

An Essential Skills Level Personal Ministries Instructional
and Enrichment Training Course

This Enrichment Training Course was prepared for the Adult Ministries Department
of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America

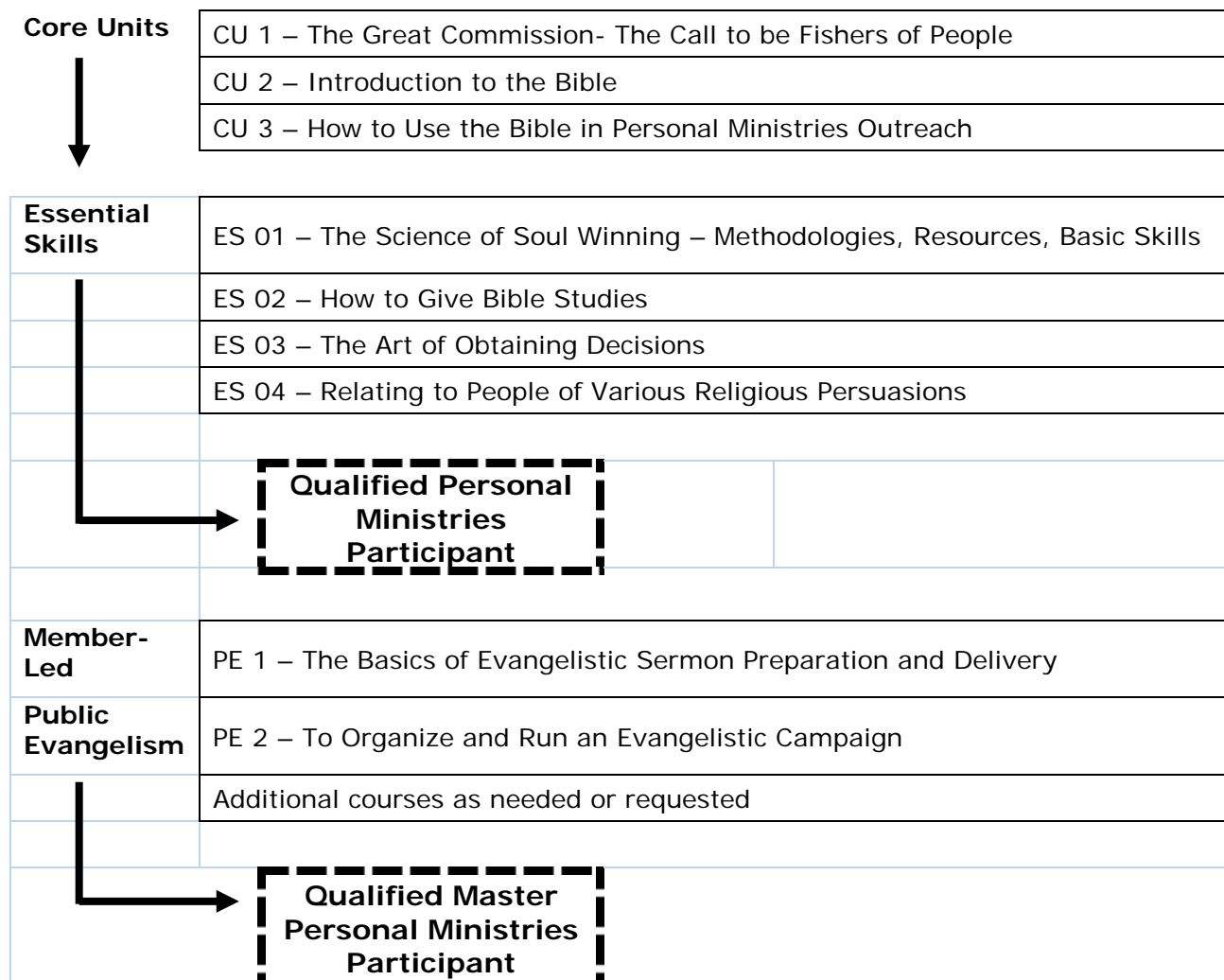
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**A North American Division Adult Ministries Sponsored
Essential Skills Level Personal Ministries Instructional
and Enrichment Training Course**

The Adult Ministries Department of the North American Division sponsors a curriculum for the instruction and enrichment of those involved in personal ministries outreach and leadership. This curriculum has three levels of training and enrichment. All the courses are available online at www.nadadultministries.org are all self-contained units. If you wish to obtain either the "Qualified Personal Ministries Participant" or "Qualified Master Personal Ministries Participant" *Certificates of Accomplishment* you must complete all of the previous courses in the curriculum outline.

**North American Division Personal Ministries Participants
Qualification Process and Curriculum**



Relating to People of Various Religious Persuasions

**A North American Division Adult Ministries Sponsored
Essential Skills Level Personal Ministries Instructional and
Enrichment Training Course**

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Course Description

Personal Ministries is both the name of a department sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist church, and a designation for any ministry carried out by individual members, or small groups of people, focused on direct evangelistic contact such as Bible studies, baptismal classes, church member-led evangelistic campaigns, or other methodologies involving direct soul winning outreach.

Ellen G White gave us the phrase “the *science* of soul saving” (See *Ministry of Healing*, p. 398). To learn and practice that science, the same statement admonishes, “a broad foundation must be laid.” This course is about one of the essential skills of that broad foundation.

This course is primarily descriptive. It explains various religious believe systems. Its purpose is to familiarize the personal ministries participant with these belief systems so that they can recognize what a person believes, and customize their presentations so they are as understandable and familiar to the person receiving the studies as possible.

How to Study this Course

This is one of the online courses sponsored by the Adult Ministries Department of the North American Division. When you finish this course, you will receive a Certificate of Completion indicating that you have satisfactorily complete this course.

This course is both theoretical and practical. It is composed of a course outline, assignment sheets, and attached readings from various sources that cover valuable insights about personal ministries outreach enrichment.

You can download the material if you prefer to study from a printed copy. You can also study it directly on the screen if that is your preference.

Often Bible texts are indicated as references. One of the course requirements is to look up these texts to see how they fit the pattern in which they are quoted or referred to in this course.

Vocabulary

Arminian. This refers to the theological system expounded by a Dutch theologian named Jacob Arminius during the times of the Protestant Reformation. He advocated free will decisions as opposed to the predestination system proposed by John Calvin. Seventh-day Adventists are mainly Arminian in their theology.

Belief system. A belief system is the same as the doctrines, or doctrinal base a person or group believes. There are some general belief systems that various religious persuasions have in common.

Bible studies/Bible readings. Bible studies refer to teaching/facilitating a Bible-based series of lessons in a systematic format. Bible studies and Bible readings are two titles for the same process.

Charismatic/Pentecostal. This term refers to religious groups that focus on supernatural religious manifestations/experiences such as speaking in tongues and various kinds of divine healing.

Church growth eyes. The term "church growth eyes" is an analogy referring to the ability to recognize how elements of church life relate to the Great Commission. A person with church growth eyes "sees" evangelistic opportunities to which others are "blind."

Church/district. Many churches in the North American Division belong to an extended family known as a district. This is usually because the local conference can only finance one pastor for various churches. Since this type of arrangement is common, and often the churches in a district cooperate in sponsoring training programs, etc. the identifier "church/district" is used.

Cult. In current religious literature, a cult is a religious group that (1) places the authority of some individual over the authority of the Bible, or (2) has a belief system that includes elements distinctly different from those taught in the Bible, or (3) a mixture of Christianity and mystical religious, most of Eastern religions or distinctly pagan origin.

Dispensationalism. This is a system of prophetic interpretation based on the idea that throughout human history God has used several ways and means of dealing with humanity. Each historical era is called a "dispensation." A different system of salvation is unique to each dispensation. This is the system that uses the famous term "the secret rapture."

Evangelism. In this course evangelism refers to the entire process of winning converts and incorporating them into the life of the congregation. It is not limited to public meetings.

Friendship evangelism. A system of evangelization based on the *koinonia* (fellowship) and *oikos* (sphere of influence) principles that involve human relationships and listening skills, as well as the passing on of information about the gospel and the church.

Giving Bible Studies. This is a common phrase used in Seventh-day Adventist literature and training classes for the on-the-spot action of presenting a Bible study. It may refer to the process or to the on-the-spot action.

Liberalism. This term refers to those religious persuasions that do not accept the Bible as the authoritative word of God. They see it as a "good book" filled with "good advice," and interesting stories, but deny its supernatural origin.

Missiology/Missiologist. Missiology is an academic discipline that studies ways and means of reaching people groups around the world with the Christian message. A missiologist is someone who is trained in this academic discipline.

Non-Christian Religions. This refers to major world religions such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Outreach. This is another word for evangelism. It refers to the process of reaching people with the Gospel, and winning them to the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Personal ministries participant. Anyone involved in soul winning/outreach/evangelistic activities in an intentional way.

Pietist. This is a term used in religious writings and teachings that refers to religious groups that emphasize personal experience and Christian behavior. Seventh-day Adventists have much in common with Pietist groups.

Reformed. This refers to those churches that basically follow the theology expounded by the Protestant Reformation theologian John Calvin. They are also referred to as Presbyterian, Dutch Reform, and Calvinist. The key element of this theological system is its emphasis on predestination in contrast to free will.

Secularism. Secularism refers to the concept that supernaturalism does not exist, or is just an idea in people's minds. Secularists basically ignore anything that has to do with "religion."

Semi-Christian groups. These are religious groups that claim to be Christian, but whose belief systems are significantly different than what is taught in the Bible.

Small groups. Small groups refer to any gathering of three to twelve people who do something in common by intention.

Spiritual gifts. A spiritual gift is a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Body of Christ, according to God's grace, for use within the context of the Body.

Spiritualism/New Age. These terms refer to religious groups that focus on communication with "spirit beings or guides," ancestor worship, and/or communication with dead relatives and friends.

Teaching ministry. Teaching ministry refers to any activity in the church whose objective is that the individual student or audience learn either information or application.

Testing truths. This phrase refers to specific Seventh-day Adventist doctrines such as the Sabbath, state of the dead, etc. These represent major decisions people make.

Unchurched. Any person or persons who does not regularly attend church services, or is not involved in the life of the church.

Witness/witnessing. This term refers to the responsibility of every Christian to relate to others what the Lord has done in his or her life, and appeal to people to accept the plan of salvation.

Textbook

There is no specific textbook for this course. Some valuable resources, obtainable on the Internet or at Adventist Book Centers, will be helpful: (1) Mark Finley, *Studying Together: A Ready-reference Bible Handbook*, (2) Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Popular Beliefs: Are They Biblical?* (3) Gregory A. Boyd & Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Baker Academic, 2002). The latter is not a Seventh-day Adventist book, but contains much helpful information. AdventSource (www.adventsource.org) sponsors a series of training materials titled *Reaching and Winning* This series gives many detailed ideas on relating to people of the designated religious persuasion covered in the training manual.

Student Fulfillment Card

At the end of this Study Guide you will find a Student Fulfillment Card. This is the record you will forward to the Adult Ministries Department of the North American Division via www.nadadultministries.org to receive your Certificate of Completion.

Types of Study Locations

- If you are studying this class on your own, this online Study Guide will indicate the exercises that you should complete. These contain question-and-answer sheets you can print out. They identify the important points of the readings and units of study. It is very important to fill in these sheets. They are your way of knowing how you are doing in the class.

- If you are studying in a classroom-type setting, an instructor will lead you through various participatory activities.
- If you are studying in a small group, ideas may also be included for those studying in this environment.
- There are no examinations scheduled for this class, unless an individual instructor decides to use them.

Course Introduction

The Bible emphasizes the responsibility of the followers of the Lord to pass on the instructions and belief system recorded in Scripture. This implies acquiring and building skills in the science of soul winning.

Medical personnel are highly trained to do their jobs. You and I would not dream of going to a doctor who had no specialized training or medical degree. We know what the results would be! When your car needs repair, you take it to a certified auto mechanic because that person has been trained to repair whatever the problem is. If you try to fix it yourself with no knowledge of how automobiles function, the problem will probably just get worse.

The science of soul winning is no different. Participants need to acquire certain essential skills to do an effective job. Some of these skills involve understanding and applying resources and social skills. Others encompass the content of the message communicated to others.

The Bible outlines many methodologies for doing outreach. Sometimes it is done through social networks (The woman at the well); sometimes through governmental agencies (Daniel, Nehemiah); sometime through public proclamations to large groups (Ezra, Paul); sometimes through one-to-one Bible study, conversations, and discussions (Nicodemus).

This present course focusses on the belief systems of various churches and religious groups. Its purpose is to highlight their belief systems so that a personal ministries participant giving a Bible study, for example, will be able to recognize by the questions asked, or the comments made, what the religious background of the questioner is.

This recognition makes it easier for the personal ministries participant to adapt/adjust his or her presentation in understandable language and format, making it easier for the person to learn and understand.

Course Objectives

The objective of this course is to gain an understanding of belief systems encountered in giving Bible studies, presenting evangelistic sermons, or in a personal ministries participant conversation with anyone on religious topics.

- Understand some common belief systems within Christianity.
- Understand and articulate the processes involved in adapting outreach initiatives to various belief systems.
- Be able to articulate either in writing or in practice how you would approach various religious persuasions.
- Become knowledgeable in the identification and use of some key resources for learning about various religious systems.

Unit 1

Explanation of Various Religious Systems

Within the category of Christianity there are all kinds of belief systems, denominations, and semi-Christian groups.

Mixed in with these Christian groups are secularists who don't believe much of anything religious, husbands and wives of church members who may or may not agree with their spouse's beliefs, or may not even care one way or the other, along with relatives, friends, and coworkers who may belong to an assortment of religious communions. Personal ministries participants will encounter many of these assorted viewpoints.

Some churches don't care much what kind of doctrines their members believe if they participate in church activities and support the various ministries sponsored by the congregation. Some denominations are very specific in what they believe, and some will not even allow a "non-believer" to attend services.

Some congregations, and even entire denominations, are part of larger theological systems that may contain terminology that the members themselves are not familiar with.

For instance, Seventh-day Adventist vocabulary often mentions "outsiders," meaning non-Seventh-day Adventists.

The purpose of this Unit is to outline some of the *broad categories* of belief systems that a personal ministries participant may encounter. Any belief system has within itself sub-systems, personalized ideas of individuals, etc. Nevertheless, understanding what a particular belief system is, what its doctrinal beliefs are, and what some key vocabulary terms mean will help a personal ministries participant when they study with someone.

Two books will be of special help in understanding these religious systems.

- 1) Mark Finley, *Studying Together* (Hart Research Center), 1995. Available at any Adventist Book Center.
- 2) Frank S. Mead, et.al, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States* (Abingdon Press). Available Online.

How People Acquire Religious Knowledge

People acquire religious knowledge in many ways.

1. The upper echelons of all religious persuasions include theological seminaries, universities, colleges, publishing houses, newsletters and websites that offer products designed to inform and educate members about doctrinal beliefs. These entities produce Bible commentary series, doctrinal treatises, etc.

Within this category there are also "parachurch" organizations (meaning "across denominational lines") that serve congregations of various persuasions, produce training materials, offer seminars, support evangelistic activities, and offer varieties of printed and online materials.

This level is often identified by phrases such as, "(So-and-so) says in his commentary . . .," "My Greek Bible says . . ." "I wrote a dissertation that says . . ."

Within the Seventh-day Adventist church this upper level is represented by products like the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, publications from the Biblical Research Institute, Andrews University Press, etc.

2. The next level of knowledge acquisition is through printed and online information. Things such as Sunday school teacher resources, popular devotional books, Bible reading

schedules, small group training and sharing activities, online training programs, etc. all impart religious knowledge to participants at a less intricate level than learned commentaries and treatises.

This level is often identified by phrases such as, "I read in . . .," "I heard (so-and-so) say on his/her TV show . . .," "I was at a seminar where the presenter said . . ."

Within the Seventh-day Adventist church this level is represented by Hope Channel programs, the *Church Manual*, the Ellen G White Estate website, etc.

3. The most common way that people learn about Bible teachings and doctrines is in their local congregations through Sunday school, sermons, Bible classes, religious TV programs, and conversations with church members and pastors. This is sometimes called the "pew level." This level of learning and understanding can be identified by phrases such as "I always thought . . .," or "my pastor says. . .," or "my church teaches . . .," or "I heard someone say . . ."

Within the Seventh-day Adventist church this level is represented by the *Adventist Review*, the *Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, *Signs of the Times* magazine, dozens of popular books, YouTube and other online media preaching and teaching.

Most personal ministries participant contacts are at the pew level of religious knowledge.

Assignment 1

What Have You Learned?

Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this Assignment.

1. Write out in your own words your understanding about how people learn about religion.
2. How have you personally learned about religion?
3. Which of the three levels has been the most influential in your personal religious education?
4. Think about the people you study with or encounter in day to day conversations. Which level do you encounter most often?

General Belief Systems

Various belief systems to which assorted denominations, or groups within denominations subscribe, can be identified. These are overarching beliefs to which assorted denominational distinctives are added or assimilated. At the “pew level” many people don’t even realize that they are part of these larger systems.

Through knowing what these larger systems are, a personal ministries participant can pick up what an interest believes and where they are coming from by their remarks and questions.

A following Unit will study more in depth how to study with these various groups.

