adoration reveals that the acknowledgement of God’s holiness is at the foundation of true worship and religious music. A conscious sense of the holiness of the Lord should permeate all worship music. “Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness” (Ps 30:4, KJV).

The music produced by the seraphim reveals their intense devotion and reverence to God. “Their songs of praise resounded in deep, earnest notes of adoration.”³⁴ Isaiah reports that one seraphim “cried” or “called out” to another (Isa 6:3), implying that they sing “with zeal and fervency; . . . alternately, but in concert, and without the least jarring voice to interrupt the harmony.”³⁵ Their “triumphant song of praise” is, at the same time, a “melodious chant.”³⁶ Heaven is full of “joyful, happy songs of praise to God and His dear Son.”³⁷ Yet, the angels’ singing “is soft and melodious. . . . It is not forced and strained.”³⁸

The seraphim’s attitude as they sing praises to God is highly instructive. “The seraphs are bright creatures, for the word means ‘burning ones,’”³⁹ and they hold a unique position around God’s throne. However, they do not see those privileges as a reason to be proud. On the contrary, they cover their faces with two wings because they feel unworthy to look at the holy God, and they cover their feet with an additional set of wings showing great humility and solemn reverence before God. “Their own perfection and beauty are not displayed in the presence and glory of their Lord.”⁴⁰ “In spite of their remarkable beauty, gorgeous voices, and many other gifts, the angels appear amazingly humble.”⁴¹ Their faces are “filled with the joy of a perfect

performance—yet no one seems to want praise!”⁴² We can imagine them bowing after singing, “not toward any intended audience, but to the great God of the universe”⁴³—not as if they expect to receive a round of applause because of their brilliant performance, but as humbly praising the extraordinary God they love. They

are so filled with reverential awe in beholding the glory of God that they do not for an instant look upon themselves with self-complacency, or in admiration of themselves or one another. Their praise and glory are for the Lord of Hosts. . . . They are fully satisfied to glorify God; and in His presence, beneath His smile of approbation, they wish for nothing more.⁴⁴

They enjoy singing with deep reverence, great humility, and steadfast love to God.

God’s Holiness and Religious Music

From our understanding of the biblical concept of God’s holiness and from the writings of Ellen G. White, specific principles emerge for religious music, at a personal and corporate level.

The need to “distinguish between holy and unholy” (Lev 10:10) in music today is more relevant than ever before, because “today’s society is characterized by a great rift between the secular and the sacred. Daily life is no more permeated by the sacred.”⁴⁵ Hence, it is even more necessary to avoid the use of profane styles in religious music. In fact, as Christ’s followers in any place and circumstance, we should always avoid music that conveys emotions and values contrary to God’s will. However, this is more crucial when it comes to worship music. All music inherently produces in listeners an association of ideas and experiences. “Musical styles come with a cultural package. They are often associated with places, people, and actions.”⁴⁶ We associate certain types of music with specific environments, attitudes, and ways of life. Therefore, “sacred music should not evoke secular associations or invite conformity to worldly behavioral patterns of thinking or acting.”⁴⁷

In the case of vocal music, biblically sound lyrics are not enough for a song to be appropriate to worship the Lord. The character of the music itself has “to serve a holy purpose, to lift the thoughts to that which is pure, noble, and elevating, and to awaken in the soul devotion and gratitude to God.”⁴⁸ However, not all music styles fulfill this purpose. Musical styles were created to achieve definite purposes in specific environments. Therefore, contrary to a prevalent idea, music style is not a neutral carrier for the Christian message. “A vast body of musicological scholarship has shown that, rather than being a blank slate for injecting propositional content through sung lyrics, musical style itself communicates a specific set of ideas and values to enculturated listeners.”⁴⁹ In fact, “music styles are religious-value laden—they are veritable embodiments of beliefs about reality.”⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the combination of religious words

with profane music styles is increasingly heard. “Unfortunately, much of today’s contemporary Christian music relies on the same flavor of background beat, instrumentation, arranging and sound as the music of the world. Yet somehow the religious lyrics are expected to turn this worldly music into a sacred song.”⁵¹ It does not happen this way. Scripture teaches that holy things do not sanctify unholy objects; on the contrary, when these two categories come into contact, the profane contaminates the holy (Hag 2:12–13). When religious lyrics are used with worldly music, “more often than not, the message of the music (carnal) and the message of the words (spiritual) are in conflict, which is tantamount to a husband saying ‘I love you, darling,’ while physically abusing his wife.”⁵² The result of this combination is that the effect of the music itself, which is contrary to Christian values, completely overrides and undermines the message of the words.

God’s holiness required “that everything offered in tabernacle worship was to be the best available.”⁵³ Animals sacrificed to the Lord were to be without blemish (Lev 1:3, 10). Musicians had to play skillfully before God (1 Chr 15:22; Ps 33:3). “When we present our talents to God as a living sacrifice, He requires no less of us now than He did the Israelites.”⁵⁴ “Music for God is music that is done at its best according to the abilities of the musician.”⁵⁵ This does not mean that we can sing to God only if we are professional singers or have a trained and beautiful voice. In congregational singing, all are encouraged to participate (Pss 21:13; 95:1). But we should always strive to give Him our best, with an attitude of humility and moral integrity.

In order to offer God the best music, we should “sing praises with understanding” (Ps 47:7).

