

“Even If Noah, Daniel, and Job” (Ezekiel 14:14, 20)—Why These Three?¹

Jo Ann Davidson

S.D.A. Theological Seminary, Andrews University

I have an addiction. Studying theology. In fact, last year when my husband Dick asked me what I'd like to do for our anniversary, I said “let's spend the evening reading theology books together!” You see, besides everything else wonderful about my husband, Dick is an incredible person to bounce theological ideas off of. He has spent much time wrestling through such issues, and I benefit richly. In fact, I've told him many times that it is a good thing that Andrews University doesn't charge me tuition for all the free classes he's given me!

He was the first of several who taught me it is important to carefully analyze any theological materials and determine the presuppositions of each writer. This is a critical work. Not everything in print is good theology—by that I mean, that which corresponds with the theological perspective in Scripture. The consistent position of the SDA church since its founding is correct—that though there are many writers within the canon, and though each one of these is of course writing from a different perspective, they are united in their worldview or basic presuppositions.

This is one of the reasons studying Scripture is such an extraordinary experience. The Bible is a unified whole. We don't need to critically sort out the underlying theological grid of each biblical writer. We know already where they stand. Instead, we can work to synthesize the OT and the NT in order to determine true biblical theology. I appreciate the way Ellen White has stated it:

The truths of the Bible are as pearls hidden. They must be searched, dug out by painstaking effort. Those who take only a surface view of the Scriptures will, with their superficial knowledge, which they think is very deep, talk of the contradictions of the Bible, and question the authority of the Scriptures. But those whose hearts are in

¹ The following was Dr. Davidson's inaugural address as the new President of the Adventist Theological Society, given in Toronto, June 2000.

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harmony with truth and duty will search the Scriptures with a heart prepared to receive divine impressions. The illuminated soul sees a spiritual unity, one grand golden thread running through the whole, but it requires patience, thought, and prayer to trace out the precious golden thread.²

This wrestling with the Word is the privilege of every Christian—tracing the grand themes and theological structures; making our picture of God ever more complete. When doing this kind of study we will find phrases used hundreds of times that always makes tingles go up my spine: Statements such as “Thus says the Lord” or “This is the word of the Lord.” We can actually hear God Himself speak! There are passages where such phrases tumble out one on top of the other in quick succession when a divine message gets intense—making it impossible for the reader to forget, because of the repetitions, the real voice speaking. For one example, listen to Jeremiah. Note the effusion of reminders of Who is really speaking:

The **word** that came to Jeremiah **from the LORD**, saying, “Stand in the gate of the LORD’s house, and proclaim there this **word**, and say, ‘Hear the **word of the LORD**, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!’” **Thus says the LORD of hosts**, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. (Jer 7:1-3)

In this particular passage, God speaks through Jeremiah to reprimand His people for their pseudo-religiosity. And throughout, even after the concentrated reminder of ‘the word of the Lord’ in the first verses, we are still prompted six more times in this address that it is God who is speaking (Jer 7:13, 19, 20, 21, 30, 32 with “says the LORD” or “thus says the LORD”)! It becomes impossible to forget the source of this pointed message.

These repetitions are not “sloppy editing” on the part of Jeremiah. Nor is God stuttering. As biblical linguists have become more sensitive to the Hebrew language, they have finally begun to understand that the recurrent repetitions found throughout the Hebrew Bible are signals of emphasis that the writer intends to make. This has been an important perception for correct biblical interpretation.

Moreover, none of the Bible writers ever express any reservation about the source or their certainty of God’s revelation to them. And with the oft-repeated

² Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:20. She continues: “Many, very many, are questioning the verity and truth of the Scriptures. Human reasoning and the imaginings of the human heart are undermining the inspiration of the Word of God, and that which should be received as granted, is surrounded with a cloud of mysticism. Nothing stands out in clear and distinct lines, upon rock bottom. This is one of the marked signs of the last days. This Holy Book has withstood the assaults of Satan, who has united with evil men to make everything of divine character shrouded in clouds and darkness. But the Lord has preserved this Holy book by His own miraculous power in its present shape—a chart or guidebook to the human family to show them the way to heaven” (1:15).

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electrifying phrase, ‘Thus says the Lord,’ the real author of the communication was nailed down with certainty.

