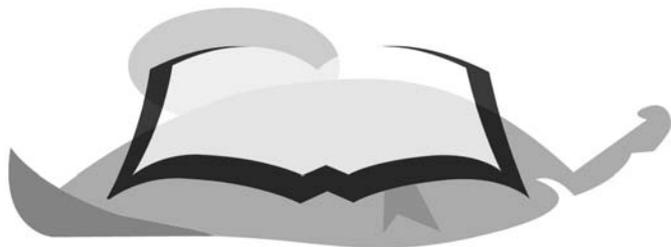


How God Speaks to Us



SABBATH—DECEMBER 27

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Genesis 18:1–15; Genesis 32:30; Exodus 4:10–17; Psalm 19:1–6; John 1:14; John 3:16; Colossians 2:9.

MEMORY VERSE: “In the past, God spoke to our people through the prophets.¹ He spoke at many times. He spoke in different ways. But in these last days, he has spoken to us through his Son. He is the one whom God appointed [chose] to receive all things. God made everything through him” (Hebrews 1:1, 2, NIRV).

GOD MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO HUMANS (PEOPLE) IN TWO WAYS: general and special revelation.² General revelation is God’s way of showing Himself to all people through nature and the conscience³ (read Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20). God shows Himself through the writings of the prophets in the Holy Bible. A very good example of how God makes Himself known to us is His revelation through Jesus Christ. This is special revelation. Through this method (plan), God made His will known to the Old Testament leaders and prophets. God revealed (made known) His power and purpose through Israel’s history. Then, later, He sent His Son as a human (man) to reveal the Father in a special and powerful way.

This week we will look at both kinds of revelation: general and special.

THIS WEEK’S LESSON UP CLOSE: What is general and special revelation? What can nature teach us about God? What can it *not* teach us? How is the revelation through Jesus Christ different from God’s other revelations?

1. prophets—men or women who are spokespersons for God; God gives His prophets special messages to give to His people. Prophets also speak to God on behalf of His people. God may also give prophets warnings about what will happen in the future.

2. revelation—how God makes Himself known to us.

3. conscience—a knowledge or sense of right and wrong with an urge to do right; moral judgment.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 28**IN THE BEGINNING (Genesis 3:8)**

In the Garden of Eden, God spoke with Adam and Eve face-to-face. But soon after, Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Then they could not be in God's presence (Genesis 3:23, 24). They could no longer speak to God face-to-face.



Before sin came into the world, God spoke with Adam and Eve face-to-face.

What do Genesis 18:1–15; Genesis 32:30; Exodus 33:11; Judges 6:22; and Judges 13:2, 3 tell us about meeting with God face-to-face?

Whenever God shows Himself in a body to humans, He always shows Himself in a human⁴ form.

In John 1:18, John says, “No one has ever seen God. But God, the one and only Son, is at the Father’s side. He has shown us what God is like” (NIRV). God, who appeared to the people in the Old Testament, must have been Jesus, not

4. human—having to do with men, women, or children.

5. fundamentals—very necessary parts; the basics.

6. relationship—your emotional connection (tie) to another person or how deep your feelings are for that person.

7. universe—all the matter (things), light, and energy (forces in nature that do work) that have been discovered (found) or that we know of.

the Father. Ellen G. White tells us that “after the sin of Adam, the Lord did not speak face-to-face to man anymore. God put the future of the human race [group] in Christ’s hands. All that God needed to tell us came through Jesus to the world. It was Christ who spoke the law on Mount Sinai.”—Adapted from *Fundamentals⁵ of Christian Education*, pages 237, 238.