I saw that all should sing with the spirit and with the understanding also. God is not pleased with jargon and discord. Right is always more pleasing to Him than wrong. And the nearer the people of God can approach to correct, harmonious singing, the more is He glorified, the church benefited, and unbelievers favorably affected.⁵⁶

The most appropriate music is that in which there is a perfect matching of words and music,⁵⁷ so that the lyrics and the music portray the same message. However, music of the best quality does not need to be complicated and intricate. Rather, the angels “delight to hear the simple songs of praise sung in a natural tone.”⁵⁸ In addition, we should

sing in a way that all can understand. It is not loud singing that is needed, but clear intonation, correct pronunciation, and distinct utterance. Let all take time to cultivate the voice, so that God’s praise can be sung in clear, soft tones, not with harshness and shrillness that offend the ear.⁵⁹

The song of the seraphim and other instances of adoration recorded in the Bible reveal that worship should include our emotions and feelings. Since “music should have beauty, pathos, and power,”⁶⁰ believers are encouraged to “sing for joy of heart” (Isa 65:14), “with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16, NAS). At the same time, we are expected to “worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” (Heb 12:28, NIV). For the unbeliever it may seem difficult to combine joy and reverence together. However, there is no dichotomy between Christian joy and Christian reverence, which should go together in worship. “Let us with *reverent joy* come before our Creator, with ‘thanksgiving, and the voice of melody’ (Isa. 51:3).”⁶¹ When we come before the Lord with “reverential awe and joyful wonder,”⁶² we will “select hymns with music appropriate to the occasion, not funeral notes, but cheerful, yet solemn melodies.”⁶³

Every song, through its lyrics but also through its music, conveys a specific feeling. “The heart must feel the spirit of the song to give it right expression.”⁶⁴ There is the risk, however, of pushing emotions to the extreme of falling into sentimentalism. When this happens,

it blows up a feeling of bliss that is disproportionate to the material at hand. It is just pretending an emotion, often in a theatrical way, and at the expense of reason. . . . Since the public loves to see emotions, . . . performers are in constant danger of getting stuck in the bottomless swamps of sentimentality, assuming emotions that are out of balance with the musical substance.⁶⁵

Conclusion

There are no easy solutions to the complex issue of religious or “Christian” music and worshipful music. Limiting all religious music to traditional hymns is not the answer, because the issue is not about choosing between traditional and contemporary music. The most important thing is not the date in which a song was written, but the message it conveys in both words *and* music.

God redeemed us to be “a holy nation” (1 Pet 2:9). “The religion of Christ will refine the taste, sanctify the judgment, elevate, purify, and ennoble the soul.”⁶⁶ It will raise us above the values that characterize most popular contemporary music so that instead of incorporating inappropriate musical styles into our religious music, we will offer holy and uplifting music to God and those around us. The same applies to our evangelistic efforts to reach unbelievers. We will not use worldly musical styles, because “we have better, nobler, and more enduring things to offer those who come to our meetings.”⁶⁷ The instruction of the Lord is clear: “You must influence them; do not let them influence you!” (Jer 15:19, NLT).

“Let us learn the song of the angels now, that we may sing it when we join their shining ranks.”⁶⁸ By God’s grace, may we “be prepared to join with the worshipers in the heavenly courts above, where all is purity and perfection, where every being has perfect reverence for God and His holiness.”⁶⁹

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¹ The image of the beast will issue a death decree against anyone who does not worship it (Rev 13:15), while the three angels of Revelation 14 call upon human beings to worship the Creator (Rev 14:7) and warn that “if anyone worships the beast and his image . . . he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God” (Rev 14:9–10). The verb “worship” (προσκυνέω) occurs eight times in Revelation 13–14.

² The first commandment defines whom to worship, while the second commandment speaks of the correct way to worship Him.

³ Siegfried H. Horn, ed., *The Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1979), s.v. “Worship”

⁴ Fernando Canale, “Principles of Worship and Liturgy,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 20, nos. 1–2 (2009): 98.

⁵ Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: The Ecumenical Century 1900–1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 121.

⁶ According to Norval F. Pease, *Worship: A Bible Doctrine*, Adult Sabbath School Lessons 326 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1976), 45, Isaiah 6 is “the model of the authentic worship of God in every age.”

⁷ Lilianne Doukhan, *In Tune with God* (Hagerstown, MD: Autumn House, 2010), 99.

⁸ All biblical quotations are from the NKJV, unless otherwise indicated.

⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 285.

¹⁰ H. D. M. Spence and J. S. Exell, *Pulpit Commentary*, 52 vols. (London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1913), 23:107.

¹¹ See Jer 7:4; 22:29; Ezek 21:27.

¹² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1089.

¹³ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, Word Biblical Commentary 24 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 74. Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students Regarding Christian Education* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2011), 402, says, “The crowning glory of Christ’s attributes is His holiness. The angels bow before Him in adoration, exclaiming, ‘Holy, holy, holy.’ . . . He is declared to be glorious in His holiness.”

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002), 310.

¹⁵ Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 7:125–126.

¹⁶ “Holy One of Israel” appears twenty-five times (Isa 1:4; 5:19; 5:24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14), “Holy One of Jacob” once (Isa 29:23), and “Holy One” four times (Isa 10:17; 40:25; 43:15; 49:7).

¹⁷ Ekkehardt Mueller, “Reflections on Worship in Revelation 4 and 5,” *Reflections* 39 (July 2012): 3.

¹⁸ Alan Johnson, “Revelation,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979–1981), 12:463–464.

¹⁹ Ivan T. Blazen, “Salvation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 295.