Even more importantly, unlike much modern speaking and writing, God’s words are always truthful and straight-forward. At the present time we face, both in the media and the printed word, something far different. Back in 1946, George Orwell published his now-famous essay, “Politics and the English Language,” in which he noted, “The great enemy of clear language is insincerity.” Orwell went on to claim that instead of being “an instrument for expressing thought,” language was now used “for concealing or preventing thought.”³ Orwell has only been proven more correct since then! You are well aware of how much public speech is designed to make lies sound truthful by using a language of deception that masquerades as openness. Much public communication today is as false, deceptive, and misleading as the language found on many used-car lots—where employees there are no longer called “car salesmen,” but now are described as “transportation counselors”. More and more language is being used with no intention of speaking truthfully.

This is not a matter of subjects and verbs agreeing. It is a matter of words and facts agreeing. For example, it is now presumed acceptable that government reports can be “economical with the truth.” Public corporations report laying off workers as “work re-engineering.” City officials force people out of their homes so the buildings can be demolished for “urban *renewal*.” Modern military jargon speaks of “killing” as “neutralizing” and deadly wars as “conflicts.” Lies told by politicians now are termed “strategic misrepresentations” or “reality augmentation.” Tax increases are “disguised” as “revenue enhancement.”

Nor is the National Cattlemen’s Association exempt. It has advised its members to “beef up” their image to the public by using more positive terms. At a time when the people are becoming more health-conscious, cattle ranchers are avoiding terms such as “fat cattle.” Instead, well-fed steer are now referred to as “market ready” cattle. Growth hormones and other chemical additives should not even be mentioned. And never speak of “slaughtering” beef. Better to say “processing” of meat.

Local utility reports turn ordinary sewage sludge into “regulated organic nutrients” that do not stink but rather “exceed the odor threshold.” Labeling nuclear waste “valuable, important nuclear materials” and a nuclear waste dump “monitored retrievable storage” buffers the critical issues of dealing with dangerous nuclear waste. Even toy companies, to avoid import tariffs mandated for dolls, name them “action figures.” In a world such as this it becomes ever more appealing to read the clear word of the Lord.⁴

For, by contrast, when the God of heaven communicates there is no “double speak.” God’s words are free from any duplicity. When reading Scripture, one

³ Cited by William Lutz in *The New Doublespeak: Why No One Knows What Anyone’s Saying Anymore* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996, xi.

⁴ These examples gleaned from Lutz.

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doesn't go away wondering whether God is motivated by any "hidden agendas," as seen too often in politics today, and even in the church. God has always spoken truthfully. And He has faithfully acted on His word, even though it has proved very costly for Him.

This is not to say that it is always easy to understand what God is saying. I acknowledge that careful study is always necessary to correctly interpret Scripture. Though there is absolute theological correspondence among all biblical writers, mental wrestling is necessary to interpret Scripture correctly. There are still difficult problems to solve: interpreting prophecy; explaining the "spirits in prison" in 1 Pet 3:19-20, etc. There are also certain enigmatic statements of God that require reflection. I'm thinking this time of Ezekiel 14, where during a time of judgment for Judah, two times in one chapter God draws attention to three people. He says:

"“Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness,” **says the Lord GOD** [v. 14] . . . [and again] ‘even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live,’ **says the Lord GOD**, ‘they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness [v. 20].’” Ezekiel 14:14, 20.

And notice that even here we are reminded more than once that God Himself is speaking!

Why did God single out these three? Why Noah, Daniel, and Job? In this divine list of OT worthies, why wasn't Abraham included, with his wrenching experience of being commanded by God to sacrifice his beloved son? Abraham is even called God's "friend forever." (1 Chr. 20:7) Why wasn't David mentioned, the one God calls "a man after His own heart?" (1 Sam. 13:14) And what about Moses, who received the Ten Commandments directly from God? God describes Himself talking face to face with Moses. And then there is Elijah, with his amazing courage on Mount Carmel, well aware that the wrath of the king and the sentiment of the people at that time of extreme famine would cause his instant death should the priests of Baal be able to sneak a spark of fire on their sacrificial altar in the attempt to vindicate Baal worship. And besides, the account of Noah's life ends so pathetically. Why these three: Noah, Daniel, and Job?

