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THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

“You Shall not Kill” or “You Shall not Murder”? The Meaning of Ratsakh in the Sixth Commandment

by Jiří Moskala

The Decalogue is a precious gift endowed to humanity by God Himself (Exod 31:18), uttered (Exod 20:1; Deut 5:4–5, 24) and written (Exod 24:12; 31:18; Deut 5:22) by Him. It presents the foundational principles to preserve life and defines how one maintains the vertical (first four commandments) and horizontal (last six commandments) relationships that are the most valuable properties in life. The Decalogue presupposes salvation and forms the heart of God’s revelation and biblical ethics. It is the Magna Carta of biblical teaching and its summation, the pattern for the rest of biblical legislation. It forms the substance and foundation of divine standards for all humanity; its principles are eternal.

In the book of Exodus, the Decalogue is called “the Testimony” (Heb. ‘edut; Exod 31:18); and in the book of Deuteronomy, it is named “the words of the covenant” (Heb. dibre habberit; Exod 34:28). Neither book uses the term “the Ten Commandments” (Heb. mitswah; however, see Exod 20:6), but rather, three times call it “the Ten Words” (Heb. ‘aseret haddebarim, definite plural form of the term dabar meaning “word, sentence, matter, thing, speech, story, promise, utterance”; see Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13; 10:4). In both Exodus and Deuteronomy, the Decalogue lies at the beginning of the law collections and their interpretation.¹

Crucial Question

The sixth commandment is a very short statement and was originally expressed in Hebrew with just two words: “lo’ tirtsakh” [negative particle lo’ plus verb in qal, imperfect second person singular of the root ratsakh]. God’s command is identical in both versions of the Decalogue (Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17).² This brief commandment is clearly translated in the KJV as “You shall not kill” (that is, to take or terminate the life of a person) and this rendering is followed, for example, by the following versions: RSV, NAB, ASV, CEB, JB, and NJB. On the other hand, Bible versions like NIV, TNIV, ESV, NKJV, NRSV, NASB, NET, and NLT render this phrase as “You shall not murder.” “Murder” is defined as unlawful killing, or killing without a legal justification, or the premeditated and deliberate killing of another human being. This would be distinct from other forms of killing that are then presumably legal or acceptable, such as execution in cases of criminal activities (capital punishment), killing in times of war, or in self-defense.

Which translation is correct: “You shall not kill” or “You shall not murder”? The answer has tremendous implications for decisions in real life. Diligent students of the Bible know that each translation of the biblical text is an interpretation, so one needs to be sure to follow the right one. This question has to be decided only on biblical grounds, which means using the

Hebrew word ratsakh in its particular context and by discerning the intended purpose of this fundamental legislation.

Some scholars and writers claim the commandment “You shall not kill” points to a specific prohibition—that is, murder. Appeal is made to the original Hebrew by arguing that the word ratsakh does not mean killing in general but refers specifically to intended killing, namely murder, or to unauthorized killing. For example, Dozeman observes, “The command forbidding murder is broad.”³ Hyatt comments, “The purpose of the sixth commandment was to prohibit any kind of illegal killing that was contrary to the will and the best interests of the community. Thus its real import was to prohibit murder, in spite of the fact that this meaning is not specifically derived from the verb employed.”⁴ Ryken states, “What the commandment forbids is not killing, but unlawful killing of a human being.”⁵ Gane in his exposé on the Old Testament Law for Christians comments, “The familiar KJV rendering ‘Thou shall not kill’ is misleading because the sixth commandment does not forbid all killing.”⁶ and he argues that this commandment only “prohibits the illegal, unjustifiable taking of life.”⁷ North, in his article on the sixth commandment, concludes, “So, in reading Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17 we must differ with the translation ‘Thou shall not kill’ on the grounds that it is too broad, and thus inaccurate and inconsistent with all the contexts in which rskh is used and not used in Scripture.”⁸ This type of interpretation is reflected in some modern translations as seen above. However, the crucial question remains: Is this argument supported by the biblical data? To the claim that the verb ratsakh is translated as “murder,” Victor Hamilton states, “I do not think it is that simple.”⁹ I agree. What does the biblical data reveal? John Durham rightly argues that “the precise meaning of the sixth commandment depends on the definition of רצח.”¹⁰

Usage of the Word ratsakh

There are four main words in the Hebrew Scripture used for killing: harag (e.g., see Gen 4:8, 14–15, 25; 12:12; 20:11; 27:41; 37:20, 26; Exod 2:14), mut (in the Hiphil; e.g., see Gen 18:25; 37:18; Exod 1:16), qatal (only in the following four Hebrew texts: Job 13:15; 24:14; Ps 139:19; Obad 1:9; and used in Aramaic in Dan 2:13–14; 3:22; 5:19, 30; 7:11), and ratsakh (see also the more descriptive expression shofek dam, “shedding a blood,” as in Gen 9:5–6; and tabach or shachat for slaughtering animals). It is significant to observe that three of these verbs (harag, mut, qatal) include killing humans and animals, while the verb ratsakh (used in the sixth commandment) applies only to killing humans.¹¹ This discovery is crucial, because then the difference in usage is not primarily regarding “various circumstances of killing”¹² (premeditated/deliberate or accidental/unintentional killing), but who or what is killed. The difference lies “between the

object that is killed—humans and animals.”¹³ The term ratsakh refers uniquely to taking the life of humans.

The Hebrew verb ratsakh occurs forty-seven times in the Old Testament, and its meaning must be determined from the context (study carefully the following nineteen biblical passages):

Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17—employed twice in the sixth commandment.

Numbers 35:6, 11, 12, 16 [twice], 17 [twice], 18 [twice], 19, 21 [twice], 25, 26, 27 [twice], 28, 30 [twice], 31—used altogether twenty times. The motive of killing must be investigated for implementation of the punishment: the intentional killing is punished by death after a court hearing (capital punishment), in contrast to the accidental killing when the killer is required to stay in the city of refuge (the institution of asylum) until the death of the High Priest.¹⁴

Deuteronomy 4:42 [twice]; 19:3, 4, 6; 22:26—appears six times.

Joshua 20:3, 5–6; 21:13, 21, 27, 32, 38—occurs eight times.

The rest of the Old Testament—used eleven times in the following texts: Judges 20:4; 1 Kings 21:17; 2 Kings 6:32; Job 24:14; Psalms 62:3; 94:6; Proverbs 22:13; Isaiah 1:21; Jeremiah 7:9; Hosea 4:2; 6:9.

A cognate noun ratsakh (killing, murder) occurs twice in the Hebrew Bible: In Psalm 42:10 (in Heb 42:11) it means “shattering,” “crushing,” “mortal wound,” or “mortal agony,” while the same noun in Ezekiel 21:22 refers to the slaughter by King Nebuchadnezzar in battles when he was conquering Israel. Thus, the Hebrew root ratsakh is also used for killing in war.

Summary of Findings in Context

God is the creator, He is life, and the source of life; this is why only He gives life and only He can take it away. He is the ruler over life and death (Job 1:21; Deut 32:39; Isa 45:7) and as the creator of life He has all rights over life and death and the authority to command: “Do not take life.” However, we need to underline that it is a strange and alien work for God to kill (Isa 28:21); it is done only out of the necessity to protect life, as in the case of the biblical flood (Gen 6:11–13). The Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23, 32).

The thematic background of the sixth commandment is in the story of Cain and Abel with two brothers worshipping God (Gen 4:3–11). The first murder occurs during their first worship, signifying that the one who kills, kills his brother. The sanctity of human life is underlined.

God's commandment is also associated with the first explicit prohibition of killing (Gen 9:5–6), in spite of the fact this text is misused to justify capital punishment as a divinely ordered act. Humans were created in the image of God; thus, theologically speaking, the one who kills destroys the image of God, and no one has the right to kill this image. This is why killing humans is absolutely prohibited: it is a sin. Hamilton rightly proclaims, "To kill another human being is to destroy one who is a bearer of the divine image."¹⁵ Doukhan observes, "This implies that killing humans impacts God Himself."¹⁶ By respecting life, one shows a deep respect for the Holy Creator. In Genesis 9, the restriction not to kill humans is given in sharp contrast to God's permission to kill animals (for food and sacrificial reasons, not for sport-hunting purposes); yet, while killing animals, humans have to pour their blood out to demonstrate respect for life because life is in the blood (Gen 9:4–5), while shedding the blood of humans is banned. Wenham aptly comments, "No sin shows greater contempt for life than homicide. Whereas an animal's blood may be shed but not consumed, human blood cannot even be shed."¹⁷ Life is sacred and people cannot take the life of another person on their own. Human life must be highly respected and preserved. Even negligence in protecting life was punishable (Deut 22:8).

