

UNDERSTANDING YOUR BIBLE

A CORE SKILLS
SABBATH SCHOOL
TRAINING COURSE
CU-102

139 *Gods alwetendheid.*
EEN psalm van David, voor
den opperzangmeester.
1 Gij weet mijn zinnen en kent mijn op-
staan, Gij verstaat van verre mijn ge-
dachte.
2 Gij omringt mijn gaan en mijn lig-
gen, en Gij zijt al mijn wegen gewend.
3 Als er nog geen woord op mijn tong
is, o HEERE, Gij weet het alles.
4 Gij beset mij van achteren en van
voor, en Gij set Uw hand op mij.
5 Uw recht is als een wonscheffing; zij is
als een rivier, die mij omringt.
6 Uw recht is als een wonscheffing; zij is
als een rivier, die mij omringt.
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30 Uw recht is als een wonscheffing; zij is
als een rivier, die mij omringt.
31 Uw recht is als een wonscheffing; zij is
als een rivier, die mij omringt.

A Core Level Adult Sabbath School Teacher 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
Core Level Adult Sabbath School Teacher Training Course**

The Adult Ministries Department of the North American Division sponsors a curriculum for the enrichment of Adult Sabbath School teacher/discussion leaders. This curriculum has three levels of teacher enrichment. All the courses are available online at www.nadadultministries.org.

These courses are all self-contained units and do not have to be studied in sequence. If you wish to obtain either the "Qualified Adult Sabbath School Teacher" or "Qualified Master Adult Sabbath School Teacher" *Certificates of Accomplishment* you must complete the previous courses in the curriculum outline.

**North American Division Sabbath School Teacher's Qualification
Process and Curriculum**

**Core
Units**

CU 101 – The High Calling of the Sabbath School Teacher
CU 102 – Understanding Your Bible
CU 103 – How to Interpret the Bible and the Writings of Ellen G. White

**Essential
Skills**

ES 01 – Laws of Teaching and Learning
ES 02 – Lesson Preparation
ES 03 – Learning Process/ Learning Styles

**Qualified Adult
Sabbath School
Teacher**

**Advanced
Skills**

AS 1 – Small Group Dynamics
AS 2 – Teaching Techniques of Jesus
Additional courses as needed or requested

**Qualified Master
Adult Sabbath
School Teacher**

Understanding Your Bible

A North American Division Adult Ministries Sponsored
Core Level Adult Sabbath School Teacher Training Course

Course Contents

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Unit 4 – Some Key Bible Problems
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Course Description

It is indispensable for a Sabbath School teacher/discussion leader to know his or her Bible. You cannot teach what you do not know.

The course is designed as an overall introduction to understanding your Bible. To some it may seem elemental, but it is always valuable to see the big picture and have in mind the broad outlines of one's textbook, in this case the entire Bible. This course covers four broad topics: (1) How the Bible is put together, (2) Outlines its contents, (3) Looks at some basic Bible themes, and (4) Pinpoints some examples of the types of problems that a Sabbath School teacher may encounter in lesson preparation resource material and in the thinking of Sabbath School class members.

Another course in this curriculum studies the principles of interpretation (*hermeneutics*) that govern the study and teaching of both the Bible and the writings of Ellen G White.

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 finished this course.

This course is both theoretical and practical. It is composed of a course outline, and assignment sheets.

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.

Vocabulary

Teacher/discussion leader. In North American Division churches it is customary to use two terms for the position traditionally known as a Sabbath School teacher: (1) "Teacher" and, (2) "Discussion Leader." The reason for the dual terms is that the title of "teacher" is too often taken to be a synonym for "lecturer." A Sabbath School teacher is supposed to be a facilitator who motivates class members to participate in the study and discussion of the lesson. Thus the use of the two titles as a motivating factor to help both teacher and class members understand the ideal role of this Sabbath School leadership team member. Both titles often appear in this course as "teacher/discussion leader."

Teacher enhancement training materials and reading assignments almost always use the term "teacher," so please remember that in terms of how the position is supposed to function, "teacher" and "discussion leader" mean the same thing.

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

Textbook

Your textbook is the Bible itself. Use a version you are comfortable with. It is best to use a translation like the *New King James Version* or the *New International Version* for this course. A paraphrase like the *Living Bible* or *The Clear Word* is not the best to use for a course of this type. The *Andrews Study Bible*, based on the *New King James Version* has helpful notes. Accessing an online Bible is also helpful.

Student Fulfillment Card

At the end of this Study Guide you will find a Student Fulfillment Card (See page 58). This is the record you will forward to the Adult Ministries Department of the North American Division) to receive your "Certificate of Completion" via the website www.nadadultministries.org.

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 or fill in. 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 are 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 mission of the adult Sabbath School teacher is founded on three cornerstones: being, knowing, and doing.

- “Being” means that an adult Sabbath School teacher must have a valid and perceptible Christian experience, and be prepared to serve as a spiritual guide for her or his class.
- “Knowing” means that a Sabbath School teacher must know what the Bible says and have a significant understanding of biblical history, doctrines, and teachings, and know how to study and interpret the Scriptures.
- “Doing” means that a Sabbath School teacher must have a knowledge of teaching methodology and be willing to invest the time and energy necessary to adequately prepare and lead a Sabbath School class.

This course, *Understanding Your Bible*, is a “knowing” class. It outlines how the Bible was developed into the book we have today, some key points of biblical history, and the development of biblical teachings. This course deals with the history of the Bible itself and the outlines of biblical history and development. Another course in this teacher training curriculum deals specifically with how to interpret the Bible.

It is especially important for Sabbath School teachers to have an accurate knowledge of the Bible. This means more than knowing and understanding the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist church. It means having in mind a picture of the overall timeline of the Bible and the various events that shaped its narratives and teachings. **Why Is This Class Important?**

- It is important to have in mind an accurate picture of when things in the Bible happened (biblical chronology).
- It is important to have biblical people placed accurately in the Bible timeline. For instance, if you were a Sabbath School member and heard the teacher/discussion leader say, “After he baptized Jesus, John the Baptist was sent to the Isle of Patmos,” what would you think? (That is a statement actually made in a Sabbath School class).
- It is important to know the outlines of Bible prophecy. The system of prophetic interpretation known as “historicism” that the Seventh-day Adventist church follows is based on chronological events that should be accurately portrayed in Sabbath School classes.
- It is important to understand how the Bible came to us and the overall emphasis of its various parts.

Course Objectives

- The teacher will examine and acquire a knowledge and understanding of the Bible’s geographical and historical environment.
- The teacher or prospective teacher be able to categorize and describe the Old and New Testament books.
- The teacher will examine and become familiar with some key biblical themes.
- The teacher will outline and understand some biblical dilemmas that might arise in class discussions.

UNIT 1

How the Bible Is Put Together

The purpose of this unit is to examine how the Bible that we use came to be. It examines the process of putting the Bible together. It will survey (1) What the canon of Scriptures is all about, (2) how the Bible was put together and, (3) why it is important to know about this as a Sabbath School teacher.

The material in the *Adult Bible Study Guide* is based on what is called a “high view” of Scripture. This means that it presents the Bible as true in what it says and as an authoritative source of doctrine and spiritual counsel. Most Sabbath School teachers and class members also accept the Bible as an authoritative source of information and counsel.

Fundamental Belief No. 1 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church clearly states our belief about the Bible:

“The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.”¹

The Bible is the principle tool in the hands of Christians to do the work of the Kingdom. Seventh-day Adventists have always accepted the Bible as their rule of faith and practice. William Miller, the Baptist layperson who was the forerunner of our Seventh-day Adventist church, described his method of Bible study:

“I commenced with Genesis. . . .Whenever I found anything obscure, my practice was to compare it with all collateral passages and by the help of Cruden [a well-known Bible concordance] I examined all the texts of Scripture. . . . Then by letting every word have its proper bearing on the subject of the text, if my view of it harmonized with every collateral passage in the Bible, it ceased to be a difficulty.”²

James White, a key founder of the Adventist Church, had no formal theological training (he was a schoolteacher), and mostly followed the example of William Miller in his interpretation of the Scriptures. White agreed with Miller that the Bible should be taken literally unless figurative language is present. Historical and grammatical context must be understood and adhered to. Once the context of a verse or verses is understood, the text is compared with other passages on the same subject/topic for a comprehensive understanding of truth. In all this White and Miller were largely following the conservative approaches of their day.

Joseph Bates, a former sea Captain, another influential founder of the Adventist church, was also a disciple of William Miller and an adherent of his interpretive method.

In 1848 the group of people who eventually became Seventh-day Adventists held a series of what they called “Sabbath Conferences.” In these meetings, usually held around the table in someone’s home or in a makeshift meeting place in someone’s barn, many of

¹ <<http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html>>.

² *Apology and Defence*, p. 6. Quoted in Don Neufeld, ed. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), p. 1889.

the Adventist views were developed from study of the Scripture. They had some real debates about the meaning of some texts and often studied all night trying to find answers. Eventually it all came together in what we know today as the Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. There are currently 28 belief statements on the list. The Adult Bible Study Guide is built around these statements.

The Seventh-day Adventist church has always accepted the idea of "present truth." Truth is not static. The more you study, the more you learn. That is why the opening clause of the statement of fundamental beliefs reads:

"Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word."³

Some of these Fundamental Beliefs, especially No. 2 about the Trinity, No. 4 about the divine/human nature of Jesus, and No. 5 about the personality of the Holy Spirit would not be acceptable to our church founders. As people studied more, they learned more, and some of our beliefs matured into what we have today. Others are basically the same as the originals, but have been confirmed by more study, and are expressed in more appropriate language. Recently Fundamental Belief No. 6 was modified to clearly state our belief in a six-day creation week.

The Canon of Scripture

The canon of Scripture (the list of books we have in our Bibles) is closed. This means that no one can add or subtract Bible books. But how we understand the Bible, what it teaches and what it says about history, the value and lessons from nature, etc. is not

³ <<http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html>>.

closed. The more you study, the more you discover and the more your "knowledge level" increases. That is the goal of Sabbath School the teacher/discussion leader.

Assignment 1

Self-Test of Basic Biblical Knowledge

➤ ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.***

An increasing number of Christians can no longer answer even simple Bible questions. See how you do on this self-test. [*Don't look at the answers at the bottom of the page until you have answered the questions*]. You can print out this page to write out the answers.

1. Name the first five books of the Old Testament.
2. What body of water parted for Moses?
3. Who was Matthias?
4. An Epistle is: (a) an ancient weapon; (b) a letter; (c) a battle; (d) wife of an apostle.
5. "A good name is better than _____".
6. What significance does the Qumran have?
7. Where were the believers first called Christians?
8. Name the Ten Commandments.
9. List the Beatitudes.
10. Name the nine-part fruit of the Spirit as listed by Paul.
11. What were Christ's seven last words from the cross as recorded in the Bible?
12. Name the seven deadly sins.
13. What are the six pieces of Paul's armor of God?
14. Who was Martin Luther?
15. Who was Martin Luther King, Jr.?

