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A Strategy To Increase Devotional Reading Of Ellen G. White's Books On The Bible Story At the Augusta First Seventh-Day Adventist Church

Bobby J. Boles
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ABSTRACT

A STRATEGY TO INCREASE DEVOTIONAL READING OF ELLEN G. WHITE’S BOOKS ON THE BIBLE STORY AT THE AUGUSTA FIRST SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Bobby J. Boles

Adviser: Walton Williams
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A STRATEGY TO INCREASE DEVOTIONAL READING OF ELLEN G. WHITE’S BOOKS ON THE BIBLE STORY AT THE AUGUSTA FIRST SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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Date completed: August 2017

Problem

Some members of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church felt the writings of Ellen G. White were irrelevant and thus had no influence in their spiritual life. The church members had dismissed her writings in their spiritual journeys and instead read the works of more contemporary authors. This group seemed to be apathetic to the matter of Ellen White as a prophet, and some avoided her written work all together. A contributing factor to this indifference might have been a lack of devotional reading of her books on the Bible story. By addressing this lack of devotional reading, I thought some might find Ellen G. White’s writings more relevant.
Method

A strategy was implemented to preach a series of sermons, implement small group discussions and create a supplemental reading plan to effect changes in the reading habits and patterns of the members of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church regarding their reading of Ellen G. White’s writings on the Bible. *Patriarchs and Prophets* was the book of choice, and a reading plan was shared with members of the congregation to guide them in their regular reading. A survey conducted before and after the sermon series was used to gauge changes in reading behavior.

Results

The overall reading of Ellen G. White’s works on the Bible story increased during the course of the project. Although attitudes toward Ellen G. White as a prophet remained unchanged, there was in fact a significant increase in the congregation’s reading of *Patriarchs and Prophets*. There were only slight changes and impacts on the congregation’s overall devotional patterns or in their Bible reading habits because of the sermon series. A positive result of the project was getting those who had never read Ellen G. White to give her a try. A shift in reading patterns of the congregation was demonstrated from non-Seventh-day Adventist Christian writers to the works of Ellen G. White.

Conclusions

The project was a success because the key goal was achieved. At the end of the project, more people within the congregation were reading the works Ellen G. White wrote about the Bible story and there was a significant increase in those reading *Patriarchs and Prophets*. More research is merited and needed in the area of
understanding reading patterns within the works of Ellen G. White and who is reading them. There is a glaring absence of research in the area of seeking to understand potential benefits and effects of reading the writings of Ellen G. White.
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A Project Document

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .............................................. viii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................ ix

Chapter

1. AN INTRODUCTION ........................................... 1
   - Personal History ........................................ 1
   - Ministry Context ........................................ 4
   - Purpose .................................................. 5
   - Statement of the Task ................................... 6
   - Justification for the Project ............................. 6
   - Expectations for the Project ............................. 7
   - Delimitations ............................................. 7
   - Limitations .............................................. 8
   - Definition of Terms ...................................... 8
   - Methodology ............................................. 11
   - Overview ................................................ 13

2. A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE GIFT OF
PROPHECY AND REGULARLY READING
THE WORKS OF THE PROPHETS ............................ 15
   - Introduction ............................................. 15
   - Biblical Doctrine of the Gift of Prophecy .............. 16
     - God’s Way of Communicating ............................ 17
     - Reveals Through His Servants .......................... 17
     - Reveals All Secrets .................................... 19
   - A Spiritual Gift ......................................... 19
     - Gift of Prophecy ....................................... 20
     - Highly Desired ........................................ 21
   - Description of the Gift .................................. 23
     - Diversity of Servants .................................. 23
     - Diversity of Methods ................................... 25
     - Contemporary Prophets ................................ 26
   - Receiving the Gift ....................................... 27
     - Test the Spirits ....................................... 27
     - Do Not Despise ........................................ 30
   - Summary .................................................. 32
Youth .................................................. 69
Effects of Reading Ellen G. White ......................... 70
Historical Review ........................................ 70
Ellen G. White ......................................... 70
Lack of Research ...................................... 71
Spirit of Prophecy Influence ............................ 71
Eight Reasons to Read ................................ 72
Dudley and Cummings’s Study ........................... 72
Lost and Found ........................................ 72
The Study ............................................... 73
Effects on Personal Spirituality ......................... 74
Effects on Witness .................................... 75
Summary ................................................ 76
Effects on Membership ................................. 77
New Members .......................................... 77
Former Members .................................... 77
Conclusion ............................................. 79

4. METHODOLOGY, DESIGN, AND IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE INTERVENTION STRATEGY ...................... 81

Intervention Methodology and Project Development ..... 81
Foundational Basis ..................................... 81
Theological Foundation ................................ 82
Summary of Literature Review .......................... 82
Personal Observation and Interaction .................... 83
Preliminary Survey .................................... 84
Methodology, Design, and Intervention Project Overview 85
Project Methodology .................................... 85
Project Design and Overview .............................. 86
Intervention Project Description and Implementation Narrative .. 87
Augusta First Congregation ............................... 88
Target Group .......................................... 88
Exclusions ............................................ 88
Attendance Patterns .................................... 89
Board and Congregation Inclusion ....................... 89
Implementation Narrative and Notes ...................... 89
Project Time Frame .................................... 91
Strategy and Reasoning ................................ 91
Balanced and Focused Schedule ........................ 91
Implementation Narrative and Notes ...................... 92
The Survey ............................................. 93
Design of the Instrument ................................ 93
Extra Information ...................................... 94
Distribution and Collection ............................ 95
Implementation Narrative and Notes ...................... 96
5. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .................................................. 112

   Demographics of the Survey Groups ................................................. 112
       Population Size .................................. 112
       Gender ........................................ 113
       Age Groupings .................................. 114
       Denominational Affiliation .............................. 115
       Race and Socioeconomic Make-up ......................... 116
   Survey Questions .................................................. 116
       Personal Devotions ................................ 116
       Read Bible Devotionally ........................….. 117
       Family Worship ...................................... 118
       Read Other Christian Books .......................... 119
       Attitude Toward Ellen G. White’s Writings ............ 120
       Opinions of Ellen G. White .............................. 121
       Reading Ellen G. White ................................. 123
       Reading Ellen G. White’s Books on the Bible Story .... 124
       Reading Patriarchs and Prophets ....................... 125
   Conclusions .................................................. 126
   Assessment of the Intervention ............................................. 128
   Recommendations ................................................ 129
   Personal Effects of This Project ....................................... 131
Appendix

A. MINISTRY CONTEXT ........................................ 133
B. CONGREGATIONAL MATERIALS ......................... 188
C. SERMONS ................................................... 193
D. SMALL GROUP STUDIES ................................... 263

REFERENCE LIST .................................................. 275

VITA ................................................................. 283
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Gender of Respondents ........................................... 113
2. Age group of Respondents .......................................... 114
3. Denominational Religious Affiliation of Respondents .......... 115
4. Those Who Have Personal Devotions .............................. 117
5. Those Who Read the Bible Devotionally .......................... 118
6. Those Who Had Family Worship ................................... 119
7. Those Who Read Christian Books Other Than Ellen G. White ... 120
8. General Attitude Toward Ellen G. White’s Writings .......... 121
9. Opinions of Ellen G. White’s Writing ............................. 123
10. Those Who Read Ellen G. White ................................. 124
11. Those Who Read Ellen G. White Books on the Bible Story ... 125
12. Those Who Read Patriarchs and Prophets ...................... 126
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CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION

Personal History

I grew up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As a family, we went to church every Saturday. My parents were so involved in church and so supportive of church activities that we set our family schedule and even our vacation plans around the church calendar. Skipping church was not an option, and if the church doors were open, we were there. Church was a part of who we were. It was our identity. I was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church when I was 8 years old.

Our home had all the little red books of Ellen G. White, and we read from them regularly. However, I observed as I grew up that my parents had a very commonsense approach to Ellen White. Their opinions of her writings contrasted with other members, who would argue points weekly at church using Ellen White’s books as ammunition. I also noticed a difference in my parents’ spiritual journey compared to those who were constantly haranguing individuals with quotes from Ellen White. Those other people seemed angry, critical, and not happy.

My parents relocated our family to a different city twice to be near Seventh-day Adventist schools. They sacrificed time and money and spent all they had to ensure my sisters and I received an Adventist Christian education. I attended all eight years of my
elementary education in Adventist schools and all four years of high school at an
Adventist academy (Georgia Cumberland Academy).

While I was a student away from home at Georgia Cumberland Academy, I began
to question my spiritual identity. I understood Adventist culture, knew Adventist
doctrine, and was quite knowledgeable in religious behavioral expectations. However, I
did not know why Adventists did what they did or understand how Jesus fit into the
picture. It was then I experienced a pendulum swing regarding Ellen G. White. During
my academy years in high school, I did not hear much about her at all. It was as if she
did not exist. This perplexed me because, if she was important, why was she not
emphasized?

At that point in my life, I was extremely religious but not very spiritual. Perhaps
my spiritual journey would have been positively affected during these wondering years if
I had been reading Ellen G. White’s spiritual work. It was through the influence of the
campus chaplain, LeClaire Litchfield, that I began to meet, know, and love Jesus Christ.
At a Week of Prayer, I rededicated my life to Jesus and had a desire to walk with Him.

After initially fighting the calling to be a minister, I finally accepted what I felt to
be the Spirit’s invitation to be a pastor. I then went to Southern Adventist University to
study theology. There, I was unexpectedly shaken in my religious journey. I had church
culture, doctrine, and religiosity down pat. I had a blossoming relationship with Jesus. I
was learning, however, to challenge those Adventist mores that had shaped my life.
There seemed to be a battle raging that I had never seen before. This battle was inside
the church and not outside, as I would have expected. The controversy was not between
Christ and Satan as much as it was between brothers and sisters within the church.
I had no idea there was so many differences of opinion about the beliefs that I had held so dear all my life. I had assumed that the church was united, but I learned that it was not. There were battles over things I had never even thought about before, like the nature of Adam and the nature of Christ. There were battles over what I thought were absurd things like whether honey was vegan and whether meat eaters would go to heaven. There were battles over Sabbath observance and over styles of music. There were battles over what to wear and what not to wear. I also saw the battle over Ellen G. White’s prophetic gift and her role in the church. Some rejected her gift of inspiration outright while others over quoted her written works. It appeared to me that very few Adventists remained balanced regarding their view of Ellen G. White and her prophetic gift. It appeared to me that there was a clear lack of a healthy hermeneutic for reading her writings. Regarding her written work some accepted everything she wrote as inspired, others were more critical and discerning of what they read while still others rejected all of what she wrote labeling it as uninspired.

After college, my years at seminary did nothing to allay these feelings of division. Instead, it seemed that within every class there were more little fights over all kinds of seemingly trivial points. There were professors who disagreed with other professors and students who disagreed with other students. The 27 (now 28) fundamental beliefs did not seem to me to be as unifying as they once had been. Instead of unity in the beliefs, there were a thousand different opinions about the interpretation and implementation of those beliefs. Over time, I noticed most people settling into one of two camps: those who were grace-based and those who were law-based in their application to spiritual life. One key distinction between these groups was their views of Ellen G. White. Some viewed her as
a prophet and saw her works as inspired and the other group viewed her as a nice lady but
her writings were perhaps helpful but not inspired.

It was difficult to find a balanced perspective on the writings of Ellen G. White. I
either found a group who used her works sparingly or not at all or a group who quoted (or
misquoted) her more than the Bible. Moreover, I sensed a dislike and even a distrust of
one group of the other. I was conflicted, battered, and tired of playing referee as pastor. I
thought that if I could unite people around the issue of Ellen G. White rather than her
being a wedge who divided them, then harmony and unity might be achieved.

I began a journey to seek an answer for myself. I decided to do something I had
never really done and actually read the writings of Ellen G. White. I had read portions,
many portions, and heard her quoted ad nauseam. I decided to begin, not with
compilations or ecclesiastical works, but with her writings about the Bible story. I read
the first four books of the Conflict of the Ages series that cover the Bible story from
Genesis to the apostles. That journey of reading her works kept me in the church and was
where I found the balance that I had been seeking, a balance that so often is not
understood on either side of those who take a stand for Ellen G. White or against her. I
found a grace-based, Christ-loving, Bible-based center that I seek to maintain to this day.

Ministry Context

This doctor of ministry project was conducted at the Augusta First Seventh-day
Adventist Church in Augusta, Georgia. Founded in 1922, the church is the oldest
Seventh-day Adventist congregation in the metro Augusta, Georgia, area. At the time of
the project intervention, the membership of the congregation was 517, with an average
weekly attendance between 240 and 275. After taking away the Hispanic church plant,
the average attendance to August First was around 200. Approximately 245 of the members were active. Although attendance was much less than membership, the congregation had an active population of around 500 individuals. Approximately 275 local households were on the mailing list for the monthly newsletter.

The church was an active congregation that had vibrant outreach work and many ministries. The congregation regularly had one of the highest baptism numbers in the entire conference. It had planted a Korean church two years before the project and planted a Hispanic church the same year as the project. Augusta First ran a Kindergarten to 8th-grade school with 33 students. There were two pastors serving the church and two teachers at the school.

Augusta First was, for the most part, conservative in theology, lifestyle issues, and worship style. It was not a wealthy congregation and consisted largely of retirees and blue-collar working class. The congregation had more females than males with an equal distribution of age. It was a multicultural congregation, with minority groups comprising 51% of the population. The annual tithe given by the church was $498,338 compared to the annual church budget of $128,000. The church had been the focus of several offshoot groups trying to take members away to join their heretical views. See Appendix A for a full ministry context paper regarding the Augusta First Church.

**Purpose**

Some members of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church felt the writings of Ellen G. White are irrelevant and thus had no influence in their spiritual life. They had dismissed her writings in their spiritual journeys, instead were reading works of more contemporary authors. This group seemed to be apathetic to the matter, and others
avoided her work altogether. A contributing factor to this indifference might have been a lack of devotional reading of her books on the Bible story. By addressing this lack of devotional reading, the goal was to lead some to find Ellen G. White’s writings to be more relevant.

**Statement of the Task**

The task of this project was to develop and implement a preaching strategy to inspire and motivate individuals to read Ellen G. White’s narrative work on the Bible story devotionally, especially the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*. This project was evaluated to determine its impact on increasing the reading of these books, specifically *Patriarchs and Prophets*, among the congregation of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church.

**Justification for the Project**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, while believing that the Bible is the supreme authority, believes that the writings of Ellen G. White are inspired and beneficial to read. I believe many are missing a rich blessing from the Lord by not reading her works. This project targeted increasing the reading of Ellen G. White’s writings on the Bible story (Genesis to Acts in particular) within the congregation.

Some who focus on the instructional aspects of her work have ended up using it to condemn or criticize others. They have missed the beauty of her devotional work, which could have helped them grow spiritually. Also, many only read snippets or compilations and lose the context of her message. A refocus on the proper use of Ellen G. White’s writings is needed. I believed that a congregation systematically exposed to the balanced writings of Ellen White and who hear sermons enriched with those insights on the Bible
story would feel more motivated to read her writings in general than those who do not have this exposure.

**Expectations for the Project**

I sought to develop an overall strategy to increase regular devotional reading of Ellen G. White’s commentary works on the Bible, specifically the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

Also, I wanted to provide a potential model for preaching Ellen G. White’s commentary on the Bible story.

Further, I sought to be a model for reading Ellen G. White’s commentary on the Bible story.

In addition, I sought to increase the importance people place on reading Ellen G. White’s commentary on the Bible story.

**Delimitations**

This project was limited to the congregation of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church in Augusta, Georgia. Surveys were only given to consenting adults who were 18 years and older. The survey instrument did not seek to follow specific individual reading patterns but rather looked at changes between the two volunteer groups (one taken before and one after the project). The project’s focus was on the overall change in reading patterns of the works of Ellen G. White on the Bible story. The project did not seek to determine or track personal views of Ellen G. White as much as to understand their reading pattern of her work during this time and to note the change in attitude.
Limitations

As individuals were not tracked between surveys, it could not be determined precisely if individuals changed their reading patterns as much as if the two distinct groups had changed reading habits. Although common sense would indicate that most of the two survey groups (pre and post) were the same, it is theoretically possible that they were two completely different groups.

There was no guarantee that people did not answer the postsurvey with an intention to give the expected answer (the Halo effect). Even though I never revealed why we were doing the special sermon series, it is plausible that some were trying to help me out by demonstrating an increase that did not exist. Even though the surveys were anonymous, it is also plausible that an Adventist would be guilt driven to put down that they read more of Ellen G. White than they actually did to avoid looking bad.

Definition of Terms

Adventist. Although this term historically referred to those coming out of the Millerite movement of the 19th century who believed in the imminent return of Christ, in the 21st century, it now mostly refers to those in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Within this paper, it refers to those who are Seventh-day Adventists.

Christians. Other terms for Christian will be used in this document like Believers, Followers, People of God, God’s People, Brethren, Saints and Disciples.

Church. For the sake of this paper’s discussion, the term the church is used to refer to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This does not mean to convey that it is the only church or that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the only definition of the church.
However, as the discussions herein are in reference to Seventh-day Adventists’ opinions and beliefs, it is used in such a manner.

*Conference.* An organizational structure within the Seventh-day Adventist Church that, in this paper, references the Georgia Cumberland Conference of Seventh-day Adventists that has oversight of a group of churches in Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina.

*Division.* The term *division* in this paper refers to a unit of the Seventh-day Adventist administrative structure that covers a portion of international geography or a collection of countries. There are 15 divisions in the Seventh-day Adventist Church covering the world. The North American Division is the administrative body over the church in the United States, Canada, and Bermuda.

*Ellen G. White.* The following are other names in which she may be referenced to in this work or may be referenced in quotations: Ellen Gould Harmon, Ellen G. Harmon, Ellen Gould White, Ellen Gould Harmon White, E. G. White, Ellen G. White, Ellen White, Mrs. White, and Sister White.

*Ellen G. White Estate.* This is the organization that is authorized, empowered, and entrusted to oversee, print, and defend the writings of Ellen G. White.

*Fundamental belief.* The Seventh-day Adventist Church has 28 (formerly 27) fundamental beliefs. These 28 paragraphs summarize the various categories of theological belief voted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church and comprise the official doctrine of the church.
General Conference. This is the highest administrative level within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The official name is the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

General Conference Session. This is the gathering of delegates of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. The General Conference Session is the only place where the Seventh-day Adventist Church votes doctrine and theological beliefs for the church.

NKJV. Abbreviation for the Bible version New King James Version. All scriptures will be from this version unless otherwise noted.

Offshoot. Term used to refer to a group that is not officially Seventh-day Adventist but who target Adventists and try to get them to leave the church. They strive to get Seventh-day Adventists to join their group, which usually has different theology than Adventists.

Prophet. A person (male or female) whom God has blessed with the gift of prophecy. This gift of prophecy includes foretelling and forthtelling. Prophets give Divine insights into the future but also share the Word from the Lord to inspire change and spiritual transformation in the receiver of the message. Both the prophet and their writings must be tested against the standards of the Bible.

Spirit of Prophecy. The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that the spiritual gift of prophecy, sometimes referred to as the Spirit of Prophecy or Gift of Prophecy, is a spiritual gift open to all who are willing to receive it should God chose to bestow it upon them. It is not exclusive to only one person or one type of person. The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes the Spirit of Prophecy was manifest in the life of Ellen G. White in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Because of this
understanding, many refer to the Spirit of Prophecy within the Seventh-day Adventist Church synonymously with Ellen G. White’s prophetic gift. This latter approach was used in this paper.

*Word of God.* Another term for the Bible.

**Methodology**

The project intervention was a quantitative study to determine the reading changes of Ellen G. White’s writings on the Bible story and in particular the book *Patriarchs and Prophets* within the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church. A survey was the analytic tool used to determine reading patterns and to determine any before and after changes in this pattern. The same survey was given to the congregation twice, once at the beginning before the sermon series and again at the end of the series.

The initial survey was given to determine the congregation’s baseline reading pattern and opinion of Ellen G. White’s works on the Bible story. The survey was distributed over a three-week span leading up to the beginning of the sermon series. Individuals were asked to take the survey only once. The survey was available to take over a period of weeks to ensure that as many people as possible within the active congregation would have the opportunity to take it if they chose to do so.

A strategy was designed and implemented to increase the congregation’s devotional reading within *Patriarchs and Prophets*. A sermonic series was created, promoted and preached entitled “Faith of Our Fathers” and covered nine key patriarchs (Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samson, Samuel, David). While these specific nine individuals happened to be men, it should be noted and clarified that God has always used men and women as His leaders, prophets and agents for change. While
the name of the sermon series was “Faith of Our Fathers,” no exclusion of the important
contribution woman have made in God’s people was intended. Biblical expository
sermons were created and preached using the content of Patriarchs and Prophets to
enrich and add external insights into the text. The content of Patriarchs and Prophets
was integrated seamlessly into the sermon and was not simply quoted or read. The
congregation was encouraged to read the accompanying passage of scripture and pages in
Patriarchs and Prophets that went along with that week’s sermon. Unique sermon study
guides were handed out for each sermon.

As part of the overall strategy, the congregation’s prayer meeting topics were
based on the scheduled reading of Patriarchs and Prophets. Rather than studying a Bible
character, the small group study guides used for prayer meeting were event or topic-based
(Creation, Tower of Babel, Sodom, Plagues of Egypt, Tabernacle, Law, Jericho, Annual
Feasts, The Ark Stolen, Sorcery, David’s Sin). Unique small group study sheets were
given out for each prayer meeting.

A reading plan for Patriarchs and Prophets was created as part of the overall
project strategy to guide the congregation through the duration of the sermon series. The
reading schedule harmonized with the sermons and the prayer meeting topics. A quantity
of the book Patriarchs and Prophets was purchased by the church to distribute to the
congregation to ensure there was one available for each person in the church who needed
it.

At the end of the sermon series, the survey was administered for a second time to
assess any changes within the congregation’s reading pattern of Ellen G. White’s
narrative on the Bible story, including the promoted book Patriarchs and Prophets. As
with the presurvey, this postsurvey was given over a three-week span to ensure everyone
had the opportunity to take it. Any changes in the survey respondents’ reading patterns
of the writings of Ellen G. White were noted. The project spanned three months and
included nine sermons and 11 prayer meetings. The Faith of Our Fathers series began on
March 5, 2011, and ended on May 11, 2011.

Overview

Chapter 2 is a theological reflection focused on exploring two key biblical areas:
the gift of prophecy and reading the works of the prophets. As an introduction to this
chapter, the supremacy of the Bible as a belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is
shared, which lays the foundational belief that the Word of God is the unchangeable
Seventh-day Adventist standard for doctrines. The first biblical area explored is the
document of the gift of prophecy. It is examined to establish the understanding that the gift
of prophecy is a key manner in which God communicates with His people and is one of
the spiritual gifts He gives His church. The second biblical area expounded on is the
importance of regularly reading the works of the prophets in conjunction with their
significance and impact on the Christian walk.

Chapter 3 is a thorough literature review on the topic. An account of the current
state of literature in this area will be given, along with an explanation of why so little
research exists. I will first examine feelings and attitudes within the Seventh-day
Adventist Church toward Ellen G. White as a prophet and her writings as inspired. Next,
I will explore reading patterns within the Adventist church to determine who is reading
Ellen White and how often. Last, the effects of reading Ellen G. White will be explored
to learn what research exists demonstrating the spiritual benefits of reading the works of
Ellen G. White.

Chapter 4 details the project intervention’s design and implementation. It
chronologically lays out the implementation and expounds on each aspect of the project
regarding why it was done in the manner it was. The narrative of the actual
implementation of the project is shared throughout the chapter.

Chapter 5 conveys the final results of the data from the project intervention. The
two surveys are compared to examine the differences between the before and after
groups. The examination of the final data was quantitative and focused on the change in
number of regular readers of Patriarchs and Prophets and other books Ellen G. White
wrote on the Bible story. While the focus of the results of this project are quantitative in
nature, some qualitative assessment will be given by me. Having served the August First
SDA Church for 6 years as their Senior Pastor, I became attuned and connected to their
spiritual journey making me therefore qualified to share my professional opinion
regarding their experience during this time. Additional interesting statistical changes
between the two groups of readers are also noted. This chapter concludes with insights
regarding how this project could have been strengthened and areas of potential future
research.
CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE GIFT OF PROPHECY AND REGULARLY READING THE WORKS OF THE PROPHETS

Introduction

Understanding where to turn for counsel, direction, and guidance is imperative to Christians’ walk and spiritual growth. Knowing whether the counsel received is of God is also important. Thousands of religious teachers, pastors, rabbis, priests, gurus, and spiritual leaders promote their wisdom or teachings as truth. People continue to search for a safe place to receive the Word of God, to learn how to filter the plethora of religious writings to understand which is right and which is wrong, to understand how God communicates to His people and how His people hear that message, and to learn the importance of the daily spiritual walk in feeding the soul on its quest for growth in Christ. I address these issues in this chapter.

Before the biblical journey to find answers begins, the first step is to lay a solid foundation of understanding regarding the supremacy of the Bible. I did not seek to expound on this specific area in depth, as my focus was on the Spirit of Prophecy and reading the works of the prophets. To grow spiritually and to mature as Christians, it is important to ensure that the foundation on which they stand is solid. The Bible is that foundation. According to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (1988), “No book has been so loved, so hated, so revered, so damned as the Bible. People have died for the Bible. Others have killed for it” (p. 5). The Bible’s author, origin, and
purpose have often been misunderstood or maligned. A correct understanding of the
Scripture’s importance is central to a spiritual understanding and a Christian walk.

The Seventh-day Adventist Belief Number 1 is as follows:

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given
by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were
moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge
necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will.
They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of
doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (General Conference of
Seventh-day Adventists, 1988, p. 4)

I will move forward with this truth of the Bible’s supremacy as a denominational
belief and will build off this understanding. Seventh-day Adventists believe the Bible is
the authoritative foundation that reigns supreme over all other written works, religious or
otherwise, in the Christian experience. The Bible is the Christian standard and rule of
faith for believers. It serves as the constitution for our spiritual journey. The Scriptures
stand forever and are unchangeably perfect. The Holy Spirit inspired the men who wrote
the Bible and that same Spirit is available to Christians to assist them in their
understanding of the Holy Word of God. Regardless of contemporary examples of the
Spirit of Prophecy, the Bible remains supreme.

**Biblical Doctrine of the Gift of Prophecy**

Now that I have shared the foundational belief that the Bible is the Word of God
and the authority for Believers, I will now explore how God speaks through the people
who write the inspired Word.
God’s Way of Communicating

God could have chosen other ways to unveil His instructions and will to His people, but He chose to empower humans as a medium for His voice. In this section, I explore God’s method for revealing all His secrets to His church.

Reveals Through His Servants

A key Scripture in understanding how God communicates with His people is the following: “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). Through the ages and from the beginning of human history, God has communicated with His people. He has not left humans to their own wisdom, direction, and devices. Instead, He has reached down from on high to reveal, counsel, instruct, reprove, encourage, and judge as needed and when needed.

Holbrook (1982) describes a “fundamental need for communication” (p. 1) between God and sinful man. He notes that throughout history, cults and false prophets have sought to mislead the uninformed and unsuspecting and distract from the authentic vehicle of God’s voice: prophecy (Holbrook, 1982, p. 1). Jesus also warned of fake and false prophets in Matthew 24. The warnings of fake or false prophets indicate that there are also genuine prophets.

The Lord chooses individuals to be conduits for His communication. Stuart (2002) indicates that what comes from God to prophets is “legitimate prophetic authority” (p. 325), and because it is received from God, it is therefore true. God does not have to use prophets and is certainly capable of speaking directly to us. God is not in a box that limits His power, but prophesy is the method He has chosen, and Amos 3:7
shows that He has decided to use prophets as the means of communicating with humans. God uses prophecy as His modus operandi to speak to fallen humankind.

Guenther (1998) explains that Amos developed a foundational principle that Israel is responsible for its own failure to hear and heed the prophetic word of the Lord throughout their history. The form of writing used follows the same pattern as God’s prophecies against the seven nations of the first two chapters of Amos. This passage is a prophecy of judgment against Israel. The message is stern and unpleasant (Guenther, 1998, pp. 273-274). The context of Amos 3:7 conveys that God uses prophets and that there are consequences for not obeying the Lord’s voice.

The seven questions asked throughout Amos 3 follow a common pattern of the day that Smith and Page (1995) indicate would have been familiar to the reader; the Israelites would have expected this grouping of seven. However, the common reader of the day would have been surprised by Amos adding an eighth statement and two additional questions in Verses 7 and 8. The eighth oracle is in the declarative-question pattern, and its purpose is to give a statement of authority to the prophet and His message (Smith & Page, 1995, p. 75). Some scholars, such as McComisky (1986), feel Verse 7 has no place in the middle of the eight questions (Amos 3:2-8) and attribute the addition of the verse to the alleged “Deuteronomist” promoted by Julius Wellhausen (Elwell & Beitzel, 1988). I agree with McComisky that Verse 7 is a key component to the passage, as it sets the prophetic tone for the message and indicates that the messenger’s authority is coming directly from God (McComiskey, 1986, p. 299).

Readers should not be confused by the term servants in the Amos passage, as it relates to the topic of prophets. This does not mean that all servants are prophets but
rather that all prophets are servants of the Lord. The term servants connected to prophets is common in Old Testament literature, and this concept of prophets as servants of God is originally a “Deuteronomistic conception” (Aune, 1998, p. 570). God’s prophets could be referred to as His officers (Waard & Smalley, 1979, p. 66). The prophets are not merely called by God but are also subject to Him and serve to convey the Lord’s message. They are divine messengers conveying God’s timely message to His people.

Reveals All Secrets

The word סָוד (cowd/sode) occurs in the Bible as secret nine times, counsel six times, assembly five times, and inward once (Strong, 2001). The New International Version translates סָוד as plan. The secret nuance in the verse is to convey God’s desire to share things that humans would not know if God had not revealed them. Thus, the information was not hidden from them as much as they did not and could not know it unless the Lord showed it to them. God’s purpose and will are not revealed or known until He desires this. His revelation is to His people and not to the world in general (Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown, 1997).

God does not hold back from His people what they need to know. Amos 3:7 indicates that God reveals or unveils truth to His people when and as they need it. King Nebuchadnezzar’s proclamation to Daniel after God revealed the king’s dream to him through Daniel was as follows: “Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret” (Dan 2:47).

A Spiritual Gift

It is important to address the specific manner of how the Lord “reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). God gives a wide spectrum of enabling powers
to the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit. These powers are called spiritual gifts, and in this section, I address the gift of prophecy.

**Gift of Prophecy**

A foundationally relevant passage appears in the book of Romans: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith” (Rom 12:6). There are many spiritual gifts, and as Schweizer (1989, p. 406) pointed out, there is even a gift to distinguish between authentic and unauthentic gifts (1 Cor 7:40 & 1 John 4:1). Evans (2008) described a prophet as one who is to “challenge believers” (p. 6) in their Christian experience and to be the voice of God to the Church and world.

Among the variety of gifts that God gives to His people is the gift of prophecy. God does not give the gift of prophecy to all His people but rather disperses among His church the various gifts to whom he pleases and chooses. He calls some to be prophets, just as He calls some to be teachers and some to be pastors. Froom (1946-1954) noted that the Scriptures, after Jesus and the Holy Ghost, are in fact the Divine’s “best gift to man” (p. 966). God elevated the gift of prophecy from strange whimsy onto the highest level in the development of the plan of salvation.

The passage in Romans 12 cited above corresponds to one in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 in which Paul records a list of spiritual gifts. A portion of that passage is as follows: “to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues” (1 Cor 12:10). The lists of spiritual gifts found in Romans and First Corinthians differ because they are not a comprehensive listing but rather a sampling of the diverse gifts.
Flesseman-Van Leer (1989, p. 353) notes that the lists may be distinctive because Paul was highlighting different gifts depending on what the needs were in the audience receiving the letter. Regardless of Paul’s reasons for having unique lists, the Gift of Prophecy is cited in both lists and is clearly one of the spiritual gifts given to the church.

The Gift of Prophecy is to be used for the edification of the church, as explained in 1 Corinthians 14:4: “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.” This is one of the best explanations of the purpose of the gift of prophecy and how it works. Dederen (2001, p. 623) notes that it is through the Holy Spirit that the prophets relay messages from God to the people so they may know His will. It is not to glorify the prophet or for the church’s entertainment. The gift of prophecy is God speaking to His children.

Duffield and Van Cleave (1983, p. 330) describe three effects of the gift of prophecy that all build up and benefit the church: edification, exhortation, and comfort. I disagree with MacArthur (MacArthur & the Master’s College Faculty, 2005, p. 150) that these three components are just describing biblical counseling. I concede that, although a prophet becomes equipped to provide counseling by virtue of these three components, all counselors are not prophets. Labeling what the prophet does as counseling demeans its high calling and silences the prophetic divine voice within. A person cannot become licensed to become a prophet, but a person can become licensed to be a counselor. The gift of prophecy is unique and few are chosen.

**Highly Desired**

Paul further expounds on the subject by saying, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor 14:1). This verse does not say that
just anyone can or should all be able to prophesy. God will call whom He will for this important task, and people should not trivialize it as if all have, or could have, the gift. The gift of prophecy is a special gift that should be respected, reverenced, and appreciated within the church. Instead of being highly desired within the body of Christ, many often ignore or brush aside this precious gift.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul instructs the Corinthians to “Earnestly desire the best gifts” (1 Cor 12:31). Williams (1996) notes this verse refers to a “hierarchy of gifts” (p. 341) or at a minimum indicates that some are more important than others. Some readers may ask whether this is possible and what the more important gifts are. Williams gives a three-point answer to the question:

1. There is no distinction of desire as Paul also says we are to desire “spiritual gifts” in 1 Corinthians 14:1. We are to desire all spiritual gifts including the best ones or “greater” ones.

2. One gift may be “greater” or “better” because of its impact when received. Some have more effect on building up the community of Christ. The greater gifts are those that more greatly edify the church.

3. Paul does not specify which the greater gifts are.

So Paul tells Christians to desire spiritual gifts from the Lord but clarifies that some are better because they have a greater impact on the church. I believe Paul is also saying that Believers should pursue the greater gifts, and I include the gift of prophecy among them. Nothing could be more important or impactful than receiving a communication from the Lord. Followers of God are to embrace the gift of prophecy rather than reject or ignore it.
Description of the Gift

I have established that the gift of prophecy is one of the great spiritual gifts God gives His people, and it is His chosen method of communicating with humankind. I now seek to explain who is to receive this gift, how to receive the gift, and whether it is a contemporary gift. I examine two parallel passages: an Old Testament text (Joel 2:28) and a New Testament text (Acts 2:17).

Diversity of Servants

The Old Testament prophet Joel declared, “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28). The Spirit of God will bless men and women with the gift of prophecy. Both old and young will be used. There is no exclusive priestly class or tribe to which God bestows His blessing but rather the field of Christian candidates is wide open. God bestows the gift of prophecy on willing individuals, regardless of their gender, race, age, social status, wealth, or education.

The term אַֽחֲרֵי־ (‘ă-chărê), afterward (Jamieson et al., 1997), in the verse means in the last days or latter days (compare to Isa 2:2). Nichol (1977, p. 946) notes that the Hebrew here literally means after this and is not specific to time or duration. God intended to give a restored Israel all the blessings listed. Nichol also notes that because the people of ancient Israel were unfaithful, the blessings were not bestowed on literal Israel but were manifest in spiritual Israel. Even in the Old Testament it was clear that God’s intention was to bestow the gift of prophecy on His future church. The wording chosen in the text indicated that God foresaw Israel’s rejection of Him and predicted His
Spirit would be given to all people in the latter days. God intended to bless His people with the gift of prophecy, which applies to the continuation of His people now called the remnant.

God’s intention was to engage all the willing into service but to call some specifically to be prophets. Although I agree with Ogden and Deutsch’s (1987) claim that the use of all flesh is not referring to all humanity, I disagree with their view that it is referring to “every member of the restored community of Judah” (p. 37). The use of all flesh used here in my estimation does not mean that God was giving the gift of prophecy to everyone in the house of Israel. Rather, the Lord indicated he would select and use willing individuals from among His people, and he would not be a respecter of gender or age in His calling.

The New Testament partner to Joel 2:28 is as follows: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17). The verse is very similar to Joel 2:28, as it is actually referencing it, but it is being used by the apostle to describe what happened at Pentecost when the disciples received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The events that transpired at Pentecost as recorded in Acts were only a partial completion of Joel’s prediction and not a complete fulfillment. The final fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy will not occur until “the closing work of the Gospel” (Nichol, 1977, p. 946). God intends to bestow His Spirit on Spiritual Israel in these the “latter days” without regard to ethnicity, race, gender, or age. A person does not have to be in the literal house of Israel or an apostle to
receive God’s gift. All Christians may be called to receive this gift of prophecy, and there is no stereotype for a prophet except to be a willing servant when asked.

**Diversity of Methods**

God not only uses a diversity of servants, as noted above, but the Lord also manifests the gift of prophecy through different modes or methods. The Holy Spirit reveals Himself through various ways as God communicates through Him to Christians through the prophets using different methods that include prophecy, dreams, and visions (Ogden & Deutsch, 1987, p. 37). Stuart (2002, p. 260) shares that prophecy, dreams, and visions all describe the revelatory function associated with the fullness of God’s Spirit, which is a heightening of obedience and revelatory powers. Hebrews 1:1-2 says,

> God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.

Certainly, Christ was a prophet for the Father but, more insightfully, the verse includes an acknowledgment that God speaks in “various ways.” Viera (n.d.) notes God uses at least six models of inspiration regarding how He uses prophets. The six patterns are as follows:

1. Visionary model is God revealing information through visions or dreams.
2. Witness model is the prophet’s testimony to what they have seen and heard.
3. Historian model is God-inspired research of historical accounts and testimonies.
4. Counselor model is the prophet acting as an advisor to the people.
5. Epistolary model is the prophet writing a letter to a group addressing a specific issue.
6. Literary model is the prophet expressing himself or herself through prose or song.
Contemporary Prophets

Another key element of Acts 2:17 is that God is revealing that He will be bestowing the gift of prophecy in the last days. Thus, Believers should expect prophets in the contemporary world in the last days. Holbrook (1982) expresses that it is obvious since the “gifts are to be continuously bestowed as the Spirit sees fit” (p. 3) that all spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy, are to be manifest until the church has “completed its ministry and human probation has closed” (p. 3). God never intended to withdraw the gift of prophecy or any other spiritual gift, and all the gifts will exist until the second coming of Christ. I concur with Holbrook: as the church has not completed its ministry and the Lord has not yet returned, the gifts should still be active.

Reid, in his article titled, “Gift of Prophecy,” notes that the gift of prophecy has been evident in the church’s history since the time of the apostles (Reid, Linder, Shelly, & Stout, 1990). It was manifest in the postapostolic church, the orthodox church, the Montanists, the gnostic groups, and even Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) acknowledged the legitimacy of the gift of prophecy and believed it to be useful to the church. Reid further explains that the Protestant reformers appreciated the gift of prophecy and that there is evidence of believers manifesting the gift of prophecy in American church history through the Shakers, the Pentecostal Movement, and the charismatic movement right up to modern day. A key point reinforced in Acts 2:17 is the understanding that prophecy is not only one of the spiritual gifts but that the Lord desires that the church has and uses this gift. It has been used since it was given, and a line of continual church history demonstrates the gift of prophecy running to the present day.
Helfrich (2013) notes that the gift of prophecy is still applicable with the exception of the prediction prophecies that died with Paul. Helfrich indicates, “Thus, in the new age, there are no more forth-telling prophecies, only that which is true from Scripture can we know as truth” (p. 73). I disagree, and I find Helfrich’s dissecting of the spiritual gift limiting. Saying *this is a part I think is still good and this is a part I think is bad* is allowing the receiver to choose God’s revelation. Although God’s people are called to hold the prophets and prophecies to the standard of the Bible, Christians are not called to receive only those they like. Disciples of Christ are not given this kind of liberty regarding the spiritual gifts. God will communicate with His people as He likes through the gift of prophecy, and if this includes prediction, there is no scripture that would prevent that.

Receiving the Gift

I now briefly address how the receiver is to interact with the prophet by exploring two key passages of Scripture: 1 John 4:1 and 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21.

**Test the Spirits**

Although I have established that God still uses prophets in the latter days, the church is not to accept someone’s message blindly merely because that person says it is inspired. The following inspired message is from 1 John: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). I like the New Living Translation of this same verse: “Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.”
God calls Believers to test the spirits because there will be many false prophets among the authentic ones who will be claiming to be genuine. I have already examined in this work the standard for testing the spirits, which is the Bible. Christians must examine professed prophets and hold them up to the light of the Holy Scriptures (Isa 8:20) as the test of authenticity and truth. Wiersbe (2007) notes that testing the spirits does not “deny the office of human teachers in the church” (p. 981) but signifies that Believers should understand that all writings and teachings of a human origin must be examined through the Holy Spirit against the Bible. The hearers are strongly instructed here to develop abilities in “critical thinking and spiritual discernment” (Witherington, 2006, p. 520). Loader (1992) indicates that becoming Christian does not mean that that people should “leave their intellect behind” (p. 47) and should not rely on their emotions to determine what is acceptable.

Yarbrough (2008, p. 192) indicates that there are warnings of the antichrist in the passage from 1 John, as well as a special divine urging to make a wise choice between the competing claims of the authentic Christ and the false Christ. Yarbrough exegetes that the Greek used in 1 John 4:1 indicates a prohibition against accepting what these spirits claim or whatever evil they may urge. Spirits that are not ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (ek tou theou), of God, are to be rejected outright, and Believers are not to give false spirits “gullible reception” (Yarbrough, 2008, pp. 220-221). Whether a message is from God or from the Devil is important, and Christians are not to yield allegiance to any spirit other than the Holy Spirit of God almighty. The key is an admonition not to believe every spirit. Kruse (2000, pp. 144-145) articulates further that Christians are not to be naïve and need to understand that just because someone claims to speak for the Lord does not
mean that that person does. Those who believe everything they are told do so at their own peril.

While examining the writer John here, I found insight into this message to “test the spirits.” John uses the term Ἀγαπητοί (Agapētoi), dear friends, in greeting the community of Christ, which expresses his tender affection and sincere concern for them and gets their attention for what he says next (Kruse, 2000, pp. 144-145). Wilson (2007) explains the prophet John seemed to be in harmony with the character of God having a genuine concern for the people. It is God’s attitude toward us (love) and His earnest desire that we not fall to the deceptions of the enemy, which is why we are to test the prophets by the only steadfast standard between genuineness and deception: the Holy Bible (Wilson, 2007, p. 97).

There is a discussion in the scholarly community regarding the actual situation in the community to which John was writing. It is a stark revelation that there are many false prophets in the world, but the prevalence of this problem in the church of John’s day is not clear. Some church historians (Witherington, 2006, p. 523) have noted that false teachers were a problem in the apostolic church and there had been a major recent split. Witherington is unsure if the problem affected only the communities connected with John or the early church as a whole. I think the problem affected the whole community because this verse is also a clear warning for the modern church. The message to test the spirits because of false teachers fits with Jesus’s own warning about false prophets and teachers coming in the last days (Matt 24) and Revelation’s warning to the remnant church (Rev 12:12).
Do Not Despise

To test the spirits, God’s people must not reject them outright before examining them. The Bible says, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess 5:19-21). Similar to the call to discern the spirits is the admonition not to despise them. People should not shun a person merely because that person claims to be a prophet. Nor should people ignore a message because it comes from a contemporary source. Rather, people should embrace and test. The only way to test and hold fast to what is true is by being people of the Word, which I address in the next section. The word σβέννυτε (sbennyte), *quench*, means to put out or extinguish. The church should not quench the Holy Spirit by neglecting or ignoring the words of God (Lee, 2000, p. 53).

Houdmann (2009, p. 89) notes that this use of quenching refers to suppressing the Holy Spirit in one’s life and that the Holy Spirit is like a fire living inside that should not be put out. Graham (2002, p. 134) indicates people put out the Spirit when they disobey God or their actions are not in line with the Bible. I believe these views to be misguided and simplistic applications. Certainly, people want the Holy Spirit to work in them and need to live Godly lives, but the passage here is referring to more than not allowing the Spirit to work in people’s lives. I believe this admonition to not extinguish the Spirit is clearly linked to prophecy by the next words: “Do not despise prophecies.” This verse is speaking about not quenching or putting out the gift of prophecy. Instead of quenching, we are called to assess the prophets by testing all things.

Donfried, Beutler, and the Society for New Testament Studies (2000, p. 59) ask whether προφητείας (propheteias) in this context refers to the gift of prophecy—that is,
the prophet—or to the words spoken by the person prophesying. Some scholars, like Volz (2003), would say that it does not make sense to examine each prophecy to determine whether it comes from an authentic, already-tested prophet. Volz asserts that claiming some prophecies are true and others are false when they come from a real prophet is nonsensical, and the proper interpretation of this verse would be rather to cling to the true prophets and reject the bad ones (p. 66). This interpretation could be dangerous because it includes an assumption that a prophet will always remain faithful. A genuine prophet could apostatize but continue to prophesy.

I agree with Grudem (2000), who states that it is the prophecies of already accepted prophets that are to be examined and not necessarily the prophets themselves. One might say that this is unnecessary, for prophets are already judged for their prophecies and conduct. However, there are more categories than just prophets’ writings that need to be examined when testing prophets. Prophets’ conduct, whether the prophecies come true, whether the prophets confess Christ, or whether they uplift the body, the church, are other important areas of testing.

Goll and Goll (2011) note that while prophecies should be tested, a whole message should not be quickly discarded just because a part of it is off. This view would be contrary to the established principle of Isaiah 8:20, which is if it is not according to the Bible, then there is “no light in them.” I agree with Goll and Goll, who noted the importance of avoiding the two extremes, but the center does not mean compromising or corrupting the truth. The two ditches are believing everything or believing nothing without testing the spirits and giving proper examination. Balance is needed. Although
people should not despise prophecies by casting them aside arbitrarily, they also should not blindly follow them without examining the message (Lee, 2001, p. 163).

Summary

God chooses to communicate to humankind through the gift of prophecy, which is one of the many spiritual gifts He bestows on His people. Although not everyone receives this gift, it is to be highly desired. Saints who receive the gift of prophecy are a diverse group, including Christians of all ages, both men and women. Brethren should not despise prophecy; rather, God calls His people to examine prophets and their prophecies to ensure they are from Him by holding them up to the standard of the law and the testimony: the Bible. The gift of prophecy is to be used to edify the Body of Christ and has been evident in the church from the time of the Apostles throughout Christian history. It is a contemporary gift for the end-time church, and it is God’s will that His people esteem, test, receive, and use the gift of prophecy.

Regularly Reading the Works of the Prophets

After prophets and their messages have been tested against the standard of the Bible, it is then vital for the Christian to receive, study, and consider the inspired works on a regular basis. By exploring the Bereans and John’s metaphor of “walking in the light,” Believers will better understand the reception and application components to the gift of prophecy and why it is important to read the works of the prophets regularly.

Like the Bereans

This section includes a description of the people Paul referred to as “more fair-minded” and consider why they were held in such high esteem. By examining Acts
17:11, I will note three important characteristics they held that Christians should emulate. Paul described the Bereans as follows: “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

**Received the Word**

The community in Berea contained a large contingent of ethnic Jews and many believing Greeks, both men and women (Talbert, 2005, p. 150). Acts 17:11 says that the Christians here were more “fair-minded.” While the Greeks here were referred to as εὐγενέστεροι (eugenesteroi) which traditionally referred to “noble birth” and eventually became to mean of a “noble character” (Barrett, 2004, p. 817). Hence, some Bible translations indicate that they were more noble. Danker (1964) notes that εὐγενέστεροι, while originally meaning one from high birth, generally applied to individuals who were “open, tolerant, generous, having the qualities that go with good breeding” (p. 368).

This noble character was evidenced in their openness to critique Paul and to take his messages seriously, as they did not simply accept what he said as truth (Polhill, 1995, p. 263). Rather, the Bereans sought to examine the prophet’s teaching to see if what he said and the Scriptures pointed toward the Messiah’s fulfillment in Christ as he claimed. So the Bereans were open to Paul and did not resent him or despise him. On the contrary, they were eager to hear him and what the Lord had to say. But while they received his teaching energetically, they also demonstrated their more honorable character in what they did with his message after receiving it. Pink (2001, p. 182) expresses that followers of God should be like the Bereans and listen to or receive messages from the servants of the Lord with eagerness but be responsible and test the messages received.
Newman and Nida (1972) note there are several ways to translate the phrase *received with all readiness*. It could mean “listened to the message with great eagerness,” “wanted very much to listen to the message,” or “desired very much to hear what Paul said” (pp. 332-333). The people were eager, enthusiastic, and excited that they had a man of God among them breaking the Word of Life. This situation juxtaposes the admonition examined earlier not to quench the Spirit and not to despise prophecy (1 Thess 5:19-21).