1. **Fundamentalism.** Fundamentalism is a term that is very much in the news because of the current political situation involving a militant wing of Islam.

The term is applied within Christianity to people who accept the Bible as the inspired word of God, and affirm its basic teachings about Jesus and the plan of salvation. There are fundamentalists in all churches spread across denominational divisions.

Fundamentalists accept biblical accounts as historically accurate, are mostly creationists, and affirm the precision of biblical prophecies.

Historically within the North American Division territory, fundamentalist Christians have historically upheld as basic (“fundamental”) five biblical doctrines:

- 1) The inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture
- 2) The deity of Jesus Christ
- 3) The virgin birth of Christ
- 4) The substitutionary, atoning work of Christ on the cross
- 5) The physical resurrection and the personal bodily return of Christ to the earth.

The five points above were the normal beliefs of nearly all churches in early Protestantism in the United States and Canada. Protestantism in general at that time was no different from what later became known as fundamentalism.

In the 1920s, historic Protestantism fell into disfavor because it opposed liberal tendencies, mostly imported from European universities, and adopted by many historic Protestant denominations. Liberalism, or “modernism” as it was known, specifically spoke out against Darwin’s theory of evolution. Someone gave this general viewpoint the name “fundamentalism.”

Many fundamentalists became what were sometimes called “come-outers.” They withdrew from society, developed their own educational systems, and in general opposed “worldly” interests, forms of entertainment, and lifestyle.

This scenario sounds very familiar to Adventist ears! Seventh-day Adventists have historically identified themselves with fundamentalists, even though there are substantial differences of belief on points such as the Sabbath, the state of the dead, system of prophetic interpretation and what we label the “sanctuary doctrine.”

Fundamentalists, however, especially at the pew level, have not been friendly to Seventh-day Adventists. They tend to identify us with groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, and see us as “legalists” because we keep the seventh-day Sabbath. Many people are inclined to classify us as a “cult” rather than a normal Christian organization.

Many people who sign up for Bible studies or respond to enrollments for Bible correspondence courses, etc. have fundamentalist upbringings and beliefs, even though they may not recognize that this is their background.

2. **Evangelical.** Evangelical is the more accepted contemporary name in the North American Protestant world for those once known as fundamentalists. Evangelicals consider themselves the descendants of the original Pilgrim Fathers and of famous American Puritan theologians such as Johnathan Edwards (1703-1758).

In the mid-1940s, some fundamentalists began to advocate that they should have more interplay with the surrounding society; be of more service to the community, rather than maintain a self-imposed "come outer" isolation from society.

Today, "Evangelical" is an accepted term for those who believe in the Bible as the inspired word of God, often using the phrase, "only rule of faith and practice" to indicate the authority of the Bible.

"Evangelical" is also an accepted term to indicate people who are conservative in their theological beliefs. "Conservative" indicates that they accept the Bible as historically accurate and written by the people indicated by the Bible itself.

Seventh-day Adventists fit into this category. Our *Fundamental Belief* No. 1 clearly places us in the conservative, evangelical wing of Protestantism:

"The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history."

Since the mid-1950s, most evangelicals with any knowledge of current religious history, especially those at levels one and two mentioned above, accept Seventh-day Adventists as evangelical Christians, acknowledging that we also have "some particular beliefs" of our own. These are the beliefs we call "Adventist distinctives."

Many people with whom a personal ministries participant may study come from churches that consider themselves "evangelical" in attitudes and beliefs. Phrases a personal ministries participant may use such as "The Bible says . . .", "we all know what the Bible teaches about (topic), but let's review it," are perfectly acceptable and understood.

3. **Liberal.** "Liberal" Christians and churches are those who "appreciate" the Bible, but do not accept it as the inspired and authoritative word of God. People of this persuasion see the Bible as a "good book," but equal to other good books. It is a religious book, not a book of divine origin. Hence, it contains good advice, but has no special authority.

The Bible may "contain" truth. In other words, something I read may apply to me and be "truth" because I find it helpful, but the book itself is just a book that happened to help me at the moment.

Many of the historical events and personalities of the Bible are considered only "stories" that teach a moral lesson of some kind.

4. **Reformed/Calvinism.** This general term is applied to those religious persuasions that follow the teachings of the Protestant reformer John Calvin. They are most well-known for the concept of predestination and its application to Christian living and belief.

Calvinism is also known as "reformed" theology and "covenant" theology. Two outlines of its belief system best characterize Calvinism: the "five points" of Calvinism and the Westminster Confession, an historic exposition of Calvinist theology.

The five main points of Calvinism are:

- 1) Total Depravity (also known as Total Inability and Original Sin)
- 2) Unconditional Election (God chooses to save only certain people).
- 3) Limited Atonement (also known as Particular Atonement. Jesus died only for these elect).
- 4) Irresistible Grace (If elected, you cannot choose to be lost).
- 5) Perseverance of the Saints (also known as Once Saved Always Saved. You cannot be "unelected," even if you do not live a Christian lifestyle.).

Many so-called "mainline" churches such as Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Anglicans/Episcopalians, and Baptists follow this theology of John Calvin.

5. **Arminian.** Arminianism is a theological system that follows the teachings of a Dutch theologian named Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) who did not accept the predestination ideas of John Calvin and his successors.

The five points outlined by Arminius in opposition to Calvinism are:

- 1) Human Free Will--Though humanity is fallen, humans are not incapacitated by the sinful nature and can freely choose God. Our will is not restricted and enslaved by our sinful nature.
- 2) Conditional Election--God chose people for salvation based on His foreknowledge where God looks into the future to see *who would respond* to the gospel message.
- 3) Universal Atonement--Jesus bore the sin of everyone who ever lived.
- 4) Resistible Grace--The grace of God can be resisted so as to reject salvation in Christ.
- 5) Fall from Grace--A person can fall from grace and lose salvation.

His ideas were picked up by John Wesley and some others. Today, most Methodists, Holiness, charismatic groups and Pentecostal denominations are Arminians.

Seventh-day Adventists are mostly Arminian in their theology. An excellent resource for understanding Arminianism is the introductory chapter to the annotated edition of *Steps to Christ* available at any Adventist Book Center and Online.

People a personal ministries participant may study with of this persuasion will easily respond to appeals such as Joshua's appeal "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve." (Joshua 24:15), and Elijah's appeal "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." (1 Kings 18:21).

6. **Perfectionism.** Perfectionism is an application of the Arminian views of John Wesley. According to this idea, a person who becomes a Christian passes through two experiences. The first is conversion, justification, and baptism. Later that person will have a second experience, called a "second blessing." That experience will "perfect" the person. It will eliminate any remaining original sin and allow the person to live a sinless life. John Wesley called this kind of perfectionism "perfect love."

People who are members of holiness groups, the Church of the Nazarene, and various conservative Methodist groups tend to be perfectionists. Some Pentecostal and charismatic groups tend to equate the experience of speaking in tongues with this "second blessing" event.

Ellen G White, who was originally a Methodist, was very much opposed to this perfectionist view. (See *The Sanctified Life*, chapter 1). Her opposition was based on personal observations that this view led to pride, "I can do what I want" lifestyles, and neglect or denial of the law of God as a guide of life.

7. **Pentecostal/Charismatic.** People of these persuasions are conservative Christians who place special emphasis on speaking in tongues and divine healing. They often emphasize the operation of spiritual gifts, especially prophets and apostles.

A variety of Pentecostalism is called the "Prosperity Gospel." In addition to the usual charismatic teachings, it focuses on claiming prosperity from God, and tends to "command" God to do certain things based on His promises that His people will be prosperous and in good health. These are also called "Word of Faith" ministries. These viewpoints are very prominent among television ministries.

Personal ministries participants who study with Pentecostals/charismatics have no problem presenting Adventist views about spiritual gifts and the gift of prophecy as seen in the life and work of Ellen G White.

8. **Roman Catholicism**. Most Seventh-day Adventists are well versed in opposition to Roman Catholicism as a religious system. In our literature, Roman Catholicism is seen as the antichrist of prophecy and the key religious system forming "Babylon," the biblical name for the forces opposed to Jesus and true Christianity.

The key issue that a personal ministries participant will meet in studying with a Roman Catholicism person is how the plan of salvation functions. In Protestant Christianity, salvation is a free gift given to a person by God when that person accepts Jesus as a personal Savior.

In Roman Catholicism, salvation is bestowed on a person through partaking of the Lord's supper, called the Mass. Jesus' sacrifice is repeated each time the Mass is celebrated. This is called "sacramental" theology, meaning the salvation comes through the sacrament. The core of Roman Catholic theology is focused on the priest and his ministry, not the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.

In practice, at least at the pew level, Roman Catholics tend to place a hierarchy of saints, led by the Virgin Mary, above Jesus as the mediators between humanity and God the Father. These saints are accessed through the local priest, not through direct prayer.

9. **Pietists**. Pietism is the historic name for a religious perspective and lifestyle practiced by many Christians. Practices such as the following suggest that a person is a pietist:

- The earnest and thorough study of the Bible in private devotions and meetings.
- The belief that non-clergy members should share in the spiritual government of the Church.
- A knowledge of Christianity must be followed by practice as an indispensable sign and supplement of "true" Christianity.
- Unbelievers should be treated kindly and sympathetically, not attacked.
- Theological training should give more prominence to the devotional life.
- Preaching should emphasize implanting of Christianity in the inner person, the soul of which is faith, and its effects on lifestyle.

Seventh-day Adventists will immediately recognize these as familiar elements of the Seventh-day Adventists belief system and lifestyle. A personal ministries participant who encounters people who express these concepts will immediately find common ground to discuss biblical beliefs.

Assignment 2

General Belief Systems

Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this Assignment.

1. True or False Seventh-day Adventists and Fundamentalists have many beliefs in common. Explain your answer.
2. Someone you study with says that they "appreciate" the Bible, but don't see how it is different from any other devotional book. Where do they fit in the categories we studied? How would you answer them?
3. Explain what you understand by "Reformed," and "Calvinism."
4. What is someone you are studying with says (even a non-attending Adventist) that they feel they must be perfect before Jesus comes? Where do they fit in the categories we studied? How would you answer them?
5. Explain in your own words the differences between "Fundamentalists" and "Evangelicals."
6. If someone says to you "I believe in Perfect Love," what category we studied do they belong to?
7. If someone you are studying with says, "I believe the Bible, but I understand that you Seventh-day Adventists are legalists because you keep the seventh-day Sabbath," which category or categories do they probably fit into? Why?

Semi-Christian Belief System

Some religious groups have a combination of Christian and non-Christian beliefs. Some claim to be Christian, but their belief system is clearly a combination of Christian and non-Christian elements. Some of these groups are borderline "cults."

A cult is usually defined as a group that has a belief system significantly different than normal Christianity. Often their authority is based on the teachings of a founder or leader more than on the Bible. Some cults do not believe in the Bible at all.

One well-known book about cults presents the following diagram as an illustration of the characteristics of a cult.¹

Cult	Term (Belief)	Cult Definition	Christian Definition
Mormonism	God	Many gods	One God
Jehovah's Witnesses	Jesus Christ	Not god, created by Jehovah	God the Son, Creator of all
Christian Science	Sin	Illusion, error, not real	Disobedience to God
New Age	Salvation	Becoming one with the Universe/God	Reconciliation with God by means of Christ's atonement

1. **Mormonism.** Mormonism, whose official name is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, appears on the surface to be a Christian church, but their belief system points in a different direction.

Mormonism has excellent presentations about the value of family life. Behind these presentations, however, is a set of beliefs that place Mormonism in the cult category.

There are three core factors that distinguish Mormonism from Christianity:

- 1) There is no immortal God the Father. The "god" of the Bible is a former human who arrived at the top of the hierarchy of gods. Many Mormons will someday become gods.
- 2) The Book of Mormon is the key authority, not the Bible.
- 3) Mormon members can be baptized for the dead (even non-Mormons) who will then have a second chance at salvation. That is the reason Mormons are famous for their vast storehouses of genealogical records. A Mormon can be baptized for any list of names they may have in hand.

2. **Jehovah's Witnesses.** The key issue with Jehovah's Witnesses is that they are anti-Trinitarian. In their view, Jesus is a created being. He is not totally divine. The Holy Spirit is an "essence," emanating from the Father, not a divine Being.

¹Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Bethany House Publishers, 1997), p. 32. The author was once instrumental in changing the public perception of Seventh-day Adventists from being considered a cult to being accepted as true believers in Jesus and Christianity, even though he did not agree with some of our beliefs, and still considered us a "puzzle."

You will be able to recognize a Jehovah's Witness when they begin to talk about the divinity of Jesus, and attempt to start a discussion (often in an argumentative tone) about the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Something to keep in mind. There was a time when the Seventh-day Adventist church was not Trinitarian. That was a long time ago. Sometimes, a Jehovah's Witness will know this and bring up the issue. The answer is to simply say, "The more you study the Bible, the more you learn. We learned that the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is the Divine Son of God, not a created being. The church learned that and changed its position."

3. **The New Age.** The so-called "New Age" takes its name from astrology, the idea that the stars and planets can control human lives. Astrologers maintain that an astrological age is a product of the earth's slow rotation and lasts for 2,160 years, on average. We are either in or approaching the "Age of Aquarius." This "age" is associated with electricity, computers, flight, democracy, freedom, humanitarianism, idealism, modernization, astrology, nervous disorders, rebellion, nonconformity, philanthropy, veracity, perseverance, humanity, and irresolution.

New Agers are mostly pantheists. A pantheist believes that there is no Supreme God. "God" is the power that lives in everything and everyone. Inside each person is a "power" waiting to be released. These ideas are connected to Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.

New Age authorities are so-called "spirit guides;" the same "spirits" who speak through spiritistic mediums.

You can obtain a book from the Adventist Book Center or online titled: *Deceived by the New Age*, by Will Baron (Pacific Press, 1990). The author is today a Seventh-day Adventist. In this book he relates his experiences and offers some good ideas on how to approach New Agers.

4. **Religious "Science."** These are religious groups that often have accepted the philosophical idea that there is no reality. They often call themselves a "science" because of this philosophy. Everything exists only inside the human mind. What we see is not real; it is just a projection, a kind of picture from our minds. Therefore, things like illness, death, etc. are just illusions. You are not really sick, for instance, you just think you are.

You can recognize people of this belief system when they begin to talk about not going to doctors. Some have died rather than see a physician or go to a hospital. They may not accept a prayer for good health because there is no sickness, so it is no use praying for health.

Many religious "science" groups are really spiritualists who market their ideas in modern packages.

Beliefs About Bible Prophecy

People have all kinds of beliefs about Bible prophecy. Some have very limited understanding of prophecy and only reflect what they have heard listening to sermons or in Sunday school classes.

Some have picked up what they know from books, television series and movies like the *Left Behind* materials.

Some people ridicule Bible prophecy. They believe that no one can foretell the future or predict anything that hasn't already happened.

There are some general ideas about Bible prophecy that you may encounter. These categories have names that help identify their primary focus. The following paragraphs outline the general ideas of these categories.

1. **Preterism**. Preterism is a name that means "in the past." A preterist believes that the so-called "prophecies" in the Bible describe things that already happened. People who believe this way are usually of a liberal persuasion. They don't believe in miracles, and consider that the Bible writers wrote about past events as if they were in the future because they wanted to impress the readers; a kind of science fiction approach. For example, they usually believe that the events in the book of Revelation refer to things that happened within the Roman Empire during the time of John, the author of the book.

2. **Premillennial**. Premillennial refers to beliefs that the second coming of Jesus happens before the 1000-year millennium outlined in Revelation 20.

There are many varieties of premillennialists. Many that you may come in contact with are called dispensationalists, or futurists, believers in the secret rapture.

Seventh-day Adventists are premillennialists, but a variety known as "historicists." We believe that the prophetic events outlined in the Bible happen as history unfolds, but Jesus comes the second time before the beginning of the millennium.

3. **Postmillennial**. Postmillennialism refers to the belief that the second coming of Jesus will happen after the 1000-year millennium is past. This is the view of the Roman Catholic Church and many so-called "mainstream" Protestant churches. This view is often connected with social action applications that see the principle mission of the Christian church to help people toward a better life on earth. According to them, this involvement in helping achieve a better life that in itself is the "millennium."

4. **Amillennial**. This is the belief that there is no millennium. The 1000-year period mentioned in Revelation 20 is just a "symbol" of an ideal world the Lord would like to see. It is not a literal period of time.

Reading 1

What Prophecy Means to This Church²

Why the historicist approach is important for Adventists

Frank B. Holbrook

Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this Reading.

Note: *This Reading outlines the Seventh-day Adventists view on prophetic interpretation. This is the view a personal ministries participant will find in Adventist-produced Bible lessons, Bible study guides, tracts, and books. Understanding this view helps the personal ministries participant recognize and answer question that may be asked by people with other viewpoints.*

What is a Seventh-day Adventist? A common description is that a Seventh-day Adventist is a Christian who observes the seventh-day Sabbath and who is preparing for the Saviour's second coming. That is true, but the perspective is larger.

The real distinctive frame holding together the picture of truth as perceived by Seventh-day Adventists is their understanding of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. In these apocalyptic prophecies Adventists have found their times, their identity, and their task.

