

ADULT  
SABBATH SCHOOL  
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE  
June • February • March 2007

# His Wondrous Cross

*The Story of Our Redemption*



# Contents

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1	<b>The Provocation and Provision—December 25-31</b> _____	6
2	<b>His Glorious Purpose Foreshadowed in Types</b> —January 1-7 _____	14
3	<b>Jesus and the Sanctuary—January 8-14</b> _____	22
4	<b>A Body You Have Prepared for Me—January 15-21</b> _____	30
5	<b>In the Shadow of Calvary—January 22-28</b> _____	38
6	<b>The Passion Week—January 29–February 4</b> _____	46
7	<b>Passage to Calvary—February 5-11</b> _____	56
8	<b>Darkness at Noon—February 12-18</b> _____	64
9	<b>He Is Risen—February 19-25</b> _____	72
10	<b>The Heart of the Cross—February 26–March 4</b> _____	80
11	<b>The Cross and Justification—March 5-11</b> _____	88
12	<b>The Cross and Sanctification—March 12-18</b> _____	96
13	<b>The Cross and the Great Controversy—March 19-25</b> _____	104

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# *The Answer From Above*

*Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels  
hierarchies?*

With that pained utterance, the German poet Rilke asked what modern humanity—whose outlines have been sketched by Darwin, then colored in with the soulless hues of science—has long asked.

Why not, considering the dismal picture evolution paints of human origins? According to this scenario, about fifteen billion years ago a tremendous explosion created matter, energy, time, and space all at once. Atoms condensed into gaseous clouds, stars coalesced from whirling strands of fire and light, and from those stars, molten globules hardened into planets, including our own. Shallow water fermented, simple life forms, emerged by chance, and millions of years later, human beings. If the temperatures had been warmer or colder or if gravity had been slightly off, none of us would be here.

No wonder Rilke asked, Is anyone above listening? Is there anyone above us? Is there even an *above* us—something besides what we, with all our sophisticated gadgetry, could ever see? Are we here only by design of cold forces that operate with no purpose and yet gave us hearts and minds that cry out for purpose? (How cruel to be creatures who want answers in a world that offers none.)

Worse than no purposeful creator would be one with evil designs on us. The fact that a god exists doesn't automatically mean good news. Ancient mythologies crowd the heavens with cruel deities. Better to take a chance with the cold, lifeless forces of the cosmos than with an evil god who takes pleasure in our sorry lot.

Fortunately, the Bible teaches that there is a Creator God, Jesus, who loves the human race. Far from taking pleasure in our sorry lot, He has shared it, suffering worse than we ever could. His sufferings climaxed at the Cross, the topic for this quarter.

Years ago, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote about a madman who shouted in a marketplace, "What were we doing when we unchained this earth from the sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, side-ward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we

not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?" His point was that all moral and spiritual foundations have been shattered, leaving humans to plunge aimlessly in all directions through a purposeless and *infinite nothingness*.

Scripture says the opposite. The spikes in His hands, in His feet, not only nailed Jesus to the cross but nailed the earth to heaven in ways that nothing could sever. The Cross shows this tiny planet that we are not alone and that our Creator has linked Himself to us through our pain.

All through the Bible, from Creation through the birth of Jesus, God reveals to us that He is intimately involved in humanity. The incarnation of Christ, where the Creator dwelt among His

## **The spikes in His hands not only nailed Jesus to the cross but nailed the earth to heaven.**

creation in human form, was amazing enough. But that God should, in this incarnation, substitute Himself for us *and bear the full brunt of His own divine wrath against sin, all in order to save us from that wrath?* Who even can begin to grasp what this sacrifice means? We'll need eternity to fathom it (in the meantime, we'll cover what we can in the next three months).

Though we follow the plan of redemption down through the ages, we will focus on the final week of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. From here we will reflect on the meaning of the Cross and what it offers to us who claim it as the foundation of our salvation.

*Who, if we cried out, would hear us from above?*

The Cross not only answers who has heard us from above, it is the answer from above.

Our principal contributor, Pastor Brian Jones, recently served as coordinator and materials developer for a multilanguage Bible information ministry, sponsored by the Upper Columbia Conference, in Spokane, Washington. Brian, the author of two previous quarterlies of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, has a Ph.D. in Christian counseling; he and his wife have a young daughter and currently reside in West Virginia.

# Got Questions?

## **Sabbath School University *has answers!***

Sabbath School University is a 28-minute discussion of the *Adult Bible Study Guide*. SSU discusses the lesson content and strategies to enrich your Sabbath School with fellowship, outreach, Bible study, and missions. Sabbath School leaders, don't miss this weekly broadcast on the Adventist Television Network.



**<http://Adventist.TV>**  
*broadcast and program information*



# It's 7:00 Sabbath morning. Where are you?

In Port-au-Prince, capital city of Haiti, early service Sabbath School starts at 7:00. The attendance is so high that it takes dozens of teachers to lead the classes. And second service is even more crowded. Each pastor in Haiti has up to 15 congregations.

The church in Haiti plans to build two lay training centers to teach thousands of lay workers to effectively share God's love. Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help provide for those centers.

**MISSION** 

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on March 26  
supports projects in the Inter-American Division.

# The Provocation *and* Provision



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Genesis 1–3.*

**Memory Text:** “Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’” (*Genesis 3:9, NKJV*).

**A** toy company produced a doll called Cindy Smart that spoke five languages, read well, told time, and could do simple math. Cindy was the first doll that would do what it was told. Those who first met Cindy were a little spooked. How could a doll do all these things?

The answer is good computer programming, a 16-bit microprocessor in the belly, and an optical scanner that allows it to recognize numbers or letter-shaped objects. In many ways Cindy Smart was just an advanced version of Chatty Cathy, one of the first pull-string dolls that could *speak*.

Yet, no matter how complicated or even intricate Cindy Smart is, the doll is still just a computer, programmed to do what it's told. Free will is not an option for Cindy, no matter how *smart* the doll is.

In contrast, we're not just quantitatively different from Cindy in that we can say more, but qualitatively different: We have been given moral freedom, something totally alien to Cindy. This issue of free will is the crucial difference, one that gets to the heart of the matter as we look at the rise of sin—and its cure.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why, in order to love God, must we be free? Why must freedom entail the possibility to do wrong? How did God respond to the fall of Adam and Eve?

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 1.

## To Love God

**Read the following texts: Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37, John 15:9-11. What are they all admonishing us to do, and why must we have freedom, moral freedom, in order to obey?**

Students of the Bible are familiar with the record that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He was not dependent on preexisting matter or conditions. He brought everything into being by His word, His *logos*, which is the expression of His mind (*Ps. 33:6, 9; John 1:1-3*). Infinitely perfect Himself, He made everything flawless and beautiful. God is love, and everything He does is consistent with His perfect love and infinite wisdom. Upon His intelligent beings He bestowed the noble attributes of personal individuality and freedom of choice. But choice, by its very nature, involves the option of choosing between right and wrong. Hence, the risk of human rebellion was there from the beginning.

At the same time, God desires us to have personal, mutually satisfying fellowship with Him (*Ps. 36:5-10*). He also endows us with wisdom, knowledge, love, and the capacity for joy. These relational qualities can have real existence only in beings who have freedom of will, something not found in Cindy Smart.

**When was the last time you ever heard of a happy computer, a joyous PC, or a loyal and loving laptop? Why can't these things, which can do amazing intellectual feats, ever be happy, loving, or loyal?**

To love God, we have to be free. It's as simple as that. Love cannot exist without moral freedom, and moral freedom can't exist without the capacity to do wrong.

“God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 34.

**A science-fiction story is told about a man who, having lost his wife, had her replaced by a robot that looked, talked, felt, and acted exactly as his wife did. If he hadn't known any better, he would have had no idea that this wasn't she. In the end, however, he sent her away, because the experience wasn't the same. What do you think was missing, and what does that have to do with the day's study?**



## Satan's Defection *(John 8:44).*

**Scripture** informs us that Lucifer rebelled against God. What factors led him to choose this path of opposition, and with what effect? *Isa. 14:12-14, Ezek. 28:14-17.*

Lucifer, Ellen White tells us, gradually becoming self-infatuated, withdrew from loving his Creator and began to covet supreme power and authority. Jealous of Christ, who is the Creator and coequal with the Father (*Heb. 1:1-3*), Lucifer began a campaign of subversion, maliciously insinuating that God was autocratic, His laws arbitrary, and His expectation of worship and service from the creation unreasonable. Ingratitude, egotistic ambition, self-love, covetousness, dissatisfaction, hostility, deceit, malice, and a craving for worship and power were the fruits of Lucifer's pride. God created Lucifer a perfect being without any propensity toward moral confusion or failure. Yet, as a free moral agent, Lucifer was at liberty to diverge from harmony with the God who brought him into existence and gave him his exalted station.

Attitudes and actions, of course, have consequences. Departure from God's law is sin (*1 John 3:4*), and the wages of sin are death (*Rom. 6:23*). Lucifer was "full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty," "perfect in [his] ways" from the day he was created (*Ezek. 28:12, 15*). He dwelt in the very presence of God as the anointed cherub, the chief communicator of divine revelations to the universe. Thus, he stood entirely without excuse for his seditious estrangement from the Lord. Through his crafty misrepresentation of God, Lucifer (renamed Satan, or "adversary," after his fall) seduced one-third of the angelic host into siding with him (*Rev. 12:4*).

Satan's representation of God and His way could not be treated as acceptable. Truth and righteousness are not a matter of subjective opinion but of absolute, unalterable revelation that shapes character and conduct.

**"In great mercy, according to His divine character, God bore long with Lucifer. The spirit of discontent and disaffection had never before been known in heaven. It was a new element, strange, mysterious, unaccountable. Lucifer himself had not at first been acquainted with the real nature of his feelings; . . . yet he did not dismiss them. He did not see whither he was drifting. But such efforts as infinite love and wisdom only could devise, were made to convince him of his error. . . . He was made to see what would be the result of persisting in revolt."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 39. Notice: An all-wise, all-powerful God would not forcibly stop Lucifer's moral slide. Why not? What does that tell us about the sanctity of moral freedom?**

## Satan's Earthly Exile

**Read** Luke 10:18, Revelation 12:4-9. What happened to Satan after his rebellion in heaven?

Revelation 12:12 tells those on earth to beware, because the devil has come down to us having great wrath. And though that warning was given in the context of the Cross and the doom that the Cross spelled for Satan, the Eden story nevertheless presents us with a prototype, a model, on how the devil, who “deceiveth the whole world” (*vs. 9*), works to deceive each of us even now.

**Read** Genesis 3:1. Compare it with Genesis 2:16, 17. What ploy did Satan use to set his trap?

How fascinating that Satan used a mixture of truth and error. He took a direct command from God and simply rephrased it in a way that sounded almost as if he were repeating what God said, only he put a different spin on it. In other words, he mixed just enough truth with error in order to make it sound right.

**Read** Genesis 3:2,3. What does it say about Eve's knowledge of God's command and, thus, her responsibility for her action?

Though deceived (*1 Tim. 2:14*), Eve, by her words, showed that she knew what God had told her to do. That's a powerful lesson for us: We could save ourselves a lot of heartache, sin, and deception if we simply obeyed the clear commands of God, no matter how much we might not understand a certain situation or all the variables in it. Deplorable as Eve's sin was, Adam transgressed with eyes wide open. Even amid their ignorance, they could have saved themselves from deception simply by obeying God, trusting that His way was the best way, even when they didn't fully understand it.

**Read** Genesis 3:6. What were the things about the tree that led Eve to disobey? What principles were at work there? How are these same principles manifested today?

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**“Ayecah”?** (*Gen. 3:6-23*).

Bewitched by Satan’s subtle and not-so-subtle lies, the human race fell. Instantly, the whole relationship between heaven and earth changed. The paradigm of Paradise radically shifted. The harmony, the peace, and the balance of Eden shattered. At that moment, the history of the universe altered. Satan’s rebellion, once confined only to himself and the fallen angels, had now gained a foothold in a new world. The issues at stake had become momentous.

**Read Genesis 3:9. What is the first thing that the Bible records as said by God to fallen humanity, and why are those words so important even for us today? What do we see foreshadowed in them?**

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The Hebrew word *ayecah* translates into “Where are you?” Thus, the first thing that God communicates to His fallen creatures is a question, a question that, in a sense, He has been asking ever since. He doesn’t ask it in order to know; He asks it in order to force Adam and Eve to confront what they had done.

“Ayecah?” What we see here is not a condemnation but already the first of what will be endless pleas to Adam and Eve and all of their descendants to acknowledge their sinful position, to acknowledge their need, and to acknowledge that God is here to save them.

“Ayecah?” God comes to them. God is seeking them out. Though we often view Genesis 3:15 as the first gospel promise, already here, in this simple question, “Ayecah?” we see the beginning of what will end only at the close of probation: the Lord seeking us out and taking the initiative to save us.

**Read the following texts: John 3:16, Rom. 8:3, Gal. 4:4, 1 John 4:10. In what way do they reflect what we’ve seen in Genesis 3:9? What principle do we see in these verses, and how have you experienced this principle in your own life?**

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## God's Intervention and Gospel Foreshadowed *(Gen. 3:15)*.

Almost immediately after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they recognized their fatal mistake. A chill crept over their cold souls, and they knew that something vital had died within them. Their beautiful garments of light and glory, exhibiting their natural harmony with God, disappeared (*Gen. 3:7*). As they stood naked and ashamed, gone was their customary joy over God's daily visit with them for fellowship and instruction (*vs. 8*).

**How** did Adam and Eve attempt to cover their nakedness? *Gen. 3:7*. **What spiritual lesson does this point to, concerning mere human effort to remedy the effects of sin and improve our moral condition?** *Isa. 64:6, Rom. 10:3*. **How was this same principle seen in Cain's offering?** *Gen. 4:3*.

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The fall of Adam and Eve hadn't taken God by surprise. No sooner did they fall and no sooner had He gotten a confession from both of them (*Gen. 3:12, 13*), then He proceeded to give them the great hope found in Genesis 3:15, understood as the first gospel promise.

**Read** Genesis 3:15. **What is it saying that offers the fallen couple hope against the serpent?** *See also Rom. 16:20, Eph. 6:11, 2 Tim. 2:26, Heb. 2:14, 1 John 3:8, Rev. 20:10*.