²⁰ “Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime” (Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005], 560).

²¹ For a clear exposition of the two dimensions of sanctification, see Blazen, 295–298.

²² Allan C. Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), s.v. “Holiness, Holy.”

²³ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002), 351.

²⁴ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York, NY: Noonday Press, 1951), 75.

²⁵ Addison H. Leitch, “Profane,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia*

of the Bible, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 4:872.

²⁶ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 512.

²⁷ “A Seventh-Day Adventist Philosophy of Music,” General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, <https://www.adventist.org/articles/a-seventh-day-adventist-philosophy-of-music/> (accessed March 08, 2021).

²⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2007), 1:506.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:497.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ White, *Counsels to Parents*, 339.

³² John Thurber and Cari Haus, *The Music of Heaven* (Coldwater, MI: Remnant, 2001), 92.

³³ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 591.

³⁴ Ellen G. White, “The Review and Herald, October 16, 1888,” in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol, 7 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1978–1980), 4:1140.

³⁵ Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1089.

³⁶ Ellen G. White, “The Review and Herald, December 22, 1896,” in Nichol, 4:1140.

³⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 25.

³⁸ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 3:333.

³⁹ Geoffrey W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in Gaebelin, 6:55.

⁴⁰ Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1964), 175.

⁴¹ Thurber and Haus, 17.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ White, “The Review and Herald, December 22, 1896,” 4:1140.

⁴⁵ Lillian Doukhan, “Historical Perspectives on Change in Worship Music,” *Ministry* 69, no. 9 (1996): 9.

⁴⁶ Doukhan, *In Tune with God*, 71.

⁴⁷ “A Seventh-Day Adventist Philosophy of Music,” General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

⁴⁸ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 594.

⁴⁹ Monique M. Ingalls, “Style Matters: Contemporary Worship Music and the Meaning of Popular Musical Borrowings,” *Liturgy* 32, no. 1 (2017): 7–8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2016.1229435>.

⁵⁰ Wolfgang H. M. Stefani, “The Concept of God and Sacred Music Style: An Intercultural Exploration of Divine Transcendence/Immanence as a Stylistic Determinant for Worship Music with Paradigmatic Implications for the Contemporary Christian Context” (PhD thesis, School of Graduate Studies, Andrews University, 1993), 278, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1713&context=dissertations> (accessed March 8, 2021). See also Wolfgang H. M. Stefani, “The Matter of Style,” *Elder’s Digest* 24, no. 3 (2018): 20–22.

⁵¹ Thurber and Haus, 68.

⁵² Eurydice V. Osterman, *What God Says About Music* (Huntsville, AL: Awasah Music, 1998), 19.

⁵³ Donald P. Hustad, *True Worship: Reclaiming the Wonder & Majesty* (Wheaton, IL: Hope, 1998), 194.

⁵⁴ Osterman, 77.

⁵⁵ Doukhan, *In Tune with God*, 116.

⁵⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:146.

⁵⁷ Austin C. Lovelace and William C. Rice, *Music and Worship in the Church* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1960), 20.

⁵⁸ White, *Evangelism*, 510.

⁵⁹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:143–144.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 4:71.

⁶¹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2011), 104, emphasis supplied.

⁶² Alain Coralie, “A Word to Worship Leaders: Reflections on Revelation 14:6, 7,” *Ministry*, April 2016, 7.

⁶³ White, *Evangelism*, 508.

⁶⁴ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 591.

⁶⁵ Herbert Blomstedt, “Present Truth in Music,” *Adventist Review*, July 12, 2012, 22.

⁶⁶ White, *That I May Know Him*, 250.

⁶⁷ Michael G. Coleman, *Reflections on Issues in Music and Worship* (Fort Oglethorpe, GA: TEACH Services, 2019), loc. 914, Kindle.

⁶⁸ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 289.

⁶⁹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:500.

Lessons from Matthew 13:53–58 and Matthew 14

By Clinton Wahlen

The subject with which Matthew 14 begins, the rejection and death of John the Baptist, is actually introduced in chapter 13 with the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth (Matt 13:53–58). The ministry of Jesus is summarized, this time by those from Nazareth, again as teaching and healing (“wisdom and mighty works,” Matt 13:54),¹ but now in a derogatory way by them. In chapter 14, reports of Jesus’ miracles reach Herod Antipas and trouble him greatly. He fears that Jesus is John the Baptist risen from the dead. As in Mark and Luke, John’s death is not narrated directly but only referred back to retrospectively (Matt 14:1–12; cf. Mark 6:14–29; Luke 9:7–9). All three Gospels describe the perplexity that Herod felt, thinking that his fears and problems were over with the death of John only to have them resurface when hearing reports of Jesus’ work, including “the miraculous powers [Gk. *dynameis*] at work in him” (Matt 14:2). It continues with the narration of two of the most amazing examples of

supernatural power, so-called “nature miracles”—the feeding of the five thousand (Matt 14:13–21) and Jesus’ walking on water and enabling Peter to do the same (Matt 14:22–33). The chapter concludes with a summary of Jesus’ healing miracles, including the remark that people who touched the hem of His garment were made well (Matt 14:34–36).