Seventh-day Adventists arrive at their interpretations of Bible prophecy by employing the principles of the 'historicist school' of prophetic interpretation. This historicist view (also known as the 'continuous historical' view) sees the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation unfolding at various points in historical time, often encompassing the sweep of history from the times of Daniel and John (the human authors of these books) to the establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

A biblical illustration of this unrolling of the prophetic scroll along the continuum of human history is the prophetic dream given to the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and its interpretation by the prophet Daniel (see Dan. 2: 31-45). In his dream the king saw an image of a man composed of various metals of descending values: golden head, silver chest and arms, bronze belly and thighs, iron legs, feet and toes made of iron and clay. The dream concluded with a large stone, mysteriously quarried without human assistance from the side of a mountain, that fell with devastating force upon the statue, smashing it to pieces. As the wind blew these metallic elements away 'like the chaff of the summer threshing floors,' the stone 'became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth' (Dan. 2: 35).

Daniel clearly identified the golden head as symbolizing the empire of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar (vss. 37, 38). It was to be followed by three successive world kingdoms corresponding to the three different metals. History records that these were Medo-Persia, Grecia, and the 'iron monarchy' of Rome. In the latter part of the fifth century A.D. the empire of Rome in the West was fully broken up. Its parts came to form the nations of Western Europe-symbolized by the strengths and weaknesses of the feet and toes composed of iron and clay. The 'stone,' which will ultimately destroy these and all other human, political entities, is the eternal kingdom that 'the God of heaven will set up' at the end of

²From *adventistbiblicalresearch.org*

human history (see vss. 44, 45, RSV).

Thus the historicist system of interpretation sees in the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation the hand of Divine Providence moving across the ages, overruling events to bring about the fulfillment of God's purposes.

Jesus, our Lord, saw a similar unrolling of the prophetic scroll in Daniel 9:24-27, part of a much longer prophecy given to Daniel by the angel Gabriel in the early years of the Medo-Persian empire. In this portion, several important predictions were made. A period of 'seventy weeks' was to be allotted to Israel subsequent to their release from Babylonian captivity. On the principle that in apocalyptic prophecy a symbolic 'day' equals a literal year, this period translates into 490 years (70 weeks of seven days each equals 490 days, or 490 actual years). Near the close of this time the long-awaited Messiah would appear. This could and should have been Israel's finest hour when the Saviour of the world would 'make an end of sins,' would 'make reconciliation for iniquity,' and would 'bring in everlasting righteousness' (vs. 24).

But there was a shadow—a dark side to the prophetic picture. It implied a rejection of the Messiah, who would 'be cut off, but not for himself.' Tragic retribution would follow in the destruction of both Jerusalem and its Temple (vs. 26).

The Messianic aspects of this prophecy met their respective fulfillments in the life, ministry, and atoning death of Jesus Christ. But the destruction of the city and the Temple were still future events when the Saviour gave His important discourse on Olivet two days prior to His passion (see Matt. 24). On the basis of the prophecy recorded in Daniel 9, our Lord pointed to the impending national ruin (see Matt. 24:15; cf. chap. 24:1, 2; Luke 21:20-24), which met a fiery fulfillment by Roman arms about forty years later, in A.D. 70.

Daniel 9:26, to which Jesus alluded, is a part of a much larger vision occupying chapters 8 and 9 of Daniel's book and symbolizing events that extend from Persian times to the onset of God's final judgment (see chap. 8:13, 14). Here again is another striking example of the historicist perspective of apocalyptic prophecy that serves to confirm and to strengthen faith in God's leading across the centuries through all the play and counterplay of satanic opposition and human pride and ambition.

Historicism and the Reformation

The Millerites, the immediate spiritual forebears of Seventh-day Adventists, were historicists; that is, they interpreted Daniel and Revelation in harmony with the principles of the 'historical school' of prophetic interpretation. But the method was by no means original with the Millerites of mid-nineteenth-century America; they simply reflected and elaborated upon the labors of many earlier Bible students of the Reformation and post-Reformation eras.

Sixteenth-century-Reformation preaching of the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation tended to center on what the Reformers believed to be a Christian apostasy that had arisen within European Christendom and which they saw symbolized in the little horn (chap. 7), the leopard beast (Rev. 13), and the woman seated on the scarlet-colored beast (Rev. 17). This preaching had a telling effect upon Europe.

In the Counter-Reformation, which inevitably followed, Rome, rising to the challenge, sought to divert the damaging import of these applications. The result was the publishing of the initial argumentation for what would later become two distinctive, but diverse, methods of prophetic interpretation: the futurist and the preterist systems. Catholic and Protestant scholars alike agree on the origin of these two distinctively different systems, both of which are in conflict with the historicist method and the interpretations derived thereby.

Futurism

Toward the close of his life, the Spanish Jesuit Francisco Ribera (1537-1591) published a 500-page commentary on the book of Revelation. He assigned the first few chapters to ancient Rome but proposed that the bulk of the prophecies would be fulfilled in a brief three-and-one-half-year period at the *end* of the Christian era. In that short space antichrist (a *single* individual, according to Ribera) would rebuild the Jerusalem Temple, deny Christ, abolish Christianity, be received by the Jews, pretend to be god, and conquer the world. Thus the Protestant contention that the apocalyptic symbols of antichrist denoted an apostate religious *system* was countered, and the focus of the prophecies was diverted from the present to the far distant future.

Preterism

Another Spanish Jesuit, Luis de Alcazar (1554-1613), also published a scholarly work on Revelation, this one posthumously in 1614. The result of a forty-year endeavor to refute the Protestant challenge, Alcazar's publication developed a system of interpretation known as preterism (from the Latin *praeter*, meaning 'past'). His thesis, the opposite of Ribera's, was that all the prophecies of Revelation had been fulfilled in the past, that is, by the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., the early centuries of Christianity. He asserted that this prophetic book simply described a two-fold war by the church-its victory over the Jewish synagogue on the one hand (chaps. 1-11) and Roman paganism on the other (chaps. 12-19). Chapters 21, 22 Alcazar applied to the Roman Catholic Church as the New Jerusalem, glorious and triumphant.

With the passage of time, these distinctive systems of counterinterpretations began successfully to penetrate Protestant thought. Preterism was the first; it began to enter Protestantism in the late eighteenth century. Its present form is linked with the rise and spread of higher critical methodologies and approaches to Scripture study. Preterist interpretations of the prophecies have today become the standard view of liberal Protestantism.

The seeds of Catholic futurism, although refuted at first, eventually took root in the soil of Protestantism during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Futurism, amplified with other elements (for example, many futurists teach a secret, pretribulation rapture), is currently followed in some form by most conservative Protestant bodies.

Thus in the centuries following the Reformation, Rome's countermoves to deflect the Reformers' application of the apocalyptic prophecies from herself have been largely successful. The futurist system of interpretation, as it functions today, wipes the Christian era clean of any prophetic significance by removing the bulk of the prophecies of Revelation (and certain aspects of Daniel) to the end of the age for their fulfillment. The preterist system accomplishes the same objective by relegating the prophecies of both books to the past. According to preterism, the significant prophetic portions of Daniel are assigned to second-century-B.C. events and the times of Antiochus IV Epiphanes; Revelation is restricted to Judaism and Rome in the first five hundred years of our era. Thus for most Protestants and Catholics the Christian era from the sixth century until the end of time stands totally devoid of prophetic significance as far as the books of Daniel and Revelation are concerned.

Seventh-day Adventists stand virtually alone today as exponents of the 'historicist school' or prophetic interpretation. If our interpretations of prophecy and our self-understanding differ from those of Christian friends outside our ranks (or from some critics who may arise from within our communion), it is largely because we as a people have been and are committed to a historicist system of prophetic interpretation, which we believe is soundly biblical.

Our times and task

In Daniel 7 the prophet records the first of several visions given to him personally. This vision parallels the prophetic dream given many years earlier to Nebuchadnezzar. However, instead of a metal image to symbolize the sequence of history, Daniel is shown the same world empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Grecia, and Rome as wild beasts-lion, bear, leopard, and a fourth creature, which bore no similarity to anything in nature. In Daniel 7 the division of Rome into the nations of Western Europe is symbolized by ten horns that rise from the head of the fourth beast. Two new elements, however, are introduced into this vision: (1) a little horn that rises among the nations of Western Europe with 'eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things' (vs. 8)-namely, the antichrist-(2) the opening phase of the final judgment.

Two things are immediately noteworthy about the prophetic description of the judgment. First, it takes place *in heaven*. 'I beheld,' Daniel says, 'till the thrones were cast down [placed], and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousands upon thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened' (vss. 9, 10).

Second, this heavenly court scene occurs *before* the advent of Jesus. It is a pre-advent judgment that begins and functions in probationary time. At its close Daniel sees another scene in heaven that confirms this observation. 'I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed' (vss. 13, 14). At His trial Jesus Christ identified Himself with this heavenly 'Son of man' described by Daniel (cf. Matt. 26:63, 64).

According to Daniel 7, it is at the close of this heavenly judgment scene that Christ will receive His kingdom and all those worthy to be His subjects under His eternal reign. *Then* He will descend the second time to this earth, not as a lowly babe, but as 'King of kings, and Lord of lords,' to bring the rule of Satan and sin to an end and to take His people to Himself.

But when will this pre-advent judgment phase take place? Does prophecy specify a time for this awesome event other than in general terms-at the end of the age? Seventh-day Adventists believe that it does. In Daniel's second vision (Dan. 8 and 9)-which again parallels and further elaborates on the dream and vision given earlier in chapters 2 and 7-the pre-advent judgment is described as a 'cleansing' of the heavenly sanctuary or temple.

A time element of 2300 prophetic 'days' is given, or a period of 2300 years according to the year-day principle. Beginning with the 70-week prophecy (an integral part of the vision and interpretation of Dan. 8 and 9) in 457 B.C. at the time of Artaxerxes' decree that restored Jewish autonomy, these 2300 years span the centuries, extending to the fall of A.D. 1844. At that time, in heaven 'the judgment was set, and the books were opened' (Dan. 7:10), and the process of cleansing the heavenly sanctuary, or restoring it to its rightful state, was begun (Dan. 8:14).

It is these lines of prophecy found in Daniel chapters 2, 7, 8, and 9, interpreted along historicist principles, that cause Seventh-day Adventists to sense the seriousness of the era in which the world now lives since 1844. The pre-advent judgment is in progress, the first phase of the final judgment. In 1844 the world entered as it were the last inning in the game of life, the last lap of the race. Christ entered His final phase of priestly mediatorial ministry. Mercy began making her last plea to a doomed planet. The sands of probationary

time have nearly run through time's hourglass, and Jesus Christ is about to lay aside His role as man's intercessor and to come as the rightful owner and ruler of this world.

It is in the awesome setting of this pre-advent judgment that Seventh-day Adventists believe that Daniel's companion book, the book of Revelation, identifies their movement and end-time task. According to the prophet John the gospel invitation, along with certain specific emphases, is to be proclaimed worldwide just prior to our Lord's return (see Rev. 14: 6-14). This special end-time work is symbolized by three angels who each have a message for the inhabitants of earth as they fly through the sky. Note some of the specifics:

The first angel is described as preaching 'the everlasting gospel' to a global audience, crying in a loud voice, 'Fear God, and give glory to him; *for the hour of his judgment is come* [Greek, 'has come']: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters'" (vs. 7). The second angel announces the fall of mystical Babylon, and the third warns against the worship of the beast, its image, and the receiving of its mark.

In these prophetic scenes, Seventh-day Adventists see delineated their task—a global outreach to announce to their fellow men that the hour of God's judgment has come, that the pre-Advent judgment in heaven, as described by Daniel, has begun and is now in progress. As probation inexorably moves towards its close, their appeal to every race and culture is to accept the salvation that is offered in Jesus Christ, to come back to the worship of God who created mankind and to respect and to give honor to Him by living in harmony with His law, including the observance of His Sabbath as stated in the fourth precept. This task involves warnings, as well, against apostasy and the substitution of false worship and institutions in the place of what God has commanded.

The world today is like that of Noah. There is a strange abandonment to every form of wickedness and pleasure with little thought for the future. It will not be long before the solemn pronouncement will be made: 'He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be' (Rev. 22: 11-12). Consequently, while Adventists seek to present Christ as the center of every doctrine and to emphasize the centrality of His atoning death, yet it is the urgency and the seriousness of the present judgment hour that impels this people to reach out by every possible means 'to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people' (chap. 14:6) with Heaven's balm of healing grace.

Beliefs About What Happens When People Die

There are many different ideas about what happens to people when they die. This is one of the most emotional subjects that a personal ministries participant faces. People are very sensitive about their departed loved ones.

1. **The word "immortal."** The word "immortal" means "cannot die." People's ideas differ about exactly what happens to this "cannot die" element of their being at death. The main idea of "living forever," however, remains in people's thinking.

2. **The immortal soul.** The most common belief personal ministries participants face is that when people die they go to heaven or hell, according to their behavior during their life. This happens because the "soul" is immortal, distinct from the "body," and therefore cannot die.

There is no biblical basis for this belief. It was adapted into Christianity in the early history of the church. Nevertheless, many people almost automatically accept it, because they have never heard anything else.

Phrases such as "My mother is with Jesus" indicate that people believe in an immortal soul.

3. **Purgatory.** Purgatory is a Roman Catholic belief in a kind of holding pattern. When a person dies, their immortal soul goes to this place (no one knows where it is). It is a situation that allows people a second chance of getting to heaven by going through a purification process, (some of which can be paid for through offerings to the church by relatives and friends).

Phrases such as "If I keep the Sabbath, will it help get my (relative) out of purgatory?" It is surprising how deeply a belief of this kind is imbedded in people's minds.

4. **Reincarnation.** Reincarnation is the belief that each person has an immortal soul that "reincarnates," (comes back to life) after a person passes away. No one really dies. They just change into a different state of existence. Some part of a living being starts a new life in a different physical body or form after each biological death. It is also called "transmigration" of the soul. The soul does not die, it just "moves" (transmigrates) from one place to another.

Eastern religions such as Hinduism and various varieties of Buddhism brought this belief to the Western world. It is an integral part of New Age culture.

Phrases such as "It doesn't matter what I believe. If I behave right, I will be back . . ." indicate this kind of believe system.

5. **Astrology and Horoscopes.** These ideas are connected to the idea of an immortal soul because they represent ways of determining a person's future as lucky or unlucky. It is believed that the stars (actually the observable planets) determine a person's actions, and as a result, the final destiny of their souls.

Most Christian religions, Protestant and Catholic, declare that astrology and the reading of horoscopes are non-Christian activities. Nevertheless, innumerable people, including those whom personal ministries participants study with, check their horoscopes on a daily basis.

6. **Spiritism and New Age.** Spiritism is the idea that it is possible for certain people to talk to the dead. This, or course, assumes that people have immortal souls that are conscious after people die.

New Age is just a modern form of spiritism repackaged to look contemporary. The "spirits" that "mediums" used to talk to are now called "spirit guides." These spirit guides are said to be beings without bodies assigned to us before we are born. They help us throughout our lives.

A personal ministries participant may meet a spiritist or New Ager, or even a Satanist. They are easily identified, and will often identify themselves.

7. Conditionalism. Seventh-day Adventists believe in what is called "Conditionalism." This is the biblical teaching that a person is a unit. We do not have immortal souls. Only God is immortal (1 Timothy 6: 15,16).

When people die, the entire person stays in the grave until the resurrection, either at the second coming (the saved) or at the end of the millennium (everyone else). *Fundamental Belief* No. 26 reads: "The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later."

There are some people who also believe this, but may not recognize the word "conditionalism." The word means that we humans receive immortality as a gift from God, we do not have it by nature. To many, it is a new idea.

Assignment 4

What Have You Learned?

Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have done this assignment.

1. Why is a correct understanding of biblical prophecy so important?

2. In your own words, briefly describe what historicism is.

3. Briefly describe each of the following systems of prophetic interpretation:
 - a. Preterism

 - b. Premillennialism

 - c. Postmillennialism

 - d. Amillennialism

4. Briefly describe the meaning of the following ideas about what happens when people die:
 - a. Purgatory

 - b. Reincarnation

 - c. Astrology

 - d. Horoscopes

 - e. New Age

5. In your own words, describe the meaning of the word "Conditionalism" as it applies to what happens when people die.

Unit 2

Reaching and Winning People of Various Religious Persuasions

Ellen G White makes a significant statement about evangelistic outreach. She was talking about the kindly way the message should be presented, but the principle also applies to the way information is presented, making it as easy as possible for people to understand and relate to what is presented.

The manner in which the truth is presented often has much to do in determining whether it will be accepted or rejected.

It is to be regretted that many do not realize that the manner in which Bible truth is presented has much to do with the impressions made upon minds, and with the Christian character afterward developed by those who receive the truth. —*Evangelism*, p. 168.

This Unit will review identifiable characteristics of some common belief systems and offer suggestions on how to present biblical information in ways that will be understandable to these assorted belief systems.

Bible study materials, Bible courses, Bible study guides, and other resources developed by the Seventh-day Adventist church typically focus to presenting what the Bible says about various doctrinal beliefs and topics as understood by our church. Many people have never heard of Seventh-day Adventists. Many have no idea about the Sabbath, our system of prophetic interpretation, what we call the “sanctuary message,” or other Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. It is all new and strange to their ears.

In each of these Reaching and Winning categories this Unit will present three things:

- 1) A brief outline of the belief system.
- 2) Adventist beliefs that should be emphasized and taught.
- 3) A brief outline of issues that may arise and objections a personal ministries participant can expect.