Answers: 1. *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*; 2. *The Red Sea*; 3. *The apostle who was chosen to replace Judas*; 4. *b*; 5. *Riches*; 6. *The Dead Sea Scrolls were found here*; 7. *Antioch*; 8. *See Exodus 20:2-17*; 9. *See Matthew 5:3-12*; 10. *See Galatians 5:22-24*; 11. *See Matthew 27, Luke 23, John 19*;

12. *Pride, lust, envy, anger, covetousness, gluttony, sloth*; 13. *See Ephesians 6:13-17*; 14. *The historic Protestant Reformer*; 15. *Baptist minister and civil rights reformer.*

Assignment 2

How Well Do You Know Bible Words?

➤ ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.***

As time passes, words change. The *King James Version* has been the most used Bible in the English language. Here are some interesting words from the King James. In the blank on the left of each of the following words write the number of the answer which best gives its meaning. [*Don't look at the answers at the bottom of the page until you have answered the questions*].

If you get less than 20/25 you should probably not use the King James Bible because there are hundreds more texts just like these, and neither you nor the class members will understand them!

You can look up each passage in a more up-to-date English version to see the difference. You can print out this page to fill in the answers.

___1. *ambassage*. Luke 14:32: "He sendeth an ambassage." (a) message; (b) ships; (c) carriage; (d) embassy.

___2. *amerce*. Deuteronomy 22:19: "And they shall amerce him in an hundred shekels of silver." (a) immerse; (b) reward; (c) pay; (d) fine.

___3. *anon*. Matthew 13:20-21: "And anon with joy receiveth it." (a) sometime; (b) never; (c) always; (d) immediately.

___4. *besom*. Isaiah 14:23: "I will sweep it with the besom of destruction." (a) fire; (b) whirlwind; (c) flood; (d) broom.

___5. *bolled*. Ex. 9:31: "And the flax was bolled." (a) boiled; (b) planted; (c) tied; (d) budded.

___6. *bewray*. Isaiah 16:3: "Hide the outcasts; bewray not him that wandereth." (a) chastise; (b) scold; (c) hurt; (d) reveal.

___7. *booties*. Habakkuk 2:7: "And thou shalt be for booties unto them." (a) shoes; (b) sandals; (c) plunder; (d) covering.

___8. *botch*. Deuteronomy 28:27: "The Lord will smite thee with the botch of Egypt." (a) whip; (b) locusts; (c) boils; (d) armies.

___9. *bruit*. Jeremiah 10:22: "Behold the noise of the bruit is come." (a) beast; (b) animal; (c) savage; (d) rumor.

___10. *chapman*. 2 Chronicles 9:14: "Besides that which chapmen and merchants brought." (a) horseman; (b) peddler; (c) guard; (d) chaplain.

___11. *clout*. Joshua 9:5: "Old shoes and clouted upon their feet." (a) clods; (b) images; (c) rags; (d) patches.

___12. *cracknel*. 1 Kings 14:3: "And take with thee ten loaves and cracknels." (a) ammunition; (b) biscuits; (c) fish; (d) money.

- ___13. *dote*. Jeremiah 50:36: "A sword is upon the liars; and they shall dote." (a) die; (b) burn; (c) be silly; (d) flee.
- ___14. *emerods*. 1 Samuel 5:12: "Smitten with the emerods." (cf. 6:4, 5). (a) rods of iron; (b) lighting; (c) ulcers; (d) pests.
- ___15. *fray*. Deuteronomy 28:26: "No man shall fray them away." (a) drive; (b) entice; (c) flay; (d) frighten.
- ___16. *grisled*. Genesis 31:10: "The rams were grisled." (a) fried; (b) sprinkled; (c) fat; (d) young.
- ___17. *habergeon*. 2 Chronicles 26:14: "And Uzziah prepared for them. . . . spears and helmets and habergeons." (a) sword; (b) coat of mail; (c) food; (d) boat.
- ___18. *implead*. Acts 19:38: "Let them implead one another." (a) support; (b) sue; (c) implore; (d) supplant.
- ___19. *knop*. Exodus 25:31: "A candlestick of pure gold. . . . his branches, his bowls, his knops and his flowers." (a) knobs; (b) capitals; (c) bases; (d) pipes.
- ___20. *leasing*. Psalm 4:2: "Seek after leasing." (a) pleasure; (b) peace; (c) wisdom; (d) falsehood.
- ___21. *marishes*. Ezekiel 47:11: "The marishes thereof shall not be healed." (a) sores; (b) wounds; (c) marshes; (d) feet.
- ___22. *neesing*. Job 41:18: "By his neesings a light doth shine." (a) sneezing; (b) window; (c) writing; (d) effort.
- ___23. *ouches*. Exodus 28:11: "Set in ouches of gold." (a) cups; (b) settings; (c) trinkets; (d) niches.
- ___24. *pilled*. Genesis 30:37: "And pilled white strakes in them." (a) painted; (b) peeled; (c) pounded; (d) scratched.
- ___25. *trow*. Luke 17:9: "I trow not." (a) try; (b) think; (c) promise; (d) affirm.

Answers: 1. D; 2. D; 3. D; 4. D; 5. D; 6. D; 7. C; 8. C; 9. D; 10. B; 11. D; 12. B; 13. C; 14. C; 15. D; 16. B; 17. B; 18. B; 19. B; 20. D; 21. C; 22. A; 23. B; 24. B; 25. B.

New Truth

"Present truth" means, as noted, that the more you study the more you learn. For instance, some biblical teachings may suddenly become more prominent because they are tied to historical events. We usually call those events prophetic fulfillments or signs of the times. But every daily headline in the local newspaper is not a prophetic fulfillment or a sign of the times. To be a valid sign of the times it has to have specific biblical backing. "New truth" is not new to the Bible; it is "new" to us because we didn't understand it in previous study. So "new truth" and "present truth" are often the same thing. The truth does not change. What changes is the knowledge level of the Bible student.

Present truth is sometimes accepted and sometimes it is resisted. Ellen G. White has some pointed statements about this issue:

● *Know what you believe.* "Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. . . . [Some] men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's word, and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative, and seek to avoid discussion. . . ."

"And there are many in the church who take it for granted that they understand what they believe, but, until controversy arises, they do not know their own weakness. When separated from those of like faith, and compelled to stand singly and alone to their belief, they will be surprised to see how confused are their ideas of what they had accepted as truth."⁴

● *The Bible speaks.* "Men entertain errors, when the truth is clearly marked out; and if they would but bring their doctrines to the word of God, and not read the word of God in the light of their doctrines, to prove their ideas right, they would not walk in darkness and blindness, or cherish error. Many give the words of Scripture a meaning that suits their own opinions, and they mislead themselves and deceive others by their misinterpretations of God's word."⁵

● *Keep studying.* "We must not think, "Well, we have all the truth, we understand the main pillars of our faith, and we may rest on this knowledge." The truth is an advancing truth, and we must walk in the increasing light."⁶

"Let no one come to the conclusion that there is no more truth to be revealed. . . . Many gems are yet scattered that are to be gathered together to become the property of the remnant people of God."⁷

How We Got Our Bible

The technical word used to refer to the collection of the books of the Bible is the "canon." All Bibles in existence today, regardless of the version or translation, are based on this commonly accepted canon. Roman Catholic and some Eastern Orthodox Bibles include what are called "deuterocanonical" (additional) books, or "extra-canonical" and often referred to as "apocryphal" (false).

The word "canon" is derived from the Greek noun *kanon* meaning "reed" or "cane," and also "rule" or "measure." In turn, the Greek word is derived from the Hebrew word *kaneh*, often used as a standard of measurement. A "canonical text" means a single authoritative edition for a given work. The term "Canon of the Old Testament," means simply the 39

⁴ *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, pp. 38-40.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

books of the Protestant Old Testament, which were written by inspired prophets, historians, and poets in pre-Christian times. No *single* church, no *single* church council, and no *single* Christian determined which books were to be included or excluded. The canon was formed through the consensus of the church over long periods of time.

In the Christian religion the commonly accepted canon of Scripture is the standard by which all other religious writings are measured. Most Christian Bibles contain 66 books. There are many books that are not included in the Christian canon that were supposedly written by one of the 12 apostles or by some Bible character. Some of these have titles like "The Secret Book of John," "The Gospel of Philip," "The Gospel of Nicodemus," etc.

Our word "Bible" designates the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments recognized and used by Christian churches. The word comes from the Greek word *biblia* ("books"). It is a reference to the inner bark of the papyrus reed (ancient paper) from which ancient scrolls were made. Daniel 9:2, for instance, refers to the Old Testament prophetic writings as "the books" (*ta biblia* in the Greek).

The prologue to Ecclesiasticus (an extra-canonical book dating from c. 130 B.C.) calls the Old Testament writings outside the Law and the Prophets "the rest of the books." The writer of 1 Maccabees (another extra-canonical book) styles them "the holy books" (12:9). Christians adopted this same terminology. Jerome (c. A.D. 400), one of the early translators, called the Bible *Bibliotheca Divina* ("the Divine Library").

Jesus customarily referred to the Old Testament books as "the scriptures" (Matt. 21:42; Mark 14:49; John 5:39). His followers did likewise (Luke 4:32; Acts 18:24; Rom. 15:4). Paul called them "the sacred writings" (2 Tim. 3:15, *New Revised Standard Version*), "the holy scriptures" (Rom. 1:2), and "the oracles of God" (3:2, NRSV).

The Bible doesn't mention any specific name for the complete body of Scripture. The only Scriptures known in New Testament times were those of the Old Testament and the earliest New Testament books. Peter, for example, refers to Paul's epistles as "scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16).

The Terms "Old Testament" and "New Testament"

Since the close of the 2nd century A.D., the terms "Old Testament" and "New Testament" have been used to differentiate the Hebrew from the Christian Scriptures. The accepted collection of Christian writings came to be called the New Testament. This collection was considered of equal inspiration and authority as the Hebrew canonical books. The Hebrew Scriptures were then referred to as the Old Testament. We still have the same division in our contemporary Bibles.

The Canon of the Old Testament

The origin of many of the individual books of the Old Testament can be traced back to their authors. For instance, God told Joshua, "Keep this Book of the Law [of Moses] always on your lips" (Josh. 1:8, *Today's New International Version*). Joshua himself encouraged the people to, "be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses" (23:6, NIV). He also held a mass meeting where instructions were publicly read from "the book of the law" (8:34, NIV).

The books of Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah record events that took place during the 6th and 5th centuries before the time of Jesus. The writing of the Old Testament, as it is known today, must have been completed by the end of the 5th century B.C. because nothing further was added to the record. The canon, therefore, must have been closed by that time.

"The efforts of Ezra to revive an interest in the study of the Scriptures were given permanency by his painstaking, lifelong work of preserving and multiplying the Sacred Writings. He gathered all the copies of the law that he could find and had these transcribed and distributed. The pure word, thus

multiplied and placed in the hands of many people, gave knowledge that was of inestimable value."⁸

Sometime around 250 B.C. some Jewish scholars produced a Greek translation of the Old Testament called the *Septuagint* (meaning 70), usually abbreviated as the LXX. It was called "70" because the story relates that about 70 people did the translating. The LXX was the standard Bible used in the time of Jesus and the early church.

The LXX contains the same 39 books as our Bibles, though they are arranged differently. It also contains some of the deuterocanonical or extra-canonical books.

