

Revelation



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 7:1–6, Ps. 19:1–4, Rom. 1:18–20, 2 Tim. 3:14–16, Heb. 1:1–3.*

Memory Text: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (*Hebrews 1:1, 2, NIV*).

For some people, God is a distant power who at a remote moment in the past set the world in motion but no longer interferes with what happens here. That, of course, is not the God portrayed in the Bible, who instead is consistently shown to be a loving Father, the Creator who continues to take an intimate interest in His creatures. He is the Covenant God, and He seeks to establish a bond between Himself and the people made in His image.

This God is a great Communicator. Human words cannot adequately explain who and what God is, but the fact that He constantly is referred to as speaking to His people is utterly significant.

As soon as Adam was created, God spoke to Him. Immediately after the first human inhabitant of this world had sinned, God called to him, Adam, “ ‘where are you?’ ” (*Gen. 3:9, NIV*). And ever since, God has spoken to humankind in various ways (*Heb. 1:1*). Even on the final page of the Bible we find confirmation of this in the divine appeal, “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ ” (*Rev. 22:17, NIV*). This week we’ll look at various ways He speaks to us today.

The Week at a Glance: The God who spoke the world into existence speaks to all who are willing to listen.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 2.

God Reveals Himself Through Nature

Read Psalm 19:1–4 and Romans 1:18–20. These are the two most cited texts when the concept of God’s revelation through nature is under discussion. Summarize in your own words what these two passages teach us.

“God has surrounded us with nature’s beautiful scenery to attract and interest the mind. It is His design that we should associate the glories of nature with His character. If we faithfully study the book of nature, we shall find it a fruitful source for contemplating the infinite love and power of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 144. Those who believe in the Bible will be confirmed in their convictions that when they look at the starlit sky or see the majestic trees in the forests and the beauty of the setting sun behind snow-covered mountaintops, they are seeing the works of a loving and powerful Creator. When they see an eagle in flight, admire a tulip, or marvel about the intricacies of the human body, they see evidences of God’s invisible qualities and agree that nature indeed declares the glory of God.

But the Bible passages take us a step further. They also suggest that the nonbeliever, by looking at nature, will somehow catch a glimpse of a divine Power that designed and made all that is. In today’s world many close their eyes to this aspect. They have imbibed evolutionary thinking and want to explain all that exists in terms of chance and necessity. But, increasingly, scholars are admitting that there is so much evidence of intelligent design that this can be ignored only by those who stubbornly close their eyes to it.

Ask yourself a simple question: What is the more logical and reasonable explanation for the beauty and complexity of life: pure chance or a purposeful and planned-out creation? Defend your answer.

Read Psalm 19:1–4 and Romans 1:18–20 again. To what extent is God revealed in nature? At the same time, what things about God does nature not tell us? However revealing nature is, what else do we know about God that we can’t find by looking at the glories of creation?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Hebrews 1:1, 2*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: That God speaks to all who are willing to listen.

Feel: The many ways God communicates with you.

Do: Become receptive to the Spirit's voice by spending time with God.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. God Speaks (*1 Sam. 3:1–10*)

This text is just one example of God's willingness to speak to us directly. In this case, God calls out to Samuel four times before he responds. What does this say about God's desire to communicate with us?

II. Man Listens (*Heb. 1:1–3*)

A God speaks to us in a variety of ways. We can see His glory through nature, His knowledge in prophecy, and His love through Jesus. How does God speak to you personally?

B The Bible often is referred to as God's letter to us. How can we make Scripture more relevant in this modern world?

III. God and Man Commune (*John 5:36–40*)

A Jesus says that the only way to the Father is through Him (*Matt. 11:27*). No matter how much you study the Word or understand prophecy, without Jesus, you can't know God the Father. How can you invest your time this week communing with God?

B In what ways can you listen to God's leading and let yourself be more receptive to what He has to say?

► **Summary:** God loves us so much that He wants to have an ongoing dialogue with us. He speaks to us through many means, the most powerful of which is Jesus.

God Speaks Through Our Conscience

“Conscience” is sometimes defined as the faculty, or inward principle, that helps us decide between right and wrong. Even those who do not believe in God usually possess some insight into what is morally acceptable and what must be rejected (*Rom. 2:14, 15*). The Christian believes that God is the supreme Lawgiver and that He has placed in humanity a conscience, even though sin has blunted this God-given tool for moral decision-making. In most Bible translations we do not find the word *conscience* in the Old Testament, though it occurs numerous times in the New Testament. But whether or not the term is used, the concept is present throughout Scripture.

Name a few stories in which we can see the impact of conscience on the lives of people. (See, for instance, *Gen. 42:18–23, Daniel 5, Matt. 27:3–5, John 8:1–9*.)