I have come to the conclusion that there are some critical issues involved in the lives of Noah, Job, and Daniel that are of import for Seventh-day Adventists of the 21st century. Let us consider each one of these briefly.

Noah

The first thing one recalls about Noah is that he was commanded by God to build a huge ship on dry land because of a coming world-wide flood. Gen 6 indicates that Noah went right to work. Apparently he did not stop to ask, "What will everyone think of me if I do this?" Instead, he believed just what God had

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told him, and he commenced his work immediately. The text in Genesis also states that the inhabitants of Noah's world were exceedingly wicked, implying that the largest part of the antediluvian world would likely react negatively to what Noah was doing.

And indeed, Ellen White informs us that, as might be expected, the crowds made fun of Noah. They ridiculed the idea of rain. They looked at the lofty trees and the wonderful things God had made in nature and said, "It is impossible that God shall destroy these things." [Surely the Creator wouldn't wipe out His own creation!] They considered Noah insane. They laughed at him and mocked him. They regarded Noah as "a wild fanatic." The impressions of their senses made a greater impression on the inhabitants of the pre-Flood world than the message from heaven. Yet Noah kept on building the ark according to God's directions. "Even the philosophers and scientists of the time reasoned that it was impossible for [it to rain and for] the earth to be destroyed by water."⁵

Great men, worldly, honored, and wise men said, 'The threatenings of God are for the purpose of intimidating, and will never be [ful-filled] verified. You need not be alarmed. Such an event as the destruction of the world by the God who made it, and the punishment of the beings He has created, will never take place. Be at peace; fear not. Noah is a wild fanatic.' [And] The world made merry at the folly of the deluded old man.⁶

If Noah had been like many today who insist that all that is important is that "Jesus loves me [us]," and that all one has to do is "love the Lord" in some nominal sense, the ark would have never been built.⁷ But in the face of intense ridicule, we find Noah proclaiming a judgment message—and demonstrating genuine faith, a faith that is obedient. He testified by what he did that he believed God's word. He could have determined that he would be considered crazy to build such a ship on dry land and refused his commission, as Jonah did much later. But Noah believed just what God had said, even though he had never seen it rain.

Yes, the people then considered him insane. But for 120 years he still kept building the ark according to God's directions.⁸ Amid the prevailing corruption

⁵ Drawn from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 96, 103; and *Christ Triumphant*, 55.

⁶ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 99.

⁷ "There will be every influence that will lead us to make light of God's requirements. But if we are prepared to meet the Son of man when He shall come in the clouds of heaven, we must be getting ready for it now.... We want a living faith and a living religion. We want that our faith shall be made perfect by our works. And of those who are crying, 'Only believe, only believe, and you shall be saved,' we want to inquire, 'What shall we believe? What is the testing faith for this time?' *Christ Triumphant*, 60 (Ms 86, 1886).

⁸ Ellen White also tells us that Noah was no arrogant preacher of doom: "When the last message of Noah was given to that degenerate age, as he stood before the people giving his warning, they turned from him to ridicule him. They had listened to the prayers of Noah that had ascended

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that had brought God to the decision to destroy the world, Noah took God at His word and labored to stay the tide of moral evil. Not only do we find Noah in God’s OT “hall of fame,” but also in Heb. 11:7:

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Even the Genesis text instructs us that Noah “was a just man, perfect/blameless in his generations” and that “Noah walked with God”—just as it was said earlier of Enoch. (Gen 5:24).

Ellen White instructs us that the times when Noah preached are not so different from the times when we, now, are called to pronounce another judgment message. She writes:

In Noah’s day philosophers declared that it was impossible for the world to be destroyed by water; so now there are men of science who endeavor to show that the world cannot be destroyed by fire—that this would be inconsistent with the laws of nature. . . . But Noah stood like a rock amid the tempest. Surrounded by popular contempt and ridicule, he distinguished himself by his holy integrity and unwavering faithfulness. A power attended his words, for it was the voice of God to man through His servant.⁹

Yes, there are distinct correlations between the issues Noah faced in obeying God in his day and what we face today:

- 1) Obeying God’s call to declare His judgment on a resistant, sinful world;
- 2) Doing this in the face of modern philosophers who insist that God is loving and would never really punish.
3. Doing this despite modern science’s repudiation of fiat creation and its Creator God.