Myers and Freed (1966, p. 53) affirm that Paul was a prophet, just as the prophets of the Old Testament, and demonstrated genuine attributes of having the gift of prophecy. Paul and the Old Testament prophets were called of the Lord, fulfilled a divine mission, and represented God. The Bereans followed the biblical counsel already presented in this paper, as they did not despise Paul or reject him outright simply because he claimed to represent God or because he was outside the Old Testament time period. They tested what Paul said against the Law and the Testimony (the Scriptures). Having tested Paul and His message, they received what God had to say through the Scriptures and through Paul, who was a modern prophet outside the canon of the Old Testament. They continued to study and strive with Paul, seeking to hear a word from the Lord.

**Searched the Scriptures**

Instead of resenting Paul or walking away from his new theology, the Bereans examined his interpretations. The Greek word used in Acts 17:11 ἀνακρινω (anakrinō), means to “sift up and down” or to “make careful and exact research” (Robertson, 1933, p. 247). This word for *search* is a judicial term meaning *an investigation*, which indicates they did not study carelessly but thoroughly (MacArthur, 1985). Torrey (1921) explained
that the Bereans did not enter into the search wanting to validate their own views but rather “to find out what they actually taught” (p. 38).

Lenski teaches (1961) that the Bereans’ examination by searching the Scriptures is part of the “right of private judgment which is part of the royal priesthood of believers” (p. 701). Lenski asserts that Christians have direct access to the Bible to discern for themselves and do not have to wait for a human authority to tell them. Paul’s preaching had to be upheld to the Scriptures. Believers need to be careful not to misuse this divine right to study the Bible for themselves. God’s people are not to be their own interpreters but find the interpretation in the Bible (Lenski, 1961, pp. 701-702).

Questions arise whether people in Berea could read or even had access to scrolls of Scripture. This question is critical, for if the people did not have access to the scrolls or could not read them, then it is not known how they could search them daily to test what Paul was saying. Ciampa (2011, pp. 527-528) asserts that it was unlikely they had scrolls and had access to them. Although the encounter shared in the Bible between the Bereans and Paul is realistic, questions remain.

Stanley (1999, pp. 126-142) challenges many of the commonly held traditional scholarly views about the Bereans in an article titled, “Pearls Before Swine.” Stanley lays out 10 assumptions that many make regarding the Christians in Paul’s day, challenged the assumptions as not able to be proven, and presented developing evidence that contradicts them. The article’s title indicates Stanley thought that the assumptions are incorrect. The 10 assumptions are as follows:

1. Paul and his audience(s) had relatively free access to the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures (the "LXX"), and could study and consult them whenever they wished.
2. Paul's audiences routinely read and studied the Jewish Scriptures for themselves in his absence.
3. Paul's audiences acknowledged the authority of the Jewish Scriptures as a source of truth and a guide for Christian conduct.
4. Paul's audiences were able to recognize and appreciate all of his quotations, allusions, and "echoes" from the Jewish Scriptures.
5. Paul's audiences could and did routinely supply for themselves the background and context of Paul's many quotations, allusions, and other references to the Jewish Scriptures.
6. Paul himself knew and took into account the original context of his Biblical quotation.
7. Paul expected his audiences to know and supply the original context of his quotations.
8. Paul expected his audiences to recognize and appreciate his many allusions and "echoes" of the Jewish Scriptures.
9. Paul expected everyone in his churches to have an equal appreciation of his Biblical quotations.
10. The best way to determine the "meaning" of a Pauline biblical quotation is to study how Paul interpreted the Biblical text.

Those holding Stanley’s views (Ciampa, 2011) say that Paul’s audience, the Bereans in particular, did not have access to the Scriptures and that a majority may have been illiterate and unable to read the Hebrew text. The assertion is that the audience would not understand Old Testament context, allusions, or stories.

Abascrano (2007) writes a rebuttal to Stanley’s work titled, “Diamonds in the Rough.” The title indicated Abascrano’s softening of Stanley calling Paul’s audience “swine.” Abascrano challenges each assertion, notes that Stanley mischaracterized Paul’s audience, and states that the Scriptures were available to the people of the day and probably many more individuals than Stanley assumes knew how to read and reason the Old Testament Scriptures. Abascrano “rendered them [Paul’s audience] capable of interacting with sophisticated forms of Biblical allusion, rhetoric, and argumentation” (p. 154).
Although the scholarly debate between Stanley (1999) and Abascrano (2007) is fascinating, it may not be as significant as they think. The Scriptures are clear that the Bereans studied the Bible daily to determine truth and to gain understanding. Whether they studied Scriptures by themselves at home or with someone reading it to them in the Synagogue or if they studied the Scriptures with Paul daily, the point is the Bereans studied Scripture as the authority over Paul to ensure what he said was in the Bible.

**Searched Daily**

The Bereans studied the Scriptures daily. They are described as returning to Paul with new inquiries each day regarding what the Scriptures taught and their connection to the claims he was making about them (Ciampa, 2011, p. 540). They set an example to seek after God daily and to receive His message from Him. The dedication to an everyday pursuit of an understanding of God’s truth is commendable. The pattern of regularity demonstrated is important. The Bereans were serious about the task, and they did not just take Paul’s word. They also did not read the Scriptures once or twice, but rather every day (Pink, 2001, p. 182).

Scholars such as Torry (1921, pp. 31-39) have gone to the extreme. Torry said, “Every Christian who does not study, really study, the Bible every day is a fool. Not only that, any Christian who neglects the study of the Bible one single day insults God” (p. 37). I believe that God is much more gracious than Torry espoused. I also believe that God’s Word serves as a foundation for being faithful, diligent, and regular in receiving
God’s Word. Ignoring God’s prophets, whether contemporary or biblical, is an insult to God.

The psalmist David wrote, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Psalms 119:11). David’s call was for Christians to hide the Word or to memorize the Bible. David’s plea is similar to Jesus’s call to eat the Bread of Life. Internalizing Scripture is a daily practice for two reasons. First, it takes time and repetition to memorize something. Second, to retain the Scripture, it is important to review it often. The Bereans were hiding God’s Word in their heart each day as they went to sit at Paul’s feet and feed on the Scriptures presented. The regularity and consistency of receiving the works of the Gift of Prophecy were important.

The Body of Christ of Berea had a commitment to meet and study daily, which is in stark contrast to once-a-week Christians. Wiersbe (1996) expounds on the daily aspect of the Bereans’ Christianity:

They met daily (Acts 2:46), cared daily (Acts 6:1), won souls daily (Acts 2:47), searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11), and increased in number daily (Acts 16:5). Their Christian faith was a day-to-day reality, not a once-a-week routine. Why? Because the risen Christ was a living reality to them, and His resurrection power was at work in their lives through the Spirit. (p. 329)

Christian Walk

The Christian experience is not a one-time event. It is a process as Christians grow in Christ and learn more of Him, His ways, and His will. It does not happen all at once, and Christians mature a little more each day as they are diligent in seeking Him. John described the Christian journey as “walking in the light” (1 John 1:7). In this section, I consider 1 John 1:7, Psalms 119:105, and Jeremiah 26:4-5 to explain the metaphors of walking and light as they relate to the discussion.
Walk in the Light

According to 1 John 1:7, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” This verse reminds Christians that they are on a Christian walk, not a run. Each day, Believers learn more about God and grow more into His will and His light. The use of walk in this verse serves as a reminder that the journey is to be daily, constant, and regular.

Smalley shares that the present tense of the verb περιπατάωμεν (peripatoōmen) used in this verse means we are walking, which suggests a continuous attitude of the believer (1989, p. 23). Therefore “living in the light (p. 23)” infers a “conscious and sustained endeavor (p. 23)” to live a life in harmony with the revelation of God. This continual dynamic reinforces the regularity of the need to be in God’s light. God expects His people to dwell in it.

God is saying that His very nature is light. Therefore, walking in the light is the daily process of fellowshipping with Him (Jamieson et al., 1997; 1 John 1:7). The essential idea presented is that light is a source of life; when light is revealed, it reveals life. God is light (life) and therefore those who would have fellowship with Him “must have the fullness of life themselves” (Akin, 2001, pp. 69-71). Barker (1981, pp. 310-311) expresses that it is well-defined here that if Christians walk in the light, God will purify them from the sins that would harm their relationship with Him and others. Understanding that walking in the light is critical to salvation intensifies the seriousness of the conversation.

God’s people are either choosing to grow in His ways or not. Christians are either
walking in God’s ways and instruction or being lost in their own wisdom and ways.

Schnackenburg expounded on walking in light or walking in darkness. Only by living in the fullness of life (Christ’s light) will one have communion with God and the forgiveness of sins. The church cannot commune with God if it is not walking in His light. The Believer is either walking in the light or walking in the darkness (Schnackenburg, 1992, p. 106).

MacArthur (2007) notes that the phrase “walking in the truth,” which John also used as a metaphor for the Christian experience, is the same thing as walking in the light. Walking is an often-used expression in the New Testament for the believer’s journey. In addition to the two above examples of walking in light and in truth, MacArthur (2007, pp. 220-221) lists other biblical examples of the believers walk:

- “Walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4)
- “Walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7)
- “Walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25)
- “Walk in good works” (Ephesians 2:10)
- “Walk in a manner worthy of the calling” (Ephesians 4:1)
- “Walk in love” (Ephesians 5:2)
- “Walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8)
- “Walk in wisdom” (Ephesians 5:15)
- “Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects” (Colossians 1:10)
- “Walk in a manner worthy of the God” (1 Thessalonians 2:12)
- “Walk in the same manner as Jesus walked” (1 John 2:6)
- “Walk according to His commandments” (2 John 6)

Case and Holdren (2006) note that the practice and discipline of walking in the light is one of the most overlooked themes in the Bible. The metaphor depicts submission or reaction to what Christians sense God has shown them or taught them. Walking in the light is living a life in agreement with the knowledge the Disciple has received from the Holy Ghost and the Bible. After Believers know what God desires,
they are bound to obey it and make it a life guideline. In the context of this discussion, this would mean adhering to the Lord’s instruction contained in the Bible and to the insight of the gift of prophecy as it is tested against the Bible. Case and Holdren (2006) indicate, “There is a sense in which a person can do no better than to live consistently with the known will of God for his or her life” (p. 201).

**Lamp and Light**

In Psalms, David wrote, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105). The Bible serves as two components of guidance. First, it is to be an immediate guide, hence the “lamp to my feet” to see where to take the next step. Second, it is to serve as a “light to my path” to be a long-range compass set on Christ to ensure we remain on the right path.

Coon (1982, p. 22) indicates that the light referred to in this verse is the revelation of God, which has two key aspects. First, it is one of the key reasons the prophetic writings exist, as God’s revelation assists Followers in preparing for what is to come and ensures they are ready when it does come. Second, and of equal significance, revelation as a light is to safeguard Christians from the attacks and plans of Satan. The gift of prophecy provides a light that exposes the Devil and his plots. Brueggemann (2001, pp. 14-20) indicates that Scripture serves to “fend off the darkness” and reminds God’s people that evil is a reality and Disciples need the light of God to navigate the dark world.

Proverbs 6:23 says, “For the command is a lamp and the teaching a light.” This verse parallels Psalms 119:105 using both *lamp* and *light*. Fry (1979, p. 37) contends that these verses are not meant to be just for the Jewish people or heritage. This concept is reinforced in Peter, lest critics make this contention. The apostle Peter discusses the
same doctrine when he says, “We have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place” (2 Pet 1:19). The light here seems to convey the Scriptures and any revelation of God through the gift of prophecy. Therefore, it might be possible to rephrase Psalms 119:105 to say God’s revelation is the Bible, that sets a clear focus and light on where the church is heading, and His prophets clarify and instruct as to details in that journey like a lamp preventing Believers from the immediate spiritual stumbling blocks by giving timely contemporary instruction.

Phillips (2002, p. 360) shares that a light on the path indicates the direction headed but a lamp reveals the next step. A light cannot show all things but it will give a comfortable sense of direction. The Bible lights the path to God. As noted in Proverbs 4:18: “The path of the just is as the shining light that shined more and more unto the perfect day.” The lamp is for the times when God’s people “need something more specific than a general principle and we need to know exactly what the next step should be” (Phillips, 2002, p. 361).

**Walk and Listen**

Jeremiah 26:4-5 says the following:

And you shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord: ‘If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I sent to you, both rising up early and sending them but you have not heeded.’”

God is calling His Followers to walk in His law (the Bible) and to heed or listen to those He will send as prophets. God is commanding Believers to listen to the His prophets just as surely as they follow His Word. Upon testing prophets against the standard of the Bible, God says heed their voice. Part of this daily growth and daily search includes
listening to the last-day prophets as well as the supreme Bible. If the Lord has a word for me, I want to hear it.

God demands nothing except that humans obey his laws, and yet He wishes His servants, the prophets, to be heard: that people may hear the words of His prophets whom He sends. There seems to be an inconsistency: If the law of God is sufficient, why does hearing the prophets add to it? But the two commands are really in agreement. The law must be heard, and with it the prophets who interpret it. For God did not send his prophets to correct the law, to change something in it, to add to it or subtract from it. The decree neither to add nor to take away is inviolable (Deut 12:32). The purpose of prophecy is to explain the law more fully and to fit it to the immediate need of the people. As the prophets do not invent any new teaching, but are faithful interpreters of the law, God is not combining two separate commands. He wishes His law and His prophets to be heard simultaneously. The majesty of the law does not lessen the authority of the prophets, for the prophets uphold the law; they in no way subtract anything from it (Haroutunian & Smith, 1958, pp. 81-82).

Summary

The Bereans were special and commended because they were eager to receive Paul and His messages, but they were wise to test the prophet and his prophecies against the Holy Scriptures. They were diligent and received instruction from the prophet while searching the Word of God daily. Believers are to walk in God’s truth and instruction, letting the Bible be their guide. By grounding themselves in the Bible and walking in its light, Christians will have a discerning ear when God speaks through modern prophets to
know if they are of the Lord. If Saints receive a word from God, they are to test it, and if it proves authentic, then they are to follow it.

**Conclusion**

Seventh-day Adventist Christians believe that the Bible is the supreme authority and foundation for Christian understanding, doctrine, and life. It is the standard by which all else is judged regarding whether the message is of the Lord. Scripture has shown that a key way God communicates with His people is through His prophets. The Bible was written by men inspired and guided by the Lord. However, God did not stop using prophets after the canonization of the books of the Bible. He said the gift of prophecy has been and will continue to be the manner in which He reveals His instruction to His church and especially in the last days of the remnant. The Bible teaches that Christians are not to despise those claiming to be prophets but put them to the test and hold them to the standard of the Bible. Christians should expect prophets in the final days, and, if found to be authentic, listen to them. It is important for believers to spend time seeking the Lord and His will in His inspired works. The church is called to be a people of the Bible but also to be willing to receive His guidance through His servants the prophets, as long as the message meets the standard of the Scriptures. The Bible supports and encourages the regular, devotional partaking of the messages from God contained His Word including end-time gift of prophecy. Christians are urged through Scriptures to regularly eat the Bread of Life. The Bible encourages Christians not to despise the prophets but rather to be willing to partake of God’s message that He chooses to send through modern prophets who have met the spiritual and Biblical test.
CHAPTER 3

EXPLORING ATTITUDES, READING PATTERNS, AND BENEFITS OF THE WRITING OF ELLEN G. WHITE WITHIN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Introduction

This chapter includes a review of the available contemporary scholarly literature regarding Seventh-day Adventists’ opinions of Ellen G. White and their views on whether she was a prophet and if her writings have spiritual authority. I will further seek to understand Seventh-day Adventist reading patterns of Ellen G. White’s written work and to understand the impact of those writings in the reader’s spiritual journey.

It was not the intent of this work to conduct an exhaustive exposé on Ellen G. White’s life, her detractors, her ecclesiology, or her theology. My goal was to present an overview so that the reader has an educated understanding of how Adventists view Ellen G. White, how often they are reading her, and how her work affects them spiritually. The approach was first to look at guidelines used in my literature review and explain certain limitations and challenges that were encountered. Next, I will explore the related literature in three sections: opinions toward Ellen G. White, reading patterns of Ellen G. White, and lastly the effects of reading Ellen G. White.

Thousands of pages of academic dissertations, study reports, and scholarly books were reviewed to complete this literature analysis. Specifically, over 600 Seventh-day
Adventist studies were read and reviewed. What follows may be the first time that research in this area of Ellen G. White has been compiled and assessed in one place.

Research Orientation

This section will orient the reader to the limitations I found during the literature review. Some limitations were self-imposed because of the constraints of the size of my study and its narrow focus. Other challenges encountered were out of my control.

Scope

Discussed below is the publication date range for the literature review, the approach to what study groups to include, and the demographics of the research allowed.

Time Frame of Academic Work

The publication date boundaries for the literature review were from 2000, which was 10 years before this dissertation project was approved in 2010, to 2016. Academic and scholarly work was not used outside of this date range unless the source was helpful historically or in another specifically noted way.

As this research relates to Ellen G. White’s writings, there are some references back to her day to include what Ellen G. White said about herself, her role, and her writings. Also included is a seminal work in this area written in 1982. Normally, a research study that is so out of the contemporary norm would not be included. However, I have included it because of its importance. The 1982 study by Roger Dudley and Des Cummings Jr. is one of the only studies ever completed regarding the benefits and effects of reading Ellen G. White. Therefore, it becomes relevant to the scope of applicable
research. It may also serve as a benchmark to compare changing reading and opinion patterns over the past 30 or more years.

**Seventh-day Adventist Audience**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a global church with people from many languages, cultures, and ethnicities. The Adventist community is quite unified in its theology. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is one unit often called a sisterhood of churches. Most churches around the globe have access to the writings of Ellen G. White in their own language. In this literature review, the Adventist world community will be treated as one to gain insights into reading patterns. International studies that do not include the United States were not included.

**Demographic Groupings**

Various research studies have been done regarding views toward Ellen G. White that focused on certain specific demographic groups. Research focusing on a specific demographic group, organizational set (i.e., a conference), or by age has been included. The comparisons between the groups may provide interesting trends to observe. Studies targeting children, youth, and young adults are included in the review, as these groups are a forecast of what is to come. Studying where the youth are may give insight into future trends.

**Guiding Parameters**

**Presuppositions**

Certain Adventist claims were taken as underlying facts while conducting the literature review. One presupposition for this literature review is that the Seventh-day
Adventist Church believes that Ellen G. White was a prophet and that her writings are important to the church. The official Seventh-day Adventist belief (Number 18) as published by the General Conference reads as follows:

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015, p. 8)

A second presupposition is that the Seventh-day Adventists’ position regarding Ellen G. White is one of balance between both the Scriptures and the works of the prophet. While they hold the Bible as the supreme authority, they see value in and encourage the reading of the works of Ellen G. White. The view of the current president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ted Wilson, as referenced by Kellner (2008), is that he “advocates that Adventists engage in personal Bible study, complemented by a study of the writings of Ellen G. White” (p. 10). President Wilson believes that a study of the Spirit of Prophecy writings will lead people to a more intense study of Scripture (Kellner, 2008, p. 10). In a recent article in Ministry magazine, Wilson (2016, p. 7) states, “The Spirit of Prophecy is as relevant today as it was when it was written. It is accurate, uplifting, instructive and powerful as it points to Christ and the Holy Bible.”

The Spirit of Prophecy is a term used within the Seventh-day Adventist Church to refer to the prophetic writings of Ellen G. White.

The last presupposition is that Seventh-day Adventists place a high value on the writings of Ellen G. White and members are encouraged to read her writings. This is easily demonstrated through the inclusion of her quotes in every Sabbath School lesson (weekly Bible study guide for members). There is a separate organization to archive,
protect, publish, and promote her writings called the Ellen G. White Estate, located in the Seventh-day Adventist headquarters building and having branch offices in every major Adventist university in the country. Any Adventist book center across the United States will have a large section of the store dedicated to her writings. Another contemporary example of how the church continues to promote Ellen White is a special edition of the magazine for Adventist leaders, *Elder's Digest*, published in 2014 and dedicated to the subject of Ellen G. White. Wilson (2016) concludes his recent *Ministry* article by stating, “It is, therefore, our responsibility to nurture and foster the belief in and the active use of the Spirit of Prophecy” (p. 9).

**Exclusions and Referrals**

It was not the intent of this paper to exhaust all the topics related to Ellen G. White but to remain focused on the set objectives noted above. The following is a listing of the areas of study and research that were not covered and therefore literature in that area, although it is on Ellen G. White, is not included in the review. The reader is given contemporary references to explore these other areas of Ellen G. White independently.

All research and academic work that focuses on defending Ellen G. White or debating with her detractors, otherwise known as apologetics, is not included in the review. If the reader is interested in this area, they should look at *Ellen White Under Fire: Identifying the Mistakes of Her Critics* (Lake, 2010).

Any scholarly books or academic research on understanding Ellen G. White’s ecclesiology or her theology were also excluded from this review of literature. For an understanding of these areas, the reader can look at the recently published exhaustive work, *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, edited by Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon.

Limitations

**Historical Trends**

Research studies relating to who is reading Ellen G. White’s writings and the benefits of reading her are, in fact, few in number. There are practically no studies done in this area historically as a church outside the current contemporary period. One key study, as noted above, was done in 1982 by the Institute of Church Ministry. This remains one of the only surveys covering the benefits of reading Ellen G. White.

Within the last decade or so, there has been more work done in the area of Adventist’s attitudes toward Ellen G. White and in understanding reading trends of her writings. However, even though more work has been accomplished on who reads her work, little remains accomplished regarding the effects of reading her writings. In most studies included in this review, research questions were asked but normally only as part of a larger, more broadly reaching study. Questions regarding Ellen G. White are
normally supplemental to the core study, with no study focusing just on Ellen G. White and Adventists’ views and patterns regarding her and her written work.

**Quantity of Sponsorship**

One of the reasons there is not more research done in the area of Ellen G. White is that researchers and academia in general outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church have little interest in doing so. I found no contemporary non-Seventh-day Adventist research done in the area of focus of this paper and none with regard to Ellen G. White in general. Even within Adventist scholarly circles, I found that there were no master’s or doctoral dissertations in the specific area of Ellen G. White researched for this paper and very few regarding her at all. Although some dissertation research has been accomplished on Ellen G. White, the major volume of work in this review is from commissioned studies done by Seventh-day Adventist research organizations.

In an interview with Roger Dudley, former director of the Institute for Church Ministry and one of the researchers who worked on the seminal 1982 study about Ellen G. White, he shared that a key reason for the lack of work in the area of Ellen G. White is money. The church has limited funding, and these types of studies do not get accomplished unless commissioned and paid for by the Seventh-day Adventist Church (personal communication, March 13, 2012). Organizations such as the Institute of Church Ministry, the Hancock Center, the Center for Creative Ministry, and the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research of the General Conference undertake almost all the research commissioned by and focusing on the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As this literature review demonstrates, this is also true regarding the research on Ellen G. White.
Availability Issues

One last limitation affected this literature review: availability of research and accessibility to the results of research that has been accomplished. Tremendous strides have been made within the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists regarding archiving and making available the results of previous case studies, surveys, and research projects. The development of a website that includes many studies is one of the key resources used to find most of the literature in this review. However, before the current period, the Seventh-day Adventist research reports were difficult to find, if they were available to the public at all.

When a commissioned study was completed, the report would be made to the organization requesting it, but there was not a venue for publishing the full academic scholarly research. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has limited scholarly journals to publish in and, as mentioned previously, the non-Seventh-day-Adventist scholarly community is not usually interested in publishing this uniquely Seventh-day Adventist material, so the research results of studies would be done in presentations to administrative meetings or to the sponsoring committees. At times, a summary of results was published in one of the various lay magazines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The 1982 study became so well-known because it was published in *Ministry Magazine*.

Even further complicating the area of accessibility is that some researchers are hesitant to share their unpublished findings because they have desires to write a book or a series of articles and they do not want the material to be released ahead. Dr. Bailey Gillespie is associate dean at the HMS Richards Divinity School and one of the key researchers in the groundbreaking study on Seventh-day Adventist called Valuegenesis.
He says that organizations that commission studies do not release the results to the public for many reasons (B. Gillespie, personal communication, February 18, 2016).

**Feelings About Ellen G. White**

In this section, I review the available research and literature in the area of Ellen G. White to see what is known in three areas. First, I seek to understand what Adventists feel and believe about Ellen G. White as a prophet and the inspiration of her writings. Second, I want to learn how many Adventists are reading Ellen G. White’s writings and how frequently they are doing so. Lastly, I will try to ascertain what benefits or effects there may be of reading Ellen G. White’s writings.

**Attitudes Toward Ellen G. White**

**Ellen G. White**

Ellen G. White called her writings and her role as a lesser light to the Bible. She said, “Little heed is given to the Bible and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light” (White, 1903, p. 30). Although she never used the term prophet to describe her function, she also did not object to others calling her one. It seems clear that she understood herself to be one. She said that her writings, or “the testimonies” as she called them, “were given by the Spirit of God to direct men to His word” (White, 1958, p. 46).

**Comprehensive Studies by the Seventh-day Adventist Church**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has committed to a huge comprehensive study of its membership and leadership. This initiative is called Reach the World. The church
is dedicated to doing this far-reaching evaluation every five years. Five major studies were conducted between 2012 and 2013 involving 35,000 Seventh-day Adventists, 4,000 pastors, 1,500 recent graduates of Adventist colleges, and 1,000 former members (Trim, 2016c). David Trim, director of the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, synthesized the results of the surveys. He relates that 74% of Seventh-day Adventist members “wholeheartedly embrace” (Trim, 2016c, p. 6) the belief that Ellen G. White had the prophetic gift. Combining those who responded “I accept it because the church teaches it” and the number who embrace Ellen G. White’s prophetic gift “wholeheartedly,” the number who believe Ellen G. White was inspired reaches 86%. Only 10% of respondents said that Ellen G. White’s prophetic gift was either “not important to them,” they “didn’t accept it,” or they “had major doubts” about it (Trim, 2016b).

In a comprehensive study done by Roger Dudley and the Institute of Church Ministry on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, an interesting contextualization trend was noted. Of the 2,972 Adventists surveyed, 83% accepted the authority of Ellen White’s writings, but almost half saw the need for a reinterpretation of her writings (Dudley, 2008, p. 9). So, while the vast majority acknowledge Ellen G. White’s role as prophet, there seems to be a growing number who feel that her message should be up for reinterpretation and contextualization to the contemporary age. This type of mentality can create a quandary. A number of theological debates happening within the Seventh-day Adventist Church today can be observed. Both sides of the argument use quotes from Ellen G. White to bolster their point, which leaves a question regarding the value of a prophetic voice if the hearers interpret the message in contrasting ways.
Collaborative Study

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was invited to collaborate with other non-Seventh-day-Adventist research organizations in a comprehensive study of the Christian church in America. The Seventh-day Adventist Church participated in three interfaith studies that were in harmony with the timing of the 2010 U.S. census to provide a comprehensive contemporary look into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Monte Sahlin, with the Center for Creative Ministry, oversaw the Adventist section of the studies.

The study showed that the majority of Adventist congregations believed that Ellen G. White and her writings were “very important.” As expected, most members did not place her work on the same level as the Bible or with the Holy Spirit. One third of the congregations surveyed placed her writings in the “foundational” category (Sahlin, 2002, p. 58). I find it troubling that such a large number (33%) saw Ellen G. White’s writings as foundational to the church, even though the official Seventh-day Adventist position held and taught is that they are not to be placed at this level. Perhaps this explains the battles that occur within the church regarding her authority if a third of the church sees her and her authority as equal to the Bible.

North America Division Studies

In 2002, the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists conducted a survey to find out more about its members. The Institute of Church Ministry designed the study and Adventist Information Ministries implemented it. Overall, 747 persons were surveyed. The sample included active and inactive members. One section covering belief in Adventist doctrines included some questions regarding Ellen G. White. Eighty-
six percent of respondents said they strongly believed that Ellen G. White had the gift of prophecy (Adventist Information Ministries, 2002, p. 3). I wish the study would have differentiated between active and inactive members, as I think the breakdown would have been educational. With such a high response, it is assumed that both groups strongly agreed.

Bailey Gillespie found that when comparing North America to the rest of the world church, 76% of North American Seventh-day Adventists believed that Ellen G. White was an inspired messenger of God. The world church, which is often seen as more conservative than North America, lagged behind. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the rest of the world ranged from 69% to 58% in believing she was inspired (Gillespie, 2016, p. 20). Many in the international Adventist community have accused the United States of becoming too liberal, especially regarding women’s ordination. This statistic would seem contrary to that accusation, as those who believe in Ellen G. White are typically considered more conservative.

The North American Division commissioned a study done by the Hancock Center for Youth and Family Ministry. The researchers asked a question relating to context and interpreting what Ellen G. White wrote. Of the respondents, 87% of those surveyed said, “Ellen G. White was inspired by God and presented God’s message in terms of her own place and time” (Hancock Center, 2013, p. 37). In other words, context in understanding her was important. Another 5% responded that she “was a person who created stories of supernatural guidance in order to explain the mysteries of life. Her writings contain a great deal of wisdom about the human experience” (Hancock Center, 2013, p. 37). These individuals see her as having supernatural wisdom. The study found 3% who agreed with
the statement “she copied what God told her word for word, and wrote without being influenced by her own place and time” (Hancock, 2013, p. 37). Only 3% of the respondents indicated this, which would be defined as word-for-word literal inspiration that the church does not teach. Only 1% said they did not know who Ellen G. White was, and 5% said that her writings “contain no more truth or wisdom than do the religious works written by the leaders of other denominations” (Hancock, 2013, p. 37).

The Hancock study further clarified the breakdown of those who believed Ellen G. White was inspired. The results indicated that 72.81% “embraced wholeheartedly” (Hancock, 2013, p. 38) the statement that Ellen G. White was an inspired messenger to the Adventist Church. An additional 6.84% accepted she was inspired because “that’s what the church taught” (Hancock, 2013, p. 37). So adding the two together, 79.65% believed in her inspiration. In contrast, 1% did not accept her inspiration, 2.23% had major doubts about it, 11.14% had some questions about it, and 6.30% said the question was not important to them. Therefore, approximately 1 in 545 members did not believe, had doubts about, or did not care about Ellen G. White’s inspiration (Hancock, 2013, p. 38).

**Pastors**

When Seventh-day Adventist pastors from around the world were asked about their belief in Ellen G. White as an inspired messenger, the response was very high. The study was implemented globally by international groups called divisions. Divisions are large geographical administrative areas of the church. Thirteen of 15 Seventh-day Adventist divisions worldwide were surveyed. The international pastors’ responses, including the United States, ranged from 84% to 97% for those who “embraced
wholeheartedly” the inspiration of Ellen G. White. The pastors who believe in Ellen G. White “because the church teaches it” ranged from 2% to 11%. In my opinion, these pastors felt they had to believe it because the church believes it. Adding the pastors who wholeheartedly believe to the pastors who believe simply because the church believes increased the ranges. The highest belief in Ellen G. White internationally was in the Southern Asia, East Central Africa, Inter-American, and Northern Asia Pacific divisions, where pastors’ belief in Ellen G. White was 99-100%. The highest belief number came from the Inter-American Division, where it was statistically near 100%. All the divisions were still very high, even though some were higher than others. While still very high, divisions that were the lowest in their belief ranges were the Trans-European Division at 93%, the Inter-European Division at 94%, and the North American Division at 95%. European pastors were more likely to believe in the Spirit of Prophecy because the church believed. They also “had some questions” (Dudley & Cincala, 2013, p. 25) regarding the Spirit of Prophecy. Of note is that the three Seventh-day Adventist unions who have voted to ordain female pastors in opposition to the desires of the General Conference reside in these last three divisions.

Dudley and Cincala (2013) give insight into the worldview of Seventh-day Adventist pastors, the spiritual leaders of the church, regarding Ellen G. White. Although the division figures are very high, with over 90% believing in Ellen G. White, it is significant to note that there is a measurable dissention growing among the pastors. In a church where a pastor can be fired for not believing in Ellen G. White, it is notable that there are some divisions where 12-15% have doubts about Ellen G. White’s prophetic gift or believe it simply because the church teaches it. I believe it to be a very significant
number when, in some places of the Adventist world, over one in 10 pastors question the Spirit of Prophecy.

Also of note was that even in the highest-ranking divisions, there were still some doubters and questioners, which meant that there was not one division within the Seventh-day Adventist Church where all the pastors wholeheartedly agreed with Ellen G. White’s inspiration (Dudley & Cincala, 2013, p. 25). Although there is certainly not a ground swell of dissent, the cracks are certainly present. There has been differing opinions among the laity regarding the belief or lack thereof regarding the Spirit of Prophecy for some time, but it appears a small number of pastors are also waffling in their conviction in this area. Those who believe in Spirit of Prophecy simply because the church believes it might openly rebel should the General Conference take a more authoritative and demanding tone, as it seems recently to be developing. When revival was emphasized in the church by the pastors, there was a positive correlation with an increase among the membership in their interest in Bible study, reading Ellen White and in conducting family worship (Dudley & Cincala, 2013, p. 31).

Young Adults

The Valuegenesis study was a large Seventh-day Adventist study of youth and young adults in three areas: family, school, and church. It was conducted three separate times in 1990, 2000, and 2010 to follow the patterns of change. Detailed reports of the first studies have been completed. Between the first and second study, a troubling pattern emerged that belief in several key beliefs had gone down significantly. Young people’s belief in Ellen G. White and her function as prophet to the church decreased from 51% to 42% (Gillespie, 2002, pp. 12-16). Dr. Merlin Burt did some research into the findings of
the final studies of Valuegenesis and discovered an alarming trend. In the third 2010 study, 61% of the young people surveyed had an understanding of Ellen G. White and her inspired role. Among young Adventists, confidence in Ellen G. White as a prophet and seeing her writings as inspired dropped from 54% to 45% (Burt, 2015, p. 243). This is a disturbing trend. These numbers are shocking, as they are so much lower than the adult patterns are. Explanations need to be explored further and understood. If this is setting a trend, the Adventist church should get ahead of the curve. It might be important to know whether the youth and young adults are rejecting Ellen G. White or whether they are rejecting how she has been portrayed to them?

Gillespie (2002) found that 54% of the youth said, “Ellen G. White fulfills Bible predictions and that God would speak through the gift of prophecy in the last days” (p. 31). An additional 33% said they “lean toward believing” (Gillespie, 2002, p. 31) the statement. Those who “did not believe” or “leaned toward not believing” were 13% of the total (V. B. Gillespie, Personal communication, 2016). A further breakdown of responses revealed that about half of those surveyed “definitely believe” (V. B. Gillespie, Personal Communication, 2016) that Ellen G. White fulfilled the predictions of last-day prophets.

In the Twenty-First Century Seventh-day Adventist Connection Study conducted by Jacobs et al. the Robert H. Pierson Institute of Evangelism and World Missions, it was revealed that 46.8% of Adventist young adults “strongly agree” with Ellen G. White and the gift of prophecy. This number increased to approximately 76% by adding in those who “agree” with the statement (Jacobs et al., 2016, p. 11).
O. J. Thayer conducted a study of college students and their spirituality. She asked some questions relating to their opinion and view of Ellen G. White’s writings and found that appreciation for Ellen G. White grew the longer the student was at an Adventist college. Fifty percent of freshman said they viewed Ellen G. White “as inspired by God and that she was a revealer of truth not in the Bible while being in harmony with the Bible” (Thayer, 2008, p. 14). When the alumni of the school were surveyed, their response to the same question was 80% positive, which represents a 30-point difference. Twenty-five percent of the non-Seventh-day-Adventist students believed Ellen G. White was inspired by God and answered yes to the same question (Thayer, 2008, p. 14). Of note regarding the findings of this survey was the growth of the freshman into a greater appreciation of Ellen G. White the longer they stayed at an Adventist college. It can be surmised that Adventist colleges and universities are good educators regarding the Spirit of Prophecy.

The well-respected Barna Group conducted a study of Seventh-day Adventist young adults. This research included a couple questions pertinent to the topic of Ellen G. White. The findings revealed that 60% of young adults who were “engaged” in their church said they believed Ellen G. White was a true prophet, compared to only 20% of those who were “not engaged” (Barna, 2013, p. 42). The study found that 52% of Adventist young people believed Ellen G. White was a true prophet (Barna, 2013, p. 47).

Seventh-day Adventist Youth and Children

Dr. Petr Cincala, director of the Institute for Church Ministry at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, oversaw a study of children and youth at the Pathfinder Camporee in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in 2014. Over 47,000
Pathfinders met for this huge gathering that happens every 5 years. He surveyed 700 Pathfinders who had registered online for the event. He asked the respondents “How relevant are Ellen White’s writings to you?” Thirty-five percent said she was “very much” relevant to them. Forty-three percent responded there was “some” relevance, and 22% said there was “not much” relevance (Cincala, 2014). However, there are two challenging aspects to the question. First, there is a missing response option between “some” and “very much.” Second, the choice of word “relevant” may not have been clearly understood by some of the younger children.

Dick Osborn, in his research, asked Adventist parents if they planned to teach their children to respect, believe, and read Ellen G. White. Seventy-four percent of the parents surveyed said they would in fact teach their children to believe and respect Ellen G. White as a prophet (Osborn, 2000). This is a very high number, but does not correlate with the low number of children and youth reading and respecting Ellen G. White’s work. This seems to be an opportunity for more study.

**Former Seventh-day Adventists**

In a study on nurture, retention, and discipleship, the Seventh-day Adventist Church learned that attitudes toward Ellen G. White by former Seventh-day Adventists were for the most part quite positive. Among former Seventh-day Adventists surveyed, 58% said they “still believe in the gift of prophecy manifested in Ellen White” (Trim, 2014, p. 33). Among former Seventh-day Adventists who returned to the church, the number who still believed went up to 81% (Trim, 2014). This difference between returned and former members is significant, as the belief in the Spirit of Prophecy might
have played a part in their returning to the church. Further study in this area is also needed.

SWOT

The Seventh-day Adventist Church does a regular survey of its world leaders to determine, in the leaders’ opinions, the current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) facing the church. In the survey conducted in 2003, of the 427 responses, 80.28% felt that the writings of Ellen G. White were one of the strengths of the church. Fifty-eight percent of the leaders felt that challenges to Ellen G. White’s authority were one of the great threats facing the church (Dudley, 2004, pp. 5-6).

In 2006, a replica of the SWOT survey was done. Of the 282 participants, Dudley (2006) found that 59% felt challenges against Ellen G. White’s authority continued to be one of the great challenges facing the church, which was only a 1% increase from the 2003 study. There was no notable change, but it is important to note that a majority of leaders remain in the frame of mind: that this is one of the great threats facing the church (Dudley, 2006, p. 6). Like in 2003, a high number (84%) believed that Ellen G. White is a great strength to the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Dudley, 2006, p. 8).

Reading Patterns

Historical

No research studies were done in the late 1800s and early 1900s during the lifetime of Ellen White about the reading trends of her writings in her day. I did find one place where she shares her guess as to how many were reading or not reading her writings. She referred to her writings as the Spirit of Prophecy, and even more so in the
early days of the church, her collective written counsel was called such. White (1882) said,

The volumes of Spirit of Prophecy should be in every family and should be read aloud in the family circle. More than one half of our people know little or nothing of the contents of these books, and they are losing much by their neglect. (1882, p. 6)

Whether she meant that more than half have never read them or more than half did not adhere to them could be debated. However, I see this as an admission by her that even in her day there was a majority who were not regular readers of her work. This is significant because we are not speaking of frequency but of total readership. This evidence is anecdotal, but it is interesting that despite some people’s perceptions that the number of today’s readers of Ellen G. White is low, perhaps they are better or at least the same as in her day.

In a study from the early 1980s, Dudley and Cummings (1982b) found that 34.6% regularly read the writings of Ellen G. White, but 65.4% did not. The 34.6% is significantly lower than modern readership numbers, as detailed below. I speculate that this lower figure is because during the 1980s, Ellen G. White’s prophetic gift and the validity of her writings was coming under severe attack from detractors within the church such as Walter Rea. Walter Rea’s book outlining his objection to Ellen G. White’s prophetic gift, *The White Lie*, was published in 1982, which is the same year as the study.

**Seventh-day Adventist Members**

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists discovered that, in recent comprehensive studies carried out by the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research called Reach the World, 16% of Adventists read Ellen G. White daily, with the number increasing to 56% when asked who reads her at least once a week or about once a week.
The 19% who do not read her writings matched up with the 14% who do not accept or have doubts about Ellen G. White as a prophet. Altogether, those who never read her or seldom read her is 44% (Trim, 2013, p. 28). In an interview with Dr. Dave Trim, director of the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, he admitted that the results might be skewed if individuals responding that they read Ellen G. White might have only read her in the context of studying their daily Sabbath School lesson or hear her read in the weekly Sabbath School class. He admitted that in the future, there should be a sifting question regarding Sabbath School to see who is reading Ellen G. White’s writings independently from Sabbath School (D. Trim, personal communication, June 14, 2016). In a study done in 2004, Dudley and Heinrich found that nearly 14% reported that they read Ellen G. White daily, with another 29% reading her writings at least once a week. Therefore, 43% of members were reading Ellen G. White at least once a week in 2004, which seems consistent with the 2013 figure of 44% shared above, and 57% read her rarely or never (Dudley & Heinrich, 2004, pp. 3-4).

Between 2003 and 2007, Dr. Joseph Kidder led a study of five of the most vibrant, successful, and growing Adventist congregations in the United States to learn why they were prosperous. One of the questions asked of the five congregations was if they read Ellen G. White regularly. Kidder (2011) found that 43% of the churches read Ellen G. White at least once a week (p. 128), which was lower than the number reached by the General Conference Reach the World studies of 56% for Adventists worldwide (Trim, 2016c, p. 14). One explanation for the difference is that the Reach the World statistic includes those who read about once a week, which was not an option in the Kidder study.
A big difference between the Kidder and Reach the World studies is seen when counting those who “never” read Ellen G. White. Kidder found that 57% of those surveyed in his study never read Ellen G. White at all (p. 128), which was in stark contrast to the worldwide figure of 19% found in the Reach the World studies (Trim, 2016c). Even using the Reach the World rate of 44% of individuals who “never” or “seldom” read Ellen G. White, it still presents a 13% difference from the Kidder study. Whether this difference is because of the separation of time between studies (4-5 years) or because of the demographic group studied is impossible to know. I suspect it probably says more about the congregations surveyed in Kidder’s study and the fact that the sample size was much smaller. He was studying uniquely successful churches, so differences from other churches would not be surprising. Other factors that might account for the difference are that the Reach the World studies involved surveying the whole world, so there may be cultural differences at play. It might be possible that North Americans believe in Ellen G. White less than international Adventists.

**Pastors**

Dudley and Cincala (2013) oversaw a massive research survey of 4,260 Seventh-day Adventist pastors. As pastors are the spiritual tone setters for their churches, their responses could be valuable in understandings trends in the area of the Spirit of Prophecy. Whether the axiom “how the pastor goes, so goes the congregation” is correct, the responses were interesting. The study found that 32% of Adventist pastors read Ellen G. White daily, which is quite high for a daily figure. Another 44% of the pastors surveyed read her writings at least once a week. Adding the daily and weekly groups together provides a significant figure of 76% reading her at least weekly (Dudley &
Cincala, 2013, p. 6), which was substantially higher than the Reach the World figure of 56% and the figure of 44% in the Kidder study for members reading Ellen G. White at least once a week. There is something that may bring the pastors’ numbers down, which is a need to adjust the responses of those who answered that they read Ellen G. White at least once a week if they meant they read her quotes in the Sabbath School lesson. The average pastor probably either studies the Sabbath School lesson daily or at least prepares to participate in Sabbath School every week. Thus, this is something that cannot be determined but raises a question. Perhaps the most surprising finding was that almost a quarter of all Adventist pastors (24%) said they only occasionally or rarely read Ellen White (Dudley & Cincala, 2013, p. 6).

The Seventh-day Adventist pastors surveyed do not think that large portions of their membership are reading Ellen G. White regularly. The pastors conjectured that only 5% read her daily and 20% read her at least once a week. This figure of 25% is quite in contrast to the pastors’ own number of 76% who read Ellen G. White at least once a week. The pastors estimated over half the congregation read Ellen White’s writings only occasionally and another 23% only rarely (Dudley & Cincala, 2013, p. 6).

**Young Adults**

Dr. Galina Stele conducted a study that used four sample studies: the 21st Century Connection Study, an Adventist Church Member Survey, the Hope Channel Student Survey, and the Beyond Beliefs Study. By compiling and analyzing these four samples, the following findings regarding young adult Adventists were determined. When asked how often they read Ellen G. White devotionally, 33% said they did at least “once a week,” and 67% said they did not read Ellen White devotionally (Stele, 2016, p. 6).
When asked how often they read Ellen G. White in general, the number increased to 51% who read her at least once a week. When the question was simplified to “How often do you read Ellen G. White?” with the option answers being daily, weekly, or now and then, the response skyrocketed to 83% responding they read her now and then (Stele, 2016, p. 13). This 83% seems to contradict the finding in the same study of 51%, but it is hard to analyze this last response because readers do not know or understand what the respondent meant. There is no context of time or frequency. Respondents might mean that they read her last year or that they read her 10 times a day.

In the Twenty-First Century Connection study, 37% of the young adults surveyed reported they read the writings of Ellen White less than once a week, and another 30% reported they never read the writings of Ellen White. This meant that 32% of the respondents read Ellen G. White at least once a week (Jacobs et al., 2016, p. 11).

The Valuegenesis studies showed a different pattern than the Twenty-First Century Connection study. Valuegenesis revealed a trend that young adults who said they read Ellen G. White’s writings dropped from 13% to 6% from 1990 to 2000 (Gillespie, 2002, pp. 12-16). When analyzing the Valuegenesis study, Burt (2015) states that only 2% of sixth to 12th-grade Adventists read Ellen G. White’s writings at least once a week (p. 243). These numbers seemed drastically low, and I found the 2% figure especially skeptical. I researched the statistic and found that the number had been listed incorrectly. Two percent of young people read her every day, not every week as Burt stated in his book. Although 2%-a-day readership is still low, it makes a lot more sense than 2% a week (V. B. Gillespie, Personal communication, 2016).
Over the course of the 20 years of the Valuegenesis study from 1990 to 2010, there was a downward trend with respect to young people not reading Ellen G. White. In 1990, 46% of the respondents said they “never” read Ellen G. White. Two decades later in 2010, the number had risen sharply to 63% (Gillespie, 2013).

Ron Whitehead, executive director of the Center for Youth Evangelism, lamented that there is not more in-depth reporting and coverage of the findings with the final 2010 study in the Valuegenesis trilogy as there was with the two earlier studies (personal communication, June 14, 2016). Gillespie (2013) shares that while there would not be a published book on the findings of Valuegenesis 3, there will be a digital book that will deal with the findings of the third study, the application of the data, and employing strategies from what was learned. Also, a book for pastors was published with the research from all three Valuegenesis studies, titled, *Hey, Love Them and They Will Come* by Gillespie and Gillespie (2011). The book gives specific ways that pastors can apply the data from the studies in their own congregations. Some 189 separate research projects have been done over the three Valuegenesis studies (Gillespie, 2013). The Valuegenesis studies were an incredible research accomplishment, and those who worked on them, including Dr. Gillespie’s leadership, should be highly commended.

**Youth**

Dr. Galina Stele found that youth 15 to 20 years old read the writings of Ellen G. White less than young adults. About 43% of the youth responded that they read Ellen G. White at least once a week, compared to 51% of young adults (Stele, 2016, p. 10). These numbers seem to align with the adult figures. It is not that under 50% is acceptable, but the rate is not alarmingly different than what we have already learned and is higher than
in other youth studies. Whether the youth grow into an appreciation of Ellen G. White and their reading pattern increases over time needs to be analyzed and observed closely.

In the Cincala study done with the Pathfinders at the Camporee in 2014, another question was asked of the 700 children and youth who responded. The question relating to their reading patterns was as follows: “Have you read any books by Ellen White?” Although the question did not establish the regularity or frequency of their reading patterns, it did reveal whether any of them had been exposed to her writing. Sixty-three percent of the respondents said they had read a book by Ellen G. White, with an additional 7% saying they had read her “many times.” Twenty-nine percent said they had not read a book by her (Cincala, 2014). My challenge with this question is it asked if they had read any books, which meant that some may have said no because they had not completed a book but they still may have read parts of books. A large part of the adult Adventist population probably has not read a complete book of hers but only parts. This potential confusion might have skewed the results.

Effects of Reading Ellen G. White

Ellen G. White

Again, I return to the time of Ellen G. White to learn her attitude toward her own work. It is clear from her many comments that she believed her writings were inspired from God and that she felt there was a spiritual benefit to reading them. She said that “much good” (White, 1903, p. 15) would come from reading her books, and she gave stern warnings about ignoring her counsel (White, 1907). Although individuals could
choose whether to read her writings, she believed that ignoring her work was to their own detriment. Inversely, she believed readers who read her writings would avoid peril and receive a blessing.