The sixth commandment is an apodictic law. Apodictic laws are unconditional and make categorical assertions, whereas casuistic laws explain different conditions and how they need to be executed/applied. In principle, killing is killing and cannot be excused. It is an absolute command regarding the respect of life. Thus, one might argue that any taking of human life violates the sixth commandment. It is significant that no casuistic law is part of the Decalogue (in contrast to the other collections of biblical law). However, when killing occurs then comes into place casuistic legislation (see Deut 19:1–22:8). Gane compares several collections of biblical laws and rightly concludes, "Casuistic laws appear in all of the major biblical law collections . . . except for the Decalogue."¹⁸ Patrick explains that a casuistic law "defines a specific case, distinguishes it carefully from other similar cases, and stipulates the legal consequences."¹⁹

The sixth commandment is brief and the word "kill" is not qualified by motives (e.g., "do not kill illegally—that is, do not murder), alluding to the fact that it should be taken as a general principle. It has a very broad meaning. Dozeman rightly observes, "The law is stated categorically and does not spell out the consequences for disobedience."²⁰

The Hebrew word ratsakh is used only for killing humans, and is not employed even for killing sacrificial animals.

No provision is made in the Old Testament sacrificial system for killing people. This crime was too serious and could not be atoned for and forgiven by rituals—by killing a sacrificial animal. The legislation was established to investigate acts of killing in the six cities of refuge where the killer could run and be tried to discover if he committed an involuntary slaughter or a murder (Exod 21:12–14; Num 35:9–34; Deut 4:41–43; 19:1–13; Josh 20).

A close examination of the term ratsakh raises questions about translating the phrase *lo' tirtsakh* as "do not murder" and using the word alone as a rationale to distinguish between various kinds of killing such as murder, manslaughter, or justifiable homicide, because the term ratsakh does not necessarily mean to intentionally kill someone. Also, the "avenger of blood" may lawfully kill the one guilty of manslaughter should the latter leave a city of refuge (Num 35:27, 30). In addition, there are several places in Deuteronomy (Deut 4:41–42, 19:3–6) and passages scattered throughout Numbers and Joshua (Num 35:6–31; Josh 20:3–5) that use the word to refer to unintentional killing or causing accidental death, namely manslaughter. Premeditation had to be determined by a judicial process, yet both those found guilty of premeditation and those considered innocent of premeditation were described by the same Hebrew term *harotseakh*, "the one who kills," "the one who commits ratsakh." Thus, the person responsible for accidental killing/ manslaughter is called *harotseakh* in the city of refuge (Num 35:12). Of course, the term ratsakh also has the connotation of "murder" or "assassination" (Judg 20:4, 1 Kgs 21:19, 2 Kgs 6:32). The term ratsakh is used for premeditated (Num 35:16–21, 30) as well as accidental or involuntary killing (Num 35:7, 11; Deut 4:42). The contextual markers usually indicate if ratsakh means "killing" or "murder."

In the context of the cities of refuge, the term ratsakh is used for executing capital punishment (Num 35:30).

The word ratsakh used in Proverbs 22:13 refers to a lion killing a person, so motivation for killing is not in place. So not only humans, but also animals can kill (ratsakh), which means that motivation for the action is not always included.

The verb ratsakh is not used directly in situations of war, but a noun *retsakh* is referred to in Ezekiel 21:22. This cognate noun (meaning "killing, murder") refers to the slaughter in a battle.

By implication, this commandment cannot be used to support not carrying guns (for protection from snakes or wild animals), unless guns are used only for the purpose of killing people.

God speaks to the nation that consists of people who are members of the covenantal community. It means

these laws are highly personal and no one can take his or her own life or the life of the other person. God speaks to Israel, His covenantal people, but these principles are for all His people at all times and are the laws for the whole of humankind to keep.

Sarna appropriately states, “Unlike other verbs for taking of life, . . . [r-ts-kh] is never employed when the subject of the action is God or an angel.”²¹

When Paul summarizes the law as being love, he quotes from the Decalogue, including the sixth commandment (Rom 13:8–10). Love is indeed the sum of God’s law because He is the God of love (1 John 4:16). Thus, true love is shown in practical actions springing from faith (Gal 6:5).

In light of the above observations, the wrong question is often asked in regard to the sixth commandment: When is killing not murder? There is no exception to it because it is stated as the principle. This perspective is for each individual to take it as a given fact. One does not ask similar questions such as, when is stealing not wrong? Or when is adultery permissible?

Israelite Casuistic Laws

In contrast to the apodictic law of the sixth commandment, the biblical text explains what to do in case someone violates it and kills. This is an immense problem, so the casuistic law needs to be implemented (see, for example, the legislation for the cities of refuge).

The legal section of the book of Deuteronomy is structured according to the Decalogue in such a way that each commandment of the Decalogue is further explained or applied in this legal part of the second speech of Moses (Deut 12:1–25:16).²² In this way the book of Deuteronomy explains, among other things, the application and relationship to the sixth commandment (Deut 19:1–22:8). These three chapters deal with homicide, holy war, and criminal justice, which now justify legitimate killing because the principle law of respecting and preserving life was not upheld, or when a nation had to engage in a holy war under God’s command. How should capital punishment and killing as a result of military actions during a holy war be understood? This excellent question does not and should not negate, disprove, or contradict our exegetical, conceptual, and theological interpretation of the sixth commandment. We recognize that capital punishment and holy war legislation represent a huge tension with the understanding of the Decalogue’s prohibition of killing. However, these issues must be answered on their own grounds and not by alteration of the meaning and intention of the divine prohibition, “You will not kill.”

In dealing with strong tensions in the biblical text—on the one hand, God’s prescription not to kill, and on

the other hand, His own orders to kill and punish by taking life in specific cases, like murder, rape, kidnapping, defiant transgression of the Sabbath, and holy war—one must have in mind the following facts, on the basis of which they should be understood:

The Ten Commandments are expressed in a personal way; they address individuals (stated in the second person singular). It means that no one can kill a person. When killing occurred, Israel as a society had a legal obligation to deal with the crime or accident, but no person had the right to avenge the killing or murder personally. Proper judicial procedure needed to take place. No Israelite was permitted to take justice into his own hands. Only the authorized ending of life as an expression of the administration of justice upon God’s command was permissible in a specific situation, in which case a judge and at least two witnesses had to be involved. Thus, a theocratic community was delegated with such tasks and capital punishment was rarely executed in Israel’s society.²³

The gravity of killing is demonstrated by the severity of the punishment. There was no sacrificial compensation for killing; only life pays for life in case of murder, or asylum in situations of accidental killing. Ryken writes, “Some [I would say: all] accidental death, although unintentional, are nevertheless culpable, which is why God’s law includes legal sanctions for a person who ‘unintentionally killed his neighbor without malice aforethought’ (Deut. 4:42).”²⁴ The protection of one’s life, family, or nation, as well as God’s honor, cannot be supported by appealing to the meaning of the Hebrew word *ratsakh* alone. Such a move requires a much wider interpretive reading. The satisfaction for the crime of murder has to be performed because life has infinite value (Gen 9:6),²⁵ and it is not within human power to ultimately forgive a murderer (Num 35:31) because the giver of life is God Himself and only upon His command can it be taken away. Ellen G. White wisely comments, “The safety and purity of the nation demanded that the sin of murder be severely punished. Human life, which God alone could give, must be sacredly guarded.”²⁶ Ryken rightly underlines that the various casuistic legislations have one purpose in mind: “The goal is always not the destruction of life but its preservation. . . . Sometimes it is necessary to take a life in order to save a life.”²⁷

God did not intend for the people of Israel to kill other people on the way to the Promised Land. He wanted to fight for His people as He did during the ten plagues (see Exod 7–12) and the crossing of the Red Sea (Exod 13–15). Unfortunately, His plan for fighting for His people so that they would not need to fight and kill in war failed because of Israel’s lack of trust in God and their disobedience (see Gen 15:13–16; Exod 14:13–14, 19, 24–25; 23:23, 27–28; Deut 7:20; Josh 24:12; cf. 2 Chr 20:20–24).

In interpreting biblical laws regarding capital pun-

ishment and engaging in war, one needs to take into account the “theocracy principle.” These biblical laws can be applied only in a situation where God’s people live under God’s direct leadership and rules, which is no longer the case because the theocracy of Israel as a holy nation ended. So this legislation was only valid during the ancient Israelite society.