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Notice, too, how, when dealing with the serpent, the Lord asked no questions and sought for no confession (*Gen. 3:14*). He simply condemned the serpent while, in the next verse, He offered the promise of hope to Adam and Eve. This promise included the termination of sin and its originator, Satan. Thus, the glory of God's everlasting gospel was disclosed in this judgment setting, a setting in which He definitively reveals the mysteries of His will and the marvels of His grace.

**How would you respond to the charge, "Why was God so harsh with Adam and Eve? After all, what did they do other than eat a piece of fruit?" What is being missed in this charge?**

**Further Study:** Read Joshua 24:15, Job 1:6-12, 38:4-7, Revelation 22:17, and Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 33–43.

“God permitted Satan to carry forward his work until the spirit of disaffection ripened into active revolt. It was necessary for his plans to be fully developed, that their true nature and tendency might be seen by all. . . .

“It was therefore necessary to demonstrate before the inhabitants of heaven, and of all the worlds, that God’s government is just, His law perfect. Satan had made it appear that he himself was seeking to promote the good of the universe. The true character of the usurper and his real object must be understood by all. He must have time to manifest himself by his wicked works. . . .

“Had he been immediately blotted out of existence, some would have served God from fear rather than from love. . . . For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, he must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, and that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of His law might be forever placed beyond all question.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 41, 42.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① Dwell carefully and prayerfully on the last sentence in the Ellen White quote above. What is she saying? What do these words tell us about the character of God? From a human perspective, with so much suffering and anguish, wouldn’t it have been better for God simply to have destroyed Satan from the start? If not, why not?
- ② Compare Genesis 3:15 with Revelation 12:17. What parallels do you see? What message is in there for us, today?
- ③ What lessons are there for us in the fact that sin could arise in such a perfect environment as heaven?

## “Make Me a Muslim Again!”

by Barbara Huff

Almira was born into a Muslim family in Russia. A few years ago Almira’s nine-year-old son became ill with severe allergies to almost everything. Almira took the boy to many doctors, but they could not help him. Someone suggested that she go to Nizhney Novgorod, a city some distance away, to seek medical help.

When they arrived in the city, Almira heard about evangelistic meetings being held nearby. Curious, she and her son attended. She heard that a baptism was scheduled, and again she decided to go, just to watch.

While the two stood beside the river watching the baptism, Almira’s son screamed, “Mama, get baptized, and I will be well!” Almira tried to quiet the boy, but he continued shouting for her to be baptized.

Those helping with the baptism heard the boy shouting about baptism and assumed that Almira had come to be baptized too. Almost before Almira realized what was happening, someone had put a white robe on her and was leading her toward the river. She was too stunned to resist.

When she realized the magnitude of what was happening, her heart was hardened and she became upset. She didn’t say anything to those who were leading her to be baptized, but in her heart she prayed, *OK, if there is Anyone in heaven, heal my son. My son says that if I’ll be baptized, You will heal him.* She says this was not a humble prayer, but a prayer of anger.

After the baptism Almira and her son returned home. That night she started crying. “God, I don’t want to be a Christian,” she said. “Make me a Muslim again.”

That night she dreamed that she saw Jesus coming back to earth to take His children home. She had never heard of the Second Coming, nor had she ever held a Bible or a Koran in her hands. She wondered what her dream meant.

Three days later her son was completely well.

With her reluctance now gone, Almira studied the Bible with the pastor and became an active, dedicated Seventh-day Adventist in her home church.

Usually God speaks with a still, small voice, but sometimes He works through a child’s screams to get a person’s attention!

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# His Glorious Purpose Foreshadowed *in* Types



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 4:1-8, 22:1-19, Num. 21:4-9.*

**Memory Text:** “And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together” (*Genesis 22:8*).

**M**ost Christians understand a crucial truth: Salvation has always been accomplished only one way—through the sacrificial death of Jesus. Anyone in heaven will be there only through Jesus, whether or not they ever knew Him by name. Some will know much about the plan of salvation, others little; some will live here amid an outburst of light, others only in the shadows.

And yet life in the shadows isn't all darkness. For there to be shadows, there needs to be light. Shadows, in their own way, are an outline of light; they exist on the edge of light; and they couldn't be formed if there were no light. Shadows help us understand the light.

This week we look at those who were living in the shadows, shadows that were created only because the light was always there to begin with. Long before the full revelation granted at Calvary, the Lord was teaching His people truths about what God would do to save the world from sin, and He taught them with the shadows.

**The Week at a Glance:** What words does the Bible use to define sin? How was the Cross revealed in the story of Cain and Abel, in Abraham at Moriah, and in the fiery serpents in the wilderness? What do these accounts teach us about the gospel?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 8.*

## The Sin Crisis

The Bible uses a number of different words to convey the idea of sin. Below are the most common ones used in both Testaments, including an explanation of their meaning and a few verses where the words are used. Look up the verses, applying the explanation as you read:

### Old Testament

1. *Hattat*, “to miss the mark,” “to miss a target” (*Lev. 5:5, Ps. 51:4*).
2. *Awon*, translated “iniquity,” with the basic idea of crookedness, falsehood, a twisting (*Gen. 15:16, Isa. 43:24*).
3. *Pesha* means a deliberate, willful violation of a norm or authority. It’s rebellion against God and is sometimes translated as “transgression” (*Isa. 1:2, Amos 4:4*).
4. *Resha* means literally “out of joint,” to “be loose,” and commonly conveys the idea of wickedness (*Gen. 18:23, Exod. 23:1*).

### New Testament

1. *Hamartia* means literally to “miss the mark” and is used in the New Testament to denote a human decision that is hostile to God (*John 19:11, 1 John 1:8*).
2. *Parokoe* means literally a “failure to hear” or an “unwillingness to hear.” Often translated as “disobedience” (*Rom. 5:19, Heb. 2:2*).
3. *Paraptoma* usually means a slip, a fault, a falling down. Commonly translated as “trespass,” or “transgression” (*Matt. 6:14, Rom. 4:25*).
4. *Anomia* suggests contempt or violation of the *nomos*, the law, and is the word from which “transgression of the law” is translated in 1 John 3:4 (*Matt. 7:23, Heb. 1:9*).
5. *Adikia* conveys the idea of “unrighteousness” (*Rom. 1:18, 2 Pet. 2:15*).

**“To miss the mark,” a “twisting,” “a failure to hear,” “rebellion” . . . so many different words and concepts express the idea of sin. What this seems to say, among other things, is that sin can be manifested in various ways, spurred on and incited for different reasons. Write a short paragraph expressing what other lessons you’ve learned about sin from this word study.**

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## The Sin Crisis *(cont.)*

“And the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19).

How can we, as beings steeped in sin, fully understand the magnitude of sin? We really can't. It's like trying to look at a blackboard in a dark room. And though we can't fully understand sin, we can still understand enough to know its malignity.

**Think** of three people to whom you are close: family, friends, neighbors, whomever. Look at their lives and write down the suffering that sin (and not necessarily their own) has brought upon them.

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What did you write about? Sickness, disease, death, crime, violence, pain, alienation, hatred, bitterness, and on and on? Now multiply that by every human being who ever has lived or ever will live (except One), and we only begin to understand the ravages of sin.

And yet the outward physical destruction of sin is only part of the problem. Sin goes much deeper than what it does to us physically. Sin is, ultimately, a rebellion against the lordship and sovereignty of God. It is a refusal to accept His authority in one's life, conduct, and final destiny, and it is manifested in different moral, spiritual, and ethical behaviors that inevitably lead to suffering and death.

Sin, to be understood as sin, must be seen in the context of who we are in relationship to God. It must be seen as a state of existence as much as it is acts and deeds. Indeed, the acts and deeds themselves result from the state of sin in which we exist. Sin, therefore, is as much who we are as it is what we do, because, in the end, we do what we do because we are what we are.

**Only as we appreciate what it takes to save us from sin can we begin to understand how pernicious it must be. What do the following texts tell us about how bad sin is, in that it took such extreme measures in order to save us from it? Luke 24:7, John 3:14, Rom. 3:21-26, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Pet. 2:24.**

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## Cain and Abel *(Gen. 4:1-8)*.

For the past two days we've looked at the sin problem. What about the cure?

For starters, after Adam and Eve transgressed and the Lord banished them from the Garden of Eden, they maintained their contact with Him through worship that centered on looking to the promised Son, who would bring an end to the sin problem. While Scripture doesn't elaborate on the system of sacrifices that Adam and Eve observed, it is evident from the worship activities of their first sons, Cain and Abel, that the sacrifice of the lamb, as an expression of repentance and faith in the coming Messiah, was central to their worship.

**What attitudes did Cain cherish that made him refuse to offer the lamb sacrifice?** *Gen. 4:1-8, 1 John 3:11-15.*

This story is often seen, and rightly so, as an early example of the contrast between those who accept Christ's righteousness by faith and those who seek to earn salvation by their "good works." Yet, there's an irony here. Those who oppose salvation by faith in Christ alone, without the works of the law (*Rom. 3:28, Gal. 2:16, 3:11*), often claim that such a teaching leads to sin. After all, they reason, if people are told that good works can't save, then why should people sweat through the self-denial needed to produce them (*Rom. 6:1, 15*)?

**Read carefully Genesis 4:3-7 and 1 John 3:12. In both texts, what is being said about Cain's works in contrast to Abel's? What were Cain's works, at least as shown in the Bible, and why were they depicted as they were? What do these texts tell us about the nature of trying to earn salvation?**

Cain's works were deemed evil, because they were wrought from an attempt to earn salvation, whereas Abel's works, stemming from a heart that understood the need for a sacrifice for sin, were deemed righteousness. In other words, only those who understand their total dependence upon God for salvation, their total dependence upon a Substitute, can produce what would be deemed "good works." The value of works must be seen, perhaps, in the motives that lead to them: Works done from a heart seeking to earn salvation are deemed evil, while works done from a heart expressing thanks for the salvation already rendered are deemed righteous. Why do you think that is so?

## **Abraham and Calvary** (*Gen. 22:1-19, Gal. 3:8*).

One of the most moving and powerful stories in the Hebrew Bible is that of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah. Three faiths, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, all for various reasons, cherish this story. Christians, of course, see in this story a type, a symbol, of the plan of salvation, of the substitutionary death of Jesus in our stead.

**Read Genesis 22:1-19.** **Aside from the gospel element, what other lessons could you draw from this story that could be of value in knowing the Lord? What lessons do you think other faiths can draw from this episode?**

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Whatever powerful spiritual truths can be taught from this story, the gospel element, the lamb as sacrifice instead of the child, forms the core of the chapter. And one of the things that God was telling us here through the gospel is that even an act of total self-sacrifice—Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his own son (surely, What father wouldn’t have preferred offering himself instead of his child?)—wasn’t what was sufficient to atone for sin. The problem of sin was way too deep for anything any of us, as sinners, could do to solve it. Even an act such as what Abraham was willing to do to, out of a heart of faith and submission, wasn’t enough. Only the Lord Himself could take care of the problem of sin; only He could provide the needed Lamb.

**Read Genesis 22:8.** **How was the gospel revealed there? Do you think Abraham fully understood what he was saying? Or was he, perhaps, just trying to calm his son?**

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Galatians 3:7-9 says that the gospel was preached to Abraham, and that in his seed (*quoting Gen. 22:18*) all the nations of the world would be blessed. Clearly, whatever Abraham had understood about the plan of salvation beforehand, he understood more now. No doubt, it was a painful lesson to learn.

**Though Abraham’s works couldn’t save him, in what ways did his works express his faith? What lessons can we learn from this about the relationship between faith and works?**

## The Serpent in the Wilderness (*Num. 21:4-9*).

During Israel's long travels and sojourn in the wilderness, God in His mercy had miraculously protected them from fiery serpents and scorpions (*see Deut. 8:15*). He had preserved their health and strength, given them water and nutritious food in abundance, as well as guidance on their journey and protection from hostile tribes. Still, the people as a whole found constant cause for dissatisfaction and complaint, especially against Moses. While their feet were moving circuitously toward the Promised Land, their hearts were steadily moving toward perdition.

**Some of Israel's complaints against Moses were, it would seem (at least on the surface), legitimate, were they not (*see Num. 21:5*)? After all, food and water are pretty basic necessities. Why, then, the fiery serpents?**

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An interesting twist to this story is the fact that the people were to look at a copy of a fiery serpent in order to live. Why, of all things, a serpent, often in the Bible, as well as in much ancient literature, a symbol for evil (*Gen. 3:1, Rev. 20:2*)? In contrast, Ellen White says that the serpent "was a symbol of Christ; and the necessity of faith in His merits was thus presented to their minds."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 430. Indeed, Christ's own words in John 3:14, 15 give the same idea. Why, then, would a symbol of evil be used to represent something so good?

Some have speculated that the answer is found in the nature of Christ's death itself. At the Cross He was our Sin-Bearer; He was the One who bore the sin and evil of the world, who even became sin, and a curse, for us (*2 Cor. 5:21, Gal. 3:13*). And it's from this, His death in our stead, that we can look and find salvation from the evil that otherwise would destroy us. This is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian faith: Jesus, all goodness, became on the cross the focus of all evil. Hence, the symbol of the serpent as a symbol for Christ, the One who bore all the world's evil.

**Put yourself in the position of an Israelite who just got bitten by a deadly snake, which has already killed others around you. You're told that the only way to live is to look at a copy of the snake. Why is this such a good example of what it means to live by faith, to trust in what you don't fully understand, and to accept your own utter inability to save yourself?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 422–432.

“Nothing but the righteousness of Christ can entitle us to one of the blessings of the covenant of grace. . . . We must not think that our own merits will save us; Christ is our only hope of salvation. ‘For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.’ Acts 4:12.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 431.

“Cain and Abel represent two classes that will exist in the world till the close of time. One class avail themselves of the appointed sacrifice for sin; the other venture to depend upon their own merits; theirs is a sacrifice without the virtue of divine mediation, and thus it is not able to bring man into favor with God. It is only through the merits of Jesus that our transgressions can be pardoned.”—Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 25.

“The same lesson that Christ bade Moses to give to the children of Israel in the wilderness is for all such souls suffering under the plague spot of sin. From the billowy cloud Christ spoke to Moses and told him to make a brazen serpent and place it upon a pole, and then bid all that were bitten with the fiery serpents to look and live. What if, in the place of looking as Christ commanded them, they had said, ‘I do not believe it will do me the least bit of good to look. I am too great a sufferer from the sting of the poisonous serpent.’ Obedience was the object to be gained, implicit and blind obedience, without stopping to inquire the reason or the science of the matter. Christ’s word was, ‘Look and live.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 20.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 How do we understand the difference between the results of sin and sin itself? Is that even a fair distinction?
- 2 How do these Bible accounts help us understand that salvation has always been by faith alone, as opposed to by the works of the law? Why can salvation never be by anything other than what Christ has done for us?
- 3 Look at the final two sentences in the last Ellen White quote above. What is she saying there? Why is this concept so important, especially today, when the claims of science have such a powerful sway over human thinking?