Interpretation of Matthew 13:53–58

After the teaching in parables recorded in Matthew 13, Jesus departs from Capernaum and returns to Nazareth. Matthew had earlier alluded to Jesus’ departure from Judea and the rejection at Nazareth narrated in Luke 4:16–30 (Matt 4:12–13).² Now, after a sizeable ministry in the cities near and around the Sea of Galilee, Jesus returns to the town of His childhood (cf. Mark 6:1–6). By now, they have heard of His wisdom, as exemplified in His teachings of the kingdom; His “mighty works” (*dynameis*); His miracles of healing; and even, perhaps, His raising the dead (Matt 9:18–19, 23–26; 11:5). The Greek term *dynameis* (plural of *dynamis*, “power/

authority”) is used several times in the New Testament—specifically with regard to the miraculous work of the kingdom by Jesus (Matt 11:20–21, 23; 14:2; Luke 19:37; Acts 2:22) and His followers (Acts 8:13; 19:11; 1 Cor 12:10; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:4), but also of miracles by false teachers (Matt 7:22). Unfortunately, the townspeople of Nazareth, rather than appreciating the heavenly attestation of Jesus’ message that these miracles represent, quickly shift their focus to His supposed human lineage through Joseph (cf. Luke 3:23), referring to Him merely as “the carpenter’s son” and to His mother and “brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas” and sisters (cf. Mark 6:3). Ellen G. White implies that these siblings of Jesus were Joseph’s children from a previous marriage.³ Their unbelief, including their disbelieving reports of His mighty works (apparently because they didn’t witness any themselves; cf. Luke 4:23), meant that Jesus could do little for them. Rather than condemn them directly, as He had the cities that saw His mighty works and nevertheless rejected Him (Matt 11:20–24), Jesus simply cited the proverbial saying that “a prophet is not without honor” except among those closest to him (cf. Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24; John 4:44). Jeremiah had suffered a similar disappointment from his hometown of Anathoth (Jer 1:1; 11:21–23). The Nazareth-dwellers were “offended” (*skandalizō*) at Jesus, using a term referring to a serious fall. In the Gospels it usually suggests actions that lead to a serious loss of faith or even becoming an unbeliever (Matt 11:6; 13:21; 15:12; 17:27; 18:6; 24:10; 26:33; Luke 17:2; John 16:1).

Interpretation of Matthew 14

1. Verses 1–12

- Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great, is called a “tetrarch” because he was, together with two other sons (Archelaus and Philip, Matt 2:22; Luke 3:1), given rule over a portion of his father’s domain (cf. Luke 3:19; 9:7; Acts 13:1). The territory given to Antipas, at just seventeen years of age, was the region of Galilee, which he governed for many years (4 BC–AD 39).
- All three Synoptic Gospels describe Herod’s displeasure at John’s rebuke of him for marrying his brother Philip’s wife (Mark 6:17–18; Luke 3:19–20)— not to be confused with Philip the tetrarch. The Philip who was brother to Herod Antipas was Herod the Great’s son through Mariamne II (daughter of the Jewish high priest Simon Boethus).
- Josephus, besides noting Herod’s love for Herodias,⁴ mentions his fear of John’s widespread and growing influence becoming a political threat as a reason for his imprisoning John at Machaerus and putting him to death.⁵
- Herod’s marriage to Herodias was a direct violation of Mosaic law (Lev 18:16; 20:21) and his putting away his first wife, who was the daughter of King Aretas IV, led to war

with the Nabataeans and a disastrous defeat. Matthew’s account of Herod’s birthday celebration is shorter than Mark’s; the event is not mentioned at all in Luke. Herod’s celebration was used by Herodias to exact revenge against John the Baptist. Among Roman elites, birthdays were hedonistic affairs and Herodias took advantage of the weakened moral judgment of Herod and his guests (cf. Mark 6:19–21).

- John, like the prophets of the Old Testament, did not shrink from reproving high and low, rich and poor (cf. Luke 3:10–14), underscoring in the minds of ordinary Israelites the genuineness of his prophetic calling (cf. Matt 21:26). And yet, when John spoke, he did it in such a way that Herod “heard him gladly” (Mark 6:20).

2. Verses 13–21

- After John’s death, Jesus, always avoiding confrontation if possible, withdrew to a safer location, described as “a deserted place” for rest (Matt 14:15; Mark 6:31). Yet, even here, the multitudes found Him. Popularity comes at a price.
- Notably, the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle of Jesus recorded by all four Gospels (Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–14). It recalls the miraculous feeding of Israel with manna in the wilderness (John 6:30–33). According to John 6:14, many interpreted the miracle messianically and saw in Jesus the promised prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15, 18).
- The word for “compassion” (*splanchnizomai*, also in Mark 8:2) refers to a deep inward feeling of pity and concern. Often used in the New Testament of Jesus’ sympathy and love for people (Matt 9:36 // Mark 6:34; Matt 14:14; 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13), it is used parabolically to describe God’s love for His children (Luke 15:20). Both the verb (found only in the Gospels) and the noun show the attitude we should exhibit toward those in need (Luke 10:33; Phil 2:1; Col 3:12; 1 John 3:17) through “the love of God . . . poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5:5).
- The logical, commonsense solution suggested by the disciples that the crowd be dismissed so they could go and buy food was not the preferred solution because it required no faith. Instead Jesus challenged them, “You give them something to eat” and multiplied the food to make feeding them possible. Although precedents in the Old Testament exist (2 Kgs 4:1–7, 42–44), a miracle on this scale was unprecedented.