The Meaning of the Sixth Commandment

The meaning is apparent: respect for life, which is a precious gift from God. Life is extremely fragile and must be carefully preserved; even negligence is punishable (see Deut 22:8). This commandment lacks specificity, as no person or object is directly defined, and the prohibition is consequently more inclusive:

1. Respect for the life of other people (against killing or murder).
2. Respect for one’s own life (against suicide).
3. Respect for the unborn life (against abortion).

Durham states:

Its basic prohibition was against killing, for whatever cause, under whatever circumstances, and by whatever method, a fellow-member of the community. . . . The primary reference of the commandment is religious, not social. . . . רצח as a verb describing killing that occurs primarily within the covenant community. . . . What is certain is that רצח describes a killing of human beings forbidden by Yahweh to those who are in covenant with him.²⁸

It is true that the Decalogue was given to the faith community. However, this legislation goes beyond borders, beyond Israel’s community of faith. All human beings are included, as all were created in God’s image. Thus, the prohibition of killing not only applies to killing a fellow believer, but also has universal implications.

Commandments as God’s Promises

One needs to keep in mind that God’s commandments are actually God’s promises. They are given to His people to obey out of love and gratitude. As Seventh-day Adventists, this is our special contribution to understanding the meaning of the Decalogue.²⁹ This is why God gives these permanent commandments as His promises. White offers this insight into the function of the Decalogue: “The Ten Commandments . . . are ten promises.”³⁰ She stresses that “the voice of God from heaven” speaks “to the soul in promise, ‘This do, and you will not come under the dominion and control of Satan,’”³¹ which is why in Seventh-day Adventists’

thought the Decalogue is perceived as God’s beatitudes. The Ten Commandments are a special gift from God to guide believers to know what He can do for and in them when they let Him. “In the Ten Commandments God has laid down the laws of His kingdom. . . . The Lord has given His holy commandments to be a wall of protection around His created beings.”³² White declares that “all His biddings are enablings.”³³

In the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ made it clear that the intention of the sixth commandment is purity of heart, grounded in deep respect for the life of other human beings. He eloquently speaks about right attitudes toward others, and even against verbal abuse:

You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, “You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.” But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, “Raqa,” will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, “You fool,” will be liable to fiery Gehenna. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny. (Matt 5:21–26, NAB)

It is evident that Jesus goes beyond physical killing. Hamilton aptly comments, “Jesus has the story of Cain’s act of fratricide against Abel in mind when he speaks of ‘anyone who is angry with his brother’ as a kind of killing, or something that, if not controlled, could lead to killing” and he further connects Jesus’ statement with Genesis 4 “by the emphasis on a ‘gift’ in both units.”³⁴

One needs to pray earnestly and sincerely to not be in a situation in which we will be tempted to kill another human being. Jesus teaches in the case of Sabbath observance that it is a matter of prayer and trusting God (Matt 24:20).

Conclusion

The Hebrew word *ratsakh* has a wide range of meanings. It is used in both versions of the Ten Commandments, and is not used only for specific unauthorized killing because such a narrow view cannot be substantiated by the biblical data. Thus, the word “murder” is not an appropriate translation of the sixth commandment, even though it includes murder. Our study leads to the recognition that all killing or taking of human life is prohibited in principle. This commandment is about respect for life, about life’s sacredness, and thus about respect for the Creator God who created humans in His image. So the translation of the sixth commandment should be in broad terms, “You shall not kill,” because it is obvious that the meaning of the word *ratsakh* is not limited to murder.³⁵ When explaining the sixth commandment, the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary states: “Any rightful understanding of our relation to our neighbor indicates that we must respect and honor his life, for all life is sacred (Gen 9:5–6).”³⁶

Doukhan supports our conclusion:

The sixth commandment should not be translated ‘you shall not murder,’ implying only the specific case of a criminal act, but ‘you shall not kill humans’ in a general sense. The prohibition as ‘murder’ would not make sense for an activity in which most common people would rarely think of engaging.³⁷

Frank Hasel comes to a similar conclusion in his study: “The military pledge of allegiance conflicts with allegiance to God’s Word and His unchanging law that commands, among other things, not to kill another person (cf. Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17).”³⁸ The sixth commandment is an absolute command and has a preventive character to preserve the gift of life, because life is sacred. It has a universal sense.³⁹

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1 There are seven main collections of legal material prescribed in the Pentateuch, and the first and principal one is the Decalogue. The seven codes are: 1) the Decalogue (Exod 20:1–17), 2) the Covenant Code (Exod 20:22–23:33), 3) the Ritual Code (Exod 34:10–26), 4) the Sacrificial Code (Lev 1–7), 5) the Purity Code (Lev 11–15), 6) the Holiness Code (Lev 17–27), and 7) the Deuteronomistic Code (Deut 12–26).
2 There are two versions of the Decalogue with very slight differences; the first is recorded in Exodus 20:1–17, and the

second in Deuteronomy 5:6–21. The second version presented orally by Moses to Israel occurred almost forty years later, just before entering the Promised Land (Deut 1:3–4; 4:44–47). These circumstances explain the slight difference that exists between these two versions of the Decalogue. See Ekkehardt Mueller, “Why is the Reason Given for Sabbath Keeping in Deuteronomy 5 Different from that Given in Exodus 20?” in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, ed. Gerhard Pfandl (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 169–173.

3 Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 494.

4 J. Philip Hyatt, *Exodus*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 214. See also Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 344.

5 Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 616.

6 Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 261.

7 Ibid.

8 James J. North, “When Killing Isn’t Murder,” *For God & Country: A Journal for Seventh-day Adventists in Military and Public Service* 1 (2019): 21.

9 Hamilton, *Exodus*, 343.

10 John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 292.

11 Jacques B. Doukhan, *Genesis*, Seventh-day Adventist International Commentary (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2016), 161. “The verb used refers to the killing of persons; it is never used of animals” (John L. Mackay, *Exodus*, A Mentor Commentary [Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2001], 352). Durham also concurs: “The verb refers only to the killing of persons, never to animals” (293).

12 Doukhan, *Genesis*, 162.

13 Ibid.

14 There are several biblical passages that legislate life in the cities of refuge (Exod 21:12–14; Num 35:9–34; Deut 4:41–43; 19:1–13; Josh 20). Six cities were chosen for this purpose—namely, Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan in pre-Jordan, and Kedesh, Shechem and Hebron (Kiriath-arba) in the land of Israel. The provision was made to establish six cities of refuge where the killer could flee and was judged to determine if the killing was intentional or accidental.

15 Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 315.

16 Doukhan, *Genesis*, 161.

17 Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 193.

18 Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians*, 89.

19 Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1985), 21.

20 Dozeman, *Exodus*, 494.

21 Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 113.

22 Stephen A. Kaufman, “The Structure of the Deuteronomistic Law,” *MAARAV* 1, no. 2 (1978–1979): 105–158; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 127–137.

23 Sarna, *Exodus*, 113.

24 Ryken, *Exodus*, 616.

25 Students of the Bible may find three competing interpretations of Genesis 9:6. 1) God is the giver of life, so He Himself will punish those who transgress this foundational respect for life and kill another person. 2) Humans need to

perform the punishment (biblical *locus classicus* for capital punishment), but not on the basis of personal revenge; each case has to be taken into court, and the guilty person has to die (it is a legal legislation against a personal feud or hostility). 3) The text only asserts that the guilty person has to die—the *lex talionis* (life for life)—but it does not specify how or by whom. For details, see Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 315.

26 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1958), 516.

27 Ryken, *Exodus*, 617. The biblical flood is the primary example of this principle when God destroys to ultimately preserve life.

28 Durham, *Exodus*, 293.

29 See Jiří Moskala, “The Decalogue in Luther and Adventism,” in *Here We Stand: Luther, the Reformation, and Adventism*, eds. Michael W. Campbell and Nikolaus Satelmajer (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2017), 101–116.

30 Ellen G. White, Manuscript 41, 1896, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953), 1:1105.

31 Ellen G. White, Letter 89, 1898, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953), 1:1105.

32 Ellen G. White, Manuscript 153, 1899, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953), 1:1105.

33 Ellen G. White, *Christ Object Lessons* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1900), 333.

34 Hamilton, *Exodus*, 344.

35 See Wilma A. Bailey, “You Shall Not Kill” or “You Shall Not Murder”?: *The Assault on a Biblical Text* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005); idem, “You Shall not Kill”: The Meaning of RTSH in Exodus 20:13,” *Encounter* 65, no. 1 (2004): 39–54.

There is an important implication in our study: Seventh-day Adventists’ official position on non-combatancy status is in direct harmony with the proposed exegetical, conceptual, and theological understanding of the sixth commandment. The attitude of non-combatancy is rooted in the biblical data and its interpretation.

