



Reflections

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Some Wrong and Right Reasons in the Women’s Ordination Debate

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

Some people do good works because they believe that by doing them they may have a better chance to be saved. Others do good deeds because they are grateful for God’s gracious gift of redemption and want to follow the example of their Master. Should Christians do good works? Yes. The Bible repeatedly stresses the importance of good works as exemplified in Jesus’ famous parable about the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31-46). After having stated that true believers have been saved by grace through faith and “not as a result of works,” Paul adds, “for we are . . . created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph 1:8-10). Is it possible to do the right thing for the wrong reasons? Obviously it is.

Presently, the Adventist Church discusses the topic of ordination with a focus on the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry. This article does not deal with the question whether or not the ordination of women as pastors is possible or should be pursued. However, it seems to this author that some arguments in favor of women’s ordination misrepresent Scripture or do not take it seriously. Arguments opposed to women’s ordination likewise reveal similar flaws. Let us take a look!

Ordination for Wrong Reasons

Adventists emphasize the importance of the Word of God and seek guidance from Scripture. In matters of faith and practice of the Christian life, the Bible occupies an unsurpassed and unrivaled place. But some arguments used in the debate do not represent Scripture well or have not much to do with Scripture and therefore are either false, weak, or of a secondary nature only. Here is a sample of arguments that do not work well or are even inconsistent:

1. *The ordination of women is necessary*

because of a cultural and societal consensus. It is no question that society and current culture in many countries around the world have redefined the role and functions of women and exert pressure on those that do not comply. This can easily lead to the perception that the church must adapt to culture in order to be relevant and not to be considered a cult. But culture is not automatically right and cannot determine what believers should believe and how they should act. In certain areas, for instance, when it comes to promiscuity and exploitation of others, true Christianity will be countercultural.

2. *The ordination of women is necessary because since other churches have decided to ordain female clergy, Adventists should not be the last to follow.* The question is not what other churches do or not do but what the right thing to do. Other churches also practice infant baptism and keep Sunday.

3. *The ordination of women is necessary because the early Adventist Church may have a track record of supporting women in ministry and possibly here and there women’s ordination.* However, even historical developments in the Adventist Church are no guarantee that things were or are right and should be pursued. The Church has had a fair amount of crises and challenges, and mistakes happened occasionally.

4. *The ordination of women is necessary because it is unethical not to ordain women.* Viewed with the eyes of this generation, the issue is an ethical one, at least for many, and it maybe so indeed. However, the Bible does not contain a command to ordain women to pastoral ministry. Therefore, it must be clarified first whether or not the Bible allows for or implicitly suggests the ordination of women. Having clarified this issue, one can talk about ethics. Otherwise, it could be argued that from a biblical perspective it may not be morally wrong to withhold ordination from women and that refusal to do so by no means violates the divine command, as there is no violation of a divine command by not ordaining Sabbath School teachers.

5. *The ordination of women is necessary because change must happen regularly and is unavoidable.*

While some change has to be expected, because the Holy Spirit continues to guide the church,

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change for the sake of change is not the best possible reason. Church history is full of examples of bad choices in theology and practice. In Scripture, the Athenians' preoccupation with "something new" is not necessarily understood as praiseworthy (Acts 17:21).

6. *The ordination of women is necessary for practical reasons.*

Although practice may have oftentimes influenced theological reflection, and such an influence may not be wrong but may even be necessary, it can, on the other hand, lead to false developments that are extremely difficult to correct. The development of the hierarchical priesthood, the primacy of the bishop of Rome, and his elevation to pope are without biblical support.

7. *The ordination of women is necessary because it opens the way to the acceptance of a homosexual lifestyle by the Adventist Church.* The two issues are not related to each other and should be kept separate. While the Bible clearly forbids homosexual activity, it does not explicitly—and some would argue that not even implicitly— forbid ordination of women.

8. *The ordination of women is necessary because the issue will not go away.* There are other issues that will not go away either, such as the evolution versus creation debate, Sunday keeping versus Sabbath keeping, belief in the natural immortality of the soul versus belief in the non-immortality of the entire human being. If the Church has to yield in a case in which the issue does not go away, would that not logically extend to all issues that remain to be challenges? This is hardly a biblical approach. It makes the Church dependent on majority views and not on Scripture.