God declares Noah righteous through four biblical penmen, in Genesis, Ezekiel, 2 Peter, and Hebrews, and in our day God will again declare “blameless” those who obey His commission.¹⁰

Job

There are many issues involved in the experience of Job. His faithfulness in suffering comes to mind first, of course. The harsh reality of unjust suffering has regularly been held up as an argument against the God of Heaven, and has often

day after day in their behalf, and with his heart drawn out for them he delivered his very last message to them” (*Christ Triumphant*, 55 [Ms 86, 1886]).

⁹ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 99, 103.

¹⁰ For an important study of the word “blameless” as applied to Noah and Job and its import for the final remnant, see Lael Caesar’s “Job as Paradigm for the Eschaton,” *JATS*, 11/1–2 (2000): 148–162.

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been the reason for unbelief. And no single book in Scripture focuses on suffering as poignantly as does the Book of Job.

Job, an upright, “blameless,” and God-fearing man, living a respected, happy, and prosperous life, is suddenly plunged into utter wretchedness. Even his wife urges him to ‘curse God and die’ (2:9). Will Job reject God? This is a the paramount issue that confronts us as we consider Job. What will Job’s response be to the unknown-to-him challenge that Satan has hurled against God.

We, the readers of the book, know Job is innocent. God has declared him so. This is disclosed in the prologue. But without being privy to this knowledge, and in the midst of intense suffering, Job expresses his profound faith in God:

I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.
And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God. (19:25, 26)

There are additional issues beyond that of suffering that we must not overlook in the book of Job. It is particularly important to note that Job is not of the “covenant line,” though the details mentioned of his life likely place him in the time of the patriarchs. (For example, the types of animal herds he had are exactly those described of Abraham and the other patriarchs. Job’s offering sacrifices corresponds to that of the patriarchs. There is no mention of the Exodus in the book of Job, which, subsequent to its occurrence, is mentioned by almost every other Bible writer. Ellen White also informs us that Moses wrote the book of Job while in Midian.¹¹

This constrains us to recognize, in the oldest book of the Bible, that Job is a “worthy gentile.” Thus, God, through Moses’ pen, is careful to record two strands of His family line: the covenant line in the Pentateuch and the existence of faithful believers outside the Abrahamic covenant in the book of Job.

Within this dating schema, we see striking evidence that God, from the very beginning of recorded history, wanted the two sides of the Great Controversy clearly delineated. The Great Battle between Christ and Satan is not a late development in the minds of the Israelites. Very early Satan’s existence is clearly defined, so there will be no confusion or ignorance about him. God’s great providence includes the recording of the life of Job very early in the history of this world so Satan’s adversarial role will be clearly portrayed.

We also observe, starting in chapter one and continuing throughout the rest of the book, that Job is a deeply spiritual and religious man. We read in his book that he regularly offers sacrifices for himself and his family; he is sensitive to the needs of the poor; he is sought out for his wise counsel—and yet he is outside the divinely chosen covenant line of Abraham through which the Messiah has been promised.

¹¹ *Education*, 159.

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This is very significant to me. This is crucial to Seventh-day Adventists in the year 2000. We believe, through a study of Old and New Testament prophecies, that we are called to proclaim God's last message of salvation to a dying world. We believe we are the last remnant of that long line of God's chosen people that started with Abraham. It makes my own heart burn when I trace this glorious legacy! This is a stirring thought, and we should review it often to keep our hearts afire with who we are and where we are in salvation history.

However, the book of Job reminds us of an important perspective that must accompany our mission and our understanding of what it means to be a Seventh-day Adventist. Yes, God has preserved a chosen people and has called us to an important mission. But the life of Job reminds us that He has faithful children outside our church. And if the life of Job is lived in the patriarchal period (as the text itself seems to clearly affirm), when God so pointedly singles out Abraham, He is also careful to record through Moses His special affirmation of a devout believer outside the Old Testament Messianic line. And thus we are reminded through Job that God has faithful children outside our faith. Yes, God chose Abraham to be the Father of Nations, but He says of Job (twice) something He never says about any of the patriarchs (though He comes close with Noah): "Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?'" (1:8 and 2:3). And then later, through Ezekiel, He again twice declares the righteousness of Job. Job becomes one of many other subsequent reminders that God's sphere of influence is much wider than we might imagine!