## Never Too Late

by J. H. Zachary

During a camp meeting held in Oregon, U.S.A., 75-year-old Wilbur Jones and his wife attended a seminar to learn how to use new DVD materials in evangelism. *I wonder if an old lay person can actually preach a sermon*, Wilbur thought. Wilbur and Arleta purchased the equipment and presentations.

He received permission to present the illustrated Bible studies in a nearby prison. "This is easier than I thought," Wilbur told his wife. His heart was touched as he watched the inmates listen to the Bible messages. It was a wonderful day for the couple when two of the inmates were baptized.

Wilbur and his wife were surprised to be invited to hold meetings in East Africa. At first he wanted to say No. "I am not a preacher," he said. But the couple asked to know God's will and talked with others who had gone before. The couple agreed to go.

Wilbur and Arleta were assigned to a team serving one town in Kenya. Wilbur almost backed down when he learned that 5,000 people would attend the nightly meetings and more than 10,000 on Sabbath.

The meetings were held on a hill overlooking the town. Wilbur watched the crowd gather late that first afternoon. The translator urged Wilbur to make an appeal to decide for Jesus each evening. Wilbur preached the same Bible message he had shared in the prison back home. By the end of the first week, 300 persons had responded to calls for baptism. "I had never preached a sermon before, let alone before 10,000 people," Wilbur marveled.

Team members conducted a program for children in the Adventist church. Leaders had brought 3,000 stickers to give to the children, enough, they thought, to last for two weeks. But almost 3,000 children had come to their program, and after the first night they had only a dozen stickers left. On Sabbath the number of children almost doubled.

Wilbur trembled when he was told that a charismatic pastor wanted to talk with him. But buoyed by prayer, he went. The young pastor told him, "As I have attended your meetings I am impressed that what you preach is based on the Bible. I have been teaching my people errors. I want to become a Seventh-day Adventist. Please pray that I will be able to share this precious message with my 14 congregations."

"I wish I had started preaching earlier in my life," Wilbur testifies. "I have seen the Holy Spirit work through me in ways I never dreamed possible."

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# Jesus *and the* Sanctuary



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## SABBATH Afternoon

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 24:5-8, 25:8, 29:12, 30:10, Lev. 10:18, Isaiah 53.*

**Memory Text:** “By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities” (*Isaiah 53:11*).

**I**n the context of war and devastation, the poet W. H. Auden wrote that humans were like children “lost in a haunted wood,” afraid of the night, and who “have never been happy or good.”

This depressing verse captures the human situation. Fortunately, God wants to lead us out of this moral and physical morass. Ellen White has said that the moment there was sin there was a Savior. Through the ages the Savior has revealed Himself and salvation, hope, and eternal life for lost and fearful beings who are neither very happy nor very good.

For centuries, the main way that He has revealed Himself and His thoughts was through the earthly-sanctuary service, which provided a model for the plan of salvation.

This week we look at that service and what the Lord was telling His people through it. This way, we can claim the hope that God graciously offers to us—we who, to some degree, are reflected in Auden's verse.

**The Week at a Glance:** What was the meaning of those sacrifices? What was the purpose of the Old Testament sanctuary? How was Christ prefigured in the sacrificial rituals? Why was blood so central to the whole process?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 15.*

## The Pre-Sanctuary Sacrifices

Last week's lesson sketched some of the earliest examples of sacrifice mentioned in the Old Testament. Interestingly enough (and perhaps you noticed), no real explanation of the origin, or purpose, of the sacrifices is given in the texts. The Bible just tells about them being offered.

**No matter the different circumstances surrounding each account, the Cain and Abel story (*Gen. 4:4*), the Flood story (*Genesis 6–8*), and the account of Abraham and Isaac (*Gen. 22:13*), all have one crucial thing in common: What is it, and why is it so important?**

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In all these presanctuary accounts, the worship centered on sacrifice, on blood, on the death of an *innocent* animal. Though the texts themselves say little about the purpose of the sacrifices, the death of the animal was still central. There was something about these deaths that made the act itself acceptable to God (contrast the Lord's reaction to Cain's offering with His response to Abel's). This is seen also in Noah's sacrifice right after exiting the ark.

**Read Genesis 8:21, 22. Notice the link between the sacrifices Noah offered and the Lord's intent never to "curse the ground any more for man's sake" (*see also Gen. 9:8-17*). What's implied in these texts, if not explicitly stated? How do we see the plan of salvation foreshadowed here?**

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Even here, long before the Cross, we are given a glimpse of the great plan of salvation, of God willing to forgive us, but only because of a sacrifice offered in our stead. God accepted—in behalf of the world—the sacrifice that Noah offered, even though “the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.”

**The Bible records Noah's first act after getting off the ark as one of building an altar and offering sacrifices to the Lord. What should that tell us about the importance of keeping the Lord first in our lives, not just in words but in concrete acts of worship, thanksgiving, and praise?**



## The Earthly Sanctuary

From the start, with the fall of Adam and Eve, we can see how one result of sin is separation between humanity and God. God is holy, humanity is unholy, and the question remains, How can a holy God come close to an unholy race? The earthly-sanctuary service helps provide an answer.

**Read Exodus 25:8.** Why does God ask the Hebrews to make a sanctuary?

The sanctuary functions as a meeting place between God and His people. The name of the sanctuary itself, the “tent of meeting” (often translated as “tent of the congregation”), carries this idea: The sanctuary was a place for the Lord, a holy God, to meet with sinful, fallen humanity. It was through the medium of the sanctuary that the Lord, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, interacted with His covenant people on a daily basis. Here is the place in which He issued judgments (*Exodus 16*), forgave sin (*Leviticus 4*), guided their journeying (*Num. 9:15-21*), cleansed them from impurity (*Lev. 14:31*), and communed with them (*Exod. 25:22*). It was the center of their worship, the center of divine revelation, and the place where the people came to in order to enjoy the benefits of this covenant relationship with God.

**Was the sanctuary the only place in which God had interacted with His people in a special way? How do Exodus 12 and Exodus 20 help answer that question?**

Of course, the Lord was not limited to interacting with His people via the sanctuary; nevertheless, that was the chosen means through which He tabernacled and communicated and interacted with them. Why He did it this specific way, Scripture doesn't say: The crucial thing is that, through this medium, He, a holy God, was able to manifest Himself to the people in order that they would be able to meet and commune with Him in a manner that allowed them to understand His will for their lives.

**Review the things that God did for His people by dwelling with them in the sanctuary. In what ways does Jesus, by having dwelt with us in the flesh (*John 1:14*), do the same things for us now?**

## Blood and the Sanctuary

Yesterday's study shows how the sanctuary was the means through which a holy God could dwell among and interact with sinners. Yet, it wasn't as though the building itself provided some kind of special filter that enabled the people to approach, worship, and have fellowship with the Lord. Something else was involved, something that a building itself could never provide.

**Read** **Leviticus 17:11.** What is the crucial element here, and why is it so important in allowing sinful humanity to approach a holy God?

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**Look up** **Exodus 24:5-8, 29:12, 30:10, Leviticus 4:17, and 10:18.** What's the one point all have in common?

Even the most cursory reading of the Old Testament—sanctuary ritual reveals the centrality of blood to the entire ritual. Innocent animals—lambs, bulls, goats—were slain in various services, everything from first ratifying the covenant between the people and God (*Exod. 24:5-8*) to making atonement for a priest who sins (*Lev. 4:3-7*) to purification rituals (*Lev. 15:25-30*), even to the communal offering on the Day of Atonement (*Leviticus 16*). What all this shows is how pivotal the sacrifices and blood were to the function of the earthly sanctuary. Whatever spiritual lessons were to be taught through the tabernacle service, the sacrifice of these animals, the spilling of their blood, was central to the whole process.

This shouldn't be surprising. As sinners, we should be destroyed, because sin leads to death. Yet God, in His grace, has provided a way of escape: the innocent dying for the guilty (*Rom. 5:8*). Jesus Himself would lose His life; that is, spill His blood, in order that we, as sinners, could stand forgiven (*Gal. 1:4, 1 Pet. 1:19*). Because blood represented life, spilled blood represented death, and the death of each sacrifice pointed to the death of Jesus, the means by which sinful humanity could be restored, in full, with the Creator.

**The sacrifice of innocent animals appears cruel, even crude. And maybe it's supposed to appear that way. What should this tell us about how bad sin is, that it takes something so hard and harsh in order to deal with it?**

## The Sanctuary and Sin

Through the sacrificial ritual, the sanctuary provided a means through which God's covenant people could enter into His divine presence. Yet, the questions are: What were those sacrifices all about that allowed people this access to God? and How is all this a prefiguring of what Christ has done for us?

**Read** the following texts: **Leviticus 5:1, 17; 17:16; 19:17; 20:17, 20.** **From the immediate context of these texts, what do you think the phrase about people or the individual “bearing . . . iniquity” means?**

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The basic idea presented here is that people are responsible for their own sin and iniquity. Excuses aren't allowed. God called His people into a covenant relationship with Him; He has allowed them to participate in His holiness (*Exod. 19:6, Lev. 19:2, 20:7*), and they could do this by living in faith and obedience to Him (*Lev. 20:8*). Sin and impurity, violations of the covenant law, could disrupt this covenant relationship. Unless sin were dealt with, His people would be punished, for they would be left to bear their own iniquity. The Lord, however, through His grace, offered them a way of being forgiven iniquity and a way to be cleansed from it. This provision was at the heart of the sacrificial system that centered on the sanctuary.

In order to be forgiven, those who were bearing their own sin brought a sacrifice to the Lord (*Lev. 5:5, 6*). The exact type of animal or ritual depended upon numerous factors, but the basic idea was the same: The sin and iniquity that a person was bearing were transferred to the innocent animal, and the animal itself suffered the death that, otherwise, would have been the sinner's. This is part of the process that's called atonement.

**What is atonement equated with in these texts? *Lev. 4:20, 6:7, 19:22, Num. 15:25.* How do the following texts help us understand what we have been offered through Jesus? *Ps. 130:3, 4; Eph. 1:7; 4:32; Col. 1:14.* How have you experienced for yourself the reality of this wonderful promise?**

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## The Supreme Sin Offering

**In light** of yesterday's study, where we looked at the idea of sin and iniquity transferred to the innocent animal as a means of forgiving the sinner, what are the following texts telling us about Jesus? *Isa. 53:11, Heb. 9:28, 1 Pet. 2:2.*

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The message is clear: Jesus became our Sin Bearer, taking upon Himself our sins and being punished for them, the only means of salvation and forgiveness for fallen humanity. This is, in many ways, the great truth foreshadowed in the earthly-sanctuary service.

**Read Isaiah 53.** How does this chapter, in its own unique way, teach us the idea of Christ's substitutionary death in our stead?

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Isaiah 53, linked with the last three verses of the fifty-second chapter, encapsulates the gospel. Isaiah's beautiful presentation of the Savior and of His redeeming work is set against the backdrop of humankind's ingratitude. Woven through these verses is a very clear and unmistakable presentation of the substitutionary nature of Christ's sacrifice, as prefigured in the earthly-sanctuary service: "This chapter [Isaiah 53] should be studied. It presents Christ as the Lamb of God. Those who are lifted up with pride, whose souls are filled with vanity, should look upon this picture of their Redeemer, and humble themselves in the dust. The entire chapter should be committed to memory. Its influence will subdue and humble the soul defiled by sin and uplifted by self-exaltation."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1147.

**Read again Isaiah 53 and write down every place it talks about humanity. What kind of picture does it present? How accurate of a portrayal is it? In what ways do you see yourself reflected in there? At the same time, what hope is offered there for fallen beings such as ourselves?**

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**Further Study:** See also Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 1147, 1148; Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 78, 458; *Evangelism*, p. 612; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 358, 359; *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 690–692.

“To many it has been a mystery why so many sacrificial offerings were required in the old dispensation, why so many bleeding victims were led to the altar. But the great truth that was kept before men, and imprinted upon mind and heart, was this, ‘Without shedding of blood is no remission’ (Heb. 9:22). In every bleeding sacrifice was typified ‘the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29).

“Christ Himself was the originator of the Jewish system of worship, in which, by types and symbols, were shadowed forth spiritual and heavenly things. . . .

“A lesson was embodied in every sacrifice, impressed in every ceremony, solemnly preached by the priest in his holy office, and inculcated by God Himself—that through the blood of Christ alone is there forgiveness of sins.

“Anciently believers were saved by the same Saviour as now, but it was a God veiled. They saw God’s mercy in figures. . . . Christ’s sacrifice is the glorious fulfillment of the whole Jewish economy. . . . All can now approach God through the merits of Christ. . . . They need not depend on priest or ceremonial sacrifice. Liberty is given to all to go directly to God through a personal Saviour.

“The whole mind, the whole soul, the whole heart, and the whole strength are purchased by the blood of the Son of God.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 155.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① In what essential ways did the services of the tabernacle in the wilderness, and afterward, in the temple at Jerusalem, prophetically symbolize the gospel?
- ② As Christians, we see the death of Christ foreshadowed in the earthly-sanctuary service. Yet, the earthly service was not limited merely to the death of the animal. The priests also ministered in behalf of the people in the earthly sanctuary after the sacrifice had already been offered. Discuss the implications of that important fact in light of our understanding of Christ as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

## The Interrupted Rock Concert

by Juan Gratica Silva

A group of youth held evangelistic meetings in their town plaza in central Chile. They showed part of a movie about Jesus each evening before they spoke. About 100 people came each evening to listen. On the last evening the youth prayed for God's blessing, then they began setting up for the meetings.

A large truck stopped nearby and began playing rock music loudly through his speakers. The youth stopped in dismay. How could they preach over this loud noise?

Someone asked the truck driver to turn the music down, but he refused, saying he had been paid to play the music and had a permit to stay there. The youth had no special permit and could do nothing.

People were gathering for the meeting, but it would be impossible to hear over the music. The youth hurried to a nearby member's home to pray while the rest of the group stayed at the plaza.

