



January - February 2018

# Knowing God





## 2018: This We Believe



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## Knowing God

**G**reetings, BA friends, and welcome to 2018! Looking back at 2017, I thank God for His mercies and you for your loyal support. I'm humbled that our magazine found a home in over eighty nations last year, and that over one hundred fifty nations found their way to *baonline.org*. We could not have done that without you.

A new year means a new theme. Over the last two years, we've laid a solid foundation of Christian essentials. This year we look at specifics. If we're a Christ-centered, Spirit-formed, and Bible-based church, what are the implications for faith and practice? The *Bible Advocate* is dedicated to that question in 2018, examining the particulars of belief and behavior and why that matters for a vibrant 21st century church.

Our yearlong study is a journey through our statements of faith found in *This We Believe: Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*. Each BA will explore two of our twelve statements. This issue begins with Statements 1 and 2 on The Bible and Deity, summed up here as "Knowing God." Is there anything more important or exciting than knowing our God? Paul considered all else rubbish in comparison: "That I may know Him . . ." (Philippians 3:10).

That we may know the Father and His Son, Jesus, and make them known by the Spirit, is our greatest privilege and mission. We rely on Scripture because we must know and reveal God as He is, not as we wish Him to be. Knowing Jesus rightly means following Him faithfully.

At *Christianity Today*, editor Mark Galli has begun a series on "evangelical distinctives." Our task is similar, and as vital, in these days of confusion. As believers committed to the canon of Scripture and the Holy Spirit's work of guiding us into all truth and sanctification (John 16:13; 17:17), we desire to equip the Church to know our particular creed: what we believe, and how to live and witness it as lights in a dark world of moral, religious relativism.

So let's begin our journey with confidence and humility, knowing that there are disagreements among Jesus-following, Bible-believing Christians. Our open creed is a gift that teaches us that conviction and graciousness are not strangers, but friends: "For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5, KJV).

— Jason Overman





A journey begins through our statements of faith. The following excerpts are taken from *This We Believe: Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*.

We recognize that Christianity is marked by diversity in understanding and doctrine. Our primary concern [is] not to *argue for* our beliefs or *argue against* the beliefs of others, but rather to clearly explain why we believe what we believe in light of Scripture. There is no sustained effort to disprove our detractors, or even to convince the skeptics. Rather, we desire to clearly explain what our Statement of Faith means and leave the convicting, teaching, and sanctifying work to the Holy Spirit.

Our desire is that this book will serve many purposes. . . . For the fellow Christian who represents a different denomination, it serves as a means of dialogue and information regarding our distinctive beliefs and practices. For those within our denomination, it serves to clarify, inform, encourage, and strengthen us in our shared convictions regarding Scripture.

*From the Preface, page vii*

# This We Believe



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## Statement of Faith 1

# The Holy Bible

This we believe:

The Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is God's inspired Word. Inerrant in its original writing, the Bible is the only authoritative and infallible rule of faith and conduct for humanity.

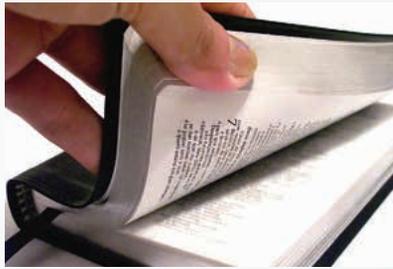
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The Bible is a collection of sixty-six books written by more than thirty men under the inspiration of God's Spirit over a period of nearly 1,500 years. This remarkable library of history, law, poetry, wisdom, gospel, letters, essays, and prophecies constitutes the Holy Scriptures of the Christian faith. The Bible forms the foundation of the Christian faith and church.

The word *Bible* derives from the Greek *biblos*, meaning "books." Within it the following words are used in reference to itself: "the books" (Daniel 9:2), "the holy scriptures" (Romans 1:2; 2 Timothy 3:15), "Scripture" (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20), "oracles of God" (Romans 3:2), and "word of righteousness" (Hebrews 5:13).

The object of our faith is not the Bible itself. A good book cannot save us, no matter how inspired and inspiring. Through the Bible we acquire the basis for faith to accept, believe, confess, and demonstrate by obedience that Jesus Christ is the true Savior and Lord. Thus the object of biblical faith is the holy and loving God who is revealed throughout Scripture and perfectly in Jesus Christ. In Him alone do we find the salvation that we need and long for (John 5:39, 40).

As the Lord Jesus Christ is the living Word of God (John 1:1-3, 14), so the Bible is God's Word written. As inspired by and rightly interpreted through the Holy Spirit, the Bible is the only reliable authority for the faith and practice of God's people.



## Old and New

This Holy Book of books is divided into two main sections. The first section records the faith and sacred writings of God's covenant people in the ages prior to the coming of the Messiah. These Scriptures, written primarily in the Hebrew language, are recognized by the Christian church as the Old Testament. Its thirty-nine books are in three categories: the five books of Moses, or Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy); the Prophets (former prophets, Joshua through the Kings - commonly called books of history - and latter prophets, Isaiah through Malachi); and the Writings (Ruth, the Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and Daniel). This division has been widely accepted among the Jews since before Jesus' time and was acknowledged by Him in Luke 24:44.

The second section of twenty-seven books contains the sacred writings that are unique to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is known as the New Testament, believed to be written in Greek. The New Testament is less than one third the length of the Old.

These two sections together form a unit that furnishes the written foundation for our faith.

Each was revealed as the Word of God, and neither may be discarded without doing damage to the full revelation of God's will for man. Both Testaments show us God's election of Israel to dispense His word through prophets and bring through her lineage the incarnate Word to save our souls and complete the dispensation of His Word through the apostles (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

The central theme of the Bible is God's message of salvation by grace through faith in His Son Jesus. In the Old Testament, this theme was announced through types and prophecies. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ the Son of God (Matthew 16:13-16) becomes historical reality as true man (Mark 6:1-4). Through the Scriptures God requires faith and obedience on the part of the reader, and provides for the same (Romans 10:17; Philippians 2:13).

The Old Testament is God's Word indeed, although not His final Word. Those who read this first section, the Hebrew Scriptures, should continue in the words of our Lord Jesus and His apostles (New Testament), for it is in the latter that God's grace and truth come to their fullest illumination and finest expression (John 1:17).

In the Old Testament, the New is concealed; in the New Testament, the Old is revealed. We must take care not to separate what God has joined — namely, the older and newer Scriptures that are combined in the Holy Bible.

*From pages 2-3*



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## Statement of Faith 2

# The Deity

This we believe:

The sovereign deity of the universe is God Almighty, who is to be worshiped in spirit and in truth. He is eternal, infinite, holy, self-existent Spirit who created, sustains, rules, redeems, and judges His creation. He is one in nature, essence and being. God is revealed in Scripture as Father and Son.

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## Attributes of God

God may be known by attributes that are intrinsic to His person. He is:

**Almighty, sovereign:** The term *almighty*, or *omnipotent*, means having absolute power over all things. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8; see also Revelation 16:7 and Genesis 17:1). God’s sovereignty means that His authority is above all others; He has neither superior nor equal. The Lord is God; besides him there is no other. He reigns supreme (Deuteronomy 4:35; 10:17; Psalms 24:1, 10; 1 Timothy 6:15, 16).

**Eternal:** God is without beginning or end. He is unlimited by time and cannot die. “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever” (1 Timothy 1:17; see also Deuteronomy 33:27; Psalm 41:13; 90:2b).

**Omnipresent, invisible spirit:** “God is spirit . . .” (John 4:24). In His essential nature, God has none of the limitations of space and matter. His presence may be experienced anywhere and everywhere (Psalm 139:7-10; Jeremiah 23:24). To human eyes, He is invisible. “No one has ever seen God...” (John 1:18; 1 Timothy 1:17).

**Holy:** God’s holiness refers to His being separate and different from everything that is not God, from all things common. This is expressed throughout Scripture

in many ways, particularly in the repeated refrain “Holy, holy, holy” that is descriptive of God alone (Revelation 4:8; see also Leviticus 19:2; Isaiah 6:3; and Luke 1:49).

**Self-existent:** In contrast to the dependent state of humans and all created things, God is independent of all others; He needs nothing. He will always remain unaltered, absolute Being. This is implied in His words to Moses: “I AM WHO I AM . . . say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14).

**All-loving:** God is love. His great love for all the world is demonstrated most dramatically in the offering of His only Son as a sacrifice for sin (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 1:4, 7; 1 John 2:1, 2).

## One God, revealed as Father and Son

From start to finish, the Bible knows only one God. The Hebrew *shema* says it best: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4; see also Deuteronomy 4:35; 32:39; 2 Samuel 7:22; 1 Chronicles 17:20; Psalm 86:10; Isaiah 43:10; 44:6; 45:5, 14, 18; Mark 12:29; 1 Corinthians 8:4; Ephesians 4:6; 1 Timothy 2:5).