- Jesus' looking up to heaven indicates the divine source of the miracle, while His blessing and breaking of the loaves made it happen. The participation of the disciples in handing out the loaves and fish illustrates the importance of cooperation with God in the work of the kingdom. It also shows Him enabling them to do what He had commanded them to do (Matt 14:16).
- All four Gospels indicate that the count of five thousand includes only "men" (Gk. *andres*), referring to the heads of families (Matt 14:21; Mark 6:44; Luke 9:14; John 6:10), but only Matthew makes it explicit that women and children were not counted. Therefore, the total number fed likely approximated 15,000 20,000.

3. Verses 22–33

- Matthew indicates that Jesus "forced" (Gk. *ēnankasen*) His disciples to depart by boat (Matt 14:22). The reason for this, owing to the political ramifications of the popular enthusiasm this miracle created, is given only by John: "Therefore, when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king . . ." (John 6:15). Such a move toward insurrection would have greatly hindered or even ended any further ministry by Jesus. But, unlike many popular speakers today, "Jesus was never elated by applause"⁶ and took the decisive action needed to ensure His work could continue.
- Jesus' response to this crisis situation was to find a solitary place and pray (Matt 14:23; cf. Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12), the only time Matthew describes Jesus being alone since His temptation in the wilderness (Matt 4:1).
- The Romans measured time in three-hour blocks called "watches." The "fourth watch of the night" would be approximately 3:00 to 6:00 a.m. Jesus had apparently been praying most, if not all, of the night. "Tossed by the waves" and struggling to survive, the disciples would no doubt be exhausted, which perhaps helps to explain their confusion as they saw Jesus walking on the water and thought Him to be a "ghost" (Gk. *phantasma*, in the New Testament only here and the parallel of Mark 6:49).
- Jesus reassures the disciples with the beautiful words, "Have courage. It's me. Don't be afraid!" Then, as told only by Matthew and somewhat surprisingly, Peter asks Jesus to command him to come to Him on the water.
 - The request blends both faith and doubt. The form of the construction with "if" (*ei*) presumes that it is really

Jesus and yet Peter asks for a miracle as proof.

- Rather than presumption, Peter expresses a faith that "with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26), and Jesus grants his request, enabling Peter also to walk on the water.
- Unfortunately, the wind and the waves capture Peter's attention and he begins sinking into the sea. But Peter's plea, "Lord, save me!" is immediately answered: Jesus reaches out, and saves him.

- This strengthening of the disciples' faith also yields a deeper insight into who Jesus is—the Son of God. The certitude of their confession is underscored by "truly" (Gk. *alēthōs*; Heb. *'āmēn*). Prior to this incident, only God (Matt 3:17), the devil (Matt 4:3, 6), and demons (Matt 8:29) seem to recognize this.

4. Verses 34–36

- Gennesaret (the modern plain of Ginosar) is three miles southwest of Capernaum. Appropriately, it is there that a first-century boat of the kind described in this story was found, excavated, preserved, and is now on display.
- Jesus seems to be appreciated by the multitudes primarily as a healer, though touching the hem of His garment may also suggest faith in His message of the kingdom.

Application of the Chapter

Many valuable lessons may be gleaned from this chapter, including:

1. Unbelief is dangerously self-reinforcing, leading people to focus on evidence that supports their doubts and to ignore evidence that would lead to faith.
2. John humbly submitted to whatever future God had for him. "God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him."⁷
3. Just as Jesus challenged the faith of His disciples in commanding them to do what would otherwise be impossible, so we are encouraged to believe that what would ordinarily be impossible in our own strength to accomplish is possible with God (Matt 21:21; Luke 18:27; Rom 4:21; 2 Cor 10:4–5). It is good to remember in challenging situations that the commonsense solution, the solution requiring no faith, may not be the solution God has in mind.

4. When faced with extraordinarily difficult situations or when obeying God seems downright impossible, it's worth contemplating Peter's faith and witness. If Jesus wants us to do something He will enable us to do it (Matt 17:20). "As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His bid-dings are enablings."⁸
5. The disciples' terrifying struggle in the boat and Peter's experience of walking on water illustrate the importance of faith when trouble comes. As a popular song by Don Moen reminds us, "God will make a way

where there seems to be no way." That "way" may not always be so immediate; it may take months or even years to discern. But trusting God will sustain us in the trials we face. And then the winds will cease.

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¹ All biblical quotations are from the NKJV, unless otherwise indicated.
² On the shift from Judea to Galilee, see Clinton Wahlen, "Lessons from Matthew 4," *Reflections* 63 (July 2018): 5.
³ Presumably, because Joseph is described by Matthew as "just" or "righteous" (Matt 1:19), he was a widower when Mary was betrothed to him. As in Scripture, Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 450, calls them "the sons of Joseph," rather than of Mary, and indicates that they were older than Jesus (ibid., 87). White describes them as "His brothers, as the sons of Joseph were

called" (ibid., 86). She also contrasts Jesus as the son of Mary with "the sons and daughters of Joseph" (ibid., 90).
⁴ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.109–114.
⁵ Ibid., 18.116–119.
⁶ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 330.
⁷ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 224–225.
⁸ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1900), 332–333.

BOOK
NOTES

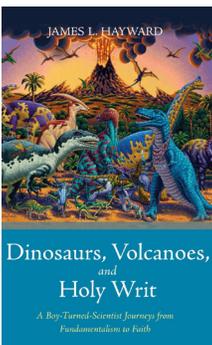
Where's the Gospel?

