LESSON 5 *October 24–30

(page 38 of Standard Edition)

Revelation *and* Inspiration



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 1:1, 2; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; 2 Pet. 1:18–21; Exod. 17:14; Rev. 1:19; Ezek. 4:1–8.*

Memory Text: **"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things he saw"** *(Revelation 1:1, 2, NKJV).*

The apostle John had been part of the inner circle of the Twelve Apostles *(Luke 8:51; Matt. 17:1; Matt. 26:36, 37)*. After Christ's ascension, he continued his ministry, in Jerusalem. Yet, before the fall of the city (A.D. 70), he moved to Ephesus in order to oversee churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor. During the Christian persecution under the Roman emperor Domitian, the apostle was exiled to Patmos, an island in the Aegean Sea.

On Patmos, John received special prophetic messages that were addressed not only to the seven churches of Asia Minor but also to Christians throughout the ages *(Rev. 1:1–3, 9–11)*. The prophetic message delivery chain, of which John was a part, looked something like this: God the Father, to Jesus Christ, to the angel, to the apostle John, and to the readers and hearers. This is a classic example of the revelation-inspiration process in which God uses prophets to communicate His messages to humanity.

This week's lesson specifically examines the multiform revelation-inspiration process, with special focus on the oral, written, and dramatized ways the divine message has been communicated to human beings.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 31.*

General and Special Revelation

Read Hebrews 1:1, 2. Why is God so interested in speaking to us? What is He telling us through Jesus and the prophets?

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What would the Creator of the cosmos have to say to us? Why does He communicate with us? It is because we are fallen human beings in a sinful world and face death, suffering, and trials; God, therefore, speaks to us because He wants us to know why we are here, why things are so bad, and why, despite it all, we can hope in His love for us.

God's *general* revelation, as seen in the natural world, speaks eloquently of His infinite power and caring love. King David exclaimed, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" *(Ps. 19:1, NKJV)*. The apostle Paul added, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse" *(Rom. 1:20, NASB)*.

It is also amazing to reflect on God's restoring power manifested in the mysterious healing processes in our world. Indeed, "God's healing power runs all through nature. If a tree is cut, if a human being is wounded or breaks a bone, nature begins at once to repair the injury. Even before the need exists, the healing agencies are in readiness; and as soon as a part is wounded, every energy is bent to the work of restoration."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 113.

As beautiful and instructive as the natural world can be, it reveals not only God's power and love but also the presence of evil *(see Gen. 3:14–19, Matt. 13:24–30)*. This ambiguous message can be properly understood only in light of God's special revelation—in both Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, and in the Bible, the Written Word of God that testifies of Him *(John 5:39)*.

The Scriptures are the inspired record of God's messages to all human beings throughout the ages. They tell us about the Creation of the world and its tragic fall, and about God's amazing plan of redemption and the final restoration of planet Earth. As brief and selective as some biblical narratives can be, they are always reliable, because it's God speaking to us *(see 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19–21)*.

Though nature surely points to the reality of the Creator's power and love, why do we still so desperately need the Written Word, as well? What does the Word tell us that nature, in and of itself, doesn't?

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The Process of Inspiration

Many books and writings, not just the Bible, have come down to us through the ages. And yet, we deem the Bible as the Word of God. What separates it from other writings?

Read 2 Timothy 3:15–17 and James 1:17. What important message should we take from these verses?

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There is some discussion about the best translation of 2 Timothy 3:16, but most Bible translations render this passage in a similar way, emphasizing that the whole Bible is of divine origin *(2 Pet. 1:20, 21)*.

One Bible commentator explains that "it seems more likely that Paul is contemplating scripture as a whole here and that he would say that the whole of scripture is 'profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness,' than that every scripture passage is profitable in these ways."—G. W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 445.

But how should we understand the inspiration process that originated in the Bible? We should recognize that prophetic inspiration is the Holy Spirit assisting true prophets for the reliable communication of divine messages. That assistance is provided not only in the process of *receiving* the messages but also in *communicating* the messages clearly to their recipients.

God's messages came through visions and dreams *(Num. 12:6; Isa. 6:1, 8)*. God also used eyewitnesses *(1 John 1:1–3)*, Spirit-inspired historical research *(Luke 1:1–3)*, and divine impressions on the mind *(2 Pet. 1:21)*. Regardless of the means used by the Holy Spirit, the prophets and biblical authors were given objective, rather than subjective, messages of truth to be shared. That is, God's messages were not to be tampered with or in any way distorted by His messengers, even if they used their own words to express those messages.

The task of communicating prophetic messages to their original audiences could be done orally *(2 Pet. 1:19–21)*, in written form *(John 20:30, 31)*, or even through dramatization *(Ezek. 4:1–8)*.

Though many questions remain about how the Bible was inspired, or how inspiration works in general, why is it so important to trust the Bible as God's inspired Word, regardless of what we may not fully understand about how it was written?

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Oral Messages

Read 2 Peter 1:18–21. What assurance do we have that the oral messages delivered by God's prophets were as inspired and reliable as the written ones?