Some of the people who had come to hear their message suggested that the youth come back another night. "You can't speak over the music," they said.

The pastor wondered if maybe they should postpone their final meeting. But, sure that God would honor their desire to share their faith, he called the remaining youth together. "We cannot do anything about the music, but God can. Let's pray." They prayed that God would step in and stop the music.

The youth who had gone to pray returned to the plaza and began setting up chairs. In record time the plaza was ready for a meeting.

The pastor turned on the video system, and a picture of Jesus flashed on the screen. At that moment the music blaring from the truck suddenly stopped. The silence was electric. Some 200 people who had gathered to listen to the rock music, stopped dancing and stood in silence. The man in the truck gathered his equipment and announced he was going elsewhere. Then he told one youth, "God told me to leave this place. Please forgive me for disturbing you."

A singer began a song, and the crowd who had been listening to the rock music turned to listen to God's music while pictures of Jesus flashed on the screen.

On previous nights, the meetings had drawn 100 to 135 people; but this night more than 250 stayed to listen. The youth, inspired by what they had seen God do, spoke with enthusiasm. During an altar call, 35 people came forward to commit their lives to Jesus.

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JUAN GRATICA SILVA is a pastor in central Chile.

# A Body You Have Prepared *for Me*



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 1:1-3; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 1:8, 9; 5:7-9.*

**Memory Text:** “When He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me’” (*Hebrews 10:5, NKJV*).

About twenty-four hundred years ago, Euripides wrote *Alcestis*, in which Admetus, king of Thessaly, was fated to an early death unless he could find a substitute to die in his place. He approached his father, mother, other kin, and friends, all who refused; only his wife, Alcestis, agreed to offer herself. After her death, Admetus bemoaned her loss: “I shall wear mourning for you, O my wife, not for one year but all my days, abhorring the woman who bore me, hating my father—for they loved in words, not deeds.”

Euripides's drama covers the theme of self-sacrifice—what it means to give of oneself for another. As Christians, we see here a faint example of the story of Jesus, who offered Himself not for one king but for a planet of unworthy beings. This week we look at Christ's coming here in human flesh in order to offer His life for ours.

**The Week at a Glance:** What was Jesus prior to His incarnation? After His incarnation, was He both God and Man? How does the Bible depict His humanity? His divinity? How could He have both natures at once? How important to us are both His divinity and humanity?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 22.*

## “Is the Universe Friendly?”

Even to begin to appreciate what Jesus Christ has done for us by taking upon Himself humanity, we first need to understand just who He is, where He came from, and what He was prior to His voyage into this world via the womb of Mary, His earthly mother. These themes aren't always easy to grasp, because the ideas behind them are so incredible. All we can do, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is marvel at what we can know and rejoice in the hope that this God-given knowledge offers to us.

**Look** up these texts: Micah 5:2, John 1:1-3, 6:62, 8:58. What do they tell us about where Jesus was and who He was prior to His coming to earth as a human being?

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These texts (and others) relate a crucial theme, that of the preexistence of Jesus prior to His incarnation (His coming in human flesh). What they teach us, among other things, is that Jesus is God and existed before coming to this earth. He was not just some great man, a great teacher and spiritual guide. He was God, and as God, He existed before He became a human being. Indeed, He exists eternally. The deity of Christ is a theme that runs through the Bible. Jesus came from the Father (*John 16:28*), was one with the Father (*John 10:30*), and exists eternally with the Father (*John 1:2*). There was never a time when Jesus didn't exist; otherwise, He would be a created being, and the Bible does not teach that.

**Read** John 1:3. How does this verse shed light on the eternal preexistence of Jesus?

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**Think about what this great truth means, that Jesus, coeternal with the Father, became a human Being. Think how an understanding of this truth changes our perception, not only of ourselves but of our world, even of our whole existence. Someone once said that the crucial question facing humanity is, “Is the universe friendly?” Discuss with others how your understanding of the deity and preexistence of Christ helps answer that question.**



## In the Form of God and Man

To the modern mind, the idea of Christ's preexistence and then His incarnation into human flesh are all too far-fetched to be taken seriously. These are tales that belong to a prescientific, prerational age. For a world raised on the scientific method, where truth is viewed only as that which can be understood in a lab or by scientific inquiry, the incarnation of Jesus simply is not something that *reasonable* people can still accept, because it exists outside the common scientific and modern tools of inquiry and examination. This would be fine if all truth existed only within those parameters; but because it doesn't, these methods will never bring us to the truth we really need to know. Instead, we learn these truths, because we have been told them.

**Read Philippians 2:5-8. What is God telling us in these verses? What do they tell us about who Jesus was and what He became in order to save us? In what ways do these texts reveal the divine and human aspect of Jesus?**

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In verse 6, Paul says that Jesus was “in the form of God” but that He “emptied Himself” (*vs. 7, NASB*) and took the “form of a servant.” What’s interesting is that the word translated “form” (He was in the “*form* of God” [*vs. 6*], and the “*form* of a servant” [*vs. 7*]) comes from the same Greek word, *morphe*, which means the essential and basic characteristics of something, as opposed to merely incidental or changing characteristics. In other words, a circle might be green or red or made out of rocks; these are elements of the circle that are not essential to its being a circle, for they can all change and the circle remains a circle. In contrast, the roundness of the circle, its *morphe*, its form, can never change; it’s what it is in order to be a circle. This is what Paul is telling us here about Jesus: He was truly God, in that He had the essential characteristics of God; and then He humbled Himself and took on the essential characteristics of a human, a servant, and became fully human, as well. He was as truly God as He was truly a man.

**Why is the great truth about Jesus’ divinity and humanity something that science or any other human inquiry can never teach us? What other important truths exist outside the realm of science and philosophy? What should this tell us about the limits of these disciplines in revealing to us crucial truth?**

## The Humanity of Christ

In the context of yesterday's study of Philippians 2, read the following from Ellen White: "Wondrous combination of man and God! He might have helped his human nature to withstand the inroads of disease by pouring from his divine nature vitality and undecaying vigor to the human. But he humbled himself to man's nature. He did this that the Scripture might be fulfilled; and the plan was entered into by the Son of God, knowing all the steps in his humiliation, that he must descend to make an expiation for the sins of a condemned, groaning world. What humility was this! It amazed angels. The tongue can never describe it; the imagination can not take it in. The eternal Word consented to be made flesh! God became man! It was a wonderful humility."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Sept. 4, 1900.

**Look up the following texts: Matthew 4:1, 2; 8:24; 26:37; Mark 2:16; 3:5; Luke 2:7; John 4:6; 11:41; 19:28. How do they attest to the humanity of Christ?**

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Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, however different their approaches to the life and death of Jesus, all in their own way testified to His humanity, for they depicted Him as one who ate, prayed, slept, and became thirsty, hungry, and tired. For them, His humanity never seems to be in doubt.

Yet, while testifying to His humanity, the Bible also makes it clear that Jesus never sinned, that in His human nature He never once succumbed to the temptations of the flesh and the wiles of the tempter. The epistle to the Hebrews states that Jesus "in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin" (*Heb. 4:15, NRSV*). Peter, who knew Jesus well, testified that He "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (*1 Pet. 2:22*). John wrote that "in him is no sin" (*1 John 3:5*), and Paul said that Christ "knew no sin" (*2 Cor. 5:21*). Meanwhile, Christ's own words in the following verses (*John 8:29, 46; 15:10*) all reveal the fact that, though human, He never sinned.

**It's not hard to understand why the humanity of Jesus is so important to us. After all, by taking upon Himself human nature, Christ linked Himself to the race in a remarkable way. Why, though, is His sinlessness so important?**

## The Divinity of Christ

**Read** the following texts. After them, write how each one expresses the divinity of Jesus:

*John 8:58*

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*John 20:28*

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*Hebrews 1:8, 9*

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While the Bible certainly makes plain the humanity of Christ, it's also clear on His divinity. The God who existed prior to His assumption of humanity remained the same God, even though now He was clothed in humanity, a concept that is, indeed, hard for us to understand.

Of course, the fact that we can't understand something hardly militates against its being true. There are all sorts of things, even in the *secular* world, that are believed to be true though hard to understand. Quantum theory teaches that subatomic particles don't really exist until someone looks at them. General relativity teaches that matter bends space and time. The very process of life itself is full of mysteries that we don't understand, even though we know life is real. In short, all around us are mysteries, things that we can't fully understand. Why, then, should we be surprised that we face them in our religion, as well? No wonder the Scriptures tell us to consider the mystery of God, even Christ (*Col. 2:2, 3*); no wonder, too, that Jesus tells us that a true knowledge of Him is possible only through revelation (*Matt. 11:25-27, 16:17*).

**What other things, whether in the secular or spiritual world, do we believe that are true yet find hard, if not impossible, to understand? How should this fact (that there's much we believe that we don't understand) help us grasp, by faith, the great truth about Jesus being both God and man? In other words, why should we not reject out of hand something that we cannot understand?**

## Author of Eternal Salvation

Fortunately, we don't need to know all the intricacies regarding the nature of Christ in order to benefit from what He accomplished for us. God has revealed enough for us to be saved.

**Read** carefully Hebrews 5:7-9. How is the humanity of Christ portrayed there? In what ways does our experience parallel His? At the same time, what did He accomplish for us that we never could have accomplished for ourselves?

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In reading Hebrews 5:7-9, we can see so clearly the humanity of Jesus: His flesh, His tears, His suffering, His obedience. In so many ways, this all sounds so human—a godly person suffering and struggling through the toils of life, clinging in faith and reverence to the Father. All this we see in Jesus (*read also Matt. 26:39, 27:46, Luke 22:42*).

Yet, at the same time, He is also God. As God, He originated the plan of salvation and implemented it in His human form. He is called the “author of eternal salvation” (*Heb. 5:9*). Otherwise, either as an angel or as only a good man, He never could have atoned for the sins of the world. A created being, no matter how lofty, exalted, or holy, would remain just that: a created being. Only He, God Himself, could provide what was needed in order to save the race from destruction. Thus, in His humanity He created a perfect, inseparable bond and link to us, giving us an example of faith, obedience, suffering; meanwhile, as God, He could provide the only offering that would suffice to pay for the sins of the world. In short, Christ needed to be both God and man in order for the plan of salvation to succeed.

**Read again Hebrews 5:7-9.** In what ways have you, in your own personal walk with the Lord, experienced some of the things expressed there? For example, how has suffering helped you learn obedience? And though the word *perfection* comes loaded with all sorts of ideas and controversies, in what ways have you experienced character changes for the good as a result of your sufferings, your prayers, and supplications? How do these verses, in their own way, reflect your own Christian experience?

**Further Study:** “As one of us [Jesus] was to give an example of obedience. For this He took upon Himself our nature, and passed through our experiences. ‘In all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren.’ Heb. 2:17. If we had to bear anything which Jesus did not endure, then upon this point Satan would represent the power of God as insufficient for us. Therefore Jesus was ‘in all points tempted like as we are.’ Heb. 4:15. He endured every trial to which we are subject. And He exercised in His own behalf no power that is not freely offered to us.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 24.

“The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.’ Rom. 16:25, R.V. It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne. From the beginning, God and Christ knew of the apostasy of Satan, and of the fall of man through the deceptive power of the apostate. God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, ‘that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ John 3:16.”—Page 22.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why does it sometimes take suffering in order to get us to obey?
- 2 Discuss the inherent paradox, or tension, regarding the divine-human nature of Christ. For instance, the One who upholds all things (*Heb. 1:3*) nevertheless grew in wisdom and stature (*Luke 2:52*); the One who was before Abraham (*John 8:58*) was born in a manger (*Luke 2:7*). What lessons can we learn from these points? How do they help us realize the limits of our understanding? Why is it important that we recognize these limits? In what ways is faith a recognition of the limits of knowledge? Discuss these issues in class.

## The Wind Called Them

by Sebastian Tirtirau

The San people of the Kalahari (sometimes called the Bushmen) live in the harsh semi-desert climate of southern Africa. They live off the land, hunting and gathering what they can find.

The chief of Nama Pan village on the Kalahari is a wise old man called N!kau (pronounce the ! as a click of the tongue). He is famous among the San people for his knowledge of San stories from the beginning of time. Today he enjoys telling a much more recent story, one of whispering winds and an encounter with God.

“My village was located at the base of the Aha Hills, an area where there is no water and no wildlife. Even birds do not come to Aha Hills, for there are no plants and few insects to feed them. The area is totally silent, and the people were often hungry.

“One day a soft wind blew across the hills. I felt it and knew that it was a wind from the Spirit of God. I asked the wind why he comes our way, and the wind told me that we should move from this place to a place that God has appointed for us. There we would find more food and better times. We would be happier there.

“I told the people what the wind had told me, and they agreed to move. We are the the people of the wind, and we recognize the gentle wind that comes from God. We picked up our few belongings and moved to where God had prepared a place for us. We are very happy now, because God is providing good food for us, but even more important, He has made Himself known to us through His Word.”

In 2001 Sebastian Tirtirau visited Nama Pan village. He introduced the people to Jesus, the Son of God and their Savior. Because they believe in God and His leading in their lives, they gladly accepted the news of Jesus, and every adult in the village is now an Adventist.

They were baptized in a broken down inflatable swimming pool that Tirtirau had carried on his car to the village. To nurture the new Christians, they listen to God’s Word in their own ancient language on cassette tapes.

These people realize that if they had stayed in their former isolated village in the Aha Hills, the chances are slim that they would have heard the message of the saving grace of Jesus. But today the village of Nama Pan rings with the happy sounds of beautiful people who have learned to love God and worship Him.

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SEBASTIAN TIRTIRAU *is founder and president of the Pilgrim Society, a supporting organization.*

# In *the* Shadow of Calvary



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:28-36; 24:7; Acts 10:38, 39; 1 Cor. 15:13-18.*

**Memory Text:** “John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (*John 1:29, NKJV*).

In *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, a monk heard about a bridge that collapsed and killed five people. He determined to find out why those particular five were killed. Because He believed in an all-powerful God, there had to be a rational explanation. Unfortunately, he took his notes, acquired over years of inquiry, and cast them into the sea. What he found disturbed him immensely—he couldn't find a good reason for their deaths.

Someone might have told Brother Juniper that he would not find *rational* answers. This side of heaven we don't have them. What we have is the Cross—God suffering for the sin, evil, and hurt of this world. Here we find, if not answers to questions about suffering, hope that those answers exist and one day will be revealed.