Helpful resources are:

- 1) Mark Finley, *Studying Together* (Hart Research Center), 1995. (Available at any Adventist Book Center and online). This handbook outlines the belief systems of many churches.
- 2) The *Reaching and Winning* series (AdventSource at www.adventsource.org). This series is designed as source material about a number of religious persuasions. Each handbook is written by a person who was either once a member of the group, or very successful in winning people from that particular group.
- 3) Allen Walker, *Last Day Delusions* (TEACH Services, Inc.). This book contains excellent material about a number of common beliefs a personal ministries participant will meet.

The Seventh-day Adventist framework. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Bible is the Word of God. It is inspired and is the authority from which we get our doctrines. We believe that the historical events mentioned in the Bible actually happened. For example, we believe that Adam and Eve were real people.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that sin is a reality. Jesus was a human and the Divine Son of God — both at the same time. He died to save us from sin.

Seventh-day Adventists believe in free-will. A person is saved because they decide to accept Jesus as their Savior.

These beliefs classify Seventh-day Adventists as conservative, evangelical Christians. They are common ground with many other evangelical congregations, denominations and/or churches.

Seventh-day Adventists also have some beliefs that we call Adventist distinctives. These are distinctive because, while they are all based on the teachings found in the Bible, they are either unknown, unheard of, or not accepted by others.

All religious persuasions have distinctive beliefs. There is nothing unusual about having distinctive beliefs. It is always helpful for a personal ministries participant to be conscious of the distinctive beliefs of the person(s) with whom they are studying. It makes it easier to formulate the way a Bible study, small group discussion, etc. is presented in the most understandable manner.

Mainline Churches

Mainline churches are those churches considered historic, the original churches established in what is today the United States and Canada. Most were imported from Europe. They include, for instance, Anglican/Episcopalian, Presbyterian, United Methodist, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Congregational, and within the Black community, the AME (African Methodist Episcopal) church. The Korean community considers the Presbyterian church as mainline. The Hispanic community considers the Roman Catholic church as the primary mainline church.

Denominational Churches

European churches tend to be “State” churches. That means that they are official churches connected to the government. There is no such thing in the United States. Canada has a document called the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in which the British king or queen is called the “Defender of the Faith,” but Canada has no state church.

Churches forming a denomination were originally unique to North America. Due to the stipulations of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, people can worship however they wish, and anyone can establish a church, as long as it is religious and not political.

That is why in North America there are so many denominations such as Baptists, Methodists, Nazarenes, Churches of Christ, Pentecostals, etc. Some are based on national origin or culture, such as many Mennonite-related groups like the Amish.

Seventh-day Adventism is a denomination within this mixture. It was born and raised in the United States before it grew into a world-wide denomination.

Non-Denominational Churches

Many individual congregations call themselves “non-denominational.” These churches are typically the outgrowth of the ministry of some outstanding pastor. Some are loosely connected to an established denomination. For instance, many charismatic congregations are either connected to, or were originally part of, the Assemblies of God denomination.

Many non-denominational churches grew out of ministries born during the 1960s counterculture movements and the Jesus Movement. Some grew out of ministries focused on the then-prominent baby-boomer generation, sometimes called "left-over Hippies" today.

Some popular non-denominational churches are loosely affiliated with organizations such as the Association of Vineyard Churches and Calvary Chapel, both of which have neo-charismatic roots.

The Edges of Adventism

Personal ministries participants will run into many Seventh-day Adventists who are on the fringes of the church. Many non-participating Seventh-day Adventists have just dropped out into secular lifestyles, but are receptive toward returning to church.

Society in general, and the church in particular, is much more tolerant of fringe persons than it once was. Such persons were once branded as "offshoots" or apostates. Today the common terminology is "non-participating members," or "ex-Adventists." A common categorization for organizations is "supportive independent ministries" and "non-supportive independent ministries."

Some local Seventh-day Adventist congregations, while still recognized as part of the sisterhood of churches, are themselves close to being in a "fringe" category.

Usually these fringe issues, if to the right of "standard" Adventism, have to do with questions such as the timing of when names appear on the investigative judgment database in heaven, or some other last-day events issue. Many focus on producing non-sinning saints prior to the second coming.

Left-leaning fringe groups, often calling themselves "progressive" Adventists, tend to focus on social issues such as being more open and accepting of unique lifestyles. They often focus on calling into question some established Seventh-day Adventists beliefs perceived as outdated and non-defensible.

It is estimated that there are literally millions of non-participating, or fringe-group Seventh-day Adventists in the North American Division territory. A personal ministries participant needs to be prepared to meet these assorted fringe viewpoints and perspectives.

Semi-Christian Organizations

Some denominations have belief systems that mix Christian beliefs with ideas adopted from other religious systems, or beliefs that are distinctly non-orthodox.

Some of these groups are based on civil rights issues, such as the Black Muslim community. The Muslim designation of this organization came about as a reaction to what is seen as inbred racism in Christianity.

Many White Supremacist groups have what is called a British-Israelism theology. That is the idea that the Anglo-Saxon people are the descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel, and therefore the chosen people of God. Some divisions of the former Worldwide Church of God (Herbert Armstrong), while not part of any social movement, are enthusiastic proponents of this unique prophetic idea.

It is always a good idea for a personal ministries participant to at least have a general idea of what some of these ideas and theories are.

Assignment 5

Types of Churches

Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this Assignment.

1. In your own words, describe the connections between Seventh-day Adventists and many other religious communions. What are the similarities and the differences?

2. Briefly describe the characteristics of the following and indicate some churches that fit each category.
 - a. Mainline churches

 - b. Denominational churches

 - c. Non-denominational churches

3. What is a "fridge" Seventh-day Adventists group? If you have experience with one that fits this category, briefly describe your experience.

4. What is a "semi-Christian" group?

Relating to Anglicans/Episcopal

Resource: A helpful resource is Martin Anthony, *Reaching and Winning Anglicans* (www.adventsource.org)

Anglicans, mostly known as Episcopalians in the United States, are the people originally known in history as the Puritans. In Canada, the Anglican church is one of the major churches in the country. In the United States Episcopal (Anglican) churches are known as “mainline” churches because they are historical congregations that have been around since the nation was founded.

There are both similarities and differences between Seventh-day Adventist and Anglican beliefs.

Some Anglican clergy and members are liberals in their beliefs and actions. Some are conservatives, known as “evangelical Anglicans.” Seventh-day Adventists have more in common with the evangelical Anglicans than with the liberal wing of the church.

Anglican Worship Patterns

The Anglican church is what is called a “liturgical” church. The focus of the worship service is on the ceremonies performed and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, still called the Mass in some Anglican churches. In Seventh-day Adventist churches, the sermon is the primary focus of worship services.

Anglican Vocabulary

Anglicans have their own vocabulary. It is helpful to be familiar with this vocabulary if you study with someone from this religious background. Here are some of the key words Anglicans use.

- **Diocese.** The churches that are under the authority of one bishop, or the district containing those churches, something like a local conference or union in the Seventh-day Adventist system.
- **Parish.** In the Anglican Church a division of a diocese that has its own church and priest (or whatever title the clergyperson carries). This is something like a “district” in the Seventh-day Adventist church.
- **Rector.** The clergyperson in charge of a parish. Similar to a district pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist church.
- **Vicar.** The term “vicar” comes from Latin (literally “deputy”). In the Anglican Church it is applied to parish priests, perpetual curates (someone with a lifetime job), or cathedral officials such as the choir leader (vicar-choral).
- **Deacon.** A deacon in an Anglican church is a beginning minister who serves for about a year before becoming a priest.
- **Churchwarden.** The equivalent to Seventh-day Adventist local church deacons in Anglican churches are called “churchwardens.” The churchwardens are responsible for the business and financial activity of the church, especially the care of church furnishings and fabric, the seating arrangements, the collection and distribution of offerings and alms, and the keeping of order during worship.
- **Matins.** The term *matins* is derived from a Latin word meaning “of the morning.” It is the first of the daily prayer services in Anglican churches. Matins consists of readings from the Bible, lessons about the lives of the saints, and sermons.

- **Evensong.** An evening service of the Anglican Communion in which most of the liturgy is sung in Anglican chant. It also contains hymns, psalms, and the canticles *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*.

Anglican Prayers

Anglicans commonly use what are called “set prayers.” A set prayer is one written out in a prayer book and read during a worship service, or even in private devotions. Anglican churches typically have a *Prayer Book* that is used in worship services as part of the liturgy. They are not opposed to spontaneous prayers as Seventh-day Adventists usually use, but they are accustomed to using “set prayers.”

The 39 Articles

The Anglican belief system is built around a document called the “39 Articles.” These Articles of belief correspond to what Seventh-day Adventists call *Fundamental Beliefs*. You can find a point by point comparison in Martin Anthony, *Reaching and Winning Anglicans*, pp. 37-52. (Available at www.adventsource.org). The articles appear in the Anglican *Prayer Book* and in many Anglican publications.

The average Anglican member you might study with will know that these Articles exist, but many may not really know what they say or even mean. Some of them are almost identical to Seventh-day Adventist *Fundamental Beliefs*.

Major Areas of Doctrinal Differences

There are three areas of major doctrinal differences between Seventh-day Adventists and Anglicans.

1. **Predestination.** In general, Anglicans follow the teachings of John Calvin about predestination. Seventh-day Adventists believe in free will. So, this is a topic that needs careful consideration when studying with an Anglican person.
2. **Infant baptism.** Infant baptism is a common practice in Anglican churches. Adventist Bible study guides and lessons always contain studies on the meaning and mode of baptism as taught in the Bible. Many Anglicans know nothing about baptism by immersion. It is a new concept for them.
3. **The state of the dead.** To many Anglicans, this is the most controversial of biblical teachings. It causes more difficulties in the thinking of Anglican believers than any other, even including the Sabbath. Most Anglicans have never stopped to consider the validity of their church traditions in this area. Most genuinely believe that death is not death but life in some other form.

Adventist Bible study guides and lessons always contain studies about this issue. A personal ministries participant should be prepared to be patient with someone of the Anglican faith to help them through this issue. It is a highly emotional issue as well as being new to Anglican ears.

Relating to Baptists

Resource. A helpful resource is Joe T. Stroufe, *Reaching and Winning Baptists* (www.adventsource.org). This handbook contains many details on how to present biblical truths to Baptists.

Assorted types of Baptist churches are some of the most numerous in the North American Division territory. In 2001 2.5% of Canadians considered themselves Baptists.³ The same source reports about 33 million Baptists in the United States. About 16 million Baptists belong to congregations affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest such confederation of Baptists.

Core Baptist Beliefs

There are many different Baptist groups. They are, nevertheless, generally classified under two general types:

1. **General Baptists.** General Baptists follow an Arminian theology. That means that they believe in free will. They believe that Christ died for all people and salvation is possible for all — if a person chooses to be saved. Because they believe in salvation for everyone, they are called “General” Baptists.

2. **Particular Baptists.** Particular Baptists follow the theology of John Calvin, also called “reformed” theology. This group accepts the idea of predestination and an atonement limited to the “elect.” That is why they are called “particular” Baptists, since only particular people are saved.

Common beliefs. In spite of these differences, the majority of Baptists have at least six beliefs in common:

1. Lordship and atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
2. Believer's baptism by immersion.
3. A personal and direct relationship with God.
4. Each believer is free to interpret the Scriptures as he or she chooses.
5. The Holy Spirit indwells each believer and leads one in righteous living, personal ministry, and preparation for Christ's return.
6. Each church congregation is autonomous and freestanding.

Which Bible?

Seventh-day Adventist Bible study guides and Bible lessons use a variety of Bible versions. Often this is the case because modern-day English is easier to understand than the English in some of the older Bible versions like the King James Version.

Many Baptists, however, are wedded to the King James Version. Quite a few believe that this is the only truly inspired Bible in the English language. Some will accept the New King James Version, because, while the language is more up to date, it is still the King James.

³*Wikipedia.org*

Some Baptists are especially antagonistic toward the *New International Version* because of contemporary battles over Bible versions; battles usually not very familiar to Seventh-day Adventist members in local churches/districts.

A personal ministries participant should be prepared to use whatever Bible version the student is comfortable with.

Biblical Knowledge

It is important to note that individual Baptist members believe in interpreting the Bible for themselves. This is an important fact about Baptists. No two Baptists necessarily have the same view of Scripture. This is a freedom that Baptists hold dear. Each person may interpret Scripture as he or she desires. Theological differences between various Baptists are common.

Many Baptist groups believe in a type of biblical inspiration known as "inerrant." That means that the Bible, in the original documents (which do not exist), called "autographs," contain God's very words.

A famous Baptist author, still considered a key authority wrote:

How came it to be written? God inspired holy men to write it. Did they write it exactly as God wished? Yes; as much as he had written every word himself.⁴

This viewpoint is commonly known in Seventh-day Adventists circles as "verbal inspiration." Seventh-day Adventists have a different belief, called "dynamic inspiration:" the prophet's *thoughts* were inspired, but not always the very words. This is something that a personal ministries participant should keep in mind when studying with a Baptist person.

Many Baptists are not well-schooled in the Scriptures. There is a tendency to rely on "what the pastor says" more than personal study. Often Baptists can be well-spoken about salvation, but know little more about biblical teachings or doctrines. One will find that Baptists can *repeat* how to be saved, who Jesus is, and that there is a pending rapture of the Church, but often don't really understand what they are talking about.

Many do not have a thorough understanding of God's Plan of Redemption (what Adventists call the "Great Controversy" theme) throughout the Old Testament and New Testament. They are often unfamiliar with the Old Testament sanctuary or its relation to the Gospel.

Baptist Beliefs about Salvation

A significant number of Baptists believe in a version of Calvinist belief called "once saved-always saved;" also called "eternal security." This is the idea that once a person places faith in Christ, usually by simply repeating aloud that they accept Jesus as a personal Savior, and is thus born again, that person cannot lose personal salvation, no matter what they do or what kind of lifestyle they practice.

Seventh-day Adventists do not believe this. We believe in free will. Here is what one expert says about how to study this issue with Baptists:

"You don't have to even mention 'once saved-always saved' when studying with Baptists, but you have to know how to answer questions that arise based on that belief, even if it is not identified as such

⁴James Petigru Boyce, *A Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine*, 1887

Never argue with a Baptist about 'once saved, always saved.' If the subject is brought up, respond by saying that Jesus provides salvation and affirm that he always takes good care of His children. Focus on a living, vibrant, daily trust in Jesus."⁵

Ask questions such as:

- Are you eager to grow in Christ?
- Are there aspects of the Bible that you would like to discover?
- How is your daily walk with God?
- Could we together encourage one another in spiritual development?
- Would you like to study the Ten Commandments in a fresh way?

An excellent resource for information on once saved-always saved and how to deal with the topic is Allan Walker, *Last Day Delusions* (TEACH Services Inc, teachservices.com). An in-depth examination of the idea written by a Baptist who does not believe it, is Robert Shank, *Life in the Son* (Bethany House Publishers, 1989).

Baptists and Bible Prophecy

Almost all Baptists follow the system of Bible prophecy known as dispensationalism (the secret rapture). When people you are studying with use phrases such as "secret rapture," "the rebuilding of the Temple," and "the return of the Jews," you can assume you are studying with a dispensationalist.

The Seventh-day Adventist church publishes many materials that refute this viewpoint. All Seventh-day Adventist Bible study guides, lessons and tracts present a different view called "historicism."

A personal ministries participant must have an understanding of the two systems of prophetic interpretation and be ready with biblical answers to questions that might arise.

Baptists and the Sabbath

Many, if not most, Baptists have never heard about the seventh-day Sabbath. There is a Seventh Day Baptist church, but it is relatively small and unknown even to other Baptists. To most Baptists, going to church on Saturday is the weirdest thing they have ever heard of!

The Baptist *Faith and Message* (similar to Seventh-day Adventist's *Fundamental Beliefs*) statement is:

The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should include exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private. Activities on the Lord's Day should be commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Baptists and D. M. Canright

Dudley M. Canright was once a well-known Seventh-day Adventist evangelist and member of the General Conference committee (in those days that General Conference committee only had three members).

As time went by, Canright ran into problems and frustrations. Eventually he left the church and became a Baptist minister. In 1889 he published a book titled "*Seventh-day*

⁵Joe T Stroufe, *Reaching and Winning Baptists*. P. 34.

Adventism Renounced." That book became famous among Baptists (and many others). It still circulates, and is often the source of the only things Baptist people know about Seventh-day Adventists.

All of Canright's arguments have been answered many times by Seventh-day Adventist authors. The key book to read if you run across this problem when studying with a Baptist person is William H. Branson, *In Defense of the Faith* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1933). Available at Adventist Book Centers or Online.

A key to unlocking the truth about the Sabbath for Baptists is to appeal to and use a "Creation Story" approach. Here is an example of a Bible study that uses this approach.

The following is how to understand the Sabbath as "A Creation Story."

Genesis 2:2-3 - "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." (KJV)

The Sabbath existed long before nationalities. The Sabbath was a part of creation, so follow now this creation theme as it is consistently presented from Genesis to Revelation.

Exodus 20:8 - "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." (KJV)

Why is this the only commandment that starts with the word, "remember"? This makes this verse significant. God wants us to remember something from the beginning of creation. This is creation language. God is speaking of His creation and how we remember what He has done.