This list of arguments in favor of ordination of women to the pastoral ministry is by no means exhaustive. It shows that some arguments are questionable, difficult to accept for Adventists or of a secondary nature, that is, they may be supportive if the ordination of women can be established on other grounds.

Non-Ordination for Wrong Reasons

We now turn to arguments against the ordination of women that are equally flawed:

1. *Ordination of women is unacceptable because whatever happens in society and culture should be rejected.* Such an argument would consider culture and societal norms as completely and always opposed to God, a position that is hardly sustainable. Culture is a mixed bag which Christians cannot accept in a wholesale way. But they do not need to reject everything either. For instance, Christians are not called to reject government which is part of culture (Rom 13:1-3).

2. *Ordination of women is unacceptable because whatever happens in other churches should be rejected.* While Adventists do not just imitate other churches, they do not object to everything that is done by and in these churches. Adventists stand on the shoulder of other Christians. They are grateful for biblical teachings that the Reformers, the Anabaptists, and others have rediscovered and practiced.¹

3. *Ordination of women is unacceptable because in spite of discussing the issue for more than forty years, the Church has never officially accepted it.* Such an argument would be an argument based on tradition, in this case Adventist tradition. It is not a biblical argument. It also took Adventist pioneers a while to agree on other issues. For instance, the doctrine of the Trinity, though clearly endorsed by

Ellen G. White, was not easily accepted.

4. *Ordination of women is unacceptable because of a militant feminist agenda and dominant females.* While some forms of feminist theology completely reinterpret Scripture based on the presupposition that Scripture is not the Word of God and may actually be harmful, which is unacceptable to Adventists, and while some actions of feminists may irritate large parts of the Church, their approval of women ordination does not mean that it cannot or should not be pursued. Usage of wrong arguments on either side should not hinder us to do things for the right reasons.

5. *Ordination of women is unacceptable*



Reflections

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

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able because it is opposed to the traditional understanding of the role and functions of women. It militates against family relations that are described in terms of submissiveness. This argument is not necessarily true. Many proponents of women ordination would still maintain that within the household women should be submissive to their husbands and husbands should love their wives with the love of Jesus. However, they would not accept that each and every woman must be submissive to each and every man. On the other hand, even if this argument were true, it cannot be used to prevent change, if Scripture would imply change.

6. *Ordination of women is unacceptable because of practical reasons. New developments create anxiety and rock the boat.* Although it is quite likely true that new developments may create uncomfortable feelings, some kind of anxiety, and would leave males wondering what their roles are and how they should relate to females in authority, nevertheless practical reasons cannot be the ultimate judge whether something should or should not be done.

7. *Ordination of women is unacceptable because it could be linked to an endorsement of a homosexual lifestyle.* It is true that some people would link women's ordination to the endorsement of a homosexual lifestyle. Others who support the ordination of women to pastoral ministry would be strictly opposed to practicing homosexuals, because the Bible prohibits a homosexual lifestyle. Again wrong reasons used by some should not prevent us to do the right thing for right reasons.

8. *Ordination of women is unacceptable because its proponents use forms of liberal theology and critical approaches to Scripture.* This argument is largely not true for Adventists. While some connect the ordination issue with a liberal theology, most likely the vast majority does not. It is those that have a high view of Scripture that oftentimes support women's ordination.

Ordination or Non-Ordination for the Right Reasons

Throughout their history Adventists have emphasized that they accept Scripture as the Word of God and are dedicated to study the Bible and follow its direction. However, it seems that in the ordination debate this is not always what happens. At times, we short-circuit the debate by secondary and even wrong arguments. We should not allow this to happen. It only creates an emotional atmosphere and makes us focus on arguments which are not very helpful instead of allowing us to focus on Scripture and its implications.

How to go about this enterprise of studying Scripture and which questions to ask I have outlined somewhere else.² Here it is sufficient to state that in areas where the Bible does not contain explicit commands

Adventists do not subscribe to the following approaches (1) what Scripture does not prohibit is permitted—this would allow us to smoke tobacco and take narcotic drugs—and (2) what Scripture does not permit is prohibited—this would outlaw the use of modern medicine and the Adventist Church structure. Therefore, we take seriously the biblical principles and make a distinction between biblical descriptions and biblical prescriptions. We also trace developments within Scripture (e.g., from the bill of divorce in the Old Testament to Jesus' clear position against divorce).