36 *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Washington DC: Review and Herald, revised 1976), 606.

37 Doukhan, *Genesis*, 162. See also Ekkehardt Mueller who argues that the change from “killing” to “murder” is often done for political agenda (The Power of Culture, <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Power%20of%20Culture.pdf> [accessed 08-22-2019]).

38 Frank M. Hasel, “Ethical Challenges in Military Service,” *Adventists and Military Service: Biblical, Historical, and Ethical Perspectives*, eds. Frank M. Hasel, Barna Magyarosi, and Stefan Hörschle (Madrid: Safeliz, 2019), 162.

39 No wonder that when rabbis reflected on this prohibition, they posed a serious question: “Why was only one man created by God?—to teach that whoever takes a single life destroys thereby a whole world [of human beings]” (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5, as quoted in Sarna, *Exodus*, 114).

The Power of Choice and Life: A Short Theological Reflection

by Frank M. Hasel

It has been said that “man has been endowed by God with the greatest and most awesome of freedoms: the freedom of choice.”¹ Indeed, the ability of human beings to make meaningful choices is one of the most significant aspects of what it means to be human. Our freedom to choose is crucial for any theory of ethics, since moral action has to do with choosing what is right. Our ability and privilege to choose grows in the soil of freedom, which is also the seedbed of true love. Divine love never forces us against our will. To be able to choose freely² is one of the highest human goods. It is at the foundation of many human rights statements and declarations.³ One cannot deny human freedom without rejecting what makes us personal beings rather than animals. The priceless freedom to choose gives dignity to our life. At the same time, it makes us responsible for our decisions and the actions that result from them.

Biblically speaking, human beings are created by God with the ability to choose.⁴ Time and again we find core biblical passages that put before us the option to choose⁵ and we are admonished to choose wisely because the fear of the Lord⁶ is the beginning of wisdom.

As with any freedom, there is a certain risk. Human beings are capable of choosing poorly and sometimes make wrong choices that are more self-centered than obedient to God’s will. Making right choices leads to blessings, but choosing wrongly leads to negative results. The Bible uses the terminology of blessings and curses for this experience (cf. Deut 28).

According to the Bible, our capacity to choose is an essential part of being created in the image of God. It coheres well with the biblical religious experience and the nature of God. In the Bible, God is the one who freely chose to create us, and God freely chooses to save us in the only way He designed for our salvation. Our freedom to choose reflects this important aspect of God’s nature and makes us powerful agents. In the words of Ellen G. White:

What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice

God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can *choose* to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure.⁷

Our freedom to choose has significant implications for a number of questions—especially those that deal with God’s moral law and pertain to human life. Our freedom to choose does not enable us to create life—which is, biblically speaking, something only God can do. Our human freedom, however, allows and enables us to modify existing life—for instance, through advances in genetic engineering and cloning, the ability to extend life up to a certain degree, or life support systems that help sustain life. On the other hand, our freedom gives us even the supremacy and power to terminate life. It is remarkable that the divine sacredness of life is not exempt from the power of human choice. As creaturely beings, we have the ability to actually terminate life that, biblically speaking, God has given and only God has the right to end. This pertains to our own life as well as the life of other human beings—born or not yet born. Our capability to choose to terminate our own life⁸ is something that distinguishes human beings from animals and sets us apart from the animal world. While this ability to choose elevates us as human beings, it is no guarantee that we are more humane. The splendor and glory of our ability to choose is often diminished by the sublime effect of sin on our choice. There is a remarkable and fascinating paradox in our ability of choice: by choosing to terminate life, we are free to decide to eliminate even the very freedom to choose, which God has given. And the effect of such a decision remains with us as something that is permanent and irreversible. It seems as if God knew about such drastic consequences of our creaturely freedom and therefore provided very strict boundaries to safeguard the sanctity of human life and the freedom it carries. This is reflected in God’s apodictic commandment: “You shall not kill!”⁹

In our modern society, however, God’s unchangeable moral law and our social and political thought are often at odds with each other. This has to do with a long historical development of thought where freedom is understood to be somewhat synonymous with (personal) liberty. In the wake of the Enlightenment, the individual is believed to have the right to pursue one’s life autonomously and apart from overbearing governmental or ecclesiastical restraint or autocratic control. The influential philosopher Immanuel Kant describes the spirit of the Enlightenment in the following words:

Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity.

Immaturity is the inability to use one’s understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. *Sapere Aude!* [dare to know] ‘Have courage to use your own understanding!’—that is the motto of the enlightenment.¹⁰

In Greek ethics, from the time of Democritus and Plato, self-sufficiency and autarky were considered to be the highest form of being and the basis for the good.¹¹ But in contrast with secular Greek philosophy or the liberal mindset of the Enlightenment, the New Testament sees human beings as basically in bondage to sin (cf. John 8:39; Rom 6:20; 2 Pet 2:19). Biblically speaking, we are not to pursue our independence so as to live without God or outside His will. Our attempts to be autonomous from God lead to the greatest bondage and ends in unfreedom, because by living autonomously apart from God we miss what we were meant to be (Matt 16:25; John 12:15). Our true freedom does not consist of the unfettered power to direct our lives independently of God. Rather, it lies in our loving faith relationship with God as He has intended it to be (Rom 6:22; Gal 5:1, 13; 1 Pet 2:16). Here we encounter another paradox of faith: we gain this freedom only as we deny ourselves (Matt 16:24). For if we are free, we do not belong to ourselves (1 Cor 16:19; 9:19; 1 Pet 2:16), but to God who has set us free (Rom 6:18, 22; Gal 5:1). The gift of freedom is bound to the divine Giver and is a call to be faithful to His will. “All things are yours . . . and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God” (1 Cor 3:21, 23).

In matters of faith and love, we realize that human beings do not live just for themselves and by themselves. We are created to live in relationships—with other human beings and supremely with God, our Creator. Without loving relationships life would not exist, and outside a relationship with God no life will ultimately succeed. Living and existing in relationships, however, also limits the boundaries of our freedom. Even in secular society we are free, theoretically at least, only to the extent that the freedom of other human beings is not negatively affected by our individual choices. There is no limitless freedom in this world. Biblically speaking, our freedom to choose is never autonomous freedom. Autonomy strikes at the very heart of biblical faith because God is a God of relationships and it is God, not self, who gives the law and provides divine salvation. Therefore, we are called to make decisions that are in harmony with God’s will as it is expressed in Holy Scripture, rather than making decisions that are in violation of His moral law.

Every person is related to God and in the movement of history is also related to one's fellow human beings. However, we cannot make others or the church responsible for our choices and the way we choose. Ultimately our choices are our own responsibility. The Bible also tells us that we all are affected by sin and that we all are influenced by God's grace. This means that in biblical thought freedom is understood as a state of being where we are rescued from the coercive power of sin that enslaves us in order to be free to live in obedience to God. The more we strive to be faithful to God's will and the promptings of His grace, the greater will be our growth in freedom. Any claim to freedom or liberty that suggests license or a departure from fidelity to God's moral law is false (Rom 6:15; cf. 2 Pet 2:19). Thus, freedom is not gained in emancipation from God but is reached in faithfulness to His Word and in loving service to His will. Therefore, our choices should reflect the good will of our Creator and Redeemer God as stated in His moral law, even if this seems to go against human logic. If we choose to live autonomously from God and in violation of His law, we will misuse our freedom and, in doing so, will experience greater bondage to sin. Hence, the Word of God counsels us to choose wisely and in harmony with the Word of God so that we will be seen as children of God, who abide in God's love if we keep His commandments (John 15:10).

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1 Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Moral Dilemma of the Space Age" in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, ed. Susanna Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 216.

2 Here we are not entering into the complex philosophical discussion of what is meant by free will. The problem of freedom of will is one of the three great metaphysical problems Kant names as lying beyond the power of the human intellect (see John Macquarie, "Free Will and Determinism" in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, eds.

James F. Childress and John Macquarie [Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1986], 237). For the purpose of this brief article we assume the common perception that human beings are capable of making meaningful choices that are not forced but reflect the significantly free decision of the individual.

3 While our ability to freely choose is not listed as a universal human right, it is at the foundation of numerous laws and is presupposed in many civil and fundamental rights. It has been pointed out that "the Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776) gave constitutional formulation for the first time to the principle that all people 'are by nature equally free and independent.' This was the starting point for the freedoms mentioned in standard lists of human or basic rights up to the present day" (Heinz Eduard Tödt, "Freedom, 2. Theological" in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, eds. Erwin Fahlbush, et.al. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999–2003], 2:352).