The New Testament Canon

The recognition of some New Testament books as canonical was a long and complicated process beginning in the early part of the second century when some of these writings began to be used by early Christians to support their teachings.

An early Christian church historian named Eusebius (c. 330 A.D.) recorded that the generally accepted criteria for accepting a book into the canon was: (1) whether it was written by an apostle or eye witness, (2) whether the writing conformed to generally accepted doctrinal teachings, (3) whether it was written during the apostolic period, and (4) whether it was generally accepted in prominent or large numbers of churches and used in their worship and baptismal preparation programs.

By the 2nd century after the time of Jesus, Christian writers were already using phrases like: "it is written," "the Scripture says," "that which is written", etc.

All kinds of writings were in circulation by that time, and authors often added an apostle's name to their own writings, because they assumed that more people would read something that came from one of the apostles of Jesus. It actually took about 300 years before the Christian church leaders got together and agreed on a list of books to include in Christian Bibles.

The final stages of the closing of the New Testament canon came in the early part of the 4th century during the persecutions of the Roman emperor Diocletian during the years 303–313. During this persecution Christians were forced to turn over their sacred writings to the Roman government. Churches had to decide which books to turn in and which to hide. Church history tells us that the Christians tried to preserve what they considered sacred Scriptures by handing over only writings of lesser importance.

The earliest list, or catalogue, of the Christian writings considered as a sacred collection comes from Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 320–30). He made a list of "canonical" writings that had three kinds of books on it: (1) recognized, (2) disputed, and (3) spurious or false. Most of the books on his "recognized" list are the same ones we have in our Bibles today. A couple of the books in our contemporary Bibles were on his "disputed" list, but were later accepted as recognized. What we have in our Bibles today is known as a "closed" canon. It is official, and no one can add or subtract anything from it.

Bible Statistics

In 1250 A. D. a Cardinal Hugo incorporated chapter divisions into the Latin Bible. His divisions, although convenient, were not always accurate. Essentially those same chapter divisions are still used today. In 1551 one Robert Estienne introduced a Greek New Testament that included verse divisions. He did not, however, fix verses for the Old Testament. The first entire English Bible to have verse divisions was the Geneva Bible of 1560.

⁸ *Prophets and Kings*, p. 609.

Old Testament Statistics

1. 39 books
2. 929 chapters
3. 23,214 verses
4. 593,493 words
5. Longest book—Psalms
6. Shortest book—Obadiah
7. 17 historical books
8. 4 poetical books
9. 17 prophetical books

New Testament Statistics

1. 27 books
2. 260 chapters
3. 7,959 verses
4. 181,253 words
5. Longest book—Acts
6. Shortest book—3 John
7. 4 Gospels
8. 1 historical books
9. 22 epistles

What Did You Learn in Unit 1?

➤ ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.***

This Assignment sheet is self-graded. Look over your notes and the course material for Unit 1 to find the answers.

1. What is the "canon" of Scripture?
2. Briefly describe how the canon was formed for both the Old Testament and the New Testament.
3. Why do you think a book like Song of Solomon got into the biblical canon?
4. What is deuterocanonical book? What are some other names used for this kind of book?
5. What is difference between a canonical book of the Bible and an apocryphal book in the Bible?
6. Explain the similarities and differences between "new light" and "present truth."
7. Why is it important for a Sabbath school teacher to know about the Bible and how it was put together?

UNIT 2

Overview of the Bible

The purpose of this study is to survey the contents of the Bible. It focuses on two things: (1) biblical chronology, and (2) brief outlines of the books of the Bible.

Biblical Chronology

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as a valid historical record. We accept that Adam and Eve were real people; the list of patriarchs in Genesis 10, 11 is a list of real people; David was a real king of Israel, etc.

Many Bible scholars do not believe these things. Many believe that Adam and Eve were not real people but “symbols” illustrating that God created the world, but not in a time frame of seven literal days. Many believe that the Bible was written by a number of different people and edited by others they designate as “J,” “E,” “P,” and “D.” This view asserts that these editors collected all these writings and put them together to make up the Bible we have today. Seventh-day Adventists have never accepted this idea.

Another chronological system is very popular among those who accept the Bible as it reads. The *King James Version* originally included (and still often does) in the margin a chronology developed by an Anglican Bishop named James Ussher. He used the genealogies in Genesis to calculate the age of the earth, based on the idea that each day of creation really represented 1000 years. (See 2 Peter 3:8.) Ussher calculated that the earth was created in 4004 B.C. Those who believe in a “young earth” Creation (including Adventists) have often followed Ussher’s chronology.

Ussher’s chronology gives a general picture of when early biblical events happened, but it has been proven to be inaccurate in its details. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, for instance states, “We should be satisfied with approximate dates for the earlier ages, where there is no fixed chronology that will pinpoint biblical events.”⁹ It adds, “This [Commentary] assigns no dates to the period before Abraham. Since final conclusions cannot be reached, even by consistent computation from the Bible data, because of the possible undetermined variations, this commentary does not attempt a complete chronology.”¹⁰

Nevertheless, it is possible to outline the overall time periods of the Bible. Also, dates for prophetic time periods are given very accurately in the Bible.

What is important for a Sabbath School teacher is to make sure that he or she has biblical events and personalities set within their proper time frame. Any Bible commentary or Bible Handbook will have additional information about specific dates.

Old Testament Chronology

The Old Testament books are grouped in our Bibles according to topics and authors. Without assigning exact dates, an Old Testament timeline looks like the following.

The first five books of the Bible. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Known as the Pentateuch (“five books”), or the “Law of Moses” or the “Books of Moses.” Creation ► flood ► Babel ► Abraham ► Isaac ► Jacob ► Joseph ► Moses ► the Exodus ► Israel in the desert ► Joshua and Caleb.

●**Genesis.** The name Genesis is the Greek word for the opening phrase of the Bible: “In the beginning.” The book deals with beginnings (the creation of earth and its inhabitants, the fall of humankind into sin, and the first promise of salvation). It also shows how and why God appointed and blessed the children of Abraham as His chosen people in

⁹ Vol. 1, p. 196.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 195.

salvation history. The stories in Genesis are largely the sagas of the Hebrews—the first murder, the first nation, Noah and the flood, and many other narratives about God’s care for His people.

●**Exodus.** This book derives its name from the Greek word in the Septuagint that means, “going out.” It refers to the principal events of the escape of the Israelites from slavery under the Egyptians. Throughout the book the power and leading of God are emphasized. Even though His people are often unfaithful, God remains faithful to them and rescues them from bondage and takes them to the Promised Land. This remains a focus of the entire Scriptures.

●**Leviticus.** The book of Leviticus was known as the priest’s manual among the ancient rabbis. The book is filled with laws about how the sanctuary services were to be carried out. Most of the book is comprised of laws and regulations.

●**Numbers.** This book takes its name in our English Bibles from the title in the Septuagint and the Vulgate (the original translation into Latin). The Hebrew name for the book is “In the wilderness,” after the first words of the first chapter. The entire book is set in the wilderness as the Israelites wander about after their exodus from Egypt to the eastern edge of the Promised Land, Canaan.

●**Deuteronomy.** The title for this book means the “second giving of the law.” Actually, the book is a restatement of the original law, not a new law, and it is presented in the form of a treaty. The book is carefully organized for a nation that is about to settle in its own territory. Along with Psalms and Isaiah, this is the book most quoted by the New Testament. The public reading of Deuteronomy later led to the great reforms of Israel during the time of Josiah.

The books of history. Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

Events: the Judges ► the United Kingdom (Saul, David, Solomon) ► the divided kingdom ► the exile in Babylon ► the experience of Esther in exile ► the return to Palestine (Ezra and Nehemiah).

●**Joshua.** The name of this book in the English Bible is taken from the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate. “Joshua” is the Hebrew name from which derives the name “Jesus,” and means “*Yahweh* is salvation.” The book is organized around the story of Joshua, Moses’ successor. It records the conquest of Canaan after the death of Moses and details the dividing of the land (chapters 13–21).

●**Judges.** About 200 years of history are recorded in the book of Judges; from the death of Joshua to the birth of Samuel. A precise chronology is probably not discernible in Judges because round numbers were often used. Conservative scholars generally hold that Judges had its source in the oral and written traditions about the heroes of Israel. The book may have been compiled by Samuel (at least in part) and put in its final form by an unknown editor.

●**Ruth.** Named for its heroine Ruth, this story took place during the days of the judges. In the Hebrew Bible the book appears in the collection known as the “writings,” though in our English Bibles it is placed in the historical section immediately following the book of Judges. Ruth emphasizes loyalty to family and the Hebrew law. Boaz and Ruth’s child, Obed, becomes the grandfather of David and the beginning of the royal line that finally leads to the birth of Jesus.

●**1 Samuel.** The books we know as 1 and 2 Samuel were originally one book in the Hebrew canon. The divisions into two books date from the time of the Septuagint, because the Greek language required more space than the original Hebrew. These two books fill in the historical period from the time of the Judges until the end of David’s reign. First Samuel tells the story of Samuel the Judge and Saul the King. The book ends with the decline of Saul’s power.

●**2 Samuel.** 2 Samuel picks up the history of David at the point of his lament over the death of Saul and continues through the Davidic kingdom. This historical account

includes the revolt of Abner, the rise of David to kingship over Judah and Israel, David's sin against Uriah, his confession, Absalom's revolt and death, and David's last words as king.

●**1 Kings.** In the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Kings are one book called Kings. These two books run from the United Kingdom of Solomon to the divided kingdom. They cover about 400 years of Hebrew history. 1 Kings uses a variety of sources.

●**2 Kings.** The book of 2 Kings covers 300 years of Hebrew history from the final ministry of Elijah to the time of the Exile (9th century B.C. to 6th century B.C.). During this time the prophets Hosea and Amos (in Israel), and Joel, Micah, Isaiah, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Jeremiah (in Judah) were prophesying. The book covers the ministry of Elijah and Elisha (chapters 1–9), and the reigns of the kings of Judah and of Israel from Jehu to Zedekiah, when Babylon finally captured Jerusalem (chapters 9–25).

The chronology developed by Edwin R. Thiele, an Adventist Old Testament scholar, in his book *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* is commonly accepted as a credible source for the dating of the kings in this book. Major figures include Elijah, Elisha, Naaman, Jehu, Joash, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah.

●**1 Chronicles.** This is a post-exilic book that may have been written by Ezra. The time period is from the death and burial of King Saul, the first king of Israel through the anointing of David, Saul's successor. The book opens with nine chapters of genealogies and then follows the rise of David to royal supremacy. Many of the stories here parallel those of 1 and 2 Samuel, but they focus more on religious themes than the historical events.

●**2 Chronicles.** Here we find the story of Solomon's reign, which includes the building and dedication of the temple. In great detail the author tells the story of the magnificence of Solomon's temple and of the great wealth of the king. The secession of the ten tribes of Israel is presented from the southern viewpoint and duplicates some of the material found in 1 Kings.

Many of the heroes and events from the book of the Kings are reintroduced in 2 Chronicles: Rehoboam, Jehosaphat's reform measures, Jeroboam's reign, Joash's reform and subsequent apostasy, Hezekiah's reform, the idolatrous practices of the northern kingdom and the final overthrow of Jerusalem by Babylon. This book gives a powerful depiction of the effect of the law in bringing about revival and reformation. It also demonstrates further how strong rulers can apostatize.