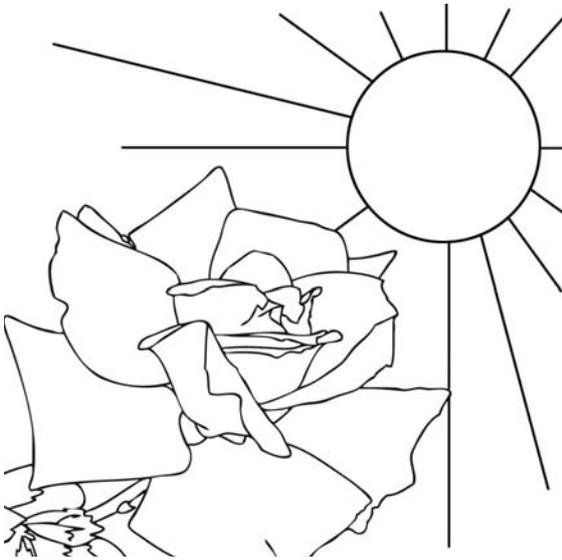
How have sin and rebellion hurt your relationship⁶ with God? For example, when you do something you know is wrong, what does that do to your closeness to God? How does sin make you feel separated from Him? How does guilt drive you away from Him? Also, how does guilt prevent you from wanting to pray and talk with the Lord? How does your own experience help you better understand what happened in Eden?

MONDAY—DECEMBER 29**IN NATURE (Psalm 19:1–6)**

According to Psalm 19:1–6; Psalm 33:6–9; and Romans 1:19–23, what can nature teach us about God?

Bible writers often tell us how nature makes known to us God’s great work as Creator (Psalm 8; Psalm 104). Think about the universe!⁷ On a clear night thousands of stars shine brightly. Our

Milky Way galaxy (a large group of stars) has about two hundred billion (200,000,000,000) stars. And the Milky Way is only one galaxy among several hundred billion (100,000,000,000) galaxies that we now know of. Who knows how many more galaxies there are beyond the reach of our telescopes!⁸



Even though sin has hurt God's creation, great beauty can still be found in nature.

Distances in the universe amaze (shock) the mind. Apart from the sun, the nearest star to our earth, Alpha Centauri, is 4.28 light-years away. (One light-year is the distance light travels in one year—5.9 trillion [5,900,000,000,000] miles.) A spaceship traveling one hundred thousand (100,000) miles per hour would need about twenty-nine thousand (29,000) years to get there. But to travel from one end of our Milky Way to

the other would take *one hundred thousand (100,000) light-years!* The largest galaxy known so far is Markarian. It would take 1.3 million (1,300,000) light-years to cross.

But we do not need to study something as far off as the stars to be amazed. Imagine the wonders we would find inside the human body. There are many things inside the body too small for the eye to see. An electron microscope⁹ could help us study them. We could use it to study the tens of thousands of genes¹⁰ each person has. But even if we could study everything, we still could not understand it all. That is because our minds are limited. We simply cannot understand all the wonders of the created world.

But nature alone is not enough to reveal (make known) to us everything about God (Romans 1:25). Many questions we have about God cannot be answered through a study of nature. It is hard to find God's love in the way cats and killer whales play with the animals they catch for food before killing them. True, we can find God's power in creation. But nature does not always tell us that God is " 'full of compassion [mercy] and pity, who is not easily angered and who shows great love and faithfulness' " (Exodus 34:6, TEV).

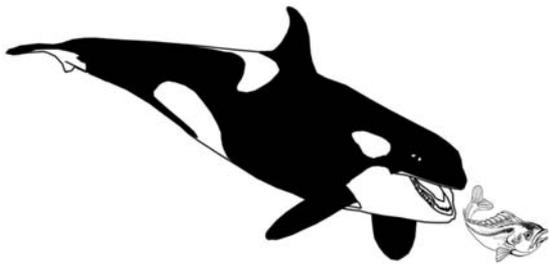
What parts of nature truly talk to you about the love and power of God? At the same time, what things

8. telescopes—special instruments (tools) that let people see things very far away; they are used to study stars and other planets.

9. electron microscope—a special instrument (tool) that uses a beam of electrons to make very small objects appear larger so they can be seen. Electrons are basic particles in objects that carry an electrical charge.

10. genes—parts of cells (basic units of living matter) that contain the information that determines what traits (qualities or features) we will have.

do you find there that bother you, and why? What do your answers tell you about how limited nature is in making known to us the fullness of God's love and who He is?



Because of sin, nature does not always show us God's love.