4 Even in the first chapters of Scripture, God gives Adam and Eve the opportunity to choose to trust His word or to follow their own choosing (cf. Gen 2:16–17; 3:6).

5 Cf. Deut 30:19; 1 Chr 21:10–11; Isa 56:4; 66:4 and passim.

6 In biblical terminology, the "fear of the Lord" is closely connected with the keeping of God's law—that is, with loving obedience (cf. Job 28:28; Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 16:8). Thus, it has been aptly said that the "fear [of the Lord] is a virtue that leads to piety, praise, and humility, since one who fears God recognizes that God, not oneself, is the center of the cosmos" (Tremper Longman, III, "Fear of the Lord" in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, ed. Peter Enns [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008], 205. The one who fears the Lord, who follows God's commandments, does not have to be afraid of other human beings.

7 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1892), 47. Cf. Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 176.

8 For a concise overview of the history of suicide and its reception in Christian thinking, see A. J. Droge, "Suicide," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:225–231.

9 On the meaning of the sixth commandment "You shall not kill" see Jiri Moskala, "'You Shall not Kill' or 'You Shall not Murder'?" *The Meaning of Ratsakh in the Sixth Commandment*, Reflections 67 (July 2019), 1–7.

10 Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" as quoted in <http://theliterarylink.com/kant.html> (accessed May 20, 2019).

11 Cf. Tödt, "Freedom," 352.

"A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil, that good may come out of it. We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive or gain by love and information. . . . Force may subdue, but love gains"

(William Penn, in Jeanne Larson and Micheels-Cyrus Madge, Seeds of

Peace [Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1986], 160).

Lessons from Matthew 8

By Clinton Wahlen

Matthew 8 begins a two-chapter sequence of miracle stories in groups of three, organized topically rather than chronologically. In the first group, Jesus cleanses a leper, heals the servant of a centurion, and banishes the fever of Peter's mother-in-law, followed by a brief summary of further healings that evening (Matt 8:1–17; cf. Mark 1:32–34). The central section is about discipleship with Jesus, confronting two wannabe disciples (Matt 8:18–22). Chapter 8 concludes with two spectacular miracles: the calming of the storm (Matt 8:23–27) and delivering two demoniacs by sending the demons into a herd of pigs (Matt 8:28–34).

Interpretation of the Chapter

Verses 1–17

- The healing of the leper, the first detailed miracle account in Matthew, is analogous to Jesus' work of cleansing people from sin (Matt 1:21), a work all His healings broadly illustrate. Touching a leper would normally defile, but Jesus reverses the equation, imparting purity and healing. Matthew emphasizes the idea of cleansing by mentioning it three times in just two verses (vv. 2–3).
- We see three evidences of the leper's faith: 1) he worships Jesus, 2) he believes Jesus can cleanse him and only wonders about His willingness, and 3) he calls Jesus "Lord."
- After he is healed, Jesus tells the man to go to the priest to verify that he was cleansed, and then go to the temple to offer the requisite sacrifices. Thus Jesus' practical instruction reinforces His earlier assertion that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17). Jesus directs the man to the temple not only for his own benefit but also "as a testimony to them." He sought to reach all levels of society, from leper outcasts to the priestly elite and even Gentiles.
- Excavations at Capernaum, where the next miracle occurs, have revealed a Roman garrison with a Roman bath. Like the leper, the centurion shows his faith in Jesus by calling him "Lord." He also shows respect for the Jewish purity laws by asking Jesus not to enter his house (cf. Acts 10:28).
- According to Luke 7:5, the centurion built the synagogue in Capernaum, so he probably attended it as a God-fearing Gentile and was familiar with the Scriptures. He believes that Jesus need "only say the word" (Matt 8:8, ESV), thinking perhaps of the power of God's word active at creation (Gen 1:3, 6–7, 9; Ps 33:6, 9). Healing from a distance is rare in Scripture. Interestingly, though,

it is usually associated with Gentile requests (2 Kgs 5:9–14; Matt 15:28; cf. John 4:49–53).

- The centurion's reference to his own chain of command to understand Jesus' authority is surprising in light of His calling Jesus "Lord," because that was a title for Caesar. Yet his words suggest that Jesus' authority is superior to and qualitatively different from that of Rome, which of course it is (cf. John 18:36–37). The word is used by the crowds to describe Jesus' authoritative teachings (Matt 7:29) and His authority to forgive sins (Matt 9:8).
- Through faith (one of the "weightier matters of the law," Matt 23:23), the centurion was enabled to understand Jesus' identity and mission more clearly than those who styled themselves "sons of Abraham," and he would sooner find a place at the messianic banquet with Israel's patriarchs. This centurion illustrates why Jesus' mission, as Isaiah describes, was not just to gather the descendants of Jacob, but also to be "a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49:6).
- The third healing miracle occurs at Peter's house, known from excavations. Just one block south of the synagogue, it was large enough to accommodate the extended families of both Peter and Andrew (cf. Mark 1:29). Within a few decades, the center room walls were plastered and Christian graffiti appeared. This suggests its use for Christian gatherings, perhaps making it the earliest known Christian church.
- Peter's mother-in-law, as with the leper, is healed by Jesus' touch. The fever leaves as soon as He touches her hand. The completeness of her recovery is shown by the fact that she immediately begins serving them (Matt 8:15).
- Throughout this chapter, Matthew shows the effortlessness of Jesus' healings. He casts out demons "with a word" (v. 16). No incantation formulas, magic names, or elaborate gesticulations so common to ancient exorcists are needed. God's word has within it the power to accomplish the work (Isa 55:11), not as a kind of magic formula but because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21) and used by Him to impart spiritual life and direction (Ps 119:105; Eph 5:26; Jas 1:21; 1 Pet 1:23).

Verses 18–22

- These verses on discipleship help us understand more about what is involved in following Jesus. The first prospective disciple, described as a "scribe," addresses Jesus as "Teacher." Equivalent

to “Rabbi” (Matt 23:8) it sounds respectful, and Jesus is certainly characterized as the preeminent Teacher in Matthew. But such an address also suggests a more distant relationship than discipleship. Usually in Matthew it is those lacking faith who address Jesus this way (Matt 9:11; 12:38; 17:24; 22:16, 24, 36), whereas those who call Him “Lord” are the true believers. In fact, near the end of Jesus’ ministry, Judas Iscariot twice addresses Him as “Rabbi” (Matt 26:25, 49). So, at this early stage, it seems that this scribe is actually Judas, with high hopes of a prestigious position in the new kingdom—hopes that Jesus seeks to correct by His reference to having “nowhere to lay His head” (v. 20; cf. DA 293).

- The title “the Son of Man,” appearing most frequently in Matthew (here is its first occurrence), is used in all four Gospels only by Jesus and only as a reference to Himself. In the Old Testament it is an idiomatic expression that means “human being” and stresses human frailty (e.g., Num 23:19; Ps 144:3). In the Gospels, however, it refers not only to Jesus’ humanity and role as a servant (Matt 11:19; 13:37; 20:28), but also to His authority as Lord (Matt 9:6; 12:8). It is even used in connection with His return in glory (e.g., Matt 16:27; 24:27, 30), a view similar to that of Daniel’s heavenly Son of Man figure pictured in connection with the judgment and God’s kingdom (Dan 7:13–14).
- Another prospective disciple asks permission first to bury his father—a seemingly urgent and reasonable request, as this was one of the most important responsibilities imaginable in Israel. However, it may refer to a secondary (ossuary) burial of the father’s bones, which could be up to a year in the future. Jesus’ response, to let “the [spiritually] dead” attend to his father’s burial, demands from His closest disciples a level of commitment to the gospel proclamation that surpasses all earthly considerations.

Verses 23–27

- After Jesus and His disciples leave Capernaum by boat, a storm arises on the Sea of Galilee that shakes the boat violently (described by the Greek word *seismos*). Winds descending from the eastern mountains to the sea can produce waves of more than seven feet and these experienced seamen fear for their lives. Only when realizing they are unable to save themselves do they cry to Jesus for help. Both in this case and later, when Peter cries for help as he sinks beneath the waves (Matt 14:30–31), fear short-circuits faith. But Jesus responds immediately. “Never did a soul utter that cry unheeded” (DA 335).
- Interestingly, before calming the storm, Jesus confronts the real problem of doubt, fear, and faulty faith. The word used to describe the disciples’ fear is very rare, occurring only in this story (v.

26; Mark 4:40) and in reference to “the cowardly” who suffer the second death (Rev 21:8). The only real solution to our fears is a faith that exceeds the “little faith” shown by the disciples in this and other situations (Matt 8:26; 14:31; cf. 2 Tim 1:7).