Studying Scripture and trying to discover biblical principles that can guide us in the ordination debate, weighing all biblical evidence, praying, and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us need to be our focus. After this is done some of the secondary arguments may provide some additional support. But Scripture remains first and foremost.

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¹See E. G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 61-264 (chapters 4-14).

²E.g., Ekkehardt Mueller, "Hermeneutical Guidelines for Dealing with Theological Questions," *Reflections: The BRI Newsletter* October (2012): 1-7. It will soon be placed on the BRI website (<http://adventistbiblicalresearch.org>).

Weekly Sabbath or Lunar Sabbath: Are Adventists Keeping the Wrong Sabbath?

BY GERHARD PFANDL

Jews, Seventh-day Adventists, and other Sabbath-keeping groups keep the Sabbath every seventh day in accordance with the creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3 and the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:9-11. In the last few years, a number of individuals among Messianic Jews and Seventh-day Adventists have started to promote the Lunar Sabbath Theory.

The Lunar Sabbath Theory

This theory says that the fixed traditional Sabbath keeping every seventh day from Friday sunset through Saturday sunset is a corruption of an "original" biblical Sabbath based on the lunar cycle. Under this model, the Sabbath always falls on the 8th, 15th, 22st and 29th day of each lunar month.

On the Biblical lunar-solar calendar, each lunation (or lunar month) always begins with a New Moon day, which is in a class of worship day all by itself. Six work days follow on the second through seventh of the month. The seventh-day Sabbath always falls on the 8th, the 15th, the 22nd and the 29th of every lunar month. This is the reason it is called a lunar Sabbath.¹

Since the lunar month is 29 ½ days, each month has 4 weeks with seven days and one or two days over depending on whether the month has 29 or 30 days. If you maintain a seven-day rhythm, it means that the lunar Sabbath can fall on any day of the regular week; because with each new lunar month it falls a day or two later in the week than the last month (see below). As a result, to follow this system one must deal with the difficult and impractical situation of having to take a different day off from work each month on a rotating schedule.

A further complication arises from the alleged counting of new moon and transition days. That is, because the seven-day rhythm cannot be maintained if the Sabbath must always fall on the 8th, the 15th, the 22nd, and the 29th of every lunar month, the first day, the New Moon day, and 30th day of the month are not counted as part of the week.

All days are not created equal according to Scripture. The Lord Yahuwah has ordained three separate and distinct classes of days that occur monthly: *New Moon days*, *six work days*, and *seventh-day Sabbaths*. The 30th day, known in astronomical terms as translation day, is simply a work day, but is not part of a six day week followed by a seventh-day Sabbath.²

S	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa
24	25	26	27	28	29	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Transition Days New Moon Day Lunar Sabbath

The transition days (yellow) and the New Moon days (blue) are not counted as part of the regular week because “the New moon is a worship day all by itself and is not counted when counting out the week.”³ Therefore, when a lunar month has 30 days the time between the Sabbath on the 29th of the month and the first Sabbath of the next month are not six days but eight days (transition day, New Moon day, and six work days).⁴

The Calendar of Israel

It is hard to imagine a people with lives more closely regulated by the calendar than the people of ancient Israel.⁵ The Israelite year was a lunisolar year of 354 days in which the months alternated between 29 and 30 days, but the seven-day week was not affected by the lunar calendar. The Jewish month invariably began with the new moon. No exact information is available to explain how the Israelites originally adjusted their inaccurate lunar calendar to synchronize with the actual solar year. But we know that in post-exilic times an extra month was inserted between Adar and Nisan. That month, sometimes called Veadar (“and Adar”), was added seven times within a 19-year cycle.

The Jewish calendrical system and the annual feast cycle was tied to the harvest seasons of the Jewish year. The Passover on the 14th day of the first month and the wave sheaf offering two days later always fell in the period of the newly ripened barley harvest, Pentecost fifty days later in the time of the ripening of the wheat harvest, and the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles in the 7th month after the remaining harvests (primarily grapes and olives) had been gleaned. This was the general pattern in Old Testament times as well as in the time of Jesus.