And for one who considers herself a "militant Adventist," I find I need to remind myself again and again, through the witness of Job's noble life, that God has always had devout followers both inside *and* outside the remnant stream. We mustn't be so stuffy as to think that we alone are God's special people and know all that can be known about God! (I think, for example, of my experience of the spirituality of students on the campus of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, where I earned my doctorate. I think of Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ, who fasts forty days a year, during which time he memorizes Scripture. I think of Jesus, commenting on the centurion's faith: "I have not found so great a faith in Israel" (Matt 8:10; the Gospels all portray Christ commending the faith of non-Israelites.) I am distressed sometimes by the arrogance of some Seventh-day Adventists as they relate to Christians outside our faith.

The teasing irony of God's response to Job's friends teaches us this. *They, and we, need to be reminded that we are not the center of reality.* We Seventh-day Adventists are certain of our role in Salvation History. Yet God's four-chapter discourse address to Job and his friends, the longest divine dialogue in Scripture, reminds us that God's work is much more extensive than we often understand.

God instructs Job that there is indeed a divine plan unfolding in all of creation, but it is a plan infinitely broader than the human mind can grasp in straight-

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forward cause-and-effect patterns. We, along with Job, need to be reminded that there is so much in God's world that eludes human analysis and control. As God instructed Job, "if you cannot understand the *wild* creatures of My creation, if the creation cannot be domesticated, how presumptuous to think that My actions can, and that you can understand what I am doing with my human children!"

Who shut up the sea behind doors
when it burst forth from the womb,
when I made the clouds its garment
and wrapped it in thick darkness,
when I fixed limits for it
and set its door and bars in place,
when I said, "This far you may come and no farther,
here is where your proud waves halt? [Answer Me if you can!]"
(38:8-11)

All right, says God, you take over the running of the universe.

Would you discredit my justice?
Would you condemn me to justify yourself? . . .
Unleash the fury of your wrath,
look at every proud man and bring him low,
look at every proud man and humble him,
crush the wicked where they stand.
Bury them all in the dust together;
shroud their faces in the grave.
Then I myself will admit to you
That your own hand can save you. (40:8-14)

God's declarations brought home to Job, and should to us, too, the limitations of human wisdom.

That Job finally understands this and is transformed by Yahweh's speeches is shown by his response:

I know that you can do all things
and no plan of yours can be thwarted....
My ears had heard of you
but now my eyes have seen you.
Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes. (42:2, 5-6)

God does have plans for this world, and everything is not in chaos, no matter how it looks to us. And as important as the SDA mission is for God's kingdom at this time, we are not the only people He loves and cherishes. (I am always moved when I read of how God calls the fallen inside Babylon "My people" [Rev. 18:2, 4].). Many are the lessons we can learn from God's affirmation of Job.

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Daniel

Seventh-day Adventists rightly continue to study Daniel's prophetic materials. However, in Ezekiel 14 it is Daniel's righteousness that God commends. What is it about Daniel's life that God acclaims? In the opening chapters of his book, we find a portrait of his life of strict temperance and integrity while a captive in Babylon. We also see Daniel maintaining his faith in God in face of death, and more than once. First, when he dares ask for a vegetarian diet as a prisoner-of-war, not knowing what will be the response from those in charge of his life there in Babylon's courts. Daniel is "sorely tried" at this time, Ellen White informs us, and "he was surrounded with distrust and suspicion . . . yet he maintained a serene and cheerful trust in God, never once deviating from principle."¹²

Yet there appears to be no evidence of Daniel harboring a haughty contempt for the non-Hebrew pagan religion he found there in Babylon.¹³ The consistent record in Scripture of Daniel's noble attitude negates that possibility. Nor, however, is Daniel casually assuming that his Israelite faith is just one of several possibilities that climb the same mountain to God, and that it doesn't really matter which religion one chooses.