**Lack of Research**

An exhaustive review of the contemporary literature found no relevant current research in the area of the effects of reading Ellen G. White. Merlin Burt, the founding director for the Center for Adventist Research and the director of the Ellen G. White Estate branch office at Andrews University, affirmed that there is little research in this area. He knows of no other research on the benefits of reading Ellen G. White (personal communication, June 14, 2016). For many years, even the statistics in this area that were quoted in contemporary articles relating to the benefits of reading Ellen G. White were quoted from Dudley and Cummings (1982b).

**Spirit of Prophecy Influence**

In the Reach the World studies by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Trim asked those who had very limited reading of the Spirit of Prophecy (Ellen White) if they agreed with the statement, “Although I am religious, I don’t let it affect my daily life.” About 40% of those who did not read Ellen G. White or had a very limited reading of her “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement (Trim, 2015a). This meant that, in essence, their religious beliefs did not translate into affecting their daily lives. The implication of this question and response is that those who were not reading Ellen G. White were not as authentic in their spiritual walk.
Eight Reasons to Read

In *Understanding Ellen White*, Merlin Burt (2015) shares eight points why someone should read Ellen G. White. Burt feels the eight points are benefits that people receive from reading her writings. While admittedly not a scholarly study, his opinion should be included in this review, as he is deeply involved in this field of research. He seems attuned to the contemporary perceptions, opinions, and patterns of those who read Ellen G. White, and I believe his professional observations and insights are valuable. These are Burt’s eight reasons to read Ellen G. White (2015, pp. 243-250):

1. Renew interest in the Bible
2. Provide a comprehensive biblical worldview
3. Restore enthusiasm for the Second Coming
4. Demonstrate practical Christian living
5. Show involvement in contemporary issues
6. Give principles for improving our quality of life
7. Provide practical advice for relationships
8. Give guidance for the church as a whole

Dudley and Cummings’s Study

Lost and Found

Most of what is known regarding the benefits of reading the writings of Ellen G. White comes from the study by Dr. Roger Dudley and Des Cummings in 1982. They published an article with a summary of their results in *Ministry Magazine* that same year (Dudley & Cummings, 1982b). The report of the actual study was thought to be lost for decades. When Dudley was asked where the report of findings was, he said that he could
not find it (personal communication, March 13, 2012). Recently, however, the Institute
of Church Ministry was digitizing its archived studies and making them available online,
and I was pleased to find the research report for this seminal 1982 work while searching
through Institute of Church Ministry website archives. If this study is to ever be
replicated, Dudley and Cummings’s report would be crucial in that endeavor.

The results of this 1982 study are shared as part of this literature review because
the study remains the seminal study on the effects and benefits of reading Ellen G. White.
As this project relates specifically to this topic of reading Ellen G. White, it is imperative
to include the only research available relating to why people should read her, even though
it is somewhat dated.

The Study

The study was commissioned by the North American Division of Seventh-day
Adventists and conducted by the Institute of Church Ministry. The study was done in the
first half of 1980 and surveyed 8,200 Seventh-day Adventist members across North
America. Dr. Roger Dudley and Des Cummings, director of the Institute of Church
Ministry, oversaw the project. The scope included 193 churches. Every union and most
conferences were represented. As its title indicated, A Comparison of the Christian
Attitudes and Behaviors Between Those Adventist Church Members Who Regularly Read
Ellen White Books and Those Who Do Not, the study’s purpose was to compare the
spiritual lives of those members who read Ellen G. White and those who did not. Their
goal was to find what significant differences there were between the two groups relating
to their spiritual journey (Dudley & Cummings, 1982a).
The survey was administered during Sabbath worship services and reflected the opinions of active Seventh-day Adventists who attended church. It also focused on reading patterns, whether they read or not. It did not focus on the frequency of reading patterns. The study was a glimpse into the reading patterns of active attending members and their responses to spiritual growth questions. From analysis of the responses, the researchers were able to draw correlations and differences between the readers and nonreaders regarding the impact on their spiritual life (Dudley & Cummings, 1982b).

**Effects on Personal Spirituality**

The findings of this research are quite impressive. One can see a striking distinction in the spiritual life of those who read Ellen G. White versus those who did not. Eighty-two percent of those reading Ellen G. White (hereafter referred to as readers) had an assurance of salvation in God, compared to only 59% of those who did not read Ellen G. White (hereafter referred to as nonreaders). That is a significant 23-point difference. Readers seemed to have a better walk with Jesus and a clearer understanding of their spiritual gifts and talents (Dudley & Cummings, 1982b, p. 10).

Dudley and Cummings focused in on some details regarding respondents’ personal spiritual life. Some of the biggest differences between readers and nonreaders was in the area of personal spirituality. Of the readers, 82% “usually” or “always” studied the Bible daily compared to only 47% of the nonreaders. This difference of 35 points was the largest distinction found in the study between the two groups (1982b, p. 12). So the question that developed was whether Adventists who study the Bible are more likely to read Ellen G. White to supplement their study or whether readers of Ellen G. White were driven and motivated to study the Bible?
The results also revealed an interesting finding regarding daily family worship. Seventy percent of readers were found to “usually” or “always” have regular family worship, compared to only 42% of the nonreaders (Dudley & Cummings, 1982b, p. 12). The same chicken-or-egg argument can be stated for this finding. Another possibility is there might not in fact be a cause-and-effect relationship at all, and it might simply be a coincidence. The difference between the two groups seems too great to ignore, and I believe that there is a causal correlation.

**Effects on Witness**

Readers of Ellen G. White were more engaged in witnessing than nonreaders by 24 points. Furthermore, 19% more readers had held Bible studies with a non-Adventist at some point in the previous year. Also, more of the readers, by 15 points, were active in community services and were more likely to meet in fellowship groups. Readers had a generally more positive view of the church and brought more guests to church than did nonreaders. Regarding daily witnessing in their everyday activities, 76% of readers were involved in outreach, compared to 48% of the nonreaders. That is a strong 28-point difference between the two groups. Readers were also more likely to share their faith informally in addition to formal methods (Dudley & Cummings, 1982b, p. 12).

Readers were more liberal in their giving to outreach and were willing to give heavily to local missionary endeavors. Besides being more active in evangelism and witnessing, readers felt better prepared to witness. Seventy-six percent of readers “usually” or “always” were involved in giving systematically and regularly for evangelism, which was a 30-point difference from the 46% of nonreaders who did this (Dudley & Cummings, 1982b, p. 11).
Eighty-one percent of readers engaged in daily prayer for a specific non-Adventist person regarding their conversion, but only 51% of nonreaders were praying in the same manner. This difference again begs the question as to why the variance exists. Did the reading of Ellen G. White drive them to their knees and instill a renewed passion for their friends’ salvation? Readers were also more likely to bear the burden for souls on their heart and seek the Lord daily for their salvation (Dudley & Cummings, 1982b, p. 12).

Summary

Dudley and Cummings’s conclusions for this study were remarkable. Dudley and Cummings (1982b) note,

Seldom does a research study find the evidence so heavily weighted toward one conclusion. In the church growth survey, on every single item that deals with personal attitudes or practices, the member who regularly studies Ellen White's books tends to rank higher than does the member who reads them only occasionally or never. (p. 12)

The difference in many of the categories was quite substantial, reaching 10-30 points.

Although the results of the study were impressive, the study merely drew observational correlations. It did not prove a cause-and-effect relationship and did not demonstrate conclusively or scientifically that these positive things will happen by reading Ellen G. White. Nonetheless, the overwhelming discrepancies in the numbers between readers and nonreaders lead to the question whether reading Ellen G. White does have these multiple positive effects. The implication is that Seventh-day Adventists should be reading Ellen G. White regularly, as it would benefit them spiritually and improve their witness.
Effects on Membership

Based on the research that has been conducted regarding incoming new members into the Seventh-day Adventist Church and those who have left the church, I observed an interesting finding. Belief in Ellen G. White as a prophet or the disbelief in her does not seem to be a significant factor affecting people joining nor leaving the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This conclusion seems to challenge some who assert that Ellen G. White is a drag on the church and even an embarrassment to the postmodern culture.

New Members

The Center for Creative Ministry conducted a study between 2011 and 2013 that surveyed 925 former Seventh-day Adventist members from around the world to understand why members left the church or became inactive. Participants were asked what attracted them to the Adventist Church. According to the survey, four key things attracted them to the Seventh-day Adventist Church originally: friendship, doctrines, charisma of preacher, and their needs. Neither Ellen G. White nor the Spirit of Prophecy was listed as a key attracting factor (Center for Creative Ministry, 2013, p. 6).

Former Members

In 2012, a study was commissioned by the General Conference Nurture and Retention Committee and conducted by the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research to understand why Seventh-day Adventists left the church. Over 785 former members were surveyed. The study found 20 key reasons why people left the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Of note was that Ellen G. White, her writings, and the Spirit of Prophecy were not among those reasons (Kent, 2012, p. 12).
In the Center for Creative Ministry (2013) study, over 21 items were listed as the most important reasons members stopped attending. Neither Ellen G. White nor the Spirit of Prophecy was listed as a reason. Not even one person shared that Ellen G. White was a factor (Center for Creative Ministry, 2013). David Trim gave a presentation to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Annual Council titled “Data on Youth Retention, Non-retention and Connectedness to the Church.” A survey of the study’s results showed that, like the studies above, Ellen G. White was a nonfactor in people leaving. There are many reasons why young people say they left the church, but Ellen G. White was not one of them (Trim, 2016a). This is significant, as it demonstrates that Ellen G. White is not a catalyst for individuals leaving the church. The data from the two studies by the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research show the many reasons people say they leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church but Ellen G. White and the Spirit of Prophecy are not one of them (Trim, 2015b).

In a General Conference study of former Adventists, the findings indicated that the majority of former Adventist still believed in Ellen G. White and that she demonstrated the Spirit of Prophecy. Approximately 69% of former Seventh-day Adventist responded they still believed Ellen G. White was a prophet (Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, 2014, p. 47). The study found that former Adventists still believed there is a benefit to studying the writings of Ellen G. White (Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, 2014, p. 48). One could speculate that the Seventh-day Adventist Church may be missing an opportunity in this area considering the high favorability of Ellen G. White among former Adventists. This could be an avenue to use
in getting them to return. Focusing on the positive could build the bridge to reunification with the church.

Conclusion

Support for Ellen G. White and her prophetic gift is high among Seventh-day Adventist members. Adventists’ belief in her as a prophet ranges, depending on the survey and year done, from 76% to 87%. The volume of surveys considered and the results of the most recent studies indicate the higher number in the range might be more accurate. Seventh-day Adventist pastors demonstrate a higher range of support toward Ellen G. White than Adventist laity, with their supporting range being 90-100% in her prophetic gift. Pastors in North America are 95% in support of her as being a prophet. Young adults and children’s belief in Ellen G. White is much lower than adults, with a range from 42% to 76%. Older youth seem to have a higher appreciation for her prophetic gift. The longer young adults were at an Adventist college, the stronger was their support of the Spirit of Prophecy.

The range of Adventists reading Ellen G. White at least once a week is between 43% and 56%. Based on my review of the research, the best figure seems to be around 44% who read her at least once a week. Seventy-six percent of Adventist pastors read the writings of Ellen G. White at least once a week. Young adults read Ellen G. White less devotionally than adults, with 33% saying they read her at least once a week. However, 51% of young adults say they read in general at least or about once a week. Forty-three percent of Adventist youth read her work at least once a week.
The research conducted in 1982 indicated that there is a correlation between reading Ellen G. White and having a more vibrant and healthy spiritual life. Also, readers were more engaged in outreach and in financially supporting the church’s work.

Although a vast majority of the Seventh-day Adventist membership supports Ellen G. White as a prophet, a little less than half read her regularly. The issue of Ellen G. White does not seem to affect joining the church or leaving the church positively or negatively.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY, DESIGN, AND IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE INTERVENTION STRATEGY

This chapter includes a discussion on the methodology used for the intervention and the foundation for why such a methodology was used. The development of the intervention strategy and a comprehensive description of this project are discussed. In addition, the chapter contains a thorough narrative of the intervention strategy’s implementation, including a detailed chronological timeline. Notations are made on the success of the implementation, the challenges met, and the insights observed.

**Intervention Methodology and Project Development**

This section explains why the intervention strategy was chosen and why it was designed as it was. It will explore four major areas that served as the basis for the intervention strategy. The choices in methodology and design are explained. Lastly, a brief overview of the intervention strategy is given. A more thorough explanation of this project will be revealed in the next section.

**Foundational Basis**

This section explains the core reasons that led me to develop the intervention strategy presented. Four areas were critical to designing the methodology and
intervention used: the theological understanding, the literature review, my personal observations and assumptions, and my preliminary survey.

**Theological Foundation**

An analysis of the theological foundation on this topic, as shown in Chapter 2, demonstrated the importance of reading the works of the prophets in balance with the higher authority of the Bible. This is in harmony with what the Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches. The Adventist Church believes that Ellen G. White was a prophet and her writings were special messages from God. However, the denomination also clearly teaches that the Bible is the supreme and only authority for doctrine in the church. Ellen G. White’s view of herself and her authority were in harmony with the church, as she called her writings “a lesser light” (White, 1903, p. 30) to the greater light of the Bible.

Based on this theology and understanding, the members of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church should spend time reading the works of Ellen G. White. Reading her narration of the Bible story devotionally and in harmony with the Scriptures themselves might have enriched them spiritually and shed more light on the Bible stories.

**Summary of Literature Review**

The review of the current literature in the previous chapter indicated that most Seventh-day Adventists are not reading Ellen G. White regularly. Less than half of Adventists are reading her written work at least once a week and about one third are reading her writings more than once a week. Although members’ attitudes and opinions toward her remain relatively high, those opinions do not translate into faithfully reading her material. There appears to be a gap between people believing she was a prophet and actually regularly reading her writings. As discovered in the literature review, very little
research has been done in this area, and research correlating reading Ellen G. White with the effects of that reading on the individual’s spiritual life and growth is specifically lacking. Based on the limited research available, there seems to be a positive correlation between reading Ellen G. White and increased spiritual activity.

The findings from the literature review indicated it would be a good spiritual exercise for the congregation of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church to read the writings of Ellen G. White. Reading her devotionally, especially her narration of the Bible story, would therefore be beneficial. Although this study was not designed to measure the results of reading Ellen G. White or attitudes toward her, it was possible to observe some correlations within the surveys. Does reading Ellen G. White regularly help a person spiritually? The results from some of the peripheral questions within the survey showed interesting correlations. I sought to quantify an increase in reading a book she wrote called *Patriarchs and Prophets* about the early stories of the Bible.

**Personal Observation and Interaction**

My conclusion through observation of and interaction with the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church congregation was that the congregation fit the statistical norm regarding Ellen G. White and opinions toward her work that was discovered in the literature review. I also found that they followed the same pattern as others in the denomination in that they seemingly had a high respect for Ellen G. White as a prophet but did not regularly read her writing. Even fewer members of the congregation were reading her books in a systematic manner. Many in the congregation often quoted Ellen G. White in Sabbath School or in other conversations to bolster their argument, but they did not actively read her writing. Even more curious was that most of the quotes from
Ellen G. White that were mentioned in conversation or argument came from books other than her works on the Bible. In other words, more of her ecclesiastical work or counsel to the church was quoted.

It appeared many were resting on their previous reading investment, while no current regular reading was being accomplished. I deduced that this was because the church was conservative. It seemed unusual that more were not reading Ellen G. White’s work regularly. Based on these observations, I saw a need to creatively present the congregation Ellen G. White’s writings on the Bible story. I developed an intervention to address the problem, and I sought to increase the regular reading of Ellen G. White devotionally within the congregation of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church and focus on her narrative work on the Bible story itself as exemplified in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

**Preliminary Survey**

The results of the preliminary survey confirmed my expectations that the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church fit with the statistics that the literature review demonstrated. I detail and thoroughly explain this survey later in this paper. The survey was a tool implemented to gauge, along with other things, participants’ belief in Ellen G. White as a prophet, their opinion of her, and their reading patterns of her written work. In fact, the findings showed that there was a slightly lower percentage of Augusta First members regularly reading Ellen G. White as compared to the pattern for the overall SDA Church. Of those preliminarily surveyed within the Augusta First congregation, only 36.6% were reading Ellen G. White daily or at least once a week. The survey also revealed that 73.8% believed Ellen G. White was a prophet and 80.5% had a positive or
very positive view toward her. The congregation followed the same research pattern of the world church in having a high belief in Ellen G. White but a relatively low regular readership.

The statistics of this preliminary survey demonstrated that there was a problem and a need to increase the regular reading of the works of Ellen G. White. The goal was to try to bring into harmony the high levels of belief in Ellen G. White as a prophet with reading her writings on the Bible more regularly.

Methodology, Design, and Intervention
Project Overview

Based on the four foundational understandings outlined in the previous section, I concluded that an intervention was needed to address the problem. This section explains the methodology chosen and the design of the project. It also gives a brief overview of the intervention strategy with its goals clearly delineated.

Project Methodology

After reviewing the literature in this area and building upon the theological foundation, my own observations, and the preliminary survey, I developed a methodology to address the problem. Due to the financial and time limitations of the project, I chose to conduct a quantitative study. Although a qualitative dynamic might have revealed any changes in the members’ opinions and patterns through the project, it would have increased the scope of the project beyond what I could implement alone. The aim of the quantitative intervention was to increase the reading of Ellen G. White as a congregation and to increase the reading of her within the genre of literature she wrote about the Bible story itself.
I surveyed the congregation as a whole rather than tracking specific individuals. The intervention did not include a control group or interviews with individual participants. I sought to determine whether more members of the congregation read *Patriarchs and Prophets* after project implementation. Because I surveyed two groups 10 weeks apart, the two groups did not include the same people. However, the vast majority of the two groups were the same. The survey filtered out guests and those who had not taken the first survey, so I felt confident that the two groups comprised a good sample of the congregation and were of equal balance and demographic composition.

**Project Design and Overview**

At the core of this intervention strategy was a series of sermons as the instrument of influence to affect reading patterns within the congregation. The sermons that I created and preached spanned 10 weeks and covered nine key patriarchs of the early Old Testament. The sermon series correlated with a promoted reading plan of *Patriarchs and Prophets* by Ellen G. White. As part of an overall comprehensive strategy, the sermon series was intended to inspire hearers to want to read the book. The reading plan served as a guide to the participants in reading the book as a daily devotional. As a component to the strategy, additional Bible topics from *Patriarchs and Prophets* were discussed during the weekly Wednesday mid-week service, also known as prayer meeting. The prayer meeting topics synchronized with the reading plan. Eleven topics from *Patriarchs and Prophets* were discussed in a small group format at prayer meeting. Thus, the mid-week prayer meeting service was part of the Faith of Our Fathers series and meant to be an important part of the overall intervention strategy.

A survey served as the key instrument to measure the readings patterns of the
congregation. The survey was given to the congregation at the beginning of the project before the Faith of Our Fathers series began and again at the end of the series to see what changes in reading patterns occurred overall, specifically regarding *Patriarchs and Prophets*. The goal was to raise the percentage of the congregation reading the works of Ellen G. White and to increase the reading within the highlighted book, *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Although the presurvey and the postsurvey largely had the same participants, the groups were not exactly alike. The intervention sought to esteem and promote the book while being faithful to uplifting the Bible as the ultimate authority and foundation of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. Through this overall strategy, my hope was to increase the reading of Ellen G. White’s writings. By comparing the presurveys and postsurveys, I was able to determine whether there had been a shift in the reading pattern of the congregation of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church during the 10-week implementation period.

**Intervention Project Description and Implementation Narrative**

This section includes a detailed description of each component of the intervention strategy to explain why I made certain decisions at each stage of the process. To the public, the intervention strategy was titled Faith of Our Fathers, which was also how it was known to the participating congregation. Faith of Our Fathers encompassed the sermon series, the prayer meeting series, and the reading plan of *Patriarchs and Prophets* by Ellen G. White. Each section below includes details of the implementation of each part of the intervention strategy (project).
Target Group

The target group for this intervention was adults who were regularly attending services at the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church in Augusta, Georgia. Certain parameters were established to qualify to take the survey. It was a voluntary survey, so those not wishing to participate did not have to do so. No one was pressured into being part of the project. Only those who were 18 years or older were allowed to fill out the survey. The survey was not limited to only Seventh-day Adventists or solely members of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church. All who regularly attended the church services were encouraged to participate in the anonymous survey. The Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church is a multicultural congregation, as seen in Chapter 1 and the context study in the appendix (see Appendix A). I expected to receive a wide range of responses that represented the diversity of the church. All individuals who attended, regardless of gender, religious belief, cultural background, or racial make-up, were encouraged to participate.

Exclusions

Certain groups were excluded from participating in the survey. Those who were minors were not allowed to take the survey, and I asked those who were mentally handicapped not to take the survey. This last request was made because there were adults who were mentally handicapped regularly attending the church services at Augusta First. Also excluded were those who did not regularly attend the church, one-time visitors, and out-of-town guests. If anyone in these excluded groups filled out the presurvey, they were weeded out by survey questions or by their absence in the postsurvey.
Attendance Patterns

Average weekly attendance of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church prior to this project’s implementation was in the 180s. Attendees at this church were considered to be in regular attendance if they attended at least once a month. As many did not attend every week, I felt it best to provide a broader range of survey distribution to ensure as many completed surveys were returned as possible. To maximize the potential of offering everyone the opportunity to take the survey, it was given out each Saturday over a three-week span before the sermon series began and again at the conclusion of the series. The survey included a question to weed out those who might have already filled one out to avoid duplication.

Board and Congregation Inclusion

Following the guidelines of the IRB of Andrews University, I processed my project proposal, including the plan to distribute surveys to the congregation, through the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church Board. I updated the board at each stage of the project. I did not intentionally reveal to the board or the congregation the specific goal of the project to avoid tainting the results. Although they knew the project involved Ellen G. White and her writings and that I would be preaching a new sermon series, little else was revealed to them.

Implementation Narrative and Notes

As the church is multicultural, it was fitting with the demographics of the church that young and old, males and females, and people from many cultures and racial groups took the survey. The representative response matched the demographics of the church.
This project was a positive experience that was well-implemented and received by the congregation of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church.

During the Faith of Our Fathers series, the head deacon of the church, Norman Rose, counted weekly church worship attendance. He reported that over the span of the series, the average attendance was around 200 people per week, which represented approximately a 10% increase in attendance. There was a positive tone within the congregation toward the series and their participation in the surveys. Not one person approached me or any of the leaders with a negative attitude toward the project or the Faith of Our Fathers series. The church was supportive and eager to be involved. Their level of excitement seemed lower regarding the doctor of ministry project itself but higher in relation to hearing and receiving the sermons in the series. The concept of having a series was not new to them, as I had completed a series using the book *The Great Controversy* the year before.

I was initially concerned during the survey distribution period that a few teenagers (minors) had taken the survey. Although I cannot say with certainty that this happened, there was nothing to stop them from doing so. If they gave misinformation on the survey regarding their age, I could not have done anything. I asked deacons to watch for this situation, but the possibility exists that some did fill out surveys. Although young people’s input is valuable, I did not design the intervention to include minors and did not receive IRB approval to do so, which is why I had the concern. If this situation did occur, it only involved a few individuals.

Another concern was that some elderly individuals may have filled out duplicate surveys. Even though we tried to be clear with communication, some did get confused.
A few regularly attending seniors, seeing the survey distributed each week for three weeks, may have filled out one each week. Although I hoped the filter question about having filled out the survey before allowed me to cull the duplicates, it was necessary to note the possibility existed.

**Project Time Frame**

**Strategy and Reasoning**

The Faith of Our Fathers sermon series needed at least nine weeks and an additional three weeks on each end of it for survey distribution. It was important to choose the time frame for the project wisely to allow for 15-16 uninterrupted weeks. I was concerned about distractions to the schedule dampening interest or allowing for a loss of momentum in the reading plan, but finding an uninterrupted span of time was challenging. I sought to avoid summer from Memorial Day to Labor Day; the holiday season from October 31 through the first of the New Year; and May because of graduations, weddings, and camp meeting.

**Balanced and Focused Schedule**

It was important to balance the schedule so all the components in the project strategy flowed seamlessly. The sermon series needed to harmonize with the prayer meeting small group series. In turn, the *Patriarchs and Prophets* reading plan schedule needed to harmonize with both the sermon series and the small group series schedule. This was significant, so the congregation could proceed together and the readers did not fall behind or go too far ahead. The Faith of Our Fathers series was the DNA of the church during this time. Other events were postponed or cancelled so this series could be
the focus of the congregation. Even evangelism was rescheduled. Special Sabbaths such as Pathfinder Sabbath and school Sabbaths needed to be moved to before or after the series. The goal was for the congregation to be on a journey together through these topics to learn about these biblical characters. I wanted a collective conversation, both formal and informal, about what the congregation was corporately learning.

It was critical to ensure the schedule encouraged the participants to read *Patriarchs and Prophets* regularly. It was also important that the momentum not be uninterrupted if the participants were to establish a pattern of using the book regularly and devotionally. The sermons and topical small group studies whet the participants’ appetite to read the Bible more and to want to know more. After the series ended, I wanted there to be a desire among the congregation to continue their journey in Bible study, in going to Ellen G. White’s narrative of the Bible story to enrich their understanding, and in learning more.

**Implementation Narrative and Notes**

The dates chosen for the Faith of Our Fathers series were from Saturday, March 5, 2011 through Sabbath, May 7, 2011. While I was able to avoid most of the schedule distractions, the sermon series had to take a pause on Saturday, April 16, 2011, due to a Marriage and Family Sabbath previously scheduled on that day. The sermon series of nine sermons happened almost uninterrupted for this period of 10 weeks. The prayer meetings series were not interrupted at all, and hence there were 11 small group topics versus the nine sermons. For the most part, I avoided May for the sermon series, but it was mainly used for the postsurvey three-week period.
I was pleased with the time frame chosen, as it did provide a long stretch without
distraction to the schedule. Constantly pausing the series for other events or holidays
would have been harmful to the project. The ability to be consistent over the 10 weeks
was one reason the attendance went up. Momentum was maintained because people were
not absent or going on vacation. Being able to walk together through the journey with a
majority of the congregation allowed us to thoroughly sample Patriarchs and Prophets,
as was the intent of the intervention. My goal was not to get them to dabble in the book
but to get them to read it and enjoy its fruits fully. This could not have been done if the
reading occurred only occasionally.

The Survey

Design of the Instrument

The instrument used in this intervention was a survey tool. The survey (see
Appendix B) was created to measure participant’s reading habits of the works of Ellen G.
White. Their general attitude toward her and her writings was measured, in addition to
whether they saw her writings as inspired or prophetic. Questions related to the
participants’ devotional patterns were asked and focused on their personal devotion life,
family worship patterns, and if they read the Bible devotionally. A specific question at
the end of the survey helped to track their reading pattern in Patriarchs and Prophets.

The same survey was used in the presurvey before the series began and in the
postsurvey after the series concluded. The format of the survey was on a half sheet of
paper, both the front and back. Participants filled out the survey manually using a pen or
pencil. Participating in the project and taking the survey were voluntary, and all results
were kept anonymous and confidential. A preamble at the top of the survey clearly stated
that this was part of a doctoral of ministry project by Pastor BJ Boles and, by filling out and turning in the survey, they were granting their informed consent for their information to be used in this project.

Extra Information

Several demographic questions were asked within the survey. The participant’s age grouping and gender were requested. Religious faith, affiliation, and membership questions were also asked. I also sought to determine the person’s attendance patterns at the August First Seventh-day Adventist Church. A sorting question was asked to ensure they had only filled out one survey and, in the end, that they had filled out both the presurvey and postsurvey.

When seeking to ascertain views of Ellen G. White, the survey provided many options so the participants could expand the breadth of their response. The survey asked the same question various ways. Eight of the nine questions had positive wording, and one had negative wording. The survey answer options for how the person viewed the writings of Ellen G. White were “prophetic,” “wise,” “insightful,” “inspired,” “inspirational,” “authoritative,” “divine inspiration,” “good Bible commentary,” and “outdated.” The goal for this question was to categorize the reader into several camps. The first camp was those who viewed her as a prophet and saw her as an authority in their spiritual life. The second camp was those who viewed her as a prophet but did not see her as an authority in their spiritual life. The third camp was those who did not see her prophetically or authoritatively but saw her as an inspirational Christian writer on par with other contemporary Christian writers. The last camp was those who did not view her writings as prophetic, authoritative, or helpful spiritually.
While this information was not specifically pertinent to the focus of the intervention strategy, it served as an insight into why people increased or did not increase their reading. However, the clear project goal of increasing the devotional reading of Ellen G. White’s writings on the Bible remained unchanged. The other reason to ask additional questions was that it might serve as an important research compass regarding which direction the next research in this area needs to be. Although no instrument is perfect, great care was placed into the design and creation of this survey. Questions were reviewed and modified while wording was fine-tuned.

**Distribution and Collection**

The surveys were distributed in two separate periods. The first was the presurvey and took place before the Faith of Our Fathers series began, and the second was after the series and was called the postsurvey. These two separate periods included promotion, distribution, and collection and spanned three Saturdays. The main distribution and collection point was before the worship services on Saturday, but extra copies were available in the lobby for individuals to turn in at the church office. No surveys were accepted outside the three-week window.

The plan was for someone other than me to serve as the facilitator up front each Saturday to do promotion and guidance for the surveys. This person gave instructions in a similar manner each week and oversaw the distribution and collection of the surveys. Ample time was given for participants to fill out the surveys. The same person went up front in church each week to provide continuity of process and to facilitate a neutral and unbiased distribution of the surveys.
Implementation Narrative and Notes

The dates for the three-week period to promote, distribute, and collect the presurveys before the Faith of Our Fathers series began were Saturday, February 12; Saturday, February 19; and Saturday, February 26, 2011. The dates of the three-week period to promote, distribute, and collect the postsurveys after the Faith of Our Fathers series ended were Saturday, May 14; Saturday, May 21; and Saturday, May 28, 2011. Outside of these Saturdays, surveys were accepted if handed to a deacon or if the surveys were turned into the church office.

The development of the survey kept expanding, and ultimately it was culled down and refocused on the questions to sharpen the instrument to fit within the confines of the format and the time given for the participants to fill it out. The final survey was reviewed by Dr. David Penno with the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry Department and by Monte Sahlin, who is a well-respected and renowned statistician and researcher specializing in the field of Seventh-day Adventist data, patterns, and trends.

Dr. Brian Metts oversaw the distribution and collection of the surveys in the Augusta SDA Church each of the six Saturdays for the presurvey and postsurvey time periods. He provided a continuity with the announcements that was helpful to avoid confusing the congregation. His instructions ensured the announcements were the same each week and the process of distribution and collection was uniform. Deacons assisted with passing out and picking up the surveys. Surveys were only received during the allotted three-week period. No presurvey was accepted after the series began. Those who took the survey were asked to not take the survey again during that same three-week
period. Dr. Metts gathered the surveys and delivered them to the church office after each Saturday. Dr. Metts did not organize, read, or compile the information on the surveys.

The Book

The book selected for this project was *Patriarchs and Prophets* by Ellen G. White. The book was first published in 1890 under the title *The Story of the Patriarchs and Prophets*. The version used for this Faith of Our Fathers series was the ASI version published by Pacific Press Publishing Association in 2005 and printed in paperback with 464 pages. *Patriarchs and Prophets* is often called the first volume of the Conflict of the Ages series and packaged as a set with four other books also written by Ellen G. White: *Prophets and Kings, Desires of Ages, Acts of the Apostles, and The Great Controversy*. The first four books of this set, which includes *Patriarchs and Prophets*, are Ellen G. White’s seminal work on the story of the Bible from Genesis through the New Testament. The last book, *The Great Controversy*, is excluded from this group, as it relates more to the history of the early church after the Bible period and expounds on end-time events as interpreted using prophecies in Revelation. *Patriarchs and Prophets* focuses on the story of the Bible from Creation through the last days of King David.

**Rationale for Choice**

Ellen G. White “during her lifetime . . . wrote more than 5,000 periodical articles and 40 books; but today, including compilations from her 50,000 pages of manuscript, more than 100 titles are available in English” ([www.EllenWhite.org](http://www.EllenWhite.org)). There were many choices to select from when deciding the book for the intervention strategy. The book chosen was critical to the success of the whole project, as it was the one promoted and
used for sermon material and prayer meeting material. The book also needed to entice
the reader to keep reading the works that Ellen G. White wrote about the Bible story.

Great care was taken to select the book for this project. The following nine
criteria were used to select the book for the intervention:

1. It needed to be a book and not an article, sermon, or pamphlet.

2. It needed to be a book that Ellen G. White herself wrote and not a compilation
   after her death.

3. It needed to be a book Ellen G. White wrote about the Bible story.

4. It could not be any of her work on church guidance or ecclesiology.

5. The length of the book needed to be sufficient to cover the 10-11-week time
   frame of the project.

6. A book that covered less familiar parts of the Bible story was preferred to give
   readers nuggets and gems from the account they did not already know.

7. It needed to be a good balance between Bible story and Bible character.

8. It needed to be a book that would be inexpensive to buy for the whole church
   and even better if it was available online for free.

9. It could not be a book that had recently been promoted in the Augusta First
   Seventh-day Adventist Church or highly used in the Sabbath School lesson
   quarterly.

**Reading Plan**

Developing a reading plan to guide participants in reading the focus book during
the Faith of Our Fathers series was important. The goal for the reading plan was to guide
the participants through the book and to establish a daily pattern of reading Ellen G.
White’s writings on the Bible devotionally. One of the keys was to pace the readers at the same pace as the simultaneously occurring sermon and prayer meeting series to stimulate the participants into reading more about what they would hear in the sermon and would discuss in the small group study at prayer meeting.

To facilitate the use of the reading plan, I made the plan into a bookmark that the participants could keep inside the book. It was printed on card stock and had boxes where they could check off the chapters as they read. Copies of the reading guide were placed inside the books as they were distributed to the congregation, and a quantity remained in the lobby of the church for those who wanted one. The reading guide started a few days before the series began and ended a few days after its completion.

**Availability and Distribution**

It was imperative that everyone in the congregation had access to *Patriarchs and Prophets*. I did not want anyone to say they did not have or could not afford the book as a reason not to participate. A bulk order of the book in paperback helped to ensure all who desired the book had a copy. There was no limit to the number of books per family.

**Implementation Narrative and Notes**

The search to select the book for the intervention strategy used the nine-point search criteria, which narrowed the list of books to three: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *Prophets and Kings*, and *Acts of the Apostles*. *Desire of Ages*, while meeting most of the search criteria, was thought to have been too familiar to the congregation. The balance between intriguing story and popular character development led me to choose *Patriarchs and Prophets*; *Acts of the Apostles* was the second option.
The choice of *Patriarch and Prophets* was well received by the congregation. It was reassuring to hear the members excited about reading the book. I suspect if it had been the more popular *Desire of Ages*, there might not have been the same level of energy. I also overheard many individuals saying they were determined to read the whole book. It seemed a very doable plan to read one chapter each day. There was a sense that something exciting was going on and people wanted to be part of it.

The reading plan bookmarks (see Appendix B) were a useful guide, not only for the personal reading accomplishments but also to keep everyone at the same pace corporately. Unfortunately, some who started late got discouraged because they were behind. In this case, I encouraged them to read the specific chapters related to the current content and not worry about reading the whole book. I reminded them that they could always go back and read chapters they had skipped.

The reading plan was designed to be paced on chapters rather than pages. This method made it more clean and simple, even though it meant they needed to read a different number of pages each day. The idea of reading one chapter each day was easy to promote and allowed the readers to begin and end a complete thought every day, which helped them be able to dwell and pray about a single concept, topic, or point. Thus, the reading guide listed the chapters with the target date to read them.

Most individuals used the offer to get a free copy of the book. No one who asked for a book was denied, even if they were a visitor or minor. Although it was available online free, most people preferred to have the physical copy to bring to prayer meeting and to church. At the time, there was not widespread ownership of smartphones and tablets at Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church, so bringing their laptop or
computer to church was not practical. The church purchased over a hundred paperback copies of the book and distributed them all. Some people used copies of the book they already had.

The Sermons

The central core of the strategy was to develop and preach a sermon series as an intervention strategy to effect change in the reading habits of Ellen G. White’s writings. The following is the understanding behind the development of those sermons, the ways they were involved in the intervention, and their implementation.

Design of Series

All components of the Faith of Our Fathers series interlocked and were woven together to affect the reading patterns of the participants. Stemming from the choice of the book, the concept and design of the sermon series were developed. The book covered a large area of the Bible story, so there was a lot of content from which to choose.

The sermons were packaged as interesting components of a complete set to tap into the desire and compulsion of most people to complete sets. I hoped the intrigue to listen to all the sermons and collect all the materials would drive the participant to covet the next in the set with the desire to complete them all. I also hoped this driving force to complete the sets would motivate the participants to stay current in their reading plan to complete all the reading sections and to complete the book. The sermons served as the backbone of a harmonious strategy that included the small group studies and the reading plan. I wanted to create a sense in the participants that they were part of something, and I hoped that the individuals would develop a feeling of accomplishment having listened, participated, and read together as a church.
Sermon Format and Outlines

The sermons were exegetical exposés of each biblical character presented. All nine sermons had a similar format, outline, and feel. The design of the sermon was to develop a biographical sketch of the patriarch by walking through key events in his life. The congregation was brought along on a shared learning experience to observe lessons to be learned from the character’s experience. There was no quoting from Patriarchs and Prophets in the sermon or from any other writings of Ellen G. White. The purpose of these sermons was not to preach Ellen G. White to the people. Instead, the sermons served to entice the listeners to want to read her writings more and to seek to enrich their understanding of the Bible story. The job of the sermon was therefore to whet the appetite of the hearers and to guide them to where they could learn more and continue the blessing. The main structure for the sermons was simple and remained consistent for each sermon. The core outline for the sermons was as follows:

I. Introduction
II. Biographical sketch
III. Key events of character’s life
IV. Lessons learned
V. Conclusion (Summary and application for today)

Notes on Preparation and Delivery

The plan was to study the key Bible character at length, and I read the section in Patriarchs and Prophets extensively to prepare. I invested time in prayer and contemplation of the Bible story itself. I summarized and synthesized the patriarch’s life and developed salient and valuable spiritual application points from his journey. My
delivery style lent itself nicely to the goals of the intervention, as I have an open and interactive preaching style that engaged the listeners in the topic while following their outline. One of the key goals was to transition the hearers to continue on their journey with the biblical character when they went home and to want to learn more by reading the applicable section in *Patriarchs and Prophets*. I preached from the same sermon study outline that the congregation had. As I do not usually preach from a manuscript or a detailed outline, this plan was both functional and fitting. By using the same outline, the hearers were on the same page as me as we walked through the story together.

**Sermon Study Outline**

To stimulate participation and engage the listener, I created a sermon outline and guide for each of the nine sermons. The format of the sermon outline guide was simple and consistent. The design of the handout was to share an outline of the sermon with fill-in areas to walk the listener through the sermon as it was being preached. Additional research and questions to do at home were given, along with the specific reading section of the book applicable to the character in the sermon. A blank-lined section gave individuals a place to take notes about the sermon. The sermon guide was formatted to fit within the book should they wish to keep it there.

The sermon study outlines were distributed in the bulletins each week of the Faith of Our Fathers series. The outlines served as a guide to walk the participant through the sermon with me and to stimulate them to continue the journey when they got home. The outlines also served as a reminder of the reading plan for that day’s character. Extra outlines from previous weeks were available in the lobby of the church. The homework or future study assignment and the specific reading assignment for that character were
included on the outline. If they did not read the whole book, they could at least read the portion of the book applying to the sermon or character presented.

**Schedule**

I preached the sermon series over nine consecutive Saturdays to maintain momentum. Keeping the topics flowing consecutively was critical to keeping in harmony with the topics of the small group study at the midweek service and the reading plan schedule. There was no overlap in content between the sermons and the small group studies, but they were complementary. As the timeline of the book moved forward, the topics and characters of the sermons and studies moved in the same sequence.

The sermons were videotaped and live-streamed online using the service UStream. Individuals who missed hearing a sermon live could then go online and watch it on the Internet. The website was promoted so the congregation could maintain their walk through the content and the book together.

**Implementation Narrative and Notes**

The project and the sermon series were named Faith of Our Fathers to distinguish it from the book. This distinction was made to avoid confusion in promotion and when discussing the sermons as juxtaposed to the book.

I narrowed the focus and developed the sermon series based on nine key characters from the Old Testament. These patriarchs were carefully chosen to be characters covered in the book and to be in the right sequence in the reading plan. The nine Bible characters were Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samson, Samuel, and David.
The sermon series was received by the congregation with great excitement. Observations revealed that it stirred conversation and discussion of the Bible characters and the content of the book. I believe the increase in church attendance was a manifestation of the increased energy of the series.

The plan to preach nine consecutive weeks was altered slightly due to a previously scheduled event. Nonetheless, the nine sermons were preached over 10 weeks, which helped keep the energy of the project high, and the loss of that one Saturday did not hurt the strategy. I believe the continuing reading assignments and the fact the prayer meeting small groups did not stop kept the continuity and vitality of the project on track.

The following was the schedule of the Faith of Our Fathers sermon series:

- “Faith of Our Fathers 01 – Noah” (Saturday, March 5, 2011)
- “Faith of Our Fathers 02 – Abraham” (Saturday, March 12, 2011)
- “Faith of Our Fathers 03 – Jacob” (Saturday, March 19, 2011)
- “Faith of Our Fathers 04 – Joseph” (Saturday, March 26, 2011)
- “Faith of Our Fathers 05 – Moses” (Saturday, April 2, 2011)
- “Faith of Our Fathers 06 – Joshua” (Saturday, April 9, 2011)
- “Faith of Our Fathers 07 – Samson” (Saturday, April 23, 2011)
- “Faith of Our Fathers 08 – Samuel” (Saturday, April 30, 2011)
- “Faith of Our Fathers 09 – David” (Saturday, May 7, 2011)

The sermon study outlines were well received. I observed individuals in the congregation filling out the outlines as I was preaching. My actual preaching from the outlines gave them importance and relevance. At times, I held up the outline to draw the
collective attention of the audience to a specific important item. Also, I was able to observe by comments made on Facebook that many were doing the future research assignments from the outline when they got home. The full set of sermon study outlines are in the appendix (see Appendix C).

My preaching style lent itself to the intent of the sermons and the project. As I preach free from a manuscript or detailed notes, I was able to look into the hearers’ eyes and relate with their emotions. I felt a connection with the congregation as I preached and sensed a collective interest in the Word and knowing more. I was also encouraged when discussion of the sermons bled over into prayer meeting and the small group discussion. I invited the congregation to do the extra study listed in the sermon outline and encouraged them to read the supplemental reading in Patriarchs and Prophets.

Prayer Meeting

The mid-week service, or prayer meeting, was used as part of the Faith of Our Fathers series and was an integral part of the project strategy. Each week on Wednesday for 1 hour, beginning at 7:00 p.m., there was a gathering at the church that some called prayer meeting and others called mid-week service. It had developed into a small group discussion over a Bible topic with some 20-30 in attendance weekly. Prayer meeting was used to synchronize the topic studied each week with the Faith of Our Fathers series. As the group needed a discussion topic anyway, it served as a bridge between Saturday’s sermons to maintain the energy. It was also an opportunity to dig into the focus book and discuss it more in depth.
Design of Series

The topics for the small group discussion at prayer meeting were chosen from the book *Patriarchs and Prophets* to complement the characters being preached about in the sermons. Instead of individual characters, the small group studies focused on topics and stories within the Bible narrative that the book covered. Ensuring the topics in the small groups were sequential with the sermons was important because I used the sermons and small groups to drive them into the book to learn more.

The small group series at prayer meeting began before the sermon series started and ended after it was completed. Thus, the small group study served as bookends to the Faith of Our Father series. Eleven sessions ran on Wednesday evenings without interruption for the duration of the Faith of Our Fathers series.

Prayer Meeting Format

The prayer meeting format was in the structure of a more formal small group study. Everyone gathered together with prayer and some spiritual fellowshipping. Then the Bible was read taking turns, with each person reading a portion of the story being covered in the night’s topic. Afterward, everyone walked through discussion questions and took time for comments and questions. Toward the end, the group read and discussed a highlighted quote from the book that related to the night’s discussion.

Small Group Study Guides

The small group study guides facilitated study and conversation on the Bible story or topic covered. The climax of the study guide was a key selected quote from *Patriarchs and Prophets* for the participants to dialogue about and comment on. Its
layout was a full-page front and back and its basic format was Scripture, discussion questions, and a *Patriarchs and Prophet’s* quote. The study guides were distributed a week ahead so participants could prepare. Extra copies were available in the church lobby.

**Implementation Narrative and Notes**

The implementation of the study group was an effective complement to the sermon series. It kept the energy high and the congregation focused on the series. I observed new faces at the prayer meeting group. There was vibrant conversation and a sense of appreciation for the study guides. The interest in the study guides went beyond the group, as many at church took the study guide material but did not come to the small group.

Samples of the study guides used are in Appendix D. The following is the schedule for the small group study topics with the dates they were covered:

- 01 – “Creation” (Wednesday, March 2, 2011)
- 02 – “Tower of Babel” (Wednesday, March 9, 2011)
- 03 – “Sodom” (Wednesday, March 16, 2011)
- 04 – “Plagues of Egypt” (Wednesday, March 23, 2011)
- 05 – “The Tabernacle” (Wednesday, March 30, 2011)
- 06 – “The Law” (Wednesday, April 6, 2011)
- 07 – “Jericho” (Wednesday, April 13, 2011)
- 08 – “Annual Feasts” (Wednesday, April 20, 2011)
- 09 – “The Ark Stolen” (Wednesday, April 27, 2011)
• 10 – “Sorcery” (Wednesday, May 4, 2011)
• 11 – “David’s Sin” (Wednesday, May 11, 2011)

Comments and conversation about the sermons were brought into the discussion of the small group topic. Furthermore, the integrated plan worked well, as the two other components of the project strategy (sermons and reading plan) were very complementary.

Promotion

Board and Pastoral Team

One way that I sought to keep the series before the people was by keeping the church board and elders up-to-date and well-informed. I let them know at least two months in advance about the plan, including the sermon series, the book, the reading guide, and the prayer meeting schedule. I also reminded them about the survey and asked them to promote it in the church and encourage participation.

Various Methods

One of the key venues in which the Faith of Our Fathers series was promoted was through the church newsletter. An entire page was dedicated to promoting the new series. The address list of the church was extensive, so almost the whole congregation received the newsletter (see Appendix B) in the mail ahead of time. This served as the umbrella to cover everyone and went out a month ahead of time.

Weekly announcements were placed in the bulletin to promote the Faith of Our Fathers series before it began and then weekly blurbs teased the next topic or sermon to remind the congregation about the series. The wording of the information was changed
each week to keep the announcements fresh. The bulletin board in the church lobby was used to keep the church aware of all that was happening.

I served as the key promoter and used the time before each sermon to accomplish this. I promoted the series from up front and kept people informed of where we were in the book and what topic was coming next.

**Implementation Narrative and Notes**

The church board served as messengers and reminded people of the series before it began. After it began, they kept people motivated and tried to keep everyone informed. Almost all the leaders participated and promoted the Faith of Our Fathers series. Their influence in the congregation was a great benefit.

I personally promoted the series, topics, and future sermons each week before the sermon. The benefit of this promotion was that almost everyone was seated by the time I began my sermon. I sought to make this time an opportunity to interact and keep energized.

The promotion plan was successful. Almost everyone received the newsletter (see Appendix B) and was informed. I also overheard members using the vocabulary Faith of Our Fathers, which was encouraging. I observed individuals discussing the upcoming topics and Bible characters who were to be explored, which showed me they were engaged.

The materials in the lobby were restocked frequently, so I assume many of the items were being taken by church members and given to others. The congregation served as the best promoters. They seemed to enjoy the sermons, book, and studies and wanted to get others involved. Distributing *Patriarchs and Prophets* to the congregation served
as a great promotion because everyone wanted a book and wanted to know more. As the
congregation saw the investment the church was making in this project, I believe there
was a great reciprocal desire to participate. Even with all the different types of promotion
and different vehicles of communication used, people still asked what it was all about,
which demonstrated that having many different methods of promotion and repeating the
information many times, were both needed.

Conclusion

This section included a description and details of each component of the
intervention strategy to explain each decision made in the process of implementation.
The Faith of Our Fathers series included a sermon series, a prayer meeting small-group
study series, and a reading plan of *Patriarchs and Prophets* by Ellen G. White. The goal
through this intervention strategy was to increase reading of *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

The congregation was well-informed of the series and was aware of the
dissertation project and the purpose of the survey. The leaders and congregation were
supportive and almost all who participated were enthusiastic about doing so. The series
seemed to energize the congregation.