- The question of the disciples, “Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?” furthers the purpose of Matthew’s Gospel in hinting that Jesus as the Messiah has powers like God, who “rebuked the Red Sea . . . and dried it up” (Ps 106:9).

Verses 28–34

- Chapter 8 concludes with a miracle that takes place in “the country of the Gergesenes” (v. 28). Its precise location has been debated since ancient times, but recent excavations have established the presence of a sizeable town and enormous harbor at Kursi on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus and the disciples could have moored the boat. Even more significant is the discovery of an inscription in Hebrew and Aramaic, showing that Jews lived there.
- It is surprising that the herd of swine were in such close proximity to a Jewish village. The owners of the pigs no doubt belonged to this community, but were more interested in material prosperity than piety. Jesus “allowed the evil spirits to destroy the herd of swine as a rebuke to those Jews who were raising these unclean beasts for the sake of gain” (GC 515).
- Matthew has two demoniacs approaching Jesus while Mark and Luke mention only one, apparently because of the one man’s desire to follow Jesus and his subsequent witness “throughout the whole city” (Luke 8:39; cf. Mark 5:20).
- The brevity of Matthew’s account highlights Jesus’ authority over the powers of darkness. He is fearless and totally in charge, whereas His disciples, who go unmentioned, have apparently fled in fear (see DA 337).
- The identification of Jesus as the “Son of God” by the demons is not really welcome in view of the source of the confession, but Jesus seems to see beyond the demoniacs’ appearance to discern their desire for deliverance. The reference to torment is to the executive judgment of the wicked, including the devil and his angels, which takes place at the end of the thousand years (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:1–3, 9–10). Their destruction in the lake of fire is perhaps foreshadowed in the drowning of the swine in the waters of Galilee.
- Perhaps fearing more misfortune, the residents of the city urge Jesus to leave their region. Although He drove out the demons and restored the men to their right mind, now He is driven away. But the seeds sown will bear fruit upon His return (Matt 15:29; cf. Mark 7:31).

Application of the Chapter

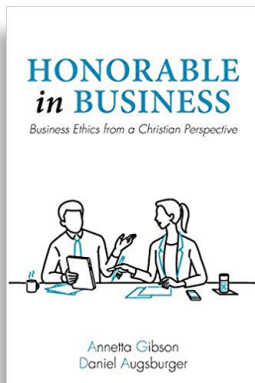
Important lessons contained in this chapter include:

1. Just as Jesus ministered to all levels of society, so we are called to reach “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Rev 14:6).
2. We must be careful not to repeat Israel’s mistake of trusting that our knowledge of Scripture is adequate, or being proud of the light we have received. This increased understanding makes us more accountable before God (Luke 12:47–48) and obligates us to share it with others (cf. Matt 5:14–16).
3. Jesus’ words to the centurion about the power of faith (Matt 8:13) are just as applicable to us today. The unusual command form, “Let it be done” echoes the creation account (Gen 1:3, 6, 14, LXX), reminding us that “with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26). God may not always grant what we want. But if we ask in accordance with His will we can be assured of a positive answer in His time and way (1 John 5:14–15).
4. Jesus’ healing ministry fulfills another of Isaiah’s
5. Servant Songs (Matt 8:17; cf. Isa 53:4). The biblical concept of healing, like that of human beings, is wholistic. Jesus came to heal us completely—physically, mentally, and spiritually. Like Jesus, we are called to minister to the whole person.
6. The fact that Jesus urged the disciples not to fear before rebuking the storm suggests that the real issue is not the circumstances themselves, but whether we look at them through the eyes of fear or faith. We should look at people the same way—with a view to their potential in light of God’s power and grace.
7. Even when we meet with rejection, we may plant seeds for the gospel that will eventually result in a harvest of souls saved for God’s kingdom.

“Whoever says, ‘I am in the light,’ while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness” (1 John 2:9 NRSV)

BOOK NOTES

**Annetta Gibson &
Daniel Augsburg,**
Honorable in Business,
(Wipf and Stock, 2019),
294pp
US \$24.75



Have you ever wondered what is “legal,” “ethical,” and “moral,” and what the differences are between these concepts? We struggle with these questions every day as business people. Laws continually change, ethics tend to drift with the tide of society, and morality is subject to interpretation. And particularly in the dynamic business environment of the modern world, the rules seem to be ever-changing.

Honorable in Business offers a Christian perspective about business ethics. With fraud and other unethical behaviors on the rise, it is a very timely book. The authors present a framework to address modern ethical and moral challenges from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective. It is an excellent resource for leaders who seek to navigate their organizations through the challenging landscape of laws, ethics, and morality.

Gibson, the former dean of the School of Business at Andrews University in Michigan, is retired and currently works on special projects and conducts seminars for the Treasury Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. She speaks frequently on the subject of ethics and leads participants through thoughtful discussions on relevant issues facing accounting and finance professionals. Augsburg, who passed away in 2004, had worked closely with Gibson in the formation of the foundations of this book.

Honorable in Business offers a good perspective on how some of the major failures in business ethics and practice have shaped our business laws and society’s views of various industries and companies. Though laws and regulations always seem to be playing catch-up with changing situations and new challenges, Gibson and Augsburg’s account of how our laws and governance practices have evolved in the wake of major scandals is good insight into why our rules are as they are today. Enron, WorldCom, the Ford Pinto, and other lesser-known cases have all played a role in shaping our legal environment and informing business ethics. Many of these case studies were front-page news items, which makes learning about the underlying details a fascinating read.

Morality, on the other hand, is shaped by one’s philosophical worldview—whether from a Judeo-Christian perspective or other humanistic philosophy proposed by the likes of Kant, Aristotle, or Plato. Again, Gibson and Augsburg present a wide variety of ideas, but eventually hone in on the Christian perspective. Trying to tie biblical morality to modern business situations is at times tenuous, as the complexities of the current financial and commercial environments simply did not exist in biblical times. However, the authors try to help readers find ways to use biblical principles that refine their moral compass in their business dealings.

Ethics—being a convergence of personal morals, organizational values, and legal structure—is inherently more complex. At times ethics is strongly aligned with morality, while at other times ethics may be somewhat amoral, being a function of a set of norms established by organizations or society.

With certain issues, the authors can make a very easy and direct link between law, ethics, and morality. The first chapter, which considers the issue of bribery at Walmart Mexico, finds alignment between these three. Other topics such as responsibility to shareholders and employees become more nuanced since organizations have numerous potential paths that are both legal and moral. The deciding factors would be the organization’s stated or intended goals and objectives and commitments to their stakeholders. Here the authors look at case studies like Malden Mills or Johnson & Johnson in their Tylenol issue to examine these topics and their many facets. There are no simple prescriptions for these types of cases, so the authors seek to provide a strong moral foundation and an understanding of legal frameworks to enable reader to develop their own conclusions and standards of ethical practice.

Furthermore, the authors also begin to engage in a new and growing area of challenge: the internet, and new businesses that make their livelihoods from online users. Issues such as privacy, free speech, and use of data are hot topics today. To thoroughly address this issue would take an additional volume or two. But the authors do begin to tackle the very thorny issues around internet-related businesses,

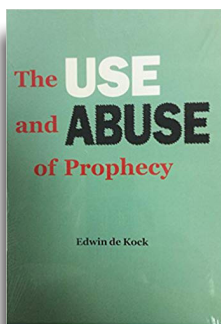
which will morph into the social media and internet ethical issues of today.

Honorable in Business is a well-researched and thoughtful guide for leaders and decision makers to begin to develop their own governance processes that promote, encourage, or ensure ethical and legal behavior. It helps us learn from the mistakes

of others, while guiding us in how to apply biblical principles to modern business situations so we can be the ethical and faithful stewards that God has commanded us to be.

Tim Aka, CFA, MBA
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Books on Prophecy, Edwin de Kock, Edinburg, TX, 2013



US \$12.70

The author of the books in this review is Edwin de Kock, who was born in South Africa in 1930, but has been a United States citizen since 2000. He graduated with honors from the theological course at Helderberg College in 1950. He also holds an MA in Afrikaans and Dutch literature, and a Licentiate of Trinity College, London, England. He was an educator for more than thirty-five years, in South Africa, South Korea, and the United States. He finished his career by teaching college writing at the University of Texas. His fascination with prophecy and history began more than eighty years ago when he became a Seventh-day Adventist, after his mother accepted the Sabbath as a result of reading the Ten Commandments. In addition to his books on prophecy, his work includes articles and poetry in English, Afrikaans, and Esperanto, three of the thirteen languages with which he is acquainted. At the age of eighty-eight, he finished in Esperanto an epic of more than four hundred pages, titled *La Konflikto de la Epokoj* (The Conflict of the Ages). Over the years, De Kock has also lectured and appeared on television and radio in several countries. Both he and Ria, his wife of sixty-four years, are retired at their home a few miles outside Edinburg, Texas. Their two sons with their spouses and three grandchildren also live in the United States.