●**Ezra.** The chronicle of Ezra deals with Judah's return from captivity and the rebuilding of the temple, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. In Jewish tradition Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book continuing the Chronicles of the Jews. Ezra was considered the chief author and Nehemiah the one who completed the writing around 400 B.C.

Ezra begins with Cyrus's decree allowing the Jews to go back to Jerusalem and begin rebuilding the temple. The book goes on to explain how the work was stopped and later completed with a log of who returned and the reforms that took place. The book ends with the problem of marriages between Jews and idolatrous neighbors.

This book is especially important to Adventists in that it establishes the date for the beginning of the 70-weeks prophecy of Daniel. The book *The Chronology of Ezra 7* by Siefried H. Horn and Lynn H. Wood, both very competent Adventist biblical scholars, establishes this date.

●**Nehemiah.** In this chronicle Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem to complete the rebuilding of Jerusalem. When he finishes the wall, he holds a public reading of the Law of God, which results in a major reformation by the former captives from Babylon. The people covenant to keep the words of the Law. This kind of reformation is repeated over and over again in both Scripture and in history. Adventists are part of the Reformation thinking that the Law and the Word are to be central in their preaching. The book of Nehemiah is filled with indications of the reformatory power of the law of God.

One inductive study you can do as a teacher is to go through the book and underline every time the phrase “the law of God” is used. It will astound you as you read what happens when the law of God is held up before the people.

●**Esther.** The events of Esther take place some 30 years before the events of the book of Nehemiah. Some scholars think that Esther’s experience may have made the work of Nehemiah possible. The story of Esther is one of the better known stories in the Bible. This is the only book in the canon that does not directly mention God, but the implications of His continual presence are certainly apparent.

The Books of Poetry. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon. These were written at various times and places. They are known in the Hebrew Bible as “The Writings;” also as “wisdom literature”. Characteristic of these books is the Hebrew concept of poetry.

In English we often think of rhyme as key characteristic of poetry, but this is not the case in Hebrew thinking. To them poetry is figures of speech such as metaphors, hyperboles (exaggerations), similes, and personification.

Another characteristic is called “parallelism.” A phrase may be repeated using different figures. An example in Psalm 15: 1 reads: “Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?” (NKJV). Notice that both lines say the same thing. This is called “synonymous parallelism.” There are other kinds of parallelism, such as opposite parallelism in which the second line expresses the opposite of the first line. An example is Psalm 1:6: “the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish” (NKJV). A Sabbath School teacher who deals with these books of poetry should be aware of these characteristics.

In Hebrew thinking “wisdom” means the willingness to perceive the world as God created it. This theme is addressed repeatedly throughout the wisdom literature. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10, NKJV). Here the writer is not talking about knowing facts, but rather how people relate to those facts.

●**Job.** Jewish tradition records that Moses was the author of the book of Job. Ellen G. White affirms this tradition, “The earliest as well as the most sublime of poetic utterances known to man are found in the Scriptures. Before the oldest of the world’s poets had sung, the shepherd of Midian recorded those words of God to Job—in their majesty unequalled, unapproached, by the loftiest productions of human genius.”¹¹

The theme of Job is how what we Adventists call the “great controversy” between Jesus and Satan played out in the life of one man, Job. He suffered a lot, and argued with God about the problem, but in the end, he came out on the right side. It is the age old challenge of understanding how evil can thrive when there is a good God. Many books have been written on this topic using Job as a major source.

●**Psalms.** One of the most commonly quoted Old Testament books by New Testament writers is the book of Psalms. Psalms is the hymn book and prayer book of Israelite worship. While David is credited with many of the psalms (73 in all), he didn’t write them all. This collection of hymns and prayers is divided into five books (1–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, 107–150). The entire spectrum of human emotions is represented in Psalms.

●**Proverbs.** A proverb is a general statement that expresses a common truth, often in figurative language. The book of Proverbs is a collection of these sayings about practical affairs of everyday life. The book is organized into five parts, most of which were written by Solomon. The purpose of Proverbs is to promote wisdom, discipline, understanding, righteousness, justice, equity, prudence, knowledge, discretion, learning and guidance.

●**Ecclesiastes.** When you read it, this book sounds very pessimistic. Solomon, the author, shares his experience that without God there really is no meaning in anything we see, confront, or enjoy. Keep in mind that it is primarily describing life “under the sun,” that is, without God. That will help to give perspective on its purpose and theme. According to

¹¹ *Education*, p. 158.

the author, things such as riches and power are worthless without reference to God. The final instruction is something of a key to the whole book: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (12:13, NKJV).

●**Song of Solomon.** Perhaps the greatest love song ever written, this book represents Solomon's masterpiece. It is commonly considered Solomon's tribute to the love of his wife (no one knows which wife!). The chief speakers in this song are the bride, the king and the chorus of palace women called the "daughters of Jerusalem."

There are a number of interpretations of this song, a dominant one being that it is talking about God's love for Israel. Many have interpreted it as an allegory of the Exodus, in which God took Israel as his wife, or, developing the interpretation further into spiritual significance, God's love of the church. These are all valid lessons and thoughts, but the book itself is a real love story. Keep in mind that Israelite society openly used language and sexual imagery that sometimes seems inappropriate in contemporary Christian society.

There is a lot of imagery in this song, including Solomon's love of nature—gardens, meadows, vineyards, orchards, and flocks. In treating this poem, a Sabbath School teacher should enjoy the poetry and compare it to the great hymns in the Lamb's marriage supper (Rev. 19:6-9).

The Prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. These are divided into "major" and "minor" prophets according to the length of the book(s) they wrote.

Events: In Judah, the Southern Kingdom, Isaiah ► Jeremiah. In exile in Babylon, Daniel ► Ezekiel.

These writers deal with issues of justice, morality, vengeance, faith, loyalty, repentance, and judgment. The role of prophets in the Old Testament varied. Though prophets did engage in those generally expected functions such as predictive prophecy, their more usual work was speaking for God about conditions in their immediate environment. This task is reflected in the meaning of the original Hebrew word for "prophet," which means one called, or one who calls. In this case, the calling or speaking was from and for God. Prophets generally saw themselves faithfully delivering God's message to his people.

●**Isaiah.** Isaiah is the first of the Major Prophets, traditionally known to Christians as the messianic prophet. His book is often called the gospel in the Old Testament. He is quoted in the New Testament more than any other of the prophets, and these usually deal with the coming of the Messiah. Messianic prophecies in Isaiah are found in chapters 2, 7, 9, 24, 25, 32, 34, 40, 42, 49, 53, 55, 56, 60, 61, 62, 65, and 66. Sabbath-keeping is dealt with in Isaiah 56–59.

●**Jeremiah.** Jeremiah lived about 100 years after Isaiah. His messages were attempts to save Judah from Babylonian captivity, but he failed. He predicts that Judah is going to be destroyed by Babylon, but that can be avoided if the people will repent.

His messages parallel those of Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Obadiah. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. Try reading the entire book through in one sitting to get the feeling for why he is called the weeping prophet.

●**Lamentations.** This book deals with what Jerusalem had been and what she could be if she repented. Each of the five chapters is a separate poem. The sweeping away of Judah by the Babylonians is definitely seen as a judgment of God on the Jewish people. The book closes with an appeal for God's favor and recognition that only God can restore Judah to its earlier glory.

Ezekiel and Daniel were contemporaries of Jeremiah. Ezekiel may have been a student of Jeremiah—they preached the same kind of messages. Unfortunately, Jeremiah did not live to see the return of the Jews from Babylon.

●**Ezekiel.** A unique characteristic of Ezekiel is the careful dating of all his visions as well as a great deal of personal information about the prophet himself. The book has a

number of interesting parables and allegories. Of special interest to Adventists is Ezekiel 18: “The soul who sins is the one who will die” (verses 4, 18, NIV). This text has defined the Adventist doctrine of personal responsibility before God that motivates one to live a life of worthiness. Adventists see Ezekiel 28 as a dual prophecy that goes beyond the King of Tyre and applies uniquely to Satan, the deceiver. Some of Ezekiel’s visions (chapters 1, 3, 38, 40-48) reappear in the book of Revelation (chapters 4, 10, 20, 21, 22).

●**Daniel.** Of the twelve long lines of time prophecies found in the Bible, four are found in the book of Daniel—chapters 2, 7, 8, 11. Adventists have produced many volumes on Daniel and Revelation. We historically accept Daniel as an actual prophet and place the time of Daniel in the sixth century B.C.

The main character in this book is the prophet Daniel himself who was taken into captivity from Judea to Babylon during the time of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon (chapter 1). The book contains both stories and prophecies. Stories such as the fiery furnace (chapter 3), the den of lions (chapter 6), the handwriting on the wall (chapter 5), and the loyalty of the captives to God in refusing to follow the king’s training program (chapter 1) are widely known and continually retold by Christians.

For Adventists, however, the major importance of the book of Daniel resides in the meticulous prophetic material available in this book, which we see as connected to the end of time.

The Minor Prophets. The Minor Prophets are called “minor” because their books are shorter than the “major” prophetic books. In this case the word “minor” does not mean less important, only a shorter book!

Minor Prophet	Where He Served
The Assyrian Age	
Jonah: 790 B.C.	Nineveh
Amos: 767-753 B.C.	Israel Hosea: 753-729 B.C.
	Israel
Micah: 740-700 B.C.	Judah
The Babylonian Age	
Joel: 7th century B.C.	Judah
Nahum: 640 B.C.	Nineveh
Habakkuk: 630 B.C.	Judah Zephaniah: 630 B.C. Judah
Obadiah: 550 B.C.	Edom
The Persian Age	
Haggai: 520 B.C.	Judah
Zechariah: 520-518 B.C.	Judah
Malachi: 425 B.C.	Judah

Events: In Israel, the Northern Kingdom, Amos ► Hosea. In Judah, the Southern Kingdom, Micah ► Habakkuk ► Zephaniah. To Nineveh, Jonah ► Nahum.

●**Hosea.** The book of Hosea is directed to Israel, the ten tribes who set up an independent kingdom. Prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, and Amos had been sent to Israel. Now Hosea brings his message. The dominant theme of his message is that God loves Israel in spite of her unfaithfulness.

This theme is played out dramatically through Hosea’s personal experience with his unfaithful wife. According to the story God commands Hosea to take a prostitute as his wife. In her unfaithfulness he brings her back to him. In the case of Israel the great charge is

idolatry, which also presented itself in deceptive practices with ruling nations. The punishment for Israel will be wandering among the nations. Because the people would not listen to Hosea's message, they were carried away by the Assyrians.

●**Joel.** The prophecy of Joel is organized into two parts: a plague and a restoration. It has been interpreted two ways: literally and allegorically. The Day of the Lord will be terrifying unless Judah repents of her sins. The plague of locusts may mean the invading armies that attacked Judah. The Day of the Lord refers to the impending judgments God will bring upon the unrepentant.

●**Amos.** Amos was chronologically the first of the Minor Prophets with a message for Israel, the northern kingdom. Israel adopted calf worship as its official religion and practiced many of the Canaanite rituals. As you read the book, you discover that Amos was not an educated man, nor trained in the schools of the prophets. By contrast Israel was very prosperous, had increased in size through conquest, and was fairly secure from her enemies.