A survey was carefully crafted and used before and after the Faith of Our Fathers
series to acquire a presurvey and postsurvey of the congregation’s reading patterns. The
distribution and execution of the survey went well and around 140 people took both
surveys, which was a significant number. The results of a comparison study of both sets
of surveys and analysis of the results appear in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, 
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes the results of the project, the statistical findings of the intervention, and a running analysis and commentary of the data. I will draw attention to any significant correlations between the presurvey and the postsurvey. An assessment of the intervention will be given; with possible ways it could have been accomplished more successfully. Recommendations for future study and research in this area will also be given.

Demographics of the Survey Groups

Population Size

The number of usable surveys from the presurvey was 149 compared to 142 for the postsurvey. Although the presurvey and postsurvey groups were distinct in composition, the fact that there were 142 or more in each ensured a substantial mutual population to compare. These sampling sizes were also significant because the average weekly attendance on a Sabbath during this period was around 200 people. After removing minors and guests from the average weekly attendance, the number is close to 150, which means that most active attending adults during this period participated in the project and turned in a survey. Although the membership of the church at the time of
intervention was 517, the active membership was approximately 245 people (see Appendix A). Subtracting minors (28% of the active congregation); shut-ins; and those away in the military, academy, or college from the active membership left an estimated active membership of between 140 and 160 individuals who could have participated in the project. Based on this analysis, the survey participation was significant.

Gender

The Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church had an active membership comprised of 56% females and 44% males (see Appendix A). The result of the two survey groups showed this same imbalance of more females than males but in a more pronounced way (see Figure 1). The presurvey had 60% females and 40% males, and the postsurvey had 66% females and 34% males. The postsurvey had a 10-point increase in female participation compared to the demographics of the church. When looking at 18-35 year olds, female participants outnumbered males 2 to 1 in the presurvey and 3 to 1 in the postsurvey.

![Figure 1. Gender of respondents.](image)

Figure 1. Gender of respondents.
Age Groupings

The age distribution of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church (see Appendix A) at the time of this intervention was as follows: 28% were minors (0-18 years old), 19% were young adults (19-35 years old), 31% were working adults (36-64 years old), and 22% were retirees (65+ years old). The young adult population who took the survey (22.8%-25.4%) was only slightly higher than the population density within the congregation. The retiree participation percentage (22.1%-22.5%) in the survey was on par with the church’s population. The survey divided the working adult category into two separate groupings (36-50 and 51-64) and was over half of all the participants (55.0%-52.1%). The working adult group of 36 to 64 year olds was significantly larger than the other two groups (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Age group of respondents.
Denominational Affiliation

The percentage of participants who were actually members of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church was 73.2% for the presurvey and 69.7% for the postsurvey. The active congregation of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church was substantially higher than the active membership (see Appendix A), so it was not surprising that the make-up of the group who participated in the survey was approximately 25% who were not members of the church. The second largest group denominationally was Seventh-day Adventists who were not members of the Augusta First Church. These comprised 17.4% of the presurvey population and 23.2% of the postsurvey group. Other assorted Protestant denominations were represented, as well as four to six Catholics and one Jew. No participants were Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist.

Figure 3. Denominational religious affiliation of respondents.
Race and Socioeconomic Make-up

The surveys did not ask for socioeconomic level or race. For the reader’s awareness, the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church was 44% White, 29% Black, 16% Hispanic, and 11% other. Its socioeconomic makeup was also diverse (see Appendix A).

Survey Questions

This section includes the results of both surveys. Some of these survey questions were indirectly related to the project’s purpose, but it is worthwhile observing whether the intervention had an impact on these areas as well. The survey questions were listed in priority, from incidental to directly relating to the goal of the intervention.

Personal Devotions

The survey asked, “How often do you have personal devotions?” This question was designed to determine if the intervention project had any effect on the respondent’s personal devotional life. The findings showed that there was no statistical change between the two groups (before and after the intervention) that affected their having devotions. About half of the respondents had personal devotions daily and a little over a quarter had devotions multiple times a week. About one in five did not have regular personal devotions (see Figure 4). These statistics did not change after the intervention. A surprising result was that the project did not seem to have an effect on personal devotions at all. Although it was not the intent of the intervention to increase the number of people having devotions, I had thought there might be an increase as a consequence of the project. The lack of change in devotional trends might be explained by the fact that the congregation was already, as a whole, very consistent in having devotions regularly.
Therefore, the project would only be effective in shifting their devotional habits rather than in creating new converts who would start having devotions.

Figure 4. Those who have personal devotions.

Read Bible Devotionally

The survey asked, “How frequently do you read the Bible devotionally?” This question was designed to see if the project intervention would shift the participants’ Bible reading patterns. As the Faith of Our Fathers sermons were based on biblical characters and the listener was encouraged to read the Bible portion along with the selection from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, I hoped there would be an increase in their daily Bible reading or at least its regularity. The results showed there was not much change in those who did not read the Bible devotionally or occasionally read it. For those who read the Bible devotionally at least “1 to 6 times a week,” there was a small increase from 37% of
participants in the presurvey to 40% in the post survey. There was also a slight two-point increase in those who read the Scriptures “daily” from 36% to 38% (see Figure 5).

![Figure 5](image)

*Figure 5. Those who read the Bible devotionally.*

**Family Worship**

The survey asked, “How frequently do you have family worship?” The question also clarified that family worship was “a worship in home with other family members like spouse, children, parents etc.” This question, like the ones regarding devotions and reading the Bible devotionally, was included to see if the intervention would affect the activity of family worships. A percentage of the respondents (15.5%-17%) were removed from the results because they lived alone. Of the remaining respondents, 18% in the presurvey said they had family worships “occasionally” or “once in a while,” and 29% said they had them “1-6 times a week.” Twenty percent said they had family worships “occasionally” or “once in a while,” and 29% said they had them “1-6 times a week.” Twenty percent said they had family
worships “daily.” There was a very slight increase in family worship occurrence after the intervention in each response category. Although the increases were only by a point, the trend pattern did show an increase across the board (see Figure 6).

![Figure 6](image.png)

*Figure 6.* Those who had family worship.

Read Other Christian Books

The survey asked, “On average, how frequently do you read Christian books other than the Bible or Ellen G. White’s writings?” The purpose of this question was to see if the intervention would affect the person’s reading patterns and see if it could be shifted from reading other Christian books to reading Ellen G. White books. A large percentage of the respondents occasionally read non-Ellen G. White Christian books, and this figure increased after the intervention from 38.3% to 46.5%. The readership of occasional Christian books might have increased because the readers’ interest in spiritual things
increased during this time or perhaps they were reading Ellen G. White. It is difficult to say.

The rate of reading Christian books not written by Ellen G. White went down for those reading “weekly.” This weekly pattern change during this time might be explained by people shifting from other books to reading specific books by Ellen G. White. Daily reading habits regarding this question were unchanged between presurvey and postsurvey (see Figure 7).

![Figure 7](image)

*Figure 7. Those who read Christian books other than Ellen G. White.*

**Attitude Toward Ellen G. White’s Writings**

The survey asked, “What is your opinion of the writings of Ellen G. White?” The responses to this question helped to determine an assessment of the participants’ view of Ellen G. White’s writings and whether that perception changed because of the intervention. Eighty percent of respondents had a “positive” or “very positive” response
to her writings, which did not change between the two surveys. This high positive view parallels what was learned from the literature review in Chapter 3. Most Adventists (70-80%) think positively of Ellen G. White and her writings. In fact, survey participants’ opinions of Ellen G. White’s writings did not statistically change at any level between the presurvey and the postsurvey. Most respondents viewed her work in a positive light and the intervention did not change the participants’ perception of her, either positively or negatively (see Figure 8).

![Figure 8. General attitude toward Ellen G. White’s writings.](image)

**Opinions of Ellen G. White**

Survey participants were asked, “Do you view the writings of Ellen G. White as: prophetic, inspired, authoritative, wise, inspirational, divine inspiration, insightful, outdated or good Bible commentary?” They could answer yes or no to each option. The
purpose of this question was to fine-tune what the participant thought about Ellen G. White’s writings. Viewing her writings as positive was one thing, but I wanted to understand in what way the writings potentially influenced the readers’ opinion of her writings and role, as well as their attitude toward her writings. I wanted to be able to track specific opinion changes of the participants over the course of the intervention (see Figure 9). In all eight categories that demonstrated a positive opinion of Ellen G. White’s writings, there was an increase from the presurvey group to the postsurvey group from 2.8 to 6.6 points. This means that the participants’ opinions were strengthened after the intervention. The greatest increases were in those respondents who called her writings “insightful,” whose opinions rose from 73.8% to 80.3%, “wise” rose from 76.5% to 81.0%, and “inspired” rose from 77.2% to 83.8%. In almost all the positive categories, the percentage responses were over 71.1% and increased as high as 83.8% in the postsurvey.

In the lower positive responses, a dichotomy emerged in the results. Although 73.8-76.1% said her writings were “prophetic” and 68.5-71.1% said they were “divine instruction,” only 55.7-58.5% called them authoritative, which begs the question how something can be “prophetic” and “divine instruction,” yet not be authoritative at the same level. This strange parallel seemed to manifest throughout the statistics, in that many viewed Ellen G. White as a prophet but not an authority in their life.

Very few people felt that Ellen G. White’s writings were “outdated.” Of those in this category who thought that her writings were “outdated,” there was no significant change between the presurvey and the postsurvey.
Figure 9. Opinions of Ellen G. White’s writing.

Reading Ellen G. White

The survey asked, “On average, how frequently do you read the writings of Ellen G. White” to see if the intervention changed reading habits by getting people to read Ellen G. White for the first time or increase their overall reading of her writings. With regard to those who never had read Ellen G. White, 16.8% said they “never” read Ellen G. White in the presurvey. That number dropped to 6.3% in the postsurvey, which indicated a movement of 10.5 points from “never” to some frequency of reading. These were classified as new readers. There was a 5.7-point increase in participants “occasionally” reading her writings after the intervention. Although the number of those reading Ellen G. White “weekly” or “daily” increased, these increases were not as
significant as other categories. In “weekly” readers, the increase between presurvey and postsurvey went from 25.5% to 26.1%, and in those reading “daily,” the increase went from 10.1% to 12.0%. Nonetheless, there was an increase or a positive trend in each of the categories of responses showing an across-the-board positive trend (see Figure 10).

![Figure 10. Those who read Ellen G. White.](image)

**Reading Ellen G. White’s Books on the Bible Story**

The survey asked, “Of the following books, which have you read in part or in full within the past three months: *Patriarchs and Prophets, Prophets and Kings, Desire of Ages, Acts of the Apostles* or *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessings*?” The purpose of this question was to see if the participants had been reading in any of the key books that Ellen G. White wrote about the Bible story itself. One of the goals of the intervention was to see if there could be a shift in reading patterns to get the participants to read the
works Ellen G. White wrote about the Bible. The books listed in the question are her seminal works on the Bible story (see Figure 11).

In the presurvey, 49.7% of participants said they had not read any of the designated books within the last three months, with 50.3% saying they had. In the postsurvey, there was a 21.5-point increase in the number of people who had been reading Ellen G. White’s works on the Bible story. This shift is a substantial positive change, and it must be assumed that such a notable change had a root cause. I would assert it was the result of the intervention.

Reading *Patriarchs and Prophets*

From the question regarding whether the participant had read any of Ellen G. White’s books on the Bible story, I determined how many had read *Patriarchs and Prophets*. This was important because *Patriarchs and Prophets* was the book of focus.
for the whole intervention and the one the reading plan was designed for. The results of this question were the most statistically significant among all the findings of the project intervention and perhaps were the most relevant to the goal of the project. There was a 30-point increase in reading *Patriarchs and Prophets* between the presurvey and the postsurvey. Readership in the book went up from 26% to 56%. This appears to demonstrate that the intervention did affect reading patterns relating to Ellen G. White’s writings on the Bible story.

![Figure 12. Those who read Patriarchs and Prophets.](image)

**Conclusions**

The goal of this project intervention was to increase the devotional reading of Ellen G. White in her written works on the Bible story. To that effect, the data demonstrates it was a success. While survey respondents’ positive and negative attitudes remained largely unchanged, there was a noticeable increase in positive opinions of Ellen
G. White’s writings that could be measured. There was also a slight positive change regarding the regularity of those reading Ellen G. White. Changes in personal devotions, family worship, and reading the Bible devotions only had a slight change or remained unchanged. In a key area, the project was also successful in getting those who had never read Ellen G. White to read her works. Participants who were already reading Ellen G. White did not decrease or increase their reading that much, although there was a slight positive change. The most significant change with those who read Ellen G. White was in what they read. The project was successful in getting the readers of Ellen G. White to shift reading patterns to read the works she wrote on the Bible story. Getting readers to shift to reading the book of focus, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, was particularly successful, which is important because the premise was that by shifting readers to her works on the Bible story, the readers would be able to transition into a devotional and enriching reading experience instead of using her as a theological or ecclesiastical encyclopedia.

Whether those who read Ellen White’s books on the Bible story did so in a devotional manner is difficult to say with certainty, as it would be challenging to determine a reader’s intent without a qualitative study. I conclude however that they did, in reality, read devotionally, as the design of the project was to pace the reader in a measured daily stride and to walk corporately and collectively through the Bible experience as the reading coincided with the sermons and Bible study small-group discussion. Because the personal devotional patterns did not change, but there was a change in the reading content of what they were reading, I propose that the shift was not whether they had devotions but what they used for devotions: *Patriarchs and Prophets*. 
I observed a significant positive response in the congregation to the Faith of Our Fathers series as a whole. As the pastor of the church, I observed an excitement about the sermons, the discussions, and the conversations about the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*. I overheard members talking about what they read and, in general, there was a positive tone toward Ellen G. White. The focus of the conversations did not seem to be theological in nature as much as they were about the Bible story itself and how to apply it to their daily walk. I believe this project did entice the congregants to read Ellen G. White, and ultimately they liked her writings on the Bible study. They found them to be enjoyable and beneficial.

The goal of this project intervention was that the readership of Ellen G. White would increase and that, by sampling her works written on the Bible story, the readers would learn how to have devotions in an enriched manner by reading the Bible and supplementing that regular reading with Ellen G. White’s works on the story of the Bible. To this end the overall project strategy and intervention was a success.

**Assessment of the Intervention**

This project research was confined to a quantitative approach. However, to strengthen a replication of this research, a qualitative approach could be undertaken. This new approach could focus on the journey of the participants as they went through the intervention. Using a control group one could then hear from the participants about their experiences and learn to what degree the sermons, the reading or the small groups affected their spiritual relationship with Christ. A qualitative approach might also reveal to what specific impact the reading had in affecting change in their lives.
In future research, an analysis of how people’s reading of the Sabbath School lesson affects their responses to questions regarding reading Ellen G. White would be helpful. Since Ellen G. White’s comments and quotes are printed within the weekly Sabbath School lesson this may affect the survey participants’ responses. Many Adventists study the lesson daily or discuss the lesson in a small group on Saturday and this might lead respondents who studied and read the Sabbath School lesson to say they read Ellen G. White that week. If this happens, that information might skew the project’s goal of understanding who was reading her independently and in other genres outside of Sabbath School.

As with any research, there is the potential for the “halo effect”. Caution should be taken in replicating this research to ensure the participants are not simply responding to the survey how they think the pastor wants them to. Great care was taken in this project to address this potential problem.

**Recommendations**

The first recommendation for further research is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church should replicate the 1982 study by Dudley and Cummings to see changes in the membership’s views about Ellen G. White over the past 35 years and to add to the research in the area of the benefits of reading Ellen G. White. If the 1982 study remains the stand-alone research in this area, its results cannot be completely trusted because they have never been replicated. It is not known if the results were correct in 1982 or whether the situation has changed because of new generational opinions and cultural norms within the church. More than 100 years after the death of Ellen G. White, there is still only one major commissioned study about the effects of reading her writings.
The Seventh-day Adventist Church has taken an authoritative approach to encouraging people to read the works of Ellen G. White. The church believes that she is a prophet, so members should read her writings. However, no one within the church’s collective mind thinks to ask why. New members in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are told to test Ellen G. White for themselves. However, a more scientific approach might be more productive. I recommend conducting more research oriented toward giving reasons to read her work. As shown in the 1982 study, giving fact-based results supported by scholarly research data has an impact. Being able to tell people that something will help them spiritually and then showing them evidence might be the missing factor in getting more people to read Ellen G. White.

The Seventh-day Adventist church needs to find creative approaches to taking advantage of the positive feelings people have toward Ellen G. White. If former members and nonmembers view Ellen G. White favorably, the church needs to use this knowledge to their advantage. Instead of hiding her as the last thing to discuss on the baptismal vow, the church should bring her out with more confidence. I believe Ellen G. White is an advantage, not an anchor, if used and presented correctly. God has blessed us with someone to strengthen our spiritual journey. Instead of using her as the corrector of the saints or as the defender of our personal pet theological or ecclesiastical position, we should highlight her ability to strengthen members’ spiritual journey.

Further research can be done using existing data from previous studies commissioned and paid for by the General Conference. The enormous amount of data from worldwide surveys of thousands of members can be crunched to see the correlations between those who read Ellen G. White and other survey questions relating to their
spiritual experience such as prayer, Bible study, and witnessing to provide an excellent area to pursue for a doctoral dissertation. There is an incredible amount of data to examine with the Reach the World studies and the ValueGenesis study. Dr. Trim from the General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research is willing to provide access to the data to complete a correlational study (personal communication, June 14, 2016). The data are available for a researcher to examine it to see the correlations to spiritual growth and activity and reading Ellen G. White.

A future study could also be done using various control groups. The different control groups could be non-Adventists who have no experience with Ellen G. White, new Adventists who have limited exposure to Ellen G. White, Adventists who do not believe in Ellen White, and Adventists who believe and read Ellen G. White. The study could follow these groups on a journey through the writings of Ellen G. White and note their opinions and their experiences. It would be advisable to seek to qualify the results and benefits of reading Ellen G. White. This study should also be done using her works on the Bible story, as they are a great foundational beginning to determine if readers want more. I believe they will.

**Personal Effects of This Project**

I believe strongly in the premise of this project. I have a core conviction that people need to get back into the works that Ellen G. White wrote about the Bible story. I believe it can rebalance the unbalanced users of her work and serve as a catalyst to new readers. Reading the books she wrote about the Bible story changed my life, and I wish them to change others. I am about to embark on a passion and goal of my ministry that demonstrates my conviction.
Next year, I will be starting a radio and video program called *Light My Path 313*. The premise of the program will be to preach through the whole Bible story over the course of one year. I will preach a 28-minute sermon on a portion of the Bible story six days a week, taking a break for Sabbath. That comes to 313 sermons. Each sermon will partner with a Bible passage and a reading assignment from Ellen G. White’s works on the Bible story. Interestingly, the first four books of the *Conflict of Ages* series, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessings*, and *Christ’s Object Lessons* have 313 chapters. So I will assign one chapter to parallel the sermon each day for 313 days in one year. Each year will rotate through the Bible. My prayer is to preach the Bible story and have it serve as a catalyst to drive people into exploring the Bible and then to read the enriching and inspired works of Ellen G. White.
Role of Leadership in Ministry Context
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

Ministry Assessment of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church

Introduction

The following paper will seek to give a complete ministry assessment of the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church by exploring its demographics, statistics, growth trends and pastoral observations. The paper will also look at the church’s community context to see if it reflects its location and if it is achieving its mission. The data retrieved will largely be from the U.S. Census, Association of Religion Data Archives and official conference and church records. The observations, assessments and estimates will be based on the insights of current Senior Pastor, Bobby J. Boles.

Introduction of Congregation

Facilities

The Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church was founded in 1922. The church is located at 4301 Wheeler Road in Augusta, Georgia. There are three structures on the church
property: a church building, a mobile home and a Family Life Center. The church structure (see Figure 1) is an “A frame” brick building that has gone through several building phases over the years. The church has a main auditorium that seats 500 people and a nursery and toddler room upstairs overlooking the sanctuary. There are three main sections of rooms in the back of the church. The East Wing comprises seven children’s Sabbath School rooms. The center section has a seminar room, a counseling room and the teen room upstairs in the loft. The West Wing houses a suite of four staff offices, a boardroom and a multipurpose room with kitchen that can seat 50. The mobile home is a “double-wide” in relatively good condition that is approximately 20 years old. It formerly housed the church office but now is used exclusively as the Pathfinder clubhouse. The Family Life Center (FLC) is a new two story metal building that was completed in 2003. The upstairs of the FLC is home to the (K-12) church school and Atlanta Adventist Academy while downstairs has a full gymnasium, fellowship hall and two classrooms.

Attendance, Membership, Participation

According to the Georgia Cumberland Conference as of August 2010 there are 517 members of the Augusta First SDA Church (2010). Average church attendance ranges from 240-275 per Sabbath. While attendance is much less than membership, the congregation has an active population of some 500 individuals. There are some 275 local metro households on the mailing list who receive the monthly newsletter.

Affiliation

The Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church is part of the sisterhood of churches within the Georgia Cumberland Conference (Ga. Cumb. Conf.) which is one of eight conferences comprising the Southern Union. The Augusta SDA School is a conference certified Kindergarten through 8th grade educational facility. Also, there is a branch campus of Atlanta
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

Adventist Academy on site that is housed in the Augusta SDA School that uses high-speed live video conferencing for distance education. The Seventh-day Adventist college that serves this area is Southern Adventist University in Collegetal, Tennessee.

Staff

The current Senior Pastor is Bobby J. Boles and has been pastoring the church since August 18, 2007. He is also the author of this Ministry Assessment. Jorge Quintana serves as Associate Pastor and also pastors the Spanish church plant. He has been on staff since the summer of 2008. Also, included in the staff are three grade school teachers, a part time custodian and the Academy Facilitator who also serves in the church as the Administrative Assistant. In addition, there is one Bible Worker on staff currently working with the Spanish Church Plant. recent budget concerns has downsized the church staff by two within the past year as one associate pastor was moved by the conference and the church Bible Worker's contract was not renewed.

History

Church History

In 1922 the founding work in establishing the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church began. This early mission effort was done by two ladies selling The Watchman magazine. One of the early converts as a direct result of their efforts in selling these magazines was an attorney and local politician by the name of Frank Courtney. Mr. Courtney developed into a key leader in the early years of the church (Hsuey, 2010). The first church structure (see Figure 2) was located at 1824 Walton Way Augusta, GA.

Pastor H. W. Walker was influential in leading the congregation to a new location as they outgrew the 1824 Walton Way facility (see Figure 3). The church moved to 2350 Walton Way
just a block away from Augusta College (now Augusta State University). During this time of expansion the school grew to 10 grades (Huey 2009).
In 1965, Pastor Robert Thompson lead the congregation in purchasing 3 acres of land on Richmond Hill Road next to what was then the Regency Mall. A new church was constructed there with stained glass windows depicting the three angel’s message of Revelation 14. The architectural plan for this new church was designed to integrate reminders of the Seventh-day Adventist belief in the second coming of Jesus and Christ as savior (Huey, 2010).

After over thirty years at the Richmond Hill location, in August of 1997, Pastor Dale Tunnel lead the church in relocating to new location at 4301 Wheeler Road (where the church resides today). Along with the existing church facility, there was 12 acres that would allow for future expansion which the church would undertake 2002 with the construction of the Family Life Center. In 2009, there was a flood due to an overflowing drain outside the West Wing of the church. In response to this flood the back church wings were re-carpeted and repainted. Over the past two years, the church facility has received many upgrades with a new roof, new gutters, new sound system, renovation of the Multi-purpose room, new wood front doors, and a
church office complex installed in the East Wing of the church. Future plans include installing a ministry leader mail room, renovation of the back church entrance, a new church sign, a new projection/screen system, renovation of the bathrooms, renovation of the Mother's Room and new church carpet.

Figure 5. Augusta First SDA Church (42301 Wheeler Road Location)

Source: Augusta First SDA Church Archive

School History

In 1934, the church established a grade school holding classes in the back of the church building. In 1977, under the leadership of Pastor John Duroe, a separate facility at the Richmond Hill location was built to house the school that included a full gymnasium. A childcare center was started in 1983 and over time grew to serve some 55 children ages 6 weeks to five years old. The childcare center would later be closed to allow for the school to expand. In the summer of 1990 a fire destroyed the interior of the school, library and gymnasium. This fire did not stop the school from meeting however and classes met in portable classrooms that year while the church and community worked together to rebuild (Huey 2009).
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

In 2002, the church completed construction of a new Family Life Center at the Wheeler Road location that included a full gymnasium. This would be the new home for the grade school and allow space for further expansion in the future. In 2007 the church officially became a satellite campus for Atlanta Adventist Academy using live interactive video technology and virtual classroom dynamics.

The Augusta SDA School is one of the earliest schools in the Georgia Cumberland Conference that is still in operation today. The school is active in the community as demonstrated by its involvement in the Columbia County Christmas parade (see Figure 6). The school has won several awards for its floats in that parade. Recently the Home and School installed a new fenced-in playground with new equipment for the younger children to play in.

The current 2010/2011 school year has begun with 33 students enrolled. You would have to go back to 2005 to find a year starting with more students (see Figure 7). According to Rebekah Helbley, current principal of the school, growth potential for the school looks strong and future plans include pursuing the addition of a Pre-K program.
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

Figure 7. Augusta SDA School Enrollment

Augusta SDA School

Source: Rebekah Helbley (School Principal) 2010

Statistics & Trends

Membership

According to the Georgia Cumberland Conference the official membership of the Augusta First SDA Church (including Hispanic mission group) is 517 as of August 1, 2010. As Figure 8 demonstrates despite strong baptism numbers (see Figure 20) the membership has been

Source: Georgia Cumberland Conference

Figure 8. Membership totals by year for the Augusta First SDA Church.
hovering around 500 members for the past 8 years. There are two key reasons for the lack of overall membership growth despite strong baptisms. Firstly, there were some 70+ inactive members that were dropped from the books from 2002 to 2007 for various reasons. The second key reason is that in 2008 some 40+ members officially transferred out of Augusta First to establish the Augusta Korean SDA Company.

**Congregational Demographics**

Of the 517 official members 245 are considered “active” (see Figure 9) meaning they are still attending church programs, would attend church programs if they could or are contributing financially to the church. There is another group in the church that is considered “active” that is comprised of individuals who meet the definition of “active” stated above but are not official members of the Augusta First SDA Church. This second “active” group is made up of three components: regular attending non-Seventh-day Adventists, un-baptized children of church members and Seventh-day Adventists who are not local church members. This group of
“active” non-members combines with the “active” membership to comprise what is called the 
“active congregation” (see Figure 10). There are about 464 people in the “active congregation”.

Figure 10. Augusta First SDA Church “Active” Congregation estimated breakdown.

One last group of note is the “extended” congregation. These individuals are not “active” 
themselves but are connected to an “active” member of the congregation by a direct family 
relation (i.e. spouse). Also included in the “extended congregation” are those members who have 
become “inactive” within the past year. Even though “inactive”, the church regularly reaches out
to the “extended” congregation and maintains them on the church mailing list. The “active”
congregation plus the “extended” congregation comprises what is called the “total” congregation
(see Figure 11).

Attendance

The recent average attendance is approximately 260 per Sabbath (Augusta First = 220
with Augusta Hispanic Mission Group = 40). The current weekly attendance average is down
from three years ago when it was an average of approximately 300. There are two key factors
that both occurred in 2008 that can attest for much of the difference in the average attendance
today versus 3 years ago. Firstly, there was an Hispanic group of approximately 25-30 that
broke away from the Augusta First SDA Church to be part of the South Atlantic Conference to
start their own congregation. This was a surprise departure and not an Augusta First sponsored
effort. Secondly, there was a group of approximately 16-20 that broke away from the Augusta
First SDA Church to join a non-Seventh-day Adventist group sponsored by Stephen Lewis. This
also was an unexpected departure and not part of or endorsed by the Augusta First SDA Church.
Overall average attendance has stabilized over the past year and is now beginning to grow
slowly.

However, average attendance does not tell the story of how many actually attend. This
number is quite higher. When examining our “active” congregation (see Figure 12) there are 304
who are considered “regular attenders” (attend at least once per month) and an additional group
of 102 who are considered “attenders” who attend at least once per quarter. If
you add these groups together (“regular attenders” and “attenders”) there are some 406
individuals who attend Augusta First programming at least once per quarter. In addition, there
are approximately 58 persons who are part of our “active” congregation who are unable to attend
but what if they could (shut-in, prison, military, academy, college etc...).

Figure 12. "Active Congregation Attendance Breakdown."

**Active Congregation Attendance (464)**

- Not attended in 6 Months: 12%
- Attends at least Quarterly: 22%
- Attends at least Monthly: 66%

Source: Pastor B. Boles' detailed analysis of total congregation

**Tithe & Offerings**

The Augusta First SDA Church had a record year for tithe in 2009 receiving $498,338.00, which is the most for one year in the church's history. In fact, this is over $150,000.00 more than the church gave annually in tithe 10 years previous in 2000 (Georgia

Figure 13. Augusta First SDA Church annual tithe % change compared to Ga. Cumb. Conf.

**Annual Tithe % Change**

Source: Georgia Cumberland Conference
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

Cumberland Conference. 2009). The Augusta First SDA Church over the past three years has trended opposite the Georgia Cumberland Conference and the North American Division by posting stronger percentage annual tithe growth each year (see figure 13, 14). Last year in particular as the Georgia Cumberland Conference posted no growth in tithe (see Figure 13) and the North American Division (NAD) posted negative growth of -2% (see Figure 14), the Augusta First SDA Church posted growth of 3%.

Figure 14. Augusta First SDA Church annual tithe % change compared to North America Div.

Anual Tithe % Change

Source: North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists

Augusta First SDA Church per capita tithe giving has grown each year over the past 10 years with last year’s per capita tithe being $1,027.00 (see Figure 15). This figure is less than the conference figure of $1,118.00 (see Figure 15) but the gap between Augusta First and the conference number is closing and becoming smaller each year. When we compare the Augusta First figures of per capita tithe giving to the North American Division (NAD) we see that four years ago the Augusta First numbers passed the NAD and the gap between them has been increasing each year since with the NAD per capita tithe giving in 2009 being $820.00. In 2004,
the Augusta First per capita tithe was basically equal with the Division but now five years later there is a $207.00 difference.

The Augusta First SDA Church has not met its budget goal for any fiscal budget over the last 10+ years (see Figures 17, 18). It came very close to meeting the budget goal in 2005/2006 (99.4%), 2010a (97.6%) and 2006/2007 (96.35%). For several years in the early part of the
2000 the annual budget goal remained static at $136,000.00 per year. Between 2004 and June 2008 the overall annual budget goals increased each year and maxed out at $150,000.00. In 2008, the Augusta First SDA Church transitioned from an annual fiscal budget (July to June) to a 2 fiscal budgets a year system (Jan. to June & July to Dec.). This was done to be able to move more quickly making adjustments in the budget and to reassess the budget on a six month
review. Since going to a six month budget the budget goal has been set the same or lowered each budget cycle until today where the budget is approximately $17,684.00 lower annually than when at its peak of $150,000 per year in 2007/2008 (see Figure 18). The current budget is at the lowest it has been since 2004.

Growth/Decline Patterns

Over the past 5 years (2005-2009), the Augusta First SDA Church has averaged a little over 30 baptisms and Profession of Faiths a year (see Figure 19). For most of those years the church has held a full evangelistic campaign. The overall membership, as previously noted, has maintained around 500 despite 2 church plants, 2 spin off groups, and the purging of members from the books for six of the past ten years. The church have seen a vibrant growth in its “active” and “extended” congregations while membership is at an all time high of 517.

**Figure 19. Total Baptisms/Profession of Faiths by year for the Augusta First SDA Church**

![Baptisms/Professions of Faith](image)

Source: Georgia Cumberland Conference

Ministry Overview

**Congregational Demographic Profile**

The church official membership is 56% female and 44% male. This ratio remains unchanged when compared to the “active” membership (see Figure 20). However, when looking
at the “active” congregation the difference between genders becomes more equal with women comprising 52% (see Figure 21). This church, in the past and to the present, has chosen to not have women elders and has never had a female pastor. All four of the teaching staff at the school are women. The Augusta First SDA Church Board’s non-pastoral members are 35% female. However, of the non-elder ministry positions represented on the Board, 58% are held by women.
After adjusting for pastoral membership, the Nominating Committee and School Board are 50% women and the Finance Committee is 43% women.

Figure 22. "Active" Membership (245) estimated by Race.

The racial demographics for this church are complex to calculate. Some of the challenges are that the analyst has to make certain assumptions and guesses regarding race in order to quantify the whole. Also, there is the complicated matter of children from mixed race couples and to which group they belong. The racial demographics in this report are based on observational analysis by the church’s senior pastor. It is estimated that the “active” membership (see Figure 22) is 49% White, 27% Black, 17% Hispanic and 7% Other (Asian, Pacific unknown). The racial breakdown of the 12 ordained elders of the church parallel the “active” membership’s demographics very closely with 50% white, 33% Black and 17% Hispanic. When comparing the “active” congregation demographics (see Figure 23) with those of the “active” membership the white population decreases to 44%, Hispanics decrease to 16% with Blacks increasing to 29%. When combining the Augusta First SDA Church Board and the Augusta Hispanic Group’s Governing Council the racial demographics of the key leadership of
the congregation is 50% White, 23% Black, 23% Hispanic and 4% Other. The church staff (pastors, teachers) is 40% white, 40% Hispanic and 20% Black.

Figure 23. “Active” Congregation (464) estimated by Race.

Active Congregation by Race (464)

White: 11%
Black: 44%
Hispanic: 29%
Other: 16%

Source: Pastor B. Boles' detailed analysis of total congregation.

Twenty-eight percent of the “active” Congregation are children (see Figure 24). When looking at the “total” Congregation (see Figure 25) the breakdown of the four main age groups remains quite balanced: 28% Children (0-18), 19% Young Adult (19-35), 31% 31-64 year olds and 22% Seniors (65 years old or older).

Figure 24. “Active” Congregation (464) estimated by Age.

Active Congregation by Age (464)

Children: 28%
Adults: 72%

Source: Pastor B. Boles' detailed analysis of total congregation.
Leadership

There are 28 people on the Augusta First Church board and Augusta Hispanic Group Governing Council combined. This means approximately 11.43% of the “active” membership is represented on the Church Board and Governing Council. Approximately 5% of the “active” membership serves as an ordained elder. When factoring out those with elder emeritus status, this leaves an elder to “active” member ratio of 1:25. However, the more realistic ratio would be the pastor/elder to “active” congregation ratio that is 1:46. There are other leaders who do not serve on the Church Board or Governing Council but are leaders of other ministries or serve on other committees (Adventurer Leader, Finance Committee etc.). When factoring in these additional leaders there are approximately 18.6% of the “active” membership is represented in leadership roles. When you explore those others in the “active” membership that are involved in ministries as either a voted assistant or official support you discover that a majority of the adult “active” members are involved in some form of ministry. Trying to avoid duplication, there are approximately 150 of the 245 “active” members who are involved in ministry.
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

Programming

The Augusta First SDA Church holds its Sabbath School and Church Service at traditional times of 9:15 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. respectively. The Sabbath School has a pre-session for 30 minutes and then divides into 3 adult classes. In between Sabbath School and the Worship Service is a Praise Time of singing and the reading of one chapter of the Gospels in the sanctuary. Once a quarter there is a special Sabbath School program on the 13th Sabbath that involves the children. The Children’s Sabbath Schools departments are all represented and in total have some 60-70 children and youth attending each Sabbath. The adult attendance slowly builds from a handful at 9:15 a.m. to over 150 by time it is over. There are Augusta First members and non-members, Seventh-day Adventists and non-Seventh-day Adventists who attend Sabbath School.

The church worship style is a “high church”, conservative model with generally a quiet congregation during the service. Music is generally conservative with a broad range of styles and instruments that are used. While live drums or electric guitar would not be well received, singers using accompaniment tapes are common. The worship service typically runs an hour and half getting out around 12:30 p.m. Each week there is a children’s story and once a month there is Children’s Church. With 406 individuals who attend services (see Figure 12) at least once a quarter and there being only 245 “active” members which includes shut-ins and those who can’t come, obviously there are many non-members who are in the congregation each Sabbath. For the last 3 years there have been a number of visitors every single week ranging from 5-30. There is a ministry to welcome visitors by giving them a welcome bag with literature, snacks, water and loaf of bread. Once a month on the third Sabbath there is “Visitor’s Sabbath” where the sermon and focus is especially on visitors. On this Sabbath there is a general Fellowship Lunch.
Visitors on that Sabbath also get a free book of some kind.

Outside of Sabbath School and Worship Service, the church offers a range of regular programs to meet a variety of needs. There is a mid-week service that is on Wednesdays that is called “Prayer Meeting”. This meeting is for testimony, prayer and group Bible study. Typically, a chapter from a book of the Bible is the focus and each week one of the pastors (usually the Associate Pastor) leads out in a dynamic study of a chapter of that book. Prayer Meeting attendance ranges from 25-70. While this meeting is usually attended by mostly members, but there are non-members who regularly come.

Vespers is held on Saturdays to close the Sabbath and is scheduled near sundown so the start time varies each month. Normally there is a specific series focus that Vespers has. Last year vespers explored the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church looking at the view of Christ in the belief and its value to present day Christianity. The most recent series was a Daniel and Revelation series walking through prophecy. The current series that just started a few weeks ago is taking the book “The Great Controversy” as its structure exploring the topic that coincides with a chapter in the book. Pastor Boles preaches on the topic and uses PowerPoint to illustrate. While attendance has gone up and down for vespers over the past year ranging from 25-60, this most current series has begun very well with attendance ranging from 70-100 people. Increasingly there are more and more non-members present for vespers.

Once a month there is something called Family Gym Night where the congregation is invited to stay by after Vespers and go to the gym for fun, games and fellowship. All the congregation is invited and usually very popular. Attendance ranges wildly from 15-50+ people.

There are many different programs that are open to the whole congregation that occur less frequently but occur at least every year. Typically at least once a year there is some type of
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

evangelistic meeting or rally. Recently the church has held a children’s program in conjunction with the adult meetings (like a Vacation Bible School). Sometimes there is even a simultaneous Teen meeting as well.

There are various social events throughout the year like banquets, showers, and specialty parties (birthday, anniversary etc.). One of the main social events of the year is the International Food Fair. Regularly (except for summer) there are flag football games held on the ball field and indoor soccer and volleyball for all who want to come and participate. There are also picnics and a variety of family festival and social activities.

Various Ministries have special programs throughout the year. Pathfinders and Adventurers have Induction and Investiture Services. The School conducts concerts, special programs and their graduation. Several times a year there are musical concerts either by a guest musician or group or by the church members. Also, the church plans special seminars where a guest speaker is brought in to focus on a certain topic. Previous seminars have included: Prayer, Family Worship, Healthy Living, Estate Planning and Spiritual Revival.

There are also regular programs that are audience specific. The Young Adults have a weekly Bible study on Friday nights that is in a small group dynamic. This group also have social activities regularly including a Sport’s Gym Night once a month. Men’s Ministry meets once a month for a men’s Prayer Breakfast and once a year there is a special Men’s Ministry Weekend. Women’s Ministry has a monthly Women’s Bible Study and they also have a Women’s Ministry weekend. There are special Women’s Ministry Prayer Dinners and social events like the Secret Sister Party. The Pathfinders and Adventurers have age specific meetings, activities and camp outs for children and teens.
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

Ministries

The key ministries related to the worship experience at the Augusta First SDA Church are: the choristers, the decorating committee, the special music ministry, the choir, the greeting ministry, the facility committee, the Audio Visual Team and the children’s church ministry. There are also service ministries involved that include: the elders, the deacons, the deaconesses and the cleaning teams.

While there is overlap between the category of nurture ministry and outreach ministry the following are the primary nurture ministries of the Augusta First SDA Church: Sabbath school and its departments, the school, men’s ministry, women’s ministry, young adult ministry, prayer ministry, children’s ministry, teen ministry, stewardship/finances ministry, religious liberty ministry, tape/cd ministry, social ministry and the encouragement/visitation ministry.

The last category of ministries is the outreach category. The Augusta First SDA Church outreach ministries include: the Discover Bible School, personal ministries, nursing home ministry, Jamaica ministry, Nicaragua ministry, community service, the soup kitchen, prison ministry, health ministry and every summer the church hosts a group of young Literature Workers from Southern Adventist University.

Budget Analysis

School Support.

The August First SDA Church is a strong supporter of Christian education. The church has had a church school at each of its four locations (see Figures 2-5) over its entire history. The church dedicates 37% of its itemized budget ($3,849.89 per month) to supporting and subsidizing the school. Even beyond the itemized budget the church contributes to the support of the school by: paying utilities, giving some $400.00 a month in Lamb’s offer, covering the
insurance for the total facility ($12,000.00 per year) and paying the mortgage on the Family Life Center ($11,300.00 per month). Factoring in the appropriate school portion of the above listed costs (2/3 or Family Life Center cost) and subtracting the $800.00 the school gives to the church per month to assist with utilities, the total monthly financial expenditure of the church in supporting the school is estimated to be around $12,150.00 per month plus private contributions into the Worthy Student Fund.

**Family Life Center.**

One key factor that affects the church budget is the Family Life Center mortgage. The initial loan to build the Family Life Center was $1,639,740.00 with payments beginning in January 2003 of $11,600.00 per month. At the end of June, 2010 the church had paid $531,574.00 against principle leaving $1,108,166.00 outstanding on the loan. For the first year and a half (2003 through 2004a) the church not only made the payments on the loan but exceeded them. This largely was due to the momentum of a pledge drive that was still active and

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**Figure 26. Family Life Center Mortgage and actual received.**

**Family Life Center (July 2002 - June 2007)**

Source: Augusta First SDA Church
the fact the church was renting to a Sunday church and using that income to supplement the mortgage payment. This continued through July 2005 (see Figure 26) at which point the church had to stop using reserves to make the payment as the funds were fast depleting. From that point forward the church only could pay on the loan what it received in specified offerings for the loan.

The congregation is asked to contribute regularly to the church budget and the Family Life Center. The church cannot simply roll the mortgage into the Church Budget because the church has not met church budget (see Figure 17 & 18) for the past 10 years even despite lowering the budget each of the past 5 budgets (see Figure 18). If the two were to be combined, the church would become insolvent financially within six months. Accumulatively the church is some seven months behind on the mortgage (see Figures 26, 27) and has not made full payments consistently since the beginning of 2005. While the church pays on the loan each month it is

Figure 27. Family Life Center Mortgage and actual received

![Family Life Center (July 2007 - June 2010)](image)

Source: Augusta First SDA Church

unable to make the full current monthly payment of $11,300.00 causing it to get further and further behind. It is however making payments beyond merely interest.

The Family Life Center mortgage remains the single biggest financial liability and stress
upon the Augusta First SDA Church. It is apparent the congregation cannot sustain the current mortgage payment and continuing in this manner not only ensures getting further and further behind in the loan. Also, with all extra resource going to the FLC payment there are not funds available for needed repairs and maintenance of the building which will compound the issue in the near future as those maintenance needs arise. In the most recent three months, the church has only averaged $6,000.00 per month on the $11,300.00 payment.

**Baptisms, Profession of Faiths & Transfers**

Over the past 9 years there have been 262 baptisms and Professions of faith into the Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church. A breakdown of the last five years shows a (see Figure 28) shows a healthy distribution of ages coming into the church. (Georgia Cumberland Conference. 2010) Of specific note is the low number of children and high percentage of adults indicating that most of these additions were new people and not merely children of members.

![Age Distribution of Baptisms/POFs](source: www.E Adventist.com)

The Augusta First SDA Church has a very active "transfer" community in and out. For every official transfer in and out of the church there probably is another who never officially
transfers their membership. Factoring out the Korean Group transfer in 2008, the church has officially averaged 25.5 transfers a year over the past five years. If you add the “unofficial” transitions to the official transfers you have an average of some 50-60 people in and out of the “active” congregation every year. This past summer alone some 19 to 25 individuals of the “active” congregation moved out of the area.

Figure 29. Augusta First SDA Church Transfers in and out by year

Membership Transfers

Source: Georgia Cumberland Conference

Community Context

Augusta Metro History

Augusta, Georgia is the second oldest city and the second largest city in the state of Georgia. The city was named for Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha, the wife of Frederick, Prince of Wales (New Georgia Encyclopedia, 2010). General James Edward Oglethorpe founded the city in 1736 on the western bank of the Savannah River as the second town of the 13th British colony, Georgia. After the Revolutionary War, Augusta became the capital of the new state of Georgia between 1786 and 1795 (National Park Service, 2010). Augusta is best known for the Master’s golf tournament held each spring and being home to singer James Brown.
The Augusta metro area is referred to in the community as the CSRA (Central Savannah River Area) and comprises (see Figure 30) some 13 counties in Georgia (Richmond, Columbia, Burke, Wilkes, Lincoln, Washington, Hancock, Taliaferro, Warren, Glascock, McDuffie, Jenkins and Jefferson) and 5 counties in South Carolina counties in South Carolina (Aiken, Edgefield, McCormick, Allendale and Barnwell). The CSRA term comes from a contest held by the Augusta Chronicle in 1950 for the community to come up with the best term to describe the area.

![Map of Georgia and South Carolina showing all counties within CSRA.](source)

C.C. McCollum, a longtime Jefferson County educator, won a $250 prize when his suggestion was chosen from the 2,500 entries (Augusta Chronicle, 2007).

**Augusta Metro Now**

Augusta, Georgia (also known as Augusta–Richmond County) is a consolidated city in the state of Georgia. As of 2009, the Augusta-Richmond County estimated population was 194,343 (not including metro area). Augusta is the principal city of the Augusta-Richmond County Metropolitan Statistical Area, which as of 2009 had an estimated population of 534,218
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT


Augusta has three key economic generators: medicine, biotechnology, and military. The Medical College of Georgia employs over 7,000 people and if you include all the area medical facilities approximately 25,000 people work in the medical field in the Augusta-Aiken area generating over $1.8 billion of economic impact. The area’s three largest employers are the Medical College of Georgia, the Savannah River Site (a Department of Energy nuclear facility) and the U.S. Army Signal Center at Fort Gordon. (Augusta Tomorrow, 2010). In June, 2010 according to the Brookings Institute’s Metropolitan Policy Program, Augusta ranked as the 2nd most recession-proof city in the whole country (CNN-Money, 1010).

Ministry Focus Area

There are 12 Seventh-day Adventist churches/groups in the CSRA within three conferences (Georgia Cumberland, South Atlantic, Carolina). The South Atlantic Conference

Figure 31. Map showing 13 Georgia counties of CSRA that comprise Augusta First SD Church Mission area.

Source: Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

focuses primarily on the African American population of the entire CSRA and they work
together with the Carolina Conference on the South Carolina side of the Savannah River and
with the Georgia Cumberland Conference on the Georgia side of the Savannah River. The
Georgia Cumberland Conference has 1 church (Augusta First), 1 Korean company and 1 Spanish
Mission group in the CSRA. The Augusta First SDA Church is the only English speaking
Georgia Cumberland Conference church in the entire CSRA. The Augusta First SDA Church
mission area is therefore a large area (see Figure 31) covering 13 counties and 41 cities in the
Georgia portion of the Augusta/Aiken metro area.

Martinez (30907)

Martinez, GA is in the northeast corner of Columbia County and is the immediate
community of the Augusta First SDA Church (see Figure 32). While the church is physically
located in the 30907 zip code (see Figure 33), the actual location of the church is right on the
border between Martinez and Augusta. Many consider it to be an Augusta address. In fact, the
official mailing address for the church while using the 30907 zip code states Augusta, Georgia. Martinez (pronounced mar-ti-NEZ) is just north of Augusta-Richmond County and is part of the Augusta-Aiken metro area and is in heart of the CSRA.

Figure 33. Map of Martinez, GA (30907)

Demographics & Population Summary

The population of Martinez in 2000 was 45,543 (US Census, 2000). Figures 34 through 42 demonstrate the demographics of Martinez, Georgia according to the 2000 US Census.

Figure 34. Gender Breakdown of Martinez Population

Martinez by Gender

- Male: 52%
- Female: 48%

**Figure 35. Education Breakdown of Martinez Population**

Martinez by Education

- Less than HS: 9%
- HS Grad.: 14%
- College Deg.: 30%
- Grad. Deg.: 47%

Source: US Bureau of Statistics

**Figure 36. Age Breakdown of Martinez Population**

Martinez by Age Group

- <6: 9%
- 6 to 18: 19%
- 19 to 24: 22%
- 25 to 39: 22%
- 40 to 64: 35%
- 65+: 9%

Source: US Bureau of Statistics

**Figure 37. Employment Breakdown of Martinez Population**

Martinez by Employment

- Employed (Military): 2%
- Employed (Civilian): 67%
- Not in Labor Force: 28%
- Unemployed: 3%

Source: US Bureau of Statistics
Figure 38: Race Breakdown of Martinez Population

Martinez by Race

Source: US Bureau of Statistics

Figure 38 demonstrates the racial breakdown for Martinez. It does not indicate Latino or Hispanic because that group can be from various races. The Hispanic population (of any race) in Martinez in 2000 was 2.4% of the total population. Current Hispanic population estimates for Martinez were not available but using the figures for Columbia County, the Hispanic population is growing in the area. In Columbia County the Hispanic population increased from 2.6% of the population in 2000 (US Census, 2000) to an estimated 3.2% in 2008 (US Census, 2006-2008).