While Christianity is a mono-

theistic faith and our God is numerically one, the best biblical evidence points to the fact that He is uniplural in His divine person. *Uniplural* suggests that God is one in essence but more than one in expression. His uniplurality was fully revealed in the divine-human person of Jesus Christ, but was intimated throughout the Old Testament in various ways. For example:

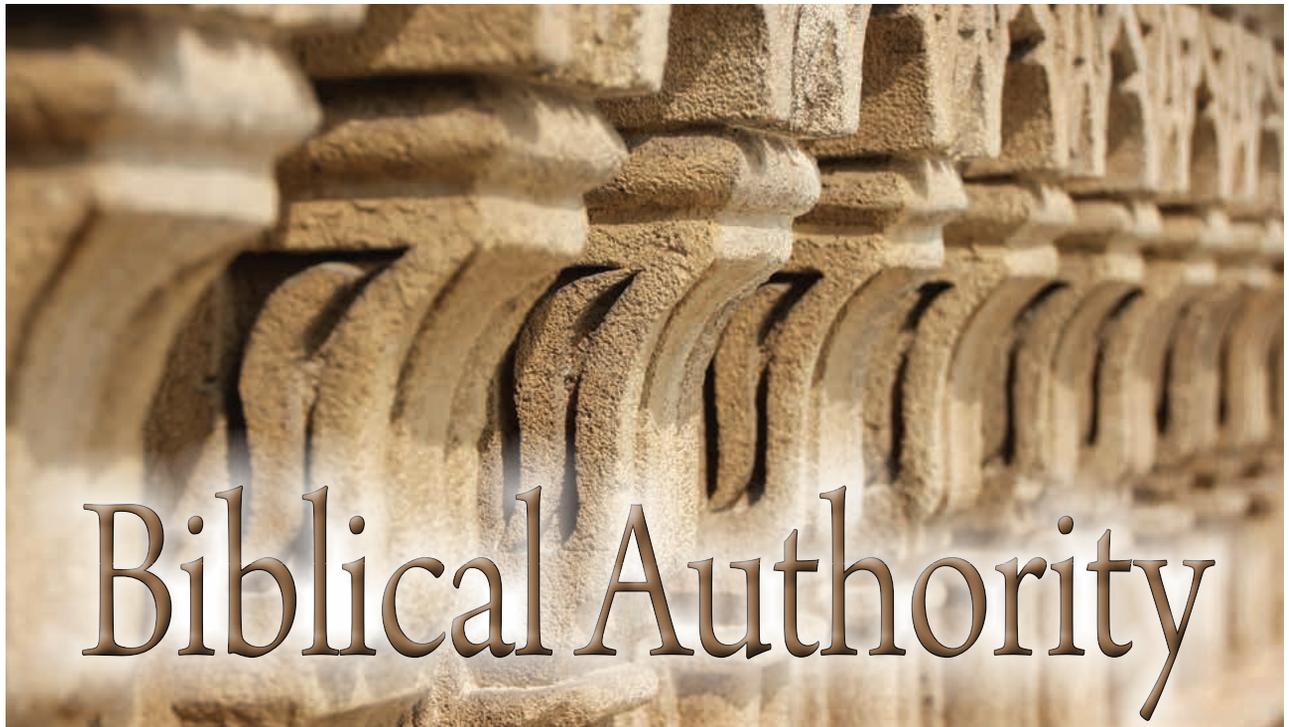
- God’s occasional use of plural pronouns to refer to Himself (Genesis 1:26; 11:5-9; Isaiah 6:8)
- References to a divine Son (Psalm 2:7-12; Isaiah 9:6, 7; Daniel 3:25)
- Personification of the “Word of God” (Psalm 33:6; 107:20)
- The Hebrew words *elohim* (translated as “God” or “gods”) and *adonai* (translated as “Lord” or “lords”) may be references to the plurality of God’s nature, as well as to the plurality of His power and majesty.
- The Hebrew word *echad* (translated “one” in the *shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4) can refer to a composite, integrated whole, thus allowing for the uniplural nature of God. <sup>BA</sup>

From pages 12-14

*This we believe:* God the Father of whom are all things, whom no one has seen nor can see, reigns in the heavens and transcends our complete knowing. He is revealed as our loving heavenly Father by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Ultimately, God the Father will restore perfect harmony to all creation through Christ and reign eternally over the redeemed.

*This we believe:* Jesus Christ is God’s one and only begotten Son. As begotten, not created, He shares the nature, names, and attributes of God with the Father. As Son, not Father, Jesus is subordinate to His Father in rank. From eternity, the Son was with the Father, shared the Father’s glory as the pre-incarnate Word, and with Him created and sustains all things. Jesus the Christ (Messiah) was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, thus uniting two natures — human and divine. Jesus lived without sin, died as an atoning sacrifice for sin, was entombed for three days and three nights, was resurrected bodily, and ascended to His Father to serve as mediator and high priest. He reigns as Lord in heaven and will return to earth as judge and king. Now it pleases the Father that the Son be preeminent in all things and receives our worship.

For a chart depicting the time element in Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, see pages 14-15.



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What makes the Bible authentic? Find out in this first of a six-part series.  
**by Gordon Feil**

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The statement of faith, published by the Church of God (Seventh Day) as *This We Believe*, states, “. . . the Bible is the only authoritative . . . rule of faith and conduct for humanity.” This isn’t just wishful thinking or guessing in the dark. When Peter tells us to defend the “hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15), he is asking us to engage in *apologetics*, a word that means a reasoned argument or defense of a belief. Our belief that the Bible is God’s Word and our faith in its promises are based on the authority we believe Scripture has. But is this *authority* defensible?

Biblical authority is derived

from its authenticity, and this involves at least six issues:

- Revelation
- Inspiration
- Canonization
- Preservation
- Illumination and Application

The first four deal with the Bible’s authority over our lives, and are the main focus of this six-part series. The last two, taken together, deal with the Bible’s impact on our lives, which is, in its own way, apologetics too.

All six topics bring with them particular challenges. Revelation raises the problem of derivation: How do we know the Bible came from God? Inspiration raises the problem of communication: How did God get the message into the text? Canonization raises the problem of recognition: Why does the Bible contain the books it does, and not others? Preservation raises the problem of replication: How do we know what we have today

is what was originally written?

Illumination and application, respectively, raise the problems of interpretation and transformation (of people): How do we get the meaning God put into the text without putting our biases into it? And how is this Book making a difference in our everyday lives?

Let’s briefly preview each area of interest, with fuller treatment to come in the remaining issues of the 2018 BA.

### Revelation

At least four kinds of revelation are claimed by the Bible. The first is creation (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20). Creation tells us some things about God, but not everything we need to know. No matter how long you look at it, you will receive no instruction on how to live. Creation provides what theologians sometimes refer to as *limited revelation*. Miracles are another kind of limited

revelation. They teach us something, but not everything.

There are also two types of complete revelation. The first is the written Word of God — the Bible, which we seek to defend with our apologetics. The Word of God in person is another complete revelation. We don't just learn about God from His written words. We also learn about Him through the person of Jesus the Messiah. He is God come in the flesh (John 1:1, 14), and what we need to know about God we can see in Jesus Christ (John 14:9; Colossians 2:9).

### Inspiration

How did God get the message into the text? One predominant view of inspiration among many Christians is that God put the thoughts into the writers' minds, and they expressed these thoughts in their own way.

But it's not just that the *writers* were inspired; it's the *writings themselves*. Second Peter 1:21 says that men of God spoke as they were "moved" by the Spirit. That may sound as if the writers were inspired, but the word *moved* is translated from a Greek word that communicates something stronger than the sense of inspiring the writer. It refers to moving someone in the sense of directing them. God-inspired Scripture means "God-breathed" Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV).

### Canonization

How did the books we have in the Bible make it in there? The earliest Christians used at least four criteria of recognition to determine what was to be accepted as Scripture.

The first was the Book's own Divine claim to authority. Second, the early church expected God's Word to come through the witness of recognized apostles and prophets, or someone directly connected with one (Ephesians 3:5). The third criterion was that the early Christians knew the Bible must agree with itself. They knew you couldn't insert a book that contradicted what had already been established to be God's Word. The fourth criterion was that a book had to be widely accepted by the mature believers, and accepted quickly.

### Illumination and application

The Holy Spirit reveals the meaning of Scripture to people in whom Jesus dwells. When we come to the Messiah, His Spirit provides illumination. "Good understanding have all those who do His commandments," the Bible says (Psalm 111:10). That's how illumination happens. It takes trust and obedience. Why? Because we learn and know by doing. If we want to understand the mind of God, we have to practice applying the mind of God, and that brings us full circle to the issue of application.

“ Our belief that the Bible is God's Word and our faith in its promises are based on the authority we believe Scripture has. ”

### Preservation

How do we know what we have today is what was originally written?

Apart from the Bible, the classical writer with the most extant documentary testimony is Demosthenes, of whom about two hundred manuscripts have survived. In contrast, the New Testament has about twenty thousand manuscripts. They don't all contain the entire New Testament. In fact, most of them contain only portions of it, but the vast majority of those — around 95 and 99 percent (called the Majority Text) — agree with one another.

We can have confidence in the Bible as God's written Word. It has Divine authority and should impact our lives. We can trust its direction when we seek it with humble hearts and open minds. In the following five articles in this series, we will attempt to show in greater detail why "the Bible is the only authoritative . . . rule of faith and conduct for humanity." **BA**

**Gordon Feil** writes from Victoria, British Columbia, where he resides with his wife, Linza.



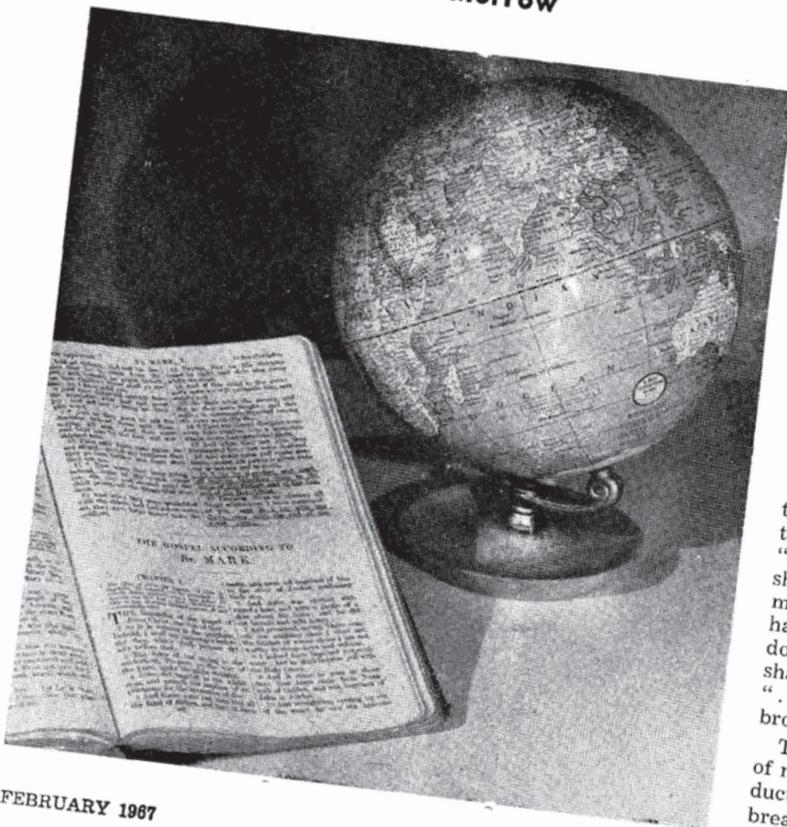
# The Bible

the only

# God-Breathed

# BOOK

Max M. Morrow



FEBRUARY 1967

**T**HERE is no book used more widely as a source book of information for guidance in Christian living than the Holy Bible. Indeed, there is no other book more worthy of this general usage!