●**Obadiah.** Of the twelve minor prophets only Obadiah contains a prophecy against Edom, the descendants of Esau. (Amos only mentions them). These people were bitter enemies of the Jews with their heritage dating back to Esau and Jacob (See Genesis 25: 23; 27; 41). Here was a genuine, ongoing family conflict. The quarrel had come to a head when Moses sought permission to travel through Edomite territory on his way with the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan (Num. 20: 14-21) and was refused permission.

The prophecy includes the message of doom on the Edomites. Four occasions mentioned in Scripture when the Edomites plundered Jerusalem (2 Chron. 21:8, 16, 17; 25: 11, 12, 23, 24; 28:16-21; 36:11-21). The prophecy predicts that the Edomites would eventually be destroyed. Obadiah closes his prophecy with the assurance that the house of Jacob would be restored and its land returned.

●**Jonah.** Perhaps the best known story found in the Minor Prophets is the story of Jonah and the great fish. Jonah is commissioned to go to Nineveh and warn them that they will be destroyed for their wickedness. Nineveh was an Assyrians city and Assyria was a nation that God had chosen to punish the northern kingdom of Israel. One can understand the Jonah's reticence to carry out such a commission.

The story is important for teaching that God loves all humanity, not only His people. This story has been interpreted as a historical narrative, as an allegory, a legend, a myth, or a parable meant to teach some great truth. Adventists have held to the literal quality of Jonah and largely base their view of conditional prophecy on this book.

●**Micah.** Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea, and was preaching in western Judah while Isaiah was preaching in Jerusalem and Hosea in Israel. Micah preaches to both Judah and Israel under the guise of their capital cities Samaria and Jerusalem. He develops the theme of national guilt and corruption and particularly blames the princes and false prophets for this. It will all end in judgment and destruction.

●**Nahum.** The message of Nahum, a prophet about which we know very little, was directed to Nineveh. Nahum delivers his message some 120 years after Jonah had given his. It is interesting that Isaiah had predicted the fall of Nineveh several years after Jonah had witnessed a great revival there. Like Jonah, Nahum's message is one of doom. The date for Nahum's prophecy is somewhere before 612 B.C., the date of the final fall of Assyria.

●**Habakkuk.** Habakkuk has an interesting dialogue with God about justice. The book was written before Babylon had invaded Judah (606 B.C.). Habakkuk was agitated by the wickedness of Judah. He recognized that in God's eyes this meant judgment. So God helped him understand that judgment was coming and it would come at the hands of Babylon, which was presently moving westward. In spite of his protests and arguments, Habakkuk would live to see this happen.

●**Zephaniah.** Zephaniah was a contemporary of Habakkuk and Jeremiah. His prophecy is filled with the expression "Day of the Lord," in which he depicts God's movement in history to vindicate His righteous deeds. That day is near for Judah. The

prediction is calculated to create fear in the people's hearts with a view to repentance. God will deliver His truly faithful in spite of the horrors of that day. Zephaniah was also involved in the great reforms of King Josiah.

The return from Babylon. Haggai ► Zechariah ► Ezra ► Nehemiah ► Malachi (100 years later).

●**Haggai.** Haggai was a contemporary of Zechariah. They both wrote after the exile of the Jews to Babylon. Malachi was also in the group of what commentators called "postexilic" prophets, although he wrote about 100 years later than the rest. Haggai's message to Judah was that the temple would be rebuilt, and a new temple is to be greater than the rebuilt one (Hag. 2: 1-9).

●**Zechariah.** Zechariah continues the encouragement of the people of Judah that Haggai started. What Haggai described as a greater temple Christians have interpreted to mean the church. Zechariah was a prophet with numerous messages about the Messiah to come with his universal kingdom. Zechariah wrote out eight visions that he had, culminating in the coronation scene in chapter 6.

●**Malachi.** The book of Malachi is not only the last book of the Old Testament, it is the last book written during the Old Testament period. It is a final message to a disobedient people of God. Malachi's work dates from approximately 450 B.C. At that time Judah had been back from captivity for almost 100 years. The temple had been rebuilt, the people had been cured of idolatry through the Babylonian captivity, but the temple was still not finished. Many had gone back to intermarrying with idolatrous neighbors. Because of this the coming of the Messiah would be a judgment rather than a glory to the people. And while Malachi talks about the Day of the Lord, as other prophets had, many Christians have seen this as a prophecy of the Christian church at the period of the end-time.

New Testament Chronology

The books of the New Testament are grouped according to topics and authors. Without assigning exact dates, a New Testament timeline looks like what follows.

The Gospels. Matthew (written c. 70 A.D.), Mark (45 A.D.), Luke (60 A.D.), John (90 A.D.). No one knows exactly when these books were written. The dates above are approximations.

●**Matthew.** Matthew appears first in our English Bibles and is the longest of the Synoptic Gospels. This gospel emphasizes the teachings of Jesus and also presents a great deal of historical material. The book is arranged in sections of sermons and narratives. Matthew seems to have a Jewish audience in mind for his writing is full of Jewish phrases (Hebraisms). He also appeals to Jesus' role in fulfilling Jewish prophecy with many references to Isaiah and other Old Testament prophets.

Matthew did not present his material in any particular historical order. There are six sections of Jesus' teachings and five sections of historical narrative in his gospel. Much of this material is apparently drawn from the gospel of Mark, but there is also some unique material that does not appear in the other Synoptic Gospels. The Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer are just two of the familiar materials in the gospel of Matthew.

●**Mark.** Mark is the shortest of the Synoptic Gospels. His gospel is considered by most scholars as the earliest because of its shortness and the fact that the other Synoptics draw from his account. Almost the entire gospel of Mark is reproduced in the other gospels. Mark is the closest to what one might call a biographer of Jesus. His style is direct and short, though amazingly detailed, moving Jesus through a series of incidents designed to show his influence in Palestine.

●**Luke.** Luke presents a great wealth of historical material in his gospel. Luke was a Gentile convert of Paul and wrote two books (the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles) that were eventually included as a part of the New Testament canon. He is identified as a physician and his stories indicate his interest in the healings of Jesus as well as the compassionate concern for human suffering.

●**John.** In a sense John is the *theologian* of the gospels. The emphasis of this book is on the deity and mission of Jesus. He arranges his material to show that Jesus is God. He develops the notion that *Jesus is God on a messianic mission*. He does this by arranging his material to revolve around certain crises in Christ's life where His mission is involved. One example of this is John 6, where Jesus claims to be the bread of life who requires total commitment from His true followers.

History

●**Acts of the Apostles** (written by Luke c. 63 A.D.). By its own claims the book of Acts was written by the same author who wrote the gospel of Luke. Acts is a continuation of that gospel and records the activities of some leaders in the early church. It is not exhaustive but rather an account of just a few of these leaders. The book covers the period from about A.D. 31-63. It was probably written by Luke in Rome around A.D. 61-63. Acts is of primary importance to the church because of its depiction of the early establishment and organization of the church that it describes. Two apostles dominate the stories in Acts: Peter (chapters 1–12) and Paul (chapters 13–28).

The Letters of Paul (also called Epistles). Written between 52-64 A.D. in this order: 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus.

Historically, the epistles of Paul have been the foundation on which Christians largely have built their theology and understanding of how God intervened to guarantee the solution to the sin problem through the work of Christ, i.e., the Gospel. These epistles are filled with theological interpretations of the life of Christ and the meaning of His ministry.

●**Romans.** Through the ages many Christian writers have agreed with Martin Luther that this book represents the clearest and most complete presentation of the Gospel of Christ. Romans is often referred to as the first great Christian work of theology. The book was written toward the end of Paul's third missionary journey (around 57 A.D.) and is carefully organized to present the basic human condition and God's answer to it in Jesus Christ.

●**1 Corinthians.** This letter, written by Paul around 57 A.D., is a problem-centered epistle. The apostle addresses such problems as church factions, incest, lawsuits between members, the abuse of Christian freedom, and chaos in church services. He also addresses marriage, single living, food dedicated to idols, the dress of women in public worship, the importance of spiritual gifts, and the Christian teaching of the resurrection.

In teaching from 1 Corinthians, as a Sabbath School teacher always keep in mind that this epistle is addressing specific problems and not presenting an organized doctrinal approach. Such study requires a sensitivity to the historical setting of the non-Jewish church. The clash of cultures has many counterparts to our day and in-depth study of this epistle can yield many rich rewards and insights.

●**2 Corinthians.** From the best evidence we have, this letter was written by Paul about six months after he had sent the first one to this church. It too was written while Paul was on his third missionary journey and the estimated date was around 57 A.D. The Corinthian church has apparently been approached by those who questioned Paul's authority, for he devotes a great deal of space to justifying his position as a bona fide apostle.

●**Galatians.** The epistle to the Galatians indicates that some teachers had invaded the church attempting to show that without keeping the law of Moses you could not truly be a Christian. These teachers are typically referred by biblical commentators as "Judaizers." Their emphasis was particularly on the importance of the Jewish rite of circumcision. It is apparent that church members had accepted this teaching, and Paul speaks directly to the situation. Paul's message is that some Jewish rites were not important to Christianity.

●**Ephesians.** The letter to the Ephesians is one of four letters Paul wrote from a prison in Rome and thus is commonly referred to as a "prison epistle." In general Paul gives a more

theological presentation in the first half of the epistle and a more practical application in the second half, but doctrine and application permeate the whole book.

Often used to underscore the meaning of "church," Ephesians is one of the more eloquent of Paul's writings on the importance of unity in Christ both personally and corporately. Ephesians gives one of the several lists of gifts granted by the Holy Spirit (4: 11-14) found in Paul's writings for the purpose of unifying the fellowship of the church. Ephesians is rich in its descriptions of the plight of humankind, i.e., estrangement from God (2: 1-12) and the message of true reconciliation through the Gospel of Christ.

●**Philippians**. Also, a prison epistle, the letter to the Philippians speaks to the problem of negative thoughts and ideas and how we can turn them into positives. Paul writes of the humility or emptying of Christ (2: 1-11) in one of the most definite descriptions of Christ's condescension in the Incarnation. In theological writing this passage is referred to as the *kenosis*, the Greek word for "emptying." Paul gives extensive instruction on achieving joy even though the book itself is one of the shortest of the epistles.

●**Philippians** is often referred to as a letter of joy. The book was written around 60 A.D. to a church Paul founded probably ten years before. The occasion of the writing was to thank the church in Philippi for sending Paul a gift in prison (4: 18). The main substance of this epistle revolves around Paul's sufferings in Rome, the humility Christ showed in the Incarnation and work of salvation, the goal of Christians to win the race and escape this world, which is only a place of pilgrimage.

●**Colossians**. As with other Pauline writings, this epistle probably had no title because it was a letter. The name given to it was added later. It is also a prison epistle written from Rome, where Paul was incarcerated. We are not sure whether or not Paul founded the church in Colossae in Asia Minor, but he was respected as their spiritual father and in this letter, he writes to some of the problems they are facing.

●**1 Thessalonians**. This letter bears all the marks of Paul as its author. The title was added later as it gained credibility among church members. Paul's first contact with the Thessalonian church came during his second missionary journey and the letter was written from Corinth on this journey.