When one compares the racial profile for the “active” congregation of the Augusta First SDA Church (see Figure 23) with that of Martinez (see Figure 38) there are stark differences. The congregation is much more racial diversified. Granted, one has to take into account that the congregation’s population is from the whole metro area and it is being compared to only the immediate community but none the less they are vastly different. Whereas Blacks make up only 10% of Martinez they comprise some 29% of the congregation. Hispanics are approximately 3.3% in the community and 16-17 percent of the congregation. The White population in Martinez is 82% White while that of the congregation is 44%.
Figure 39. Household Size Breakdown of Martinez Population

Martinez by Household Size

Source: US Bureau of Statistics

Figure 40. Income Breakdown of Martinez Population

Martinez by Income

Source: US Bureau of Statistics

Figure 41. Language Breakdown of Martinez Population

Martinez by Language

Source: US Bureau of Statistics
Religious Profile

The Association of Religion Data (ARDA) lists six main categories when determining the religious makeup of a community or area: Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Orthodox, Catholic, Other and Unclaimed. The Seventh-day Adventists are within the category “Evangelical Protestant.” The “Other” designation includes mainly non-Christian religions like Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, etc.. The “Unclaimed” designation by ARDA signifies the people who are not adherents of any of the 188 main religious groups in the United States. ARDA cautions that this number “should not be used as an indicator of irreligion or atheism, as it also includes adherents of many groups not included in the data.” Figures 40-43 demonstrates the religious profiles of the nation, Augusta-Aiken metro area, Richmond County and Columbia County. It should be noted that ARDA has included the 30907 zip code erroneously in the Richmond county statistics. So the Richmond County data (see Figure 40) includes the Augusta First SDA Church and Ebenezer SDA Church. The Columbia County (see Figure 41) data needs to balanced against the fact that even though the Augusta First SDA Church is actually located in this county ARDA does not list any SDA churches with in the county (ARDA, 2000).
Figure 43. Denominational Groups within Richmond County

Richmond County, Georgia
Denominational Groups, 2000

Source: ARDA

Figure 44. Denominational Groups within Columbia County

Columbia County, Georgia
Denominational Groups, 2000

Source: ARDA

Figure 45. Denominational Groups within Augusta-Aiken MSA

Augusta-Aiken, GA-SC MSA
Denominational Groups, 2000

Source: ARDA
Penetration Ratio (Adherence Rate)

The adherence rate for Seventh-day Adventists in the United States is 3.3 Seventh-day Adventists for every 1,000 people (a rate of 3.3). The adherence rate of Seventh-day Adventists in the Augusta-Aiken metro statistical area is 2.5. As stated previously, the Richmond county statistics erroneously include the Augusta SDA Church so that is the only statistic for local county adherence rate that would include the Augusta First SDA Church. The SDA adherence rate for Richmond is 4.6. This must be balanced against the fact the ARDA lists the adherence rate of Seventh-day Adventists in Columbia County where the church actually resides as 0 (Association of Religion Data Archives, 2000).

Community Needs

While a formal “needs assessment” for the Martinez community (or Augusta for that matter) could not be found, an assessment of the community demographics leads one to observe several areas of potential need. With such a high population of transitional individuals (military, medical college, people seeking work) an orientation or “welcome to the community” outreach could be beneficial. Also, with the Hispanic population growing perhaps a language school...
offering English as a second language would meet a need. Even though the Augusta area has
done better than the rest of the country in the current recession there are still people losing their
homes and jobs. A program to offer individuals assistance in pointers for selling your home,
classes for writing a resume and seminars in preparation for job interviews would be potentially
valuable.

Congregational Community Involvement

The Augusta First SDA Church’s congregation is well represented in the community in a
variety of professions including doctors, nurses, medical professionals, teachers, architects,
lawyers, truck drivers, and many other professions. There are various outreach ministries the
church participates in or provides that directly impact the community. Augusta First has an
active Prison Ministry to the Augusta State Medical Prison that involves some 20-40 prisoners
monthly. The church also offers regular Health and Cooking Classes to the Martinez area that
have been very well received and an average 40-50 from the community attend an event. Our
elementary school has marketed itself to the community and as a result has non-SDA students
from outside the congregation. The church also is involved with Harvest Food Bank and has a
food bank that is open to the community every week to those in need. Lastly, on a bi-monthly
regular basis a group of church members volunteer at the downtown “soup kitchen.”

Situation Analysis

Goals and Strategic Plans

Outreach Strategy

The church is participating in a new outreach paradigm being developed by the Georgia
Cumberland Conference that seeks to be more holistic in its evangelism. This new approach
emphasizes discipleship and brings the “interest” through four quadrants: (Love) developing
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

loving relationships with them. (Learn) teaching them truth. (Live) discipling them to live for Christ and (Lead) modeling leadership so they can disciple others. The Augusta First SDA Church is one of a handful of churches serving as a pioneer model for this new program. All outreach will be part of this new paradigm and process. It is less of a program that will come and go but more of a mentality shift and a paradigm change. The “change” will not be dramatic for the church, as the pastor has been teaching and preaching these same systems for the past three years. All that really needs to be done is to orient the church to some new terminology but as for “buy in”, the leadership and congregation in essence already understand and support the concept. The orientation and official implementation will begin soon.

A key foundational outreach philosophy of the Augusta First SDA Church is that the church itself and its programs are an evangelistic tool. In particular, that the Sabbath services can be a tremendous opportunity to witness to others. While it has taken time and some further strengthening is needed, the statistics demonstrate that visitors are now a vital part of the regular active congregation (see Figure 11). A specific plan that the church desires to implement, if funding is received, is to invite the community to worship with them on Sabbath. The method of invitation would be a billboard on the I-20 in one of the most prominent places on the interstate that runs through Augusta. The billboard would be simple, aesthetic and professional. It would offer an invitation to worship on Sabbath linking them to a website

www.WorshipOnSabbath.com for more information. The premise for this new approach is that the Holy Spirit has lead and is leading many to the understanding of the Sabbath on their own and these individuals would respond positively to an invitation to worship on the seventh day. The church is regularly contacted or visited by individuals in the community who desire more information on the Sabbath.
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

The Augusta SDA Church has an active Discover Bible School, prison Bible Study program and “one on one” Bible study program but its current goal is to strengthen this ministry. The church needs to reorganize the Bible School and in cooperation with the Voice of Prophecy, to begin a new advertising campaign to the community. A restructuring of the school and installing new trained volunteer staff is needed to refresh this vital ministry.

Unfortunately due to finances, the local church Bible Worker position could not be renewed for this year. This, in the end, may be a blessing as it is imperative to involve more church members in the process of giving Bibles Studies. The “one on one” Bible study program will be a focus of recruiting new teachers, training those teachers and then engaging them in studies with others. The prison Bible study program is strong and has some 30 individuals regularly studying with the prison ministry team.

Nurture Strategy

One key goal of the leadership of the Augusta First SDA Church is to strengthen the “nurture” ministry of encouraging those within the congregation. One component of the nurture ministry that is extremely strong is the ministry to the sick and shut-ins through the Encouragement Ministry. This particular ministry is well organized and extremely effective. However, outside of the “sick and shut-in” the other section of the congregation needs better nurture. With such a large congregation and with such a large portion of that congregation not attending regularly, it is a present and urgent challenge to effectively uplift all those needing encouragement. One dilemma is with the trend being irregular attendance versus regular attendance, the leadership cannot be sure if “Brother X” is not at church it because he is discouraged/upset or just because that’s his normal pattern. This post modern mentality makes it difficult for the leadership creating quite a quandary: over contact every time they are not there
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

and risk being “Big Brother” or give them space and risk they fade away before its known what happened. A ministry structure using dedicated individuals needs to be implemented to serve as a net so no individual is overlooked who needs a ministry contact. This will require vigilance, attendance observation and follow-up. One thing is certain about this goal is that it must go beyond the pastoral staff for its sheer numeric challenges makes its impossible for the pastors to accomplish on their own.

Debt Elimination

One of the key goals for the congregation is to eliminate the mortgage on the Family Life Center. This will have to be done in stages but is accomplishable. The first step will be to restructure the loan so the monthly payment is lowered and is at a more attainable for the church. Secondly, the church will need to redo its budget to underwrite the monthly mortgage to ensure consistency and that the church does not fall behind. Lastly, a campaign to raise funds will be started to apply to the outstanding principle. Eliminating this debt will be the single best physical thing the church could do to further its ministry to the congregation and the community.

Facility Goals

Another key goal is to continue to renovate and modernize the existing church and Family Life Center facility. Following the same strategy used over the past 3 years, the church will prioritize the renovation projects and then systematically complete them using volunteer labor and only as money is in hand. Some of the projects that have been completed recently or are being completed are: new roof, new gutters, new carpet in back wings of church, installation of new 4 office suite, rekeying of facility, installation of new children’s playground, inserting windows in all interior doors, renovation of multi-purpose room, new back lobby entrance area, new mail room, new sanctuary sound system, installation of new projectors/screens in sanctuary,
renovation of trailer to create Pathfinder Club House, new signage for whole facility and grounds, reorganization of storage space, installation of new freezers/refrigerators in food bank, installation of new network infrastructure and phone system for facility, two new copiers for church/school, creation of an Adventurer Room, renovation of Teen ministry loft and a new church sign. Some of the projects in the planning stages or that are being discussed (not in any specific order) to be done in the future are: installation of new security system, redoing landscaping for facility grounds, renovation of church bathrooms, renovation of lobby, renovation of church multi-purpose room kitchen, re-carpeting of sanctuary, additional parking, installation of new nursery, installation of new toddler’s rooms, redoing sanctuary platform area, installing balcony seating in sanctuary, completion of older children’s playground and retiling of floor in gym/fellowship hall.

**Media Goals**

A tremendous area of opportunity for Augusta First is in the better use and utilization of media in ministry. While great equipment upgrades have been made, further work needs to be accomplished to bring the whole Audio/visual system to a high professional and functional quality to take the media ministry to the next level. A goal of the church is to utilize the media to bring the programming to those who are not there and to archive sermons, training etc... to avoid duplication of programing. Again, the attendance issue means that no matter how effective a sermon or program was, only a portion of the church heard it or participated in it. So the church must find an effective way to give those opportunities longer “shelf life”. Combine the irregular attendance pattern with such a high percentage of transition in the church each year, it is estimated that only one year removed from a training event or sermon series that the percentage of the current congregation who was in attendance is maybe 50%. Of those 50% who remember
the content it would probably drop in half again. The goal is to take that 25% retention impact and increase it.

Due to congregation’s distance from the church, increasing gas costs and some individual’s preference more “distance ministry” needs to be accomplished through technology. A live stream of the worship service would be extremely effective at Augusta First. While this is a key goal to implement it still is a ways out until proper equipment can be purchased and funding can be raised. Online giving is being implemented through the church website and doing more virtual leadership conference using methods like “Skype” are being considered. The church website and Facebook Group are being reviewed and restructured to be more effective.

**School Goals**

As the school is sponsored by the church and is intricately connected to the vision and ministry of the church, it is appropriate to include the school’s goals. Their goal is to further expand the educational program to include a Pre-K program. Paperwork and the application process has begun on to make this happen. In addition to the Pre-K teacher, a goal is for the school to grow to sufficient size and finances to sustain 3 full time conference teachers and have a vibrant after school care program. Two areas the school is using to reach its goal of strengthen its finances are: utilizing a Georgia Tax reversion program to allow people to send their tax money to the school and to establish a alumni association that can raise funds to support the school.

Augusta First Church has a branch campus of Atlanta Adventist Academy. Currently in order to make the program possible, the facilitator is a volunteer in the classroom and all finances and billing fro the program flow through the Augusta First SDA Church and then to AAA in Atlanta. The goal is to increase the number of students in that program. Once there is a
strong enough tuition base than Augusta First can transfer all facets of the tuition billing over to the mother campus in Atlanta which would also include paying for the facilitator.

**Strengths of Congregation**

It has been said that the most segregated place in the United States is on Sunday mornings. The Augusta First SDA Church stands in contrast to the norm. Rather than being a weakness, the church's diversity is seen as one of its greatest strengths. Its congregation is diverse in age (see Figure 24, 25), gender (see Figure 20, 21), culture, professions, income, race (see Figure 23) and in outreach (see Figure 28). It is this diversity that is appealing to those looking for a church which represents a taste of heaven’s future diversity. The congregation has a core of very dedicated supportive and engaged individuals who love Jesus.

There is a strong unity among the leadership at Augusta First. Especially among the pastors and elders there is a real sense of harmony, unity of vision and brotherhood. Even amidst the various offshoot distractions, the leaders of the Augusta First Church are strongly united in mission, standing for the truth and in their love for the body of Christ. The leadership is talented, committed and desires to do God's will. They work well together and show great support, respect and love to the pastoral staff as is returned to them from the pastors. Meetings (Church Board, Elder, Leadership, Nominating Committee, Finance Committee, School Board, Facility Committee etc...) are all productive and conducted in a Christ-like attitude. None of the committees, councils or boards of the church are contentious, political, argumentative or divisive.

Augusta First has developed and continues to strengthen strong and effective administrative systems. These systems allow for leaders to focus on overseeing specific areas of ministry within the congregation without causing overload on one board, duplication of function
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

or micromanaging of the pastoral staff. Some examples of the administrative systems of the church are as follows: Elders address spiritual matters of the church, Finance Committee deals with financial matters, Facility Committee deals with facility repairs and maintenance, School Board deals with school matters, Sabbath School Council deals with matters relating to Sabbath School, Children’s Ministry deals with matters relating to teen and children ministry and outreach. Nominating Committee (standing committee) serves to strengthen ministries and place individuals in service, Hispanic Governing Council oversees all aspects of the Hispanic church plant and Church Board focuses on outreach, evangelism and official oversight of church. The church and school staff serve to facilitate healthy planning and scheduling and overall further strengthen the above mentioned administrative systems. Most of the systems are functioning very well and further effort will be made to strengthen those that need it. Two additional administrative systems are being planned for implementation: Worship Committee and an Evangelism/Discipleship Committee.

Another strength of note is the very ideal location of the Augusta First Church. While certainly there are areas in the metro vicinity that could be considered ideal for a church plant, it would be difficult to choose a one spot location in the CSRA better than the current location. While the mortgage is a struggle, one cannot deny the wonderful opportunities our fine facility offers the church for ministry. The location and completeness of the facility provide the infrastructure to move forward with a wide variety and diversity of ministries and outreach programs that other church simply cannot accomplish because of being out of the way, unable to handle the crowd or not having the necessary infrastructure. Location and facility are an incredible blessing and strength.
Lastly, something must be said about the heart of the congregation regarding giving. One may assume that because the church struggles to meet its mortgage payment and it has difficulty maintaining the budget or because the school is at times in financial stress that the congregation does not care or is apathetic. While only God knows the heart, it is observable that in actuality the members have big hearts for giving. Many give sacrificially. The church is 100% supportive of the school and does not complain about the financial investment. Per capita giving has been increasing every year for the past 10. The people faithfully support the conference with their tithe and are glad to be in the sisterhood of churches. They are not selfish, self-centered and certainly do not demonstrate the trend of congregationalism. Beside the obvious challenge of the current recession, a key financial issue impacting giving is that most in the congregation are in one of four lower income categories: retired, in college, family with kids in school or work a “blue collar” job. There are very few big donors in the congregation further demonstrating as one looks at the statistics the big hearts of the people. While it is true consistence in giving is needed and that overall giving can be strengthened, the foundation of the Augusta First SDA Church is made of a people of love Jesus, His work and give proportionately to support His church. They are a faithful people who give their “mite” freely.

Weaknesses of the Congregation

The lack of community within our congregation is a huge weakness and challenge. Inconsistent attendance and lack of interaction between the congregation outside of Sabbath weaken the atmosphere of community. Without a sense of community it is challenging to retain and grow fellowship. Hence, a loss of community is a weakness that threatens the ability to sustain the growth of the congregation. Fresh and new approaches need to be explored to knit together a congregation that is spread over such a large demographic area. It is not merely the
distance individuals live from the church that is a challenge but as the recession deepens many simply do not have funds to buy gas to come to church. If there is another gas crisis this problem will even further be exacerbated.

As mentioned previously in this report, the Augusta First SDA Church has a percentage of its congregation in transition into and out of the church each year. While the new people bring new opportunities and “new blood” to the whole, there is a weakness to the high transition rate. Ministry leaders who move away need to be replaced and retrained. It is difficult to sustain giving patterns when the base is always changing. Lastly, it is a prickly balance pastorally in how to repeat needed topics and training for new members without boring the remaining congregation with the duplication.

A strength can create a weakness. In the case of Augusta First, it has created a wonderful ministry dynamic where 47% of its active congregation are non-members (see Figure 10). However, while this is wonderful in having created mission opportunities, it does also create a challenge in filling leadership roles that can only be filled by active members. A vast majority of active members already are serving in not one but multiple ministries. So as the ratio of “active” members within the “active” congregation diminishes the talent pool of qualified and willing leaders becomes smaller as well.

Opportunities

When looking at future opportunities for the Augusta First SDA Church there are many. One area the church is not currently actively involved in ministry but which holds a tremendous wealth of potential is in the Military sector. Fort Gordon is expanding and is going to be one of the key National Security Agency headquarters for the nation bringing high end personal from all branches of the military and the intelligence community. No one knows exactly how many
individuals will be coming in or exactly how it will impact the area. One thing that is certain however, the Fort is already a key component of the community and any expansion will only increase an already prime target for ministry. The church needs to explore and develop methods and ministries to reach out and connect to the military community. One also wonders what percentage of those on base and who are being transferred into the area are Seventh-day Adventists or have a Seventh-day Adventist background.

Another area of opportunity lies within the medical and college communities. There are 7 main hospitals and 3-5 community hospitals in the CSRA. Two key universities are the Medical College of Georgia and Augusta State University but there are other smaller colleges present as well. While each of these two communities is quite large in and of themselves, they are intrinsically tied together through the Medical College of Georgia. The Augusta First SDA Church has students represented in each of the universities and has members employed at almost all of the medical facilities. Fresh ministry opportunities need to be generated to connect with these young adults to reach this collegiate demographic perhaps working with Adventist Campus Ministries. Also, ideas need to be explored to collaborate with, work with, and minister to the hospital community.

Another tremendous opportunity exists with the number of visitors attending the Augusta First SDA Church. Besides the regularly attending “non-members” that have already been noted, there are always new visitors at church each Sabbath. The size of the “first time” visitor crowd ranges from 5-30 and sometimes more. This group can only be expected to grow and especially after the billboard goes up. While there are some good welcome structures in place, more needs to be done to connect with, welcome and follow up with this portion of the congregation. Also, continued orientation and training of the members in how to be patient,
loving and long suffering with "guests".

Lastly, there are areas in the CSRA that are prime for planting additional churches (south Augusta, Hephzibah, Evans, Grovetown, Downtown). The philosophy of the pastoral leadership is to strengthen the mother church (Augusta First) first and to use it to plant these branch campuses at the appropriate time. Focus, and properly so, has been to strengthen the systems and congregation at home before planting a new church. Especially with the high transition, financial volatility and offshoot issues, the timing has not been right. However, in the near future this is an opportunity that will be pursued. It is important to mention that the Augusta First SDA Church has planted a Korean SDA Church and is currently in the process of planning a Spanish SDA Church.

Threats

One of the key threats to growth right now is financial stress. Four key elements to this stress are: the Family Life Center Loan, inconsistent offerings for church budget, financial support of the school and personal debt of the congregation. The church is seeking to restructure the Family Life Center Loan. The church budget has been cut as far as it can realistically be cut but a consistent and persistent stewardship campaign should help with the inconsistent giving regarding church budget. With strong leadership at the school, its financial picture should get healthier and that stress should diminish. Lastly, a series of stewardship and financial planning seminars will be held to assist the congregation in becoming financially sound and debt free.

A consistent threat over the past 2 plus years is off-shoot theology and off-shoot groups. Quite honestly the biggest impact of off-shoot attacks is the enormous energy drain it causes on the pastoral staff and elders. While in reality the statistical membership impact of off-shoot theology and direct attacks has been extremely minimal, the number of hours the leadership
spends in fighting off the attacks, defending the faith and protecting the sheep is significant. One positive result in fending off these attacks is a unity of leadership, a galvanized conviction of truth and a better process in addressing heresy when it arises.

As it is taking time to strengthen leadership structures and empower and train the laity a great threat to achieving success is impatience. If members and individuals within the congregation do not see change fast enough they may grow weary of the cause and just “give up”. Time will be needed to accomplish the physical, spiritual and leadership changes necessary to accomplish the vision laid out. Keeping the vision before the congregation will be important to avoid apathy and despair.

Further Study & Summary

Further Study

While the data in this report was compiled by careful and thorough examination of information compiled by the Senior Pastor, a reexamination of the congregational demographics once all the data is input into a searchable database would be extremely valuable to increase the accuracy of the results.

Another area of further study would be to find, or have commissioned, a complete need assessment of the community and how the Augusta First SDA Church may be able to meet those needs. Furthermore, with the great changes to the Martinez community like its overall growth, increase in military personal and the growth of the Hispanic community a comparison study of the 2000 Census and the 2010 census would be crucial in understanding trends and grasping an accurate picture of the community.

Summary

While there are financial challenges and off-shoot theology distractions, the Augusta First
Ministry Assessment

Seventh-day Adventist Church is very blessed. It continues to strengthen leadership structures while expanding its ministry opportunities. The church's goal continues to be to share the gospel, disciple the convert, train strong leaders and nurture the congregation in a healthy relationship with Christ. The future is bright as the church in Christ focuses on loving, learning, living and leading.
References


MINISTRY ASSESSMENT


## APPENDIX B

### CONGREGATIONAL MATERIALS

### Patriarchs and Prophets

*Daily Reading Plan*

The *Daily Reading Plan* paces the reader so that by the end of the Sermon and Prayer Meeting series *Faith of Our Fathers*, they will have finished the whole book *Patriarchs and Prophets* by Ellen G. White.

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# Patriarchs and Prophets

## Selected Reading Plan

The *Selected Reading Plan* is designed for those who wish to read just the portions of the book *Patriarchs and Prophets* by Ellen G. White that deal with the specific Prayer Meeting or Sermon topic in the *Faith of Our Fathers* series.

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<td>May 11</td>
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Pastor Boles will be starting a new series entitled “Faith of Our Fathers”. This will be a sermon series looking at key figures from the Old Testament. Also, Prayer Meeting topics will be synchronized with the sermon series and will explore important stories from the Old Testament. Please refer to the schedule below to see the exact sermon titles and Prayer Meeting topics.

### SERMON SERIES

- **Sabbath, March 5**
  - “Noah”
- **Sabbath, March 12**
  - “Abraham”
- **Sabbath, March 19**
  - “Jacob”
- **Sabbath, March 26**
  - “Joseph”
- **Sabbath, April 2**
  - “Moses”
- **Sabbath, April 9**
  - “Joshua”
- **Sabbath, April 23**
  - “Samuel”
- **Sabbath, April 30**
  - “Saul”
- **Sabbath, May 7**
  - “David”

### PRAYER MEETING

- **Wednesday, March 2**
  - “Creation”
- **Wednesday, March 9**
  - “Tower of Babel”
- **Wednesday, March 16**
  - “Sodom”
- **Wednesday, March 23**
  - “Plagues of Egypt”
- **Wednesday, March 30**
  - “The Tabernacle”
- **Wednesday, April 6**
  - “The Law”
- **Wednesday, April 13**
  - “Jericho”
- **Wednesday, April 20**
  - “Israelites in Egypt”
- **Wednesday, April 27**
  - “The Ark Stolen”
- **Wednesday, May 4**
  - “Sorcery”
- **Wednesday, May 11**
  - “David’s Sin”

To enrich the Faith of Our Fathers series, we are encouraging you to read the book *Patriarchs and Prophets* by Ellen G. White. Paperback copies of this book will be available at the church if you do not already own a copy. These books are free but if you would like to supplement the cost you may make a donation to the church and mark your contribution envelope “Faith of Our Fathers”. You may also go online to [www.egwhite.com](http://www.egwhite.com) and download a copy for the book for free. At this website, you can even listen to the book online or download the mp3 of the book to listen on your phone or other electronic device.

For your convenience, Pastor Boles has developed a reading plan to assist you in synchronizing your reading with the series. These are available in the church lobby.
SURVEY

This survey is part of a doctoral project being conducted by Pastor BJ Boles. Survey participants recognize that by completing and returning this survey that they give their informed consent to participate in this project and for the information contained within this survey to be used in this project. The participant’s identity will be anonymous. You must be 18 years old to participate and please just one survey per participant.

1. Which age group are you?
   - 18-35
   - 36-50
   - 51-64
   - 65+

2. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female

3. Have you turned in one of these surveys before?
   - No
   - Yes, within last 4 weeks
   - Yes, 2-6 months ago

4. Which best describes your religious faith?
   - Buddhist
   - Christian (Catholic)
   - Christian (Protestant)
   - Hindu
   - Jewish
   - Muslim
   - Other
   - None

5. Which best describes your denominational affiliation?
   - Seventh-day Adventist (Member of the Augusta First SDA Church)
   - Seventh-day Adventist (Member of other SDA Church)
   - Other Denomination/Faith (Please Print Below)
   - None (I have no denominational affiliation)

6. How frequently do you attend this church? (Augusta First SDA)
   - First Time
   - Occasionally
   - Just Started Regularly Attending
   - Have Regularly Attended for Long Time

7. How often do you have personal devotions? (On Average)
   - Daily
   - 3-6 Times a Week
   - Twice a Week
   - Weekly
   - 2-3 Times a Month
   - Monthly
   - Occasionally
   - I do not

SURVEY CONTINUES ON BACK OF THIS SHEET
SURVEY (Continued)

8. How frequently do you have family worship?
   (Worship in home with other family members like spouse, children, parent, etc…)
   - Daily
   - 3-6 Times a Week
   - Twice a Week
   - Weekly
   - Sabbaths
   - 2-3 Times a Month
   - Monthly
   - Occasionally
   - Never
   - Does Not Apply (I live alone)

9. How frequently do you read the Bible devotionally?
   (Not a Bible study, Sabbath School lesson or in a public setting like church)
   - Daily
   - 3-6 Times a Week
   - Twice a Week
   - Weekly
   - 2-3 Times a Month
   - Monthly
   - Occasionally
   - I do not

10. What is your opinion of the writings of Ellen G. White?
    - Very Negative
    - Negative
    - Neutral
    - Positive
    - Very Positive
    - I do not have an opinion

11. Do you view the writings of Ellen G. White as:
    ("?" – Don’t know)

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12. On average, how frequently do you read the writings of Ellen G. White? (Please do not include the book, The Great Controversy if you are reading it in conjunction with our church’s current vespers series)
   - Daily
   - 3-6 Times a Week
   - Twice a Week
   - Weekly
   - 2-3 Times a Month
   - Monthly
   - Occasionally
   - I do not

13. On average, how frequently do you read Christian books other than the Bible or Ellen G. White’s writings?
    - Daily
    - 3-6 Times a Week
    - Twice a Week
    - Weekly
    - 2-3 Times a Month
    - Monthly
    - Occasionally
    - I do not

14. Of the following books, which have you read in part or in full within the past 3 months? (Mark all that apply)
    - Patriarchs and Prophets
    - Prophets and Kings
    - The Desire of Ages
    - Acts of the Apostles
    - Thoughts From the Mount of Blessings
APPENDIX C

SERMONS

The sermon outlines in this appendix were the same outlines I used to preach the sermon and were what was given to the congregation. These outlines therefore are the actual outlines used by me when preaching for all the nine sermons and serve as the official record of the series. It was my original intent to include these outlines as the documentation of the sermons. However, I also thought it would be nice to have available a link so the reader of this paper could, if they desired, so they could watch the series. However, challenges out of my control, have made that not possible. The explanation and the accommodations I have made for it are shared below.

After I relocated from Augusta First Seventh-day Adventist Church to another church in Las Vegas, the August First Seventh-day Adventist Church, independent of my knowledge and advice, decided to cancel their UStream account. UStream was the online service that was used to record and streamed the sermons from the Faith of Our Father series. It was also the cloud location to archive the sermons. Unfortunately, due to this unforeseen and ill-fated decision by the church to cancel their UStream account, the archive of the sermons was lost. My original intent was to link you, the reader, to these sermons through that archive online. While this decision had unfortunate consequences, I provide below several opportunities to read and watch the sermon series through a few different methods.
Manuscripts of the sermons have been prepared, after the fact, using subsequent videos from when I preached this exact same Faith of Our Fathers series a year and a half later (2011) in the same church, August First Seventh-day Adventist Church. Very little variation exists from the original series so these manuscripts can reveal to you the style, format and content of the sermons. Also, you can go to www.FaithOfOurFathers.info and watch videos of the Faith of Our Fathers sermon series. The reader is encouraged to watch the videos so as to ascertain the style, content and flow of the series. Seven sample sermon manuscripts of the nine are included in this appendix. Included in this appendix are:

1. Faith of Our Fathers #1 (Noah)
2. Faith of Our Fathers #2 (Abraham)
3. Faith of Our Fathers #3 (Jacob)
4. Faith of Our Fathers #4 (Joseph)
5. Faith of Our Fathers #5 (Moses)
6. Faith of Our Fathers #6 (Joshua)
7. Faith of Our Fathers #7 (Samson)
8. Faith of Our Fathers #8 (Samuel) Not included appendix but available online
9. Faith of Our Fathers #9 (David) Not included appendix but available online
SERMON STUDY OUTLINE

Title: “Faith of Our Fathers: Noah”
Series: “Faith of Our Fathers” 1 of 9
Preached: BJ Boles (03/03/11) @ Augusta 1st SDA Church
Key Passage: Hebrews 11:7

TIME OF NOAH
HOW BAD WAS THE EVIL IN THE WORLD? (GEN 6:5 & 9:11)

DID NOAH KNOW ADAM AND EVE?
WHAT DOES METHUSELAH MEAN?
WHAT DOES NOAH MEAN? (GEN 5:29)
WHAT WERE THE COVENANTS? (GEN 6:18; 9:8-17)

ATTRIBUTES OF NOAH’S CHARACTER
“FOUND GRACE IN EYES OF GOD” (GEN 6:8)

“JUST MAN” (GEN 6:9)
“UNQUESTIONING” (GEN 6:13-17)
“OBEDIENT” (GEN 6:22)
“GOD FIRST” (GEN 8:20)
“BLESSED” (GEN 9:1)
“PREACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS” (2 PETER 2:5)
“FAITHFUL” (HEB. 11:7)

CHIASTIC STRUCTURE

195
FURTHER READING
The suggested supplemental reading for this topic of “Noah” is found in chapters 7 and 8 of the book *Patriarchs and Prophets* by Ellen G. White.
Serenity Study Outline

Title: "Faith of Our Fathers: Abraham"
Series: "Faith of Our Fathers" 2 of 9
Preached: BJ Boles (03/12/11) @ Augusta 1st SDA Church
Key Passage: Hebrews 11:8-10

TIME OF ABRAHAM

How long after the flood was Abraham?

Did Abraham know Noah?

Wickedness and Idol Worship?

God Always Has a People

KEY EVENTS

The Covenant (Gen. 12:2-3, 15 & 17)

Abram Leaves Home (Gen. 12)

Abram's "Lie" (X2) (Gen. 12:10-20 & 20:1-18)

Abram Inherits Canaan (Gen. 13)

Rescue of Lot (Gen. 14)

Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20)

Hagar and Ishmael (Gen. 16)

Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18 & 19)

Birth & "Sacrifice" of Isaac (Gen. 21 & 22)

DECLINING LONGEVITY

Noah (Father of Shem) lived (Gen. 9:29)
Shem (Father of Arphaxad) lived (Gen. 11:10-11)
Arphaxad (Father of Salah) lived (Gen. 11:12-13)
Salah (Father of Eber) lived (Gen. 11:14-15)
Eber (Father of Peleg) lived (Gen. 11:16-17)
Peleg (Father of Reu) lived (Gen. 11:18-19)
Reu (Father of Serug) lived (Gen. 11:20-21)
Serug (Father of Nahor) lived (Gen. 11:22-23)
Nahor (Father of Terah) lived (Gen. 11:24-25)
Terah (Father of Abram) lived (Gen. 11:32)
Abram (Abraham) lived (Gen. 25:7)
SERMON STUDY NOTES

FURTHER READING
The suggested supplemental reading for this topic of “Abraham” is found in chapters 11-13 of the book Patriarchs and Prophets by Ellen G. White.

SERMON & READING NOTES

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SERMON STUDY OUTLINE

Title: “Faith of Our Fathers: Jacob”
Series: “Faith of Our Fathers” 3 of 9
Preached: BJ Boles (03/19/11) @ Augusta 1st SDA Church
Key Passage: Hebrews 11:20-21

KEY EVENTS

BIRTH OF ESAU AND JACOB (GEN. 25:19-28)

ESAU SELLS BIRTHRIGHT (GEN. 25:29-34)

JACOB & REBEKAH DECEIVE ISAAC (GEN. 27:1-40)

ESAU SEeks ISAAC’S BLESSING (GEN. 27:39-40)

REBEKAH HEARS OF ESAU’S HATRED (GEN. 27:41-47)

ISAAC BLESSES/SENDs AWAY JACOB (GEN. 28:1-5)

ESAU MARRIes ISHMAEL’S DAUGHTER (GEN. 28:6-9)

JACOB’S DREAM (GEN. 28:10-22)

JACOB MEETS RACHEL (GEN. 29:1-14)

LABAN DECEIVES JACOB (GEN. 29:15-30)

JACOB’S CHILDREN (GEN. 29:31-35 & GEN. 30:1-24)

JACOB’S DEALINGS WITH LABAN (GEN. 30:25-43 & 31)

JACOB REUNITES WITH ESAU (GEN. 32:1-21 & 33)

JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD (GEN. 32:22-32)

NAMES

WHAT DOES “JACOB” MEAN?

WHAT DOES “ISRAEL” MEAN?

JACOB’S CHILDREN

Review the text and outline Jacob’s 13 children recorded in the Bible. Note each of their mothers. Jacob’s sons would develop into the 12 tribes.
SERMON STUDY NOTES

FURTHER READING
The suggested supplemental reading for this topic of “Jacob” is found in chapters 16, 17 and 18 of the book Patriarchs and Prophets by Ellen G. White.

SERMON & READING NOTES

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SERMON STUDY OUTLINE

Title: “Faith of Our Fathers: Joseph”
Series: “Faith of Our Fathers” 4 of 9
Preached: BJ Boles (03/26/11) @ Augusta 1st SDA Church
Key Passage: Genesis 50:24

KEY EVENTS

Young Joseph, the Dreamer (Gen. 37:1-11)

Brothers Sell Joseph as Slave (Gen. 37:22-36)

Joseph in Potiphar’s House (Gen. 39:1-19)

Joseph in Jail, The Interpreter (Gen. 39:20-23 & 40)

Pharaoh’s Dream (Gen. 41:1-36)

Joseph, the Egyptian Leader (Gen. 41:37-57)

Joseph Brothers in Egypt (Gen. 42-45)

Jacob Comes to Egypt (Gen. 46 & 47:1-11)

Jacob’s Last Days (Gen. 47:27-28; 48, 49 & 50:1-21)

Joseph’s Last Days (Gen. 50:22-26)

MAIN POINT

How is the covenant present in Joseph’s story?

How does God use Joseph to save His people?

FIRST FOUR

Examine the lives of the first four patriarchs of our series (Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Joseph). How does God test them before using them? How are others blessed by God’s blessing them? How did other’s see their testimony? How does Romans 8:28 apply to their stories? Explore how each is listed in Hebrews 11 and consider what each is noted for.

COMPARE

Take a few minutes and compare the lives of Joseph and Daniel. Write down all the points in which their lives are similar and then note the distinctions between them.
FURTHER READING
The suggested supplemental reading for this topic of “Joseph” is found in chapters 19, 20 and 21 of the book *Patriarchs and Prophets* by Ellen G. White.

SERMON & READING NOTES

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SERMON STUDY OUTLINE

Title: “Faith of Our Fathers: Moses”
Series: “Faith of Our Fathers” 5 of 9
Preached: BJ Boles (04/02/11) @ Augusta 1st SDA Church
Key Passage: Hebrews 11:23-29

SETTING
SUFFERING OF ISRAELITES (Exodus 1)

KEY EVENTS (Through Sinai)
BIRTH & EARLY YEARS (Exodus 2:1-10)

FLIGHT TO MIDIAN (Exodus 2:11-21)

BURNING BUSH & RETURN TO EGYPT (Exodus 3:1 - 4:31)

BEFORE PHARAOH (Exodus 5:1 - 6:13 & 7:1-13)

THE PLAGUES & PASSOVER (Exodus 7:14 - 12:30 & 12:43-51)

EXODUS & RED SEA (Exodus 13:17 - 15:20)

GOD PROVIDES (Exodus 15:22 - 17:16)

JETHRO’S ADVICE (Exodus 18:1-27)

MOUNT SINAI (Exodus 19:1 - 31:18)

GOLDEN CALF (Exodus 32:1-35)

MOSES SPEAKS WITH LORD AGAIN (Exodus 33:1 - 34:35)

MAIN POINT
HOW IS THE COVENANT PRESENT IN MOSES’ STORY?

PREPARATION
Examine the life of Moses from birth until he was called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. How did God prepare him for this task?

COMPARE
Compare Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. How did God develop patience in each of them? Why is patience so important to the Lord? How is God developing your patience?
FURTHER READING
The suggested supplemental reading for this topic of “Moses” is found in chapters 22-26 of the book Patriarchs and Prophets by Ellen G. White.

SERMON & READING NOTES
SERMON STUDY OUTLINE

Title: “Faith of Our Fathers: Joshua”
Series: “Faith of Our Fathers” 6 of 9
Preached: BJ Boles (04/09/11) @ Augusta 1st SDA Church
Key Passage: Joshua 1:9

INTRODUCTION (Background)
NAME (NUM 13:16)

SETTING & TIME

EARLY YEARS (With Moses)
MILITARY LEADER (EX 17:9-14)

MOSES’ ASSISTANT (EX 24:13 & 32:17 & 33:11)

SPY (NUM 13 & 14)

KEY EVENTS (From Book of Joshua)
GOD COMMISSIONS JOSHUA (JOSHUA 1)

CROSSING OF JORDAN (JOSHUA 3 & 4)

ENCOUNTERS GOD THE COMMANDER (JOSHUA 5:13-15)

BATTLE OF JERICHO (JOSHUA 6)

CITY OF AI AND SIN OF ACHAN (JOSHUA 7 & 8)

SUN STANDS STILL (JOSHUA 10)

CONQUEST OF THE LAND (JOSHUA 9, 11-12)

DIVISION OF LAND AMONG TRIBES (JOSHUA 13-22)

FAREWELL ADDRESS (JOSHUA 23)

“BE STRONG AND OF GOOD COURAGE”
Moses (Deut. 31:7-8), God (8x in Joshua 1:6-9), and the Leaders of Israel (Joshua 1:18) tell Joshua to be “strong and of good courage”. Compare these texts to what Joshua told the Israelites after spying in the land of Canaan (Num. 14:6-9). How can this message be applied to your life? Consider Rom. 8:31.
FURTHER READING
The suggested supplemental reading for this topic of “Joshua” is found in chapters 34, 44, 49 of the book Patriarchs and Prophets by Ellen G. White.

SERMON & READING NOTES
SERMON STUDY OUTLINE

Title: “Faith of Our Fathers: Samson”
Series: “Faith of Our Fathers” 7 of 9
Preached: BJ Boles (04/23/11) @ Augusta 1st SDA Church
Key Passage: Judges 16:20

INTRODUCTION (Background)
STATE OF ISRAEL (Judges 2:11-13 & 2:16-17 & 5:33-34 & 13:1)

GIDEON (Judges 6-8)

DIVINE ANNOUNCEMENT & INSTRUCTION (Judges 13:2-25)

KEY EVENTS
SEEKS PHILISTINE WIFE (Judges 14:1-10)

RIDDLE, LOSS OF WIFE, VENGEANCE (Judges 14:11-15:8)

ISRAELITES TURN OVER SAMSON (Judges 15:9-17)

GOD PROVIDES & JUDGES 20 YEARS (Judges 15:18-20)

HARLOT IN GAZA & DELILAH (Judges 16)

IMPRISONMENT & DEATH (Judges 16:20-31)

LAW OF THE NAZIRITE
Read Numbers 6:1-21 which describes the law of the Nazirite.
What are the 3 key components of the vow applied to Samson:
1. No Wine, Vinegar, Grape products, Raisins
2. Not to cut hair
3. No unclean thing

CHRIST COMPARISONS
Samson, unlike Christ, disregarded his divine calling and sinned against God. However, he serves as a “type” of Christ.
1. Miraculous Birth
2. Holy from birth (set aside from birth)
3. Faced crisis alone
4. God took special care of him
5. Betrayed for silver
6. He sacrificed his life to deliver God’s people

PATRIARCH COMPARISONS
Explore parallels in the story of Samson with the other patriarchs we have looked at in this series: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Joshua.
STUDY NOTES

FURTHER READING
The suggested supplemental reading for this topic of “Samson” is found in chapter 54 of the book Patriarchs and Prophets by Ellen G. White.

SERMON & READING NOTES
SERMON STUDY OUTLINE

Sermon Title: "Faith of Our Fathers: Samuel"
Speaker: Pastor BJ Boles
Date: Sabbath, April 30, 2011
Key Passage: 1 Samuel 2:26

INTRODUCTION (Background)
ELKANAH & HANNAH (JUDGES 6:8)

HANNAH'S PRAYERS (1 SAMUEL 1:10-18 & 2:1-10)

KEY EVENTS
SAMUEL'S BIRTH & DEDICATION (1 SAMUEL 1:15-28)
ELI'S SONS (1 SAMUEL 2:12-26)
GOD SPEAKS TO SAMUEL (1 SAMUEL 3:1-21)
SAMUEL & THE PHILISTINES (1 SAMUEL 7:3-17)
ISRAEL REJECTS SAMUEL (1 SAMUEL 8:1-22)
SAMUEL ANNOUNCES SAUL 1ST KING (1 SAMUEL 9:12)
GOD REJECTS SAUL (1 SAMUEL 15)
SAMUEL ANNOUNCES DAVID (1 SAMUEL 16)

7 LESSONS LEARNED
1. Pray to God (1 SAMUEL 1:15-17 & 15:11)
2. Hear God (1 SAMUEL 3:10)
3. Live for God (1 SAMUEL 2:18)
4. Obey God (1 SAMUEL 15:22)
5. Please God (1 SAMUEL 15:24)
6. Accept God's Word (1 SAMUEL 15:26)
7. Return to God (1 SAMUEL 7:3)

THE EASY WAY?

PATRIARCH COMPARISONS
Explore parallels in the story of Samuel with the other patriarchs we have looked at in this series: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua & Samuel.
FURTHER READING
The suggested supplemental reading for this topic of “Samuel” is found in chapter 55, 57-58 of the book *Patriarchs and Prophets* by Ellen G. White.

SERMON & READING NOTES

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SERMON STUDY OUTLINE

Title: “Faith of Our Fathers: David"
Series: “Faith of Our Fathers” 9 of 9
Preached: BJ Boles (05/07/11) @ Augusta 1st SDA Church
Key Passage: Acts 13:22

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KEY EVENTS (Early Years)

GOD ANNOITS DAVID (1ST SAMUEL 16:1-13)

DAVID DEFEATS GOliATH (1ST SAMUEL 17:1-58)

SAUL TRIES TO KILL DAVID (1ST SAMUEL 18:10—28:2)

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KEY EVENTS (As King)

DAVID UNITES KINGDOM / MOVES ARK (2ND SAM 1—7)

DAVID DEFEATS ENEMIES (2ND SAMUEL 8—10)

3 SINS (BATHSHEBA/URIAH/CENSUS) (2ND SAMUEL 11 & 24)

CONSEQUENCES OF DAVID’S SINS (2ND SAMUEL 12—24)

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CONSEQUENCES OF DAVID’S SINS

David lamented acts rest of life: Others suffered because of sins;
Lost infant son; Lost respect with people; Lost moral authority;
Sons see and follow bad example; Disgrace, incest and death in the
royal house; Shamed Cause of God; Legacy for God tarnished;
Complicated life and ability to carry out God’s will...

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HEART CONDITION

• David is “man after His own heart” (1 Sam 13:14 & Acts 13:22)
• “Lord doesn’t see as man...but looks at heart” (1 Sam 16:7)
• David: “God...knows secrets of the heart” (Psalm 44:21)
• David: “Search me God and know my heart” (Psalm 139:23)
• David: “Create in me clean heart” (Psalm 51:10)
• In end: “Every intent of heart evil...” (Gen 6:5 & Matt 24:37)
• “Trust in the Lord with all your heart...” (Prov 3:5)

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COMPARE/CONTRAST THE 9

Compare and contrast Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses,
Joshua, Samson, Samuel and David. Look for patterns in:
⇒ Ways God communicated, called, tested & prepared them
⇒ Characters, Sins they committed; Consequences for sins
⇒ “God’s timeline” for each (From moment called to service)
⇒ How they each played part in fulfilling God’s covenant
FURTHER READING
The suggested supplemental reading for this topic of “David” is found in chapter 62-73 of the book Patriarchs and Prophets by Ellen G. White.

SERMON & READING NOTES
Our study of Noah’s faith begins on a very sad note in Chapter 6 of Genesis.

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5 NKJV)

We know that we live in evil times today. But the fact is that the Bible warns us that the evil will only continue to increase, and the wickedness of man will become greater and greater, in these last days before Christ’s return until:

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. (Matthew 24:37 NIV)

Even as evil as the world is today, we still see moments when people’s hearts soften just a little, such as at Christmas time when people are feeling a bit charitable or even during a tragedy that draws people together. Thus, it might be hard for us to fathom that it was so bad in Noah’s time that people’s hearts were evil all the time! That was the catalyst that caused God to implement the next stage of His plan when He did.

And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. (Genesis 6:6 NKJV)

Parents can understand this kind of grief. It is a grief brought on when your children do things that are harmful to themselves or others. I feel great sympathy for the mothers of “shooters” who take a gun and randomly shoot people, whether it’s in a school or a movie theater or a nightclub. It never fails that the news crews stick a camera and a microphone in the shooter’s mother’s face and ask her questions for which she has no answers. She only knows that she did not raise, or she did not intend to raise, her child into that kind of person. Likewise, in the days of Noah, God knew that man, created in His image, had deviated from the path He intended man to take.

So the Lord said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I made them.” (Genesis 6:7 NKJV)

When the word “sorry” is used in Genesis 6:7, God is not saying that He made a mistake but rather that He is mourning because He didn’t intend this outcome for man and because He is grieved that evil is everywhere. But we can’t stop reading the story here, because God has a plan, and Genesis 6:7 is setting the stage for the implementation of that plan. Many times, if we look only at selected verses and take them out of context, we only get a portion of the story. It’s similar to what happens with rumors. For instance, you might ask a friend, “Do you know David?” To which the friend replies, “No, I don’t know David.” So you might suggest, “Well, we ought to get together and go out to eat sometime or go to a basketball game or something.” And then you’re surprised when your friend replies, “Oh, I don’t think so.” So you ask, “Well why not? You don’t know him.” But your friend answers, “Well I’ve heard...that he’s a terrible person.” Unfortunately, your friend has only heard half of the story, and has never gone to meet David to understand who he is and to give him a chance. That’s how it is when we only hear half of the story when reading the Bible too—when we only hear half of the story, we can come to some very poor conclusions. But if we continue to read the 6th chapter of Genesis, we discover that even though everything on the Earth was evil, not everyone was evil. There was a ray of hope for humanity.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. (Genesis 6:8 NKJV)
What a simple verse. God saw Noah. God already had a plan; and the verses we’ve studied above were setting the stage for why He was going to do what He was going to do. God was not changing His plan but rather it was part of His plan to reach out to Noah and use him to save a remnant of humanity. God always has a plan.

When we find ourselves in an unfavorable situation, we can assess the situation and find that it seems bleak and dark and overwhelming and even impossible—but that’s before we understand God’s plan. Sometimes, however, we don’t have an understanding of God’s plan—it’s at those times that we just watch His plan unfold before our eyes! God always has a plan. God is always bigger than any situation we’ll ever face. As Jesus taught, there are no impossibilities with God:

But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26 NKJV)

All things are possible!