The Bible—and *only* the Bible—serves as the guide to the Church of God in matters pertaining to salvation and godly living. "The Holy Bible (consisting of the two parts commonly known as the Old Testament and the New Testament) is the divinely inspired Word of God. No other writing is of such divine origin. The Bible is infallible in teaching, and it contains the complete revelation of the plan of salvation and of the instruction and will of God for man," quoted from *Doctrinal Beliefs of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*.

Much doubt is cast upon the Holy Bible in many circles. Faith in the Bible is undermined in college classrooms, through political isms, and even by churchmen in the pulpit. Yet, the Scriptures abide, unshaken, eternal, as the Word of God. How can this be? Because "all scripture is given by the inspiration of God..." This means the writers were inspired, motivated, directed by God so that in reality the Bible is God's workmanship. And God's Word is just as indestructible and eternal as He is.

The Bible ever remains true and reliable, for its Author is true and reliable. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" "... The scripture cannot be broken."

The Bible is not the product of man; it is the inspiration of God. It is breathed from the first last word. "... Holy r

Page



Read this article in its entirety, along with the February 1967 issue, at [baonline.org](http://baonline.org).

# Questions & Answers



**What** does progressive revelation mean? Does it affect our belief that Old and New Testaments together are God's rule for faith and conduct?

**Progressive** *revelation* is a theological term for the idea that on many Bible topics, God's truth is revealed gradually and incrementally, starting in Genesis until His ultimate Word came through Christ.

Examples of this augmenting of truth in Scripture include the topics of slavery, marriage, enemies, death penalty, and even gender equality. The enslavement of one person by another was not only practiced by some in ancient Israel but also found support in one or more texts of Hebrew Scripture, from the Pentateuch forward. The same is true of men taking multiple wives, ill treatment of one's adversaries, international warfare, animal sacrifice — even suppression of women. Six times in Matthew 5 Jesus insists that His own teaching intensifies or replaces that of Moses. He uses this formula: "You have heard that it was said to those of old . . . But I say to you . . ." (v. 21-44).

To affirm progressive revelation is not to say that Scripture got it wrong at the start. The ideal case for permanent and monogamous marriage, in fact, goes all the way back to Genesis 2:21-25. Even so, later narratives in Genesis approving multiple wives, and laws in Deuteronomy permitting divorce, illustrate exceptions to God's original intent, only to be repaired and restored to the original standard by the living Word (Matthew 19:1-9). This one instance demonstrates the general truth, that we often find greater light and clarity in the newer Scriptures, without negating the essential accuracy of what God revealed through Moses and the older Scriptures.

From these examples, we turn to an inspired summary statement of progressive revelation: "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets [including Moses], has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*" (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

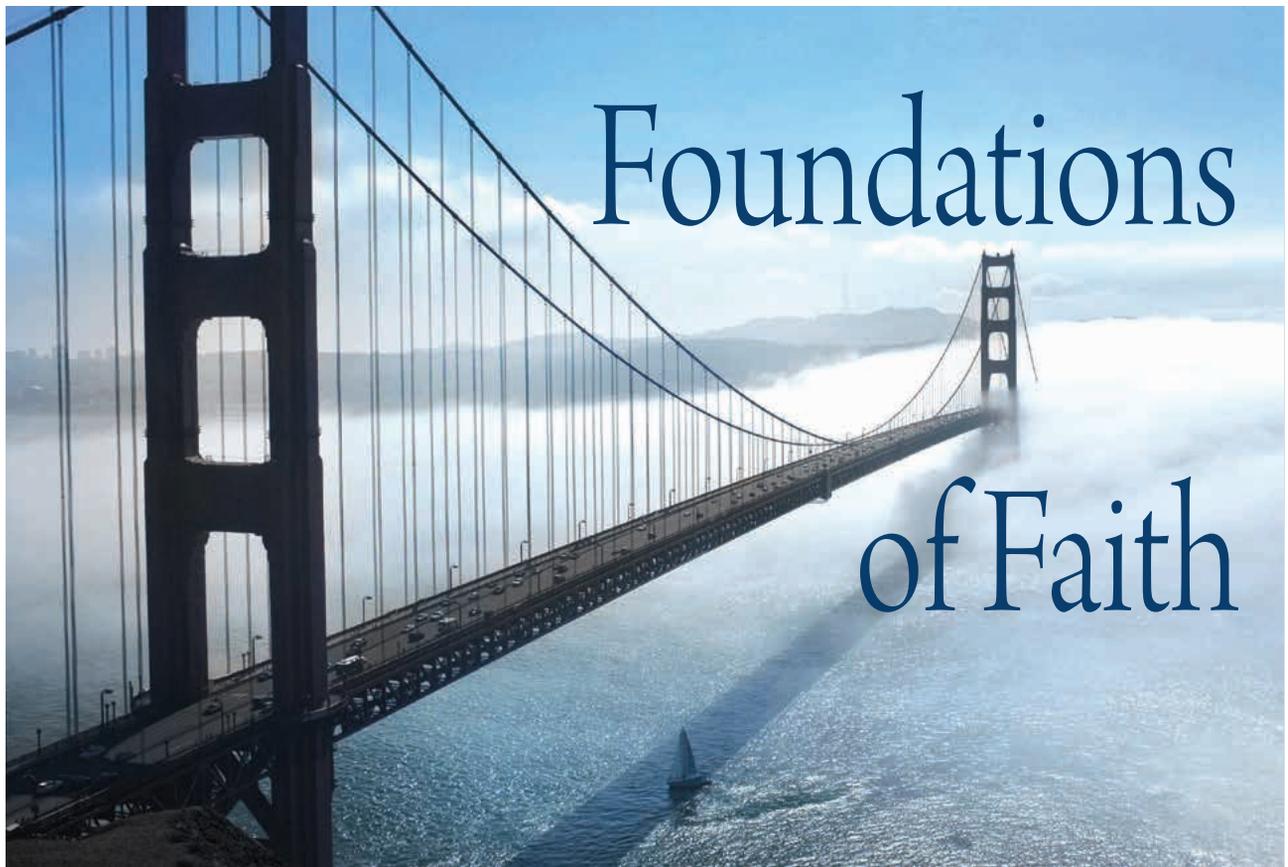
The bold implication of this passage is that a qualitative difference exists between Moses' and the prophets' words and those of Christ and the apostles. This distinction becomes more clear as Hebrews progresses. It piles up reasons that Jesus the Son is better than Moses (3:1-6); that those who lay hold of Christ by faith have a better hope (7:19), a better priesthood (v. 24, 25), and a better covenant (v. 22; 8:6) based on better promises (v. 6) than those who rely on the old covenant with its Levitical laws. All of this adds another witness to the voice from heaven pointing Jesus' disciples to the Man in the middle between Moses (the law) and Elijah (the prophets) on the Mount of Transfiguration: "Hear Him!"

Progressive revelation and the truth of the new covenant surpassing the old don't cancel the belief that both Testaments of Scripture are our authority for faith and life. But they do call for a nuanced view of that doctrine.

The Old Testament with its 613 laws is God's Word. It stands written for our learning, giving us space to grow in grace and knowledge. But not every law of it is written for our obedience in the new covenant. Consider those laws that required rebellious sons to be stoned and animals to be sacrificed for sin.

The Old Testament is God's Word, but not His final word. The ultimate unveiling of God through the person, words, and work of Jesus Christ brought fuller light into the world. Progress indeed! Progressive revelation for sure!

— Elder Calvin Burrell



# Foundations of Faith

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Our CoG7 historian reflects on the history of two fundamental statements of faith.  
**by Robert Coulter**

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## Statement 1: The Bible

**T**he Church of God (Seventh Day) has always taught, in various forms, “The Bible containing the Old and New Testaments, is God’s inspired Word. Inerrant in its original writing, the Bible is the only authoritative and infallible rule of faith and conduct for humanity.” But this commitment was tested in our earliest days.

Gilbert Cranmer, founder of the Church, joined the Christian

Church (Christian Connexion) in his youth. Its slogan “The Bible and the Bible alone” guided his lifelong belief and ministry.

Upon becoming a William Miller Adventist and Sabbath-keeper, Cranmer associated with James and Ellen Whites’ Advent and Sabbath movement, but never received ministerial recognition. However, he kept Sabbath speaking appointments at some of Whites’ congregations around Kalamazoo, Michigan. As Ellen White’s visions and writings became popular and were considered divinely inspired, Cranmer disavowed the claim. James White retaliated by forbidding his congregations to let him enter their pulpits. This forced Cranmer to evangelize on his own initiative in southwestern Michigan, resulting in the establishment

of several Sabbath, Advent, and Bible-believing congregations known as the Church of Christ.

The Church of Christ’s premier issue of *The Hope of Israel* magazine of August 10, 1863, stated, “‘The Bible and the Bible alone’ contains the whole moral law; and its precepts are sufficient to govern God’s people in every age of the world, without the addition of human creed or articles of faith.”