●**2 Thessalonians**. Written a few months after his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul was engaged during this time in establishing the Corinthian church. He is writing to a vigorous and excited group of Christians. Throughout the epistle Paul gives thanks for God's leading in the church in the form of the spiritual growth of church members.

●**1 Timothy**. The epistles written by Paul to Timothy and Titus are referred to as the Pastoral Epistles. As such they cover the duties of church officers and certain problems of administration present in the church of the first century. The best estimates place the writing of these letters between 64 and 66 A.D. From the historical evidence we have Timothy was the pastor in Ephesus when Paul wrote to him. This letter is the most complete account in the New Testament of the kind of organization the early church had or should have. Doctrine is a strong emphasis in the two epistles to Timothy. In this letter Paul is very frank with this pastor with whom he has a very close relationship.

●**2 Timothy**. From the internal evidence of this letter, Paul was writing from prison. Historically, this was Paul's last epistle (written in 66 A.D.). He was executed soon after under the reign of Roman Emperor Nero (67 A.D.). Timothy was from Lystra in the Roman province of Galatia (Acts 16: 1) and we know that his mother was Jewish (1: 5). He was Paul's spiritual son (1: 2). Timothy had accompanied Paul on several of his travels around the empire (17: 14-15, 1 Thess. 1: 1, 2; 2 Thess. 1: 1).

●**Titus**. The letter to Titus was written by Paul during his first missionary journey. Titus was the pastor of the Christians in Crete, a large island in the Mediterranean just south of Greece. Like the other pastoral epistles, this letter gives ministerial instruction regarding excellence of character in church leaders as well as salvation as the fruit of divine love.

●**Philemon**. The letter to Philemon is an intimate, personal one. Philemon was Paul's friend whose slave, Onesimus, had run away and joined him in Rome. Paul now writes his friend and asks him to release his slave and accept him as a Christian brother. Slavery was a common practice in Roman times. Generally, these were the better young men and young women from captured nations who were sold into slavery.

General Epistles. These are letters written by various people. This is the approximate chronological timeline: James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Hebrews, 1, 2, and 3 John, Jude.

●**Hebrews**. The book of Hebrews focuses on interpreting the Jewish symbolism found in the Old Testament sanctuary service. For this reason, this epistle should be foremost in the minds of Adventists who place significant emphasis on the importance of the sanctuary. Following a commonly accepted principle of hermeneutic (which calls for the New Testament to interpret the Old Testament) one should place the epistle to the Hebrews alongside the book of Leviticus and derive the meaning of the most significant symbols in the earthly sanctuary. Hebrews is a commentary on the Old Testament.

●**James**. Martin Luther didn't like the book of James. He referred to it as an epistle of straw, an expression meaning "worthless." The reason was James's emphasis on good works: "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?" (2:14, NIV). "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (verse 7, NIV).

There were many men in the New Testament named James. Three prominent ones include James, son of Alphaeus; James, son of Zebedee; and James the brother of Jesus. Adventists leave the issue of authorship to these three possibilities and draw no further conclusion. The book remains a major contribution to the relationship of faith and works. It shows how to recognize true religion in your life and warns against many behaviors that not only create a dysfunctional community of believers but hurt one's personal spiritual growth.

●**1 Peter**. This is a circular letter—that is, one prepared to be read by a number of different churches. In this case the churches are those in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1:1).

This epistle expresses pastoral concerns: living a worthy life, maturing and advancing in Christian knowledge, being meek in suffering. The letter includes counsel for husbands and wives. It encourages the church to be unified, to practice personal self-control, to be charitable and strong in persecution. It closes with counsel to church officers and members in general, both elders and young people. Overall, 1 Peter is very practical and caring.

●**2 Peter**. As in his first epistle, Simon Peter claims to have written this letter. He calls himself a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1), and claims to have been present when Jesus was transfigured (1:16, 17). It was probably written shortly before 67 A.D. ●**1**

John. This is a circular letter and is believed to have been written by John the beloved disciple when he was pastor of the churches in Asia Minor. The date is shortly before John's death in 96 A.D. as he writes as an old man (2:1, 12, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21).

John warns against heresy in the church, specifically an early form of Gnosticism (a form of spiritualism) that would eventually attack the church on a larger scale. This heresy was an attack on the nature of Christ, which became a major battle in the early church. The book is filled with the basic elements in the Gospel as well as the implications of those elements for life.

●**2 John**. We don't know if this epistle was written after 1 John or not. This epistle refers to elements in the first epistle so it seems logical that it came afterwards. The book is only one chapter long, one of the shortest books in the Bible. The reason for the brevity is often ascribed to the availability of writing materials, in this case papyrus.

●**3 John**. This epistle is addressed as a personal letter to Gaius, who is characterized as faithful and charitable and whom the writer loves in the truth (3 John 1). It speaks of a faction in the church led by Diotrephes who has undermined the apostle's authority. This letter is limited to Diotrephes' heresy, while 2 John is written to a more general environment of heresies.

●**Jude**. This letter is sometimes referred to as a catholic (meaning universal) epistle, that is, a general epistle addressed to no one in particular. The author refers to himself as "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James." There are several Jude's, or Judases, in the New Testament. It is possible that the Jude referred to here was the brother of James, the church leader who presided over the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 12:17). The substance of the epistle deals with certain elements who have disrupted the church and drawn people away from the pure gospel. **Prophecy**

●**Revelation**. Adventists see a close connection between the book of Revelation and the Old Testament book of Daniel. In Adventist thinking each of these two books helps to interpret the other, with Revelation being the opening of the understanding of the book of Daniel which was closed (Dan. 12:4). Because of the emphasis put on this book by Adventists, Sabbath School teachers must have some background on the book of Revelation.

Assignment 4

What Did You Learn In Unit 2?

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

This Assignment sheet is self-graded. Look over your notes and the course material for Unit 2 to find the answers.

1. What did you learn in this Unit that you didn't know before?
2. Which is your favorite Bible book? Explain why.
3. Why is it important for a Sabbath School teacher/discussion leader to know about biblical chronology?
4. What is "Ussher's Chronology?" Where is it usually found? Why is it important to know about it?
5. What is the difference between a "major" and a "minor" prophet?
6. What is a "General Epistle?"
7. What is a "Prison Epistle?"
8. List the Bible books that fall under the following categories:
 - Pentateuch
 - Old Testament history
 - Old Testament poetry
 - Major Prophets
 - Minor Prophets
 - New Testament gospels
 - Epistles of Paul
 - Prison epistles
 - General epistles

UNIT 3 Understanding Biblical Themes

The purpose of this unit is to survey certain key biblical themes. These are themes that appear regularly in all parts of the Bible and are often the subjects of Sabbath School *Adult Bible Study Guides*.

These major themes might be compared to a house with a large picture window. You can look in the window and see all the details of the furniture, etc., but all those details wouldn't be much good without the "house" that surrounds them. It is of value for a Sabbath School teacher to be conscious of these themes and to know their content and some ways to present them.

Themes are indications of why the Bible was written. They recur throughout the Scriptures. What follows are illustrations of a few of the themes that appear in the Bible and are of special significance to Seventh-day Adventists. A Sabbath School teacher/discussion leader needs to know how to identify and incorporate these themes in the class discussion as they appear in the Bible and the *Adult Bible Study Guide*.

The Central Theme: Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the central theme of the entire Bible. Through actual promises (Gen. 3:15, 16), through symbolic prophecies, through the sacrificial system representing Him as the Lamb, Jesus is the one whom the entire Old Testament anticipates.

In the New Testament He arrives exactly as promised, on time and in the place foretold. He announces that He is indeed the Promised One. After three and a half years of ministry among His people, He is rejected and put to death by crucifixion. On the third day He rose from the grave, having defeated the powers of darkness and having made eternal salvation available to everyone. He gives His disciples authority to establish His church and commissions them to preach the good news to the whole world.

The story of Jesus culminates in the book of Revelation by showing how He will defeat His enemies and rescue His people. We might summarize it this way: (a) the promise given—Old Testament; (b) the promised fulfilled—New Testament.

What happens when people fail to see Jesus Christ as the central theme of the Scriptures? To the people in His own generation, Jesus said: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:39, 40, NKJV). Many of Jesus' contemporaries studied the Scriptures diligently but failed to discern its central figure. To them the Bible (the Old Testament in their case) was primarily a set of rules and regulations to be followed to the last detail. They were ignorant of its central theme, a spiritual Messiah. When He did appear, the majority of them neither recognized nor welcomed Him.

The writers of the New Testament saw Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecies and the central theme of Scripture. Speaking on the Day of Pentecost to the Jews (Acts 2), Peter stressed the following facts of faith:

- That the prophecies of Joel (Joel 2:28-32) were fulfilled in the apostles (Acts 2:16-21).
- That Jesus of Nazareth was accredited by God (Acts 2:22).
- That Jesus was put to death by His own people (verse 23).
- That Jesus was raised from death by God (verse 24).
- That David had prophesied that a Holy One would come to His people (Ps. 16:8-11) and Jesus was that Holy One (Acts 2:26-28).
- That Jesus has been raised and exalted to the right hand of God as prophesied in Psalm 110:1 by David (Acts 2:32-33).

- That Jesus is Lord and Christ (verse 36).

This theme is emphasized in many New Testament passages that often quote the Old Testament and show the fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Some examples are: 1 Corinthians 1–2; 2 Corinthians 1:18-22; 3:14-18; Ephesians 1–3; Philippians 1–3; Colossians 1–2; 2 Timothy 3:10-17; Hebrews 1:1, 2; 1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:19-21; Revelation 1:1.

The Theme of Law and Grace

As you read the Bible, look for this theme. For instance, what is the purpose of all those stories in the Old Testament? Is the Law always applied without mercy? What kind of a God tells people to kill everyone in sight? Why would God apply capital punishment to a man who was picking up some sticks to build a cooking fire on the Sabbath? (Num. 15:32). When these actions and events are taken out of context (both the local and the more general overview of Scripture) they definitely become confusing and may well lead to a very lively class discussion.

The Old Testament shows how God gave the law containing the principles of life to His people. The law was intended to lead people to a relationship with Christ by pointing out the need for a Savior. At that point grace entered the picture, but as the remedy for the need, not as a counterpoint to the Law.

Also a New Testament Theme

“The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17, NKJV). The same theme appears in Romans and Galatians. Does the word “but” here mean that law and grace are mutually exclusive? Or does it mean that Jesus added dimensions to people’s understanding of the law by His physical presence on earth and His teachings?

In the *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5–7), Jesus declared His total allegiance to upholding the principles found in His law. He saw in God’s law deeper and more spiritual principles than people had previously discerned. Nevertheless, He was accused of being a lawbreaker because He dared set aside the human traditions and regulations that had been formulated to protect God’s law, but had actually obscured its beauty and purpose. When Jesus died on the cross, His death affirmed the following about the law:

- The law of God is the foundation of God’s government.
- The law of God cannot be set aside or annulled.
- If God’s law could be annulled, Jesus would not have needed to die.
- By both His life and His death, Jesus paid the penalty of the broken law. The penalty for any righteousness short of absolute perfection was death. None of us has ever, or can ever, produce such a life. So grace was demonstrated through Christ producing that perfect life, as well as the death we must die because of our sinful condition.
- Through a relationship with Christ, human beings are saved from the penalty of having broken the law, and through the Holy Spirit we receive a new perspective. Though God’s grace does not annul His law, it brings human beings into a saving relationship with Christ, enabling us to respond positively to God and His requirements and instructions.
- Since God’s law has already been broken by every human being, we cannot be saved by keeping it. We need Christ’s life to cover us. In theological terms this whole transaction is called the Atonement.
- The Old Testament records the giving of God’s law and our inability to keep it. The New Testament records how through the grace of God human beings are credited with Christ’s righteousness.