Matthew 24:20 - "But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day:" (KJV)

Jesus' disciples have just asked about the temple. Jerusalem was destroyed in the winter of AD 70, a full forty years after this conversation. You see, Jesus knew they would have to flee in the cold of winter and on the Sabbath. Jesus knew that, forty years after He made this statement, His followers would be Sabbath keepers.

If the Sabbath had been changed to Sunday because of His resurrection, then Jesus would have said Sunday, not Sabbath.

Hebrews 4:1, 4, 9 - "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

"For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works." "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." (KJV)

This is "creation language." The story of the creation is carried through again! Recall how God said, remember? He is here telling us what it is to be remembered: the Sabbath.

Revelation 14:6-7 - "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment has come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." (KJV)

Are you or I exempt from this message? This is creation language. This is the beautiful story of creation from Genesis to Revelation. This is a story of a love relationship between the Creator and His children. God has established a day of remembrance. The Sabbath is for believers and is consistent from Genesis to Revelation.

Relating to Roman Catholics

Studying with Roman Catholic is both a science and an art. Roman Catholicism is the largest religious communion in the North American Division territory. In 2011 38.7% of the population of Canada was Roman Catholic. In 2017 22% of the United States population was Roman Catholic.⁶

Official Roman Catholic teachings are found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1995), available in print and online. The *Imprimatur* (official stamp of approval) is by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI. This is a primary resource for learning about Roman Catholic beliefs. It is advisable for a personal ministries participant to read and study this Roman Catholic catechism to get a background on Roman Catholic beliefs and practices.

Roman Catholic beliefs have changed very little over the years. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) many beliefs have been restated in modern-day language, and sometimes with a different emphasis. Nevertheless, what a contemporary Roman Catholic “pew person” believes today is basically the same as Roman Catholics have historically believed and practiced.

Most Roman Catholics in the territory of the North American Division are not openly hostile to Protestants. Occasionally you might find a sign posted on a home door that says something like; “This is a Catholic Home. Protestants Not Welcome.”

The key to studying with a Roman Catholic person is to understand Roman Catholic vocabulary and the belief system behind it. Most Seventh-day Adventist Bible study guides and Bible study lessons are designed for Protestants or people with no religious affiliation. Sometimes it is helpful to follow a lesson sequence that will answer Roman Catholic questions and/or objections before they even arise.

Key Methodology

The key methodology in studying with a Roman Catholic person is finding ways and means of getting them to read the Bible. Many Roman Catholics are not familiar with the Bible. Reading it for the first time is almost like reading an adventure story. Bible reading is no longer prohibited in Roman Catholicism, but it is not always encouraged. Have the person begin by reading the Gospel of John. This is an impressive record of the life of Jesus.

Illustration of How to Approach a Roman Catholic about the Blessed Virgin

A Roman Catholic once stopped a professor in front of a Seventh-day Adventist college and asked him: “Do you people believe in the Blessed Virgin Mary?”

“Oh, yes,” replied the Protestant. “In fact, St. John the Apostle once quoted the Blessed Virgin when she said about Jesus, her son, “Do whatever he tells you” (St. John 2:5). We take that command from the Virgin very seriously, and we honor and do what she said.”

The Roman Catholic walked away very satisfied with the remark, “I never heard that before, but I will think about it!”

⁶Google.com

Key Difference from Protestantism

The key difference is that Roman Catholicism is “sacramental” in its theology. That means that a person can only receive salvation through the liturgy and mediation of the sacraments as carried out by a Roman Catholic priest.

Here is what the Catechism says:

The Church was made manifest to the world on the day of Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit ushers in a new era in the “dispensation of the mystery” the age of the Church, during which Christ manifests, makes present, and communicates his work of salvation *through the liturgy of his Church*, “until he comes.” In this age of the Church Christ now lives and acts in and with his Church, *in a new way* appropriate to this new age. *He acts through the sacraments* in what the common Tradition of the East and the West calls “the sacramental economy”; this is the communication (or “dispensation”) of the fruits of Christ’s Paschal [Roman Catholic vocabulary for death and resurrection of Jesus] mystery in the celebration of the Church’s “sacramental” liturgy (Ref. 1076, page 304. Italics supplied).

Seventh-day Adventism and Roman Catholicism

Our understanding of what we call the “sanctuary message” gives Seventh-day Adventists a distinct advantage over other Protestants when studying with Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholic celebration of the Mass is very similar to the format of the sanctuary services outlined in the Old Testament and explained in the book of Hebrews in the New Testament (see Hebrews 9). Hebrews 9 goes on to say that all these ceremonies were transferred to the heavenly sanctuary in the person of Jesus, so the Mass is today an empty ceremony.

Daniel 8, shows that truth was “cast to the ground” by a semi-pagan Roman emperor named Constantine (274-337 A.D.). This truth will be restored by believing and practicing what the Holy Bible teaches. All of this is easily understood by Roman Catholics, and its implications are clear. You don’t even have to mention the Roman Catholic church.

Roman Catholic Understanding of Salvation

It is important for a Roman Catholic person to understand that salvation is a free gift from God. It is not something the church confers. Roman Catholics know about Jesus, but He is not the most important person in the Roman Catholic system.

The Catechism says:

The ordained ministry or ministerial priesthood is at the service of the baptismal priesthood. *The ordained priesthood guarantees that it really is Christ who acts in the sacraments through the Holy Spirit for the Church.* The saving mission entrusted by the Father to his incarnate Son was committed to the apostles and through them to their successors: they receive the Spirit of Jesus to act in his name and in his person. *The ordained minister is the sacramental bond that ties the liturgical action to what the apostles said and did and, through them, to the words and actions of Christ, the source and foundation of the sacraments.* (Ref. 1120, page 317. Italics supplied).

Roman Catholic Understanding of the Bible

As is well known, Roman Catholicism accepts as authoritative revelation from God both Scripture and the "tradition" of the church. "Tradition" refers to the teachings of various authors and theologians through the centuries, known in Roman Catholicism as "Canon Law."

The Catechism reads:

As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, "does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. *Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.*" (Ref. 82, page 31. Italics supplied).

Some Roman Catholic Perceptions

There are some general perceptions that most Roman Catholics have in their minds, even if they may not openly express them.

1. A Roman Catholic person lives under spiritual dictatorship. He or she is accustomed to believing and practicing only what the church teaches. The liberty to study for themselves has been so long inhibited that the person may not even know how to evaluate any new teaching. "My priest says . . ." is considered maximum authority.

2. The Roman Catholic person believes that the only true church for all times was founded in Christ's time, and established on the rock St. Peter. He was the first of a succession of Popes. Consequently, they believe Protestants came into existence out of time — too late.

3. Roman Catholics still believe that outside of Roman Catholicism there is no salvation for those who know about the church, or who may choose to leave it. This is a serious hurdle for many Roman Catholic persons.

The Catechism says:

"Outside the Church there is no salvation." How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers. Re-formulated positively, it means that *all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body*. Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council [Vatican Two] teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. *Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it.* (Ref. 846, page 244. Italics supplied).

How to Present the Three Angeles Messages to Roman Catholics

The book of Revelation contains many prophetic passages that refer to Roman Catholicism. Revelation 12, 13, and 17 all indict Roman Catholicism as the "beast," the deadly enemy of the people of God.

If these prophecies, as true as they are, are presented in an argumentative, direct way to a Roman Catholic, they will probably just get mad instead of being convinced.

Ellen G White wrote:

It is true that we are commanded to "cry aloud, spare not, lift up the voice like a trumpet." . . . This message must be given, but while it must be given, we should be careful not to thrust and crowd and condemn those who have not the light that we have. We should not go out of our way to make hard thrusts at the Catholics. Among the Catholics there are many who are most conscientious Christians, and who walk in all the light that shines upon them, and God will work in their behalf. . . . Do not censure others; do not condemn them."—*Evangelism*, p. 575.

For example, using the type of approach mentioned above on Daniel 8, show how the truth was cast to the ground for political reasons by Constantine the Great in 312 AD. He convinced some overzealous Christians to tamper with the law of God and caused the church to believe all kinds of wrong ideas.

The prophet Daniel tells us that even though that happened, the truth is going to be restored. Say something like: "So we will investigate and find out what the Holy Bible says about this restored truth. What was lost, and what will be restored?"

The format of the sanctuary services in the Old Testament sanctuary and the Jewish Temple are almost duplicated in the Mass. When Roman Catholic realize all this ended at the cross, they often conclude all by themselves that they should not attend Mass anymore. Roman Catholics will recognize erroneous teachings and see the contrast with what the Bible teaches. It is usually not necessary to even mention Roman Catholicism by name. People come to their own conclusions just through studying the Bible.

Relating to Pentecostals/Charismatics

Charismatic churches are among the fastest growing in the North American Division territory. What is called "Classic Pentecostalism" has been around for a long time. The charismatic movement dates from the 1960s. It originated in some mainline churches seeking spiritual renewal.

"Charismatic" refers to a style of worship format that includes some form of spiritual gifts, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in worship services.

The most frequent *charisma* that appears is speaking in tongues. Other elements of a charismatic-style worship service include "receiving the Holy Spirit," praise singing, raising of the arms, shouts of "halleluiah" and "amen;" and in some cases, things like "falling in the Spirit," and divine healing.

"Praise singing" refers to Psalms imbedded in modern music formats, often "gospel rock" music, often accompanied by guitars and drums.

"Baptized in the Spirit" is affirmed by receiving the gift of tongues.

Resources

- Daniel Scarone, *Reaching and Winning Pentecostals* (www.adventsource.org) is a handbook of detailed information on how to win Pentecostals.
- Vincent Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Wm. B Eerdmans, 1971). Vincent Synan is a principle Pentecostal historian.
- *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Zondervan, 1988).

Characteristics of Charismatic/Pentecostal Groups

Most Pentecostal groups have a background in various holiness/Wesleyan affiliations. The majority are Arminian in their theology. Most are Trinitarians.

For example, the Assemblies of God, one of the largest Pentecostal churches, believes the following:

- God eternally exists in three persons: God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Ghost.
- The Holy Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, which is the all-sufficient rule for faith and practice.
- Humanity is justified only by God's grace.
- There is double evidence of salvation: inwardly, by the direct witness of the Spirit (Rom. 8: 16); and outwardly, by a life of righteousness and true holiness.
- The Baptism of the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking in tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance (Acts 2: 4).
- Complete (or entire) sanctification is evident in obedience to the Lord's Word.
- Deliverance from sickness is provided for in the atonement, and is a privilege of all believers.
- Pentecostal congregations tend to pray in unison, everyone praying at once.

The Pentecostal message emphasizes power. From the Pentecostal pulpit a person gives orders to the Spirit, and in the church the idea prevails that all heaven is submissively awaiting to receive human orders.

In the Pentecostal worship structure, humanity commands and God obeys. God heals whatever a person requests, and He acts according to orders received from human beings. Common phrases in Pentecostal testimonies are: "I received," "I got."

Pentecostal preaching tends to concentrate on healing, speaking in tongues, driving out demons, and laying hands on the head of a follower to throw him or her to the ground. There is often some reference to the true spiritual characteristics of Christian living, such as kindness, generosity, patience, faith, and hope.

The Pentecostal emphasis on the spectacular may distract the Christian from the essentials of the biblical message. As a personal ministries participant, it is necessary to de-emphasize the idea of the gospel of power in favor of the power of the gospel.

Prosperity Gospel

A variation of Pentecostal/Charismatic belief is the so-called "prosperity gospel." This version has become popular because many of the Pentecostal-oriented TV evangelists promote it and have huge viewing audiences.

It is also called the "Word of Faith" movement. People in this movement believe in a "positive confession." This refers to the teaching that words themselves have creative power. What you say, Word of Faith teachers claim, determines everything that happens to you. Your confessions, especially the favors you demand of God, must all be stated positively and without wavering. Then God is required to answer.

This prosperity gospel has been very successful among poorer people, who are naturally looking for increased financial income. In the mid-1960s a sociological study of Pentecostalism in Chili in South America, one of the original centers of the Charismatic movement in Latin America, showed that this charismatic variety of Protestantism tended to be "The Refuge of the Masses."⁷

People you may study with who are participants in the prosperity gospel will be interested in stewardship, how tithe is used, and will ask "what's in it for me?" type questions.

Key Methodologies

There are some major issues to take into consideration when studying with a Pentecostal person:

1. Pentecostal churches tend to be fellowship oriented. In Pentecostal environments, the pastor is king and the membership "followers." As a result, the church membership becomes a family, with close emotional and fellowship ties.

A major concern of Pentecostal members is whether or not they will find a close-knit "family" in a new church. The sooner you can connect the person with some new friends, the easier it will be for them to decide to join the new group.

2. Pentecostals are often not very knowledgeable about the Bible. Doctrinal literacy is not very important to Pentecostals. Their religious lifestyle is based on emotional reaction, not content. Be patient and kind toward slow-learning students.

Key Issues

Pentecostals and charismatics fit the category of evangelicals. They believe the Bible is the inspired word of God and that Jesus is the Divine Son of God. Most are Trinitarians.

Most are also adherents of dispensationalism and the idea of the secret rapture.

⁷Christian Lalive D'espina, *El Refugio de las Masas* (Editorial del Pacifico).

The most complicated problem is the issue of speaking in tongues. Once people have had this experience, it is difficult to persuade them that it is not from the Lord.

A problem is that Pentecostal theology tends to connect speaking in tongues with the holiness/Wesleyan concept of perfect holiness. Speaking in tongues is presumed to be the sign that the Lord has "sanctified" the recipient. This idea is also sometimes connected with "once saved, always saved." Once a person has spoken in tongues, the Lord has told them that their salvation is assured. They can no longer lose it.

A Sample Bible Study About Speaking in Tongues

The Experience of Speaking In Tongues

1. When did the disciples speak in tongues for the first time?
 - It was in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1, 2).
2. Was this an experience only for them?
 - No. They preached in other tongues and were understood by Jews coming from those lands (verses 7-10).
3. How could we know that was an initial evidence of the appearance of the Holy Spirit?
 - Because it was in plain harmony with the Word of the Lord: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8, NIV).
 - The apostles were witnesses of the miracles of the Lord.
4. Is speaking in tongues a requirement for those who have received the Holy Spirit?
 - No. The following people received the Holy Spirit and didn't speak in tongues:
 - John the Baptist (Luke 1:15).
 - Elizabeth (verse 41).
 - Mary, the mother of Jesus (verse 35).
 - Paul (Acts 9:17).
 - Jesus (Luke 4:1).
5. How can I know that I am going in the right way?
 - Follow the steps of Jesus (1 Pet. 2:21).

Concluding questions:

1. Do you believe in this?
2. Do you have any questions?
3. Do you accept this message?

Relating to Jehovah's Witnesses

Resources. Two helpful resources are Daniel Belvedere, *Reaching and Winning Jehovah's Witnesses* (www.adventsource.org), and Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Bethany House Publishers, 1997).

Jehovah's Witnesses are one of the denominations often classified as semi-Christian. The primary reasons for this classification is that they have consistently set dates for the second coming, have a unique belief about their role as world leaders during the Millennium, and are Arian in their beliefs about Jesus.

Seventh-day Adventists are often confused in people's minds with Jehovah's Witnesses. In part, this stems from the fact that both religious communities have their roots in the Millerite Movement of the 1840s. Jehovah's Witnesses grew out of what is called in Adventist literature "First Day Adventists," or "Age-to-Come" Adventists. Their immediate parent was the Advent Christian Church, formed by the majority party of Millerites after the October 22, 1844 "Great Disappointment." They were never part of the group that became Seventh-day Adventists.

Jehovah's Witnesses also use some of the same vocabulary Seventh-day Adventists use, such as "the little flock." Jehovah's Witnesses do not accept the sovereignty of any government. They do not salute the flag and will not serve in the military, even as what Seventh-day Adventists call "conscientious cooperators" in military medical corps.

Early in their history, the Jehovah's Witnesses accepted the idea that the second advent happened "spiritually," as a secret event (Jesus returned invisibly). They have set various dates when some of the "faithful" were supposedly resurrected and are now with the Lord in heaven.

They also believe in what is called the "theocratic kingdom." In this kingdom, Jesus is only the mediator of the 144,000 (the Jehovah's Witnesses' leadership). The "great crowd" (pew people) of those redeemed should associate with the 144,000, who will intercede for them.

They divide themselves into four levels of social strata:

1. The Faithful and Discreet Servant class. Using Matthew 24:45 (*Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?*), they say that this is the only "class" of believers that can "supply spiritual food to the rest." They are the governing body of the theocratic kingdom.
2. The Mordechai-Noemi class. Only an exact number, 144,000 will go to heaven. They are the Mordechai-Noemi class. They are also known as the "anointed ones." Individual believers can declare themselves to be anointed. Anyone else will get to heaven only if someone from this group drops out or leaves the Jehovah's Witnesses and allots an opening for a new individual.
3. The Ruth-Esther Class. These are people who may get to heaven because someone else dropped out. They are those who remain loyal to the Jehovah's Witnesses even when some others leave the organization.
4. The Jonadab class. These are Witnesses who believe that while they have no hope of joining the anointed, they can still live eternally in an earthly paradise. They are also known as the "great crowd," or the "other sheep."