Merritt E. Cornell organized a Sabbathkeeping Adventist church in Marion, Iowa, in June 1860, with fifty members. They signed a covenant:

We the undersigned, do hereby express our wish to be associated together in Christian fellowship, as a Church of Jesus Christ, at Marion, whose covenant obli-

gation is briefly expressed in keeping the commandments of God and faith of Jesus, taking the Bible and the Bible alone, as the rule of our faith and discipline.

When Cornell returned to Marion from attending James White's conference at Battle Creek, Michigan, in October 1861, he proposed that Ellen White's writings be added to the church's covenant. He argued, ". . . these recent publications were equal authority, and binding forever with the Bible, and urged [the church] to adopt their teachings also, as a rule of faith and discipline." Half of the congregation accepted his proposal and affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The other half refused Cornell's proposal, retaining their covenant and name.

On October 3, 1884, the Marion church assisted in organizing the General Conference of the Church of God with the churches in Michigan, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska without preconditions or negotiation.

## Statement 2: Jesus

The founders of the Church of God (Seventh Day) believed the Father alone is God. Jesus did not preexist His birth to Mary, and Joseph was His father.

A Churchwide discussion of the subject began with the October 10, 1871 issue of *The Hope of Israel*. Erastus Branch challenged its readers to prove Jesus' preexistence. Henry E. Carver responded by defending Jesus' preexistence, deity, and virgin birth. Jesus' preexistence was discussed in the Church's magazines on occasion, resulting

in a progression of thought that ultimately led the Church to its current Christology.

Andrew N. Dugger, editor of the *Bible Advocate* magazine, unilaterally revised the Church's doctrines in 1917, and wrote, "We believe that Christ is the Son of God . . . and is now at the right hand of the throne of God." His editorial of October 28, 1924, entitled "Anti-Arianism Denounced," presented Arianism as the Church's Christology. (Arianism teaches that Jesus was created in eternity before all creation in a life-form between God and mankind, participated in creation, and was born of the

deemer") and "Pre-existence of Christ" (" . . . Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was in the plan of salvation before the foundation of the world. He was the Word spoken of in John 1:1, 2 . . .").

A revision of the preexistence statement in 1986 could be taken as a reference to His Deity: "Jesus was present with God and was preeminent in the Creation. He shared His Father's glory before taking on the form of a man. . . ." But a further revision of the doctrinal beliefs was made in 1994, and amended in 1996, intending to affirm Jesus' deity: "Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. He is of the same



virgin Mary.) In 1936, Dugger wrote Arianism as a distinguishing doctrine of the Church in his and C. O. Dodd's spurious book *A History of the True Religion*.

Christology went unaddressed further by the Church until 1949. In that year it adopted two doctrinal statements: "Jesus the Son of God" ("Jesus of Nazareth is the only begotten Son of God, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He is the Christ, or Messiah, sent from God to be our Savior and Re-

substance as the Father. Before time began, He existed with the Father, shared the Father's glory, and participated in creation. . . .")

That statement was revised in 2006 and represents the Church's current Christology (see page 7). **BA**

**Robert Coulter** and his wife, Ida, reside in Northglenn, CO, and attend the Denver church.



# THE DURATION OF

The Church of God (Seventh Day) teaches that Jesus' Most other Christians teach that Christ was crucified

*Note: In Bible times, a day began and ended at sunset, so the night part occurred before the daylight part of the day. This chart is based on that configuration.*

FRIDAY (Nisan 9)		SABBATH (Nisan 10) Weekly Sabbath		SUNDAY (Nisan 11)		MONDAY (Nisan 12)		TUESDAY (Nisan 13)		WEDNESDAY (Nisan 14) Preparation Day			
Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day		
Jesus journeyed to Bethany Mark 11:1, 2; John 12:1 — • — Martha prepared supper John 12:2		Triumphal entry into Jerusalem John 12:12-15 — • — Jesus wept over Jerusalem Luke 19:41 — • — Jesus observed temple Mark 11:11		Fig tree cursed Mark 11:13, 14 — • — Jesus returned to cast out money changers Mark 11:15		Fig tree dried Mark 11:19, 20		Upper room reserved Luke 22:8-14		Lord's Supper instituted Luke 22:7-14 — • — Judas betrayed Christ Luke 22:47, 48		The trial Luke 22:66 — • — Jesus Crucified; three-hour darkness Matt. 27:34-50 — • — Jesus entombed John 19:31-42	
						Jesus secluded Himself							

The above chart shows events that took place each day during the last six days of Christ's life before His crucifixion, and it ends at the close of the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. John 12:1 says Jesus went to Bethany six days before the Passover. Evidently, this means six days before the Passover Sabbath (Nisan 15). Counting back, Jesus went to Bethany on Nisan 9, and His triumphal entry into Jerusalem occurred

on Sabbath, Nisan 10. Jesus was crucified on "the Preparation Day of the Passover," Nisan 14 (John 19:14). The Jews killed the Passover lambs on the same day, and then ate the Passover meal after sundown, at the beginning of Nisan 15, the annual high day Passover Sabbath.

The references shown on the chart represent events that happened on each day. Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover meal, and Jesus

# JESUS' ENTOMBMENT

entombment was a full three days and three nights.  
on Friday and raised early on Sunday morning.

"Feast of Unleavened Bread . . . called the Passover" (Luke 22:1; Exodus 12:6-21)

Jesus in the Tomb (Matt. 12:40)  
3 nights and 3 days = 72 hours  
(six 12-hour parts — John 11:9)

THURSDAY (Nisan 15) High Day Sabbath		FRIDAY (Nisan 16)		SABBATH (Nisan 17) Weekly Sabbath		SUNDAY (Nisan 18)		MONDAY (Nisan 19)		TUESDAY (Nisan 20)		WEDNESDAY (Nisan 21) High Day Sabbath	
Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day
Jesus one night and one day in the tomb — • — Yearly high day Sabbath John 19:31 — • — Watch set and tomb sealed Matt. 27:62-66		Jesus entombed two nights and two days — • — Woman brought and prepared spices to anoint Jesus' body Mark 16:1 Luke 23:56		Jesus three nights and three days in the tomb — • — Jesus resurrected (before sundown) Matt. 28:1-7 — • — Angels declared event Matt. 28:6, 7		Visits made to tomb while dark and at sunrise; Jesus not there! Mark 16:1-6 Luke 24:1-6 John 20:1-6 — • — Third day since watch set and sealed Luke 24:12-21		Fifth Day of Unleavened Bread Exodus 13:6, 7		Sixth Day of Unleavened Bread Deut. 16:8		Yearly High Day Sabbath Deut. 16:8 Exodus 12:15-18	

instituted the Lord's Supper at the beginning of Wednesday, the fourteenth of Nisan (following sundown at the end of the thirteenth). Then Jesus was crucified during the daylight part of this day, on the Preparation Day of the Passover Sabbath (or high day Sabbath), approximately the same time the Passover lambs were killed by the Jews.

Jesus was placed in the tomb just before sunset as the Passover Sabbath drew on. He

remained in the tomb Thursday night and day, Friday night and day, and the weekly Sabbath night and day, rising from the tomb just before sunset at the end of the weekly Sabbath. Jesus was in the tomb 72 hours, or a full three days and three nights. Thus, He fulfilled the prophecy He had given in Matthew 12:40: "So will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."



# A Sun and Shield



Andrey Kuzmin photo

by R. Herbert

King David certainly had a way with words — not just in the eloquence and poetry of many of the psalms he composed, but also in the way he could pack so much meaning into even a short expression. “The LORD God is a sun and shield” (Psalm 84:11) is a wonderful example of this.

Today, it’s easy to read over those two words *sun* and *shield* and see them only as a reference to the sun as a great light and a shield as an antiquated symbol of protection. But in David’s day those two words were infused with a much broader range of meaning.

In the ancient Near East, the sun was a symbol of light, sustenance, and life itself. The ancients understood that without the sun, there would be no crops and no life. The sun also symbolized the concept of righteousness, just as we see in the biblical statement “But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise . . .” (Malachi 4:2).

In the same way, just as a pair of scales symbolizes fairness and justice today, the sun often symbolized justice in the biblical world because of its association with light and righteousness. In fact, in many cultures the sun god was also the god of justice. We see this association in biblical verses such as “He will make your righteousness go out as the light, and your justice as the noon day sun” (Psalm 37:6, WEB).

In David’s time, the sun was also associated with majesty and strength. When the king wrote that the sun was like “a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course” (19:5), he was referring to the majesty of a bridegroom in his splendid wedding garments and the strength of a champion runner. These were con-

cepts that his hearers would have easily understood relative to the symbolism of the sun.

The shield, in a similar way, primarily connoted protection and refuge. It is often used alongside the image of God as a “rock” in verses like “my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation” (2 Samuel 22:3). In this sense, the shield symbolized help in any difficulty: “The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me” (Psalm 28:7). But the shield not only signified protection, rescue, and help, but also could symbolize kingship (84:9), as well as monarchical power and kingly treasures — and even the words of God (Proverbs 30:5).

So if we look closely, we find that light, life, sustenance, righteousness, justice, strength, majesty, power, protection, refuge, rescue, help, kingship, monarchy, the treasures of kings, the words of God, and many other things may all be symbolized in the words *sun* and *shield* that David used to describe God in Psalm 84:11. Most of these symbolic meanings would have been clear to the psalmist’s original readers.