While the Jewish feasts were set by the lunar calendar, the seventh-day Sabbath was not. It had its own set time and was not considered part of the feasts. The feasts were dependent on the lunar calendar but the Sabbath was not dependent on anything except the seven-day cycle God developed and preserved since Creation.⁶ Throughout the Bible there is a distinction between the feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths of the ceremonial system (see, e.g., Lev 16:31; 23:4-8; 25:4) and the seventh-day Sabbath (Gen 1:2-3; Exod 20:8-11; 28:9; Lev 23:3; Deut 5:12).

The Claims of Lunar Sabbatarians examined

Claim # 1 – “The seventh-day Sabbath fell on every 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th of the lunar month.”⁷

a. All the ceremonial Sabbaths were assigned to certain dates. The Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month (Lev 23:5); the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the fifteenth day of the first month (Lev 23:6); the Feast of Firstfruits on the sixteenth of the

first month (Lev 23:10, 11); the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost 50 days after the Feast of Firstfruits (Lev 23:16); the Feast of Trumpets on the first day of the seventh month (Lev 23:24); the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev 23:27); the Feast of Tabernacle on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Lev 23:34).

God tied each ceremonial Sabbath to a particular day. If He wanted each weekly Sabbath celebrated on the 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th of the month why is there not a single verse in Scripture telling the Israelites that the Sabbath should be observed on these days? Was not the weekly Sabbath more important than the yearly Sabbaths?

b. According to Numbers 33:3 the Exodus took place on the fifteenth day of the first month. The fifteenth day was the day after Passover, “They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians.” They began their journey on the 15th while it was still night. Ellen White says, “Before the morning broke, they were on their way.”⁸ If the 15th was a Sabbath it would have been their first full day of travel. In light of Matthew 24:20 where Jesus told the disciples “And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath,” it is hardly likely that God began the Exodus from Egypt on a Sabbath.

c. The children of Israel arrived in the wilderness of sin “on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt” (Exod 16:1). Again, they travelled on the 15th; therefore it cannot have been a Sabbath.

d. In Joshua 5:10-12 we are told that the manna ceased on the 16th of the first month:

Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

The Passover was the 14th day of the first month. On the 15th they ate the produce of the land, and on the 16th the manna ceased. If the manna ceased on the 16th of the first month, it must have fallen on the 15th otherwise the text would have said it ceased on the 14th or on the 15th. Hence the 15th cannot have been a Sabbath because God never gave manna on the Sabbath.⁹

We have looked at four biblical texts that indicate that the 15th of the month could not have been a Sabbath. This shows the fallacy of the Lunar Sabbath theory. The main pillar of this teaching is clearly not as sound as advocates of this theory would have us believe.

Claim # 2 – “*The Lord has ordained three separate and distinct classes of days that occur monthly: New Moon days, six work days, and seventh-day Sabbaths.*” In addition, the 30th day is also not counted as part of the six-day week.¹⁰

a. According to Genesis 1:1-2:3, God created only two classes of days: six working days and the Sabbath. This is confirmed in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work” (Exod 20:9, 10).

b. There is evidence for a New Moon festival among the nations in ancient Mesopotamia as far back as the third millennium B.C.¹¹ In the Bible, however, the New Moon celebration is not mentioned until the time of Moses. The only legislation concerning the New Moon in the Old Testament is in the prescribed burnt offering of Numbers 28:14. While Amos 8:5 seems to indicate that no work was to be done on the New Moon day, other texts show that it was not a day of rest. For example, Moses was told to set up the tabernacle on the first day of the month (Exod 40:2); Ezra began his journey to Jerusalem on the first of the month (Ezra 7:9). William Hallo says, “Only the first day of Tishri had the character of a special holiday, and even here the biblical text, as is well known, avoids the term *rōš haššānā*, head of the year.”¹²

Even if the New Moon was a day of rest like the Sabbath, there is no indication that it was not reckoned as part of the 6-day week, as were all the other ceremonial Sabbaths of Leviticus 23. Why should all the other yearly Sabbaths be part of the 6-day week but not the New Moon day?

c. That the weeks in the Old Testament were continuous unbroken cycles uninterrupted by the New Moon is shown in Leviticus 23:15, 16.

And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. ¹⁶ `Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.