By L. James Gibson

James L. Hayward,

**Dinosaurs,
Volcanoes,
and Holy Writ:**
A Boy-Turned-Scientist
Journeys from
Fundamentalism
to Faith

(Eugene, OR: Resource),
236 pp., USD 26.00



In this book (hereafter *The Journey*), James L. Hayward, retired biology professor, presents his argument against the "fundamentalist" faith of his childhood and for theistic evolution.¹ *The Journey* describes the author's "fundamentalist" roots in chapters 1–4. Chapters 5–7 describe some issues for which his background had left him unprepared. The central argument is given in chapters 8–13. Chapter 14 concludes *The Journey* with Hayward's reasons for choosing to believe in a "larger reality" (p. 193), in contrast to friends who have chosen atheism.

The Journey is skillfully written and interspersed with interesting stories. The book makes some important points worth pondering, especially by those who disagree with its conclusions. One lesson is that disagreeable, unloving believers may do great harm (pp. 20–22). Another is that sincere seekers may be turned away by well-meaning yet misinformed people who make exaggerated or untrue claims (pp. 29–32, 40). A third lesson is that beliefs should be accompanied by positive action (pp. 48, 82, 107).

The Journey shows that too many students leave our schools and churches unprepared to deal with evolutionary thinking (chap. 5), and that teachers and mentors have a strong influence (pp. 59–63), and therefore also have a greater responsibility (cf. Jas 3:1). I came away with the impression that unpleasant

experiences with overbearing or pompous believers, in contrast with friendly encounters with people holding long-age views, played a crucial role in turning the author away from his "fundamentalist" roots.

The Argument

Briefly, the argument presented in *The Journey* consists of three premises:

1. The Bible is not intended to teach us about physical reality (pp. 109, 119). Rather than being "God's Word," the Bible "consists of writings by people who, like me, were searching for meaning and a better understanding of reality and the sacred" (p. 118).
2. Geological evidence points to the reality of Deep Time (chaps. 9–11).
3. Fossil and genetic evidence point to common ancestry through evolution as the explanation for the diversity of life (chaps. 11–13).

The logical conclusion from these three premises is that the biblical history of a six-day creation and global flood is false (pp. 109, 113, 200).

As I considered the argument, I was struck by the parallels with another well-known argument recorded in Genesis 3:1–6. First, God's Word is questioned, then physical evidence is presented that appears to

contradict God's Word, then the conclusion is drawn that God's Word is untrue. The similarity of the arguments was surely unintended, but should alert the reader to the implications of the claims of *The Journey*.

Problems with the Premises

The first premise—that the Old Testament is not “meant to convey facts about history and science” (p. 109)—is falsified by the many biblical appeals to consider God's actions in the past (e.g., Deut 6; 1 Chr 16; Pss 78, 106) and the abundant references to creation.²

The theory of common descent by natural selection (the third premise) has too many scientific problems to discuss them all here, but the inadequacy of random mutations for driving evolution has been shown mathematically,³ and the creative power of natural selection has come under increasing skepticism among biologists.⁴ Evolution can truly be called a theory in crisis.⁵

Claims of Deep Time (the second premise) can also be questioned. The sediments have some features that seem inconsistent with Deep Time. Layering of sediments occurs when rates of deposition exceed rates of mixing by burrowing animals. Mixing may occur in a few hours,⁶ suggesting that thick stacks of layered sediments do not represent long periods of time. Exposed land normally experiences either deposition, producing a layer, or erosion, producing an irregular surface. “Flat gaps,” where layers are absent with no evidence of erosion, suggest the time represented by the missing layers never happened.⁷

Fossils also have features that question Deep Time. Fossils often contain preserved biomolecules thought to decay in a relatively short time, a discovery that has faced resistance from some geologists.⁸ The abundance of fossils and the preservation of organisms lacking hard tissues point to rapid geological activity. Lack of change (stasis) of fossil species through their stratigraphic range seems difficult to explain in comparison with rapid change often observed in living species.⁹

Some evidence once urged as evidence for Deep Time has been reinterpreted as not needing so much time. These include the Yellowstone Fossil Forests,¹⁰ time for formation of mineral crystals,¹¹ and plate tectonics.¹² Computer simulations have shown the plausibility of catastrophic plate tectonics by runaway subduction. Heat dispersal remains an issue, but this research shows that alternatives can be proposed and studied scientifically.

Extraterrestrial impact craters, massive volcanic outpourings, and widespread sedimentary layers show that the past was different from the present. These are commonly interpreted as isolated incidents separated by long ages of relative calm, but an alternative view is that they are events separated by days or weeks during the extraordinary global catastrophe recorded in Genesis 7 and 8. This remains an interesting model for research by those willing to consider it.

This is not to claim that one can infer a complete biblical history directly from physical data. The

intentions and actions of an intelligent Agent are not deducible from natural laws. Unanswered questions, such as various methods of dating, should be matters for further study, not used as reasons for abandoning faith in Scripture.

Theological Costs

Each of the premises of *The Journey's* argument is based on the presupposition that ultimate truth is best discovered by human effort, not by divine revelation. Instead of using Scripture as a guide to understanding reality, *The Journey* advocates “a perspective that is more in line with the history of life proposed by the majority of the scientific community” (p. 160)—that is, evolution (pp. 186–187). There may be room for God, although it seems He is not active in nature (p. 178) and we cannot know much about Him (p. 200). Indeed, it is unclear whether the “God” of *The Journey* is a personal God or merely an “essence beyond” (p. 200).