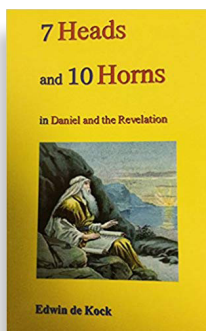
The Use and Abuse of Prophecy, (Edwin de Kock, Edinburg, TX: 2007; 127 pages).

In the first chapter of this book, de Kock summarizes L. E. Froom's *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, a four-volume series on the history of prophetic interpretation from the church fathers until the twentieth century. He traces two tracks of prophetic interpretation during the two thousand years of church history. The first one is the mainline historical interpretation that can already be found in the writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus (second and third century). It dominated prophetic

interpretation until the nineteenth century. The second track contains all the various interpretations that diverged from the historical explanation.

In chapter two, the author outlines seven principles of prophetic interpretation that provide, for him, the means to understand prophecy correctly. These principles are: 1) the internal expositors, or texts that provide an explanation (e.g., Dan 8:20–21); 2) comparing Scripture with Scripture; 3) consistency in applying the same or similar meanings to the same symbols; 4) prophetic augmentation, meaning that later visions on the same topic add further details to the prophetic scenario; 5) historical correctness and honesty, in that prophecies should be correctly measured against historical events; 6) avoiding the interpretation of prophecy with current events; and 7) respecting previous prophetic interpreters. To a large extent, we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. de Kock recognizes that there are other principles of prophetic interpretation,¹ but these are the principles he considers of primary importance.

The second chapter in the book is titled “History as Christian Forgery,” which deals with distortions in historical documents—even Christian documents. The next chapter asks, “But is the Bible True?” as a historical document, and the answer is a resounding “Yes.” The last chapter addresses the issue of “History and Prophecy as Christian Mythology.” Throughout history, rulers and churchmen have applied prophecies to their own time or person. For example, Bishop Eusebius believed that Constantine fulfilled Revelation 12 by casting down the dragon, which for him was paganism. More recently, Herbert W. Armstrong of the Worldwide Church of God taught that the English and American people are descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel. Prophecy and history are indeed closely intertwined, but incorrect interpretations of Scripture have produced a variety of Christian mythologies. The book *The Use and Abuse of Prophecy* is



US \$17.00

a valuable introduction to the interpretation of prophecy. It highlights the importance of proper principles of interpretation and the pitfalls the student of prophecy should avoid. The history of prophetic interpretation in chapter one provides a concise summary of the various methods of prophetic interpretation in church history and helps the reader understand why today we have preterist, futurist, and historicist interpretations of Daniel and Revelation. Every student of prophecy will benefit from the study of this small volume on prophetic interpretation.

7 Heads and 10 Horns in Daniel and Revelation (Edwin de Kock, Edinburg, TX: 2011; 207 pages)

In this volume the author surveys various Adventist and non-Adventist interpretations of the seven heads and ten horns and comes to the conclusion that all of them fall short of getting it right. In agreement with traditional historicism, he identifies the woman in Revelation 12:1 as God's people in the Old and New Testaments, and the woman in Revelation 17 with apostate Christianity, including Catholicism and the degenerate forms of Protestantism (p. 41). The scarlet beast he identifies with Satan.

The author introduces an interesting interpretation when he deals with the seven heads of the scarlet beast (Rev 17:3). Generally, Adventists have interpreted the seven heads as the major persecuting powers of Israel in history—namely Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, the Roman Empire, and the papacy.² de Kock begins his list with Babylon and Medo-Persia, but then he goes to Daniel 7:6 and introduces the four heads of the third beast (and the four horns in Dan 8:8) as the next four powers in Revelation 17. Thus, head number three is Macedonia and Greece, followed by the Seleucids of Syria and the Ptolemies of Egypt. The sixth head is the Greco-Roman Empire of Magna Graecia, Sicily, etc., and the seventh head is the papacy. Revelation 17:10 is explained as follows: The five fallen kingdoms are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Macedonia and Greece, the Seleucids in Syria, and the Ptolemies in Egypt. “The one that is” is the Greco-Roman Empire of Magna Graecia, Sicily, etc., and the one that “has not yet come” is the papacy (p. 81).³ The historical basis of de Kock's interpretation is the fact that “a large and influential

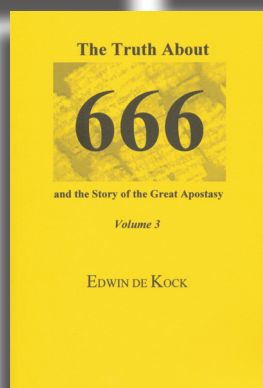
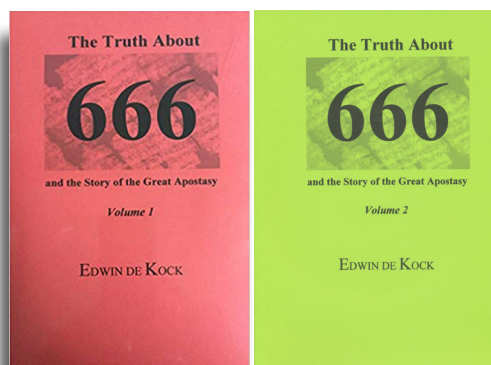
portion of Hellas, the region that lay in the West (particularly Sicily, Italy, and southern Gaul) at no time came under his [Alexander's] control” (p. 82). This large region, which the Romans called Magna Graecia (p. 85), is for the author the fourth horn in Daniel 8:8, out of which, following Rome's conquest of all these lands, came the little horn, the papacy. de Kock spends many pages buttressing his contention that the Roman Empire was really a Greco-Roman Empire. Thus, for him, the little horn came out of one of the four horns of Daniel 8:8–9. This is not a new interpretation; a similar position was held Taylor G. Bunch in his commentary on Daniel. He wrote, “Rome did come out of the Macedonian or western division of Alexander's empire,”⁴ by which he meant the “Greek part of Italy.”⁵

By including the western Greeks in Italy in Daniel's prophecies, de Kock believes he has solved some of the problems in Daniel 8. For example, when Alexander died in 323 BC, rival generals fought for control over his empire. In 311 BC there were five of them, ten years later there were four, and in 281 BC only three were left: the Antigonids who ruled Macedonia and Greece, the Seleucids in Syria, and the Ptolemies in Egypt. To complete the four, says de Kock, we need the Greeks in Sicily and southern Italy (p. 149).

The second problem concerns the origin of the little horn. He rejects the current Adventist position that the little horn came out of one of the four winds,⁶ which he says, “flies in the face of both the prophetic context and the historical facts” (p. 150). However, this is not just an Adventist position; the Protestant scholar A. Bloomfield wrote, “The little horn, we are told, is to come out of one of the four winds of heaven (v. 8).”⁷ de Kock's offhand dismissal of the Adventist position may be due in part to the fact that he is not a Hebraist.⁸

A third problem, according to de Kock, is the phrase “in the latter time of their kingdom” (Dan 8:23). De Kock insists that this must refer to the four kingdoms. When Rome expanded its territory during the Punic wars (264–146 BC), only three of the traditional four kingdoms were still in existence. Hence the Greco-Roman Empire of Magna Graecia is needed to make up four kingdoms.⁹

According to this reviewer, the book *7 Heads and 10 Horns in Daniel and Revelation* is the best scholarly defense of the position that the little horn came out of



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one of the four horns in Daniel 8. Apart from the position whether this view is correct or not, the book is valuable because it is full of historical events and facts that are of interest to every student of the books of Daniel and Revelation.

The Truth About 666, second rev. ed., 3 vols. (Edwin de Kock, Edinburg, TX: 2013; 880 pages).

The three volumes of de Kock's magnum opus contain the most extensive treatment of the traditional historicist interpretation of the enigmatic number 666 in Revelation 13:18. At the present time, two views concerning it prevail in the Adventist Church. The traditional view, which de Kock defends, holds that it is one of the many titles of the pope in Rome; the second view teaches that it is a human number that "stands for the satanic triumvirate in contrast to the triple seven of the Godhead in Revelation 1:4–6."¹⁰

Whatever view one holds on the issue, these three volumes are a veritable goldmine of historical information on this issue. Every Adventist interested in the meaning of 666 will benefit from reading this trilogy. My review of the three volumes was published in the *Adventist Review*, May 15, 2014.