Important though our conscience is, it is not always totally trustworthy. We notice that people in good conscience often come to very diverse conclusions about what to do in particular circumstances. The apostle Paul was aware of this, as his remarkable statement in 1 Corinthians 4:4 shows: “My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me” (*NIV*). The same apostle also warns that we can resist the pull of our conscience. In fact, some people appear to have seared their consciences with a hot iron (*1 Tim. 4:2*) or have corrupted them (*Titus 1:15*). On the other hand, there are ways of sharpening one’s conscience. Being in tune with God by regularly reading His Word and by frequently communicating with Him in prayer will make us more sensitive to the voice of the Spirit, who can speak to us through our conscience.

How do you arrive at important moral decisions? Do you listen to your conscience? How can you be sure that your small, inner voice is not overruled by other voices in and around you? How can you know whether or not you can trust your conscience? When was the last time you let your conscience be your guide and ended up making a wrong moral decision? What did you learn from that experience that could help you not to repeat it?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God reveals Himself and His plan for our lives through a number of sources, including nature, the conscience, His prophets, the Bible, and, most of all, Jesus.

Sugar’s rather villainous reputation is enough to leave a sour aftertaste in the mouth of someone with the biggest sweet tooth. There’s no denying that when sugar occurs naturally in nutritious foods, such as honey and papayas, it is, of course, beneficial. But it’s no secret that too much sugar can have detrimental effects on the body.

However little or much of it we may use, we all crave sugar, and there’s just no denying it makes certain foods taste better. We know that sugar is present in candy or cake, but did you know that it also can be a “hidden” ingredient in soups and sauces, ketchup, and even some meats? When sugar is included in foods in which you might not expect to find it, sugar’s sweetness often is disguised by less sugary names, such as lactose, maltodextrin, high fructose corn syrup, sorbitol, and xylitol.

Like sugar, a knowledge of God and His will also can be obtained through abundant sources. God reveals Himself to us through nature, our conscience, His prophets, the Bible, and, ultimately, through Jesus Christ. One has only to avail oneself of these sources in order to “taste and see that the Lord is good,” as the psalmist says (*Ps. 34:8*). The difference, however, is that giving in to the soul’s craving for a knowledge of God—unlike too much sugar—actually is good for you.

Consider This: When you want something sweet, what do you usually crave? Mangoes? Coconut custard pie? Baklava? Chocolate cherry chunk ice cream? Granted, everyone’s taste buds crave something different, and we might find ourselves reaching for chocolate instead of an apple more often than we’d care to admit, but our cravings for sweet foods actually may have something beneficial to teach us about our cravings for spiritual things. Too often we may fill this “God hunger,” or craving for spiritual things, with other kinds of stimuli that do not feed or satisfy our soul. How can the different ways that God reveals Himself to us offer the true nourishment and sustenance the soul needs most?

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God Speaks Through Prophets

Many people have a very restricted view of the gift of prophecy. Prophecy is mainly seen in terms of predictions, and the prophets they are aware of are those who have given their names to a number of books in the Bible. The facts are different. God used prophets on a much wider scale than one would think. And prophecy is not only about predictions. It stands for much more.

How does the relationship between Moses and his brother Aaron illustrate the key meaning of the word *prophet*? *Exod. 7:1–6*.

The passage of Exodus 7:1–6 highlights the true work of a prophet. Moses, who himself is referred to as a great prophet (*Deut. 34:10–12*), was assisted by his brother, who served as his spokesperson. “Moses is like God to Aaron, who is like a prophet to Pharaoh. The clear idea is that prophets don’t manufacture their own speeches but only pass on what they have heard from God.”—Jon Dybdahl, *Exodus*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), p. 80.

A prophet is a man or a woman who speaks on behalf of God. Those words have authority because the message comes from God, even though the prophet may choose his or her own words to convey that message. God used this manner of communicating with His people quite extensively, as Amos underlined when he stated, “The Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets” (*Amos 3:7, NIV*).

What does Scripture say about the continuation of the gift of prophecy beyond Old Testament times? Look at the following sample of the New Testament evidence. What do you conclude?

1. Prophets mentioned by name (*Luke 1:67, 2:36, Acts 13:1*)
2. The abiding gift (*1 Cor. 12:28, 14:1–5*)
3. False prophets (*2 Pet. 2:1, Rev. 2:20*)
4. A characteristic of the remnant church (*Rev. 12:17, 19:10*)

What has been the impact of the writings of Ellen G. White (who had the gift of prophecy) upon your own life? How has God spoken to you through her ministry? In what ways could you better avail yourself of the blessings of this gift?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 2—Explore****Bible Commentary**

I. Seeing Is Believing (*Review Psalm 19:1–4 and Romans 1:18–20 with your class.*)

Consider This: How is God revealed in nature?