Not all the Bible’s descriptions of God are phrased in symbolic language. But the more we look at and meditate on what the Scriptures say about God, the more we too can see of Him. It can richly repay us to think about those descriptions — even when they are only one or two words. **BA**

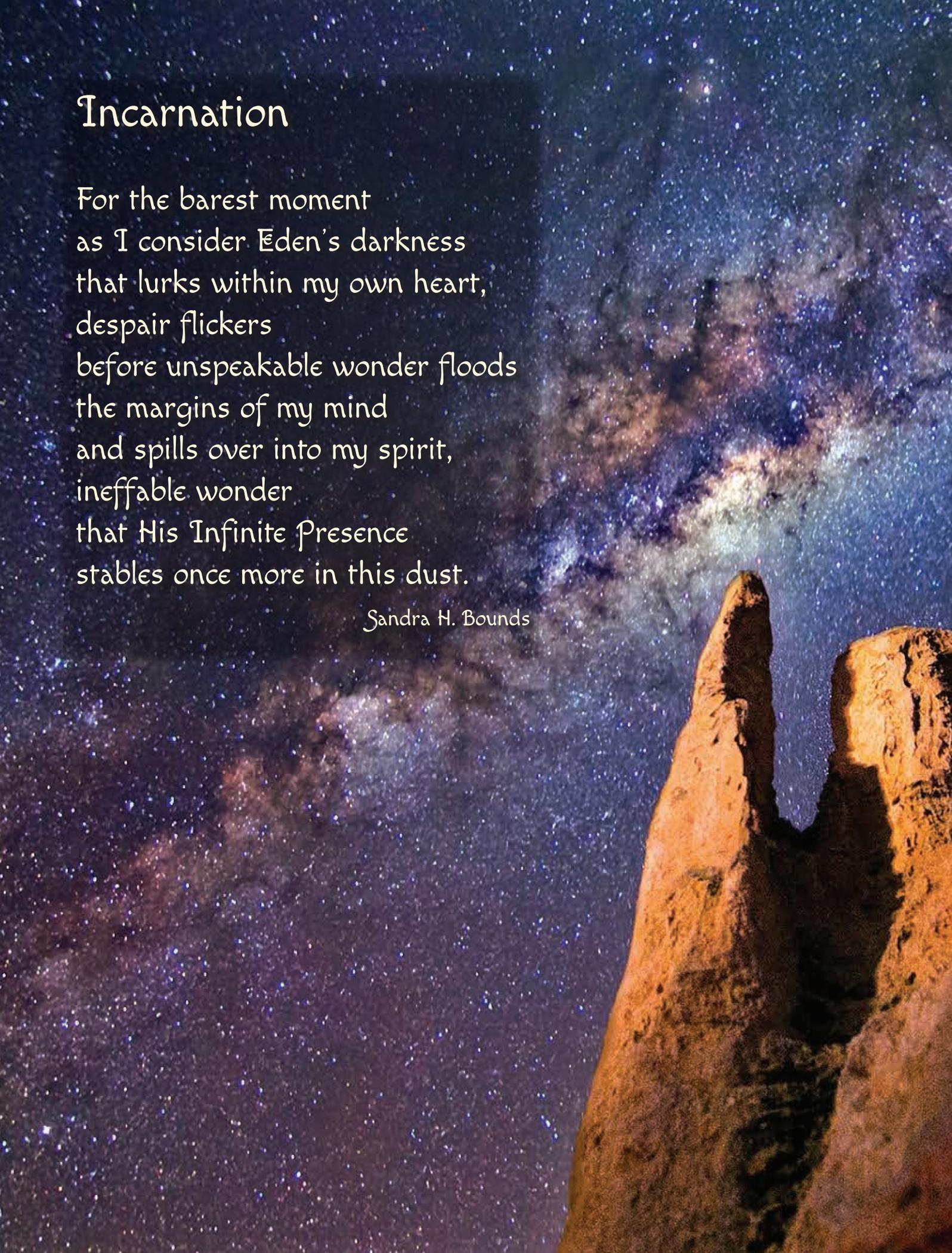
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**R. Herbert** is a pen name. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, except where noted.

# Incarnation

For the barest moment  
as I consider Eden's darkness  
that lurks within my own heart,  
despair flickers  
before unspeakable wonder floods  
the margins of my mind  
and spills over into my spirit,  
ineffable wonder  
that His Infinite Presence  
stables once more in this dust.

Sandra H. Bounds



# How to Study God

*Artios Christian College is a diverse community of followers of Christ who are committed to studying God together for the purpose of being Christian leaders who reflect Christ into our spheres of influence. To find out more or to enroll in Artios' introductory Essentials of Vibrant Leadership course, visit [www.artioscollege.org](http://www.artioscollege.org).*

by Amber Riggs

“There weren’t a lot of books on leadership in those days, so I studied leadership by reading biographies of leaders like Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr.” When my mentor shared how he had studied leadership as a young man, it initially took me by surprise, especially when I mentally surveyed my growing library of leadership books — none of them biographies.

And yet, there is a clear logic to it. One way to learn something is to study an “expert” — someone who demonstrates the skills we want to practice. Watch them, learn from them, and then train our minds and bodies to live out those practices in the context of our own lives. Musicians, writers, and artists all do this.

Our world needs Christian leaders now more than ever — not just in the realm of church leadership but in the workplace, community, government, and our homes. We need to study a leadership expert who understands the ins and outs of our post-Christian, pluralistic culture and the hearts of the people who live within it.

In short, we need to study God.

## Beyond facts

To study God goes beyond memorizing facts about Scripture. It’s one thing to state that Genesis 1:27 says humanity was created in the image of God. It’s another thing to explain the original understanding of this term in the context of the original recipients of the Pentateuch. It is yet something else to reflect on the significance of Christ’s revelation as the image of God (Colossians 1:15) and how it relates to God’s covenant with humans to embody His leadership in the world.

Studying God involves recognizing patterns of His character and interactions with humanity and how, at the core, they defy the bounds of time and culture. Yet it also involves the ironic understanding that, like Moses striking the rock (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:8-12), an action may be obedience to God in one context and disobedience in another.

## Approaching study

How then do we approach discerning the patterns of God’s character so that, with renewed minds (Romans 12:2), we can more accurately reflect His image to the world around us?

**Embrace your identity as a theologian.** In *Who Needs Theology?*, authors Grenz and Olson observe that because *theology* literally means “God-thought,” and



everyone has an opinion resulting from their thoughts or studies on who God is, that actually makes everyone a theologian.

What distinguishes a Christ-honoring theologian from the guy next door is a commitment to compare your theology against God’s revelation of Himself through careful interpretation of Scripture.

**Stay rooted in communion with Jesus.** Because Jesus Christ reveals God personally in human form, we can have a living interaction with a living God who has literally walked miles in our flesh. God’s character is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Thus, as we become familiar with God’s attributes revealed in Scripture, we can ask the Holy Spirit to make us aware of His presence and guidance throughout the day.

**Learn the underlying narrative and themes of Scripture.** Scripture reveals God through written text and narrative, instructing us as they tell the story of God interacting with humans. Broad themes — like the kingdom of God, community, and God’s covenant faithfulness — run throughout Scripture. Reading individual books and passages within the context of these timeless themes reveals aspects of God’s interaction within the pages of Scripture that are oth-

erwise easily overlooked. For an introduction into thematic study of Scripture, I highly recommend the engaging videos at *the bibleproject.com*.

**Become familiar with historical theology.** The church has always sought to communicate God’s relevant truth. However, certain doctrines have been affirmed since the first century. Some interpretations of Scripture have proved to be universal and unchanging. Absolute. On the other hand, certain periods of Christianity have embraced or dismissed other issues and interpretations as culturally relevant or because they lacked access to Scripture’s original cultural and historical context. We do the same thing today. We may not “lose” truth, but we may focus on different parts of it or interpret it in different ways as we interact with our world and Scripture. Familiarity with historical theology anchors our understanding of God. *Introducing Christian Doctrine, 3rd Edition*, by Millard J. Erickson, is an excellent introductory resource for historical Christian theology.

**Study God within a diverse community of respected Christians.** No individual Christian has a monopoly on understanding God; He is much too vast for that. Thus, we need to value Christian scholars who study the

patterns of God’s character and interactions with humanity in their historical contexts. Likewise, we need other Christians to help us analyze, process, and apply these patterns to the diverse human experience. Fortunately, diversity within the body of Christ allows us to study God from the perspective of brothers and sisters in Christ who embody Christ in contexts that fall outside our realm of familiarity.

## Living God

Studying God is key to our ability to image Him and thus live out our created purpose to reconcile creation to the ultimate leadership of Christ. Studying God goes beyond the facts of who He is to discovering a timeless character that undergirds all of His relationships with humanity throughout history.

But most of all, the study of God — theology — is exciting . . . because we serve a living God.

BA

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**Amber Riggs** is dean of administration for Artios Christian College. She lives near Eugene, OR with her husband, Bryan, and their four daughters.





# Holy Spirit Formed

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The God of creation is still moving in His people today.

by John Klassek

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This we believe:

The Holy Spirit is the promised divine helper who proceeds from the Father and Son. The Spirit is God's presence and power in the world and indwells believers. By the Holy Spirit, God inspired and illuminates the Scriptures; convicts and regenerates sinners; sanctifies, teaches, comforts, guides, and preserves believers and empowers them for service. Evidence of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life are faith in

Christ, obedience to God, and the spiritual fruit of love.

**T**he book of Acts, written by Luke, a Greek convert to Christ as well as an adept historian and much-loved doctor, may first seem to be just an interesting journal documenting the work of those first century apostles.

It is much more than that. Quite simply, Acts is a testimony to the work of the Holy Spirit. As such, its story is ongoing. Written as a letter some two thousand years ago, Acts gives us amazing insights into apostolic times, introduced with the ascension of Jesus to heaven and the beginning of the church era with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

On that day, faithful men and women were suddenly transformed and empowered from on high. They boldly proclaimed their faith in different languages. The sick were healed. Thousands were baptized, and deceitful intent was revealed. Their new hope and resulting message simply centered on Jesus Christ as Lord. Thus dawned the church era as we understand it (Acts 1-2).

## Beginnings

The first time we encounter the work of the Holy Spirit is in the opening verses of the Bible. We read in Genesis 1:2 that the "Spirit of God was moving. . . ."