One might look at the situation of the earth at the start of the 6th chapter of Genesis and think that the situation is hopeless and determine in reading verse 7 that God’s going to destroy the Earth completely and abandon His creation. But, ultimately, what verse 7 is saying is that He’s going to cleanse and restore.

As we look at what happens with Noah, we must consider what happens in the last days also—not because there are obvious parallels, but because Christ told us to:

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. (Matthew 24:37 NIV)

As it was in the days of Noah!

It will be very evil in the last days, and the actions God takes in the last days will be similar to His actions in the days of Noah, in that He saves and restores His people while cleansing the Earth from sin. His actions in the days of Noah are actually a forecast, a prog nostication, of what will happen permanently in the last days. Noah would serve as a form or type of Messiah. By listening to God, Noah would demonstrate that if we put our allegiance with God, we will be saved.

We learn the type of man that Noah was in verse 9:

This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. (Genesis 6:9 NKJV)

He was a just man. That does not mean that Noah was without sin. There has only been One who has lived without sin: Our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. So what does it mean to be a just man? What does it mean to be a just woman? When we contrast Noah being called “just” with what we read earlier in Genesis 6:5, we see that the thoughts of the minds of everyone else was evil continually. In other words, they had already made an allegiance to go away from God’s way. “Evil” is a description of going against God’s way. “Sin” is the result of an action or the mindset of going against God’s way. Thus, we find that the people had rejected God’s way. They had rejected God’s plan. In contrast, Noah was a man who was “just.” He was a man who was on the path with God.

As it was in the days of Noah... We see here that percentages don’t help us if we’re trying to choose the right side. The vast majority of the people in the time before the flood were evil. While there was a way provided for them to be saved—most rejected that way, resulting in only Noah and his family being saved. Likewise, in these last days, people say, “Well, I see the Sabbath, but you know, millions of Christians can’t be wrong” or “I understand that God will someday have a judgment and a day of
accountability, and that there will be an accountability for all the sinners, and there will be a lake of fire, but I can't imagine that millions and billions of people will be burned!” However, the Bible says, “This is the way. Walk ye in it.” There’s no other way to salvation. The devil plays with our minds but it only makes us feel good for a little while. Until, just as it was in the days of Noah, we hear the raindrops and realize, “Oh! God’s serious.”

Noah was a just man. A just man or woman seeks to honor God with his or her decisions, actions, and words. Think of a person whom you would call just. You know that person isn’t perfect. You know that person has issues. However, there are people who stand out because they lead their lives trying to emulate God’s character. They stand out as Noah stood out. Noah was a just man.

But what does the phrase perfect in his generations mean in verse 9? What it means is that, in stark contrast to the verses that told of the evil in the world, Noah was blameless in his time. He was on the opposite side of the evil. Perfect in his generations.

We are all saved through Christ and His righteousness. We are found blameless not because of what we do, but because we’ve accepted the robe of righteousness of Jesus Christ. In those final last days, the contrast will get greater and greater between those who are following Satan and those who are following Christ—those who are following the beast and those who are following the Lamb. The contrast is that we are blameless before the Judge in the divine judgment scene because Jesus Christ is there with us. Noah was blameless because he had sided with God and was following God, and so God spoke to Noah:

“...And God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch.”” (Genesis 6:13-14 NKJV)

God gave Noah all the details of how to build the ark. We see here an important aspect of Noah’s character—he unquestioningly did all that God told him. In a time when no one even understood what a flood was, because it had never even rained before, in a time when there’d never been a boat that large, in a time when people would ridicule and challenge him, Noah said an unquestioning, “Yes Lord.”

How much easier would our spiritual journey, our walk with Christ, be if we simply listened and obeyed the Lord? We may not understand God’s plans, but God understands we don’t understand. In the Psalms, David expressed his doubts, questions, and lack of understanding of the purposes of God, but still he said that he would do all that the Lord said.

Think about the journey that Noah took in his character regarding patience. When God gives a big vision to His people, we all get excited at the beginning; however, the true test of faith is whether or not we’re willing to be in God’s timeline. Not everything happens quickly. Imagine Noah in the beginning of this journey. He rallied a lot of people to help him in the beginning. They were building because Noah thought that maybe the flood was coming in the next couple of months. But they waited month after month, and then year after year, and the flood still did not come. Certainly, there would have been opportunity during this time for Noah to doubt that he’d understood God correctly. However, Noah remained faithful and true to the purpose to which God had called him. He remained faithful and true to a belief in the future and what God had said would happen. He remained faithful and true to the hope that his salvation was tied to God.

Think about what happens in the Church when time goes on and on, and Jesus doesn’t return? Scoffers come into the Church and question the promise of Jesus’s Second Coming. The devil wants to get inside our minds and tempt us to reject our hope in Christ. He wants us to question how we know Christ will return because, just like there had never been a flood before Noah’s time, Jesus has never returned before! So Noah became a community laughing stock and the target of scorn. Yet he remained faithful to the cause.
There was only One who knew when the flood was going to come: the same One who called Noah. The same One who told Noah that He would take care of him and his family is the same One who knew when it was going to come. When we accept the call to become a Christian and we go forward to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and the three angels’ messages about preparing for the soon-coming end of the world, we aren’t told exactly when it will happen. God, who called us, as He called Noah, is the only One who knows when that will happen. Our call is to remain faithful.

God’s Word does not return unto Him void. When God says something, He does it. When God says something, He means it. When God says something, He accomplishes it. We can count on the Word of the Lord. We need to just remain strong in our faith and remain strong in our hope, because the same God who has never lied is the same God who has told us, “I am coming again.”

We find that Noah was obedient.

"Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.” (Genesis 6:22 NKJV)

All that the Lord commanded him! God was careful to give very detailed instructions on how to build this ark. Noah might have been tempted to follow the spirit of God’s intentions and to cut some corners on the application. Noah might have been tempted to say, “Gopher wood’s awful heavy, Lord. You know, these trees over here are a lot closer, they’re a lot lighter, and if we made it with this kind of wood—I’m pretty sure that we could get it done quicker, and that is going accomplish the task that You want.”

Why do we argue with God’s instructions? Why do we presume to know more than God? God invites us to keep a special day, a day that He created and set aside as holy. Yet many argue with God—as if it’s up for negotiation! As if we can come before God and say, “God, my schedule is not convenient to keep that day. So I’m going to honor all the other principles but keep this day instead.” It would have been as just as foolish for Noah to build that ark while making modifications to God’s plan. When God gives detailed instructions, there is a reason why He is doing that! Yet sometimes we either follow our own hearts or we think we are more intelligent than we are and we try to help God out with His plans! Yet Noah did according to all that God commanded. Likewise, we need to know that cutting corners as a Christian never works!

This is exemplified in the interaction between the rich young ruler and Jesus, which is recounted in the 10th chapter of Mark:

Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Do not defraud,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’” And he answered and said to Him, “Teacher, all these things have I kept from my youth.” Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.” But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (Mark 10:17-22 NKJV)

When the young man professed that he’d kept all of the Commandments since he was a child, he was hoping that Jesus would say he’d done good. He didn’t want to hear that he was lacking anything. But God, reading the young man’s heart, told him there was one thing he lacked. But that one thing was more than the young man was willing to do. He was not willing to sell all that he had and to give the proceeds to the poor, because he had great possessions, and he was not willing to leave it all behind to follow Jesus. God always looks at the heart.
Noah has an obedient heart. We also see in Genesis 8:20 that Noah always put God first:

*Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. (Genesis 8:20 NKJV)*

The first thing that Noah did when he got out of the ark was to make a sacrifice to honor God and to celebrate and glorify God’s name. I want to put that into context. They had been cooped up in the ark with all those animals, probably eating a very minimal amount to get through—then they are finally *outside!* Animals are hard to come by because the only animals around are the ones that were in the ark. Yet, having a barbecue isn’t the first thing that Noah does! He wanted instead to honor God. He put God first.

How many times in the celebration of God’s miracle have you forgotten to thank God? We’re intense in prayer during the crises.

For instance, say that “Brother Joe” is in the hospital. We all have to come together and we all have to pray. But then “Brother Joe” gets better and everyone’s happy and everyone’s celebrating. But what caused “Brother Joe” to get well?

Another example is that you’re late for work and you can’t find your keys. Situations such as this happen frequently in homes. So you shoot up a prayer, “Lord, help me find my keys.” You keep looking and you quickly find your keys—so you rush to work as if you found them!

God first! God first in all things.

Immediately after Noah honors God, Noah is blessed by God:

*So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” (Genesis 9:1 NKJV)*

God bestows His blessings on those who are in His camp. Noah is one of the men who is said to have walked with God. You can probably remember the other: Enoch; Enoch walked with God. A good afternoon spiritual exercise is to turn to Hebrews 11 and read what it says about Enoch and Noah. Look at their parallels and the similarities. Noah walked with God. Enoch walked with God. I think that sometimes we desire to be blessed by God but walk by ourselves on our own path. However, God will not bless you so that you can sin more abundantly. God will not encourage you and empower you and enable you to go on a path that leads away from Him. It is only those who desire with all their heart to walk with God that He blesses and empowers because He won’t help you hurt yourself.

Remember the Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski? He had blown up many different kinds of bombs, resulting in the injuries and deaths of many people. The FBI sought him for 17 years in a worldwide search. Do you know how they ultimately caught him? The FBI published his manifesto, and his brother read the manifesto and identified him. As much as his brother loved his own, he couldn’t help him hurt people.

Satan would have us view God as a God who’s oppressive and vengeful and hurtful. But, ultimately, God’s goal is the redemption of His own, redemption back to Himself, to prevent us from hurting ourselves and hurting others. In the end, a strange act of God will be to prevent harm to those who want to walk with Him.

The book of 2 Peter tells us that Noah was a “preacher of righteousness.”

*and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly. (2 Peter 2:5 NKJV)*
Now, think about Noah’s preaching. He preached basically the same sermon, consistently, for 120 years. Imagine how he might have considered himself to be a failure because he preached the same message God told him for all those years—yet the only people who went in the ark were his family! He could have assessed his career as a minister, his career as a God-fearing servant, and said, “I am a failure!” Was Noah a failure? Not! We are not to judge our success with the Lord based on the results! You are successful in the Lord if you heed His call and obey His command. You are successful if you are faithful to the cause.

For example, maybe a church hasn’t had a baptism in a long time. It could indicate that there’s a spiritual problem. But it might indicate something totally different! It might indicate a hard-hearted community. The question isn’t, “Why hasn’t there been a baptism?” The question is, “Are they being faithful to the Lord?” When you step back, what is more impressive to you spiritually? Someone truly walking with God or someone baptizing 1000 people? I’ve met men who’ve baptized 1000 people, and some of them I wasn’t impressed with. The people in your life who walk with God, they leave an impression!

There were towns that rejected Jesus and His message. There were towns that rejected the disciples and His message. In the end, Jesus died alone! We don’t quantify success!

Someone might boast, “I’ve been a member for 50 years in the church.” Well, praise God for that, but the quantity of years doesn’t mean anything. What is important is: are you faithful to the call and obedient to His will? That is true success!

Noah’s character is one that we want to emulate—ultimately because Noah wanted to emulate God. Therefore, our goal should be to emulate God also! Noah was faithful and obedient. He preached what God told him over and over again. Likewise, you may have repeatedly witnessed to your family. You’ve witnessed to your neighbors. You’ve witnessed to friends. But you’ve been discouraged because they rejected the message. However, if you are sincere and you are witnessing with integrity and righteousness—and you’re not beating people over the head—then don’t take it so personally.

Ultimately, they’re not rejecting you, they’re rejecting Jesus and His message. Jesus instructed His disciples on what to do if a group or an individual rejects His message:

> And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. (Matthew 10:14 NKJV)

Jesus also admonished His disciples to not get so caught up in the emotions of one person or group rejecting them that they would question their mission:

> Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” (Matthew 9:37 NKJV)

If you believe God, then this teaching means that there are others that need to be harvested! Be a faithful witness. Be obedient to the Lord’s call. Share His message with everyone you can. But if they reject His message—move on, for the harvest is great!

God wants to use us, just as He used Noah.

In Hebrews 11, that famous chapter that talks about faith and all the individuals in the Bible who highlighted that faith, we find a little section on Noah:

> By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. (Hebrews 11:7 NKJV)
Likewise today, by faith the remnant of God, being warned about what is to come in the end, moved with Godly fear. Preparing a people for His soon coming and for the saving of God’s household. God has condemned the world, but we can become heirs of righteousness according to faith.

I pray that, as we look at the biblical character of Noah, we can glean some key insights and apply them to our own walk with God. I pray that my personal walk with God would characterize my life to the point that if someone were asked to describe me—rather than physical characteristics, the description would be, “He walks with God.” How simple, yet how powerful, a testimony! May our character and our testimony be:

"He walked with God."

"She walked with God."

Have faith brothers and sisters. Be obedient to the Lord’s will, and He will save the righteous.
The story of Abraham, father to not just one current religion but three major religions of the world that trace their lineage back to Abraham, is a story of faith. The story of Abraham is a story of learning to let God do His will in His way. The story of Abraham is a story about learning that God doesn’t need our help to fulfill His promises and His will in our lives—rather, we simply need to submit. The story of Abraham is a story that proves to us that God keeps His promises. The story of Abraham is a story of courage in the Lord. And finally, the story of Abraham is a story about faith.

We’ll begin our look at Abraham’s journey of faith by looking at his story as it is recounted in the book of Hebrews, Chapter 11, beginning at verse 8:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an Inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:8-10 NKJV)

This summary of Abraham is a summary of a fascinating story of success! People without Christ seek objectives of money and wealth and power, and they put people down and they climb over people and they do anything they can to achieve those objectives. But here we have Abraham, who throughout his life kept demonstrating that possessions didn’t matter to him; yet he was one of the wealthiest men in God’s history. Jesus tells us a little about this—doesn’t He? The first shall be last, the last shall be first. Those who seek earthly kingdoms—that earthly kingdom may be their only reward if they lose the heavenly kingdom. But those who seek, as it says in Hebrews, a city whose foundation is God, those who seek eternal things, those who seek God’s kingdom, even though the things of earth aren’t important in eternity, God provides them—and in many cases, such as Abraham’s, God blesses them.

Now, if Abraham had veered from his walk with God, maybe all of that would’ve been different. But from the beginning, God called him to leave his home country of Ur. Abraham had a comfortable life in Ur. His whole family was there. He had a lot of sheep and livestock, which was one of the ways that wealth was assessed in that time. He also had a lot of people in his household—not just family but helpers and servants also. Yet he was willing to leave all that and, taking all those who wanted to accompany him, go to a place that he did not even know where he was going. Today we might say he didn’t have a penny to his name after he left Ur. However, eventually he and Lot, his nephew, had difficulty surviving together because they had become so wealthy that there wasn’t enough land in the same area to take care of their livestock! This caused their households to fight between each other, so Abraham and Lot had to choose to separate and go in different directions. It was at this time that Abraham, even though he had been given the promise of the whole land, yielded and allowed Lot to choose the land he wanted when they separated. Of course, Lot chose the best land. So Abraham settled in another area and God blessed him abundantly. Later, when Lot was under siege and taken captive, Abraham didn’t have a bitter spirit about Lot taking the best land—instead he went and rescued Lot.

The biggest sacrifice Abraham would be asked to make wouldn’t be giving up sheep and goats or orchards and trees. God would eventually put Abraham to the ultimate test and ask him to give up his own son. Thus, the story of Abraham in Hebrews 11 begins in verse 8 with the words “By faith...”

Faith is the belief in those things that we cannot see, but that we know are real.
By faith... The belief in God, and that His way will be successful, even though we don’t know what steps God will take to bring that success about.

By faith... The willingness to obey God, even though we don’t know why He wants us to do what He tells us to do, what it means, where we’re going, or how it will work. Faith is being willing to take that step when God says, “Step.”

My little three-year-old is now getting into the phase of “why?” Do you remember that phase with your children? At the beginning it’s so cute. They want to know why this and why that, and as a parent you go through long explanations. However, after a while, you get tired of answering every single question about every single thing. Small children don’t have the understanding and the depth of knowledge and the vocabulary to fully grasp your answers, so when you’re answering one “why” question and describing something to them—they have questions about the answer! And then the next answer has questions: Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?

I would imagine that God must also feel that way sometimes with us. He is very patient when we ask Him questions; however, is there any way that God can truly connect and explain His will to us in our human condition, in our simple state? Even if God were to sit next to one of us and to begin that explanation—would we be capable of really understanding the divine things now? It would be like me trying to explain “why” to a small child regarding something that requires a very intricate answer.

When God called Abraham, He just told him that He wanted him to pack up and go. God told Abraham that He would show him where he was going en route! Where would your faith be if God were to tell you to leave your home, take your family and whatever you can fit in a UHaul, take this highway, then that highway, turn this way, then turn that way, and keep going until He told you to stop.

Can you imagine the conversation Abraham had with his wife? I would imagine it went something like this:

“Honey, I’ve heard from the Lord!”

“Oh, that is exciting! What did the Lord tell you?”

“Well, He wants us to pack up everything and leave.”

“Are you sure it was the Lord? Are you sure that’s what God wants?”

We talk about Abraham’s faith, but Sarah had faith as well. She went with him. She also had faith to move first when God calls and asks questions later—or in some cases, maybe not ask questions at all. It’s not that questions are sinful. In fact, I believe that if Abraham had been more honest with God about his questions, he wouldn’t have tried to “help God out” later in life regarding the promise of a covenant son; he wouldn’t have tried to fulfill God’s promise by doing it humanly. If Abraham had laid himself out before the Lord and said, “God, I’m really worried. My wife is worried. You promised us this great lineage. You promised us that all our descendants would be like the sand in the sea, the stars in the sky but Lord, we don’t even have any children! How is this going to be possible God? We’re getting older and you know, we made us, old people don’t have kids, Lord. How is this promise to be?” Instead, Abraham, as we all can if we listen to the temptation of the devil, began to question God’s calling and promise.

The Bible tells us that in the last days there will be scoffers questioning where the promise of Christ’s return.
knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." (2 Peter 3:3-4 NKJV)

The Bible also says that in the last days people will have itching ears. The truths of the Bible, the promises of God are not enough anymore—they want more! Therefore, instead of standing on God's promises, instead of standing in faith and walking in the path that God has set forth, instead of sharing the gospel and sharing the Great Commission and sharing the three angels' messages, the Bible says that they heap up for themselves their own teachers and follow after them!

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Timothy 4:3-4 NKJV)

If we don't walk by faith, we may walk off a cliff! Conversely, if we walk do by faith, we may not know where we're going—but we can be sure and confident that God does!

Our family sometimes takes long trips in the car. We've found that it's sometimes better to drive at night while the kids are asleep. Why is that? Because, again, something parents can communally relate to, the kids have no idea how to get where we're going, and so if they're awake, they ask about every ten minutes, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" But if they put their total trust in us as their parents, and just go to sleep, what happens is that they wake up at the destination! They don't have to go through that anxiety of the trip being too long for them and the constant questioning of "Are we there yet?"

God is so patient with us. We question, "When are You coming, Lord? It's been so long!" But God wants us to know that what seems to us like a long wait for His coming is really relative. He wants us to understand that He exists in eternity and will continue to exist in eternity and that what He's trying to do for each of us will last for eternity. He wants us to realize that those years are but a small moment in eternity but He knows that's hard for us to understand now; so He wants us to just be patient and wait on Him and see what He is doing. The enemy of faith is impatience—God wants us to have faith.

In Genesis, Chapter 12, we find the beginning of God's covenant with Abraham. This promise to Abraham for something great is repeated throughout his life and then later throughout the Bible. This covenant begins with verse 1, where we find the call of Abraham to leave and to go where God directs him:

Now the Lord had said to Abram:
"Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father's house,
To a land that I will show you.
I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:1-3 NKJV)

God always calls us from something ordinary to something great.

So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. (Genesis 12:4 NKJV)
Abram (later his name would be changed to Abraham in the covenant) was 75 years old when he began his journey. He was 75 years old when he began this journey! Too often we get perplexed and impatient. Perhaps even Abraham felt this way later on when he was even older and the promise still hadn't been fulfilled. Sometimes we think that life has passed us by and we're too old to reach our goals. For instance, some young people put what seems to be a "mystical age" by which they feel they must be married. Then, when they get to that age and aren't married, they think it's all over and they're too old to get married! Another example is the "midlife crisis." Adults set goals in their lives, men seem to go through this more than women, and when they reach what they consider their "midlife," they suffer from feelings of disappointment and discouragement because they didn't achieve their goals. They think that because they didn't fulfill their goals on their timeline that it's all over for them! This happens once more when people reach retirement age. Many people, when they reach the end of their working years, think it's all over for them! They feel discouraged and disappointed because they didn't achieve in their lives what they had wanted to achieve. They think it's time for the younger generation to step in and that they are to just sit and wait for the Lord.

At 75 years old Abraham was called! He wasn't just called—he was told to get up and move! And moving him wasn't all that God was going to do in Abraham's life—God was going to teach him patience! Even at that advanced age! God was also going to call him to do courageous things—even going to war! He was also going to use him to rescue his nephew, Lot.

God wants to use you, no matter what your age. God has a plan for your life.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

Therefore, do not check out if God has not checked you out! Be willing to serve and respond to His call. Be willing to live for God. Be a man of faith, be a woman of faith, wherever you are! If you breathe—serve God! If you breathe—be willing to respond to God. It doesn't matter if you're in the beginning of your life or the end of your life; if God calls—answer the call! And as you answer the call, be a man or woman of faith!

God can do incredible things with a 100-year-old man or woman just as well as He can with a 6-year-old child. The question is—are you willing to serve? God can use you if you have no legs, and God can use you if you're an athlete. God can use you if you are a poor widow, and God can use you if you're one of the wealthiest people on the face of the Earth. If God calls you—you can be used! Some people try to use the excuse, "Well, I don't speak well." Neither did Moses! Another excuse is, "I don't have any training." There are many instances in the Bible when God called the untrained and the uneducated and the un-pedigreed. Gideon, for instance, was least in the tribe that was the least tribe of Israel. When God calls, be ready to move!

If God calls you to do something great—God's already "got your back." God already knows how He's going to achieve that success in you. God would never call you to do anything unless through His power you will be successful!

The story of Abraham; his whole life began by being willing to respond to the Lord's call in faith. God taught him and corrected him and caused him to grow.

Abraham got caught lying twice—his poor wife! He drags her out of their homeland. He drags her away from his family. Then, at one point, he puts her into a situation where he acts like they're not even married! You know ladies, one thing you think you have in life is that your man's going to stand by you. He's going to stand up for you. He's going to protect you! But Abraham denied being married to Sarah and claimed that she was his sister! He denied they were married because he didn't want to be killed. But what he was ultimately saying was, "You can have her." But God protected her. God came down
and protected her from Pharaoh. God came down and protected her from anything that might happen to her in that situation. Ladies, this story illustrates that you don't need a man to protect you because God will protect you.

God moves ahead of us; and if we're in His hand, He will protect us.

There's a beautiful story in the life of Abraham that gives us insight into his heart. We've already seen his selflessness and his willingness to give up things, such as when he allowed his nephew, Lot, to choose the better land. But when God told Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, his response wasn't, "You're right, Lord, they are just a filthy people. My nephew and his family, they're all corrupt too. I see those girls and what they're wearing; and that woman he married—I'll tell You what, Lord, You're right, I don't see anything good down there." Instead, what was his response? Abraham pleaded. He pleaded not just for his own family—he pleaded for all the people. Abraham had a heart and a passion for the lost, which was akin to the heart of God.

Why do we witness? I dare say that some people witness out of fear. Some people witness because they think if they do it'll hurry God's coming and they'll get to Heaven sooner. I pray that we can witness because we have a passion for the lost. As much as I want to go home to see Jesus, when we have a passion for the lost, we want more time to reach them. That's a different perspective—isn't it? I want Jesus to come; but even more so, I want my brother, my sister, my neighbor, my coworker—I want them to know Jesus. "Oh, Lord, don't come—don't come just yet. My son doesn't know Jesus. Lord, don't come just yet! We're still talking to Mrs. Smith who lives next door. Lord, don't come just yet! Look at all the people who are so in sin." The heart of the Christian is to anticipate the Kingdom that's not made with hands, but to yearn for the souls of the lost. "Just one more. Just one more."

Oskar Schindler, the man whose story was told by the famous movie Schindler's List, used industry in Germany during World War II to save the lives of many Jews. Through bribery and giving money, he was able to save many Jews and to prevent them from being killed. In the end, when even that wasn't going to work and the Nazis came in, Oskar Schindler is said to have broken down and started looking at his watch and other things and saying, "This—I could have saved one more if I'd have given this watch and sold it. Just one more."

The passion of our lives is for Christ—to walk with Christ and to know that we will one day see Him face-to-face. To walk in faith with the heart of Christ is to have a heart for the lost. Thus, our heart cry should be: "Lord, how can You use me, an imperfect vessel, to reach the lost?"

As we come to a close in our brief look at the faith of Abraham, I want to look at one critical event that demonstrated his willingness to give up everything for God. From the moment that God first made the promise of the covenant to Abraham, his life revolved around a future son—and eventually Abraham had that promised son! The promise that God had made to Abraham was that he would have a son and he would have a legacy and that it would grow and fill the sky. Therefore, when God came to Abraham and said, "Abraham, I want you to take your son, just like at the beginning, and I want you to go." As Abraham obeyed, God's instructions on the way made it clearer and clearer that God wanted Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham could have responded, "Lord, how can you be asking me to do this after the journey we've been through and I messed up and then you still blessed me? And that covenant! How, Lord? You know that I'm really old now. And you know how this is going to break his momma's heart! How can you ask this?" But Abraham, being a man of faith, moved when God asked. Did he have questions? I'm sure he did. However, he had learned to trust God regardless of his questions, because he knew that God would always do what was right.

But Abraham's ultimate test of faith included the journey to the mountain where he was to sacrifice Isaac. His test included setting up camp. His test included climbing up the mountain. His test included putting the wood on the altar. His test included telling Isaac what was happening. It was when the knife was coming down on Isaac that God stopped him and concluded his test of Abraham's faith.
Abraham endured true and severe tests; but throughout his life he learned that when living and moving by faith, God would always take care of him. He learned that God’s way would always be the best way. God did bless Abraham. God did keep His promises to Abraham. I pray that we can learn from Abraham’s experience to live by faith—to move and respond when God calls, because God will always take care of us.
Title: “Faith of Our Fathers: Jacob”
Series: “Faith of Our Fathers” 3 of 9
Preached: BJ Boles (03/19/11) @ Augusta 1st SDA Church
Key Passage: Hebrews 11:20-21

To begin our study of Jacob, whose story is also recounted in Hebrews 11, we’ll look at what this chapter of faith says about Isaac, who was the promised son of Abraham and the father of Jacob:

*By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. (Hebrews 11:20-21 NKJV)*

Joseph, the son of Jacob, will be studied in a later chapter.

There are some unique things about each character that we explore in this study of Hebrews 11. But there also seems to be a trend; there seems to be a thread that ties them all together. One thread is that Jesus’s mission is tied into their lives in that they were called for a specific purpose. Another thread is that they often had to wait for extended periods of time for that promise or that calling to be fulfilled. Perhaps this was testing their faith. Perhaps this was growing them in their faith. Whatever God’s reason was for making them wait, we see that patience had to be cultivated before they could serve in the capacity in which they were called.

The line that God would start for His people began with the promise to Abraham and then developed into Isaac; and we find in Hebrews 11:20-21, again speaking of the blessing, the birth of the next generation that was Esau and Jacob. God would be testing Isaac, as he had his father, Abraham. But interestingly, if we remember the story of Abraham, God’s promise to him to have a child didn’t come until the end of his life! Abraham lived his whole life in anticipation of the promise—every day wondering if “this” would be the year. He waited so long that as he neared the end of his life, he thought it wasn’t going to happen. Then, a few years after the promise was fulfilled, God tested Abraham’s faith once more. God called Abraham to take Isaac, his precious son in whom the promise would be fulfilled for a great nation, and to sacrifice him. Of course, it was a test of Abraham. However, Abraham’s faith was strong and he was obedient, and God provided a ram.

Isaac knew from the very beginning of his life, from the stories his father and mother told him, that he had a special purpose and his purpose was to be that father, Abraham’s lineage, of a great nation whose population would be as great as the sand, as great as the stars. Yet, Isaac ended up with the same dilemma as his father. After he got married, he probably assumed that they were going to have children right away. However, that didn’t happen!

How is it that God can have a plan for you? How is it that God could have a promise for you? How is it that God could have a purpose for your life? And then you have to wait?

Many who read this are wondering:

*Does God have a purpose for my life?*

*I believe the promise that He’s coming—but it’s been so long!*

*I’ve lived a long life—but it seems there’s something else!*

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. On down the line. God’s purpose is always fulfilled in His time. If we live our lives according to His will, His purpose will be unveiled. His purpose will be revealed.
I’d like to share the account of the birth of Esau and Jacob to demonstrate the patience that had to be endured, even for the birth of Jacob. The story really begins in the 25th Chapter of Genesis at verse 19:

This is the genealogy of Isaac, Abraham’s son. Abraham begot Isaac. Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. (Genesis 25:19-21 NKJV)

God already had the plan. God had already promised that this would be a great nation. Yet Isaac and his wife had to demonstrate patience—and it wasn’t just about them. They had to realize that God was going to do this. Just as the birth of Isaac was a miracle for Abraham and Sarah—how many ladies of that age do you know having children? God had to have done that! Now Isaac and Rebekah couldn’t have children either. However, again, a miracle, and she conceives! God had to have done that again!

But the children struggled together within her; and she said, “if all is well, why am I like this?” So she went to inquire of the Lord. (Genesis 25:22 NKJV)

There was a even message for Isaac and Rebekah in the way that Jacob was going to be born. But you notice that the road to the promise isn’t all smooth! Even when we’re on the path of God, it’s not all smooth road! There are bumps in the road. There are questions. There are challenges. Rebekah questioned, “Lord, You performed the miracle! You did something powerful and now I’m pregnant—but this isn’t right! What’s going on? Something’s not right!” However, she found out that the pregnancy was fine. What she deemed as a complication was actually God sending a message.

I wonder how often that we equate “smooth sailing” with, “This must be God’s will.” However, that’s not a good equation. Many times when we choose God’s will we should actually expect turbulence because the adversary doesn’t want us to accomplish God’s will. In this case though, it’s yet another scenario in which God had a special message through the turbulence. God can speak to us through the turbulent storms? God can send messages to us when things aren’t going smoothly? To her credit, Rebekah went to the Lord to inquire. We find the message from the Lord in verse 23:

And the Lord said to her:
“Two nations are in your womb;
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;
One people shall be stronger than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger.” (Genesis 25:23 NKJV)

She should have listened to the promise, because later on she tries to force God’s will to happen. She tries to “help God out.” However, when God makes a promise, when God calls us to a specific mission, we need to have faith that those things will happen. We don’t need to “help God out.” Throughout the Bible we find those who have tried to “help God out,” such as when Abraham tried to help God fulfill His promise by having a child with a servant. However, when God calls, when God has a plan, He is able to accomplish the plan! We don’t need to “help God out.” We help God by being pliable and willing to serve. That’s how we help God! We help God by getting out of His way and being willing to be part of His plan.

So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. (Genesis 25:24-26 NKJV)

The name Esau literally means “hairy” and the name Jacob means “supplanter” or “deceiver.”
If we do a little math, we find that Jacob and Rebekah had been married 20 years before the promise was fulfilled. It’s interesting to note that, especially for that period in history, Jacob had married at a rather old age at 40, but God’s timing is always significant.

Rebekah had been promised that she would have two sons and the younger would serve the older. So from the beginning, she knew that the younger, Jacob, would be special. She also knew that both sons would be fathers of great nations; “great” nations referring to “large” nations.

In those days the “birthright” was very significant, in that it was how the family legacy or heritage was passed on. Normally, the birthright went to the firstborn. Even though Esau and Jacob were twins, technically one was older than the other because one would have been born first. Therefore, Esau was considered the firstborn by tradition and culture, and he would have been the recipient of the birthright.

Rebekah knew that God’s promise had been that Jacob, the younger twin, would be the stronger of the two and would rule the older twin, Esau. She knew that God had made her a promise. However, she didn’t submit to God and allow him to implement His plan to fulfill His promise in His perfect timeline. If she had submitted to God’s plan to fulfill the promise, everything would have fallen into place without complications. Instead, she and Jacob believed they would need to work it out themselves. In fact, what we find is that they tried to “help God out” several times in fulfilling the promise.

Jacob knew the story of the promise; his mother had shared it with him. As he grew old, Jacob began to wonder—just as Abraham had wondered how he could have a great nation if he was so old and had no son, just as Isaac had wondered how he could be a great nation if he had no son—how he, Jacob, could be a great nation if he had no birthright. So he tried to “help God out” with fulfilling the promise.

As any parent can attest, all children are unique individuals, each with their own personalities, characteristics, and nuances. This is true even with twins. We are told in Genesis 25:27-28 of the very different personalities of the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Esau was a hunter; he liked to go out and hunt for the food. He was a rough and tough “man’s man.” Jacob, on the other hand, was more of a “home body” and preferred more comfortable environs. One day, Esau had been out hunting and returned home very hungry. Upon his arrival home, Esau found that Jacob had made some lentil soup. We find this story in Genesis 25:29-34.

Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. And Esau said to Jacob, “Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary.” Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright as of this day.” And Esau said, “Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?” Then Jacob said, “Swear to me as of this day.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. (Genesis 25:29-34 NKJV)

I imagine one of two things, and maybe both, had to be true for Esau to be willing to accept Jacob’s offer of exchange. The first is that Esau must have been very surprised by Jacob’s proposition and may have even thought he was joking. After all, if you’re really hungry and ask a sibling or a friend for food, they aren’t going to demand that you give them your car in exchange for a sandwich! Even if you’re really hungry, you’re not going to agree to that—are you? The second is that Esau must not have fully comprehended the importance of the birthright at that time. We play carelessly sometimes with things that are very precious when we don’t appreciate their value.

The truth is that Jacob and Rebekah should have shared and prepared both young men for the promise of God. They should have revealed to their sons the insights that had been given and the testimony of their father. They should have shared the story of Abraham. They should have shared the story of Isaac. They should have shared the story of God speaking to Rebekah. It seems, though, that maybe this wasn’t done—because later Rebekah feels that she must force the matter. Isaac seems content to pass the birthright on to his oldest son. However, Rebekah has a different plan.
I'm sure that Jacob had told his mother about the trading of stew for Esau's birthright. But Rebekah knew that Isaac would never accept that as a legitimate transaction. So, as Isaac got older and the time for him to bestow the birthright blessing grew near, Rebekah and Jacob came up with a new plan that involved directly deceiving Isaac as he passed on the birthright.

Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, that he called Esau his elder son and said to him, "My son." And he answered him, "Here I am." Then he said, "Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death. Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. And make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die." (Genesis 27:1-4 NKJV)

So Esau, the hairy older twin who was a skilled hunter, set off to hunt game so he could prepare the special meal that his father requested, after which he would receive his birthright blessing.

Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt game and to bring it. (Genesis 27:5 NKJV)

But Rebekah had listened in on the conversation, and hurried to put into motion the plan to deceive Isaac into blessing Jacob instead.

So Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, "Indeed I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying, 'Bring me game and make savory food for me, that I may eat it and bless you in the presence of the Lord before my death.' Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you. Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savory food from them for your father, such as he loves. Then you will take it to your father, that he may eat it, and the he may bless you before his death." (Genesis 25:8-10 NKJV)

Because Jacob was worried that, even with his failed sight, Isaac would recognize that he wasn't Esau, Rebekah even went so far in the deception as to physically disguise Jacob as Esau.

Then Rebekah took the choice clothes of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. And she put the skins of the kids of the goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. Then she gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob. (Genesis 25:15-17 NKJV)

When Jacob went in to deceive his father, he found that Isaac wasn’t easily fooled. Isaac first questioned how the game had been caught so quickly. Then, despite the care taken in Jacob’s physical disguise, Isaac recognized Jacob’s voice.

Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not." So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him. (Genesis 25:21-23 NKJV)

When our senses fail us, it's easier for us to be taken advantage of. That’s what happened to Isaac. So after eating the meal that Jacob, disguised as Esau, had brought him, Isaac asked his son to kiss him, after which Isaac gave Jacob the full blessing that he had intended to give to Esau:

And he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him and said: "Surely, the smell of my son
Is like the smell of a field
Which the Lord has blessed.
Therefore may God give you
a better job." On the contrary, God tells us that because they persecuted Him, they’re going to persecute us. In His honesty with us, He warns us that as a result of standing up for Him, we can actually expect persecution.

And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. (Luke 21:17 NKJV)

But then He also promises that He will never leave us nor forsake us:

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5 NKJV)

So when tough times come against you in this world, if you stand for God and you still get persecuted, that doesn’t mean God has left you—it simply means that you are standing for God and the devil doesn’t like it. Just remember God’s promise that He’ll never leave you nor forsake you.

So Joseph was put in prison because of the lie of Potiphar’s wife.

While he’s in prison, Joseph begins a new stage of his journey. While he’s in jail he interprets a couple of dreams for other prisoners and he asks that in return they remember him when they are released. Of course, they promise to remember him and then forget about him. There are a lot of areas that I can resonate with Joseph. How many times have you helped someone out or placed your trust in someone who said they were going to take care of you or said that they were going to look after you or said that they were going to recommend you—after which you never hear from them again? And so Joseph continued in prison.

However, as we look back in scripture, we can see how God’s hand was working even then. Joseph correctly interpreted those dreams, which seemed completely irrelevant to Joseph at the time. Later on though, when Pharaoh had a mysterious dream, someone whose dream Joseph had interpreted in prison would remember him and recommend him to Pharaoh.

In looking at this story, we need to be cognizant of the fact that the time for Joseph to be remembered wasn’t right until that moment so that Joseph would know, and Pharaoh would know, and Egypt would know that there was one who could interpret the dream. So even in prison, the perfect timing of God was manifest.

When we look back at the great characters of Bible, we find that many of them went through great trials. How many of the disciples were persecuted? Many of the apostles and the disciples were put in prison. How many of the prophets were hated when they were alive as prophets? The interesting thing about prophets is that they usually aren’t appreciated until after they’re dead. Even all these men that we’re even looking at in this Faith of Our Fathers study, all of them received great persecution and were rejected. Even Moses, whom we will study in the next chapter, went through great times of despair.

So now Joseph is brought before the Egyptian leader, Pharaoh, to interpret his troubling dream. Of course, we know that this is the dream about the coming famine and how they would need to prepare for it. But Pharaoh didn’t understand the dream, and so Joseph was finally remembered and was brought from prison to interpret the dream.

Joseph, as we know, was elevated to second in command in Egypt, controlling and preparing for the famine that was foretold in Pharaoh’s dream. We may not be elevated to “second in command” by obeying God and following His will; thus, we should never view serving God as an equation in which, if we obey, if we endure trial, then God is going to bless us with great abundance of wealth or whatever. That may happen, but I honestly don’t believe that was Joseph’s intent. Joseph’s elevation was part of God’s plan being fulfilled. God’s plan for Joseph, ultimately, was to save His people. God is willing to do whatever it takes to save His people, if we’re willing to be part of that plan. Joseph went through that
When he was running for his life, Jacob must have felt very alone. Being out in the wilderness with wild animals wasn’t his area of expertise. His brother, Esau, was a hunter and would have been fine being out in the woods. However, for Jacob, just the unfamiliar sounds of the wilderness must have been terrifying! Jacob wasn’t used to living in those rustic situations. He was used to the comforts of the tent environment. And he wasn’t only scared because of his strange surroundings. He was scared because he thought Esau was coming after him to kill him. He was scared because he was away from his mother. He was scared because this was probably his first time away from home. He was scared because he was out in the "middle of nowhere." We can relate to his situation—can’t we? Sometimes we stop in the middle of our trials and ask, "How did I end up here? How did all this happen?" It’s often when we’re alone and feeling hopeless that we have our most intimate encounters with God. This is what happened to Jacob in Genesis 28 when he finally stops to sleep.

Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. (Genesis 28:10-11 NKJV)

Imagine using a stone for a pillow! This was a far cry from what he was accustomed to when he lived with Isaac and Rebekah.

Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold the Lord stood above it and said: "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants." (Genesis 28:12-13 NKJV)

This was a message from the Lord. It was a message of reassurance. But it was also a message telling Jacob that the promise God gave to his grandfather, Abraham, and the promise God gave to his father, Isaac, would still stand. God was also letting Jacob know that the land on which he slept would be given to him by God Himself. He wanted Jacob to know that he couldn’t connive it. He wanted Jacob to know that he couldn’t do a "soup deal" for it. He wanted Jacob to know that he couldn’t deceive for it. God wanted Jacob to understand that it was a promise that God alone would fulfill; a promise that God had given to Jacob’s grandfather and father, and that Jacob would see the promise through to fruition. But God wanted Jacob to understand that God’s plan succeeds in God’s power.

"Also, your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south, and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you." (Genesis 28:14-15 NKJV)

God did fulfill the promise in Jacob, just as He had promised. Jacob was blessed with 12 sons! God also changed Jacob’s name to Israel; thus, Jacob’s 12 sons’ descendants would become the 12 tribes of Israel and would spread abroad in every direction—just as God had promised! God also promised to never leave Jacob until He had done what He had promised.

We have promises similar to Jacob’s promises—don’t we?

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5 NKJV)

being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; (Philippians 1:6 NKJV)

The lesson that God was teaching Jacob was, "My promise is something that I will fulfill, if you are faithful. I don’t need help. Submit to My will and I will fulfill the promise."
Abraham had tried to “help God out.” Isaac had tried to “help God out.” Even Judas had tried to “help out Christ,” thinking that he could force Christ to establish His kingdom rather than being crucified. Is it possible that we, even in a modern setting, even in a modern church, even with the promise of The Return, even with the promise of The Blessed Hope, even with the understanding of the end time message, might try to “help God out?” Try to force the issue? There’s heresy out there that God wants the people in the Church to cleanse the Church. That’s God’s job. God told us to not judge, lest we be judged. God wants us to go out and be His ambassadors and let Him take care of the rest. We should not try to “help God out” by forcing the issue because in God’s plan there is a day set aside for judgment.

“...because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31 NKJV)

So the story of Jacob continued. I won’t go into all the details, but God was not done teaching Jacob and preparing him for his task. It’s important that, as we study the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, his son Joseph, and on down this powerful lineage, we remember that just because God calls you and just because God has a plan, doesn’t mean it’s going to be easy. It doesn’t mean that you won’t encounter many different challenges: external opposition for sure, but also challenges internally. You will encounter challenges of faith. You will encounter physical challenges. However, in each case, those challenges will be the way that the path led—yet it was still God’s path! I’m sure that Jacob had heard the story about the love and romance when his mother met her father and how wonderful it was. I’m sure that Jacob wanted that same “fairy tale” romance story. However, when you study the story of Laban and you study the story of his daughters and you study the story of Jacob and what he had to do to marry the woman he loved—you find out that he was deceived. I don’t believe God caused that deception; however, it is interesting that we reap what we sow. Jacob had deceived his father to steal the birthright, and then later on he was deceived by another! However, this time we see a man who is patient. This time we see a man who is faithful. Jacob served the years required by his father-in-law and then he had not just one son but twelve! One of those sons, Joseph, will be the subject we pursue in the next chapter.

God teaches us patience. Often God fulfills His plan in a different way than we would—outside of cultural norms and traditions and expectations. God doesn’t need those confinements to have His power flow and to accomplish His goals.

The life of faith that we see in all those men listed in Hebrews 11 can be summarized as: we live by faith in the simplicity of knowing that God is able! A life of faith is a life understanding that God, when He makes a promise, will keep it. A life of faith is a life knowing that when faced with obstacles: God is able!

Abraham: “There’s no way that God can fulfill this because my wife and I are too old.” God is able!

Jacob: “How can I claim this land when I’ve been cast off? My brother’s trying to kill me! This will never happen!” God is able!

We don’t need to “help God out” by maneuvering and manipulating His plan to see its accomplishment. We help God out by humbly submitting ourselves and submitting to His will.

I pray that, as we continue the journey of studying these characters, that we will each make similar commitments in our personal lives. I pray that today we will each make a simple commitment to the calling of a life of faith. A commitment of: “Lord, I submit myself to You, and I believe You’re a God who is able. The promise that You have given to me. Naysayers say You’re not coming back. But I know that You are a God that keeps Your promises, and I know that You are a God who is able.”
As we go through this study of the Faith of Our Fathers in Hebrews Chapter 11, looking at some of the more famous stories of the Bible, you will probably recognize stories you’ve heard since you were a little child. One of those famous stories is the story of Joseph; and, when we think of Joseph, many of us will immediately think of Joseph and his coat of many colors. As we take another look at the story of Joseph in this chapter, we’ll gain an understanding of what God has to teach each of us through Joseph’s life.

In Hebrews 11, that “Chapter of Faith,” we find that Joseph is only mentioned in one sentence, in one verse:

By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. (Hebrews 11:22 NKJV)

Isn’t that unique? For all the stories that you know about Joseph, Hebrews 11 mentions only his impending death and what he said to do with his remains after he was buried. We’ll come back to why that was important enough to be mentioned in Hebrews 11 toward the end of this chapter.

We begin the story of Joseph by looking at the context in which his life was set. The context begins in Genesis, Chapter 37. Jacob, the son of Isaac, had two wives: Leah and Rachel. However, his favorite wife, Rachel, only bore him two sons. Joseph was the first of those two sons.

As parents, we have to be very careful when there’s more than one child, to not “play favorites.” But that’s very difficult sometimes because they’re all so different; therefore, we relate to each one differently because of their individual personalities and skills. Nonetheless, we have to be very careful not to “play favorites” and certainly never say that we have a favorite. In Jacob’s family it was clear to all that Joseph was his favorite son—we’re even told this in scripture!

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. (Genesis 37:3-4 NKJV)

Of course, we have to remember that Israel was Jacob’s name when it was changed in the covenant.

There’s a difficult household. When Israel clearly likes one son over all the others, it causes division within the house. How many times have we seen sibling jealousy or sibling rivalry cause division in a family? Sometimes we don’t even see it until it comes out after the passing of the parents—then we see the family dynamics emerge. Here though, the majority of the brothers have developed not just a dislike but a hatred of Joseph.

Maybe it’s Joseph’s youth, or perhaps Joseph is just a “happy go lucky guy,” but it seems that Joseph is oblivious to the hatred his brothers feel toward him. Israel, his father, certainly doesn’t seem to let it bother him, because he gives Joseph a special coat—a coat of many colors. Why would a coat of many colors be a significant gift? Today you might stay away from a coat with flashy colors because you wouldn’t want to “stand out.” However, it was a significant gift because color was very important and expensive in clothes. The dying process involved getting the right plants and other materials to make the dyes and inks, and that process was very expensive because they had to trade to get them from certain areas of the world. So a coat that had many different colors not only signified a special gift, it signified a very expensive gift—an honored gift. Thus, anyone who wore a lot of color was someone of importance and rank. So, ultimately, not only was Israel showing favor to Joseph, he was setting Joseph
apart as special and important. The other brothers, obviously, became jealous because they were concerned about the birthright. They were concerned about all this extra attention that Joseph was getting.

But then the story gets even more interesting. Joseph had a dream, and this dream had a specific meaning. So Joseph, apparently oblivious to some of the family dynamics, decided to tell his brothers and his father about the dream.

Now Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf." And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me." So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?" And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind. (Genesis 37:5-11 NKJV)

Joseph was adding fuel to the fire by sharing his dream with his brothers! And this time we see that even his father rebuked him! Even Israel was beginning to wonder, "Why in the world is my son doing this? Why is Joseph antagonizing his brothers?"

Understanding that those dreams would not come to fruition many, many years, we can sometimes be hard on Joseph for what he was doing. However, I believe it was God's intent that Joseph share the dreams because years later, when his brothers went to Egypt and eventually understood who Joseph was, they would remember the dreams and know that it was God's will.

Sometimes we just don't understand why things happen to us and we wonder, "How can things get worse?" It's at those times that the Lord says to us, "Look, you don't understand this now, but you will." Later, when we look back, we see clearly how God's hand was moving in the situation that had caused us so much uncertainty at the time.

One day, Joseph's brothers were out in the field taking care of the sheep. Israel sent Joseph to go after them—to say hello and take them food. It almost seems like a set-up doesn't it? The brothers, being envious, grabbed Joseph and threw him in the pit. Afterward, there was a disagreement between the brothers about what should happen to Joseph; ultimately, the majority of the brothers decided to sell him rather than kill him. Then the brothers devised a very deceitful tale to tell their father about the fate of Joseph. They put blood on that precious coat of many colors and showed it to their father as "evidence" that Joseph had been killed.