Some have illustrated this theme as two mountains: Sinai and Calvary. The apostle Paul likens this theme to two Adams: the first Adam (Adam) and the second Adam (Jesus).

- Always look for the implications of grace in the context of the discussion. Wherever God’s law is invoked, search for the reason He invoked the law. Why did God give the law at that

particular point? Usually it is because God wants His people to understand their responsibility in what it means to respond to Him. It is never because He wants anyone to earn their way to heaven or to somehow appease Him because He is upset about something. That will never happen! Only pagan religions and misguided Christian groups try to do such a thing.

Law, (literally “instruction”) is the basis of God’s government. The problem we face is not with the law. The problem is with us. The law didn’t abandon us; we humans abandoned the law of God. That is precisely why we need a Savior and a rescue plan.

The Sin Problem

All of this is often called “the sin problem.” God takes it upon Himself to solve this problem. We can *cooperate* with His side of the question or refuse to cooperate. Cooperation does not mean *works plus faith*, it means accepting God’s plan which is by *faith alone*. This is a universal theme throughout the Bible. Getting it straight is our challenge—especially in our Sabbath School teaching.

In presenting this theme, *always focus on the relationship between law and grace*. There are some passages of Scripture that are more difficult than others. Here one needs to recognize the following New Testament interpretation of God’s grace and its relation to the law:

The source of salvation is grace. It is through God’s grace, an attribute of His being, that we have any chance of salvation. Romans 3:24 says: They are “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (NKJV).

The method of salvation is faith. Through faith we appropriate the gift of grace. Even faith is a gift, because in our sinful human natures, we are not naturally trusting. Romans 5:1 says: “Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (NKJV).

The means of salvation is the blood of Jesus. There is a cost involved in salvation. Christ’s life and death constitutes the payment of that cost. This is the center of the Gospel message. “Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (verse 9, NKJV).

The evidence of salvation is action and application. We usually call this “works.” Always keep in mind that works are not the source, the method, or the cost of our salvation. Works are the expression of our response to God. We demonstrate our acceptance of salvation by living a life worthy of our high calling. “A man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24, NKJV). This passage is not talking about the nature of righteousness but rather the nature of response.

The Theme of the People of God

This is also called the theme of the “remnant.” The story of humankind as God’s people begins with the creation of the world (Genesis 1–3). When sin entered the world, God promised to send a Redeemer to crush evil (3:15). As the story continues, humanity sinks deeper into sin, and with the exception of the faithful Noah and his family, is destroyed by the flood.

Following the flood, iniquity arises again, until finally the people of God become only those who are in covenant relationship with Him. This is an important point sometimes overlooked in our attempt to make *all people* the children of God. This term, the “people of God,” or the “children of God,” is used in the Bible as a technical meaning referring to those who respond to God.

The covenant with Abraham. God promised to make a great nation of Abraham’s family (12:1-3). This theme dominates the Old Testament to the extent that the Hebrews of Jesus’ day were looking for a political Savior as a part of their culture. On the other hand, the Anointed One, or Messiah, is a persistent theme of the Hebrew Scriptures.

This theme is discernible in many incidents from the Exodus under Moses, to the kingdom under David, and finally to the fulfillment of the promise in Jesus. Understanding

this theme will help everyone to understand the reason and need for all the genealogies listed in both the Old and New Testaments.

The New Covenant. In the New Testament God's people are presented under what writers call the "new covenant." It is really a repeat of all the promises in the Hebrew Scriptures, but applied to those who accepted Jesus as the fulfillment of those promises. The New Testament represents Jesus' interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures as opposed to that of the Rabbis of His day. This constitutes the basic religious difference between Jews and Christians.

In 1 Peter 2:9, 10, for example, we find the common view of the New Testament writers. Addressing the church, Peter writes: "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (NKJV).

Other terms for the People of God. In Leviticus 16:12 we have the basic notion of God's chosen people: "'I will . . . be your God, and you shall be My people'" (NKJV). Israel is called God's "son" (Exod. 4:22), God's "spouse" (Ezek. 16:6-14), God's "vine," God's "flock," God's "assembly," God's "dwelling," and God's "chosen."

In the New Testament the church is "Christ's flock, the branches of the true vine, his bride, his body, his temple, the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, the house of God."¹²

This theme is so connected to everything written in the Bible that it is imperative to keep it in mind as you are studying. What makes people God's people is the binding effects of the Gospel message.

"Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ."¹³

The Great Controversy Theme

The Great Controversy theme sees the entire Bible as portraying the struggle between two main characters, Christ and Satan. It reveals in Genesis 1-3 the beginning of this struggle on the recently created perfect world and how humanity sinned and lost face-to-face relationship with God. In the closing chapters of the book of Revelation, we see how God will restore our world to perfection. Everything between Genesis and Revelation is an account of this controversy, and how Christ shares His victory with His followers. This theme is a fundamental element of Seventh-day Adventist theology.

Fundamental belief No. 8 states this theme: "All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the worldwide flood. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation. (Rev. 12:4-9; Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-18; Genesis 3; Rom. 1:19-32; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; Genesis 6-8; 2 Peter 3:6; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 1:14.)"¹⁴

¹² Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 29, 30.

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper, 1954), pp. 6, 7.

¹⁴ <<http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html>>.

The entire Bible describes how sinful human beings are redeemed by a loving God. Discerning this thread of redemption is indispensable to understanding the message of Scripture.

Here are some ways in which the great controversy theme can be expressed:

- Eden lost and Eden restored (Genesis 3; Revelation 22).
 - The story of four gardens—the struggle took place in four gardens: the garden of Eden (Genesis 3), the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26), the garden of the resurrection (Matthew 28), the garden of paradise (Revelation 22).
 - The story of three trees: the tree in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), the tree on which Jesus was crucified (Luke 23), the tree of life in New Jerusalem (Revelation 22).
 - The story of the two Adams: the failure of the first Adam (Genesis 3), the success of the second Adam (Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15).
 - Humanity tries to become God (Genesis 3), God becomes human (Philippians 2).
 - God and humankind are separated by sin (Isaiah 59); God and humankind are united through Christ Romans 5; 2 Corinthians 5).

Seventh-day Adventists and the Great Controversy theme. Ellen G. White gives insight into this theme of the great controversy, although the theme is not original with her. This theme has been emphasized from the time of the writing of Revelation 12. Ellen White shows the play and counterplay of the forces of Christ and Satan as they struggle of human destiny.

The Seventh-day Adventist theology of the heavenly sanctuary and its meaning and importance is part of the Great Controversy theme. So is our emphasis on a pre-advent judgment. All of these themes need to be well understood by Sabbath School teachers.

The Prophecy Theme

Peter tell us that “we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19, NKJV).

The sure word that Peter referred to here is the Old Testament. It is indeed like a light shining in a dark place. Its purpose is twofold: (1) to guide us “until the day dawns,” i.e., the second coming of Christ; (2) to lead us to a personal relationship with Christ (“until . . . the morning star rises in your hearts”).

Seventh-day Adventists have always stressed the importance of biblical prophecy. Our very church name “Adventist” refers to the second advent of Jesus. Prophecy has always been a significant element of the study program of the Seventh-day Adventist church and of the *Sabbath School Bible Study Guides*. It is very important that Sabbath School teachers know and understand the prophetic teachings of the Bible.

Seventh-day Adventists follow a system of prophetic interpretation called “historicism.” That means that the prophecies of the Bible are fulfilled in the course of history. “In the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, behind, above, and through all the play and counterplay of human interests and power and passions, the agencies of the allmerciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.”¹⁵ Until the middle 1800s this was the accepted system of prophetic interpretation by nearly all Christian churches.

This theme is presented throughout the Bible, but is emphasized the most in the books of Daniel and Revelation. “There is need of a much closer study of the Word of God; especially should Daniel and the Revelation have attention as never before in the history of our work.”¹⁶

¹⁵ *Education*, p. 173.

¹⁶ *Evangelism*, p. 577.

"The unfulfilled predictions of the book of Revelation are soon to be fulfilled. This prophecy is now to be studied with diligence by the people of God and should be clearly understood."¹⁷

"The solemn messages that have been given in their order in the Revelation are to occupy the first place in the minds of God's people."¹⁸

"There are many who do not understand the prophecies relating to these days, and they must be enlightened. It is the duty of both watchmen and laymen to give the trumpet a certain sound."¹⁹

The key time prophecies that a Sabbath School teacher must understand and know how to present are: (1) The outline of world history [Daniel 2]; (2) the 70 weeks [Daniel 9], (3) the 2300 days [Daniel 8], and the 1260 years [Daniel 12].

Other Prophetic Systems

In addition to the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of prophecy, a Sabbath School teacher needs to have at least a general understanding of what other churches teach about prophecy. Sabbath School class members may have come from some of these churches. They have undoubtedly heard preachers on TV expound on prophetic themes, read popular books about last day events, or seen TV movies and "documentaries" about last day events.

There are three popular views to which people are regularly exposed:

- *Dispensationalism and the Secret Rapture*. This idea is so common that many people don't even know that other systems of prophecy exist. Christian bookstores are filled with books presenting this view. Movies and TV presentations regularly feature this idea. Seventh-day Adventists have written many books refuting this system of interpretation.

- *Armageddon and Prophecies of Various Cultures*. These so-called documentaries focus on prophecies of mystics and spiritists like Nostradamus, the Mayan calendar, etc. These ideas are all speculation and have little to do with the Bible.

- *Postmillennialism*. This is the idea that the prophecies in the book of Revelation are already fulfilled. Many theologians believe this and many TV presentations about prophecies also present this idea.

¹⁷ *Last Day Events*, p. 15.

¹⁸ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 302.

¹⁹ *Evangelism*, pp. 194, 195.

Assignment 5

What Did You Learn In Unit 3?

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

This Assignment sheet is self-graded. Look over your notes and the course material for Unit 3 to find the answers.

1. What is a biblical theme?
2. Why is the theme of law and grace so important for Seventh-day Adventists to understand?
3. What is the great controversy theme?
4. Why is the theme great controversy theme so important Old Testament Seventh-day Adventists?
5. Briefly describe the following prophetic systems of interpretation indicate why Seventh-day Adventists accept or do not accept each one. (You can Google these if you need more information).
 - a. Historicism
 - b. Dispensationalism
 - c. Postmillennialism
6. Describe how you would lead a discussion in your Sabbath School class if a member brought up a TV documentary they viewed about Nostradamus and his so-called last day prophecies. The class member is really confused about this.