Seven Sabbaths are forty-nine days and the day after the last Sabbath is the fiftieth day. This can only be so if the weeks are counted as uninterrupted cycles of seven

days. This is confirmed by the timeline for the Flood. According to Genesis 7:24, “the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days.” It began to rain “in the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month” (Gen 7:11). The ark came to rest on Mount Ararat five months later “in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month” (Gen 8:4). This is clear evidence that the biblical month has 30 days; therefore, 150 days are five months, uninterrupted by New Moon days.

Claim # 3 – *The Jews were forced to give up their lunar calendar and accept the pagan Roman calendar:*

The Julian/Gregorian calendar has never changed its seven day cycle once it changed from the original eight day cycle around the time of Constantine in A.D. 321. . . . Most people have had no idea that the eight day week of the original pagan Julian calendar was not recognized by the Hebrew communities at the time of Christ. . . . It was only after Rome conquered Jerusalem in A.D. 70 that the Jews began to succumb to the ways of Rome and her pagan calendar.¹³

Traces of the seven-day week can be found among the earliest civilizations of the Middle East. Mesopotamian astrologers designated one day for each of the seven most prominent objects in the sky—the Sun, the Moon, and the five major planets visible to the naked eye. The Israelites always adhered to the seven-day week as Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Leviticus 23:15, 16 clearly indicate. Other nations had weeks of different lengths.¹⁴

The Roman eight-day calendar was changed to a seven-day calendar early in the imperial period not in the time of Constantine.¹⁵ Now, if the Jews were forced to give up their lunar Sabbath calendar in exchange for adopting the pagan Julian calendar either in the days after A.D. 70 or since the time of Constantine, there should be a huge amount of evidence in existence today that this change occurred.

The Jews have always been persistent and faithful in observing the Sabbath. If they believed God had given them a lunar Sabbath, they would not have given it up without a major struggle. There would be records everywhere in history about the resistance of the Jews in changing their method of keeping Sabbath.

Since the Jews were spread throughout the nations of the world it would have required an army of missionaries going everywhere to convince and enforce the change of their Sabbath-keeping from the lunar method to the weekly cycle. There should have been pockets of Jews worldwide ferociously clinging to the old ways

that God had given them and many Jewish groups still keeping the lunar Sabbath to this day.

But the exact opposite is true. History is absolutely silent as to any such events taking place. There are no recorded commands given to change the cycle from a lunar to weekly Sabbath, and the Jews today around the world keep the Sabbath on Saturday.

When differences arise between two groups, there is always a split, with some believing one way and others believing the other way. With such conflicting changes to the belief structure of the Jews, we should see such a split among them. There was a split between Jews, but it wasn’t over the lunar Sabbath theory. It was the split between the Karaite and Rabbinical Jews – and that was mainly over how to calculate the feast days.

The mathematical odds of all the Jews worldwide changing from the lunar calendar to the 7-day week without leaving any historical trace are astronomical – it is virtually impossible. This is an overwhelming missing link for the lunar Sabbath theory.

Summary and Conclusion

Lunar Sabbatarians claim that the luni-solar calendar is the true biblical calendar in which the Sabbath falls always on the 8th, 15th, 22nd, and 29th of the month. Furthermore, the New Moon and the 30th day of the month are not counted as part of the week. They also claim that the Jews under the Romans were forced to give up the lunar calendar and accept the Julian calendar with its continuous cycle of seven-day weeks.

Our investigation has shown that these claims cannot be substantiated from Scripture or history. The biblical Sabbath, as the seventh day of the week, was instituted in Eden and was celebrated by the Jews in Old and New Testament times without interruption. Like the feast days the new moon days were part of the weekly cycle. Ellen White clearly stated:

Like the Sabbath, the week originated at creation, and it has been preserved and brought down to us through Bible history. God Himself measured off the first week as a sample for successive weeks to the close of time. Like every other, it consisted of seven literal days.¹⁶

In conclusion, all the arguments of lunar Sabbatarians seem to boil down to whether God tied the Sabbath to the lunar calendar, as He did with the feasts, or if He set up a weekly cycle at Creation for the Sabbath and preserved it to our day. There is no conclusive evidence in Scripture pointing to the Sabbath being tied to the moon. On the contrary, the Bible is clear that the

week has a recurring cycle of seven days ending with the Sabbath. This is supported by the plain statements of God's word, the Spirit of Prophecy, and history.