**The Week at a Glance:** What was John the Baptist's role in the ministry of Jesus? Why should the Cross be the center of our beliefs? Why did the disciples respond as they did to Christ's warning about the Cross? How do we reflect the same attitude?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 29.*

## John the Baptist—Christ’s Forerunner

(John 1:29-34).

Though little is given in Scripture about John the Baptist, enough is given to show us his zeal, dedication, faith, and (most important) humanity. We have much to learn from this fiery, uncompromising preacher who heralded the first coming of Christ.

**What** foundational truth did God reveal to John about Jesus of Nazareth and what Jesus came to do? What do you think John meant by those words (John 1:29)?

Although John certainly did not fully grasp the import of his own words designating Jesus as the Lamb of God, he, nonetheless, spoke them under the prompting of the Spirit. His mission was to open the minds and hearts of people to the centrality of Christ’s atoning sacrifice in the plan of salvation. Whatever else Jesus came to do—the healing, the teaching, the preaching, the raising from the dead—it all was to point the people not only to who He was but to what He was going to do for them by His death. Because without that death and what it would accomplish for the world, in the end all His other work would have been in vain.

**Look** up the following texts. What do they tell us about how crucial the death of Jesus was to the plan of salvation? *Mark 8:31, Luke 24:7, 1 Cor. 15:13-18.*

“The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light which streams from the cross of Calvary, and in connection with the wondrous, central truth of the Saviour’s atonement. Those who study the Redeemer’s wonderful sacrifice grow in grace and knowledge.”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 221.

**Why must the Cross and Christ’s atonement at the Cross be central to our message as Seventh-day Adventists? What can we do as a church to make sure that we keep this great truth at the center? What will happen to us if we ever lose this focus?**

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## **Christ's Life of Service, Suffering, and Sacrifice** (*Acts 10:38, 39*).

For about three and a half years, the Son of God toiled laboriously among fallen humanity. The Gospels are filled with account after account of the good deeds that Jesus accomplished through the power of God working through His humanity. Never did the world see such a Healer, such a Teacher, such a Lover of people! His life, from His earliest days, was dedicated to the service of fellow human beings.

**Describe** Christ's work and its effect. *Matt. 4:23-25; 8:14-17; Acts 10:38, 39.*

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If you read Acts 10:38, 39, you can see the most incredible paradox: Jesus goes around "doing good," and what does He get for His effort but "hanged on a tree"? How could this happen? Why would someone, whose kindness, goodness, purity, and love were apparent to everyone, elicit such a negative, hateful reaction? Unless, of course, it was precisely His purity, love, and goodness that caused such a reaction.

**Read** John 3:19-21, 15:17-25, and Romans 8:7. How do they help answer the questions posed in the above paragraph?

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Lest we be so quick to judge and condemn, we ought to look at our own wicked hearts (*Jer. 17:9*). Who among us, when confronted by someone whose lifestyle or kindness or love or faith or generosity or benevolence are contrasted to our weaknesses in any (or all) of these areas, has not felt twinges of guilt, resentment, even hatred? And if we would feel this way when contrasted with another sinner, imagine what we might feel when placed in the company of Jesus.

**Why do we sometimes feel anger, resentment, or guilt when placed around such people? What should those thoughts tell us about ourselves? What kind of warning signals are they? What's the only remedy?**

## Warnings of the Cross

**At what point in His ministry did Christ begin to make increasing references to His destined crucifixion? Why do you think He waited until this time?** *Matt. 16:13-21, Luke 9:18-22.*

Many Bible scholars believe that it was in the summer before His crucifixion (August or September, A.D. 30) that Christ received Peter's great confession of His Messiahship at Caesarea-Philippi. (*See The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 231.) From that point on, Jesus wished to dispel the apostles' false concepts of His essential mission and brace them for His rapidly approaching ordeal and the attendant trials that they would bear for His sake.

**Why was it so difficult for the disciples to accept or even understand Christ's explicit references to His impending sacrifice?** *Mark 9:31, 32; Luke 9:44, 45.*

In both accounts, Mark and Luke say that the disciples feared to ask Jesus what He meant; that is, they didn't want to know. How human a character trait: not wanting to hear bad news, not wanting to hear something that would go against our own cherished notions and hopes.

In many ways, we can find the key to this attitude in Mark's account, a few verses later (*vss. 33, 34*), when they had been disputing among themselves who would be the greatest. In other words, those who were busy thinking about worldly honors weren't really ready for the shame and degradation of the Cross. No wonder Mark twice refers to the dullness of the disciples' comprehension of Christ's words and deeds, because their "hearts were hardened" (*Mark 6:52, NRSV; 8:17*). This hardening was from the deceitfulness of pride and vainglory that conflicted with the spirit of the Cross. His disciples, at this stage, viewed self-sacrificing love as a rare medallion to adorn the mantle of life's majestic moments, rather than as the proper spirit of everyday life. When they saw Christ turn aside in self-abnegation from opportunities to seize the reins of political power, they were offended by His apparent lack of gritty pragmatism and ambition.

**How, even in our local church or even in our own heart, do we see this same spirit manifested? It's only natural to want honor and glory, is it not? In what ways do you see it in yourself? Why, then, must we be broken at the foot of the cross?**

## Falling Shadows and Radiant Glory

**Read** Matthew 17:1-9, Luke 9:28-36. Write down what things happened that should have increased the faith of those who witnessed this incredible divine manifestation.

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Christ knew that His disciples were altogether unprepared for the impending crisis. Burdened with the mounting opposition of the religious leaders, with John the Baptist's recent beheading, and with Christ's warning of His own imminent sufferings, they faced a certain foreboding. Hence, this incredible manifestation of divine power, including a voice from heaven affirming Jesus before the disciples. All this certainly should have increased their faith and strengthened them for the coming trials.

**What** did Moses and Elijah talk about with Christ? *Luke 9:30, 31.* Why do you think they discussed this topic?

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It is fascinating that Heaven did not send mighty angels to the Savior at this time; instead, two human beings who themselves, in their own way, suffered the toils and trials of humanity came to talk with the Savior about His impending sacrifice on the cross. In other words, this incredible scene wasn't just for these three disciples (who slept through part of the whole thing, anyway) but for Jesus, to strengthen Him in His humanity as He faced the Cross. "These men, chosen above every angel around the throne, had come to commune with Jesus concerning the scenes of His suffering, and to comfort Him with the assurance of the sympathy of heaven."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 425.

**Imagine yourself having the privilege of some incredible divine manifestation of heavenly power that strongly affirmed your faith in Jesus, just as what Peter, James, and John had here. You would never doubt again, right? Your faith would remain solid, right? You'd never need any other affirmation, right? Why was this not the experience of the disciples, even after the Transfiguration? What was their problem, and what is ours?**

## Law of the New Kingdom *(Matt. 20:25-28).*

Christ's ministry was moving toward its climax. He was leading His disciples on their last journey together. On the way, He told them plainly that at Jerusalem "all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished," for "the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again" (*Luke 18:31, NKJV; Matt. 20:18, 19, NKJV*). This statement of coming events should have turned the disciples' interest to the teachings of the prophets concerning these matters. But "they understood none of these things; . . . and they did not know the things which were spoken" (*Luke 18:34, NKJV*), not because Jesus' words were unclear or enigmatic but because His purposes were so foreign to their aims and expectations. They simply didn't want to hear what He had to say. Christ had, after all, commissioned them to proclaim everywhere that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (*Matt. 3:2, NKJV*) and promised that they would be given positions of high honor in it, enthroned as judges of Israel (*Matt. 19:27-30*).

**Stimulated** by this promise, James and John, with their mother, Salome, asked Jesus for what special favor? What did His reply reveal about the path to the throne of glory in His kingdom and the nature of His government? *Matt. 20:20-28, Mark 10:35-45.*

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This request smacked heavily of self-serving ambition, but Jesus did not rebuke them or their mother for coveting personal honors that were so incongruous with His character and mission. Rather, He sought to deepen and purify their love for Him and their attachment to His cause. He wished them to see that the cross precedes the crown.

**Fyodor Dostoyevski once wrote a story about Jesus coming to earth in the flesh, as He had come the first time. Before long, Jesus was arrested and thrown into jail, where He faced interrogation by the Grand Inquisitor, who wanted to know why Jesus came back and interfered with them and their plans. Now suppose Jesus were, in the flesh, to step directly into your life. In what ways would He be interfering with you and your plans? What does your answer tell you about yourself and how you are living?**

**Further Study:** See Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 359, 541–543; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 547–551, 644; *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 142; *The Sanctified Life*, pp. 56, 57; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 226.

“The cross of Calvary is to be lifted high above the people, absorbing their minds and concentrating their thoughts. Then all the spiritual faculties will be charged with divine power direct from God. Then there will be a concentration of the energies in genuine work for the Master. The workers will send forth to the world beams of light, as living agencies to enlighten the earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 44.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Christ, the world’s best Teacher and Model of truth, consistently demonstrated, in every act, that He came “not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (*Mark 10:45*). Why did His disciples have such difficulty grasping His sacrificial, self-transcending mission and calling for their lives? What does this say about humanity in its fallen state? How only can this spirit be changed?
- 2 If Christ had grumbled about humanity’s lack of appreciation for His services and complained about His disciples’ unperceptiveness with regard to His essential aims and character, how would that have affected His influence and mission? Do we have any more right to grumble and complain than Christ had? What is the antidote to this all-too-common spirit and behavior? *John 15:11, 16:33, Heb. 12:1-5*.
- 3 The disciples, followers of Christ, were unprepared for the Cross, despite being given much light beforehand about it. What parallels can you find between them and their spiritual state and ours as a people and a church as we await the Second Coming?
- 4 Discuss the question at the end of Thursday’s section, though in the context of the church, as a whole, or in your local church setting. Would we welcome Jesus, or would He get in the way of our plans as a church?

## God Is Faithful

by Dobrinka Nakova

Evgeny Nakov grew up in an Adventist home in Bulgaria. But after serving in the army, he was not satisfied to live in the village; he wanted to see more of the world and earn good money.

Evgeny found work driving a taxi in Sofia, the capital city. Some days he earned good money, but other days he barely made enough to buy fuel. He tried working longer hours, but he became tired and had an accident that cost him his savings. At times he wondered if his failure to get ahead financially was due to his lack of faithfulness to God.

He helped his family sell a house, but on the way to the bank, robbers stole the money. The money wasn't even his; how would he ever repay it? *Why are so many bad things happening to me?* he wondered.

Evgeny began examining his spiritual values. He realized he hardly knew God and promised himself to spend more time getting to know Him.

One night he drove until 3:00 A.M. looking for customers, but with no luck. Finally two men stopped him for a ride. He took them far outside the city. But when they arrived, the men said they had no money. Evgeny feared pushing them to pay him. Feeling like a failure, he turned around and started toward home. *Why are things going so badly?* he wondered. *I've earned nothing today!*

As he drove home, the car lights shone on some papers lying on the road. He stopped the car to investigate. He found money. Lots of money. He found no bag or wallet from which it could have fallen. He picked up the money and counted it: \$250, three months' wages.

Evgeny knew that God had led him to the money, that God knows his needs and wants to be part of his life. Evgeny recommitted his life to God and asked God to lead him.

Soon Evgeny was offered an opportunity to study at an Adventist school outside Bulgaria. He had focused his life on making money, but God is refocusing his life on service. The peace that Evgeny feels assures him that he is on the right track.



EVGENY NAKOV (left) is studying theology in Villa Aurora Adventist College in Florence, Italy. DOBRINKA NAKOVA lives in Sofia, Bulgaria.

# The Passion Week



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Mark 11:1-11, John 13:1-17, 15:9-17.*

**Memory Text:** “Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him” (*John 13:31*).

A museum in Rome displays what might be the earliest picture of the Crucifixion. Unfortunately, it is a caricature, graffiti sketched on a wall. It's a drawing of a man, with a donkey's head, stretched out on a cross. Before the cross another man stands, his arms lifted in adoration. Below the picture these words, in Latin, were scribbled: “Alexander worships God.”

Though both Jews and Christians had been accused of donkey worship (the exact origins of that accusation is unknown), the derogatory nature of the picture should help us understand the shame associated with the Cross, something not easy for us to appreciate. After all, we adore the Cross, we sing songs about it, we place it on our churches, and we write books extolling it. Yet, how much sense does it make to worship a Man executed as a criminal in the most shameful and barbaric manner?

The answer, of course, is that it makes a lot of sense, once you understand who that Man was and what His death meant for the world.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why did Jesus not stop the outpouring of support for Him during the triumphal entry? What was the attitude of a majority of Jews toward Jesus? What was the significance of the foot-washing ceremony?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 5.*

## Outline of the Final Passover Week

About one-third of the material in the four Gospels deals explicitly with the final Passover week leading up to Christ's crucifixion and His resurrection. This material includes some parables of the kingdom and of future judgment.

Today's study presents a brief outline of the period often termed the Passion Week—from the Sunday or Monday prior to Christ's crucifixion to the following Sunday, when He was resurrected. In accordance with the Lord's original instructions, the Passover lamb was slain in the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month (originally called *Abib* in Hebrew and later *Nisan*, which came in the early spring). (See *Exod. 12:1-6, 34:18, Esther 3:7*.)

Below is a quick outline of the high points:

*Sunday (Nisan 9)*. The triumphal entry; Jesus' silent visit to the temple; and His return to Bethany.

*Monday (Nisan 10)*. The fruitless fig tree cursed; second cleansing of the temple; Jesus heals the afflicted there; He returns to Bethany in the evening.

*Tuesday (Nisan 11)*. Last day in the temple (Greek believers meet with Jesus in outer court); Jesus' last day of public teaching; woes against religious elite; retirement to Mount of Olives and discourse there on the Second Coming; Judas clinches betrayal bargain with priests that night.

*Wednesday (Nisan 12)*. Jesus in quiet retirement with disciples.

*Thursday (Nisan 13)*. Preparation for the Passover; the Lord's Supper; Judas's betrayal; Jesus' farewell discourse for disciples and high-priestly prayer; Gethsemane; His arrest. The events following the Lord's Supper were at sundown and afterwards; consequently, the day was now the fourteenth of Nisan, or Thursday night.

*Friday (Nisan 14)*. Jesus led to Annas, then to Caiaphas, and then to Sanhedrin; Peter's denial; Jesus is brought to Pilate, then to Herod's palace, and back to Pilate. He is scourged, condemned, and crucified.