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 30

THROUGH PROPHETS (Exodus 4:10–17)

After the Fall, God no longer spoke to people face-to-face. But He spoke to them through men and women called prophets (1 Samuel 9:9). What do 2 Samuel 23:2; Jeremiah 1:5; Hosea 4:1; Amos 7:14, 15; and Jonah 1:1–3 tell us about these prophets?

The word *prophet* (in Hebrew *nabi*) means “one called [by God].” Or it can mean “one who has a vocation [call from God].” The prophet is a person who announces God's messages. These messages may be about the past, the present, or the future. They

may include warnings, instruction, comfort, or prophecy.¹¹

The English word *prophet* comes from the Greek word *prophētēs*. The word *prophet* is formed by joining the preposition¹² *pro*, which means “for” or “on behalf of,” and the verb *phemi*, “to speak.” So these joined words give the word *prophet* its meaning “to speak for.”

How does Exodus 4:10–17 help us better understand the role (work) of a prophet?

This story teaches us that a prophet speaks for someone. The prophet may speak to people for God, or to God for people. The main duty of a prophet in the Bible was not to foretell the future. A prophet's main duty was to announce what God wants. Throughout the history of Israel, the prophets' main duty was to guide God's people. During the time of the kings, the kings often “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 13:2, NIV). But the prophets were the guardians¹³ of the theocracy.¹⁴ The prophets upheld the law of God. They taught the law to the people.

Notice how humble Moses was. He knew his own weakness. Why is this attitude (feeling) good for anyone, not just a prophet, to have? What dangers do we face if we do things on our own without God's leading?

11. prophecy—a special message from God, often an explanation of what will happen in the future.

12. preposition—a part of speech.

13. guardians—persons who watch over, and take care of, someone or something.

14. theocracy—a group of people, a country, a state, or a government that is ruled by God.

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 31**THROUGH THE WORD
(BIBLE) (John 20:30, 31)**

Christianity claims to be based on the truth God has made known to us. The record of what God has made known is found in the Bible. In the Bible, we learn how God has made Himself known to persons in the past. He reveals Himself through dreams, visions,¹⁵ or epiphanies (appearances). From the time of Moses (fifteenth century B.C.) and onward, many of these revelations¹⁶ were written down. As a result, we have 66 books in the Bible today. The Bible includes all we need to know to be saved.

What do Matthew 1:22; Matthew 2:15, 17; Matthew 4:14; John 20:30, 31; and 2 Timothy 3:16 tell us about the Bible itself?

The Bible is special in many ways. First, the unity¹⁷ of its different books makes it special. Nearly 40 authors wrote the Bible. They wrote it over a period of nearly 1,600 years. Just knowing these facts helps us to admire the unity of the Bible even more. We find unity in what the Bible teaches. It teaches us the plan of salvation.¹⁸ The plan of salvation is made known step-by-step from

Genesis to Revelation. There is unity in the theme:¹⁹ the Messiah is promised throughout the Old Testament. And the New Testament announces that He has come in the Person of Jesus Christ. There is also complete unity in the Bible's teaching: the doctrines²⁰ of the Old and New Testaments are the same.

Second, the history of the Bible makes it special. The Old Testament includes the oldest history of any people in the world. William F. Albright, the greatest archaeologist²¹ of the twentieth century, wrote, "The Hebrew history is greater than any other record of history. No other history gives such a clear picture of its people and their beginnings. In Egypt and Babylonia, in Assyria and Phoenicia, in Greece and Rome, we cannot find a record that equals the Bible. There is nothing like it in the history of the Germanic peoples. Even India or China cannot give us as great a record of its people."—Adapted from *The Biblical Period [Span of Time] From Abraham to Ezra* (New York: HarperTorch Books, 1963), page 27.

Third, the Bible is special because it has lasted for thousands of years. And more people than ever follow its teachings today. What makes this fact so amazing is that many people tried to destroy the Bible. For instance, Roman emperors tried to destroy it. But the Bible survived. And more copies of the Bible still exist

15. visions—special messages from God that are seen in the mind or in a dream or in a trance to help a person know God's will (plan).

16. revelations—the many methods (ways) God uses to make Himself known to us.