Why didn't they just tell their father that a band of raiders came and stole Joseph? Well, they wanted to put the story of Joseph to rest. They didn't want Joseph to be in their lives at all; and if they had left hope that Joseph was alive—what would Jacob have done? He would've said, "You guys are getting on some camels and you're going over there and you're going to find him!" So the brothers thought that they had put the story of Joseph to an end.

As we move through this story, I want you to see that God's hand was upon Joseph. I want you to also see that God had a plan and His hand was also upon His plan. God could have taken Joseph to Egypt any number of different ways; however, Romans 8:28 is the recurring theme of the story of Joseph in that:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28 NKJV)
Joseph had been called. The dreams were definitely given to Joseph by God. However, the brothers did something very bad as a result of their jealousy. But God was going to make something good for Joseph out of the bad that his brothers did. When we are submitted to God’s purpose, everything that happens to us, whether God ordained, God directed, or a direct attack of Satan, God can move and make good even out of bad! Whether it’s physical, financial, occupational, or whatever it might be, there will be attacks from the devil—the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. The question is—will we remain faithful to God? Will we remain faithful to His purpose?

Through those dreams, Joseph had an “insider’s look” at his life; thus, for his whole life, he knew he was going to be something special. He knew that his brothers and his father and all the other people would bow down to him! But how would this happen? As Joseph was being taken off to Egypt, probably being trailed behind a cart, he may have been wondering, “How can these dreams be true now? I’m going off to my death—or even worse, I’ll just live as a slave my whole life!”

Have you ever experienced that uncertainty? How can I achieve what God has planned for me in this situation? How can I serve the Lord in this job? How can I do what God wants because I’m this or because I’m that? I believe, just as God called Joseph, God calls each of us to a special purpose: a special intent to witness for Him, to stand up for Him, to testify for Him. The devil tries to distract us. The devil tries to discourage us. So while we’re in our prison or while we’re going through our malady or while our family is rejecting us, we feel that we’re all alone and that God has abandoned us. But in reality, God had His hand on Joseph, just as God has His hand on you. Just because bad things happen to you, doesn’t mean that God has abandoned you. It simply means that sin abounds. But let me tell you what abounds all the more.

God’s goodness.

God’s power.

God’s grace.

Always remember that God is bigger than your problems. Always remember that God did not cause sin nor did He want sin—that’s why He injected Himself to die on the cross for your sin. When we are suffering from the effects of sin, instead blaming God or thinking He has abandoned us, we should remember, “God died for me because of sin, and He is coming soon.”

Let’s be honest, young Joseph was ultimately a “mama’s boy”—a “daddy’s boy” if you will—always staying close to home. He didn’t go out with the “big boys” to take care of the flocks. He was spoiled. He was in no condition to be out there by himself with those nomads, a slave to be sold. What must he have thought? Naively, he thought that his brothers would welcome his dreams—but they didn’t. Naively he thought that they would welcome him when he went to visit them—but they didn’t. Now he knew without a doubt that his family had rejected him. He knew in his heart, “They’re not going to come after me. There’s no rescue party coming.”

Joseph was looking at the rest of his life as a slave. He could have given up. He could have said, “Well, what good is it now? I’m by myself. My people are isolated. I’m with these heathens. Now I’m a slave. Go ahead, God, kill me.” But instead we see something in the character of Joseph that maybe we missed earlier on, and that is that Joseph loved God and the Joseph wanted to live his life honoring God in every aspect of his life.

When Joseph arrives in Egypt he is sold as a slave. Who is he sold to? He’s sold to Potiphar, one of the high-ranking officials in the Egyptian government. Now Joseph is going to be a special person in a very influential household. I’m not saying slavery was a good thing—but if you were going to be a slave, why not be a slave in the best house? In his special position in Potiphar’s house, Joseph could have eaten their food and enjoyed many of the privileges they lavished on him and may have eventually said, “Well,
this isn't that bad.” However, just like Daniel and the Hebrew children, Joseph remained true to who he was. Joseph knew that where you are does not dictate who you are, and what happens to you does not dictate who you are.

Too often the devil wants us to think that our circumstances, where we are and what happens to us, dictate who we are—that’s why people who are experiencing troubles think they can change their troubles by running away. Have you ever known someone who keeps running? Why don’t their problems go away? Because they take them with them! Things happen to you—they don’t affect who you are. People call you names—that doesn’t affect who you are. People abandon you—that doesn’t affect who you are. Who you are is determined by who you’ve given your life to. Of course, as we have given our life to Christ, we are God’s.

Joseph understood this, as exemplified by the integrity he showed when Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him—not just once but many times. Think about the situation that Joseph was in. Think about all the legitimate excuses that he could have used to justify giving in to her:

“She owns me, I have to do this.”

“You am I?”

“No one’s going to find out.”

But instead of giving in to his circumstances, Joseph committed the “cardinal sin” of a slave. He said, “No.”

But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:8 NKJV)

Imagine the courage that Joseph manifested when he said, “No,” because he could be punished or even killed for refusing a command from his master or his master’s wife. But we see in the passage above that Joseph didn’t say, “No,” because he was worried about retribution if he was caught by Potiphar; in fact, he honored Potiphar in his refusal, which shows us Joseph’s character. If stop there, his refusal might just be out of loyalty to Potiphar. However, when Joseph added that it would be great wickedness and a sin against God, we see that he had refused because he knew God did not want him to do it! Now that’s courageous! That’s the courage that I want as a Christian.

So we see a pattern with Joseph in that he is innocently but purely ignorant and seemingly doesn’t care how others respond when he’s doing God’s work. God sends dreams and even though he probably knows that telling his brothers those dreams is going to get them angry—he tells them anyway. He tells Potiphar’s wife, “No, I can’t do this, I can’t sin against God.” Joseph knows what’s going to happen—she gets angry with him and is out for vengeance. So Potiphar’s wife contrives a false story, she sets up the whole plot to make the lie believable, and when Potiphar ultimately hears the story, he puts Joseph in jail. Thus, things went from bad to worse for Joseph.

Certainly, Joseph must have thought that God had abandoned him. He had taken a righteous stand for God, and God seemingly didn’t have his back! He stood up for God, and yet he still ended up in prison.

I’ve heard similar stories before: “I told my employer that I can’t work on Sabbath, and I lost my job!” Well, God didn’t promise you a job—he asked you to stand for Him, and you don’t know what He has planned for you in the future. Be faithful to God, because that’s the right thing to do. Obey God because He is your creator. It’s not an equation where, “Okay, if I obey God, then I’m going to get this goody.” Or, “If I pay my tithe, then I’m going to get this blessing.” Or, “If I do this, then I’m going to get
a better job.” On the contrary, God tells us that because they persecuted Him, they’re going to persecute us. In His honesty with us, He warns us that as a result of standing up for Him, we can actually expect persecution.

And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. (Luke 21:17 NKJV)

But then He also promises that He will never leave us nor forsake us:

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5 NKJV)

So when tough times come against you in this world, if you stand for God and you still get persecuted, that doesn’t mean God has left you—it simply means that you are standing for God and the devil doesn’t like it. Just remember God’s promise that He’ll never leave you nor forsake you.

So Joseph was put in prison because of the lie of Potiphar’s wife.

While he’s in prison, Joseph begins a new stage of his journey. While he’s in jail he interprets a couple of dreams for other prisoners and he asks that in return they remember him when they are released. Of course, they promise to remember him and then forget about him. There are a lot of areas that I can resonate with Joseph. How many times have you helped someone out or placed your trust in someone who said they were going to take care of you or said that they were going to look after you or said that they were going to recommend you—after which you never hear from them again? And so Joseph continued in prison.

However, as we look back in scripture, we can see how God’s hand was working even then. Joseph correctly interpreted those dreams, which seemed completely irrelevant to Joseph at the time. Later on though, when Pharaoh had a mysterious dream, someone whose dream Joseph had interpreted in prison would remember him and recommend him to Pharaoh.

In looking at this story, we need to be cognizant of the fact that the time for Joseph to be remembered wasn’t right until that moment so that Joseph would know, and Pharaoh would know, and Egypt would know that there was one who could interpret the dream. So even in prison, the perfect timing of God was manifest.

When we look back at the great characters of Bible, we find that many of them went through great trials. How many of the disciples were persecuted? Many of the apostles and the disciples were put in prison. How many of the prophets were hated when they were alive as prophets? The interesting thing about prophets is that they usually aren’t appreciated until after they’re dead. Even all these men that we’re even looking at in this Faith of Our Fathers study, all of them received great persecution and were rejected. Even Moses, whom we will study in the next chapter, went through great times of despair.

So now Joseph is brought before the Egyptian leader, Pharaoh, to interpret his troubling dream. Of course, we know that this is the dream about the coming famine and how they would need to prepare for it. But Pharaoh didn’t understand the dream, and so Joseph was finally remembered and was brought from prison to interpret the dream.

Joseph, as we know, was elevated to second in command in Egypt, controlling and preparing for the famine that was foretold in Pharaoh’s dream. We may not be elevated to “second in command” by obeying God and following His will; thus, we should never view serving God as an equation in which, if we obey, if we endure trial, then God is going to bless us with great abundance of wealth or whatever. That may happen, but I honestly don’t believe that was Joseph’s intent. Joseph’s elevation was part of God’s plan being fulfilled. God’s plan for Joseph, ultimately, was to save His people. God is willing to do whatever it takes to save His people, if we’re willing to be part of that plan. Joseph went through that
journey because he needed to be in this place to be in a position to save God's people. By saving Egypt, God saved His people.

Serving God is its own reward! Walking with God is its own reward! Having the peace in our heart and knowing that God is leading, knowing that we are secure in His hands, knowing that we are in His plan is its own reward! When we try to force a different plan, when we try to question His plan, or we get angry because our vision of our plan doesn't work out—we need to take a step back and remind ourselves of the promise in Romans 8:28 that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. If we truly believe that, then the attacks of the adversary, whether they are physical or emotional or financial—whatever they might be—they don't have the same effect because this world is not our home!

There is a great reward, which is ultimately being reunited with Christ. However, walking with Christ in His plan, serving God is its own reward! If we serve God only for Heaven—then we miss the experience of communing with Him now. If the only reason we gave our hearts to Christ was for Heaven—then we're missing a greater dynamic of changing our character even now. Because, as Jesus told us, He came to give us life and life more abundantly.

Sometimes things get tough. They must have gotten really, really tough for Jacob and his sons and their households, because they actually started to discuss going to Egypt to get food! This would kind of be like President Obama going and asking the Iranian President for a loan. That would seem very unlikely—right? But Jacob determines that this must happen. So Jacob sends all the brothers, except Benjamin, to Egypt in search of food. Benjamin remains behind with his father because he has now become Jacob's favorite in the absence of Joseph and because Benjamin is the only son left from this precious wife, Rachel.

There's so much to learn in the dynamics of what happened when Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt. If Joseph had not been in God's plan and in His Spirit, the first thought that Joseph would have had would have been to take vengeance on them and destroy them. If Joseph had let bitterness build in his heart and had stored it all those years, that bitterness would have surfaced right away and he would have said in his heart, "I have them right where I want them! Man, I am going to get back at those guys!" That's because bitterness can lie dormant and then come back with the same wrath. Have you ever seen that? That's why we have to give bitterness to God, because if we keep it we're going to end up hurting ourselves and hurting others. However, instead of being overcome with bitterness, we see that Joseph had a compassionate heart and acted in love. He did test his brothers, to see if they had truly changed and because he wanted to know how Benjamin and his father were, but he tested them with love.

I ponder the story of Joseph and how he endured all that he went through. I ponder the story of him being in prison. I ponder the story of him perhaps going through abuse and beatings and living in a rat- and bug-infested prison. I ponder the story of Joseph and I wonder, "How did Joseph get through those times?" It was not hatred that got him through. It was not planning his vengeance that got him through. It was, in fact, a connection with God that got him through. The same God to whom he had dedicated his life was the same God that he continued to serve all the way through his time of trial. And I believe it was because of his steadfast dedication to God that he was able to remain true to God's calling for him. If he would have allowed hatred and vengeance and bitterness and revenge to come into his heart, I believe he would have strayed from God's calling and God's purpose would not have been fulfilled. Joseph lived a life of letting go of these negative feelings and allowing God to come in.

After Joseph had tested his brothers and he is reunited with his father and Benjamin, instead of punishing his brothers, he throws a feast to celebrate being reunited with his family.

In the end, God's purpose was to save His people. That was what He used Joseph to do. God saved His people by moving them to a special place, the land of Goshen.
So, going back to Hebrews 11:22—what is this verse about? Considering all that could have been said about Joseph, the reason he’s listed in the Chapter of Faith seems very strange:

By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. (Hebrews 11:22 NKJV)

The reason Joseph is listed this way is because Hebrews Chapter 11 is a tapestry of God’s providential hand being on His people. Hebrews 11:22 speaks of Joseph conveying the promise that they would be delivered. As we all know, many years later, Moses, by faith, would be the one whom God would use to lead His people out of Egypt.

The greatest thing in this story that impacts me is the reminder to live by faith and the reminder that no matter what we go through, God has not left us or abandoned us. It’s also a reminder that just because bad things are happening to us or we’re going through trials or we’re going through tribulations, we should not be frustrated or think that God’s plan for us is not happening; instead, we are to be reminded of the Romans 8:28 promise:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28 NKJV)

Remain faithful to the Lord. Remember every aspect of God and know that His plan will be successful. Remember that if we give our lives to Him, if we love God with all our heart, His plan will be fulfilled—in His time, in His power. His plan will be fulfilled regardless of adversity. And remember always His promise that He will never leave you nor forsake you.
In this chapter, we'll be looking at and exploring the fascinating life of a great patriarch, Moses, as part of our continuing study of "Faith of Our Fathers." Moses certainly played an integral role in the deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, but he was also a writer. He wrote what is typically called The Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and maybe even some of the other books as well.

Moses is in our story line because he is mentioned in the famous Hebrews Chapter of Faith. As we look at the list of patriarchs we've studied so far, and we see each one's unique characteristics, it becomes clear why they were included in Hebrews Chapter 11. But ultimately the story of Hebrews Chapter 11 is a list of individuals whom God used to maintain His covenant, from Adam all the way through mankind's journey until the cross. We've looked at Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph; and now we want to look at Moses.

As we learned in the story of Joseph, God's hand was directly involved in His people going to the land of Egypt. In providential preparation, God had placed Joseph in the position of being a great leader in Egypt prior to a terrible famine so that His people could be fed when they came to Egypt and settled in the land of Goshen. But as time went on, the pharaoh who had a pleasing attitude toward the children of Israel and toward the family of Joseph came and went, and other pharaohs came and went; and as the years went by, that memory became dull. Other pharaohs came in who didn't know the story of how God had used Joseph and how he had blessed all of Egypt because of his wisdom. As a result, the Israelites became oppressed by the Egyptians and were ultimately enslaved. Some historians believe that the great workforce of the nation of Israel was used to build the pyramids and the sphinx and some of the great buildings and works of wonder that still exist in Egypt today.

What was Moses's part in this lineage in Hebrews? We discovered in the last chapter that Joseph's part in the Hebrews 11 lineage was that he had predicted the Israelites would not stay in Egypt but would depart. 

Moses is the fulfillment of that promise, that prediction, made by Joseph.

What one wonders is why did it take so long? If God's favor was on Joseph and his family—why did it take so long to bring them back and to take them to the Promised Land? I believe the answer is more complicated than just one verse. I believe the answer can be found as you study the story of the Exodus and you find out where the hearts of the people were. Their hearts were not turning to God. Their hearts had already begun to worship pagan gods and they had infiltrated pagan ideas from the Egyptians into their own culture. We know that they had all types of jewelry and idols and those types of things: the fleshpots of Egypt. The Israelites had become Egyptian—and had thus abandoned their uniqueness as God's people. Even though the story was told over and over again of the promise of a deliverer; someone who would rise up and deliver them, at some point I believe the children of Israel forgot that—not just over 10 years or 50 years, but over hundreds of years they lost hope in the promise.

There's so much that we can learn about today's church from the people of Israel. There are many today in the Church who know that God has promised to come again. They know the promise of the Blessed Hope. They know the promise of the Second Coming. Yet, over time, our faith has dulled. Thus, the Church as a whole is experiencing the same thing that happened to the Israelites. Even today, pagan ideas have infiltrated parts of the Church, and in some cases whole doctrines, to distract or stall the mission of God's Church, causing the Church to become very complacent and lethargic. Revelation calls it Laodicea.
The story of Moses would be a story of God’s deliverance. It would be a story of faith. It would be a story of God fulfilling His promise. But the length of the journey and the “hiccup” along the way were not dictated by God as much as by the people themselves through their lack of faith and their continual turning to their own ways.

Just like today, as time passes and the promise of Christ’s return is longer and longer in being fulfilled, and we ask: “Why hasn’t God come?” I’m sure they asked that question around the tables in the camp of Israel: “Where is this deliverer that’s supposed to deliver us from Egypt?” However, the problem wasn’t Egypt. The problem was their hearts. Egypt was never a problem. God could blink and the children of Israel would have been delivered from the oppression of the Egyptians. But I believe one of the challenges they had to overcome was that they had become Egyptians in their hearts, even though they were slaves.

Now, we are slaves—if we are in Christ we are slaves to Christ. Yet, if we aren’t careful, we can also become like the world, where we have an identity as a group. The Bible says:

*For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!* (2 Timothy 3:2-5 NKJV)

Here’s what we read about Moses in Hebrews 11:

*By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s command. By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.* (Hebrews 11:23-29 NKJV)

We see in this passage in Hebrews that the story of Moses really begins with his parents’ faith, which is honored here in the Chapter of Faith. Without his parents’ faith, Moses’s life never would have happened. Without their faith, they would have acquiesced to the command to kill all the young children, and God would not have been able to use Moses and call him to fulfill his purpose. However, by faith, his parents hid him. We know the story and we’ll look at that shortly.

The passage continues, talking about Moses in particular. First, to be the leader who would lead the children of Israel out of bondage, Moses would have to make a decision. He had to choose to refuse the pleasures of the world and to look for God’s reward instead. After that, we see time and time again that the people themselves would be asked to make that same decision—first the leader must make the decision and then guide the people to make the decision themselves. The first great decision was actually Passover, where they would have to put blood over the door; if they chose not to follow this command, they would not be included in the camp of Israel. Their name, their pedigree, would not be enough to save them from that plague, that judgment. They had to apply the blood. Ultimately it was an individual choice: “Will I follow the pleasures of Egypt or will I stand for God?” They had to choose delayed gratification and forsake the “niceties” of Egypt.

They also had to make another decision: “Do I just listen to my slave masters and be reproached by Christ or do I accept the reproach of my slave masters and get the whip because I choose to follow God?” Even though they had adopted the pagan rituals and the luxurious diet and all those things that
are bad, "the fleshpots of Egypt," they were still slaves. Therefore, they had to make a decision of great courage to stand up in rebellion against their slave masters.

Thus we see that Moses and the children of Israel had to make a courageous decision. We today have to make that same decision. When we understand the Sabbath truth, we have to make a decision: "Does it matter to me the reproach of Christ or the reproach of man?" Likewise, when we understand the health message: "Does it matter to me the reproach of Christ or the reproach of man?"

The story of Moses also teaches us great insight into how God uses His people. I think that sometimes we focus so much on the stories that we forget about the journey. As Hebrews mentioned, the first part of the journey was quite spectacular. Soldiers were going around killing all the babies; so this one couple, seeing how precious their child was, decided to hide him from the soldiers. The parents decide to get him out of the house, by hiding him in a basket in the bulrushes. Because they couldn’t just leave their baby out in the bulrushes alone, they sent his sister to watch over him. What faith it took on their part to put their baby in a basket and leave him there. Now, we might think, "Oh, that's so nice— floating gently on the water amid the nice bulrushes." But there were wild animals in that water, including alligators! Therefore, it took great faith to take that step. But it shows us how God was protecting Moses's life even when he was a baby. This part of the story also shows us that when we submit to doing what is right—when we submit to God—God gives us more than we expect! No one could have expected that Moses would go home to his parents with the pharaoh’s daughter’s blessing!

Likewise, if you stand for the Sabbath and you lose your job, you might wonder, "Why is God cursing me?" God doesn't curse you! Doing what's right is always the right thing to do. Following God is always the right thing to do. It's not a matter of blessing or cursing. Honoring God is always the right thing to do. But what we do find out, in Romans 8:28, is that:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28 NKJV)

So you may lose that job—but what good is a job if you gain money but lose your salvation? What good is a job if you're only honoring man but you're not honoring God? It would be better to be in a soup line and a homeless shelter as a result of honoring God than to be in a mansion with a nice job, dishonoring God, because you want the reward that you get now. That's what it's about. That's what the decision Moses had to make: "Do I take the temporary reward of being called pharaoh's son? Or do I choose the eternal reward?"

Too often we're short-sighted and only think about immediate consequences, the temporal, the earthly, when we should rise up and think about eternal consequences for our actions. Men and women both, if we think too much about the immediate sin and the immediate pleasure, then we're going to fall into an affair. Take a step back in the power of God and look at the big picture. That affair is not going to bring anything but heartache to you down the road. Temporal pleasure now—heartache later.

As we look deeper into the story of Moses, we see how God’s hand is upon him as the story takes a twist. You would think that Moses, being trained in the house of Pharaoh, is being prepared by God to be the leader that everyone knows he's going to be. He's being trained both scholastically and militarily. I can imagine his mother and father instilling in him, "There's something special here, Moses. God did not save you in the bulrushes to abandon you. This is something special here. Nowhere else did one of our people, except for Joseph, get into a high place, Moses! This is just like how we got here when we had favor, and now we have favor again. God is going to do something special through you, Moses!" Thus, he was told over and over again, "Something special here! Great hope! We have one of ours in the house!" I've heard similar conversations about President Barack Obama being President. Sometimes we can have higher expectations than are physically possible. "One of ours is in the house! Things are going to be different!"
So Moses gets to an age where he becomes impatient. You have to have an understanding of Moses’s life to understand why he would be impatient. Moses certainly was going to be a great leader for God; however, Moses didn’t remember slavery because he had never experienced slavery. Moses didn’t grow up as a slave, even though he was a Hebrew. He had grown up in the life of privilege. In fact, one might assume that Moses might have been kind of spoiled. Moses very well might have been given everything and probably never had to work for anything:

“T’m thirsty.”

“Here’s a drink, Moses.”

“I’m hungry.”

“Here’s food, Moses.”

“I’m dirty.”

“I’ll prepare a bath, Moses.”

“I’m this. I’m that.”

“Yes Moses.”

Moses, however, took it in his own hands to defend his people. But a human way to do God’s Will normally doesn’t work. We have to submit to God’s way to do God’s Will.

There are others in the Bible who tried a human way to do God’s Will. One example is Judas, who tried to humanly “help God out” and got into trouble. Another example is Saul who was trying to “help God out” and it got him into trouble too.

Likewise, Moses got into trouble by killing another man to defend his people, and he found himself being hunted by the Pharaoh to be killed! The people he thought would defend him turned on him and caused him more problems.

So Moses went from a life of leisure and pleasure and everyone taking care of him to suddenly being by himself and running through the desert for his life. His dreams of being some kind of deliverer were gone! Everyone had just turned on him and he was running for his life and knew that he could never go back. He was ill-prepared, after his life in Pharaoh’s house, to take care of himself in these conditions, so he had to learn how to find food and water for himself.

I find it interesting that after being raised in a palace, the rest of Moses’s life was very meager. He didn’t even get to experience the Promised Land and all the milk and honey! In fact, his diet would mainly be manna for the second half of his life! But God knew that he would have to train and prepare Moses before He could use him. In looking at people that God has called, we find that very often God has to teach them patience and train them and prepare them before He can use them. That’s what’s happening when you see the call of a person and then there’s a delay before they engage in ministry—God is preparing them.

Forty years! It wasn’t by chance that it was 40 years. I imagine in the beginning, Moses probably thought, “Well, you know, once I get my feet back under me and then Pharaoh leaves, I’ll be able to come back and do something. Maybe I can get an army of rebels gathered together and we can go in there and deliver them.” Soon he realized...40 years...taking care of sheep. But God was actually going to tell Moses and teach Moses that there was going to be another 40-year period, and he was going to have to endure that too.
Now, there are two things that those 40 years really taught him. The first thing it taught him was dealing with sheep. Moses developed a heart for the sheep. Shepherds loved their sheep, and it took them time, but they knew their sheep by name. You couldn’t be a shepherd for 40 years without knowing your sheep. Later on, we would see that shepherd’s heart manifest in his love for the people, his yearning for the people. Granted, he wouldn’t understand the people all the time, but he didn’t understand the sheep all the time either. However, he learned patience. The second thing Moses learned was patience. Not just with the sheep, which he would need, but he was learning patience with God. Everything doesn’t happen with a “snap of your fingers.” God can call you but it might not be immediately that God wants to use you. God’s timing is different than our timing. God’s mission and plan is different than our mission and plan. Thus, God was teaching Moses patience to wait on the Lord.

I don’t want to say that Moses forgot God. Certainly God didn’t forget Moses. But in the great encounter with the burning bush, God had to tell Moses to take off his sandals because he was on holy ground. Thus, Moses encounters God—at the right time, God reaches out. The question at that moment was: how would Moses respond? Sure, Moses gave God some grief initially in saying that he couldn’t talk and asking how they would know it was him and all sorts of other arguments... but ultimately Moses went. Ultimately, Moses responded to the call. The question isn’t when? The question is when God calls are you ready?

God may be calling you. Are you fighting God? Or is it time to respond? God may have already called you but hasn’t engaged you. During this time, understand that God might be preparing you. He might be teaching you some things that you need to learn so that you can be an effective witness and tool for Him. In any case, in God’s timeline, when you have your burning bush experience—are you ready to engage?

Aaron went with Moses as kind of the “deaf” that Moses made. He didn’t really need Aaron; and, in the end, Aaron probably gave him more problems than help. But what courage it must have taken Moses to go back to Egypt! Who would remember him? He wasn’t the same man that he was when he left—he was much older but he was still wondering if he would be killed. But God assured him that He would be with him. But even when Moses returned to Egypt, it was a story of patience, because instead of just going to Pharaoh and saying, “We’re leaving,” God had other plans, which involved giving Pharaoh several chances to free the Israelites and Pharaoh’s refusals which caused the plagues. You have to wonder if Moses wasn’t thinking, “Why can’t we just do this already?”

The plagues were actually teaching two things to two very different groups. Certainly, Pharaoh asked the question, “Who is this God that I should let these people go?” And God, through the plagues, was answering that question. “I am God. I am a God that controls nature. These things that you worship, they’re not gods—they are things that I have created. I am the only God. I am the Almighty.” Then, after the first three plagues, the last seven plagues only affected the Egyptians; therefore, God was also teaching both the Egyptians and the Israelites that, “I am able to protect you. I am able to deliver you. My hand and providence and protection are sufficient.” God wanted the Israelites to know that they could trust Him because they would have to make a decision. God did not force His people to leave—they had to make a choice, a decision, to leave Egypt. The last plague was also symbolic to the Israelites that they were not being delivered by their own power—they would be delivered by the blood. The blood, which would ultimately symbolize the Great Deliverer, the Messiah, who would come and cleanse the world from its sins. But even that night there was an understanding: the blood of the lamb would save them. That Passover would be initiated and would be continued even to this day, a commemoration of God’s protection. Patience.

The Israelites crossed the parted Red Sea and the Egyptian army drowned in the Red Sea. The Israelites were celebrating and singing songs of celebration and glory and praise and victory. They believed it would only be a couple weeks until they saw the Promised Land. They believed they would just walk into it!
However, the problem was never the desert. The problem was never the water or the food or the logistics. The problem was the heart of the people. God wanted to do great things with them and through them and for them, but He couldn’t really do that until they changed and became His. God couldn’t do these great things until they made a decision to be His people. The Israelites struggled with that. They struggled with thinking that maybe it had been better to be a slave than to be God’s people. Their memory was poor. They kept forgetting all the things that God had done for each of them. He provided them with shade. He provided them with light. He provided a demonstration of His power. He provided food. He provided water. But still they weren’t satisfied. This is a demonstration that even if all your prayers are answered, you might still lose your salvation. You can be praying, “Lord, I need a house.” God gives you a house. “Lord, I need a job.” God gives you a job. “Lord, I need a car.” God gives you a car. All your prayers could be answered, but you could still lose your salvation if you don’t have a relationship with God. God wants a relationship with His people.

Moses again embarked on a journey of patience. Not only was this a longer journey than Moses expected—it would eventually be forty years longer than expected because God would tell the Israelites that, because of their sins, the generation that started on the journey would not enter the Promised Land—it would be the next generation that would enter. It was also a journey of patience with the people because they were always complaining and complaining and complaining. A great quote in ministry, in Testimonies to Ministers, the Spirit of Prophecy, the first chapter:

“The greatest thing we have to fear is that we forget how God has led us.”

Think about all the incredible things they saw! All those plagues in Egypt—that is and of itself should have said something! Then they saw the final plague, the great Passover—that should have said something! They saw the Red Sea opened up and they walked across on dry land, and then they saw God use that same sea to destroy their enemy—that should have said something! They saw water come from a rock and food fall from the sky—that should have said something! They saw God’s intention that He wanted to tabernacle with them. He wanted to live with them! He didn’t even want to wait until they got to the Promised Land. He wanted to live with them and travel with them one the journey! Even after all that—they still grumbled and complained!

I think about the Church today. God has blessed His Church. God has His hands on His Church. The Church is the object of His great affection. Yet it seems that all we can do is complain about the Church and the people in the Church. We have lost sight of the awesome God that’s taking care of the Church. There are great things happening in God’s Church. There are great blessings that He is pouring out. There are people that He is working through—and He wants to work through you. God has not abandoned His Church! We need to remember to look and to see how God has worked and is working in His Church.

God cares so much for His people. He called Moses up into the mountain, and with His own finger wrote a love letter to them, essentially reminding them that: “This is who I am and this is My character. These are the things that will make you happy. Follow these. You have forgotten these things and I want you to remember them. You have strayed into all these other spiritualist things and idols and all this other stuff—I want you to remember from whence you came. And with My own finger, I am writing this on stone so you will never forget.”

Imagine Moses, remembering, “Wow! This is the same God that spoke to me through the burning bush! This is the same God that providentially sent those plagues and protected us. This is the same God! Now, I’m in His presence.” Talk about a mountaintop experience!

Friends, I want you to learn something from this story. When you’re having a “mountaintop experience,” the armies of the devil are rallying to attack you. When you’re on “cloud nine” with God, when you’re up here, the devil says, “We got to get him off his game. We have to discourage him. We
have to get him to reject God or doubt God or get upset or grumble. We have to get him off course. We can’t let him stay laser-locked on what he’s doing. We have to distract him!” So when you’re on a mountain high with God, understand that there will be attacks that will come. Do not let them discourage you or get you down. Moses came down off the mountain, spiritually up here. He was so excited. He was going to share with them, “Look! God wrote with His own finger! This is what He said!” But instead of the people asking excitedly, “What is the Lord saying? What does the Lord want us to do?” They had built a golden calf and they were worshipping it. And Aaron—the one who Moses wanted to help him—had helped make the calf!

If only God’s people had been faithful.

Why is it that even today there are many in the Church who want to say, “How little can I do? What is the least that I can do and still be saved? Just tell me the minimum.” Then there’s the other group, like those who built the golden calf—they create their own amalgamation, as if to say, “Oh, our blood is Hebrew, so it really doesn’t matter what we do—we can dishonor God—we’re Hebrew!” Some people believe that since they’ve been baptized and claim themselves as Christian then they can do anything that they want. People inside the Church so this as well. But Jesus said that if we love Him we are to keep His commandments. That’s not a new command. It goes all the way back to the children of Israel. This transcript of God’s character, The Ten Commandments, was so important that when Moses went up the mountain—because he had thrown the tablets down and broken them when he saw the golden calf—that God wrote it again. God didn’t want Moses to just tell the people what had been on the tablets of stone—He wanted them to be able to read for themselves the handwriting of God and what He wanted them to do. So God wrote the transcript a second time.

We sometimes give a hard time to the Israelites about their lack of faith because Moses had handwritten instructions as to what God wanted from them and what He wanted them to do. However, our Bible is a letter from God. Yet how many times have we said, “Why doesn’t God just write me a letter? Why doesn’t God just tell me exactly what I need to do? Why doesn’t God just answer my prayer?” The truth is, if we were really looking for those signs, we’d probably reject them if we got them. During His ministry on Earth, the unbelievers kept asking Jesus for a sign; however, they didn’t really want a sign—and if they had received a sign, they would have wanted another sign and another sign. They were really just seeking an excuse for distraction, procrastination, and rejection because the evidence was already there that He was the Messiah.

So we see that the story of Moses is as much a story of his faith as it is Israel’s faith. We see in that 40-year journey a man who learned patience. We see a man who had a challenge. We see a man who disobeyed God; yet even in his disobeying of God by striking the rock rather than speaking to it, we see that God still blessed His people with water. However, God was not pleased with what Moses had done and how he had done it. Like Moses, we sometimes take for granted that we are in God’s favor and because we have His name, He still blesses; however, that doesn’t mean that He’s happy with what we did or how we did it. There have been a lot of evangelistic meetings that have been done wrong. Some possibly even for the wrong reasons—maybe even egos were involved or whatever. Yet because it was His work, God blessed it—but that doesn’t mean He was pleased with how it was done.

In the end, Moses was able to see the Promised Land but not go in. That seems pretty harsh—doesn’t it? Moses dedicated his whole life and came through that long journey, dragging himself as an old man through the desert, and then he had to stay out there for another 40 years? I believe that one of the key reasons God did this was to demonstrate accountability—that even His leaders need to be accountable. Even God’s leaders who are called and set aside need to obey Him and do according to His will. God loved Moses. We know that he was taken. He was resurrected and taken up to Heaven after he was buried. Jude tells us that. But God wanted to make an example of Moses, this great prophet and great man, that God’s not going to say, “I’m going to give you a mulligan—don’t worry about it.” God made an example of Moses so we would know that when He gives instructions, whether to the king or the prophet or the patriarch, He expects it to be done. It also demonstrates to us that there’s no
excuse for doing it our way instead of God’s way. It’s a demonstration to the leader, to the person who’s been in the Church a long time, to the person who’s been called into great responsibility—all of whom might, over time, assume that they are the one making the decisions and they are the one who has the power. However, God will also humble them, as He did Moses, for the very same reason. God can’t use a person who isn’t humble. God will demonstrate that His way is the only way.

Moses’s life is a fascinating testimony, and even the story of the children of Israel, because I can relate to the journey:

The tension and wanting to be used.

The wondering why?

Why not now?

I imagine if you were to give Moses a timeline at the beginning of his life, he would never expect it would take so long to finally be engaged in what he felt his calling was. Of course, when we look back at Abraham, he was also an old man when he embarked on his journey.

The life of Moses can best be summarized by going back to that verse in Hebrews, in that he made a choice, a decision to be used; and in making that choice, that decision, God would grant him his heart’s desire to free the Israelites from slavery. God would grant Moses that desire through his preparation to be used and to be used in God’s way, and through teaching Moses to worship Him and to not worry about the reproach of man.

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward. (Hebrews 11:24-26 NKJV)

How often do we esteem the reproach of Christ as something we want? But here, Moses wanted to make sure that he was on God’s side, and he did not want to fall to displeasure with Christ. He forsook Egypt and chose God. God would use him and train him and teach him and mold him. Moses was a character in formation the whole way.

How many times do we say, “Lord, use me.” But then we don’t want God to change us in order to be used. Moses was a flawed leader who kept being molded into something better because he yielded to God in His power. Moses wasn’t perfect, as his great sin demonstrated.

What I would personally like to learn from Moses, which I encourage you to as well, is to choose God rather than the distractions of Earth and to do things in God’s timeline—to allow God to work in me and through me, in His time. Not pushing. So that when God calls, when God calls to engage, we are ready to respond.
In our study of the fathers of our faith, we now come to a man about whom we certainly remember stories about: Joshua.

One of the first times that we encounter Joshua in the Bible, he probably didn’t realize it at the time but he was being tested. He was one of the spies sent into the Promised Land by Moses with the mission of exploring the layout of the land and seeing what the Promised Land was like. When those spies came back, ten of them had a negative report. But it wasn’t just a negative report—it was a report that lacked faith. They reported that there was no way the Israelites could take the land because there were giants in the land. However, they were forgetting one thing, which too often we also forget in our own lives, and that is—where we can’t, God can. They also were forgetting something else—God had already promised them the land, and God always keeps His promises!

There are many times in my life when I confront a problem or I confront a challenge. Perhaps it’s a bill that I don’t know how it’s going to get paid. If I look at that and say, “There’s no way that we can pay this bill,” then I’m forgetting something major, which is—God has promised to take care of me. If I honor God and return a tithe and am faithful, He has promised to make sure that I’m taken care of. Why do I perplex myself over these things that God has already promised the victory over? Even if, for some reason, I can’t make my mortgage payment and they take the house, God has already promised to take care of me. David said:

I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread. (Psalm 37:25 NKJV)

In other words, God has said, “If you’re My people, I am going to take care of you. You represent Me. My name is on you: Christian.”

When the spies came back from investigating the Promised Land, Joshua was one of only two who stood apart and said, “We can take this land that God has promised us.” Of course, there was a disagreement and the Israelites began to murmur. It’s amazing how quickly negativity spreads. It’s amazing how even one person’s lack of faith is contagious to someone else’s lack of faith. In the church, one person can say, “Oh, this meeting is going to be unsuccessful. We don’t do evangelism very well here.” And then other people say, “Oh yeah, that’s right, that’s right.”

What we often forget is that the same dynamic on the opposite side can be contagious as well. Contagious Christianity. Your strength in times of trouble, your testimony of faith even in the midst of trials in your own life, is a testimony to others who will face similar trials. Your positivity about Christ, your positivity about God—who is in control of your life—is contagious to others. That’s the kind of contagion we want inside the church—isn’t it?

Joshua, as one of those two spies who stood for God, by faith, did not know that this actually was a “trial run” for greater things later on. Joshua wasn’t campaigning to take Moses’ place. He wasn’t trying to say, “Hey, I think I want to be the next leader.” At that time, no one thought Moses would be replaced. But, by being faithful, Joshua stood out. Therefore, when the time came that Moses should be replaced, Joshua was the man; and not just by popular vote—God chose Joshua. Joshua had stood for God, even though the rest of the camp had lacked faith and rejected God and His promise. Joshua had stood by God, and God had noticed his character. God noticed people of faith. Think about that for a moment. When Jesus was here on Earth, He noticed some very unusual things that everyone else didn’t notice:
He noticed a beggar lying on a mat. Everyone else was stepping over or around him, but Jesus noticed him and stopped.

He noticed the woman at the well. Rather than just looking the other way, He engaged her.

He noticed the widow in quiet silence who put in two mites. There were probably a lot of people in the temple that day who had flashy clothes. There were probably a lot of people who had high prestige. There were certainly a lot of people trying to get the attention of Jesus—including His disciples. Yet, He noticed a widow who quietly comes and drops two coins in the offering.

God notices people of faith.

Sometimes we wonder—has God forgotten us? We look around the church and we say, “Wow, that guy is so spiritual! Oh, that person is so talented. This person does so many things. Oh, look at that person and how they are so blessed—they have a nice car, they have a nice home.” Those aren’t the things that God notices. God notices the faithful. Joshua had been faithful. God called Joshua and said, “Serve Me.”

We find his story in, fittingly, the book named Joshua, beginning in Chapter One:

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying: “Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses.” (Joshua 1:1-3 NKJV)

Now, this is a promise! But I want you to notice in verse 3 how God worded it:

“Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses.” (Joshua 1:1-3 NKJV)

He is telling Joshua that every place that the sole of his foot treads He has already given to him! He merely needs to go claim the promise that the Lord has given him!

God doesn’t say, “Everywhere that you will tread upon I will give to you.” It says, “Everywhere that you will tread upon I have given you.” They simply needed to go in faith and claim the promise of God. God had already give them the Promised Land. He was looking for a people who had faith to move forward and allow Him to work ahead of them.

Again I think of my own life. How many promises might God have already given me—yet I fight God instead of claiming the promise! How many promises might He already have granted me—but I am hesitant and weak of faith and do not step forward in His path and do not engage Him in service.

Thus, God commissioned Joshua.

In addition to encouraging Joshua to be courageous and to be strong, God also gives Joshua some advice that is very powerful and still appropriate for us today:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8 NKJV)

I want to be a successful Christian—don’t you? I want to be a successful servant of God, as God has called us to serve. He promised Joshua the same thing that He promises us, and it’s a promise of
prosperity. It’s a promise of success. I apply these same dynamic words of advice that God gave Joshua to myself; similarly, what David would write years later:

Your Word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You. (Psalm 119:11 NKJV)

Day and night, this book, the Law and the Testimony, is to be part of my life. If I read and observe according to all that is written, God is walking right there with me to sustain me.

The next verse is a very famous verse:

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9 NKJV)

What a “vitamin shot” to the Christian to read and to claim this verse! Because the devil wants to discourage us. The devil wants us to be dismayed. The devil wants to do anything he can to distract and detract and get us off our goal. But here God tells us to be strong and to be of good courage and to not be afraid. Why? Because He, the Lord our God, is with us!

Many years later, Paul would write:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31 NKJV)

Of all the troubles, of all the challenges, of all the obstacles that lie in our past, that lie in our present, that lie in our future—if we would simply pause and acknowledge, “My God is able. My God is larger than these problems.”

As he looked at what they were going to do, Joshua could have been frozen in fear if he had not been a man of faith. Their first obstacle was—how are we going to get across this river? The second obstacle was—there are giants in the land, they have high walls, and they’re well-fortified. Joshua could have thought, “I know the promise, but everyone’s been talking about the Promise a long time—can we really be sure about the promise?”

Years later, in today’s world, the Bible tells us that there will be scoffers who come in the last days and say, “Where is the Promise?” Those scoffers want to discourage you and dismay you and distract you—but be of good courage, be not dismayed, for the Lord thy God is with you! He makes a promise that He will never leave you nor forsake you. How encouraging is that? There are times in this world when we can feel extremely lonely—even if we have a full house and are in a crowded place, there are times that are extremely lonely. There are journeys that are private journeys, on which at times you feel as if you’re all alone. I know Moses and Joshua, being leaders, understood those of dynamics when at times it seemed the whole camp had turned against them. In your own life, you may have had some journeys where you felt all alone; however, God wants to remind you, “Be of good courage. Do not be dismayed. For I, Me, the God that hangs the Earth in existence and speaks things come into creation—My Word does not return void. Be of good courage. Do not be dismayed, for you are not alone, for I am with you.”

It is very difficult at times to "see" God. However, even though we cannot see Him physically, we can look in spirit, in faith, and know that He is with us. When we look for Him in spirit and in faith, we can see the evidence all around us that He truly is with us and He is in control of the situation.

By faith, the children of Israel crossed the Jordan. By faith, they moved ahead into the Promised Land.

Then, that famous story: Joshua and the battle of Jericho. What a fun story! God was again trying to teach the Israelites that it was not going to be by might or brawn or sword or spear or hired army or mass of army that was going to give them the victory. It would be God who would give them the victory.
God was not looking for fighters. God was not looking for soldiers. God was looking for men of faith. Men who would listen to His word and say, "All that the Lord has said, we will do." Therefore, God gives them very strange instructions: they are to simply march around the city!

These were strange instructions indeed! Jericho was surrounded by a high wall, a thick wall, and you didn’t get close to that wall unless you were trying to go through it; because if you got close to that wall—what would the inhabitants of the city do? They would drop stuff on you from the top of the wall. They would shoot arrows at you from a high vantage point on the wall. Strategically, marching around the walled city was not a good idea! But God wasn’t looking for a good idea.

Sometimes we think we “help God out” by giving Him a good idea—He’s already got good ideas! He’s not looking for good ideas. He’s not looking for a consultant. He’s looking for an obedient servant!

So Joshua obeyed. He told his men, “This is what the Lord has said we will do.” The men were probably thinking, “Oh, we’re going to march around the city—and then we’re going to run inside?” Or, “Something amazing’s going to happen. We just crossed the Jordan—we can do this!” But then, after marching around the city, Joshua gave a very unclimactic command, telling them to return to their tents. I’m sure they were wondering, “What?” But then the next morning, Joshua told them that they would march around the city again. The men probably imagined that the previous day’s march had been a strategic move to inspect the wall for breaches that they could go back and penetrate that second day. But then, after they marched around the city walls again, Joshua again dismissed them to their tents.

The men were ready to take the city by force. However, Joshua knew that he had to wait on the Lord, in His timing. God had told Joshua in the beginning that He had already given them the land. The circling of the city walls was, in fact, the Israelites “going through the motions” to testify that they would be obedient and be a people of faith. The victory was already God’s! So many times, we want to engage. We want to take God’s promises now, in our own power—but God says, “Let’s wait.”

Thus, the third day, fourth day, fifth day, and sixth day the Israelites did the same thing—they marched around the walls of the city and then dismissed to their tents. Then, on the seventh day, Joshua informed them that they were going to do something new—they were going to march around the city not once, not twice, but seven times! Imagine this was a test of faith for the children of Israel, not only because it took obedience—but can you imagine what those soldiers on top of the walls were saying about the children of Israel as they marched around the city? “What’s the matter with these people? What’s the matter with these soldiers? That’s not the way it’s supposed to be done!” But they were following God’s command. Without all the human weapons of the time, because they were a people of faith, listening to the Word of God and His specific instructions.

God’s instructions don’t have to make sense, but they’re always right. In fact, sometimes even today God’s instructions sometimes don’t make sense to humans. We might have no idea why God is asking us to do a certain thing because it doesn’t make sense. “Lord, I only have $100 and my electric bill is $100, and you want me to give 10% of that to You?” That doesn’t make sense! But those who honor God reap the victory. For God does not give the victory to the faithful. He lets them receive the victory that He has already given.

Have you ever thought about it that way? Often, we think we’re in the battle, when actually—God is already way ahead of us! He says to us, “Oh, I’ve already passed that point. Just keep walking. Something better lies ahead of you.”

So on the seventh day, after circling the city seven times, the priests blew a long blast on their priestly trumpets and the Israelites gave a loud shout unto the Lord—and the walls of Jericho came tumbling down! The only part of the great walls surrounding the city that did not fall were the area where Rahab was; she was protected by God because she had protected the spies. It’s interesting to note that archeologists think that they have found the city of Jericho. Now, the city itself had been relocated and
so it existed by that name in other places—but archeologists think they found the original; and as they excavated, they discovered one section of the old wall that was intact. How amazing is that?

Joshua would lead the Israelites on to claim the Promised Land.

The story of Joshua is a story that stands out because of the amazing things that were done in God’s name: the walls of Jericho falling without a battle, the conquest of the land, the sun stopping in its movement across the sky. By the way, those who keep track of the times and calendars have found a note of that in their evaluations—of the sun standing still as related in Joshua 10.

We pause again to remind ourselves that in the conquest of the land—we do not conquer anything. It is God who conquers. In our own lives, if we were to add up the amount of time that we spend asking for God’s help vs. the amount of time that we spend acknowledging and praising Him for the victories that He has given, unfortunately, many times the asking outweighs the praising. We need to remind ourselves that anything good in our lives—all that we have—comes from God. Any blessing, from a simple meal, to the clothes on our back, to the place where we live, to the little animals that make our lives wonderful, to the bountiful blessing and treasure of children, to a job, to having water come into our homes that enables us to bathe on a regular basis. I’m not kidding about that—if you’ve been to other places in the world, running water in your home is a blessing. Pausing a moment to assess the other 5 to 6 billion people that live in this world, I’m not ashamed nor will I ever retract the statement, “The poor in this country are the wealthiest poor people in the world.” We don’t realize the blessings that we have.

God gave the victory to the Israelites; and I believe that if they had continued in the spirit of truly honoring God and recognizing that He was the Deliverer and the Conqueror, that perhaps their journey would not have been so bumpy down the road. As they retracted from God and retracted from worshiping Him and retracted into their own selves, other countries began invading and conquering them because they no longer were relying on the Deliverer. The Israelites would go through a long journey throughout the Old Testament—it’s a long journey from Joshua all the way to the Messiah.

May we learn from Joshua, the man of faith. He was so faithful! Think about it. If you needed extra time for something—what would you ask God for?

Lord, help me do this quicker.

Lord, send me some help.

Lord, stop the sun?

That’s a man of faith. “Lord, we need some extra time here. If you would please just pause that up there for just a little while longer.”

God is not looking for people of ability but people of faith. I pray that we can all be people of faith. God is not looking for the flashy and the educated and the prominent—even though those people tend to stand out and sometimes they’re up front and honored. God, instead, is looking for the humble, faithful servant. Whatever the Lord has called you to do, do it with all your might, and ask the Lord to bless it. Walk strong and be courageous, for the Lord the God, is with you. He will give you the victory.
Title: “Faith of Our Fathers: Samson” 
Series: “Faith of Our Fathers” 7 of 9  
Preached: BJ Boles (04/23/11) @ Augusta 1st SDA Church  
Key Passage: Judges 16:20

The next individual we will look at in our study of “Faith of Our Fathers” is the judge, Samson. The story of Samson is a very fascinating story that most people have heard many times. In fact, even most non-religious individuals are familiar with the story of Samson, and also with another person who comes on the scene later in Samson’s story: Delilah. Even today, people sometimes use the name “Samson” when referring to someone’s muscular strength and use the name “Delilah” to characterize deceptive individuals.