UNIT 4 Some Key Bible Problems

The Bible was put together over some 1500 years from the writings of some 40 different people. For instance, sometimes two different people see that same thing, but their descriptions are different. Many Bible students have identified what they call “problems” in the Bible due to some of these kinds of things.

Here are four samples of the kinds of issues that arise. These problems are not due to any weakness of the Bible itself. Most result from misunderstandings of biblical texts or personal ideas about how the Bible ought to be interpreted.

Some of these issues are quite technical, but it is worthwhile for a Sabbath School teacher/discussion leader to be familiar with them if they should arise in a class session.

Another course in North American Division Adult Sabbath School Teacher’s Training curriculum deals with questions such as the nature of inspiration, the use of various Bible versions and hermeneutics (rules of biblical interpretation) in general.

The issues included here are not explained exhaustively. These are only brief explanations that will give a Sabbath School teacher/discussion leader some ideas on how to answer questions that might come up. Many sources are available in books and on the Internet that have very extensive discussions about these kinds of issues.

Two excellent resources that all Sabbath School teacher/discussion leaders ought to have are the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventists Theology* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000) and *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers* (Biblical Research Institute, 2010).

The Synoptic “Problem”

Many people wonder why there are four gospels. Matthew, Mark, and John were disciples of Jesus throughout His entire ministry, yet they tell some things about the same events differently. Luke, a Gentile convert, says that he did some careful research before writing his gospel (Luke 1:1-4), and some of things he tells about in a different way.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are called “synoptic” gospels because they were written about the same time and give more or less the same view of Jesus’ life and teachings. The Gospel of John was written later and is focused mostly on the last week of Jesus’ life and ministry.

Some scholars, looking for something they can identify as a discrepancy in the Bible, focus on these differences as evidence that the Bible isn’t inspired.

Here is an example of the kinds of problems they mention in an effort to create a so called “synoptic problem.” In the well-known incident of Peter’s denial of Jesus during His trial, Mark records that Jesus told Peter a rooster would crow twice after Peter had denied Jesus three times (Mark 14:30). Matthew and Luke say only that the rooster would crow, but don’t mention how many times. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* remarks that “only Mark notes this detail.”²⁰ That’s a perfectly good explanation. Not everyone has to mention every detail exactly the same.

Since the time of Augustine (A. D. 354-430) these similarities in the Synoptic Gospels have been a subject of study among biblical scholars. Several theories have been proposed as to how the gospels were put together in the form we have today.

The earliest explanation claimed that one original source, written in Aramaic (Jesus’ mother language), was used by all three writers. Another suggests that there were records of incidents in the life of Christ circulating in the early church and that the synoptic writers drew from these and compiled the gospels. A third theory asserts that two main documents formed the basis for the synoptic writers. The first was Mark’s gospel, the second was the *logia* (sayings), which modern scholars call “Q” (from the German *Quelle* or “source”). Another view in an effort to account for the unique material in Matthew and Luke suggests that there were actually four major documents.

²⁰ Vol. 5, p. 654.

The latest approach to the synoptic problem seeks to identify forms (parables, passion stories, miracle narratives, etc.) in the Gospels. This view suggests that the stories about Jesus circulated orally and the church preserved them for use in worship or to answer doctrinal questions about who Jesus was. Those holding this theory claim that all the materials in the Gospels can make sense by identifying these forms.

No one has the complete answer to these questions, but Seventh-day Adventists, holding to the inspiration of the Gospels, have traditionally resisted anything that would undermine their faith in these writings as authoritative, and we believe them to be authentic productions of inspired eyewitnesses (John 21:24).²¹

What Is Legalism?

Seventh-day Adventists are often called “legalists” because of our defense of the continuing validity of the Law of God and because we keep the seventh day Sabbath. Is that what legalism is?

Legalism is not a belief; it is an attitude. Believing and practicing what the Bible says should be believed and practiced is not legalism. It is obedience. But if that obedience somehow brings a person to believe, even unconsciously, that they now *deserve* salvation because they obey, it becomes legalism. No one ever deserves salvation. It is a gift of God.

Fundamental Belief No. 10 clearly states: “In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ, as Substitute and Example. This faith which receives salvation comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God’s grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God’s sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God’s law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment.”²²

Legalists are people who base their salvation on themselves and what they do rather than on Christ and what He has done. Even if our beliefs are scripturally sound, there is such a thing as exalting some truth *about* Christ above Christ Himself. And when we thus tip the balance of our partnership with Christ toward our own side, we become legalists.

What Is Gnosticism?

Gnosticism has suddenly revived in today’s world under the guise of a “New Age” and in famous novels like “The Da Vinci Code.”

Gnosticism in the early church period refers to a combination of biblical ideas mixed with Greek philosophical ideas about the body and the soul. Gnosticism comes from the Greek word for knowledge: *gnosis*. According to this idea, if you can find the right “knowledge,” you also find “salvation” by “releasing” the divine “spark” inside you.

To Gnostics, all matter was evil. Only the spirit was pure, and they sought to rise to a higher, more spiritual plane. This teaching often produced a side effect: people who strove to rise above matter didn’t care about personal ethics. Their pure spirits could not be tainted by earthly sin. Thus, they could act any way they wanted.

Some people wrote what are called “Gnostic gospels” and attached the names the original apostles to them as if they were part of the Bible. For instance, today some of these legends are presented as historical facts about Jesus and Mary Magdalene being married and establishing a blood line known as the “Holy Grail.”

²¹ See *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 175-179 for a detailed discussion of the synoptic problem.

²² <[Http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html](http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html)>.

There is also a revived Gnosticism that focuses on the potential inside each person. It is usually called New Age thinking. Its principle point is that you will be successful if you can learn how to free and use that divine spark that is hidden somewhere inside your body

Early Gnostics didn't like the Christian concept of God becoming human. Because they believed a physical body was intrinsically evil, they denied that a pure God could take on a body. Some dealt with the problem by claiming that Jesus was never a real human being, but a phantom, a temporary appearance of God who only looked human. Others proposed that God had descended on Jesus at His baptism, but left Him before His death.

In one of his letters, called 1 John in our Bibles, John took on these beliefs, and presented an entirely different idea: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2, NKJV). The very first sentence in the epistle expressly states that the author has seen, heard, and touched Jesus—implying that He could not have been a phantom, or pure spirit. Throughout the letter, and especially in 1 John 4:2, 3, the author attacks those who deny that Jesus came in the flesh.

All kinds of legends and traditions have grown up around Gnosticism, known by all kinds of names. Christian groups have mixed up biblical ideas with mystic ideas about the power of words, often called "name it and claim it." In other words, if you say it, it has to happen. Some others focus on the "god" inside each person, and believe that salvation turns us into "little gods" who have power to heal, make money, etc. All these things are a perversion of the Gospel and have no place in Christian thinking.

Who Wrote Hebrews?

In *The King James Version* this book is called "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews." Later Bible translations simply call it "The Epistle to the Hebrews," because in the older manuscripts found since the King James translation was made, its author is not named.

The reason for the debate about the identity of the author is that the Greek language used in the book is sophisticated and elegant. Some other New Testament books, such as Revelation, are written in a language that obviously shows that the author was writing in a second language, not his mother tongue.

"The authorship of Hebrews has been in dispute since early times. While many attributed the book to Paul, others dissented vigorously. Origen, one of the early Fathers, concluded his examination of the book with the declaration, "Who wrote the epistle, in truth God knows" (quoted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* vi. 25. 14).

"When compared with the generally accepted epistles of Paul, Hebrews differs markedly, especially in the small, common connective words with which its author binds together his clauses. Another distinctive difference is found in the handling of quotations from the Old Testament Old Testament quotations in Hebrews are virtually always word for word from the LXX. . . . From a broader standpoint, the general literary style of Hebrews is notably different from that of any of the epistles that bear the name of Paul. . . . Hebrews presents a thoroughly organized argument, and maintains the highest rhetorical level of any New Testament book."²³

So the conclusion is that the Greek of Hebrews does not appear to be the Greek of Paul. The early church theologian Origen (died c. a.d. 254), says: "the thoughts are the apostle's [Paul], but the style and composition belong to one who called to mind the apostle's teachings and, as it were, made short notes of what his master said" (quoted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* vi. 25, 13).

²³ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 387, 388.

The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* holds that: "Much of the difference in tone and style of Hebrews compared with the known Pauline epistles may be reasonably explained by the fact that these other epistles are addressed to particular church groups, or to individuals, to meet particular problems. . . . The differences may be reasonably explained on the assumption that Paul preached certain sermons on the theme of Christ's priestly ministry and that these were taken down stenographically."²⁴

Ellen White accepts the fact regardless of who may have done the actual writing whatever the book of Hebrews says came from Paul: "The kingdom of grace is brought to view by Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews. After pointing to Christ, the compassionate intercessor who is 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities,' the apostle says: 'Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace.'" Hebrews 4:15, 16. — *Great Controversy*, p. 347.

We do know that the author was well known in the early church and that Timothy was with the writer (13:23). "Those from Italy send you their greetings" (13:24) may indicate that the letter was written from Italy, although this is not a necessary conclusion. But whoever the author was, as a literary work Hebrews is superb: orderly and logical, in balanced and resonant sentences of remarkable precision, rising to wonderful heights of eloquence.

It has become a custom when quoting Hebrews to simply say "The writer to the Hebrews says . . ."

²⁴ Ibid., p. 388.

Assignment 5

What Did You Learn In Unit 4?

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

This Assignment sheet is self-graded. Look over your notes and the course material for Unit 4 to find the answers.

1. What did you learn in this Unit that you didn't know before?

2. Briefly explain each of the following issues that arise in Bible study:
 - a. The synoptic problem
 - b. The explanation of "legalism."
 - c. Gnosticism and its contemporary expressions
 - d. The author of Hebrews

Course Summary

This is a “knowing” course focused on Bible as the primary textbook of Sabbath School learning. It is essential for the Sabbath School teacher/discussion leader to know and understand their Bible.

This course has reviewed how the Bible was originally put together, reviewed the overall contents of the Bible, described and reviewed some biblical themes of importance to Seventh-day Adventists, and looked at some of the types of problems about the Bible that might arise on a Sabbath School class.

The teacher/discussion leader taking this class will have an adequate understanding of biblical backgrounds.

Understanding Your Bible

Student Fulfillment Card

Name: _____

Church/District _____

This Fulfillment Card is the record that you have successfully completed the core course *Understanding Your Bible* of the North American Division Adult Ministries Department Sabbath School Teacher training curriculum. When all the items are completed, have the Fulfillment Card signed by the appropriate person (your class instructor, your Internet instructor, a Sabbath School superintendent, person in charge of Sabbath School teachers in your church/district, your pastor or someone from the conference in charge of Sabbath School teacher training).

Check the items completed.

- I have read the four Units of the Study Guide.
- I have completed Assignment 1: Self-Test of Basic Biblical Knowledge
- I have completed Assignment 2: How Well Do You Know Bible Words?
- I have completed Assignment 3: What Did You Learn in Unit 1
- I have completed Assignment 4: What Did You Learn in Unit 2?
- I have completed Assignment 4: What Did You Learn in Unit 3?
- I have completed Assignment 5: What Did You Learn in Unit 4?

_____ has satisfactorily completed the course *Understanding Your Bible*.

(Signature) _____ Date _____

Position _____

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