Jehovah's Witnesses and the Creation

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the days of creation were each 7000 years long. They have a complicated way of fitting this prophetic scheme together. Here is how it works:

- Gen. 1:3-13 is not the original creation of matter or of the heavenly bodies. It describes the preparation of the already existing earth for human habitation. This includes creation of the basic kinds of vegetation, marine life, flying creatures, land animals, and the first human pair.
- According to them, the Hebrew word translated 'day' has a variety of meanings, including a long time, or the time covering an extraordinary event. The term used allows for the thought that each 'day' could have been thousands of years in length. *(This is true, but it is a misreading of the use of the Hebrew word 'yom' (day) in Genesis).*
- They also apply 2 Peter 3:8 ("With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" to the Creation of the world. *(That statement is a figure of speech, not a Bible prophecy).*
- They believe that Adam and Eve were created in 4026 B.C. How do they arrive at this date? They use what they call "reliable Bible chronology." Where does this so-called "reliable" chronology come from? It is an invention of the Jehovah's Witnesses designed to defend the accuracy of the so-called invisible second coming of Jesus in 1914 and the subsequent authority of the Witnesses as His "sole visible channel" on earth.
- They believe that Jesus was enthroned in heaven in 1914 C.E. and that he accompanied Jehovah to his temple in 1918 C.E., when judgment began with the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17).
- According to their belief, here is what happened in 1914 *(later changed to other dates, but 1914 remains a key for the "invisible" return of Jesus)*. After cleansing those belonging to his house who were alive on earth, Jehovah poured out his spirit upon them and assigned them the responsibility of serving as his sole visible channel, through whom alone spiritual instruction was to come. Those who recognize Jehovah's visible theocratic organization therefore, must recognize and accept this appointment of the faithful and discrete slave (the leadership) and be submissive to it.
- The Sabbath. If the days of Creation represent long periods, then the seventh-day Sabbath is not a weekly event, but a "symbol" of God's rest.

Jehovah's Witnesses and the Trinity

The primary objection raised about Jehovah's Witnesses is that they are Arians. They do not believe in the deity of Jesus. They believe that He is a created being. The only eternal deity of God the Father, who must be addressed only as "Jehovah."

The name "Arianism" comes from Arius (225-336 AD), an early Christian pastor and theologian from Alexandria in Egypt. He maintained that Jesus was not God. The church Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) rejected the ideas of Arius and developed what is today called the Nicene Creed. This document affirms that Jesus, though He carries the title "Son of God," is equal to the Father and is eternal.

Many early Seventh-day Adventists were Arians, mostly because they came originally from anti-trinitarian churches. Today, the Seventh-day Adventist church is Trinitarian. *Fundamental Belief* No. 2 states "There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons."

To reinforce their understanding, the Jehovah's Witnesses publish their own version of the Bible, called the *New World Translation*. It mistranslates verses such as John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," to read "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." There is no justification whatever for translating the original Greek language this way.

They also believe that the Holy Spirit is not a person. He is an influence that emanates from God the Father.

Last Day Events

In the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus was raised from the dead as an "immortal spirit person" with authority to rule over the messianic kingdom. An "anointed class" (also called the "little flock") will rule with Christ as kings over the earth. They will not be resurrected at the second coming because they go to heaven as "spirit beings" when they die. These "anointed ones," will administer divine government over the paradise on earth, populated by the "great crowd" of resurrected believers, also known as "other sheep." The present role of the "great crowd" is to assist the contemporary anointed class in bearing witness to Jehovah's kingdom.

The members of this "great crowd" are the Jehovah's Witnesses who knock on the door of your home spreading the news of the kingdom. That is also why Jehovah's Witness meeting places are called "Kingdom Halls."

The Millennium

The Millennium is very important to Jehovah's Witnesses. They expect the new earth to be established on this planet at the beginning of the millennium. The ruling entity during the millennium will be the anointed class (also identified as the 144,000). This anointed class, will administer divine government over the paradise on earth, populated by the "great crowd" of resurrected believers.

Jehovah's Witnesses also believe in a second opportunity for salvation during the millennium after the first resurrection.

Jehovah's Witness Study Methods

Jehovah's Witnesses work in small congregations. When a Kingdom Hall reaches 100 members, it is split into two of 50 each and assigned its respective missionary territory. A witness with more experience accompanies two or three couples, in order to help them with the task. This is a good method that makes them into active participants and links them sociologically. Unfortunately, it bonds them to a congregation that has theological discrepancies.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have a unique training system for members. Their books have the paragraphs numbered, a system similar to the one used to number verses in the Bible. This makes it easy to locate what interests them. At the end of a chapter, there are questions that include the number of the paragraph where the answer is found. After reading the page or the assigned portion, the Witness formulates the questions and asks the interested party to answer them. If the answers are not satisfactory, they read the relevant paragraph again and discuss its contents. The chain of thought follows the outline of the questions and expedites the decision process.

Studying with Jehovah's Witnesses

When possible, use study methods that are familiar to Jehovah's Witnesses, carefully going from point to point in the lesson. However, don't get lost in the details. Trying to refute errors one by one until you get to the last page of one of their books is an overly complex strategy because you get lost in the details.

A good procedure in studying with Jehovah's Witnesses is to follow a three-step process:

- Step one: Remove their erroneous eschatological foundation.
- Step two: Remove their basic theological errors.
- Step three: Replace the errors with "the whole counsel of God."

Jehovah's Witnesses are taught to be very persistent. They may invite a servant or a Witness with more experience, or even a district supervisor, to a study. If that happens, use the following strategy:

- Tell them that before beginning to study you would like to pray to God the Father, in the name of the Son, and ask Him to fulfill His promise to send the Holy Spirit, so that He can teach us the truth. It is very possible that they will not want to do this, arguing that they cannot pray with a trinitarian. Don't give in. Let the Witness react and the interested party draw his or her own conclusions.
- Simply say: As Christians, we have to do what Jesus taught: (1) Pray to the Father, in the name of the Son (John 14:13, 14), (2) Ask that the promise to send the Holy Spirit as an infallible Teacher to guide us to all truth be fulfilled (John 14:16, 26; 16:13), and (3) All religious teaching must be proven by the Bible (Isaiah 8:20; 2 Timothy 4:2-4).

An Example of How to Study with Jehovah's Witnesses

The Jehovah's Witness method is to polarize the positions taken with the idea of winning at all costs; generating rivalry, and neutralizing the genuine desire to investigate the Word of God.

Sample Case Study. Assume you are studying about the creation week. As the personal ministries participant, you must be the one to determine the topic to be studied. Find ways to obligate them speak on that topic.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 14:40: "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."
2. Present the idea that each will speak for alternating periods of 20 minutes, and that you will not interrupt each other during that period. There is "a time to be silent, and a time to speak" (Ecclesiastes 3:7).
3. Start with a question that forces them to think and leads them to discover that they have nonbiblical beliefs. Say, for example, "I believe only the doctrines taught in the Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that each day of Creation is a period of 7,000 years. They have never retracted that belief. In their latest books they continue to say there were periods of thousands of years. Which verse in the Bible teaches that?"
4. Don't add more than this. Don't argue. Don't discuss. Give them the first 20 minutes. Listen to them respectfully and let them get twisted up in their own arguments.
5. When it is time for your first 20 minutes, don't refute anything they may have said. Simply ask the interested person if they understand what is at stake.

- “Brother/sister, did you hear a verse that says that each day of Creation is a period of 7,000 years, or of thousands of years? No, I didn't hear it either.”
6. Next, direct a question to the servant, or Witness member who came to argue, and say, “We did not hear you tell us which verse of the Bible says that each day of Creation is a period of 7,000 years or thousands of years as the Jehovah’s Witnesses teach. I want you to show me the verse that says that, because I believe the Bible is the Word of God. One clear verse is sufficient.”

The one with the problem is the Witness, not you. Avoid verbal gunfire that greatly offends and wins little or nothing (2 Timothy 2: 14).

1. Let the Witness attempt to defend as much as he can and be confronted with his own reality. The interested person needs to understand that Jehovah’s Witnesses believe doctrines that are not in the Bible so her/his mind will be open to genuine biblical investigation.
2. Avoid an argumentative tone of voice. Just say to them respectfully that since their time is up, and they have still not read the verse, you are going give them your 20 minutes so they can find it. Remind them that one verse is sufficient.
3. The Witness will probably continue talking, using a flood of verses. Don't abandon the strategy. Follow the plan of pressing the question until they recognize that there is no verse that says each day of Creation represents a period of 7,000 years.
4. They need to be confronted with this reality because, in theory, they say that it is vital that belief be based on the Bible, and not on simple imagination nor in human religious creeds, though in practice they have nonbiblical doctrines, and some that are even anti-biblical.
5. Begin your argument only when they recognize the nonexistence of a biblical base for the doctrine of the days of Creation as 7,000 years. Let the interested party know what is at stake, and then say: “You see for yourself that Jehovah's Witnesses believe in doctrines that are not in the Bible. Therefore, you and I cannot be Jehovah's Witnesses.”
6. Point out that the problem is even larger. This particular doctrine is actually anti-biblical, yet it serves as the foundation for other beliefs taught by them.
7. At this point use your 20 minutes to show that the days of Creation are not prophetic, nor represent long periods of time. They are normal 24-hour periods.

Relating to Mormons

You need to be familiar with the *Book of Mormon*, because you will occasionally need to refer to it. It is available as hardcopy, as an eBook or downloadable online as a PDF file.

Resource. Three helpful resources are Daniel Belvedere, *Reaching and Winning Mormons* (www.adventsource.org), Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Bethany House Publishers, 1997), and Mark Findley, *Studying Together*.

Mormons, officially known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is a North American-born religion that is a mixture of ideas found in many other religious persuasions. Some are Mormon inventions, and some are adapted from organizations such as the Masonic Order.

At its core, Mormonism is not a Christian religion. It is closer to New Age philosophy and spiritism than to Christianity.

Mormonism is built around the teachings of its founder, Joseph Smith and his manuscript, *The Book of Mormon*. This book is the story of Jesus' supposed visit to North America, and battles between some indigenous tribes. Supposedly, the outcome was the preaching of the gospel to these tribes. The book is said to have been written on some golden plates in an unknown Egyptian language. The plates, allegedly discovered and translated by Joseph Smith, were supposedly seen by three witnesses. They mostly saw them through the "eye of faith." You can see a lot of things with that kind of "eye."

According to the record, Joseph Smith translated the golden plates using the Urim and Thummim, two stones given him by an angel named Moroni. These are purportedly the stones from the breastplate of the High Priest in the Old Testament sanctuary.

He also used a "seer stone," described as a chocolate-colored, egg-shaped rock Joseph Smith found while digging a well. A number of witnesses claimed Smith used the stone when translating the Book of Mormon. One authority says, "Most of the translation [of the golden plates] was done using something called a seer stone. He would put the stone in the bottom of a hat, presumably to exclude surrounding light. And then he would put his face into the hat. It's a kind of a strange image for us."

Complicated!

It is not easy to understand what Mormonism believes. Its public image is very appealing. What is presented sounds very much like normal evangelical Christianity. Its emphasis on family values and decent behavior appeals to people.

The reasons behind this emphasis on family values and decent living are much more complex. It is necessary for a personal ministries participant to understand the core Mormon belief system so that it can be replaced in the student's mind with the biblical understanding of God, Jesus and the plan of salvation.

Where do Mormons Get Their Information?

Mormon knowledge is based on four sources: (1) *The Book of Mormon*, called "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," (2) *Doctrines and Covenants*, a book describing Mormon beliefs, (something like the Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs books), (3) *The Pearl of Great Price*, a selection of writings of Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, and (4) The Bible.

The core authority for Mormons is the *Book of Mormon*. The Bible is used, but only, in Joseph Smith's words, "if it is translated correctly." The Bible used by Mormons is not a translation from the original languages. It is basically a King James Version modified and amplified by Joseph Smith.

Similarities with Seventh-day Adventists

Seventh-day Adventists are sometimes confused with Mormons. We both do door-to-door missionary visitation. Mormons practice lifestyles and health habits similar to ours. They do not smoke or use alcoholic beverages, and are against substance abuse of all kinds. They have well-regulated, well-dressed and behaved families, and practice what is often called the "Protestant work ethic." Mormons are very faithful in worship attendance, and very dedicated to their religious community.

They are often active in politics, usually on the conservative side of the spectrum, typically active and successful in the business world, and often found in high-level military positions.

Mormon Church Organization

Local congregations of 300 members or more are called "Wards." Congregations with less than 300 members are called "Branches." Wards are organized into "Stakes" (from Isaiah 33:20 "Look on Zion, the city of our festivals; your eyes will see Jerusalem, a peaceful abode, a tent that will not be moved; its stakes will never be pulled up, nor any of its ropes broken"). A "stake" is similar to a Seventh-day Adventist local conference.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not have a professional clergy. Local congregation overseers are all self-supporting laypersons, often business people who are also leading church members.

Spiritual leaders in Mormonism have various names, but they all belong to one or two levels of "priesthood." People who are members of these priesthoods are not called "priests," however. They are something like the licensed/ordained/commissioned ministry categories in the Seventh-day Adventist church.

This chart shows the various levels of priesthood functions in the Mormon church:

Office	Minimum requirement to be ordained to office	Rights and responsibilities
Apostle	Married holder of the Melchizedek priesthood	"Special witnesses" of Jesus Christ who hold the rights to officiate in all responsibilities and duties of the priesthood, including the sealing power. Apostles direct the calling of patriarchs and may ordain persons to all other offices and callings in the church. The President of the Church must be an apostle.
Seventy	Holder of the Melchizedek priesthood	"Especial witnesses" of Jesus Christ; called to preach the gospel to the world; work under the direction of apostles; may be general authorities or area seventies.
Patriarch	Married high priest; normally at least 55 years old	Gives patriarchal blessings to Latter-day Saints

High Priest	Holder of the Melchizedek priesthood	Responsible for the spiritual welfare of the Latter-day Saints; may serve in a bishopric, stake presidency, high council, or temple presidency and may serve as a mission president; may ordain other High Priests and Elders
Elder	Priest in the Aaronic priesthood; at least 18 years old	Confer the gift of the Holy Ghost; give blessings by the laying on of hands; ordain other Elders; holds all the rights of the Aaronic priesthood

1. The Melchizedec priesthood. Worthy adult men in the Church receive the Melchizedek Priesthood, which is authority from God to perform sacred ordinances and to lead in the Church. Men who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood can perform ordinances such as bestowing the gift of the Holy Ghost and giving blessings to the sick by the laying on of hands.

2. The Aaronic Priesthood. The Aaronic priesthood is primarily for young men ages 12 to 18, and recent adult male converts to the church.

The general leadership of the Aaronic priesthood, called the Presiding Bishopric, are administrative and financial agents of the church. Local leaders of the Aaronic priesthood are adult male bishops, who serve as pastoral leaders of individual congregations. Aaronic priesthood holders generally prepare, bless, and administer the sacrament, collect fast offerings, perform church and community service, assist in home teaching, and occasionally perform baptisms.

Local congregations are presided over by a bishop. He is responsible for watching over all ward members. He oversees teaching, missionary work, and spiritual growth in the ward. He is responsible to conduct worthiness interviews, counsel Church members, and administer Church discipline. He is responsible to care for the poor and needy, and he oversees finances, records, and the use and security of the meetinghouse.

Mormon Vocabulary

Mormons use some terms identical to the usually Christian vocabulary, but often give them specialized meanings. Other terms are unique to Mormonism.

It is important for a personal ministries participant to recognize and be familiar with Mormon vocabulary.

Vocabulary	Meaning
The "Ancient of Days"	Adam. He lived before Creation and is also known as Michael.
Water baptism	Baptismal candidates must be eight years or older. A Mormon male who holds Melchizedek Priesthood authority immerses the candidate in water, usually at a local LDS chapel.
Born in the covenant	A child born to Latter-day Saint parents who were married in a Mormon temple, automatically sealing the child to his or her parents for eternity.
Baptism for the dead	Also known as "baptism by proxy" or "vicarious baptism," this Ordinance is performed in Mormon temples by living church members on behalf of someone who is deceased. The soul for whom the work is done is given a chance to receive the gospel in Spirit Prison.

Celestial marriage	This term means marriages performed in Mormon temples, which are not only binding in this life but also in the next, and lead to “forever families.”
Confirmation	A Melchizedek priesthood member lays his hands upon the head of a recently baptized convert, thus bestowing membership into the LDS Church and the gift of the Holy Ghost.
Eternal increase	The ability of qualified Mormons who have become gods to procreate throughout eternity in the celestial kingdom. This will give them access to unlimited spirit children.
Exaltation	Synonymous with eternal life, culminating in attaining godhood achieved by complete obedience to all the commandments and complete repentance of sins. Those who are exalted earn the right to eternal life in the celestial kingdom with their families. Those who are exalted will create worlds and populations, receive the worship of those people, and rule as Gods and Goddesses over their creations.
Food storage	The belief that Latter-day Saints should have sufficient storage of food and water along with other supplies to survive disasters. Members are encouraged to have food storage and other essentials of emergency preparedness, clothing, bedding, fuel sufficient for a year.
Genealogy	Research of one’s family history. Names are gathered so that those already deceased can have temple rituals performed on their behalf.
God the Father	First member of the Godhead who once lived as a righteous human in another realm before he became exalted. He has a tangible body of flesh and bones and is the literal father of every premortal human being in the spirit world.
Heavenly Mother	The wife of “Heavenly Father.” Women are created in the image of Heavenly Mother. God made man in his own image and he made woman in the image of his wife partner.
Kingdom of God	The Kingdom of God on earth is the Mormon Church. The Kingdom of God in the millennium will be both an ecclesiastical and political kingdom ruled and governed by the LDS Church.
Continuing revelation	God’s ongoing communication to humankind through the words of General Authorities and their ability to receive direct guidance from God in the latter days.
Missionary elder	This is the title of the person in charge of a group of Mormon missionaries, the well-dressed young men you see on bicycles.