Something powerful happened at creation, resulting in all we know and experience today.

Out of what is not visible — by the power and word of God — time, matter, and space were brought into existence. “In the beginning [time] God created the heavens [space] and the earth [matter]” (v. 1).

Central to creation was the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

In the Scriptures we gain additional glimpses of the Holy Spirit in anointing and equipping faithful people throughout Old Testament history, especially in the priests and kingly leadership of ancient Israel. At a time of sore repentance and reconciliation, one of Israel’s greatest leaders, King David, cried out in prayer, “Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51:11).

Confronted by his sin against the holiness of God, David knew what mattered most at that moment. From then on, we see a man further shaped into the righteousness and heart of God.

### Intersection

Perhaps the most intriguing account of the Holy Spirit was in the angel Gabriel’s extraordinary announcement to the young Jewish woman, Mary: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

Joseph, her betrothed, was similarly told the same: “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20).

Thus, the Holy Spirit, introduced to us at creation and existing outside time, space, and

matter, entered the created and earthly — our domain framed by time, space, and matter. In the birth of Jesus Christ we witness the two natures of Divine and human united. In Christ alone we find heaven and earth intersecting!

No wonder Jesus often repeated during His ministry, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (4:17). And therein lies our hope: Jesus, via the transformational journey we experience today. This very Holy Spirit, given to those who believe, upon repentance and baptism, begins in

prompts, discerns, and empowers. Thus, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God’s good work as the Master Potter is being wrought in each of our lives. As a result, the gifts, talents, and resources He’s given us are not for our own glory. Rather, in the context of living this dynamic within church community, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for the benefit of everyone.

The special work of the Holy Spirit in Acts 10 perhaps illustrates, as well as anywhere, God’s reconciling work of heaven and earth as experienced in

“By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God’s good work as the Master Potter is being wrought in each of our lives.”

earnest the work of the kingdom of God — that is, daily forming Christ in us.

In his letter to the faithful in Galatia, the apostle Paul expressed his desire for the Holy Spirit’s work: “until Christ is formed in you . . .” (Galatians 4:19).

### Spirit acts

The Holy Spirit illuminates, guides, leads, comforts, and teaches. He regenerates,

the lives of Peter and Cornelius. Peter was a Jew. Cornelius was a Roman, regarded by Jews as an *unclean* Gentile and therefore treated with contempt. Thus, the two contemporaries lived in a society that regarded them as totally irreconcilable. One represented the promises of God to His people, the other those excluded on the outside.

Peter and Cornelius separately experienced a vision from God. Both initially were perplexed, but expectant. When they met, Cor-

nelius was overwhelmed and fell at Peter's feet. But Peter instantly raised him up, being just a man like him.

Just like heaven and earth intersecting and uniting in Jesus because of the Holy Spirit, the reconciling work of the Spirit brought these two men, regarded as opposites in their society, to not only meet but also embrace each other as brothers. Where before there was division, now there was peace.

Prior to Christ's coming, a vast chasm caused by evil and sin existed between heaven and earth. But Jesus, conceived of the

ence of God via the Holy Spirit reconciles us to God, and, importantly, to each other. The forming and gifting of the Holy Spirit then empowers and equips us in the context of community — the body of Christ.

The primary work of the Holy Spirit is to form in us the very image and stature of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. For all humanity, this was typified in Peter and Cornelius' experience. The irreconcilable became reconciled. The broken was healed. And the kingdom of God was established in the hearts of people. In the words of Scripture, we thus

“The power and personal presence of God via the Holy Spirit reconcile us to God, and, importantly, to each other.”

Holy Spirit and formed in Mary's womb, set in motion the bridging of that chasm.

### Becoming

What was beyond time, space, and matter entered in a visible way — the express image of the Father as seen and witnessed in Jesus Christ. Thus in Jesus and Jesus alone, we are reconciled to our heavenly Father.

The power and personal pres-

ence of God via the Holy Spirit become a new creation, as Paul says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

To be Holy Spirit formed is to be part of the ongoing work of creation. Without the Spirit, we are subject to sin, decay, and death. But life in the Holy Spirit, as the Bible says, is righteousness, peace, and joy (Romans 14:17). May the good work of

the Spirit continue to transform our lives until that day of resurrection and glory in the kingdom of God, for which all of creation yearns.

Although our names are written in the Book of Life right now, at the final day of glory, the story told in the book of Acts will also include our story of Spirit formation and reconciliation to God and to each other in its final chapter. **BA**

**John Klassek** serves as secretary of the International Ministerial Congress and lives in Northam, Western Australia. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



We believe in miracles!  
The BA invites you to share your stories of Divine deliverance for possible publication in 2018. Send your submission of 250 words or less to [jason.overman@cog7.org](mailto:jason.overman@cog7.org) or [sherri@cog7.org](mailto:sherri@cog7.org).

# Yahweh: God Shares His Name

by Jason Overman

Considering our “Knowing God” theme, there is no better word to explore in this first “In a word” feature than the personal name of God. Found about 6,800 times in the Old Testament, much mystery and meaning surround the Tetragrammaton, a term referring to the four Hebrew consonants *yod*, *he*, *waw*, *he* that make up The Name: YHWH.

We know God because God has made Himself known. Revealing the name *Yahweh* to Moses prior to the Exodus is one of the best examples of this in Scripture. It links *Yahweh* with Israel as His special people and His gracious acts on their behalf.

Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ . . . This is My name forever . . . to all generations” (Exodus 3:13-15, NASB throughout).

*Yahweh* is considered a form of the Hebrew verb *hayah* (“to be”), leading to the common translation “I AM.” YHWH is! And acts! He exists and is the cause of existence. Known first as Israel’s covenant God, He is also the only God and the Creator God (Deuteronomy 27:9; Isaiah 37:16; Genesis 2:1-8).

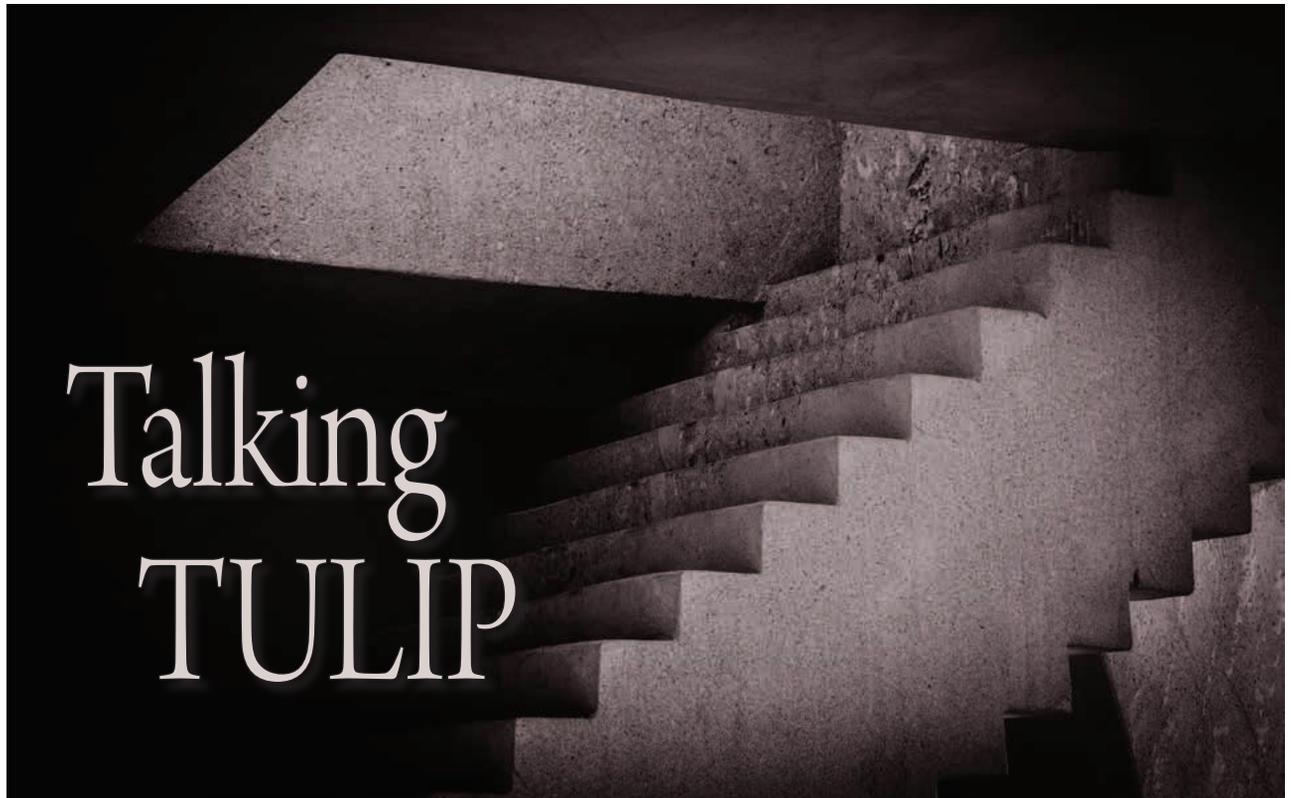
Prior to this personal revelation, God was known to the Patriarchs by more general Divine titles based on the ancient Semitic appellative for Divinity, *El*. As creatures existing in a world of space, time, and matter, *Yahweh* was thought of as the maximal of each: *El Elyon* (“God Most High,” Genesis 14:18), *El Olam* (“Everlasting God,” 21:33), and *El Shaddai* (“God Almighty,” 17:1). Retrospectively, *Yahweh* was identified with each.

God spoke further to Moses . . . “I am the LORD [*Yahweh*]; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD [*Yahweh*], I did not make Myself known to them” (Exodus 6:2, 3).