**Carefully read John 15:9-17. Against the background of the Passion Week, Jesus focuses here on one point. What is it, why is it so appropriate (especially in light of the Cross), and what is the message for us? How can you make that point real in your own life?**

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## **Triumphal Entry; the Temple Cleansed**

*(Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-48).*

**Read** the story of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem in **Matthew 21:1-11** (see also *Mark 11:7-11, Luke 19:29-40*). **What was so different about how He interacted with the people here as opposed to when He multiplied the fish and the loaves?** (*John 6:15*).

Throughout most of His ministry, Jesus kept a fairly low profile. He didn't encourage large demonstrations of fealty and loyalty. Knowing, as He did, the hatred and animosity of the leaders, He worked in a way that allowed Him to complete His work of healing, teaching, and preaching.

Now, however, He allowed this demonstration, knowing that it would lead Him to the cross. Plus, with such crowds mounting and the interest in Him growing into a fervor, many more would know of His death and resurrection than would have had He kept a low profile.

**What** did Jesus do the next day and with what results? *Matt. 21:12-16.*

During the triumphal entry, some in the crowds had shouted, "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest" (*Luke 19:38*). Christ's response to the Pharisees in the next few verses showed that not only did He acknowledge these acclamations and praises, He affirmed them. Then, as the Davidic king, the son of David, He cleanses the temple, calling it "My house" (*Matt. 21:13*), and as its rightful owner, He exercised His divine authority over it.

Thus, between the triumphal entry, the cleansing of the temple, and His final return to the temple, where He is challenged by the leaders (*Matt. 21:23-27*), Jesus, in an undeniable manner, has openly shown His own authority before the people and the religious teachers. In His own merciful way, He has given them even more evidence of who He was (*see Matt. 21:15*). The question now for them is, How would they respond?

**Some leaders rejected Jesus because His claims threatened their power, prestige, and authority. In what ways do the claims of Jesus threaten your own power, prestige, and authority? How do you respond to those threats?**

## Jesus and the Jews

Immediately after putting the religious leaders in a bind (*Matt. 21:23-27*), Jesus told a few parables about the fate of those who would reject Him (*vss. 28-46*). Interestingly enough, in Matthew 21:45, the chief priests and Pharisees believed that Jesus had spoken about them; that is, the chief priests and the Pharisees themselves as opposed to a majority of the Jewish people, who, themselves, seemed supportive of Jesus.

**Look up the following texts. What do they say was the attitude of most of the people about Jesus during His ministry?** *Matt. 26:3-5; Mark 14:1, 2; Luke 22:2; Luke 23:27, 28; John 11:48.*

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According to these texts, many of the people supported Jesus, which is why the chief priests and rabbis were so fearful of Him. If Jesus were just some inconsequential preacher who had no following, the leaders wouldn't have had the attitude they had, so powerfully expressed in John 11:48, in which they said that if they let Jesus alone, "all men will believe on him." Obviously, there were many Jews who believed in Jesus already, and unless Jesus were stopped, many more would become believers.

Scholars have noted gross irregularities in the trial of Jesus. First, it was held at night, which, according to traditional Jewish practice, should not have happened, especially in a case involving a capital offense. The fact is that the leaders had to hold the trial as they did in order to keep it from the people.

Of course, there was a rabble that promoted His death, but because this was during the Passover, when many Jews had come from other countries, it's likely that these had never heard of Jesus or seen what He was like or what He had done. In Matthew 21:10, 11, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, some people asked, Who is this? The crowd answered them that it was Jesus. How could those people have not known? Possibly they were Jews who—coming from abroad (and were thus unaware of Jesus)—followed their leaders and called for His death. Once the truth about Jesus was known, many Jews became followers (*Acts 2:41; 21:20, 21*).

## Clean Feet

After a day's interlude of quiet reflection with Jesus, the disciples made preparations for the Passover. Fully aware that He was the true Paschal Lamb who was to be sacrificed, Jesus wished to spend the few remaining peaceful hours with His disciples for their benefit. How moving are His words: "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (*Luke 22:15*).

**Read John 13:1-17. What was one of Christ's last acts before His atoning death? What was the significance of that act? What does it tell us about the character of God?**

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Just before the shame, the suffering, and the pain of the Cross, Jesus washes the feet of His own disciples! Here He is, God Himself, the One who made the worlds, washing the feet of His disciples? Only as we grasp who Jesus really is can we even begin to realize what an incredible act this was, what an incredible revelation of the character of our God. And, in its own indirect way, this act is a revelation about ourselves—we who, by nature, want to be served by others rather than to serve others. Christ's act wasn't a rebuke just to His disciples; it's a rebuke to us every time we're arrogant, proud, and selfish.

**Besides giving His disciples a needed lesson in humility and servanthood, what theological lesson was Jesus teaching through the foot washing? *John 13:10*.**

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By saying that he or she who has been bathed doesn't need another full bath but merely needs his or her feet cleansed, Jesus was talking about what might be called postbaptismal sin. That is, those who have been baptized (bathed) don't need to be rebaptized after each sin. Foot washing itself can be a symbol of repentance, cleansing, and forgiveness.

**Most people don't find foot washing pleasant (*which is why many churches don't practice it, despite Christ's command in John 13:14, 15*). Yet, it wasn't meant to be pleasant. Why not? What other unpleasant thing does God admonish us to do?**

## Gethsemane

**Jesus** entered Gethsemane with His three most intimate disciples and bade them pray and watch, lest they enter into temptation. What petition did He then plead before the Father three times? What did the cup signify? What paramount principle brought resolution to Christ's heart? *Matt. 26:36-44, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-44.*

Even as Christ was pleading for strength to save lost and guilty humanity, a maelstrom of treason and treachery against Him was gathering momentum. Satan strove with all his cunning to discourage Him, Judas was leading a band of religious mobsters to arrest the Savior, and the disciples slumbered.

Christ's heart was so deeply pierced with grief that He was already shedding His blood for the sins of humanity, even before the spikes of Golgotha bit into His flesh. He drank the gall of our guilt and shame that He might give us the nectar of His innocence and mercy. For us He drained the cup of wrath to offer in its place the cup of reconciliation.

**What** made Christ's suffering in Gethsemane almost unendurable? *2 Cor. 5:21 (see also Isa. 53:10, Zech. 13:7).*

"As the Son of God bowed in the attitude of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the agony of His spirit forced from His pores sweat like great drops of blood. It was here that the horror of great darkness surrounded Him. The sins of the world were upon Him. He was suffering in man's stead as a transgressor of His Father's law. Here was the scene of temptation. The divine light of God was receding from His vision, and He was passing into the hands of the powers of darkness. In His soul anguish He lay prostrate on the cold earth. He was realizing His Father's frown. He had taken the cup of suffering from the lips of guilty man, and proposed to drink it Himself, and in its place give to man the cup of blessing. The wrath that would have fallen upon man was now falling upon Christ. It was here that the mysterious cup trembled in His hand."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 203.

**Why do you think that Jesus, who knew all along that He had to die this death (John 12:27), would, nevertheless, ask that the cup be taken from Him? What does this tell us about His human nature? What comfort can we draw from the fact that even the Lord Himself, in His humanity, had such battles?**

**Further Study:** See also Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 685–694; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 200–205.

“Never before in His earthly life had Jesus permitted such a demonstration. He clearly foresaw the result. It would bring Him to the cross. But it was His purpose . . . to call attention to the sacrifice that was to crown His mission to a fallen world. While the people were assembling at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, He, the anti-typical Lamb, by a voluntary act set Himself apart as an oblation. It would be needful for His church in all succeeding ages to make His death for the sins of the world a subject of deep thought and study. Every fact connected with it should be verified beyond a doubt. It was necessary, then, that the eyes of all people should now be directed to Him; the events which preceded His great sacrifice must be such as to call attention to the sacrifice itself. After such a demonstration as that attending His entry into Jerusalem, all eyes would follow His rapid progress to the final scene.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 571.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① **Why do the Gospels focus so much on the last week of Christ’s life? Why is that so important for our understanding of the plan of salvation?**
- ② **Read the quote from Ellen G. White taken from Thursday’s study. Write, in your own words, what she is saying. In class on Sabbath, let different people read what they wrote. What is her essential message, and why is that so crucial to all that we believe as Seventh-day Adventists? In what ways do these words catch the essence of the gospel?**
- ③ **If the disciples had imbibed more of Christ’s sacrificial spirit while He was with them, how would that have affected their ministry, their influence, and their capacity to appreciate His character and mission? What is the application for us today?**

## The Six-Week Journey

by Carlos Sebit Abraham

Carlos is a lay evangelist in southern Sudan. He and fellow evangelists work amid incredible challenges in a region that has been wracked by war for 40 years. In spite of the difficulties, Carlos loves teaching eager people about God. But with no ordained pastors in the area where Carlos works, believers must wait months—even years—to be baptized.

Some of Carlos's converts had waited five years for baptism. Carlos decided to take those who could walk on a seven-day journey to the border of Sudan, where they could be baptized. Seven believers joined Carlos on the journey to the border. The trip was filled with dangers, from snakes and soldiers. They ate what they could find along the way and often went hours without water. At night they slept in the bush.

The group stopped to rest in a village where some fellow believers lived. They stayed three weeks, visiting the people and inviting them to accept Jesus. Some 50 people accepted Jesus and began preparing for baptism. Seven believers in the village who had been waiting for baptism joined Carlos on his journey to the border.

After walking a total of seven days, the group arrived at the town on the border where a pastor lived. They found the pastor and arranged for the baptism. It was a joyful day.

The group remained with the pastor just one day before starting toward home. They stopped for a week in another village, where they held a week-long evangelistic series and helped the new believers build a hut-church. In all, Carlos and his pilgrims had been gone six weeks.

Today lay evangelists such as Carlos can baptize their converts, so the believers do not have to wait months or years to be baptized. But lay workers and pastors in Sudan continue to face many challenges in their

work—they lack basic tools and supplies to assist their work. Pray for the faithful believers and their spiritual leaders in southern Sudan.



CARLOS SEBIT ABRAHAM is a district leader of gospel evangelists in Mundri, southern Sudan.

**AD**



# The Voice of Hope to an Entire Nation

During the recent political turmoil in Haiti, the Adventist radio station stayed on the air. Located in the capital city, the station could have been shut down. But unlike the other stations in the city, the Voice of Hope continued to broadcast its message of hope and peace to a troubled nation.

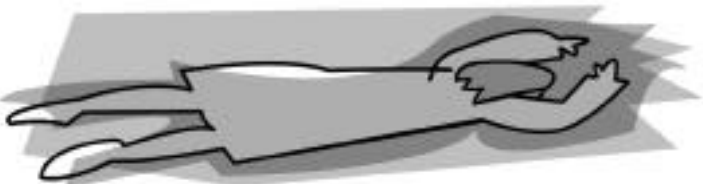
Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help replace broken or outmoded equipment and add transmitters and repeaters that will enable "the Voice of Hope" to broadcast across the country, to everyone who wants to hear it.

## MISSION

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on March 26 supports projects in the Inter-American Division.



# Passage to Calvary



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 26:57-68, Luke 22:66-71, John 18:2-9, 12-23.*

**Memory Text:** “**But Pilate once more addressed them, wishing to set Jesus free. They, however, persistently shouted, ‘Crucify, crucify him!’**” (*Luke 23:20, 21, Weymouth*).

In his book *The Trial*, Czech writer Franz Kafka wrote about a bank clerk named Joseph K. who was arrested, convicted, and executed on charges that were never explained to him. Throughout the story he faced an absurd and unjust labyrinth of interrogations, summonses, and delays. Though continuing to proclaim his innocence (even if not sure what he's charged with), Joseph K. is at the end led to an abandoned quarry and executed.

However absurd and unfair Joseph K.'s experience, it pales in comparison to the absurdities and injustices attending the trial of Jesus. And though hauled before a biased court that had no intention of getting the facts (they were interested only in getting Jesus), Christ maintained the dignity, love, and compassion that marked His entire ministry. However much of a farce, this trial reveals what fallen humanity is capable of doing, even in the face of unconditional love.

**The Week at a Glance:** **How, even in Gethsemane, did Jesus show His compassion for His enemies? How was the gospel prefigured in Christ's arrest and trial? How did Christ respond to those who persecuted Him? What helped explain the blindness of the leaders toward Christ?**

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 12.*

## Arrest in the Garden

**What** opportunity did God provide to arouse the rabble to a sense of their crime in coming to arrest Jesus? *John 18:2-9.*

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When they said that they came to seek Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord responded with two Greek words, *Ego eimi*, which means, “I am,” the same words He used when He said to the Jewish leaders, “Before Abraham was, I am” (*John 8:58*). This simple phrase is linked in meaning to the Hebrew name for God, often translated “Yahveh” (*Exod. 3:11-14*), and it seems to come from a Hebrew root word that means “to be.” Thus, some believe the name means the “One is who,” or “the Self-Existing One.” By using that phrase, Jesus was, perhaps, subtly witnessing to them about His identity.

Immediately after Jesus says “I am,” the crowd falls backward, to the ground. “A divine light illuminated the Saviour’s face, and a dove-like form overshadowed Him. In the presence of this divine glory, the murderous throng could not stand for a moment. They staggered back. Priests, elders, soldiers, and even Judas, fell as dead men to the ground.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 694.

**What** does Peter’s action show about how little even he understood what was happening? *Matt. 26:51, Mark 14:47, Luke 22:50, John 18:10.*

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One would think that after seeing the crowd fall down before Christ’s “divine glory,” Peter would have realized that the Lord didn’t need the disciple’s weak sword to protect Him. By His words, and then by causing the unruly mob to fall to the ground, the Lord showed that He was allowing Himself to be taken. Even more so, by these acts, Jesus was still giving evidence of His divine character and nature, thus, in a way, witnessing to the mob that had come to take Him. Even here, amid the impending doom, Jesus was working for the salvation of those who hated Him.

**Nothing in Scripture indicates that anyone in the mob, even after seeing this divine manifestation of power, changed his or her mind about Jesus. Why are our hearts so hard toward the Lord, even when faced with evidence of His existence and love?**

## Jesus Before Annas, Peter Before the Young Woman

**Read** John 18:12-23. Both Peter and Jesus faced questioning. What were the differences between the situations in which they were questioned, those who questioned them, and their responses to those questions? What can we learn from these contrasts?