No, Scripture is explicit: Daniel knows exactly where he stands. He reveres the God of Heaven and faithfully maintains his distinctive worship amid great difficulty. His posture is indisputable. And when called before the king in high court, to the very monarch who despises his Hebrew race and has decimated his own small country of Israel, Daniel does not hesitate to acknowledge the true God of Heaven as his source of wisdom. And he does this repeatedly, at times risking his life.¹⁴

Later, when a death decree is issued by the king, which Daniel realizes will certainly condemn him, he withdraws to his room. And in the face of determined and deadly political strategy, Daniel prays.

This is the fifth prayer in the book of Daniel.¹⁵ The aged prophet knows he is powerless. He has served the high court with distinction and is well-acquainted with Median and Persian law. He realizes that once a royal decree is issued, it is irrevocable (v. 8). Even the king can do nothing. A similar example of the principle appears in the book of Esther (Esth 8:8).

¹² *Selections from the Testimonies to the Church*, 2:69.

¹³ Indeed, he almost certainly studied it in detail, as he is numbered among the "wise men of Babylon" (Dan 2:13), "the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers" (2:2). Perhaps his role was to discover the future by asking the God of Israel, rather than to cast the entrails or read the stars, but he certainly would have had contact with the other "wise men."

¹⁴ "Although he knew full well the consequences of his fidelity to God, his spirit faltered not. Before those who were plotting his ruin, he would not allow even the appearance that his connection with Heaven was severed" (*Prophets and Kings*, 44).

¹⁵ The following material on Daniel's prayer life is influenced by Jacques Doukhan's book, *Secrets of Daniel* (Review and Herald, 2000).

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The prophet's prayer takes on deeper significance when seen in such a context. Daniel does not pray as a religious duty, nor out of mindless routine or superstition. Nor is it just the circumstances that have forced Daniel to pray. The text mentions that he "prayed, . . . just as he had done before" (v. 10). In spite of the calculated extermination policy forced by the satraps, Daniel offers the prayer of a free man. For he has always prayed, no matter what the circumstances. Prayer is not for him a last resort in sickness or in death, but an integral part of his life. The text states plainly that the prophet prays "three times a day" (Dan 6:10, 13), and not just when his soul is stirred by some special need.

But in this instance it takes heroic courage to ignore the edict and pray. In performing the simple act of kneeling, Daniel risks his life. He could have prayed in secret. Scripture even encourages prayer in seclusion (Matt 6:6). But when the authorities outlaw prayer, to pray in hiding is to imply that the king is greater than God. Daniel could have, for a while at least, adapted to the circumstances. After all, God forgives—He knows a person's heart. But Daniel prefers to die rather than put a momentary hold on his communion with heaven, or even let it appear that his connection with God is broken. Under these threatening skies, he does not run for shelter, but stands tall as a free man. The prophet chooses to remain faithful to God in his heart *and* in his actions. His courage is remarkable. An intelligent and experienced man within Persia's high court, Daniel knows what he is up against. His is not the action of naive virtue, incapable of appreciating the gravity of the consequences.

And we find that God dramatically singles out Daniel more than just through the prophet Ezekiel. On three occasions when the mighty angel Gabriel is dispatched from heaven to answer Daniel's prayers, note how Gabriel first expresses to Daniel the divine encouragement: "You are greatly beloved" (Dan. 9:23), and "O Daniel, man greatly beloved" (10:11; 18–19). Daniel is the only person in all the Old Testament so signally affirmed. Only the Messiah Himself receives such multiple divine expressions of affection (when at both His Baptism and His Transfiguration, the Father proclaims from heaven, "This is My beloved Son!").

Why These Three?

Why does God draw such pointed attention to Noah, Job, and Daniel through the prophet Ezekiel? Why does God hold Noah in such high esteem? Could it be because of his unqualified faithfulness amidst the prevailing skepticism of his time, his integrity in the face of scientific and philosophical mockery of the divine command given to him? He seems to face, just as we do now, a worldview committed to a kind of technological positivism which believes reality is defined and circumscribed by what is humanly imaginable and presently available. But Noah grasps the infinite unseen world, and this shapes his strikingly obedient faith, which leads him to follow God's commands explicitly by building a large boat on dry land, having never seen rain, and to announce God's

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judgment on sin. And God commends Noah to us through the prophet Ezekiel—and also through Moses, Peter, and Paul!