“The invisible things of God may be clearly perceived by the mind with the help of the created works of nature. Even though blighted by sin, the ‘things that are made’ testify that One of infinite power created this earth. All around us we see abundant evidence of His goodness and love. Thus it is possible for even the heathen to recognize and acknowledge the power of the Creator.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 478.

Still, as beautiful and potent a witness as nature is, it alone cannot reveal the plan of salvation. For the fuller picture, we must turn to other sources, such as the Word of God and the revelation of God through Jesus.

Consider This: What do we need to know about God that nature cannot tell us?

II. Taking God at His Word (*Review Hebrews 1:1–3 and 2 Peter 1:19–21 with your class.*)


Consider This: What gives authenticity to a prophet’s words? Why do we know that we can trust the Bible prophets?

We can trust God’s prophets because “true prophecy is a revelation from God. . . . He decides what shall be revealed and what shall remain concealed. Unless the Holy Spirit impresses the mind, man is incapable of prophesying—of speaking forth for God—no matter how ardently he may wish to do so.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 602.

Consider This: What is the Holy Spirit’s role in revelation and inspiration?

III. In the Flesh (*Review Hebrews 1:3 and John 14:8, 9 with your class.*)

Have you ever met a child who looked, sounded, and acted just like his or

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God Reveals Himself in His Word

Many of the things God has revealed through His prophets in the past have not been handed down and have not, eventually, found their way into the Bible. But some of those revelations from God, which were received by a few dozen people during a period of more than fifteen hundred years, were written down. The compilations of these writings is our Bible. Jesus and His contemporaries treasured the writings that we today refer to as the Old Testament. Today our Scriptures include also the Gospels and other apostolic writings from the first period of the church.

Paul commended Timothy for his diligent reading of God’s Word, which, he said, has the capacity to make you wise for salvation. How does he in this context further describe the influence of the Written Word of God? 2 Tim. 3:14–16.

“As we contemplate the great things of God’s Word, we look into a fountain that broadens and deepens beneath our gaze. Its breadth and depth pass our knowledge. As we gaze, the vision widens; stretched out before us, we behold a boundless, shoreless sea. Such study has vivifying power. The mind and heart acquire new strength, new life.

“This experience is the highest evidence of the divine authorship of the Bible. We receive God’s Word as food for the soul through the same evidence by which we receive bread as food for the body.”
—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 26.

More Bibles are sold today than ever before. New versions for specific target groups keep appearing. We have Bible versions that are more easily accessible to beginners, while we also have versions that lend themselves to liturgical use. And this is a good thing. But that does not necessarily mean that the Bible also is more widely read. In fact, there are indications that Bible reading among Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, is on the wane. Many do not know their Bible as a former generation once knew it. But only at our own eternal peril can we ignore the Word of God, which has the power to speak to us afresh every time we open it.

How much time did you spend with your Bible during the past week? In the past month? Is Bible reading a prominent feature in your daily program? If not, why not? Compare the time you spent in front of the TV with the time spent reading the Word. What changes might you need to make?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

her parent? It can be an unsettling experience. You may have even felt as though you were in the presence of the very person the child resembled, though, of course that was not the case.

Jesus resembled His Father in character even more than any earthly parent and child ever could resemble each other. He and the Father are One. Jesus' presence here on earth was the most complete revelation of God ever given to humanity. "Christ was the express image of His Father's person."—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 148. Additionally, "Christ came to the world to reveal the character of the Father and to redeem the fallen race. . . . He made known in His words, His character, His power and majesty, the nature and attributes of God."—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 38.

Consider This: How can we grow to "look more like" God? What is the relationship between growing in Him and growing to look like Him? What can we learn from Jesus' own example? What does His closeness or oneness with the Father reveal about how we may attain God's character attributes?


► STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

- 1 What is the best way to get to know someone or for someone to get to know you? Make a list. How can these ways be compared to the ways that God reveals Himself to us? What can we learn from them about the ways in which we come to know God?
- 2 Romans 1:18–20 tells us that the "invisible things" of the eternal power of God and the Godhead are revealed so clearly through nature that an ignorance of Him or a refusal to acknowledge Him is "without excuse." Pretty powerful words. Put them to the test. What specific example or examples can you find in nature that reveal God's "eternal power" or that illustrate the concept of the "Godhead"? Explain your answer.

Application Questions:

- 1 Think of someone who knows you very well. How did that understanding come about? Did it develop through letters, phone calls, e-mails, IMs (Instant Messages), face-to-face conversations, shared experiences, or all of

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Christ—God Comes to Us in Person

Getting letters from someone on a regular basis can go a long way toward getting to know that person more intimately. Receiving a picture will reveal another dimension of that person. But you will not really know that person until you actually have spent time face-to-face.