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What a powerful contrast between Jesus and Peter. Peter is outside, in an informal setting, before a person with no real stature or standing and, certainly, with no legal authority to do him harm. And yet, when questioned about his relationship to Jesus, Peter lies, saying “I am not.” In contrast, here’s Jesus, inside, before a high official in the Jewish nation, a leader with standing and power. And when asked about, among other things, His disciples, Jesus speaks openly and freely. Even when hit for His words, Jesus responded in a candid manner that showed He had nothing to hide.

**Read** carefully John 18:20-23, especially the words Jesus spoke to the officer who smote Him (*vs. 23*). How is this little account—that of Jesus being unfairly struck by the officer—a small example of the whole principle of the gospel? See *Isa. 53:5*, *2 Cor. 5:21*.

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Peter lies; Jesus is smitten for doing no wrong. What a powerful representation of the contrast between fallen humanity and the loving God who came to save humanity. In Jesus’ answer we see intimations of the gospel: His enemies can find no evil in Him; thus, it’s in His innocence that Jesus is punished.

**How should this account of Christ’s treatment help us deal better with situations in which we ourselves are treated unfairly?**

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## The Evening Trial

**Read** in **Matthew 26:57-68** (also in *Mark 14:53-65*) the account of Jesus before Caiaphas, the scribes, and the elders. How do these verses show how unfair and prejudiced the trial was?

**Why** was it not necessary for Jesus to answer those who had accused Him? *Mark 14:56-59*.

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Because they were getting nowhere in their trial, the high priest finally asked this question: “I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God” (*Matt. 26:63*). Christ fully recognized that His affirmative answer was His death warrant, but He would not deny His identity or His relation to His Father. He warned the court, however, that someday they would see Him in His divine authority.

**How** does Jesus respond to the high priest’s question?

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How fascinating that in response to the high priest’s question, Jesus referred not to His atoning death for the sins of the world or to His resurrection or to His upcoming ministry in heaven as the true High Priest (the one that Caiaphas was supposed to represent). Instead, in a clear and unambiguous manner, Jesus talked about His second coming, when He’ll be seen by them, not as some itinerant preacher whom they can arrest, torment, abuse, and sentence to death but as the Son of man, “sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (*vs. 64*). All through Christ’s ministry, He talked about the Second Coming to His disciples; now, at this climactic moment, He talks about it to His enemies, as well. After this, they could never say, “We weren’t told.”

**By referring to His second coming, Jesus—despite the immediate circumstances—pointed to the great and grand hope of all Christians everywhere. Why, particularly in trying times, does the promise of the Second Coming give us our only hope? Why, in the end, is it our only hope?**

## The Morning Trial

After the night trial, Jesus again faced the leaders, perhaps in an act to formalize the death sentence issued against Him the night before.

**Of all the Gospel writers, Luke gives the most detailed account of this morning trial. Read his account (*Luke 22:66-71*). What similarities exist with what happened the night before? What differences?**

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With more people there, they ask Him basically the same question they asked the night before. Notice how Jesus responds (*vss. 67-69*). Knowing their hearts and knowing that they weren't asking because they wanted to know truth but wanted only to condemn Him, Jesus doesn't answer their question directly, though He does answer it. "If I tell you, ye will not believe" (*vs. 67*). Believe what? That He's the Christ, what else? They certainly would have believed Him if He said that He wasn't. Indeed, they had Him there because they didn't believe that He was the Christ (otherwise they would not have been doing to Him what they were). Thus, Jesus revealed to them that He could see right through their face of a trial. They weren't interested in finding out the truth; they were interested only in making the Truth go away.

Then, before the whole group, Jesus repeated His reference to the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of God, alluding to His power and authority. The leaders, obviously assuming that He was talking about Himself, then asked Him flat out, "Art thou then the Son of God?" (*vs. 70*).

Here, too, Jesus, though not directly answering their question, answers it nevertheless, using in His answer the phrase "I am." Their reaction shows that they clearly understood His claim to divinity. Again, as the night before, Jesus made it clear to them who He was. With all the evidence He had given through His ministry of His divine credentials, the leaders should have believed Him. Sadly, for them, they did not.

**One reason the leaders were so blind to Jesus was that they had a false understanding of prophecy. They expected the Messiah to come in a different manner. This ignorance helped explain, though not excuse, their hostility to Him. What does this tell us about how important it is to have, as much as possible, a correct understanding of prophecy, or Bible doctrine, in general?**

## Pilate's Wife's Dream

After the three religious *trials*, Jesus was herded off for three political *trials* before Pilate, Herod, and then back to Pilate again. What's especially fascinating is what happened to Pilate when his wife warned him against bothering with Jesus. Notice the intensity of her warning (*Matt. 27:19*). Whatever she saw in her dream, it was real and convincing enough for her to tell her husband to stay away from Him completely, as opposed to just *be nice* to Jesus or to *treat Him fairly*. What did she see?

"In answer to Christ's prayer, the wife of Pilate had been visited by an angel from heaven, and in a dream she had beheld the Saviour and conversed with Him. Pilate's wife was not a Jew, but as she looked upon Jesus in her dream, she had no doubt of His character or mission. She knew Him to be the Prince of God. She saw Him on trial in the judgment hall. . . . She saw the cross uplifted on Calvary. She saw the earth wrapped in darkness, and heard the mysterious cry, 'It is finished.' Still another scene met her gaze. She saw Christ seated upon the great white cloud, while the earth reeled in space, and His murderers fled from the presence of His glory. With a cry of horror she awoke, and at once wrote to Pilate words of warning."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 732.

**Analyze** her dream. Notice the three specific elements about Jesus that were shown to her (see the texts below). What are they, and how are they all related to one another? Also, what significance is found in the fact that Pilate's wife wasn't a Jew but a Gentile? *Mark 14:62, Acts 1:11, Rom. 5:18, 2 Cor. 5:21, Phil. 2:8, Heb. 12:2.*

In one sense, in that vision, Pilate's wife was given a compressed version of the whole plan of salvation, from the righteous character of Christ to His second coming. Notice, too, the parallel between what she saw regarding the Second Coming and Christ's words to the leaders in both the evening and morning trial. Besides receiving a clear vision of the Cross, she was shown the Second Coming, as well. So closely tied was the First with the Second that in this dream, the angel gave her images of both.

**Look over the week's lesson and review the ways in which Jesus, even amid the turmoil, was working to save all those with whom He came in contact, even those who were bitterly opposed to Him. What hope should that give you—who might be struggling with faith and assurance of salvation—about God's desire to save you despite your struggles and weaknesses?**

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 698–740; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 1104, 1124.

“It will do you good . . . to frequently review the closing scenes in the life of our Redeemer. Here, beset with temptations as He was, we may all learn lessons of the utmost importance to us. It would be well to spend a thoughtful hour each day reviewing the life of Christ from the manger to Calvary. We should take it point by point and let the imagination vividly grasp each scene, especially the closing ones of His earthly life. By thus contemplating His teachings and sufferings, and the infinite sacrifice made by Him for the redemption of the race, we may strengthen our faith, quicken our love, and become more deeply imbued with the spirit which sustained our Saviour. . . . Everything noble and generous in man will respond to the contemplation of Christ upon the cross.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 374.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** In healing Malchus’s ear and in His accompanying rebuke to Peter, what did Jesus reveal concerning
  - a. His attitude toward His enemies?
  - b. the degree of freedom He could potentially exercise to liberate Himself from their clutches?
  - c. His manner of dealing with the mistakes of His disciples?
  - d. His own state of mind regarding the peril in which He was placed?
  - e. His approved methods of defending and upholding His cause?
  - f. His view of employing physical force in the realm of spiritual conflict?
  
- 2** When Pilate presented Christ and Barabbas side by side and offered to free the man of their choice, the mob pressed for Barabbas’s release. In what less dramatic ways do people today continue in principle to choose Barabbas over Christ?
  
- 3** Why do you think Pilate was given a warning when Herod wasn’t?

## A Spiritual Hunger

by Juan Carlos Conde, Sr.

Juan Carlos managed a large company in Guatemala. He worked 16 hours a day seven days a week, and it was killing him. He became discouraged and started drinking. Although his wife, Elba, was more religious than he, neither regularly attended church.

One day Elba's brother invited her to the Adventist church. Elba had visited the Adventist church as a child and remembered the quiet, orderly worship services. She accepted her brother's invitation. Juan Carlos was too busy to go, so Elba went alone.

Elba began attending regularly and enrolled her children in the Adventist school. One by one her three children asked to be baptized. Elba wished she could be baptized too, but she and Carlos were not legally married. Elba often talked to Carlos about getting married, but some legal papers were not in order, and the marriage had to wait.

When the couple's son, Juan Carlos, Jr., was baptized, Carlos responded to the pastor's call to follow Christ. Carlos wanted to become a Christian example for his family. He saw a lawyer about the legal papers he needed and was amazed to learn that the lawyer would prepare the papers for a tenth of the cost. A few months later Elba and Carlos were married and baptized on the same day.

Sabbath problems led Carlos to resign his job, putting the family into financial difficulty. Elba traveled to another country where she had family. She planned to work there to help the family get out of debt. But she was not able to get steady work that paid enough to help the family as she hoped.

Back home Carlos struggled with the family's financial situation. One day they had no food in the house and only the tithe money with which to buy anything. Carlos prayed with the children, then he turned in the tithe. Moments later neighbors knocked at the door bringing food. When they learned that the family had nothing to eat, the members of the church purchased groceries to sustain them.

Carlos grew spiritually and became a Sabbath School teacher, a small group leader, and eventually a church elder. Elba's influence led several of her relatives to visit the Adventist church; and a number were baptized. But she missed her husband and children and decided to return to Guatemala.

After months of temporary jobs and low pay Carlos found steady work, and the family was reunited. They still have challenges, but God is their strength, and He helps them.

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JUAN CARLOS CONDE, SR., *and his family live in Guatemala City, Guatemala.*



# Darkness at Noon



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 27:42, 45; Mark 5:33; Mark 15:31; Luke 23:44.*

**Memory Text:** “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (*Matthew 27:46*).

**F**or those who will listen, nature speaks eloquently about the character of God. It's a loudspeaker, suffusing our senses with sublime messages about the One who created it all. But even in their fullness and beauty, nature's words are often muted, and, sometimes, because of *static*, the signals can be grossly misread.

In contrast, the Cross is the ultimate revelation to humanity about our Creator. Only as we grasp the incredible reality that the Man hanging on the cross was also God—the One through whom all things in both heaven and earth were created—can we begin to understand truths about this God that the most vibrant sunset or exotic plant could never reveal. As we grasp, too, what kind of death He in His humanity died, and why He agreed to do it, we learn lessons about our God that surpass what anything growing out of the ground or floating in the heavens ever could teach us.

**The Week at a Glance:** What irony is found in the leaders' taunts against Jesus? What caused the darkness that surrounded Him? What was the meaning of His cry “Why hast thou forsaken me?” What does the Cross teach us about the nature of sin?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 19.*

## “He Saved Others!”

From the bogus trials, Jesus was led down the Via Dolorosa (“the Way of Pain”) to Golgotha, “the place of the skull,” where He was crucified. Little did His murderers know what they were doing. No doubt, His awareness of their ignorance was partly why Jesus cried out, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (*Luke 23:34*). Their ignorance, though, will not excuse them on the day of judgment, not when they had so many opportunities to know the truth. If those who, having never seen Jesus, will be condemned for disbelief (*John 3:18*), imagine the fate of those who rejected Him while He lived among them.

**As Jesus hung on the cross, He faced numerous taunts, such as those depicted in Matthew 27:42, Mark 15:31, and Luke 23:35. Though meant as an insult, what great truth were these men uttering in their ignorance?**

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He saved others, but He couldn’t save Himself. That’s true: He couldn’t save others and Himself at the same time. It had to be one or the other but not both.

Jesus could have chosen *not* to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world (*see Matt. 26:39; John 10:17, 18; Gal. 2:20; Heb. 7:27*), but then the world would have been lost. Only by offering Himself could He save *others*. There was no other way.

Though uttered in derision and hate, those words captured the greatest truth of all time: If Christ wanted to save the world, He could do it only at the Cross.

**In Matthew 26:39, Jesus asked that if it were possible, let this cup pass. Obviously, it wasn’t possible, not in the sense that He had no choice in this matter (If He had no choice, why even bother to utter the prayer?) but in the sense that it was not possible for Him to be spared if the world were to be saved. With this idea in mind, read also Mark 8:31, Luke 24:7, John 3:14. What are these texts telling us about the necessity of Christ’s death for our salvation?**

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## Darkness at Noon

**Read** Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33, and Luke 23:44. What do all three say happened? What is the spiritual significance of this event?

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In the Bible, darkness is a symbol of evil, of separation from God, who is Light and in whom “is no darkness at all” (*1 John 1:5*). In fact, Jesus talked of “outer darkness” (*Matt. 8:12, 22:13*) as an expression for hell. In a sense, Jesus at the cross went to hell for us; that is, He suffered the penalty of sin that those in hell will have to face themselves.

**Look up** these few texts. What do they say happened at the cross that could help explain the meaning of this supernatural darkness that appeared during the crucifixion of Christ? *Isa. 59:2, 2 Cor. 5:21, Gal. 3:13.*

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The darkness, then, is an outward symbol of the spiritual darkness that was surrounding the Son of God as He bore the full brunt of God’s righteous wrath against sin. With the accumulated sin of the world not only falling on Him but being punished in Him there at the cross, with the Father, who is light, hiding His presence from Jesus—it’s not hard to see why the darkness would sweep over the land as a powerful manifestation to the world and to the universe of what was happening at the cross, of the great punishment that Jesus was taking upon Himself in order to save humanity from the condemnation that sin would otherwise have brought. “The dense blackness,” wrote Ellen White, “was an emblem of the soul-agony and horror that encompassed the Son of God.”—*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 164.

**At times, who hasn’t felt oppressed by spiritual darkness? What caused it? How did it go away? And what advice would you give to someone who says that he or she feels enveloped in spiritual darkness?**

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## The Father Hidden

**“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46).**

*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* What could Jesus—who had said “I and my Father are one” (*John 10:30*) and that “Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me” (*John 16:32*)—have meant by those words? Was not this the same Jesus who stood on the banks of the Jordan when the Father uttered, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (*Matt. 3:17*)? Was not this the same Jesus who had prayed “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee” (*John 17:21*)? Was not this the same Jesus who had prayed to the Father, “Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (*vs. 24*)?

Of course, it was. What, then, could He have meant by that cry?