So precious and sacred was the name *Yahweh* to Israel that over time, they refrained from saying it at all. Instead, through scribal notations, the title *Adonai* (or “Lord”) was read in its place. With the Greek equivalent *Kyrios* used in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) and later New Testament writings, this replacement practice continues in most translations to this day. Where we see *LORD* capitalized in the Bible, *Yahweh* is being translated and reverentially concealed. Eventually its exact pronunciation was lost, with *Yahweh* becoming the common, if educated, guess.

The revelation of the great I AM reaches its personal climax in the person of Jesus Christ. In Jesus, God’s name is made known, and made flesh, proclaiming the personal God of Israel to the very maximal extent (John 1:14-18; Exodus 34:5-7). In Jesus, Israel’s loving, faithful, and longsuffering God reaches down to the world in a cosmic Exodus of grace and truth and power. This is seen in John’s Gospel, as Jesus is suggestively presented as the great I AM on fourteen different occasions (4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5; cf. 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).

The great confessions “The LORD is our God, the Lord is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4) and “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:11) recognize that *Yahweh* unites the personal God of Israel and our personal Savior Jesus in one (John 1:1; Isaiah 45:22-25). **BA**



# Talking TULIP

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A fresh look at an old debate  
about God, humanity,  
and grace.

by Israel Steinmetz

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As we begin a yearlong journey exploring our Statement of Faith, we consider profound questions related to the relationship between God and humanity. Central to such discussions is the Calvinist vs. Arminian debate, which raises questions regarding God's will, human freedom, and grace. To engage this debate, we consider the five points of Calvinism, summarized in the acronym TULIP:

**Total Depravity** – the human inability to desire or do good to merit salvation without God's intervening grace.

**Unconditional Election** – the election of some humans to

salvation and eternal life, based solely and unconditionally upon God's sovereign will.

**Limited Atonement** – the teaching that the death of Jesus Christ was intended to atone only for the sins of the elect. All those for whom Christ died will be saved, but those who are not the elect have no possibility of salvation because no atonement has been provided for them.

**Irresistible Grace** – the inability of humans to resist God's saving grace, so that all those God elects to receive His grace will receive it and consequently be saved.

**Perseverance of the Saints** – the elect will persevere in faith, by God's grace, to the end. No one elected by God for salvation will be lost.

As we begin, we should note that Calvinism is a comprehensive theology that cannot be reduced to five points and that

the TULIP was not invented by John Calvin (1509-1564). Rather, these five points were stated at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) when the synod members rejected the five articles of faith proposed by followers of James Arminius (1560-1609). With that background in mind, let us explore these five points over the course of three articles, noting how each of them relates to our understanding of Scripture.

## Total depravity

One leading Calvinist theologian, C. C. Ryrie, writes, "... total depravity means that the corruption [inherited by all humanity from Adam's sin] has extended to all aspects of man's nature, to his entire being; and total *depravity* means that because of that corruption there is nothing man can do to merit saving favor with God."

The Church of God (Seventh Day) shares this belief in the total depravity of humanity. Article 3 of our Statement of Faith states, "As a result of Adam's fall, all humanity became sinners by nature and by choice. The result is spiritual separation from God, physical death . . . , and eternal death. . . ."

In Article 4 we affirm, "Sinful humanity may be saved . . . solely by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from human merit, works, or ceremonies."

These sentences capture the twofold essence of total depravity: 1) Humanity is sinful by nature and therefore condemned to eternal death; 2) Salvation comes solely by virtue of God's grace through faith, not by any human merit.

Scripture supports this belief. Many passages speak of the absolute sinfulness of humanity from which no one is exempt; among them, the litany of quotations that Paul shares in Romans 3:9-18. There are none righteous; all have turned away from God. Later, Paul connects this universal condition of sin and death with the sin of Adam and the ongoing sin of humanity (5:12-14).

Regarding the inadequacy of any human work to merit salvation, we think of Ephesians 2:8, 9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast"; and Titus 3:4, 5a: "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy. . . ."

Thus, we reject the idea that humans are naturally innocent and free from sin. We reject the teaching that humans can initiate a redeeming relationship with God by virtue of good works or any other means. While we are left with various questions about the implications of total depravity, we affirm that it is true. But what about unconditional election?

### Unconditional election

In Philip Schaff's *The Creeds of Christendom, Volume 3*, the Canons of the Synod of Dort describe unconditional election as follows:



That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God's eternal decree. . . . Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath, out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault . . . a certain number

of persons to redemption in Christ . . . This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others . . . God hath decreed to give to Christ to be saved by him . . . The good pleasure of God is the sole cause of this gracious election . . . the election made by him can neither be interrupted nor changed, recalled nor annulled.

One searches our Statement of Faith in vain for this understanding of election. The word *election* does not even appear there. Rather, two elements are emphasized: 1) the grace of

God, demonstrated by Christ's death, and 2) the reception of salvation in human experience by personal faith.

The implication of this is that God's grace in Christ is available to *whosoever will* place their faith in Him. There is no suggestion that the opportunity for such faith is predicated on God's arbitrary election of some and rejection of others.

But what does Scripture say? Arminians and Calvinists both

quote proof texts supporting their views regarding election — oftentimes the same texts! Rather than dissect individual verses, let us view the issue of election in broader perspective.

The archetypal figure in election history is Abram, elected to be the father of God's chosen people. His relationship with God is paradigmatic for how election functions in Scripture. So too is the communal life of the children of Israel, God's chosen/elect people. The New Testament writers explicitly and implicitly relied on the concept of election from the experiences of Abram and his descendants in

If anything, they were the opposite! Rather, God set His love on them and chose them by unconditional grace.

However, the second striking feature of God's election is the response of faith. Abram emerges in Scripture as an exemplar of faith because he responded to God's election by believing. Contrast this with the children of Israel who, though all elect, are often divided into two groups in Scripture: those who responded to God's election in faith and those who did not. The most striking example of this is that out of an entire nation elected by God to leave Egypt and enter

on to become ancestors of Jesus. This reminds us of God's greater purpose in electing Abram, that in him *all the nations of the earth* would be blessed, not just the one nation God had elected. Throughout Israel's history the prophets and psalmists urged them to answer their sacred call to invite others to join God's chosen people. God elected *some* to be His people in order to *invite* everyone to be His people.

When we look at the New Testament, we see election functioning in the same way. God initiates redemptive relationships with certain ones by virtue of His loving grace. He calls them to be His special people, chooses/ elects them to be "in Him." They, in turn, respond in faith or in disbelief. Those who respond in faith are commissioned to invite others to join God's people. One thinks of the twelve apostles of Jesus and their individual journeys. By the end of the story, eleven responded in faith and invited others to become disciples, while one of God's chosen ones turned away in disbelief.



their discussion of Christ's followers and election. Consider three common features of election in the Old Testament.

#### **Grace, faith, and invitation.**

First, and most significant, is the unmerited grace-initiative of God. Both the narratives and later commentary regarding Abram and his descendants demonstrate that God initiated a relationship with them purely out of His own will and desire. He did not choose them because they were more worthy or holy than others.

the Promised Land, only two individuals actually received God's promise. The distinguishing mark between Joshua and Caleb, and every other adult who left Egypt, was *faith in God*.

This discussion of faith leads us to the third election reality. Individuals who were not elected by God become part of God's elect by virtue of trusting Him. We think of Rahab and Ruth, two women who were not chosen, but by faith became a part of God's chosen people and went

#### **At odds**

In light of this, when we look at the Calvinist notion of unconditional election, things seem terribly amiss. The Calvinist viewpoint has God predetermining the eternal fate of every person before they are even created. Election becomes an inescapable and completely arbitrary process whereby a group of condemned persons are chosen by God's arbitrary whim to receive the full complement of His unmerited loving grace, while everyone else is left to their just punishment. In

this scenario, faith has no human significance, and the invitation of others who are not elected to join God's chosen people is futile. Also ruled out is the idea that someone could be elected by God and, through lack of faith, lose out on God's promises by virtue of their election. *In short, the Calvinist concept of Christian election is at odds with the Old Testament examples of election.*

It is true, as Calvinists teach, that election is based solely on God's loving grace and not the merit of the individual. However, those who are elected by God must respond in faith in order to receive the promises of their election. And faith is something exercised by humans in response to God, not something God foists upon those He chooses. To observe this, we must look no further than the elected Judas, who hanged himself, or the elected people of Israel, whose carcasses rotted in the wilderness.

At this point the Calvinist may ask, "Then are you saying people earn salvation by the work or merit of faith?" In response, we point to the consistent distinction in Scripture between faith and works/merit. To construe faith as a work/merit that humans perform is to place it in the wrong biblical category.

Faith is not work or merit. Rather, it is a response of trust and belief to a loving, gracious God. And it is a *human response*. Scripture is clear that a response of faith is necessary for those elected by God to receive, and maintain, the benefit of their election. And God has given humans the freedom to trust, to believe, to place faith in Him. This is not a unique gift given to

an elect few, but a universal gift given to all.

### Co-mission

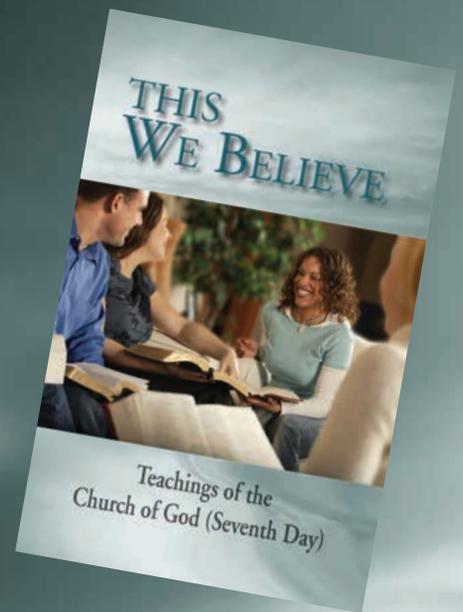
This understanding of faith undergirds our commitment to join God's mission of worldwide redemption. Those who are elected by God and have responded in faith are called to invite others to join the elect by placing their faith in God through Jesus Christ. As with Abram and the children of Israel, the elect of God in Christ is not an exclusive, closed group. Rather, they are those who have been chosen to invite everyone to become God's people by grace through faith.