Samson’s story began even before he was born. When you think of the stories in the Bible, there are several very significant and important individuals whose births were foretold to their parents. The story of Samson is found in the book of Judges. To set the context of the story, we find that Israel once again has turned away from God. This isn’t too long after Gideon, another man of faith, had demonstrated how God could take care of His people by defeating the Midianites with only 300 individuals. But again, in Judges 13:1, we find a familiar phrase describing the condition of God’s people:

*Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.* (Judges 13:1 NKJV)

This seems like a cycle for the Israelites—doesn’t it? They see God’s hand. They see His hand of deliverance. They see that He is a God who wants to take care of them. He desires to be their God. Yet, over time, they turn and do evil in His sight and basically reject Him as their God. This results in God allowing them to fall into the hands of their enemies.

When we see the contrast between the blessings and the curses, we sometimes think, “Wow, God was harsh.” But even today, what would happen to this world if God’s protective hand was not holding back the winds of strife? God simply withdrawing His providential protection and blessing is enough to put us into a world of hurt. I don’t think anyone can be blamed for the plight of Israel except Israel. Even today, when I make bad decisions and I’m reaping the consequences of those bad decisions, is it right for me to curse God because I’m reaping the consequences for my own bad decisions? Especially when God has gone out of His way to give me instructions as to what to do to be happy. Yet, I sometimes say, “I think I know better than God,” and then make the decision to do something else. Israel often thought they knew better than God.

Yet God had never intended to abandon them. He certainly was hoping that they would learn from this isolation that they needed Him. Then, after 40 years had passed, God goes to a man and promises a son. Forty years is a very significant period of time in the Bible—remember that 40 years was the length of time the Israelites had to wait to enter into the Promised Land.

*Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. And the Angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, “Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”* (Judges 13:2-5 NKJV)

Again, we see a pattern in that when God comes ahead of time to speak to the parents to tell them that they’re going to have a child, it is often a miraculous birth. Remember the promise to Abraham. Time went on and on and on without the fulfillment of the promise—until they were old! No one has kids at
that age! God did something miraculous so they would know that He did it. The story was likewise with Samson’s parents—his mother was barren. They were not going to have kids. But God was going to do something miraculous. In a later chapter, we’ll look at the life of Samuel—again, his mother was barren and God did the miraculous. These miraculous births all pave the way to the ultimate miraculous birth of Jesus. The birth of Jesus was an unprecedented miraculous birth because Mary had a son but did not know a man—a virgin conceived!

So, God made a promise to them that they were going to have a son. Samson’s parents talk this over and wonder, “Wow! This is major. And we’ve been in the presence of God. Is this good or bad?” But, of course, God was speaking to them to reassure them that this was something that He was a part of and that He would bless.

The law of the Nazirite is outlined in Numbers 6. It’s an interesting study if you want to learn more about it. They were to have no wine, no vinegar, no grape products, no raisins. They were not to cut their hair. They were to eat no unclean thing. They were to be by sight and conduct different, set apart.

There are quite a few parallels to the Messiah in Samson. Samson being a type, projecting forward, pointing toward Christ. He had a miraculous birth. He was holy from the birth—set aside from birth. He faced the crisis alone. God took special care of him. He was betrayed for silver. He sacrificed his life to deliver God’s people. Even the Nazirite vow of no grapes or vinegar or wine or raisins is paralleled because Jesus vowed that He will not drink of the juice of this fruit until He sees us again, face-to-face.

However, while there are certain markers that demonstrate that Samson was a type, projecting and prophesying forward to the Messiah, his story certainly was not a story paralleled with Christ with regard to character. In fact, Samson’s life and conduct would be something of a journey that is very frustrating to read. Set aside from birth, blessed from birth, Samson had an ego. Samson had a stubbornness. Samson had an arrogance. Samson had a pridefulness. He understood that he was to represent his people and that God had called him; however, he was so self-absorbed that he really didn’t understand what his mission was. I know his parents had to have repeatedly told him the story of the Angel of the Lord’s visitation. He was keeping the Nazirite vow. Yet he desired a Philistine wife. His parents didn’t approve of this and tried to discouraging him, but his arrogance and self-dependence would get Samson in a great deal of trouble.

There’s a point in the beginning here that I believe is critical for parents everywhere. A large percentage of parents pray for their children—not just once a day but throughout every day. Thus, their hearts break when their children make wrong choices and stray. Their hearts are torn when they observe their children make decisions that they know will be harmful and bring pain to them and lead them down the wrong path. Samson had a miraculous birth, was set aside by God, his parents were given divine assistance with parenting and raising him—yet he still made choices that led him astray. Samson’s story demonstrates that you can be a perfect parent, with divine assistance, but your children can still make choices that take them in a different direction. However, there’s also an aspect to this story in that there’s a promise that your children will not forget the way that they have been raised. They won’t forget the context of the stories that you have taught them about Christ. They won’t forget about the principles of living a life for Christ. There’s a promise that, in the end, in a day that you may not even be around to see, they will remember.

“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6 NKJV)

Your children will still have that power of choice; however, as we see in the story of Samson, in the very end he remembered. He came back. Therefore, our prayer is that the Holy Spirit never stops being with our children—that He continues to make them uncomfortable with bad decisions and continues to encourage them and remind them of the way that they were raised.
I can’t imagine the disappointment that Samson’s parents must have felt regarding the choices he was making that were so contrary to those he should be making. I can imagine his father saying to his mother, “We taught him better than that! He knows. Why is he doing this?” But in the end, God would be glorified, despite Samson’s terrible vignettes away from the path to which he was called. Romans 8:28 comes to mind in that all things work together for good, because God did have a plan.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28 NKJV)

And so Samson would stray, but God would take him back. When we read Samson’s story, we sometimes think it happened very quickly—but Samson judged 20 years in Israel. The stories we’re familiar with from his life are simply those that stand out as milestones in his journey.

So, against better judgment, Samson chose to seek a Philistine wife. Sometimes that which we want, that which we desire, that which we think is best—is not best for us. Samson created a lot of his problems himself. Can we really blame Samson’s problem on women? Sometimes it’s said that way: “Samson had a woman problem.” No—Samson had a spiritual problem. If Samson had remained faithful to God’s calling, these distractions and temptations would not have been distractions and temptations.

No matter how strong a temptation may be, we still make a choice to yield to the temptation. However, God promises us that if we are with Him, then no temptation can overcome us. So we can’t blame it on the temptation because God has promised us that, with Him, we can overcome any temptation.

And so, Samson finds a Philistine wife and has a big party, to which his guests bring 30 extra people. During the course of the party, Samson tells a riddle to his guests and challenges them to guess the answer in seven days with a prize of 30 garments and 30 shekels if they can answer it correctly. He was very confident that no one would be able to guess the riddle because it was based solely on one of his personal experiences.

The subject of the riddle was a lion that Samson had killed with his bare hands as he traveled to visit his wife before they were married.

Can you imagine that? Killing a lion with his bare hands! We have a dog—I should say a dog found us and now he has us! He was an abandoned puppy; so we fastened him up into a cute little puppy. But you know what the problem with puppies is—right? They become dogs. They don’t stay puppies. They lose their cuteness. I love dogs, but there’s something special about a puppy. Well, he’s big now and he has claws on his paws, but he’s still full of puppy energy. So when we go outside, he’ll jump all over us and we get clawed up, which we’re working on correcting. But can you imagine? That’s a puppy that loves us and doesn’t realize that he’s hurting us! Can you imagine a lion? The fangs? The claws? Can you imagine going up against a lion with nothing but your bare hands? The Spirit of God delivered Samson that day. In truth, whenever Samson was able to do these incredible things, it always was the Spirit of God. Samson’s dilemma was that he began to think that he who was performing these feats himself: I did this. That’s where his arrogance came into play.

So, returning to the source of Samson’s riddle: as he was passing by the carcass of the lion some time after he had killed it, he saw that bees had built a beehive inside it and he ate the honey from the beehive. From that experience, this is the riddle Samson gave:

So he said to them:

"Out of the eater came something to eat,  
And out of the strong came something sweet."
Now for three days they could not explain the riddle.

(Judges 14:14 NKJV)

Now, who would be able to solve that riddle? I mean, throughout history, how many people have even seen a beehive inside a lion carcass, let alone eaten honey from that beehive inside the lion carcass? They are not going to get this riddle! Seven days they had to figure out the riddle, but the days passed, they realized, “We have no idea what he’s talking about.” He had made it sound so curious.

The pattern begins here that Samson is not watching and praying. Jesus tells us to watch and pray.

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (same wording in both Matthew 26:41 and Mark 14:38 NKJV)

No matter what your calling, no matter what your position, even when doing what God has asked you to do, if we are not in a state of watching and praying, we can fall to temptation. If our mind is not attuned to God, we can become dumb or foolish to the will of the devil. The pattern that develops here with Samson would result in his ultimate demise, for the party guests trying to guess the riddle figured out that they could get to Samson through his wife; so they approached his wife and forced her to press him to give her the answer to the riddle.

Samson tells her the story and she tells her people, because her people are more important to her than Samson. He was duped. Of course, they tell him the answer before the seven-day deadline has passed, and then he owes them the promised 30 garments and 30 shekels. So Samson goes and violently gets them their gift and delivers it to them; but in the end, he seeks revenge, and this causes a domino effect in his life. God wanted Samson to deliver his people, but instead Samson gets caught up in personal vendettas—his own personal missions of vengeance. The story of the riddle is just one of many fascinating stories about Samson.

I wonder, in our personal spiritual life and in our personal lives in our homes, and in the spiritual life in our churches, how often we are side-tracked from God’s agenda with our own agenda? How often is our time and effort and money caught up dealing with problems that we’ve created for ourselves that we’re asking God to get us out of? How often are we fighting battles that God didn’t ask us to fight? And all the while, our personal “Israel” or our personal mission from God is lost. God is still there for us. God still helps us get out of those terrible squirely difficult situations; yet He must say to Himself, “I wanted more for you than this. I called you to a higher purpose.” In the Church when we get distracted with all these other things, God must say, “The harvest is great. The harvest is in the fields. Why are you in here? Why are you fighting with your brother? Why are you fighting with your sister? Why are you upset? Why are you angry at Me? Why do you continue to disobey?” It’s a similar situation to Samson’s that we don’t like to notice or acknowledge. But think about the negative energy of distraction—the devil understands it for sure.

In the end, Samson’s wife is killed. What has he gained? Vengeance doesn’t satisfy. Once you’ve gotten vengeance—then what? The internal anger doesn’t go away. In fact, most of the time that anger leads to more and more trouble. Think of the old Hatfields and McCoys. A historical feud that went on for years and years and years. Yet they say that, in the end, no one could really explain why they were upset at one another, except that they knew that they should be upset at one another because they’ve always been upset with one another!

There are similar “feuds” causing distraction from God’s work in churches all around:

“Mr. Smith, why don’t you and Brother James get along?”

“Well, he hurt my feelings a long time ago!”

256
"What did he do?"

"I don’t remember, but I remember I was angry, and he hasn’t said he was sorry."

Rather than forgiving and moving on, we not only carry that burden around but keep adding other burdens to ourselves that just weigh us down from doing God’s work. Vengeance. Vengeance. Vengeance. Vengeance. Vengeance. It’s like a ping-pong game.

After Samson got vengeance, then the Philistines wanted vengeance. So the Israelites decide to turn Samson over to the Philistines. To paraphrase the story, they go to Samson and say, “Look, you’re causing a lot of problems for us. You know, we’re already oppressed, and we don’t need this extra on top of it. Um, so if you don’t mind, we’d like to tie you up.” You know that if you have to ask permission to tie someone up that tying them up is really not going to help—right? But they ask anyway, “Can we tie you up?” And Samson’s like, “Are you sure you’re not going to kill me?” “Oh no, Samson, we’re not going to kill you.” So Samson agrees to allow them to tie him up. Samson wasn’t worried about being turned over to the enemy because he still had a confidence that he would overcome the enemy. God was not yet through with Samson and his journey of growth continued. He was turned over to the Philistines, and of course God caused him to be released from his bonds and he killed 1000 Philistines with a donkey’s jawbone.

But in Judges 16, the story turns. This is during the latter part of Samson’s reign as a judge. Again, he reigned for 20 years as a judge. First, he encounters a harlot in Gaza and the old pattern starts up again. He then gets enticed by a woman in Philistine territory whose name is Delilah. Once again, he loses track of his purpose. He loses track of what God has called him to do and focuses instead on a personal agenda. It is down this path that he would bring shame and dishonor on God’s people. We have to remember that no matter what specific talent or gift God gave Samson, God never intended for Samson to visit a harlot. That wasn’t part of the plan. Even if the rest of the story hadn’t happened, the visiting of a harlot brought dishonor on someone who had been set aside and claimed the name of God—he was a Nazarite from birth, so Samson stood out. Then came Delilah. She must have been incredibly beautiful—at least you would hope. There’s no other explanation that could even try to defend or describe what happened! Samson begins to visit her regularly. The Philistines notice this, so they get together and tell her that they need to know the secret of his strength.

When we venture on our own, the foolishness of sin warps our minds from making wise decisions. Wisdom comes from God. A man has an affair and says, “Let’s keep this secret.” The woman promises to keep it secret. You know the amazing thing about affairs? They’re never kept secret! First of all, it’s open to God; but secondly, eventually everyone finds out anyway. But in their foolishness, without wisdom, they make choices that don’t make a lot of sense, and they think that their deceitful verbal contract is going to stand. Likewise, Delilah wasn’t loyal to Samson—she was loyal to her people. Even in the mafia, the Mafioso—it used to be that the family was number one and no one turned on one another; but then when one gets arrested, he suddenly turns on everyone else. Loyalty, ultimately, in sinful individuals, is about one person: me. Is there honor among thieves? I might change that and say, “Is there honor among sinners?”

The story of Samson and Delilah is well-known. It seems that Samson should have remembered the riddle and how his first wife pressed him and how that situation ended up. But now Delilah is pressing him and he plays with her. He gives her the wrong answer. The Philistines come in and try to capture him using the false answer Samson gave Delilah—but, of course, he is able to get free because he still had the source of his strength. The first time this happened should have told him. The second time this happened should have told him. The third time—was flat out stupid! But again, when we’re not watching and praying, we aren’t in the wisdom of God. When we lean onto our own understanding, we make decisions and choices that seem right and good to us. He thought he was in control. He thought
he could keep playing this game. But the fourth time—he told her the truth! That was going to be a problem. Why did he think the result would be different?

True wisdom comes from God. No matter how smart you are, no matter how intelligent you are, no matter how educated you are, you can be really dumb without God. You can read this story and wonder, “What’s he doing?” Especially when, after three different attempts in which he gave her a false answer, he finally gives her the correct answer! You know that old expression: “Fool me once, don’t fool me twice.” It was the fourth time when Samson gave her the correct answer!

That was definitely not wise! Perhaps he thought that the hair really didn’t matter. It wasn’t, of course, the hair that actually gave him his strength—it was God. Perhaps he thought, “I’ve had this strength my whole life and I’ll be strong whether I have hair or don’t have hair! I’ll be strong whether I drink wine or I don’t drink wine!” It’s that arrogance that got him in trouble. In fact, the saddest verse in the whole story is found in Judges Chapter 16 and verse 20. This is after Delilah has had Samson’s hair cut off while he slept with his head in her lap.

And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” So he awoke from his sleep, and said, “I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!” But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him. (Judges 16:20 NKJV)

Samson had played the game too long. Then, in the most critical time, he realized it wasn’t a game at all. He had rejected his calling by the Lord God Almighty, and so he was by himself. He was then put into prison, his eyes were gouged out, and he was made a laughingstock. He was in the exact opposite position of where he was supposed to be, and he was bringing dishonor to God’s people. In prison, he was able to reassess his life, and to think and to pray and to ask forgiveness. Ultimately, the last prayer of Samson is in verse 28 of Judges Chapter 16:

Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, “O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!” (Judges 6:28 NKJV)

The lesson I learn from Samson is multi-faceted. I certainly see the importance of watching and praying. Regardless of our pedigree or education or calling or mission, we must remain in contact with God so that we are not distracted—so we are not torn off course by leaning on our own understanding. Every day, we need the Lord to guide us. Every single day.

I’m also reminded of how sin is gradual. It’s control over us becomes increasingly strong if not broken. Its effect is similar to if I allowed you to put a string around my wrists—I could easily break it; however, if you kept wrapping the string over and over and over again, I would not be able to break it because it gradually becomes stronger. In the beginning, Samson never would have chosen the end. But each bad decision reinforced the other. Samson thought he was in control. He thought he was in control of the temptation. He thought he was in control of sin. That’s how sin entwines itself in our lives. It allows us to think we’re in control of this affair. It allows us to think we’re in control of this embezlement. It allows us to think we’re in control of this or that—but ultimately sin controls us! Too late, Samson discovered that he had lost control and, really, had given it to the other side.

I’m also intrigued by the very powerful point that we are to stay away from areas where we shouldn’t be—areas of individual struggle or weakness in our own personal lives. We each have certain areas that are especially important for us to stay away from. For instance, if I’m an alcoholic, I shouldn’t go into a bar to witness for Jesus. Stay away from the devil’s territory. What would have happened if Samson had stayed away from the land of the Philistines and had not been enticed by their lifestyle and their women? He kept putting himself in the wrong area and was continually tempted. I believe that’s another reason why the Church exists—not because it is perfect and not because there aren’t
challenges, but so that we can put ourselves in a place where God can speak to us and other brothers and sisters can encourage us.

Ultimately, the greatest thing that we can learn from Samson is that it is not in our power but in God’s power. Samson was not the strongest man in the world. God is the strongest, and He chose to use Samson by imparting strength. Samson may not have even looked the strongest, by the way, because the Philistines knew that there had to be a secret to his strength. If Samson had looked strong, they might have just assumed he was a strong guy—but they knew there was something underlying his strength. We learn from Samson that we need to remind ourselves that even in God’s calling, even in God’s work, even in His mission, it is He who works through us to achieve the success. Also, that God truly cannot use anyone until they are empty because He can’t fill something that’s already full. Therefore, we need to empty ourselves of ego and selfishness and our own agenda as we ask God to come in and empower us to accomplish and fulfill His purposes.

I pray that each of us learn from the story of Samson. He’s listed in the Chapter of Faith in Hebrews. God included Samson in that chapter because these lessons are important for us to learn. Therefore, may we stay on course and not stray into the devil’s territory, may we not play and flirt with sin, and may we rely on the Lord’s power to do His will.
The following guides are samples of the 11 guides used in the prayer meeting small group study. Seven samples are given of the eleven total:

#1 “Creation” [Unavailable – Not included in appendix]

#2 “Tower of Babel”

#3 “Sodom”

#4 “Plagues of Egypt”

#5 “The Tabernacle”

#6 “Law” [Unavailable]

#7 “Jericho”

#8 “Annual Feast” [Unavailable – Not included in appendix]

#9 “The Ark Stolen”

#10 “Sorcery”

#11 “David’s Sin” [Unavailable – Not included in appendix]
Faith of Our Fathers

Study Sheet

"Tower of Babel"

INTRODUCTORY TEXT

Genesis 9:18 Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. 19 These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated. 20 And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. 21 Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent. 22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. 23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father’s nakedness. 24 So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. 25 Then he said: “Cursed be Canaan. A servant of servants He shall be to his brethren.” 26 And he said: “Blessed be the LORD, The God of Shem, And may Canaan be his servant. 27 May God enlarge Japheth. And may he dwell in the tents of Shem. And may Canaan be his servant.” 28 And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. 29 So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.

QUESTIONS

1. Why was it such a big deal for Ham to have seen his father’s nakedness?
2. Doesn’t the punishment seem severe?
3. Which of the three sons was to be the line of the chosen race?
4. How does this text relate to this story? Psalm 144:15

QUOTE DISCUSSION

“The prophecy of Noah was no arbitrary denunciation of wrath or declaration of favor. It did not fix the character and destiny of his sons. But it showed what would be the result of the course of life they had severely chosen and the character they had developed. It was an expression of God’s purpose toward them and their posterity in view of their own character and conduct.” Patriarchs and Prophets [Chapter 19].

PASSAGE DIALOGUE

Psalm 37:18, 26.
Deuteronomy 7:9.

• How does the blessing or curse pass along to future generations?

MAIN TEXT

Genesis 11:1 Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. 3 Then they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. 4 And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make ourselves a name, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” 5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6 And the LORD said, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. 7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” 8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. 9 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.
QUESTIONS
1. What one thing divided the people and led some to the banks of the River Euphrates?
2. The builders of the Tower wanted one unified world community and power. What was wrong with this?
3. What were some of the reasons for building the Tower of Babel?
4. As you read the text and the chapter from Patriarchs and Prophets... what was this tower like? How was it similar to modern skyscrapers?
5. How might Noah and Shem been involved in this story?
6. Why did God send angels to check the progress of the tower?
7. How did God stop the construction and what specific act demonstrated He was God?
8. What do we learn about a government founded without God?
9. Discuss how these two principles are present in this story and still today in those working against God: Relying on self and rejecting God’s law.
10. How are there “tower builders” in our time?

QUOTE DISCUSSION
"The Babel builders had indulged the spirit of murmuring against God. Instead of gratefully remembering his mercy to Adam and his gracious covenant with Noah, they had complained of his severity in expelling the first pair from Eden and destroying the world by a flood. But while they murmured against God as arbitrary and severe, they were accepting the rule of the cruellest tyrants. Satan was seeking to bring contempt upon the sacrificial offerings that prefigured the death of Christ, and as the minds of the people were darkened by idolatry, he led them to counterfeit these offerings and sacrifice their own children upon the altars of their gods. As men turned away from God, the divine attributes—justice, purity, and love—were supplanted by oppression, violence, and brutality." Patriarchs and Prophets (Chapter 10).

PASSAGE DIALOGUE
Revelation 14:8, 16:2
• How does the term Babylon connect to the story of the Tower of Babel?
Psalm 53:13, 14, 10, 11
• What does God observe from Heaven?
ABRAHAM PLEADS WITH GOD

Genesis 18:16 Then the men rose from thence and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. 17 And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing? 18 since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations shall be blessed in him?" 19 For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him." 20 And the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, 21 I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know." 22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD.

23 And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city, would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? 25 Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked, far be it from You! Shall the Judge of all the earth do right?" 26 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." 27 Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, my Lord, the souls are but fifty; why, then, doth Your servant speak according to the number of the souls? Send, I pray, Your servant and we will find fifty, even if we find them in the city." 28 And He said, "If I find there forty-five, will You not spare it for the fifty righteous that are in it?" 29 And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of forty." 30 Then He said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" 31 And He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 32 And He said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty should be found there?" 33 So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty." 34 Then He said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose ten should be found there?" 35 And he said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." 36 So the Lord went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

MAIN TEXT

Genesis 19:1 Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed himself with his face toward the ground. 2 And he said, "Now, my lords, please turn to your servants' household and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early in the morning." And they said, "No, but we will spend the night in the open square." 3 But he insisted strongly, so they turned in to him and entered his house. Then he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. 4 Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. 5 And they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally." 6 So Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him, 7 and said, "Please, my brothers, do not do so wickedly! 8 See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof." 9 And they said, "Stand back!" Then they said, "This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them." So they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near to break down the door. 10 But the men reached out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. 11 And they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they became weary trying to find the door. 12 Then the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Son-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whomever you have in the city—take them out of this place! 13 For we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it." 14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, "Get up, get out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city!" 15 But his sons-in-law seemed to be joking. 16 When the morning dawnd the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city." 17 And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. 18 So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed." 19 Then Lot said to them, "Please, my lords! 20 Indeed now, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die. 21 See now, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one; please let me escape there (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live." 22 And he said to him, "See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city for which you have spoken. 23 Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there." Therefore the name of the city was called...
Zor. 33 The sun had risen upon the earth when Lot entered Zor. 34 Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens. 35 So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. 36 But his wife looked backward behind him, and she became a pillar of salt. 37 And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. 38 Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and beheld, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace. 39 And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt. 40 Then Lot went up out of Zoar and dwelt in the mountains, and he and his two daughters were with him, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar. And he and his two daughters dwelt in a cave.

QUESTIONS (GENESIS 18)
1. Genesis 18:17-19 - Why are these verses in the Bible? What do they teach us?
2. What do you think about Abraham's "negotiation" with Abraham?
3. What is the "outcry against Sodom" spoken of in verse 20?
4. Why does God need to go down to Sodom in verse 21? Doesn't He already know?
5. Who is Abraham talking to?

QUESTIONS (GENESIS 19)
6. What was Lot doing at the city gate?
7. Why had Lot chosen Sodom?
8. Why didn't the angels immediately accept Lot's invitation?
9. What does the mob who gathered around Lot's house tell you about the city?
10. Why does Lot offer up his virgin daughters to protect strangers?
11. How do the strangers (angels) save Lot's household from the mob?
12. If 10 were not found, why was God willing to save a larger amount if they left with Lot?
13. How large is Lot's family?
14. What was the rush for Lot to leave the city if the angels were the ones to destroy it?
15. Why didn't Lot want to go to the Mountains?
16. Why did God spare a whole city set to be destroyed because Lot wanted to go there (Zoar)?
17. What were the angels' instructions to Lot and his family as they fled?
18. What were all the things God destroyed?
19. Why did Lot's wife get turned into a pillar of salt? Was Lot also responsible for this?
20. Why did Lot leave Zoar? What did God do to Zoar after Lot left?

QUOTES DISCUSSION
"Idleness and riches make the heart hard that has never been oppressed by want or burdened by sorrow. The love of pleasure was fostered by wealth and leisure, and the people gave themselves up to sensual indulgence. Their useless, idle life made them a prey to Satan's temptations, and they defied the image of God, and became satanic rather than divine. Idleness is the greatest curse that can fall upon man, for vice and crime follow in its train. It enfeebles the mind, perverts the understanding, and debases the soul. Satan lies in ambush, ready to destroy those who are unguarded...he is never more successful than when he comes to men in their idle hours." Patriarchs and Prophets (Chapter 14).

"It is little things that test the character. It is the unpretending acts of daily self-denial, performed with a cheerful, willing heart, that God smiles upon. We are not to live for self, but for others." Patriarchs and Prophets (Chapter 14).

PASSAGE DIALOGUE
Ezekiel 16:49-50.
• What was the iniquity of Sodom?
Revelation 2:4-5.
• What does God's instruction to Ephesus have in common with this story?
Malachi 3:7.
• What is God's true character and His desire for all who have strayed?
• What is the parallel between the time of Lot and the Last Days?
Faith of Our Fathers
Study Sheet

“Plagues of Egypt”

INTRODUCTION

Exodus 6:1 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.” 2 And God spoke to Moses and said to him: “I am the LORD. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name LORD I was not known to them. 4 I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. 5 And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant with the children of Israel. I am the LORD, I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 7 I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8 And I will bring you into the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you as a heritage. I am the LORD.” 9 So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel, but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage. 10 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “11 Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the children of Israel go out of his land.” 12 And Moses spoke before the LORD, saying, “The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?” 13 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them a command for the children of Israel and for Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

Exodus 7:1 So the LORD said to Moses: “See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. 2 You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land. 3 And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. 4 But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. 5 And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.” 6 Then Moses and Aaron did so, just as the LORD commanded them, so they did. 7 And Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three years old when they spoke to Pharaoh. 8 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, “9 When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Show a miracle for yourselves,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and cast it before Pharaoh, and let it become a serpent.’” 10 So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as the LORD commanded. And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent. 11 But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did like manner with their enchantments. 12 For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods. 13 And Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said.

QUESTIONS

1. What does uncircumcised lips mean? (Ex. 6:12)
2. How is God going to make Moses a God to Pharaoh? And Aaron a Prophet to Moses?
3. Why does God “harden Pharaoh’s heart”? What does this mean?
4. What do you think about the magicians being able to do the same sign as Aaron?

QUOTE DISCUSSION

“In their bondage the Israelites had to some extent lost the knowledge of God’s Law, and they had departed from its precepts. The Sabbath had been generally disregarded, and the excisions of their taskmasters made its observance apparently impossible. But Moses had shown his people that obedience to God was the first condition of deliverance; and the efforts made to restore the observance of the Sabbath had come to the notice of their oppressors.” Patriarchs and Prophets (Chapter 23).
THE TEN PLAGUES (Exodus 7:14-12:30)

1. First Plague (Exodus 7:14-25)
2. Second Plague (Exodus 8:1-15)
3. Third Plague (Exodus 8:16-19)
4. Fourth Plague (Exodus 8:20-32)
5. Fifth Plague (Exodus 9:1-7)
6. Sixth Plague (Exodus 9:8-12)
7. Seventh Plague (Exodus 9:13-35)
8. Eighth Plague (Exodus 10:1-30)
10. Tenth Plague (Exodus 11:1-10 & 12:1-30)

QUESTIONS
5. Disregard the 10th plague... of the others which is the worse to you?
6. Why does God send the plagues?
7. Why does God send 10 plagues? Weren’t one or two sufficient?
8. What distinct change happens between the 3rd and 4th plague?
9. Why weren’t Moses and Aaron killed by Pharaoh?
10. Do you notice an intensity as the plagues progress? What does this mean?

QUOTE DISCUSSION
“The elders of Israel endeavored to sustain the striking faith of their brethren by repeating the promises made to their fathers, and the prophetic words of Joseph before his death, foretelling their deliverance from Egypt. Some would listen and believe. Others, looking at the circumstances that surrounded them, refused to hope. The Egyptians, being informed of what was reported among their bondmen, derided their expectations and scornfully denied the power of their God. They pointed to their situation as a nation of slaves, and tauntingly said, “if your God is just and merciful, and possesseth power above that of the Egyptian gods, why does he not make you a free people?” They called attention to their own condition. They worshiped deities termed by the Israelites false gods, yet they were a rich and powerful nation. They declared that their gods had blessed them with prosperity, and had given them the Israelites as servants, and they gloried in their power to oppress and destroy the worshippers of Jehovah. Pharaoh himself boasted that the God of the Hebrews could not deliver them from his hand.”
Patriarchs and Prophets (Chapter 23).

“The Hebrews had expected to obtain their freedom without any special trial of their faith or any real suffering or hardship. But they were not yet prepared for deliverance. They had little faith in God, and were unwilling patiently to endure their afflictions until he should see fit to work for them. Many were content to remain in bondage rather than meet the difficulties attending removal to a strange land; and the habits of some had become so much like those of the Egyptians that they preferred to dwell in Egypt. Therefore the Lord did not deliver them by the first manifestation of his power before Pharaoh. He overruled events more fully to develop the tyrannical spirit of the Egyptian king and also to reveal himself to his people. Beholding his justice, his power, and his love, they would choose to leave Egypt and give themselves to his service. The task of Moses would have been much less difficult had not many of the Israelites become so corrupted that they were unwilling to leave Egypt.”
Patriarchs and Prophets (Chapter 23).

PASSAGE DIALOGUE
Exodus 4:21.
Galatians 6:7.
Revelation 16
* What do we learn of the 7 last plagues from the 10 plagues of Egypt?
Faith of Our Fathers
Study Sheet

“The Tabernacle”

Offering Aisle
Exodus 25:10 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering. 8 And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. 2 According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.

The Ark of the Testimony
Exodus 25:10 "And they shall make an ark of acacia wood. ... 10 And you shall make two cherubim of gold, of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. ... 21 You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. 22 And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.

The Table for the Showbread
Exodus 25:23 "You shall also make a table of acacia wood. ... 29 You shall make its dishes, its pans, its pitchers, and its bowls for pouring. You shall make them of pure gold. 30 And you shall set the showbread on the table before Me always.

The Gold Lampstand
Exodus 25:31 "You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work. Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its ornamental knobs, and flowers shall be of one piece. 32 And six branches shall come out of its sides: three branches of the lampstand out of one side, and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side.

Exodus 25:31 "And you shall command the children of Israel that they bring you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to cause the lamp to burn continually. 21 In the tabernacle of meeting, outside the veil which is before the Testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening until morning before the LORD. It shall be a statute forever to their generations on behalf of the children of Israel.

The Altar of Burnt Offering
Exodus 27:1 "You shall make an altar of acacia wood. ... 2 You shall make its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it. And you shall overlay it with bronze.

The Altar of Incense
Exodus 30:1 "You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood. ... 6 And you shall put it before the veil that is before the ark of the Testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the Testimony, where I will meet with you. 7 "Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning, when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. 8 And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. 9 You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it. 10 And Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement; once a year he shall make atonement upon it throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD.

The Bronze Laver
Exodus 30:17 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 18 "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it. 19 for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. 20 When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the LORD, they shall wash with water, lest they die.
QUESTIONS
1. What were the first two prerequisites in preparing a dwelling place for God?
2. Why did God desire to build a sanctuary?
3. What was unique about the offering gathered for the sanctuary?
4. What do we learn about God by reading the instructions for the sanctuary?
5. If Moses was God's special prophet why wasn't he the High Priest?
6. Look at each piece of furniture in the sanctuary and understand its purpose.
7. What is in the Ark of the Covenant and what do the items represent?
8. Who ministered in the sanctuary and who alone could go into the Most Holy Place?
9. Why was the Most Holy Place so restricted?
10. Why did the sinners have to make the sacrifice and kill the lamb?
11. What did the Urim and Thummim represent on the High Priest's breastplate?
12. How did the daily sacrifice differ from the Day of Atonement?
13. Why were there two goats used on Day of Atonement and what did they represent?
14. When was the sinning forgiven? At time sin offering? On Day of Atonement?

SANCTUARY
Below, draw a sketch of the Tabernacle with its court yard, Holy and Most Holy places along with
the various pieces of furniture.

QUOTE DISCUSSION
"The blood of Christ, while it was to release the repentant sinner from the
condemnation of the law, was not to cancel the sin; it would stand an record in the
sanctuary until the final atonement, so in the type the blood of the sin offering removed
the sin from the penitent, but it rested in the sanctuary until the Day of Atonement.
In the great day of final atonement, the dead are to be "judged out of those things which
were written in the books, according to their works." Revelation 20:12. Then by virtue
of the atoning blood of Christ, the sins of all the truly penitent will be blotted from the
books of heaven. Thus the sanctuary will be freed, or cleansed, from the record of sin. In the
type, this great work of atonement, or blotting out of sins, was represented by the services of
the Day of Atonement—the cleansing of the earthly sanctuary, which was accomplished by the
removal, by virtue of the blood of the sin offering, of the sins by which it had been polluted.
Patriarchs and Prophets (Chapter 30).

PASSAGE DIALOGUE
Romans 12:1.
• How are we to be compared to the sacrifice of the lamb?
Psalm 51:10.
• How does this verse connect with the Sanctuary and with which piece of furniture?
Hebrews 8:5 & 9:24
• How was earthly sanctuary the same or different than heavenly one?
Faith of Our Fathers
Study Sheet #7
"Jericho"

Bible Reading: Joshua 2, 5 & 6
Supplemental Reading: Patriarchs and Prophets Chapter 45

RAHAB
Joshua 2:1. Now Joshua, the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there. 2 And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country." 3 So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country." 4 Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. 5 And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them." 6 (But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof.) 7 Then the men pursued them by the road to the Jordan, to the Jericho. And as soon as those who pursued them had gone out, they shut the gate. 8 Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, 9 and said to the men: "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are faint-hearted because of you. 10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the waters of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. 11 And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. 12 Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown kindness that you will show kindness to my father’s house, and give me a true token. 13 And spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death." 14 So the men answered her, "Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the LORD has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you." 15 Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall. 16 And she said to them, "Get into the country, lest the pursuers meet you. Hide there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go your way." 17 So the men said to her, "According to your word, so be it." And she sent them away, and they departed. And she bound the scarlet cord in the window. 18 So the two men returned, descended from the mountain, and crossed over; and they came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all that had befallen them. 19 And they said to Joshua, "Truly the LORD has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are faint-hearted because of us.

QUESTIONS
1. Why did Joshua need to spy out the land and Jericho?
2. Why did the spies go to and stay with a harlot?
3. What was Rahab’s dilemma?
4. Rahab lies and deceives in order to protect the spies. How is this moral? Ethical?
5. Why does Rahab help the spies even at risk of her life?
6. What does the scarlet rope indicate? Symbolize?
7. Why is Rahab listed in the "Faith Chapter"? (Hebrews 11:31-32)

COMMANDER OF THE ARMY
Joshua 5:13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" 14 So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" 15 Then the Commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

QUESTIONS
8. What does God teach Joshua through this interaction?
9. How does the question, "Are you for us or against us?" impact you and your spiritual journey?
10. How is this incident similar to ones Jacob and Moses had?
11. What is the importance of taking off the sandals if he was already on the ground face in the dirt worshipping God?
RAHAB

Joshua 6:11. New Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel, none went out, and none came in. 1 And the
LORD said to Joshua: "See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor. 2 You shall march
around the city, all you men of war, you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. 3 And seven priests shall
bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the
priests shall blow the trumpets. 4 It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear
the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And
the people shall go up every man straight before him." 5 Then Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them,
"Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD." 6 And he said
to the people, "Proceed, and march around the city, and let him who is armed advance before the ark of the LORD." 7 So it
was, when Joshua had spoken to the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD
advanced, and blew the trumpets, and the ark of the covenant of the LORD followed them. 8 The armed men went before the
priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets. 9 Now
Joshua had commanded the people, saying, "You shall not shout or make any noise with your voice, nor shall a word
proceed out of your mouth, until the day I lay to you, 'Shout!' Then you shall shout." 10 So he laid the ark of the LORD
circle the city, going around it once. Then they came into the camp and lodged in the camp. 11 And Joshua rose early in the
morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. 12 Then seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the
ark of the LORD went on continually and blew with the trumpets. And the armed men went before them. But the rear guard
came after the ark of the LORD, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets. 13 And the second day they marched
around the city once and returned to the camp. So they did six days. 14 But it came to pass on the seventh day that they rose
early, about the dawning of the day, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner. On that day only they
marched around the city seven times. 15 And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua
told to the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city! 16 Now the city shall be wholly devoted to the LORD to
destruction, and all who are in it, and the king of it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, and all who are with her." Then the
messenger who went to Rahab came to tell her about it, and she took the two men who were sent to her city, and brought
them to the roof, 17 And she set a rope in the window for them to use as a rope by which they might go down from the roof,
and concealed them. 18 And she said to them, "Get out now while you can! For I know that you will be delivered to the
enemy. Go into the harlot's house, and hid there until they depart from the city!" 19 And she hid them, and the men got up
from the house of Rahab in the evening, and set forth. 20 And she shut the window heavily after they were gone. 21 And they
took of the accursed things, and made the camp of Israel a curse, and tumbled it. 22 But all the silver and gold, and vessels of
bronze and iron, are consecrated to the LORD, they shall come into the treasury of the LORD. 23 So the people shouted
when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted
with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. 24 And the city was taken at one time, and all the men of war were slain in
the city. 25 But all the women who were in the city, and all that was left of the spoil of the city, went out and came to the
field of vineyards, and to the fields. 26 And the army of Israel went through the middle of the city, and cut down the 

QUESTIONS

12. Why didn't the army of Jericho send arrows down on the Israelites who were marching?
13. What is the significance of the number 7 in this story?
14. How does the Sabbath fit into the week of siege?
15. Why couldn't the Israelites take any spoil from their conquest?
16. Was anything taken from the city? For whom was it taken?
17. What is significant about Rahab and her family being saved and living with Israel?
18. Why was the curse put on Jericho to never be rebuilt?

QUOTES DISCUSSION

"The Israelites had not gained the victory by their own power; the conquest had been wholly the Lord's, and as the first fruits of the land, the city, with all that it contained, was to be devoted as a sacrifice to God. It was to be impressed upon Israel that in the conquest of Canaan they were not to fight for themselves, but simply as instruments to execute the will of God; not to seek for riches or self-exaltation, but the glory of Jehovah their King." (Patriarchs and Prophets, Chapter 45).

"The inhabitants of Canaan had been granted ample opportunity for repentance. Forty years before, the opening of the Red Sea and the judgments upon Egypt had testified to the supreme power of the God of Israel. And now the overthrow of the kings of Midian, of Gilead and Bashan, had further shown that Jehovah was above all Gods ... All these events were known to the inhabitants of Jericho, and there were many who shared Rahab's conviction, though they refused to obey it, that Jehovah, the God of Israel, is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath. Like the men before the Flood, the Canaanites lived only to blaspheme heaven and defile the earth. And both love and justice demanded the prompt execution of these rebels against God and foes to man." (Patriarchs and Prophets, Chapter 45).
Faith of Our Fathers
Study Sheet #9
“The Ark Stolen”

Bible Reading: 1 Samuel 4-6
Supplemental Reading: Patriarchs and Prophets Chapter 57

The Ark Captured

1 Samuel 4:1 Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Eben-ezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. 2 The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield. 3 When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, “Why did the LORD bring defeat on us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD’s covenant from Shiloh, so that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.” 4 So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. 5 When the ark of the LORD’s covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. 6 Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, “What’s all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?” When they learned that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp, 7 the Philistines were afraid. “A god has come into the camp,” they said. “Oh no! Nothing like this has happened before. 8 We’re doomed! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness. 9 Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!” 10 So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. 11 The ark of God was captured, and Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

Questions
1. Why were the Israelites defeated in the first battle?
2. Why did they bring the ark into the second battle?
3. What should they have done?
4. How should Eli have responded to their request as High Priest?
5. What were Hophni and Phinehas like spiritually?
6. Why were the Philistines afraid?
7. If they were defending the ark why were Eli’s sons killed?

Death of Eli

1 Samuel 4:12 That same day a Benjaminite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dust on his head. 13 When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart was given to the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sat up a cry. 14 Eli heard the outcry and asked, “What is the meaning of this outcry?” The man hurried over to Eli, 15 who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes had failed so that he could not see. 16 He told Eli, “I have just come from the battle line. I fled from it this very day.” Eli asked, “What happened, my son?” 17 The man who brought the news replied, “Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.” 18 When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man, and he was heavy. He had led Israel forty years.

Questions
8. Why was Eli anxious?
9. What do you think about the news of the Benjaminite affected Eli the most?
10. How did Eli’s age, position and longevity in that position play into the story?

1
THE ARK WITH THE ENEMY

(1 SAMUEL 5)

QUESTIONS
11. Why didn’t the Israelites go after the Ark?
12. What did the Philistines hope to gain by having the Ark?
13. Why didn’t the Philistines uncover the Ark?
14. Why did the Philistines give back the Ark?

RETURN OF THE ARK

(1 SAMUEL 6)

QUESTIONS
15. Why did God kill the people who looked inside the Ark?
16. Why did the people of Beth Shemash (Israelites) not want the Ark?
17. What did the Israelites need to do before God’s presence would return? (1 Sam. 7:4-6)
18. How many Israelites did it take to conquer the Philistines?

QUOTES DISCUSSION
"They had not realized that their faith was only a nominal faith, and had lost its power to prevail with God. The law of God, contained in the ark, was also a symbol of His presence; but they had cast contempt upon the commandments, had despised their requirements, and had grieved the Spirit of the Lord from among them. When the people obeyed the holy precepts, the Lord was with them to work for them by His infinite power; but when they looked upon the ark, and did not associate it with God, nor honor his revealed will by obedience to his law, it could avail them little more than a common box. They looked to the ark as the idolatrous nations looked to their gods, as if it possessed in itself the elements of power and salvation. They transgressed the law it contained, for their very worship of the ark led to formalism, hypocrisy, and idolatry. Their sin had separated them from God, and he could not give them the victory until they had repented of and forsaken their iniquity." [Patriarchs and Prophets Chapter 57].

"There is need today of such a revival of true heart religion as was experienced by ancient Israel. Repentance is the first step that must be taken by all who would return to God. No one can do this work for another. We must individually humble our souls before God and put away our idols. When we have done all that we can do, the Lord will manifest to us His salvation." [Patriarchs and Prophets Chapter 57].

FURTHER STUDY
1. Proverbs 28:9
2. Story of Ichabod. (1 Sam. 4:19-22)
3. The Ehecenter (1 Sam. 7:12)
Faith of Our Fathers
Study Sheet #10
“Sorcery”

Bible Reading: 1 Samuel 28
Supplemental Reading: Patriarchs and Prophets Chapter 67

WITCH OF EN DOR
1 Samuel 28:3 Now Samuel had died, and Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land. 4 Then the Philistines gathered together, 5 When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. 6 And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets. 7 Then Saul said to his servants, “Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.” And his servants said to him, “In fact, there is a woman who is a medium at Endor.” 8 So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothes, and he went, and two men with him; and they came to the woman by night. And he said, “Please conduct a seance for me, and bring up for me the one I shall name to you.” 9 Then the woman said to him, “Look, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the spiritists from the land. Why then do you lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die?” 10 And Saul swore to her by the LORD, saying, “As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing.” 11 Then the woman said, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” And he said, “Bring up Samuel for me.” 12 When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, “Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul!” 13 And the king said to her, “Do not be afraid. What did you see?” And the woman said to Saul, “I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth.” 14 So he said to her, “What is his form?” And she said, “An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle.” And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down. 15 Now Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” And Saul answered, “I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do.” 16 Then Samuel said: “So why do you ask me, seeing the LORD has departed from you and has become your enemy? 17 And the LORD has done for Himself as He spoke by me. For the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. 18 Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD nor execute His fierce wrath upon Ahab, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this day. 19 Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.” 20 Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night. 21 And the woman came to Saul and saw that he was severely troubled, and said to him, “Look, your maidservant has obeyed your voice, and I have put my life in my hands and heeded the words which you spoke to me. 22 Now therefore, please, heed also the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you, and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way.” 23 But he refused and said, “I will not eat.” So his servants, together with the woman, urged him: and he heeded their voice. Then he arose from the ground and sat on the bed. 24 Now the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she hastened to kill it. And she took flour and kneaded it, and baked unleavened bread from it. 25 So she brought it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they arose and went away that night.

QUESTIONS
1. Why had God stopped communicating with Saul?
2. If God had stopped communicating with Saul wasn’t he justified in going somewhere else?
3. What evidence in the story indicate that Saul knew what he was doing was wrong?
4. What evidence from the story indicate that this was not Samuel?
5. The witch’s “prophecy” sounds like something Samuel would say. Does this validate it?
6. The witch uses references to God and seems to reverence the Lord. What does this mean?
7. Verses 14 indicates Saul perceived it was Samuel. What is dangerous in relying on perception?
8. What is Satan’s motive for giving Saul a message of “divine rebuke”?
9. Why doesn’t the story instead of saying “Samuel said” (v. 15) say “the false spirit said”?
10. What is the significance of Saul refusing food at the end of the story?
SCRIPTURES (ORIGINAL LIE)
Gen 3:4 Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

SCRIPTURES (DIVINE WARNING)
Isa 8:19 And when they say to you, “Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,” should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? 20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

Num 25:1 Now Israel remained in Aracaria. And the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. 2 They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel. Ps 106:38 They joined themselves also to Baal of Peor, And ate sacrifices made to the dead.

Lev 19:1 ‘Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God.

Lev 20:6 ’And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people.

Deuteronomy 18:10 Thou shalt not be found among you anyone, ....... who practiseth witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11 or one who conjures spirits, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. 12 For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. 13 You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. 14 For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not appointed such for you.

SCRIPTURES (STATE OF DEAD)
Eccl 9:5 For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. 6 Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; neither have they any more share in anything done under the sun.

Psalm 146:4 His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish

Job 7:9 As the cloud disappears and vanishes away, so he who goes down to the grave does not come up. 10 He shall never return to his house, nor shall his place know him anymore.

SCRIPTURES (DEMONIC DECEPTION)
1 Cor 10:20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.

1 Tim 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

Rev 16:14 For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth

QUOTE DISCUSSION
"The belief in communion with the dead is still held, even in professedly Christian lands. Under the name of spiritualism the practice of communicating with beings claiming to be the spirits of the departed has become widespread. It is calculated to take hold of the sympathies of those who have laid their loved ones in the grave. Spiritual beings sometimes appear to persons in the form of their deceased friends, and relate incidents connected with their lives and perform acts which they performed when living. In this way they lead men to believe that their dead friends are angels, hovering over them and communicating with them. Those who thus assume to be the spirits of the departed are regarded with a certain idolatry, and with many their word has greater weight than the word of God." (Patriarchs and Prophets Chapter 67).
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Background: I was born on November 22, 1968 in Charleston, South Carolina but raised in Georgia. I have two older sisters and was raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church by loving parents who are still married. I was baptized into the body of Christ and became a Seventh-day Adventist at a young age (1977). I am a product of Adventist Christian education and have attended Seventh-day Adventist schools from 1st grade through University.

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