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God spoke to Adam and Eve before the Fall *(Gen. 2:16, 17)* and after *(Gen. 3:9–19)*. In both cases, they perfectly understood His words. His voice was heard in clear terms also at Sinai *(Exod. 20:1–20)*, as well as at the baptism and the transfiguration of Jesus *(Matt. 3:17, Matt. 17:5)*. We might misinterpret when other people talk to us. But, surely, when God talks to anyone, there will be no miscommunication or deception.

The Bible affirms that "God spoke to Moses and said to him: 'I am the LORD' " *(Exod. 6:2, NKJV)*. Many Bible writers acknowledged hearing the voice of God as He spoke to them. This was the case, for example, with Isaiah *(Isa. 8:1, 11)*, Jeremiah *(Jer. 1:4, 9, 11)*, and Ezekiel *(Ezek. 3:16, Ezek. 6:1)*. Any attempt to deny these and other similar claims ends up questioning the honesty of the prophets and the reliability of the Bible itself.

As God spoke to the prophets in an intelligible human language, so did the prophets to their respective audiences. For instance, Noah was a true prophet of God and a faithful "preacher of righteousness" *(2 Pet. 2:5)*. He did not write any portion of the Bible, but he delivered God's message orally to his contemporaries, and his message was no less inspired than the writings of the canonical prophets.

Several other prophets, including Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, and John the Baptist, never wrote any portion of the Bible; instead, they delivered their message orally.

And what about Jesus Christ Himself? The Gospel record mentions that, during His earthly ministry, He "wrote on the ground with His finger" *(John 8:6, NKJV)*. That's it. We have no record of Jesus' writing anything else. But He taught and preached orally "as one having authority" *(Matt. 7:29, NKJV)*. Some of His listeners even confessed, "No man ever spoke like this Man" *(John 7:40, 46, NKJV)*. Jesus was primarily an oral communicator of God's messages. His messages were no less authoritative or binding simply because He Himself did not write any books of the Bible.

How fascinating that God has prophets who had no writings in the Bible. Why do these noncanonical prophets also carry authority?

Written Messages

Some famous speeches have deeply impacted people's lives and even changed the course of history. If these speeches were not recorded, the words would have faded or become distorted with the passage of time. Thus, writing gives permanence to the spoken word, and that permanence allows the message to be transmitted through time.

Shortly after the Israelites left Egypt and defeated the Amalekites, God instructed Moses to "write this for a memorial in the book" *(Exod. 17:14, NKJV)*. Beginning with Moses, who authored the first five books of the Bible, Psalm 90, and Job, the Holy Spirit guided the canonical prophets to produce the writings that now comprise the 66 books of the Bible.

Read Exodus 17:14; John 20:30, 31; 1 Corinthians 10:11; and Revelation 1:19. What are some of the reasons God asked His prophets to write down the messages that He gave them?

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The various books of the Bible reflect the literary style and skills of their respective writers. As we will discuss in next week's study, the personal nuances and various styles of each author don't take away from their messages, because there are no "degrees" of inspiration. Some parts of the Bible are obviously more relevant and applicable to our lives and faith today than are other parts. But this truth doesn't make one part of the Bible more inspired than another part.

Sometimes Bible writers recorded the inspired messages that they first delivered orally, by themselves, or by a trusted associate. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses recorded the last speeches that he made to the Israelites before his death. The four Gospels register many of the sermons and teachings of Jesus during His earthly ministry.

But there are instances in which prophets quoted non-inspired sources *(Acts 17:28, 1 Cor. 15:33, Titus 1:12)* and even the words of Satan *(Gen. 3:1–5, Matt. 4:1–11)*.

We should remember that as the prophets recorded the feelings and desires of other people, they also expressed their own human reactions *(see Dan. 8:27; Rev. 22:8, 9)*. Furthermore, the Bible describes many good examples to be imitated but also many bad ones to be avoided *(1 Cor. 10:1–11)*.

While reading the Bible, we should keep in mind that, while not written in perfect language, it carries an infallible message that will stand the test of time.

Drama, Symbols, Parables

The Bible has a rich variety of word pictures and metaphors. For example, the whole Old Testament sacrificial system of patriarchal altars, the Mosaic tabernacle, and the temple in Jerusalem was a pictographic representation of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross and His heavenly priesthood *(Heb. 8:1–6)*.

In the prophecies of Daniel, the kingdoms and powers in the world were represented by the different parts of a great image *(Dan. 2:31–45)*, various animals and horns *(Daniel 7 and 8)*, and two kings *(Daniel 11)*. Similar representations appear also in the book of Revelation, as in the case of the two beasts of chapter 13.

In His teachings, Jesus spoke of Himself, for instance, as the Bread of Life *(John 6:35, 41–58)*, the Light of the world *(John 8:12, John 9:5)*, and the True Vine *(John 15:1–8)*. And through the parable of the sower *(Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23)* and several other ones *(Matt. 13:24–52, etc.)*, Jesus illustrated the nature and growth of His kingdom.