Attractiveness of Mormon Teachings

Seventh-day Adventists Bible studies appeal to reason, because the Bible says “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord” (Isaiah 1:18). The Mormon emphasis on sentimentality tends to appeal to a person’s emotional nature.

The Mormon approach also has a certain appeal to people with a postmodernist perspective that emphasizes personal experience more than an appeal to reason. If relationships matter more to a person than biblical teachings, Mormon emphasis on family, ultimately owning an entire planet, and being part of a universal family of celestial beings is very appealing. Mormon teachings appeal to some deep-seated human motivations:

- The desire for self-realization, to progress, to be powerful and first in everything. “Your eyes will be opened and you will be as gods” (Genesis 3:5). The Mormon doctrine of exaltation promises that believers will become gods, ruling over all “because you will be all-powerful, and all the angels will be subject to you.” (*Doctrines and Covenants* 132:20).
- The desire for better health and personal appearance. Abstinence from tobacco, alcohol, coffee and tea are attractive and reasonable ideas.
- The desire for personal authority and prestige. The doctrine of the priesthood, which all worthy male Mormons may attain at the very early age of 10 or 11 years, gives them a significant degree of dignity and importance within the Mormon congregation.
- The desire to be known as a good father or mother. Family night, with its program of strengthening the family bonds, is seen as a way of accomplishing this.

Obstacles Studying with Mormons

Studying with Mormons is not easy. There are some special problems or obstacles involved. A personal ministries participant needs to be alert and prepared for these difficulties.

1. Don't begin by attacking Joseph Smith. Mormons love their prophet. They identify with him both intellectually and emotionally. Stick to the Bible and don't argue about Joseph Smith. There will come a point where this issue will be confronted, but that will be later in the studies.

2. Mormon's basis of religious authority is the *Book of Mormon*, not the Bible. They believe in the Bible only “whenever it is translated correctly,” which means Joseph Smith's version of the King James Version. They believe that the *Book of Mormon* corrects the Bible. They reject anything that in their opinion is not in agreement with what is called “revelation of the last days.”

3. Mormon members are not very biblically knowledgeable, and will often call for help from a missionary elder or their local bishop. This leader may show up for the study, prepared to argue with the personal ministries participant. Missionary elders belong to both the Melchizedec and Atonic priesthoods, and are accepted as authorized “teachers” by Mormon members.

4. In Mormon theology, all other churches are apostate and must be evangelized. So the elders/bishops will take the initiative and *try to evangelize you* as a personal ministries participant. They will assume that they have nothing to learn from you as a non-Mormon.

5. When a Bible verse differs from their theology, they will immediately argue that it is a translation problem, or an intentional modification made by Christians. They will immediately introduce something from the “other canon,” the Mormon books.

6. When you insist on sticking to the Bible, the elders will argue that you are holding to an ancient revelation that is no longer dependable because it has been superseded by new revelations.

Five Procedures in Studying with Mormons

Normal Bible study methods and the use of Seventh-day Adventist Bible study guides often are not effective when beginning studies with Mormons. The reason is that our Bible study material is geared to accepting what the Bible says. With Mormons, you have to be very patient and develop rapport and confidence before they will even listen, because they are coming from an entirely different background. The Bible is only a secondary authority.

1. Friendship evangelism. The religious experience of Mormons is built on highly cultivated emotional issues. Mormon history of persecution and being the underdog has built into Mormon members a mental attitude of defense and attack.

They are susceptible to things that touch their feelings. This involves identifying common practices and understandings between Seventh-day Adventists and Mormons: family issues, health and lifestyle issues, etc. You can plan on some four weeks of just getting acquainted before actually beginning systematic Bible studies.

2. The importance of family. Mormons have strong family-oriented lifestyles. Take advantage of this routine. Invite Mormon persons to family-oriented seminars your church may sponsor. Share literature about family concerns. In Mormon homes, the husband is priest. Always be differential to the husband in the family. Invite the entire family to participate in studies, not just individual members.

3. Teach without teaching! What this means is that often you have to take a different approach than systematic Bible studies. Ask questions that prompt them to confront erroneous Mormon beliefs and help them discover biblical truth. You can say, for instance, "I read in the *Book of Mormon* that . . . I wonder what the Bible also says about that? It would be interesting to find out." Little by little, build confidence in the Bible without directly attacking the Mormon "other canon."

4. Demythologize. That means that at some point in the studies you will use their own "revelation of the last days" to help them see that the Mormon canon and the Bible do not agree. When you have built enough rapport to study with a Mormon person, you can begin to build the case against Joseph Smith and his writings, and establish the Bible as the ultimate religious authority.

5. Study the Bible. At this point, you can use normal Bible study guides. Use whatever Bible version fits best with the circumstances.

Personal Testimonies

Mormons love to testify. When backed into a corner, a Mormon will draw on their ultimate defense, a personal testimony. They will raise their hand and say something like, "I believe in God the Father, and Joseph Smith is his last day prophet." In their mind, that ends the discussion because it is final authority.

H.M.S Richards, founder of the Voice of Prophecy radio ministry, was a world-class expert on Mormonism. The Mormon hierarchy often said he was the worst enemy the Mormon church ever had. Whenever he backed a Mormon, especially an elder or bishop, into a corner during a study, and the Mormon person gave their "testimony," Elder Richards would raise his hand and say, "I believe in the Bible and its last-day message, and Ellen G White is its prophet!" Believe it or not, even if no one changed their opinions, they usually parted as friends, because they both had a "testimony."

As a personal ministries participant, you probably don't want to try that, but having a personal testimony ready to give is very important. Saying things like, "I believe that Jesus forgives my sins, and I trust in Him," is a powerful personal testimony that will impress a Mormon person.

The Issue of Witnesses

Mormon defense of the Book of Mormon as an authority is based on the testimony of witnesses. By undermining these witnesses, the authority of the *Book of Mormon* is also undermined, and the authority of the Bible established. Biblical prophets needed no

witnesses to demonstrate that God spoke to them. They declare, for instance, "The word of the Lord came to me" (Jeremiah 1:4).

As studies progress, a personal ministries participant will use ways and means to undermine the idea and validity of witnesses. Here are some key questions to ask:

1. **Question:** How do you know that Joseph Smith actually had the golden plates to the *Book of Mormon* in his possession? (*The Mormons you are studying with will repeat the story of the plates, the Urim and Thummin, the inspired translation, etc. Continue to ask this question until they tell the story of the three witnesses. Then ask question 2*).
2. **Question:** Is it true that only Joseph Smith and these three witnesses saw the plates that contain the original manuscript of the *Book of Mormon*? (*Keep asking this question until they tell the story of the other eight witnesses. If they do not tell that part, look through the introductory pages of the Book of Mormon until you come to the part about these eight witnesses. Read it with them*).
3. **Question:** Why did Joseph Smith need the testimony of persons less worthy of confidence than himself for his words to be believed?
4. **Question:** Why did Joseph Smith need another eight witnesses besides the first group of three? (*Even though Joseph Smith said that the first three were called and ordained by God as witnesses, by 1838 the three had apostatized from the church. The Mormons claim that in spite of this apostasy they never renounced their testimony*).

A Short Bible Study about Witnesses

Matthew 18:16, 2 Corinthians 13:1 and the Issue of Witnesses

Mormons may appeal to these two verses because they use the word "witnesses." Here is what the verses really mean:

1. Matt. 18:16 "But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

This verse is not talking about prophets but about someone who had offended another person and did not want to be reconciled. It does not apply to the case of Joseph Smith's confirmation as a prophet.

2. 2 Cor. 13:1 "This will be my third visit to you. Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

One of the guidelines Mormon elders use says: "Read and explain 2 Corinthians 13:1, beginning with the phrase: "by the testimony of . . ."

Point out that the apostle Paul is using these "two or three witnesses" to confirm the sins committed by some members in Corinth. Tell them that you cannot reconcile this experience with that of Joseph Smith. If necessary, make the comment that in this epistle Paul did not defend his apostleship with witnesses but through the fruits of his ministry (2 Cor. 11:22-12:12).

How Mormon Missionaries Teach

There are two kinds of Mormon related persons a personal ministries participant may study with: (1) Mormon members, and (2) people who have in the past or are currently studying with Mormon missionaries. It is important to know how Mormon missionaries study with people. Seventh-day Adventists have a different study system, so if a personal ministries participant studies with a Mormon person, he or she should have in mind how they have studied with Mormons.

Mormons are aggressive missionaries. They have one of the best organized and effective outreach strategies in the world. They also have an effective vigilance system to care for their members.

1. When a personal ministries participant begins to study with a Mormon person, the local bishop (church pastor) will know about it very soon, and will send in the troops. He may personally appear at the study to refute the personal ministries participant and protect his member.

2. The Mormons most effective methods are personal outreach and witnessing. At eighteen years of age, Mormon males receive some training and are then sent on a two-year mission. These missionary elders use a highly emotional methodology. They frequently replace the inability to answer questions with a subjective memorized personal testimony: (1) that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is the true church; (2) that Joseph Smith was a true prophet; and (3) that the Book of Mormon is the Word of God.

3. People are impressed by the idealistic image of these well-dressed, polite, young people, many of them blond and blue-eyed. It gives them a captivating air. The aura of mystery with which they surround their presentation of the history of the hidden book, added to the magical connotations of translation plates that had to be used in secret, and the covenants and visions of their prophet, gets the attention of people of a mystical inclination, the same people who consult horoscopes and indulge in other esoteric activities.

The Mormon Instruction System

Interested non-Mormons receive a series of studies or lectures from what is known as *The Uniform System for the Study of the Gospel*. Each study is about two hours long, and is led by a missionary elder who uses the printed material provided by the Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

This series is made up of two parts: A manual with seven sections that instructs the elders in what to say and do in each study, and seven small booklets with a summary of each lesson and the decisions they should call for after each study. The interested person will be baptized at the end of the seven studies.

The studies themselves are structured as follows:

1. *Pre-approach*. A few minutes are spent in a dialogue designed to get acquainted, set the tone and build confidence, often called an "ice-breaker."
2. *Doctrinal explanation*. Both elders participate, alternating as the short explanations are given one after the other.
3. *Questions*. At the end of each segment of doctrinal explanation questions are asked to check up on the depth of understanding of the interested person. Usually then ask about ten questions per study.
4. *Testimonies*. The elders give their personal testimony four times during each study. They do this right after the interested person responds to the questions that prepare them to make a decision.

How Mormons Present Calls for Decisions

Following the first study the elders make definite calls for decision. Indecisive persons are oriented toward seeking a subjective, emotional experience. The order of the calls is as follows:

1. First study: A call to accept Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.
2. Second study: Call for baptism
3. third studies: Call for baptism.
4. Fourth study: A call to accept some of the regulations such as abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, coffee and tea.
5. Fifth study: Call to pay tithe.
6. Sixth study: Call to become involved in the activities of the church.
7. Seventh study: The interested person can be baptized at the end of the seven studies. General review explanation of Mormon ceremonies.

Many Mormons have become Seventh-day Adventists, but it takes patience and understanding of their belief system to study with them.

Relating to New Agers and Followers of the Occult

New Agers and followers of the occult are similar, but not always identical. They have enough in common that a personal ministries participant may use the same general approaches for both.

The core belief of both groups is that humans have an immortal soul, a divinity, inside them that needs to be "released," or at least "set free."

Some New Agers are completely secular, but still believe there is a creative power inside them that can be "set free" and employed for achieving success in life. Some business practice seminars and training courses are based on this philosophy.

Many have a religious component in their belief system. They typically have "spirit guides" who "channel" messages and instructions to them. Most religious components of New Age ideas come from Hinduism, Buddhism, and other Eastern religions. Some segments claim to be Christian, but in reality only use Christian vocabulary baptized with their own New Age meanings.

Followers of the occult (spiritists) are more openly religious. They are believers in magic, astrology, horoscopes, spiritistic seances, etc... Some directly worship Satan. Some are followers of imported spiritistic religions such as Voodoo and Santeria, basically different names for the same thing. Some, like Scientology, are the outgrowth of science fiction and theories about aliens, comets, other worlds, etc. For example, religious communions such a group called Unity, the Unitarian/Universalist church, and Christian Science are really spiritistic organizations.

The key issue in studying with any of these groups is the issue of the afterlife and immortality of the soul. Many adherents believe in reincarnation, the belief that after death the soul comes back to inhabit a new body.

Resources. Some helpful resources are Walter Martin, *The New Age Cult* (Bethany House Publishers, 1989), Will Barron, *Deceived by the New Age* (Pacific Press, 1999), Manuel Vasquez, *The Mainstreaming of New Age* (Pacific Press, 1998) and *Reaching and Winning New Agers* (AdventSource, 1999), Graeme S. Bradford, *Reaching and Winning Followers of the Occult* (AdventSource, 2001).

Is the Occult Real?

Yes, it is. It is the power of Satan that he and his fallen angels use to trap as many people as possible. A personal ministries participant who studies with someone involved in the occult needs the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, and a dedicated intercessory prayer group on their knees behind the scenes. You cannot take Satan on by yourself without the power and presence of the name of Jesus.

There are people a personal ministries participant may meet who are very much into occult beliefs and experiences, even though they may not even know that such things as the New Age exist. They hear voices; they "feel" spirits around them at night, and have stories to tell that will make your ears tingle. These are not imagination or mental disabilities. Satan attempts to apply his skills wherever he finds an opening or any kind.

Two Extremes

There are two extremes to avoid when dealing with the occult:

1. On one hand are those who do not believe that there is such a thing as supernatural occult forces. They believe in naturalism or observable science. These people may suddenly

come face to face with an unexplainable experience that will not fit into their scientific world of naturalism. They are vulnerable to being caught up in something they can't explain, and can be led into beliefs and practices of the New Age and the occult.

2. On the other hand are those who do believe the occult exists, but make the mistake of thinking they can handle it on their own. They talk continuously about the devil and magnify his supposed power, but forget that whatever holds our attention can also hold us.

Sometimes these experiences come from cultural backgrounds where "spirit" issues are common. Spirits are sometimes known as "howlers," a "warm presence," or a "cold presence." Some people come from areas of the world where it is common to build houses with upturned corners so that "spirits" cannot land comfortably.

A personal ministries participant may study with someone who has a "shrine" in a corner of a room. As they study the Bible, the student may continually cast a glance at the shrine to make sure the enclosed god is not angry. These beliefs and practices die hard. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can overcome them.

Some religious communions focus on casting out demons. These practices are often called "deliverance ministries." They usually call any practice, illness or idea they don't agree with a "demon," and attempt to "cast it out."

Some Roman Catholic priests claim to be experts in exorcisms (casting out demons). Often however, they attempt to do so using Roman Catholic religious tools such as relics, crucifixes, etc., along with the names of saints, not the power of Jesus.

The New Age/Occult

The so-called New Age is a collection of beliefs and ideas; a mixture of religious, political, and cultural concerns.

The "occult" is another name for spiritism. Both the New Age and contemporary occultism are reborn ancient ideas and practices, sometimes called "neo" (new) paganism.

Astrology believes that a unique "age" in world history begins approximately every 2,100 years. The world prior to the 1960s, according to their calculations, was in the Age of Pisces, an age of war, bloodshed, racial division, materialism, and male domination. This was also, according to them, the Age of Christianity, which often waged war against fellow Christians.

The "New" Age, the Age of Aquarius, is supposed to be an age of peace, prosperity, harmony, and spiritual enlightenment, led mostly by women. Its religious basis is Eastern religions instead of Christianity. Eastern religions are thought to focus on inner peace, tranquility and "relationships," rather than promoting doctrines and beliefs.

The terminology "Age of Aquarius" became famous beginning in 1967 when a rock musical titled "Hair" used as its opening music "This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius." The words and music caught on and became a kind of symbol for the so-called counter-culture, or "hippy" movement, of the 1960-1970s.

The New Age and the occult share the same thinking patterns and belief systems. The occult is more open about its pagan beliefs. The New Age presents itself as a key to business and leadership success, and the source of personal and family happiness. Nevertheless, the core beliefs of both are basically identical.

New Age Culture

New Age/occult thinking has permeated society. Many people that a personal ministries participant may study with don't even realize that they are reflecting New Age thinking in the questions they ask or the comments they make. They may not even realize that many of the normal cultural elements they take for granted are permeated with New Age ideas and symbols. These elements include all kinds of YouTube presentations, video games, Disney

movies, "new spirituality" ideas, self-help and advancement books and seminars, holistic medical remedies, philosophies involved in martial arts, etc.