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¹www.worldslastchance.com, "Saturday Sabbath? Or Lunar Sabbath?" (accessed January 2011)

²www.worldslastchance.com "Three Months in a Row." (accessed January 2011)

³Arnold Bowen, "The Lunar Sabbath," page 1 (<http://www.lunarsabbath.org/> accessed January 2011).

⁴I am indebted to Terri Heagy for the above calendar graphic. Her unpublished manuscript "Challenges Regarding the Lunar Sabbath" contains an excellent rebuttal of the Lunar Sabbath theory.

⁵G. W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 1:576.

⁶See Gerhard F. Hasel, "Sabbath" in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed.

David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:849-856. ⁷www.worldslastchance.com "Time by Design." (accessed January 2011)

⁸Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 281.

⁹I am indebted to Michael Pedrin for some of the material in this article. His unpublished manuscript "The Big Lie" is another excellent rebuttal of the Lunar Sabbath theory.

¹⁰www.worldslastchance.com "Three Months in a Row." (accessed January 2011)

¹¹See William W. Hallo, "New Moons and Sabbaths: A Case-study in the Contrastive Approach," *Bible and Spade* 9 (1980).

¹²*Ibid.*, 64.

¹³K. L. French, "The Creator's Calendar," unpublished manuscript, 3, 4.

¹⁴In Assyria, 6 days was the rule; in Egypt, 10; in China, 15. The ancient Germans used a five-day cycle; the early Romans used eight days.

¹⁵"During the first two centuries AD, the Greco-Roman world generally adopted the planetary seven-day week of the astrologers" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*), 15th edition, s.v. "Church Year").

¹⁶Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 11.

SCRIPTURE APPLIED

The Gift of Prophecy

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

We would not know about God, if He had not revealed himself to us. But God in his mercy chose to make Himself known. He did this to some extent through nature (general revelation) but specifically through the Bible, Jesus Christ, appearances of angels, prophets, etc. and also through personal experiences. God's adversary tries to imitate and distort these forms of divine revelation.

We will focus on one way in which God decided to reveal Himself through the gift of prophecy. However, even within Christianity there are questions about this gift. While today some Christians think that this gift has disappeared at the close of the first century A.D., others see it in many phenomena today, while still others redefine prophecy to such an extent that it describes basically any Christian ministry.

I. The Prophet

1. What Is a Genuine Prophet?

Eze 33:7 The prophet Ezekiel was speaking for God. Prophets were called in a supernatural way (Isa 6:1-8) and had to communicate the message and will of God faithfully, without

adding their own ideas or deleting what they did not like (Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18-19). God then acknowledged the message of the prophets as his own message.

2. Since when Did God Use Prophets?

Acts 3:21 God spoke through holy prophets from ancient time onward, after the earth was created.

Jude 1:14 Already Enoch, who belonged to the seventh generation after Adam, spoke prophetically.

3. How Did God Communicate with the Prophets?

1 Sam 3:4, 10 He let them hear His voice or the voice of heavenly beings (Rev 5:5). This is called an "audition."

Eze 1:1 He revealed Himself, revealing supernatural realities, and messages in visions (Rev 6:1).

Num 12:6 He spoke to them through visions and dreams. In the case of visions, it could happen that astonishing phenomena occurred such as the following:

Num 24:3-4, 16 Seeing another reality

Dan 9:21 Appearance of an angel (Rev 10:8-9)

Dan 10:8, 9	Loss of strength
Dan 10:17	No breath
Dan 10:18-19	Divine strengthening

4. What Did Prophets See?

Prophets saw and recognized:

- Events of the past (Eze 16—the origin of God’s people; Rev 12:1-5—the birth of the Messiah)
- Events of the present (Isa 36-39—the Assyrian threat and Hezekiah’s illness; Rev 2:1-7—the condition of the church)
- Events of the future (Isa 9 and 11—the coming Messiah; Rev 21-22—the new earth)

Sometimes prophets did not understand their own prophecy, however, they passed it on faithfully (Dan 8:27; 12:4). The main task of prophets was spiritual instruction, teaching, bringing about reformation, being advisors, and among other tasks also predicting the future. In case the people of God did not obey the voice of God through the prophets, they faced God’s judgment.