Because of sin, God could no longer commune with us as He had done with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Though He has communicated with us very effectively in various ways, He wanted to give us a fuller picture of Himself. And this He has done through Jesus.

How did God provide us with this full picture of Himself? *John 1:1, 2; John 14:9; Heb. 1:1–3.*

The precise wording of John 1:1 is important. John does not say that God showed Himself in the flesh, or appeared in the flesh. Rather, John says that Jesus became flesh at a definite point in time. Jesus came from above and became flesh; that is, He took on Himself our humanity. That our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became flesh for our salvation is probably the one tenet of the Christian faith that is basic to all Christian denominations.

What relationship is there between God's revelation in Scripture and His revelation in Jesus Christ? *John 5:36–40.*

For some the study of the Bible is an end in itself. Indeed, many gifted Bible scholars don't believe in God at all. Yet, reading the Bible without seeking to know the Lord whom it reveals can no more lead you to salvation than reading a recipe can fill your empty stomach.

Jesus Christ is the focus of the Scriptures. The Bible is about Him, about what He has revealed to us regarding the nature and character of God. The Bible doesn't save us, but it is the authoritative source of truth about the only One who can, Jesus of Nazareth.

It's one thing to read the Bible; it's another to know the Bible; and it's another to recite texts by memory. But do you know the Lord revealed in the Bible? What are ways in which you can read the Bible in order to come away from it knowing God better?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

the above? Which way made the greatest contribution to intimacy with that person? What do these answers tell us about what is involved in getting to know God?

2 Think about how you came to know God personally. Was it nature, prophecy, the Bible, or the life of Christ that made the greatest impact? Which revelation will you explore now to deepen your intimacy with God? Give reasons for your choice.

3 Read John 17:3. Discuss how important it is to get to know God. Keep a journal this week describing the ways in which God reveals Himself to you.

Role-playing: Have a class member pretend to be someone who does not believe in God. He or she would ask, “How do you know that God exists?” Have another class member answer the question based on what you learned in class this week.

► STEP 4—Apply

This week’s lesson has explored ways in which God reveals Himself to us. Let’s look at ways to make this revelation more personal.

1 Find a historical event that has been a direct fulfillment of Bible prophecy within the past five hundred years. For example, the sun darkened, the moon turned to blood, falling stars, the great Lisbon earthquake (these four events fulfilling Matthew 24:29 and Revelation 6:12, 13), and so forth. Take the opportunity to share with someone who may not be familiar with the prophecy how its fulfillment has deepened your faith.

2 Tell, act out, or rewrite in a contemporary setting your favorite Bible story that portrays the character of God.

3 Note the names of Jesus mentioned in Isaiah 9:6. Write each one in a separate column. Then, under each, write how that particular name has been meaningful in your life. For example, under “Prince of Peace” you might write about a time that you were troubled about something and God gave you peace about it, and so on.

4 Spend time as a class in nature, if possible, or bring some objects of nature into class. How do the things of the natural world “declare the glory of God” (*Ps. 19:1*) as the Creator?

Further Study: “Many are the ways in which God is seeking to make Himself known to us and bring us into communion with Him. Nature speaks to our senses without ceasing. The open heart will be impressed with the love and glory of God as revealed through the works of His hands. The listening ear can hear and understand the communications of God through the things of nature. The green fields, the lofty trees, the buds and flowers, the passing cloud, the falling rain, the babbling brook, the glories of the heavens, speak to our hearts, and invite us to become acquainted with Him who made them all.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 85. Read this entire chapter in *Steps to Christ*, titled “A Knowledge of God” (pp. 85–91).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 To what extent does nature help us find God? Does nature teach us anything about the God of the Bible, or does it merely impress us that there must be Something or Someone out there?
- 2 In class, talk about the importance of following one’s conscience. Then talk about the dangers that are involved. What are ways we can help others know if and when they can trust the prompting of their conscience?
- 3 What role do culture and upbringing have on the shaping of your conscience? In what ways has your culture influenced your concepts of right and wrong? How can you learn to transcend culture when you need to, that is, when your culture teaches something that is against the clear teaching of the Word of God?
- 4 If the gift of prophecy is a spiritual gift to God’s church, should we expect it to play a prominent role in our day and age? May we expect God to raise up other prophets similar to the way He called Ellen G. White more than a century ago? Discuss.
- 5 What are ways that we can study the Bible in order to come away knowing God better? What are ways to study the Bible and come away not knowing God any more than when we first started reading?

Summary: God wants to communicate with us. He does so through nature and by speaking through our conscience. Throughout the ages He has used prophets, and He has made the prophetic gift available even for His church today. The Bible, God’s Written Word, remains the divine Guidebook for our pilgrimage. Its focus is on what God has done for us, most sublimely in entering this world in the Person of His Son, to which all Scriptures testify.