Why Job? Job, too, travels a tortuous route with God. Yet in the face of seeming confusion, suffering, and pain, we find Job declaring his immovable faith in God. Moreover, his life is also an important portrait of the “grafted branches” God promises for the True Vine. And we must stand amazed at the *quality* of these grafts!

Why Daniel? Have we who face New Testament Babylon been called to the same lofty standard in our own personal habits, refusing harmful drinks and choosing a simple, vegetarian diet? I occasionally hear rumblings among some Adventists that these health standards of ours are not that important, or maybe not even relevant now. Daniel's singular witness in Babylon's luxurious court and its subsequent results gives different testimony.

Ellen White also implores us regarding Daniel's prayer life:

If we as a people would pray as Daniel prayed, and wrestle as he wrestled, humbling our souls before God, we should realize as marked answers to our petitions as were granted to Daniel.¹⁶

When I consider the profound prayers of Daniel, along with his determination to bring glory to the God of heaven in that premier but pagan court, and recall that he is willing to face execution rather than compromise his faith or even let it appear that his relationship with God has been altered in any way, it is not difficult to understand why God pointedly draws attention to the righteousness of Daniel through the prophet Ezekiel.

Noah, Job, and Daniel—each one of them faces a distinct challenge that demands a profound level of faith. The issues that confronted them:

- faith in the word of God amid prevailing scientific skepticism,¹⁷
- faith in God in spite of acute suffering;¹⁸

¹⁶ *The Sanctified Life*, 47. She also tells us “Daniel was a moral and intellectual giant; yet he did not reach this pre-eminence at once and without effort. He was continually seeking for greater knowledge, for higher attainments. Other young men had the same advantages; but they did not, like him, bend all their energies to seek wisdom” (*Selections from the Testimonies to the Church*, 2:69)”

¹⁷ “Every soul of us living upon the face of the earth must have our test and trials. Circumstances will occur in the providence of God when we will be called to vindicate our faith. We shall give decided evidence which side we are on. We shall either be decidedly the vindicators of God's holy law, or on the side of the transgressors. We shall be tested as Noah was tested. Because the corruption was nearly universal in his age, did he then argue that it would not pay for him to stand separate and alone for God's law? He took his position as God's nobleman on the side of right because it was right” (*Christ Triumphant*, 59 [Ms 86, 1886]).

¹⁸ “Jesus did not interpose to deliver His servant. He knew that John would bear the test. Gladly would the Saviour have come to John to brighten the dungeon gloom with His own presence. But He was not to place Himself in the hands of enemies and imperil His own mission. Gladly would He have delivered His faithful servant. But for the sake of thousands who in after years must pass from prison to death, John was to drink the cup of martyrdom. As the followers of Jesus should languish in lonely cells, or perish by the sword, the rack, or the fagot, apparently forsaken by God and man, what a stay to their hearts would be the thought that John the Baptist, to whose faithfulness

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—faith in God displayed in a situation of sophisticated pluralism, choosing to accept death rather than dishonor God.

These are issues that Ellen White, in *The Great Controversy*, suggests we too will face as our world falls under its final judgment.

Through Ezekiel, God commends these three Old Testament “worthies” to us, twice in one chapter! When God speaks, we can believe Him. He does not deal in “doublespeak.” All through Scripture God calls us to righteousness. For example, He urges through Amos:

Let justice run down like water,
And righteousness like a mighty stream. (Amos 5:24)

He also commends Noah, Job, and Daniel for their righteous lives. Thus, we can begin to understand what God means. He twice calls our attention to these three, coupled with the repetition of “thus says the Lord.” We can be certain what a righteous life really means—faithfulness to God *no matter what*.

Jo Ann Davidson teaches Systematic Theology at the S.D.A. Theological Seminary, Andrews University, and is President of the Adventist Theological Society. She holds a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Christ Himself had borne witness, had passed through a similar experience. . . . 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 coworkers with Him. Not Enoch, who was translated to heaven, not Elijah, who ascended in a chariot of fire, was greater or more honored than John the Baptist, who perished alone in the dungeon. ‘Unto you it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.’ Phil. 1:29. And of all the gifts that Heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor” (*Desire of Ages* [Chapter: “Imprisonment and Death of John”], 224, 225).