5. How Did Prophets Communicate their Messages?

The prophets communicated the messages entrusted to them orally (2 Sam 12:1-7), in written form (Jer 36:2, 4), and through actions (Eze 24). Expressions such as “Thus says the Lord,” or “I saw” show that they were convinced they were talking in the name of God. Their messages were true and trustworthy (2 Pet 1:20-21; 2 Tim 3:16). God recognized their words as His own — Jer 25:1-4, 7-8.

6. Genuine or Not?

There were not only genuine prophets throughout history but also false prophets. So God provided criteria for us to be able to distinguish between true and false prophets. In case, one of the following points is not met, the respective prophet is a false prophet. Here are the distinguishing marks:

- Full agreement with the Holy Scriptures—Isa 8:19-20; Deut 13, 1-4
- Recognition of Jesus Christi as Son of God and Savior who had become fully human—1 John 4:1-3
- Good fruit, that is, an exemplary conduct of life and an effective ministry—Matt 7:15-21
- Fulfillment of predictions—Deut 18:22
- No materialistic attitude—Micah 3:9-12
- Proclamation of God’s messages, not what people like to hear—1 Kings 22:4-8

II. Prophets in the New Testament und Today

1. Prophets in the New Testament

The first prophet to appear in the New Testament was John the Baptist (Luke 1:76) and the greatest was

Jesus (Deut 18:15; Matt 21:11). The gift of prophecy was one of the spiritual gifts in the early church and played a special role—1 Cor 12:28; 14:1; 12:11; Eph 4:11; 1 Thess 5:19-21.

2. How Long Should the Gift of Prophecy Remain in the Church?

Joel 2:28-31 Joel’s prediction was partially fulfilled at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out (Acts 2:14-21, 32-33). However, the great day of the Lord, mentioned in Joel, is in a special way connected to Christ’s Second Coming. So there should be another fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy prior to Christ’s return.

Matt 24:11, 24 Jesus predicted the coming of false prophets prior to His Second Coming, indicating there would also be true prophets, otherwise he would have warned of prophets in general. Obviously the problem would be to distinguish false from true prophets.

3. What Would Be the Relation between a True Prophet in Our Days and the Bible?

Holy Scripture surpasses the ministry of true prophets in so far that it is the yardstick by which prophecy is being evaluated. However, both the message of Scripture as well as the message of genuine prophets come from the same source, the Holy Spirit, and call for obedience—2 Chron 20:20.

III. Categories of Prophets in Scripture

True prophets of biblical times can be classified in four groups. This classification has nothing to do with their authority or scope of ministry. However, it shows that God has different tasks for different prophets, that prophets can be male or female, and that all of them spoke in the name of God to humans. Here is the list:

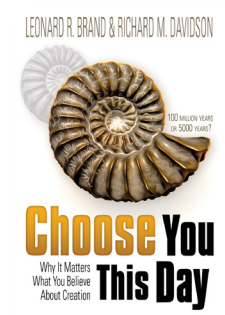
1. There are prophets who have written down their messages, and these were incorporated into Scripture, for instance, Isaiah, Daniel, John, and Paul. These prophets are also called canonical prophets.
2. There are prophets who left no written records either to their generation or to us, but whose ministry is extensively described in Scripture. For instance, Elijah (1 Kings 17-19, 21; 2 Kings 1-2; Mal 4:5; John 1:21; Jam 5:17) and Elisha (2 Kings 2-9, 13; Luke 4:27). They are not less important than the first category of prophets.

3. There are true prophets who wrote down their messages, but these documents were not incorporated into Scripture. About ten such persons are known (for instance, Nathan und Gad—1 Chron 29:29). There are also letters of Paul that were not added to the New Testament canon, for instance, a letter to the Laodiceans (Col 4:16).
4. There were genuine prophets, mentioned briefly, that had oral messages only. About thirty such people are know from Scripture, for instance the prophetess Deborah (Judg 4:4), Agabus (Acts 11:27-28), Philip’s daughters (Acts 21:8-9), and others.

Conclusion

God is interested in us and loves us. He wants us to enjoy eternal life in His presence. Therefore, He reveals Himself and His plan of salvation among other things through the gift of prophecy. All Scripture came about through the gift of prophecy. We are extremely grateful and follow God’s revelation through Scripture as well as through genuine prophecy that is given to us in addition to Scripture, but reflects what Scripture teaches.