This approach entails enormous scientific, theological, and philosophical costs. The theological costs start with Genesis 1 and continue through Revelation 22. The most significant victim of theistic evolution is the gospel. If living organisms appeared in succession across long ages of time, the biblical story of creation in six days is given up. Abandoning the story of Adam and Eve, and the fall with death as its result, leaves the redeeming sacrifice of Christ without its biblical foundation. One can, of course, make up one's own story of redemption, but such “just-so” stories have no basis in either science or Scripture.

Another major casualty of the approach of *The Journey* is the character of God. *The Journey* is deeply concerned about the problem of evil (pp. 64, 110–111, 162, 168–170, 179–185) and rightly so. Explaining natural evils such as suffering and death as necessary for evolution (pp. 165–167) supposedly “lets God off the hook” (p. 185). However, this approach is inextricably trapped in a dilemma between theologically catastrophic alternatives over the purported relationship between God and evolution.

If God directs evolution, then He is the direct cause of suffering, death, and other evils, as Charles Darwin points out.¹³ If God merely watches evolution unfold, He is still responsible for the evil He could have prevented. If He is too impotent to prevent evil, then He is not God; if He is indifferent, then He is part of the problem. None of these ideas are supported by science or the Bible. Instead of “letting God off the hook,” theistic evolution impales Him on the hook.

Unfortunately, *The Journey* does not recognize the existence of a personal devil (pp. 169–170, 185). Thus, there is no one to blame except God, or “nature.” A far better response to the problem of evil is presented in Scripture (Gen 1–3; Isa 14; Ezek 28; Matt 4; Luke 10:18; John 12:31; Rom 5; Rev 12, 20; etc.).¹⁴

Theistic evolution entails other serious theological costs, including the reliability of the Bible (pp. 109, 119), the “Jewish Sabbath” (p. xiv), God's providence (p. 162), and presumably foreknowledge and numerous

other biblical teachings.¹⁵ Even many who accept Deep Time find fault with the notion that evolution and God are compatible.¹⁶ In summary, the theological costs are “astronomical.”

Given the high theological costs of theistic evolution and the possibility of interpreting nature differently,¹⁷ there is not sufficient basis for rejecting the biblical record of earth’s history. Although unanswered questions remain, experience encourages us to continue to explore nature in the context of God’s Word, confident that He will guide our efforts.

A Choice of Destinations

In reading *The Journey*, I was reminded of an experience I had when flying to Ontario, California in the United States. As we disembarked, a distraught fellow passenger with a French accent approached one of the flight attendants and pled, “This is Ontario, Canada, isn’t it?” *The Journey* portrays the path away from “fundamentalism” as a correction of a wrong understanding of origins. Yet, the possibility remains that this is the very path that leads to a confusion of destination.

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¹ The combination of a (personal?) God with conventional evolutionary history (pp. 187, 193) gives *The Journey* a flavor indistinguishable from theistic evolution, despite the book’s hesitancy to endorse that term (p. 201).

² Gerald A. Klingbeil, ed., *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015); see also Michael G. Hasel, “The Genesis Account as a Test Case for Biblical Hermeneutics” in Frank M. Hasel, ed., *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute/Review&Herald Academic, 2020), 323–347.

³ John C. Sanford, *Genetic Entropy & the Mystery of the Genome* (Lima, NY: Elim, 2005). See also Paul S. Moorhead and Martin M. Kaplan, *Mathematical Challenges to the Neodarwinian Interpretation of Evolution* (Philadelphia, PA: Wistar Press, 1966); and Michael J. Behe, *The Edge of Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 2007).

⁴ E.g., see Jerry Fodor and Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini, *What Darwin*

Got Wrong (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010); and James A. Shapiro, *Evolution, A View from the 21st Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: FT Press Science, 2011). There are many others.

⁵ Michael Denton, *Evolution: Still a Theory in Crisis* (Seattle, WA: Discovery Institute Press, 2016).

⁶ Murray K. Gingras et al. “How Fast Do Marine Invertebrates Burrow?,” *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology* 270, nos. 3–4 (2008): 280–286.

⁷ Ariel Roth has written extensively on this topic. See, e.g., Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1998).

⁸ E.g., the experience of Mary Schweitzer; see Robert F. Service, “I Don’t Care What They Say About Me’: Paleontologist Stares Down Critics in Her Hunt for Dinosaur Proteins,” *Science*, September 13, 2017, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/09/i-don-t-care-what-they-say-about-me-paleontologist-stares-down-critics-her-hunt> (accessed March 5, 2021).

⁹ Philip D. Gingerich, “Rates of Evolution: Effects of Time and Temporal Scaling,” *Science* 222, no. 4620 (1983): 159–161; and Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould, “Punctuated Equilibria: An Alternative to Phyletic Gradualism,” in *Models in Paleobiology*, ed. Thomas J. M. Schopf (San Francisco, CA: Freeman Cooper, 1972), 82–115.

¹⁰ Harold G. Coffin, “The Yellowstone Fossil Forests,” *Origins* 24, no. 1 (1997): 5–44, <https://www.grisda.org/origins-24005> (accessed March 5, 2021); and Clyde L. Webster Jr., “A Chemist’s Perspective of the Yellowstone Petrified ‘Forests,’” *Origins* 65 (2018): 62–73, <https://www.grisda.org/origins-65062> (accessed March 5, 2021).

¹¹ Patrick R. Phelps, Cin-Ty A. Lee, and Douglas M. Morton, “Episodes of Fast Crystal Growth in Pegmatites,” *Nature Communications* 11, no. 4986 (2020).