17. unity—when two or more people or things are joined together as one; when two or more people or things are in agreement in ideas, feelings, and so on.

18. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

19. theme—topic; subject.

20. doctrines—church beliefs about God based on what the Bible teaches.

21. archaeologist—a person who digs to find things from the past that have been buried.

today than any other writing from Bible times. For example, there are more than 5,000 known Greek manuscripts (copies) of the New Testament still around. Homer's *Iliad*²² is second to the Bible in the number of copies it has. Only 643 manuscripts of the *Iliad* have survived.

The reason for the Bible's survival is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the real Author of God's Word. He inspired²³ all the human authors. The Holy Spirit made sure that the authors of the Bible wrote a true record of history. He watched over the making of the Bible. And He has protected it over thousands of years.

THURSDAY—JANUARY 1

THROUGH CHRIST (John 1:9)

According to John 1:14; John 3:16; John 14:8, 9; Colossians 2:9; and Hebrews 1:1, 2, how is God's revelation through Christ different from the other revelations discussed this week?

If the Bible does not lead us to Jesus, then our study of the Bible will have very little value. The Bible was written to make God known to the world through the life and death of His Son, Jesus.

How does John 1:9 help us better understand the revelation of God in Christ?

The NIV English translation catches

the idea of John 1:9 best: "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." This does not mean that every person receives this Light. But if a person understands the light at all, this understanding must be from Jesus (Acts 4:12). The true Light shines on all people because Jesus died for everyone. But not everyone will be saved. As John goes on to say, many will not accept this Light (John 1:10–12).



Jesus is the best revelation of God there is. He is better than nature and the Bible. That is because He is God in human form.

How well do you know Jesus yourself? Imagine someone said to you, "Tell me about Jesus. What is He like? What can He do for me?" What would you say, and why? Be prepared to share your answer in class on Sabbath.

22. (the) *Iliad*—a famous poem by the blind Greek poet Homer. The *Iliad* tells the story about the 10-year war between the Greeks and the Trojans (people of Troy).

23. inspired—to cause, urge, or influence someone to do something; to cause someone to have certain feelings or thoughts; to be led by the Holy Spirit to act or speak.

FRIDAY—JANUARY 2

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “A True Knowledge of God,” pages 409–426, in *The Ministry [Work] of Healing*; “God in Nature,” pages 99–101, in *Education*.

“Christ came to teach human beings [people] what God wants them to know. In the heavens above, in the earth, in the ocean, we find the handiwork of God. All created things tell us of God’s power, His wisdom, His love. But neither the stars above nor the ocean below can teach us as much about God as the Person of Christ can. God knew that a clearer example than nature was needed to make known both His personality²⁴ and His character.²⁵ So, He sent His Son into the world to make Himself known to us.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*²⁶ for the Church, volume 8, page 265.

“Christ revealed [made known] to us as much of God as we could bear without being destroyed by the knowledge. Jesus is our Teacher. He is the Light. If God thought we needed better examples than Christ and His Written Word [the Bible], He would have given them.”—Adapted from page 266.

“The Bible is a wonderful book. It is a history that opens up to us the past. Without the Bible we would have been stuck with trying to guess what truly

happened in the past. Or we would have believed false stories about what really happened. The Bible is a prophecy that makes the future known. The Bible is the Word of God. It makes known to us the plan of salvation. It points out the way by which we may escape eternal [forever; without end] death and gain eternal life.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo*, October 1, 1892.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In class, compare your answers to Thursday’s final question. What can you learn from one another’s answers?
- ② God makes Himself known to us through nature. So, what does this tell us about why we need to protect the environment?²⁷
- ③ What are some other ways God communicates (speaks) with us? How can we be sure it really is God talking? How can we protect ourselves from being fooled?
- ④ As a class, plan an outing in nature. Find examples of God in nature. What things in nature clearly make known His creative power and love? What things leave large questions still unanswered? Why is nature, however beautiful, still not enough to tell us all that we need to know about God?

24. personality—the qualities of a person; what makes one person different from another person.

25. character—who a person is; God’s Ten Commandments show us who God is.

26. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

27. environment—the land, air, and water around us.