Core New Age/Occult Beliefs

The New Age is a modern adaptation of spiritism dressed in up-to-date fashion attire and vocabulary, a revived paganism in modern garb. Its religious base is Eastern religions rather than Christianity. These Eastern religions are modified, adapted and syncretized to look and feel "Western." Their basic beliefs, nevertheless, are the immortality of the soul and the release of the divinity hidden in each human being. "God" is "within," not "up there." There are "spirit masters" who control the keys to success and life itself. These spirit masters "channel" their instructions and secrets to New Age adepts.

New Age Vocabulary

Term	Meaning
New Age/Occult Practices	
Astrology	Astrology is the interpretation of human destiny by reference to the position of the stars at the time of a person's birth.
Horoscopes	Astrologers have divided the heavens into 12 sections, each ruled by a different sign of the zodiac. Once the particular sign has been established, the mythological characteristics of the heavenly bodies are used to foretell events in the life of the individual for whom the horoscope has been drawn.
Palmistry	A type of fortune telling. It is the practice of supposedly interpreting a person's character or predicting their future by examining the lines and other features of the hand, especially the palm and fingers.
Astral Projection	A term used to describe a willful out-of-body experience. It assumes a person has a soul that can leave the body and travel around the universe.
Yoga	Yoga is a Hindu meditation practice. In the 1980s, it became popular as a system of physical exercise across the Western world. Yoga is more than physical exercise; it has a meditative and spiritual core.
Tarot cards	A way of foretelling the future using playing cards of European design.
Fortune-telling	Fortune-telling is the practice of predicting information about a person's life.
UFOs/Aliens	Much of the occult carries over to fascination with UFO's. UFO clubs exist in almost every country in the world. Their belief system appear to be in harmony with occult.
Meditation	Meditation employed by New Agers, such as Transcendental Meditation (TM), mystical meditation, yoga, visualization, and guided imagery, involve altered states of consciousness. The purpose of New Age meditation is an awareness of the higher self, the god within, oneness with the universe, or contact with spirit guides and entities.
Channeling	Channeling is a form of communication between humans and angelic beings, nature spirits, non-physical entities, or even animals and pets.

Crystals	Spiritual energy or healing energy is thought to transmit at very high vibration levels or frequencies. Since crystals transmit radio waves, occultists assume that they must also be good for transmitting psychic frequencies.
Amulets	An ornament or small piece of jewelry thought to give protection against evil, danger, or disease.
Practitioners	
Wizards	A practitioner of magic.
Soothsayers	A person supposed to be able to foresee the future.
Oracle	A person through whom a deity is believed to speak.
Clairvoyant	A person who claims to have a supernatural ability to perceive events in the future or beyond normal sensory contact.
Shaman	A person regarded as having access to, and influence in, the world of good and evil spirits. Typically, such people enter a trance state during a ritual, and practice divination and healing.
Wicca	A contemporary pagan religious movement derived from various historical pagan beliefs, often originally from European pagan sources.
Movements and Organizations	
Environmental Movements	Some are legitimate forms of conserving the environment. Others are connected to the New Age. They worship Gaia, "Mother Earth" as a goddess, a form of pantheism that envisions nature as god.
Holistic health	Alternative medicine is often based on sound principles. Many New Age medical entities, however are based on using assorted herbs, drinks and medical procedures to release the god that supposed lives in each person.
Spiritism	Spiritism is the idea that humans are immortal spirits that temporarily inhabit physical bodies for several necessary incarnations to attain moral and intellectual improvement.
Magic/sorcery	Magic or sorcery is the use of rituals, symbols, actions, gestures, and language with the aim of utilizing supernatural forces.
Animism	Animism is the idea that all objects in the world have an inner or psychological being. This soul can transmigrate from person to person, and from and into plants, animals, and lifeless objects.
Theosophy	Philosophical teachings maintaining that a knowledge of God may be achieved through spiritual ecstasy, direct intuition, or special individual relations. Many New Age ideas originated from theosophy.

New Age and Adventist Similarities

Seventh-day Adventists believe in some things that are similar to New Age practices, but are actually something entirely different. These agreements can be points of contact for personal ministries participants to study with New Agers, but you must be careful to make sure that both student and instructor understand what they are talking about.

Things such as holistic health, meditation, vegetarianism, human potential, and character development are examples of New Age vocabulary.

Wholistic and holistic only sound the same. Seventh-day Adventists are very much in favor of wholistic health and vegetarianism. "Wholistic" health, however, is different from what sounds like the same New Age term "holistic" health. For New Agers "holistic" is a term referring to spiritual exercises like yoga and channeling of spirit messages using things like crystals, amulets, pendulum divination, etc. They will also often *replace* (not just use as supplements) conventional medical treatment with herbs, massage, etc. that include the spiritual elements mentioned.

Methods to Reach and Win New Agers/Occultists

The core understanding that a personal ministries participant must deal with is the issue of the immortality of the soul. That humans have an immortal soul is a belief of just about all religious groups, and is especially emphasized by New Agers/occultists.

Seventh-day Adventists are Conditionalists. We do not believe in an immortal soul. Our belief is that only God is immortal. Any degree of immortality that a human being may possess is a gift from God.

Once a person understands that biblical teaching, it is much easier for them to recognize that the occult involves Satan, and not the God of heaven.

Eight-Step Process

New Agers/occultists with whom a personal ministries participant may study will need to go through an eight-step process. These steps may be in any sequence, depending on the person and their level of involvement with the occult.

1. The power of the gospel. New Agers believe in the presence and power of angels. We should expect a heavenly power to accompany the preaching of the gospel. This power of the Holy Spirit causes the preaching to triumph over the works of the occult no matter which form it takes. The Son of God came to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8). "The Saviour would sooner send every angel out of heaven to protect His people than leave one soul that trusts in Him to be overcome by Satan." — *Great Controversy*, p. 560.

2. Unite in prayer and fasting. Form an intercessory prayer group. If the person interested wishes, invite them to the group. It is not wise for anyone to go it alone to deal with occult powers. It is wise to form a small prayer group. Nor should a novice be quick to get involved, nor anyone who is practicing deliberate sin. There are dangers to be faced when attempting to help. Jesus recommended prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:21).

3. Point the person to Christ. We should warn the occultist of the danger they are in. Urge them to come to Christ. If people are really suffering from occult oppression, they will get no help from a psychiatrist or a psychologist. Nor is there help in yoga or meditation. Only Christ can help (Acts 4:12).

4. Destroy all occult objects. The key Bible text is Acts 19:17-20. Often there can be no help unless they first decide to make a clean break with all aspects of the occult. This could include objects like amulets, fetishes, letters, lucky charms, figures of gods, and other cultic objects. The personal ministries participant may have to help the persons do this. Some people are so frightened of these objects that even after becoming Christian, they will not touch or destroy them.

5. Break all ties with the occult. They should break off all contacts and friendships with mediums. They may need to move out of a house. Do not try to help or pray for someone who shows no willingness to become free from the occult forces.

6. Repent of their practices. They should pray a prayer of renunciation of the occult practices and accept God's forgiveness by faith (Romans 10:9).

7. Be confident of Christ's power. Some religious persuasions practice various "casting out of demons," or "exorcisms." These ceremonies are not biblically. It seems that some people enjoy the feelings and attention, in spite of the danger.

Deliverance can come only in the name of Jesus Christ. In Acts 16:16-18 Paul commanded, in the name of Jesus Christ, that the spirit come out of the young girl. However, this can happen only if the possessed person desires deliverance.

Studying about Jesus' experience with Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4) is also valuable.

8. Guard against a relapse. Have the person read Luke 11: 24-26. It is crucial that the one experiencing deliverance be filled with God's Spirit. Help them put on Paul's description of a Christian's armor (Ephesians 6:10-18). These words are the language of war. Paul shows us that in our struggle with Satan and his demons we are on a spiritual battlefield, where real instruments of war are being used.

Possible Approaches for Studying with New Agers/Occult Followers

People who are involved in New Age/Occult movements often realize that they are associating with evil forces. Some know it is evil but have sold their soul to the powers of the occult in return for favors. Only prayer and a miracle from God can open their eyes.

People who are deceived. Some people are deceived into believing the powers of the occult are friendly and will help them. Some may even associate the occult with the Bible and genuinely believe that the spirits are good spirits. As a first step, they must recognize that they are deceived.

1. Explain that it is easy to get caught up in the occult, but difficult to get out.
2. Share some of the Bible references that warn against the occult.
3. Relate the experiences of others who have been caught up and how it has led many to self-destruction. It is not hard to learn about these experiences. They may be found in books or from your own personal experiences.

Use Bible stories. For instance, show how Manasseh's downfall came about because he got involved in the occult. This led him into idolatry (2 Kings 21:6; 2 Chronicles 33:6). The Old Testament says "God's face is set against" anyone involved with familiar spirits and wizards. That's the same language as a "curse," something well known to people involved in the occult. (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6).

Some people are confused. For example, some people get involved in things like playing with a Ouija board. This is an occult practice where you direct questions and the board moves around and answers the questions. It is used as a parlor game, and many people don't know it is connected to the occult. Some people don't really believe in the occult, but they are puzzled about what is happening.

- Show them that what they are experiencing has been around for the whole of human history and is explained in the Bible as dangerous.
- Illustrate how people's lives have been affected by the occult. It has driven some insane, while others have been led to suicide. Unless they see the danger they are in, you cannot get far with them.
- Sometimes it helps to tell the person to ask the spirit who is appearing to him or her or moving the Ouija board to identify itself. This often leads to a conflict with the spirit, which frightens the person.
- Sometimes it helps if someone who has come out of the occult and is now a Christian gives their personal testimony.

People troubled by spirits. There are many people troubled by spirits. They may come to a Christian for help. Usually they don't understand why these things are happening. Explain to them:

- The love of God for all of His creation
- How the gospel works in our lives
- How Jesus helped those who had similar needs
- The promises of God to those who follow Jesus regarding the power they will have over demons.
- Organize a prayer group to pray for these people.

Suggested Order of Bible Studies

Seventh-day Adventists Bible study guides follow a topical order that works well. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to use a specific order of topics with people involved in the New Age or the occult. Very often they have little or no knowledge of the Bible, and are surprised to learn what it says about occult beliefs.

1. Begin with subjects that deal with the love of God, the authority of the Bible, and the meaning of the gospel. These subjects counteract belief in the occult and show that it is God, not the spirits who oversees the universe.
2. Before getting into topics involving what we call the "state of the dead," study:
 - The creation. The creation was a plan of God, not an accident.
 - The fall. Show how things went wrong, and Satan was involved on the wrong side.
 - Why suffering exists. The existence of angels, the fall of Lucifer, the great controversy theme. This is important because it shows that Satan is no longer Lucifer. He is now on the wrong side. Good angels are on God's side. Evil angels are demons.
 - Why Jesus came to earth. This is not a "re" incarnation, it is a "in"arnation (God taking on humanity). Explain how the gospel works. This involves true repentance. Show why universalism, the idea that somehow everyone is "saved," is not correct. We must decide whose side we are on—Christ's or Satan's.
 - What and where heaven is. Show how God will one day reward His faithful ones by re-creating this world. We do have the hope of seeing loved ones again. It will be when Jesus returns. *(This is a subject about which emotions run very deep. Don't mention the state of the dead yet; this will be a difficult testing truth for those who are sure they regularly see their loved ones through the occult).*
 - The millennium. Show how there are two resurrections. Satan and all his angels are destined for the lake of fire with those they take with them. Appeal to the fact that we must make a decision to accept Christ or we will certainly share the same fate as Satan and his angels.

After you have done this, you have built a wall around the subject of the state of the dead. When you begin studies dealing with immortality, the state of the dead, and the meaning of "soul" in the Bible, keep referring to the subjects just mentioned and show them how truth fits together like a jigsaw puzzle. Continue mentioning how the Christian life works in a practical way. Keep bringing in subjects on the love of God, the gospel, and prayer.

Sample Bible Study on the Occult

This is a sample Bible study dealing directly with the occult. A personal ministries participant will have to decide in each case the best time to give study of this type.

It may not be necessary to go through the details of occultism in all its various forms, but its main ideas should be covered.

This study is designed to reach someone who thinks the occult can be connected to Christianity. The aim of the study is to point out how the Bible views the occult, and warn the person of the danger they face dealing with anything spiritistic.

Is the Occult in Harmony with the Bible

1. What did God say when He created our first parents? (Genesis 1:26-28).
2. What was the warning He gave them? (Genesis 2:17).
3. What was the first lie ever told? (Genesis 3:1-4). (*Why would the serpent (Satan) want people to believe that their eyes will be opened and they will become as gods, knowing good and evil? What is the difference between being made in the image of God and your eyes being opened and being as gods?*)
4. What did God say when Adam and Eve disobeyed? (Genesis 3:17-19). (*Note the comparison between what God said the words of the serpent. Ask who we are to believe.*)
5. Why did God banish Adam and Eve from the garden? (Genesis 3:22-24). (*If they were banished from the garden so they could not eat of the fruit of the tree of life and live forever, what does that tell us about the mortality or immortality of the human race?*)
6. Who alone is immortal? (1 Timothy 6:15,16).
7. Who is called the father of lies? (John 8:44).
8. Through what means does the devil work to make people believe that his ideas are correct about life and death? (Deuteronomy 18:9-13. 1 Samuel 28:15-18). (*Explain why it could not be Samuel himself. It was a seance. What do you think the Bible says of occult practices?*)
9. With what forms of worship were these occult forms associated? (2 Kings 21:5, 6).
10. When Pharaoh resisted the message of Moses, for whom did he call? (Exodus 7:11).
11. Whom did the pagan Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar call for help? (Daniel 2:2). (*Were they able to help him? Why did God choose to reveal His message through a prophet like Daniel and not these astrologers? On another occasion, a representative of the occult and a representative of Jesus met in conflict. (Acts 13:1-4, 6-11). God's messengers who were chosen by and filled with the Holy Spirit opposed a sorcerer named Bar-jesus. Paul calls him a child of the devil and causes him to lose his sight for a season. Who wins in this power encounter?*)
12. What did God say about these mediums? (Deuteronomy 18:9-14).
13. What was one of the civil laws of Israel? (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:6, 27). (*What would happen to those who sought communion with these spirit beings?*)
14. What did Isaiah say about seeking the dead? (Isaiah 8:19, 20).
15. Can the dead communicate with the living? (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6).
16. Can the dead return to their homes? (Job 7:9,10; 2 Samuel 12:23).
17. Is seeing really cause for believing? (Matthew 7:15-22).
18. As we get close to the end of this world can we expect to see miracles? (Matthew 24:4, 5, 11, 23, 24). (*If God is not working these miracles who do you think is and why?*)

19. Why would the spirits of devils go out to deceive? (Revelation 16:12-16). (*Verse 15 is the key. They are trying to cause God's people to lose their hold upon the righteousness supplied by Jesus*).
20. Occultism says we are all going to make it to heaven. What did Jesus say? (Matthew 7:13, 14; John 14:6). (*Use this as a springboard to share the gospel and make your appeal to accept Christ*).
21. God does promise that we will have a better world where we will see our loved ones. (Revelation 21:1-4).

Assignment 6

Identifying Religious Groups

Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this Assignment.

1. In your own words, describe some identifying marks of each of the following religious communions.
 - a. Anglicans
 - b. Baptists
 - c. Roman Catholics
 - d. Pentecostal/Charismatics
 - e. Jehovah's Witnesses
 - f. Mormons
 - g. New Age/Occult

2. If someone you are studying with makes one of the following remarks, what church group would you recognize that they probably belong to?
 - "My uncle is a Churchwarden."
 - "I was born in the covenant."
 - "My spirit guide told me not to listen to you!"
 - "I am not sick. There is no sickness, and I don't want you to pray for me."
 - "Jesus took my mother to heaven five years ago."
 - "I was saved in 1999 when I got the Spirit."
 - "I finally managed to get my late husband out of purgatory."
 - "I'm not sure I should study the Bible. I learned in catechism class that the church teaches members what they should know."
 - "The Holy Spirit told me that I already know the truth. I don't need to study any more."

- "Jesus isn't coming again. He already came, we just can't see him."
- "If I join your church, will I still be exalted?"
- "But I have been saved. I can't lose what I already have can I?"
- "This crystal saved my life and protected me many times. I mustn't get rid of it!"

Student Fulfillment Card
Relating to People of Various Religious Persuasions

Name: _____
Church/District _____

This Student Fulfillment Card is the record that you have successfully completed the Essential Skills course *Relating to People of Various Religious Persuasions* of the North American Division Adult Ministries Department Personal Ministries Instruction and Enrichment training curriculum. When all the items are completed, have the Fulfillment Card signed by the appropriate person (your class instructor, your Internet instructor, a person in charge of Personal Ministries in your church/district, your pastor or someone from the conference in charge of personal ministries or evangelism training).

Check the items completed.

- I have read the two Units of the Study Guide.
- I have looked up and read the Bible passages included in this Study Guide.
- I have completed Assignment 1: "What Have You Learned?"
- I have completed Assignment 2: "General Belief Systems."
- I have completed Assignment 3: "Semi-Christian Belief Systems."
- I have completed Assignment 4: "What Have You Learned?"
- I have completed Assignment 5: "Types of Churches."
- I have completed Assignment 6: "Identifying Religious Groups."
- I have completed Reading 1: "What Prophecy Means to This Church."

_____ has satisfactorily completed the course
Relating to People of Various Religious Persuasions.

(Signature) _____ Date _____

Position _____

Please submit at www.nadadultministries.org