¹² Jesse A. Sherburn, John R. Baumgardner, and Mark F. Horstemeyer, “New Material Model Reveals Inherent Tendency in Mantle Minerals for Runaway Mantle Dynamics,” *Proceedings of the International Conference on Creationism* 7, no. 21 (2013), https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/icc_proceedings/vol7/iss1/21/ (accessed March 5, 2021); and John R. Baumgardner, “Catastrophic Plate Tectonics: The Physics Behind the Genesis Flood,” *Proceedings of the International Conference on Creationism* 5, no. 13, (2003): 113–126, https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/icc_proceedings/vol5/iss1/13 (accessed March 5, 2021).

¹³ Charles Robert Darwin to Asa Gray, May 22, 1860, “Letter no. 2814” in Darwin Correspondence Project, <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/DCP-Lett-2814.xml> (accessed March 5, 2021); cf. Cornelius G. Hunter, *Darwin’s God: Evolution and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001).

¹⁴ See also Alvin C. Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974).

¹⁵ See, e.g., L. James Gibson, “Theistic Evolution: Is It for Adventists?,” *Ministry*, January 1992, 22–25; Jim Gibson, “Issues in ‘Intermediate’ Models of Origins,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15, no. 2 (2004): 71–92; and Jay W. Richards, *God and Evolution* (Seattle, WA: Discovery Institute Press, 2010).

¹⁶ J. P. Moreland et al., eds., *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

¹⁷ E.g., Leonard R. Brand, *Faith, Reason & Earth History*, 3rd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2016).

"As clearly as human beings have been taught by the experience of six thousand years, that death is their common lot, so clearly are we taught by the word of God, and by some notable exhibitions of divine power, that all who have gone into their graves shall come forth again to life."

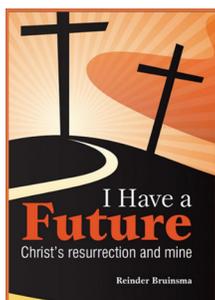
Uriah Smith, *Here and Hereafter* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1897), 221.

Reinder Bruinsma

I Have a Future:
Christ's Resurrection
and Mine

(Alma Park: Autumn
House, 2019)

184 pp., USD 49.95.



Reinder Bruinsma, a retired Dutch Adventist thought leader and church administrator, has written a little book on a topic that has not received much attention in recent Adventist literature: the resurrection of Christ and what it means for us today. This is indeed a subject that deserves to be explored. In nine compact chapters, the author deals with various aspects connected with the resurrection from a biblical perspective. He discusses the issues of life and death, the truth about death, whether we can communicate with the dead, the resurrection of Christ and our resurrection, what it means to live in the face of death, what people think about eternal life and hell, and how we can have assurance of salvation. Each chapter has a number of end notes with references to other literature and primary sources. Reinder Bruinsma tackles an important subject that has wide-ranging ramifications for our beliefs, for our understanding of God, and for our salvation. It is amazing that Seventh-day Adventists have not produced more books on this vital biblical subject. In this sense, *I Have a Future* fills a need in this area and provides many helpful insights.

Bruinsma writes as a seasoned theologian and well-informed author, cognizant of the various theological and philosophical questions that surround this crucial subject. A key question that resurfaces throughout the book is: what can I know? We are often reminded that “lots of questions will remain” (p. 88; see also 103, 108, 139, 145, and *passim*) and that his presentation will not answer all of our questions—nor even his own questions (p. 108). When dealing with the historical evidence for Jesus’ resurrection, Bruinsma makes clear that “there will never be absolute evidence that will answer all our questions” (p. 76). For him there “is no absolute proof, and we cannot get away from the fact that the resurrection is historical in a very special sense” (p. 86). As such, it defies any comparison with other historical events and is, for Bruinsma, ultimately grounded in faith. The most he is able to assert about the resurrection is a confession that he affirms with another Protestant theologian who states that “resurrection means that for me, as one who is bound to die, God will provide a future above and beyond death” (p. 108). Throughout the book, Bruinsma constantly oscillates

between not knowing many things and affirming some biblical teaching. The author often quotes other theologians and their opinions before he endeavors to present the biblical view of a given subject. One repeatedly wonders what Bruinsma’s own responses to some of the questions might be.

There are aspects where Bruinsma ventures outside the traditional box and favors his particular preferences. For instance, when it comes to the issue of Christians and cremation, he makes a subtle plea for cremation as the best choice (pp. 116–117). When he discusses the issue of assisted suicide, one wonders what the author thinks about it and what he would favor (p. 121). In several discussions one would have hoped for more courage to express greater biblical specificity rather than the sense of ambivalence that results from the presentation of various questions and positions. In his discussion on whether the remnant is small or a great multitude (pp. 179–181), the author only hints at his preference that is expressed elsewhere in greater detail, where he describes the remnant as not “directly equivalent to an institutional structure, church organization, or denominational entity.”¹

The book is helpful in those sections where Bruinsma provides good reasons for the biblical teaching on the subject—for instance, when he discusses the doctrine of hell, or deals with the biblical teaching on death, or where he discusses some difficult biblical passages. Unfortunately, throughout the book the author at times raises more questions than he is able to answer, leaving the reader with a certain ambivalence regarding topics that are vital to our faith.



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¹ Reinder Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ: A Biblical Understanding of the Church*, ed. George R. Knight, Woodrow W. Whidden II, and Richard W. Coffen, Library of Adventist Theology (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2009), 201.

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