Christ and Antichrist in Prophecy and History (Edwin de Kock, Edinburg, TX: 2013; 419 pages)

This book is a defense of the historicist method of prophetic interpretation. The author deals specifically with the book of Daniel, focusing on the prophecies concerning Christ and the antichrist. After a brief introduction and some pointers on how to study prophecy, he spends four chapters interpreting and explaining the historical background to the prophecy of the image in Daniel 2, and two chapters on the vision of the four beasts out of the sea in Daniel 7. As he had done in the book *7 Heads and 10 Horns in Daniel and Revelation*, he emphasizes again that the fourth power in Daniel 2 and 7 is a Greco-Roman power (p. 99).

In chapter 9, titled "The History That Never Was," the author looks at prophecies that predict a Messianic kingdom in Old Testament times, in which "nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more" (Mic 4:3). A wonderful temple would be built (Ezek 40–48)

and the Messiah would rule as king (Mic 5:2–4, Isa 9:6–7). Because general prophecies are conditional (Jer 18:7–10), Israel's failure to live up to God's plan for them meant that this kingdom never became a reality. Nevertheless, the essentials of this prophecy will be fulfilled in the heavenly kingdom. The apocalyptic prophecies in Daniel, however, are not conditional, and they depict a very different history. Thus "God gave two sets of predictions, foretelling entirely different histories for the world: two tracks so to speak" (p. 110). Which of the two would actually take place depended on God's people.

The next four chapters (10–13) provide a brief summary of Messianic prophecies and their fulfillment. One of the most important Messianic prophecies was the seventy-week prophecy, which predicted Christ's ministry and His death in AD 31. In this connection the author points out that the futurist/dispensational interpretation "is simplistic, unscriptural, and has given rise to many errors" (p. 140).

Chapters 14–19 address the issue of the antichrist—the little horn, or the papacy. He traces the origin and development of the papacy and its effect on Christianity, of which the change from Sabbath to Sunday was one of the most significant. Chapter 18, "Words Against the Most High," chronicles the blasphemous statements of the popes, who claimed to rule in the place of God, "and to speak ill of them was to slander God himself" (p. 206). The next chapter, "Tampering With God's Law," is an exposition of Daniel 7:25, which not only refers to the change from Sabbath to Sunday, but also to a number of other changes in the Ten Commandments. de Kock says, "The papacy has altered more than half of the Decalogue" (p. 231).

The next section of three chapters (20–22) explains the ten horns and the little horn and its activity in Daniel 7:7–8. The ten horns are seen as the Germanic tribes "who took over the Western Roman Empire and later became European nations that still exist" (p. 250). The following, the author says, are representative: "Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Franks, Vandals, Alemanni, Saxons, Heruli, Lombards, Burgundians, and Suebi" (p. 255).¹¹ The little horn is the antichrist, which from the third century on has been identified by some as the Roman Church or the papacy. de Kock provides pages of historical evidence for this fact. He also refutes the preterist and futurist interpretations that identify

the little horn either with the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes, or with a single future individual who would rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and abolish the Christian religion (p. 272–277). For de Kock, the three uprooted horns are the Heruli, the Ostrogoths, and the Vandals.¹² He believes the Germanic Christians were not Arians,¹³ but that they kept the Sabbath and refused to accept Rome's insistence on Sunday-keeping (p. 290).¹⁴ In chapter 23, "The Sevenfold Prophecy and the Year-Day Principle," de Kock defends the year-day principle, and in the next chapter he addresses the question "Why Christians Persecute Christians?" He provides a long list of atrocities committed by Christians against Christians throughout church history and concludes that the reason for Christians persecuting Christians is "that they have forgotten what their religion is supposed to be based on: love, not only for the Lord in heaven, but also for every human being on earth." (p. 346). An appendix on "Literature and the Bible" concludes the book.

A More Sure Word of Prophecy (Edwin de Kock, Edinburg, TX: 201; 68 pages).

This booklet is based on four lectures presented in Havana, Cuba, in 2014, to which the author added some additional material. The book focuses on historicism, which, as the author says, "validates itself by comparing Bible predictions with events as they unfold through the centuries, and is therefore fully credible. This is not true of any other method, like Idealism, Preterism, or Futurism" (back cover). In contrast to historicism, all of them deny that the papacy is the antichrist.

de Kock begins with a survey of ancient historicist interpreters—for example, Jewish rabbis who identified the fourth beast in Daniel 7 with Rome, and the Church Fathers Irenaeus (c. 130–203), Tertullian (c. 160–240), and Hippolytus (c. 170–235), all of whom interpreted the four kingdoms in Daniel as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. He believes that historicism flourished during three periods of church history: in Apostolic and post-Apostolic times, from pre-reformation times until the early nineteenth century, and among the Millerites and present-day Seventh-day Adventists (p. 21).

The second half of the book pays particular attention to the revival of historicism after the Middle Ages, in which Augustine's view held sway. Augustine (354–430) taught that the fourth kingdom was Greece and the stone in Daniel 2 was the Catholic Church. The revival of historicism, the author believes, began with the Waldenses, Albigenses, and men like Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202), Dante Alighieri (1263–1321), and the Dominican priest Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498).

The Reformers all saw the papacy as the Antichrist. The Counter-Reformation, therefore, deflected this criticism by introducing Luis Alcazar's (1554–1613) preterism and Francisco Ribera's (1537–1591) futurism (p. 44). Both men were Spanish Jesuits, whose teachings were eventually taken over by Protestants. Futurism in particular has become the hallmark of Protestant eschatology, as the books by Hal Lindsay and the *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins show.

This booklet is a good survey and explanation of the three major methods of interpreting the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation: historicism, preterism, and futurism. It and all the other books reviewed are well researched and documented. The only thing missing are indices (scholars like indices!).

Of all the books reviewed, *Christ and Antichrist in Prophecy and History* is probably the most useful for pastors and church members. It contains a great amount of historical background information concerning the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation that can be used in Bible studies, sermons, and public lectures.

While one may not agree with all the positions presented, all the books are valuable additions to the library of anyone interested in the apocalyptic prophecies of Scripture. They can be purchased from Amazon, or directly from the author edwdecock@hotmail.com.

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US \$8.50

1 See for example, George W. Reid, ed., *Understanding Scripture* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005).

2 F. D. Nichol, ed., "Revelation," *Seventh Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1978), 7:855. See also Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, rev. ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 521.

3 The problem with this view is that Magna Graecia was a number of independent city-states in southern Italy, but never a Graeco-Roman empire. They originated in the eighth century BC, long before the four horn replaced the kingdom of Greece. By the time the Antigonids, the Seleucids, and the Ptolemies were established in their kingdoms in the third century BC, Magna Graecia was nearing its end. When in 282 BC the Romans appeared in the Tarentine Gulf the end was near.

4 Taylor Bunch, *The Book of Daniel* (reprint, Payson, AZ: Leaves-of-Autumn, 1986), 11.

5 Ibid., 113.

6 William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, rev. ed., DARCOM Series, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 50; Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 125.

7 Arthur E. Bloomfield, *The End of the Days: A Study of Daniels Visions* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1961), 165.

8 The Adventist Old Testament scholar Martin Pröbstle has put together some solid arguments

for the Adventist position that the little horn comes from one of the four winds. See his book "Truth and Terror: A Text-Oriented Analysis of Daniel 8:9–14" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2006), 119–126.

9 Except that by that time most of these city-states had disappeared or were taken over by the Romans.

10 Stefanovic, 437.

11 The fact is, the Roman Empire succumbed to many more than ten Germanic tribes, it is better therefore to take the number ten as a round figure (e.g., Gen 31:7; Num 14:22; 1 Sam 1:8; etc.) indicating the multiplicity of states in contrast to the one empire of Rome.

12 More recently, Adventist scholars have identified them with the Visigoths, Vandals, and Ostrogoths. See Heinz Schaidinger, *Historical Confirmation of Prophetic Periods* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 30; William H. Shea, *Daniel 1–7*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1996), 168.

13 The fact is, most of the Goths were Arians or semi-Arians, some however were not; see Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 75–85; Peter Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 245.

14 This is based on a statement by Sidonius Apollinarius, a bishop in France (c. 430–489).

*“Be strong and take heart, all
you who hope in the Lord”
(Psalm 31:24 NIV)*

Index to *Reflections*

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“Let us the pursue what makes for
peace and for mutual upbuilding.”
(Romans 14:19 NRSV)

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

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