BOOK NOTES



Leonard R. Brand, and Richard M. Davidson. *Choose You This Day: Why It Matters What You Believe About Creation*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2013, 126 pp. US\$2.49.

In *Choose You This Day*, Richard Davidson and Leonard Brand show that the biblical text and the scientific evidence can

illumine each other and give depth to our perception of reality. They argue that “to be truly Christian one’s worldview must consider the Bible to be trustworthy—a sound basis for an integrated view of the world. A Christian world view must, then, offer a ‘biblically informed perspective on all reality’ that doesn’t separate religion from the rest of experience and knowledge” (17). In this regard, the story of the great controversy provides the philosophical foundation for understanding creation and its challenges.

The authors explain how the conflict between science and religion arose and how misunderstandings of both science and Scripture have widened the chasm between the two. They describe these conflicts and explain some alleged discrepancies pointed out by evolutionists and naturalists who pit science against the Bible (e.g.,

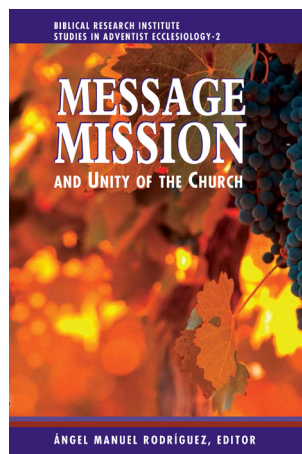
the case of Galileo). On the other hand, the authors point out instances where the Bible was misinterpreted to make it harmonize with current scientific paradigms (e.g., fixity of species). Having critically analyzed the historical backdrop behind the whole conflict, the authors point to scientific evidence supporting a literal six-day creation, such as the fossil forests in Yellowstone, the Coconino Sandstone deposits in Arizona, and the Miocene-Pliocene fossil whales in Peru.

In addressing some of the challenges that the scientific evidence poses to both the creationist and the evolutionary model of origins, the authors show how preconceived philosophical assumptions and conflict of interests have hindered the scientific enterprise. They point to recent scientific evidence that supports a factual interpretation of the Genesis creation account. So, despite the challenges of naturalistic interpretations of the geological column, a creationist worldview can better explain the challenges raised by scientific investigation. The book also shows that foundational biblical doctrines such as justification by faith and Sabbath are compromised by theistic evolution.

To conclude, this short book offers a compelling case for the integration of Bible and science in non-technical language and provides an entry point into significant issues of the current debate on creation.

Elias Brasil de Souza, BRI

NEW BOOK ANNOUNCEMENT



In Message, Mission, and Unity of the Church, 17 respected and recognized Adventist scholars address such questions as:

- In a fragmented world, what elements hold the church together, and which should or ought not be present?
- Why is it important to view the church as a global entity?
- What are the forces

that led to the dramatic disconnect between the apostolic and medieval church? Is there a “cosmic conflict” present in the history of the church?

- What are the roots of Adventist ecclesiology in the apostolic era that surfaced through the message of the Reformers and reached maturity in

the “end-time” message and ecclesiology of the remnant church?

- How has a hermeneutic been informed by Greek philosophy, damaged the message of the Christian church, and necessitated an “end-time” movement that brings freedom from philosophical traditions?
- In what way have the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation defined the Adventist church, empowered its message, and informed its ecclesiology?
- Are the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church descriptive or prescriptive? What is their authority and in what way do they contribute to the unity of the church?
- Is there salvation apart from the Christian church? If salvation is available to the unevan-

gelized then why is evangelism a necessary function of the remnant church?

- What is the relationship between Israel and the Christian church? Is there a genetic connection between them or are they two opposing movements? How can the Adventist church fulfill the Pauline mission to the Jews?

The answers to these questions make *Message, Mission, and Unity of the Church* essential reading as these issues relating to the doctrine of the church are brought under the lens of biblically informed thinking. *Further, in a fragmented world in which the church is steeped in contemporary ideas about its nature, this volume will, with unblinking clarity, show how the Adventist doctrine of the church intersects conclusively with modern concerns.*

Editor: Ángel Manuel Rodríguez

Pages: 496

Regular Price: \$19.99 + s/h

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