Thus, on the first two letters of the TULIP we find ourselves split. The Church of God (Seventh Day) agrees that humans are totally depraved and thus totally dependent upon God's mercy and grace to redeem us from sin and death. However, we believe that the reception of God's gracious election is conditioned upon a response of faith, and that faith is something God allows humans to exercise of their own free will. They are not compelled to place faith in Christ by force, but invited by grace.

In the next two issues of the BA we will consider the remaining three letters. Keep reading! **BA**

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**Israel Steinmetz** is dean of Academic Affairs for Artios Christian College. He lives in San Antonio, TX, with his wife, Anna, and their eight young children. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



**Do you want to learn more about the Church of God's beliefs? Then be sure to purchase a copy of *This We Believe: Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*. All twelve statements of faith are covered in detail, with space to take notes.**

**This paperback edition is available for purchase in English and Spanish for \$10. Order it through the online store at [cog7.org](http://cog7.org). For special pricing on bulk orders, call 303-452-7973.**



# A Step Farther



by **Bev Brenneise**

Have you ever thought about becoming a missionary? Could you really exchange living in a wealthy country for living in one that is poor and whose people seek care — and God's love?

Do you want to find out if you could be effective as a missionary? Then read on.

Pioneer Missionary Training (PMT) and SHINE, two General Conference mission ministries, have been operating for many years.

PMT offers opportunity for participants, ages 13-99, to attend a ten-day, hands-on outreach program in Mexico. There, team members learn how to share the gospel through impact evangelism, devotionals, visiting the poor and sick, and other activities. Daily morning workshops are followed by afternoon outreach opportunities. People who successfully graduate from PMT 1 training are eligible to apply for the next level of training.



SHINE teams conduct medical and dental missions annually in developing countries. In addition to sharing the gospel, doctors, dentists, nurses, and other trained volunteers provide free professional services and free medications to thousands of people attending the clinics. At the mission's conclusion, team members, local church members, and those served during the week celebrate Sabbath services.

Despite PMT and SHINE providing valuable services and training, the effectiveness of their outreach could be improved by extending time spent in the mission country. Thus, collaboration between these two missions ministries began in order to develop a higher level of missionary training for interested individuals. Select missionaries will receive more extensive hands-on training, plus remain in countries (post missions) longer to work

with leaders and members of local congregations.

SHINE's mission to Peru (November 2017) began launching PMT 2. This new program is developing teams of six to eight individuals, from Mexico and US/Canada, who will complete three tours of three-month-long mission programs. Each tour (like to Peru this past November) plans to do the following: 1) include an initial two weeks of extensive training in Mexico City; 2) include travel to the country of the mission one week before it begins; 3) allow participants to attend and participate in the SHINE mission for its duration; 4) allow them to remain and live in the mission country for nine more weeks to guide and lead church people in follow-up work.

To fulfill the requirements of PMT 2 training, members are expected to complete three tours (of three months each) following the schedule previously mentioned.



At least one tour will be in the Western hemisphere. Another will be in Africa or Asia, or elsewhere in the world.

An interested person must be a PMT 1 graduate, have a rudimentary knowledge of Spanish or a willingness to learn communication in a new language, and raise needed funds for the cost of participation in the tours.

Because the Peru mission was the first time PMT 2 and SHINE partnered for this new program, the pre-mission time in that country needed alteration due to time constriction and preparation. As PMT 2 establishes itself in future SHINE missions, the original time schedules will be followed.

PMT 2 and SHINE are both individual ministries operating independently of each other and will not always work together. SHINE, for example, usually conducts one or more medical/dental mini missions each year, in addition to its longer annual mission. PMT 2 conducts other independent evangelical missions.

Yet SHINE and PMT 2 will dovetail in planning for SHINE's 2018 mission to Chile. Plans will begin developing once Peru's mission and follow-up are completed. Both PMT 2 and SHINE will then recruit team members.

To learn more about the new PMT 2 mission program, contact Pastor Monico Muffley ([pastor\\_monico@gmail.com](mailto:pastor_monico@gmail.com); cell: 208-697-8398; office: 303-428-6000). Also visit [churchright.org](http://churchright.org) for specifics regarding PMT 2.

Please support these three missions with prayer and donations. Then prayerfully consider whether you might become a missionary.

# IMC Sabbath Around the World

## November 4, 2017



Myanmar



Angola



India



Kenya



Mozambique



Nigeria



Pakistan



Portugal



South Sudan



Zimbabwe



Colombia



US



# G. C. Ministries News

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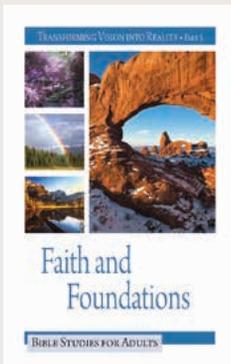


## Publications



### Sabbath School Quarterlies

The quarterlies for 2017, 2018, and 2019 make up the Transforming the Vision into Reality (TVR) series. The three stages of TVR are simple yet infused with great meaning: Jesus as our Savior, Jesus as our Lord, and the Great Commission. In a nutshell, this means “Focus on Christ and follow His plan.” That’s how we become a vibrant 21st century church!



The quarterlies this year provided a detailed study of the Church’s ten-point vision. Next year we will explore Jesus as our Savior and Jesus as our Lord. The quarterlies in 2019 will complete the journey as we grow in our commitment to Christ, allowing Him to fulfill His purpose in us and through us in the Great Commission.

Please join in this exciting spiritual journey of trust and surrender as we allow the Holy Spirit to transform our nature into God’s good, giving nature. Order quarterlies at <https://cog7.org/online-store/>.

By the way, the high school quarterlies are based on the same Sabbath school material. If your high school class is using the quarterlies, you’ll be promoting their classes at the same time. If they aren’t, it’s a great time to start!

### Sabbath School Videos

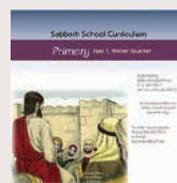
Have you seen the series of videos recently produced by one of the district teams to complement Sabbath school classes? The promotional video creates awareness and interest in our Sabbath schools. You can view them on YouTube (*NED CoG7 Transforming Vision into Reality*).

In addition, the district team created thirteen

videos (one per lesson) to assist teachers and students in personal preparation for class and enrich their learning after class. More videos will come in future quarters.

### Children’s Curriculum

**Intermediate.** In *The Early Church Begins*, lessons begin with Jesus’ ascension and instructions to the disciples to remain in Jerusalem for a time. Lessons include stories about the rapid growth of the church, miracles performed by the disciples, how the believers shared, the persecution and dispersion of believers, Saul’s conversion, Peter’s vision, and Cornelius becoming a Christian.



**Primary.** *The Life and Ministry of Jesus* teaches students that Jesus did some amazing things while on earth, such as healing the sick and raising the dead to life. Sometimes Jesus chose to forgive a sin-burdened paralytic, test a father’s faith, or allow a dear friend to die because He had an even greater goal in mind. More than anything, Jesus wants us to believe and trust in Him through everything.

**Preschool.** Lessons in *Jesus, God’s Power and Love Revealed* take students from the early part of Jesus’ ministry to His triumphal entry and His cleansing of the temple. They will learn that Jesus was truly God and that He showed us God’s power and love throughout His life on earth. They will learn that Jesus’ miracles show us that Jesus can do anything and has the power to forgive sins. He truly loves and cares about us.





## Canon and Creed

The Preface to *This We Believe: Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)* begins, “Since its inception, the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) has maintained an open creed — one that can be (and has been) amended with the passage of time.” The next paragraph reads:

As a body of believers, we strive for continued growth in understanding and wisdom. Thus, our beliefs will continue to evolve as our horizons broaden. At the same time, our beliefs are securely grounded in what Scripture proclaims about God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Canon and creed. The written Word of God and our best interpretation of it as it informs our beliefs and practices.

About the written Word, we are certain. We believe that it is God given and God preserved. Without it, we would be incredibly ill-informed regarding God, His will, and His activities throughout history to reconcile and restore humanity and all creation to Himself. Without God’s Word, we would float about on the subjective currents of human imaginations — our own and those of others. We would have no trustworthy measure of what is truth and what is not.

But, thank God, we are not in that sorry circumstance. Every one of our dogmas and doctrines is informed by our understanding of the wonderful revelation in God’s Word. We are, as we say in our vision, “Bible based.” About the written Word, we are certain.

About our interpretations and understandings of God’s written Word, we are humble. We recognize that the Holy Spirit has led us to different and more accurate interpretations and understandings of God’s Word in the past. And we

realize (and pray) that God will continue to lead us to more and more accurate understandings of His Word and will until Christ returns, when the glass through which we now see darkly is made completely clear. That is what we mean when we say that we have an open creed.

Our highest purpose is not to protect our past or present doctrinal statements. It is to know God more and more intimately and to glorify Him more and more fully. Because we love God, we want to serve and obey Him as He desires. Certainly, we have more to learn and further to grow. When we find that we have misunderstood God’s Word and will, we are eager to be corrected — and change. We have no desire to continue in an error no matter how sincerely we, in ignorance, believed it. About our interpretations and understandings of the written Word, we are humble.

These two commitments of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) — to God’s written Word and to our open creed — are among the many reasons that I love serving Christ as a member of our church. Here, I can live as a Christ-centered and grace-oriented believer. Here, I can grow in my understanding of God as I grow in my understanding of His Word. Here, I am surrounded by kindred spirits, brothers and sisters in Christ who help guard me from falsehoods and guide me to truths. Here, we learn and we grow, together.

In a world of uncertainties and competing claims regarding what is and what is not truly true, I am blessed to be a part of this body. I am blessed by canon and creed.

— Loren Stacy



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