Read Ezekiel 4:1–8. Why do you think God not only spoke verbally but also dramatized some of His messages?

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A vivid dramatization appears in Ezekiel 4:1–8, where God asked the prophet to make a miniature model of Jerusalem and to lay himself down, first on his left side for 390 days, representing the house of Israel, and then on his right side for 40 days, representing the house of Judah. Another visual experience was Hosea's divinely ordained marriage to Gomer, a prostitute, representing Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness to God *(Hos. 1:2–9)*.

The dramatic experiences of Ezekiel and Hosea seem quite shocking today. But that was the point: they were supposed to be shocking, not just to us but also to the people back then. At a time when the warnings of the prophets were openly rejected *(see 2 Chron. 36:15–21)*, the last act of divine mercy was to dramatically alert the people to their true condition in order to lead them to genuine repentance. Such a dramatic presentation certainly should have shown them how seriously they should have taken God's warning to them.

What kind of dramatization might someone do today to warn us about, say, being Laodicean? *(See Rev. 3:14–18.)*

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Ellen G. White on Revelation and Inspiration

Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen G. White was divinely inspired. Her writings, life, and ministry meet the criteria of a true prophet. She possessed the same quality of inspiration as Bible prophets, though she never considered her writings to be the same as Scripture. On the contrary, Ellen G. White always uplifted the Bible. But how did she herself understand God's prophetic revelations to her and the process of her inspiration?

First, Ellen G. White always considered the Bible as the authoritative and infallible revelation of God. The Bible reveals God's truth and His plan of salvation for the fallen human race. In that process, as we are learning, He uses prophets to communicate His messages.

Second, Ellen G. White recognized that the process of inspiration involved divine-human interaction. God communicated His messages, but then the prophet would convey the divine instruction using his or her own words. As Ellen G. White put it: "It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. . . . The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21.

In relation to visions and prophetic dreams, Ellen G. White understood "thought inspiration" as a union of divine revelation and human experience. She wrote, " 'The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human.' "—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 25. God used many ways to produce an understanding of His message in the mind of His messenger. These included picture representations, words, and thoughts that engaged all the prophet's senses. Ellen G. White's experience was similar to that of Bible writers.

Third, Ellen G. White noted that not all of her human experiences and communications were inspired. "There are times when common things must be stated," she advised, "common thoughts must occupy the mind, common letters must be written and information given that has passed from one to another of the workers. Such words, such information, are not given under the special inspiration of the Spirit of God."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 39. It is important to realize this distinction as we read and relate to her writings and experiences, particularly her correspondence and diaries.

Knowing Ellen G. White's understanding of revelation and inspiration helps us avoid extremes and read her counsels prudently with understanding.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/5.

INSIDE *Story*

From Despair to Destiny

In the bitter cold of January 1906, a young Slovenian named Albin Močnik stood on a bridge in Bremerhaven, Germany, contemplating suicide. But just as he teetered on the edge of despair, a stranger intervened, directing him to a pair of Adventist shoemaking families who would unknowingly change the course of history for the Balkans.

Močnik moved in with the Schiefers and Banas families. Their quiet witness stirred his heart, and, by March 1906, he was baptized. This marked the beginning of a lifelong mission that would shape the Adventist Church in the former Yugoslavia.

Soon after his baptism, Močnik attended a German Union conference that was held in Friedensau, unaware he was the first Slovene Adventist. Encouraged by John F. Huenergardt to serve his own people, he enrolled in the Friedensau school, where his passion for mission grew. He began translating and distributing Sabbath School materials in Serbo-Croatian.

In 1908, Albin's dream took form. Upon completing his studies, he went to Croatia with Pastor Robert Schillinger. Though hindered by language barriers and legal obstacles, Močnik shared the gospel in Zagreb and Split. He moved into Srem, then part of Croatia, and ventured into Serbia, preaching and baptizing new believers, often at the cost of imprisonment.

Despite recurring illness and political opposition, Močnik never abandoned his mission. During World War I, he endured army service, severe health conditions, and the grief of separation from his growing family. Yet even in convalescence, he produced the first Adventist hymnal in Serbo-Croatian, composing 120 songs himself.

After the war, Močnik led efforts to counter the divisive Reform Movement and rebuild the Adventist Church. This movement started before World War I, when differing opinions on military service arose among German Adventists. Eventually, Albin's ministry bore fruit: he revitalized the church, raised up new leaders, and, by 1925, was elected the first president of the Yugoslav Union Conference.

As president, Močnik gave the Adventist faith a public voice in a hostile political climate. His 1925 book *Adventism* clarified church beliefs to the government and helped secure legal recognition for the denomination. He spearheaded translation work and edited the church paper *Glasnik*. He also founded a school for pastors in 1931.

Močnik's legacy was carved through hardship and relentless faith. From the moment he chose life on a bridge in Bremerhaven to his bold witness across Croatia and beyond, Albin Močnik became a pioneer of hope. His story is a testimony to the transformative power of the gospel and the courage of those who carry it to new frontiers.

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