**Go back** over the texts from yesterday’s section (*Isa. 59:2, 2 Cor. 5:21, Gal. 3:13*); read them in the context of Christ’s lament. **How do they help explain what is happening here and why He uttered what He did?**

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However difficult for us to understand, Jesus—who had been One with the Father since eternity—now felt the complete separation from God caused by sin. God’s wrath, which would otherwise fall on us, fell on Him so that none of us would ever have to face it ourselves.

“It was necessary for the awful darkness to gather about His soul because of the withdrawal of the Father’s love and favor; for He was standing in the sinner’s place, and this darkness every sinner must experience. The righteous One must suffer the condemnation and wrath of God, not in vindictiveness; for the heart of God yearned with greatest sorrow when His Son, the guiltless, was suffering the penalty of sin. This sundering of the divine powers will never again occur throughout the eternal ages.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 924.

**Have you ever met someone who felt forsaken by God (or perhaps you have felt that way yourself)? What happened to Jesus on the cross that offers you, or anyone, a way out of the seemingly bottomless pit? Why, because of the Cross, should no one ever feel that God has abandoned him or her?**

## “It Is Finished!”

Christ did not die in defeat but as a conqueror over sin—a spotless sacrifice of perfect innocence and virtue, infinite in moral power and love. His words “It is finished” signified not merely the termination of His human life but the consummation of His sacrifice and assurance of its success. Nothing could negate the completeness of the provision thus made. That which had so long been prophesied was now an accomplished fact of history. Henceforth His paramount task, and that of all heaven, would be to apply the saving merits of His sacrifice to the sin-stricken inhabitants of earth till the close of probationary time.

Those words, “It is finished,” uttered by the One who created all things by His word, echoed throughout the universe, ensured that the stability of its moral order and the joyous harmony of its fellowship are forever guaranteed.

**How** does Christ’s cry “It is finished” shed light on what happened to the veil of the temple at His death? *Matt. 27:51.*

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Every animal sacrifice—from the one offered by Abel (*Gen. 4:4*), up through the beasts slain in the temple precincts on the day of Golgotha—pointed to Christ’s death. The rending of the temple veil, then, betokened the accomplishment of that death. It symbolized the end of the old Hebrew system and pointed to the inauguration of a new and living way into God’s presence through His torn body (*Heb. 10:19-21*), once and for all ending the need for any other animal sacrifices (*Heb. 9:26*).

**What** do the following texts say that relate to the veil being torn at Christ’s death? *Pss. 49:7, 15; 51:16-19; Heb. 10:1-5.*

No animal could ever atone for sin. Just look at the havoc that sin has wreaked upon our world—the suffering, the misery, the loss, the disappointment, the death. And to think that all it would take to atone, or to pay, for all this suffering would be the death of a goat, or even of a thousands goats?

No wonder the veil was torn. In the end, it was a symbol, a picture, and thus in and of itself it couldn’t save one soul any more than staring at a picture of a salad could fill an empty stomach.

## “God Was in Christ”

**“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor. 5:19).**

We can look at the world all around us and see, the cost of sin. Every one of us, to one degree or another, faces its sad results.

**In what ways has sin (not just your own but sin in general) impacted your life and brought you sorrow?**

Yet, it is only at the Cross that we can see just how terrible sin really is, because it took something as extreme, something as incredible, as the Cross to atone for it. The seriousness of the remedy is a way to judge the seriousness of the offense. If someone had to do five hours of community service as a punishment for a crime, you could guess that whatever that crime was, it wasn't too bad. In contrast, if that person faced death, you'd assume that whatever he or she did, it was deemed serious. Thus, nothing has revealed the horror and gravity of sin like the Cross, where God, “in Christ,” suffered the ultimate consequences of sin so that we don't have to ourselves.

**Read prayerfully and carefully 1 Peter 2:24 and 2 Corinthians 5:19 in the context of Philippians 2:6. How do they help us understand how bad sin is?**

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The gulf caused by sin between humankind and God was so serious that it took God's inflicting the punishment of sin upon Himself in order to save us from sin, in order to reconcile us to Him. Whatever the mysteries of the Godhead, we must never forget that “God was in Christ” on the cross, bearing in Himself the penalty of sin. Sin is so bad that it took this, the Cross, in order to save us from it. The debt that the world owed God because of sin was so great that only God Himself could pay for it.

**How have you experienced personally the reconciliation talked about in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that has come through “God . . . in Christ”? What does this reconciliation mean on a practical level? How does it impact your view of yourself and others? How should it impact every relationship you have?**

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 741–764; *Early Writings*, pp. 177, 180, 209, 253; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 348, 503; *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 304.

“When our Redeemer consented to take the cup of suffering in order to save sinners, His capacity for suffering was the only limitation to His suffering. . . . By dying in our behalf, He gave an equivalent for our debt. Thus He removed from God all charge of lessening the guilt of sin. By virtue of My oneness with the Father, He says, My suffering and death enable Me to pay the penalty of sin. By My death . . . His grace can act with unbounded efficiency.”—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 69.

“Christ felt much as sinners will feel when the vials of God’s wrath shall be poured out upon them. Black despair, like the pall of death, will gather about their guilty souls, and then they will realize to the fullest extent the sinfulness of sin. Salvation has been purchased for them by the suffering and death of the Son of God. It might be theirs, if they would accept of it willingly, gladly; but none are compelled to yield obedience to the law of God. If they refuse the heavenly benefit and choose the pleasures and deceitfulness of sin, they have their choice, and at the end receive their wages, which is the wrath of God and eternal death. They will be forever separated from the presence of Jesus, whose sacrifice they had despised. They will have lost a life of happiness and sacrificed eternal glory for the pleasures of sin for a season.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 210.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① In our place Christ experienced His Father’s wrath against sin. Explain how divine wrath against sin is perfectly consistent with God’s character of love. If God had no wrath against sin, what moral climate would that create for the perpetuation of rebellion? *John 3:16-21, 36; Rom. 1:16-19; Eph. 5:1-8.*
- ② Why is the idea that we can somehow earn our salvation an idea that subtly degrades the Cross? How does the Cross prove the futility of our works to save us?

## Returning To God

by Arnold Serole

I grew up in an Adventist family. My grandfather was a pastor, and when people asked what I wanted to be, I told them a pastor. It was the natural answer. And for a short time I really did want to be a pastor, but I had no real idea what it meant to be a pastor.

But when I entered secondary school, I wandered away from God. I stopped attending church and took up some pretty bad habits. I grew dread locks and wore jewelry. I knew my family was worried about me, but they never forced me to go to church.

One day Mom told me about a youth retreat the young people were planning. She said if I wanted to go and would attend church every week until the retreat, she would pay my way to the retreat. I agreed, thinking a few weeks' worth of church services was a small price to pay for a great adventure.

I went to church, but outside of church I did not change. However, my mom kept her promise and paid my way to the youth retreat.

Even at the youth retreat I found ways to get into trouble. I slept through most of the devotional meetings and spurned a group of young people who I learned were praying for me. I didn't care. But the youth kept praying.

After the retreat I went to stay in our family's home village. With time on my hands, I began reading some books my grandfather had left there. The Holy Spirit used these books to change my life. I realized how the devil had deceived me, and I gave my life to God.

My parents visited me in the village. They were not at all sure I was serious when I told them that I had given my life to God and wanted to become a minister. But when they saw the changes in my life, they rejoiced.

I want to follow Christ and resist the devil's temptations. I am determined to become the minister I believe God has called me to be. God led me to Tanzania Adventist College to study. I want to be where God wants me. I've learned to listen to Him and follow Him.

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# He Is Risen



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 28:9, John 11:1-46, 20:10-18, Rom. 6:4-6, 1 Cor. 15:3-8.*

**Memory Text:** “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen” (*Luke 24:5, 6*).

**H**is name was Rebbe (for Rabbi) Menachem Schneerson, and at the time of his death in 1994, speculation was rife among thousands of Lubavitch Jews that the 92-year-old spiritual leader was the long-awaited Messiah. After all, they said, he claimed lineage to King David (and such a righteous man as the rebbe would not lie). His physical sufferings fulfilled, they said, the predictions of Isaiah 53; and the intravenous tubes in his body were a fulfillment of the predictions that the Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced. All that remains, they believe, is for him to be resurrected from the dead.

So far, though, Rebbe Schneerson is still resting quietly.

Contrast this rebbe and his death to another Rebbe and His death, almost two thousand years ago. It's obvious which one is the real Messiah.

**The Week at a Glance:** What specific miracles did Jesus do that should have prepared people for His resurrection, were they open to it? How convincing is the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus? How does the resurrection of Christ form the foundation for our own? What happened at the Cross that has paved the way for our resurrection?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 26.*

## Precursors

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus performed numerous miracles: healing those who were blind, feeding the 5,000, turning water into wine, curing leprosy, walking on water, casting out demons, mending deformities, stilling a storm, raising the dead, and so many other acts that, as John said, the world itself couldn't contain the books "that should be written" about what Jesus did (*John 21:25*).

**Read** the following texts. What miracles did Jesus perform here, and how do these acts fit in with the miracle of His own resurrection from the dead? See also *Matt. 11:5*.

*Mark 5:35-43*

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*Luke 7:11-17*

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*John 11:1-46*

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What's so important about these accounts is they prove that the power attending Jesus and His ministry is so great that even the dead could be raised. Numerous times prior to the cross, Jesus talked about not just His death but His resurrection from that death (*see Matt. 12:38-40; 17:22, 23; 20:19*). Under normal circumstances, one could (and should) be a bit skeptical about someone who claimed that although he or she was going to die soon, three days after death he or she would be resurrected. Of course, Christ's situation was hardly "normal"; even more so, by doing what He did in raising the dead, Jesus gave His followers and all those who had heard about Him undeniable demonstrations of the power of God to raise the dead, thus making the promise of His own resurrection something that should have been easier for people to believe.

**Read** *John 11:25*. What's so important about what Jesus said here? Why, in the context it was given, were those words so powerful and so full of hope?

Most household dust is composed, really, of us; it's dead skin. Run a finger across a counter, and you'll be staring at your future, at least in the short term. What, however, is your long-term hope, and how is that linked to the resurrection of Jesus?

## The Resurrected Christ

Leo Tolstoy wrote his great novel *War and Peace* about a number of aristocratic Russian families during the time of Napoleon's war against Russia in the early 1800s. The story itself, the characters, their lives, were a fabrication. He made them all up.

Now, imagine Tolstoy insisting that these people were, in fact, real and that they actually lived and did what he said they did. Imagine, too, that he was told by the authorities to stop telling people that his characters were real or that the police would throw him in jail or even kill him. Unless Tolstoy were insane, he'd stop, would he not? Why die promoting as truth a story you made up and know is a lie?

In a sense, this is the dilemma that the critics of the resurrection of Jesus face: Why would the Bible writers make up the story that Jesus was raised from the dead when He wasn't? It's not as if they became wealthy, popular, or successful by promoting this story; on the contrary, they faced ostracism, persecution, torture, jail, and, in some cases, death. Why go through all that for a story that you purposely concocted?

**Below** are some accounts of Christ's postresurrection appearances: **Matthew 28:9, Luke 24:33-49, John 20:10-23, John 21:1-14, Acts 1:4-9.** What transpired at these meetings? What hope did Jesus give them? Why would it make no sense for these people to have made up this story?

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Jesus appeared numerous times to His followers. He obviously wanted them to be strong in their belief in whom He was and what He had done. It worked, too. They went from a band of dejected, scattered, and frightened people (*Matt. 26:56, Mark 14:50, Luke 24:17, John 20:19*) to a spiritually powerful group of men and women who boldly proclaimed the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel and the world. Obviously, they believed that Jesus had been resurrected, for they dedicated the rest of their lives to proclaiming that truth. *See also 1 Cor. 15:3-6.*

**Most of the world, however, has not seen the resurrected Jesus. Yet, we are asked to believe anyway. If someone were to ask you, Why do you believe in the resurrection of Christ, what would you answer?**

## Witnesses From the Grave

**“And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many”** (*Matt. 27:52, 53*).

At the moment Christ died, Matthew records three events: (1) The veil in the temple was torn (*Matt. 27:51*), (2) the earth quaked and rocks split (*vs. 51*), (3) and graves were opened (*vs. 52*). It was, however, only after Jesus Himself had been resurrected early on the first day of the week that “many bodies of the saints which slept arose” (*vss. 52, 53*).

**Why** was it only after Christ’s resurrection, and not before, that these saints rose?

How appropriate that only after Jesus was resurrected would some of these saints be resurrected, as well: His resurrection was the guarantee of theirs (and ours). Through this act, the Lord has given the world (not to mention those who saw these people) even more reasons to believe in the power of His resurrection.

**What** did Matthew say that these resurrected saints did after they arose?

Outside of Matthew’s few verses, Scripture says nothing else explicitly about these saints. Who were they? What happened to them? What impact should they have made on those who saw them? (Remember what Jesus said in Luke 16:30, 31?) Ellen White writes that these were martyrs who had given their lives for the Lord and that they had been “raised to everlasting life” (unlike those whom Jesus had raised from the dead earlier, who were still subject to death) and that when He ascended to heaven He took them with Him: “They ascended with Him as trophies of His victory over death and the grave. These, said Christ, are no longer the captives of Satan; I have redeemed them. I have brought them from the grave as the first fruits of My power, to be with Me where I am, nevermore to see death or experience sorrow.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 786.

**“Nevermore to see death or experience sorrow.” Dwell on what that means. Using your imagination (you’re going to need it), write a paragraph on what life will be like without death or sorrow. (See Rev. 21:1-5 for some hints.)**

## Paul and the Resurrection of Jesus

Though the apostle Paul speaks very little about the life of Christ, the death and resurrection of Jesus are constant themes in Paul's letters. These events are for him the foundation of the whole Christian hope.

**Read** 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 and then answer these questions:

- **What did Paul consider of *first importance*?**
  
- **Paul said that both Christ's death and resurrection were "according to the Scriptures." See also Acts 17:2, 3. Why is that so important? Who else tied these specific events to the Scriptures? See Luke 24:25-27.**
  
- **In verses 5-7 Paul spends a lot of time on one subject. What is it, and why do you think he emphasizes it so much?**

In the rest of 1 Corinthians 15 Paul stresses one point: Our hope of the resurrection from the dead rests on Christ's resurrection from the dead. As humans, we have no natural immortality (1 Tim. 6:15, 16). Death is an unconscious sleep (John 11:11, 1 Thess. 4:13), not some ascent or descent into another existence. The Lord is the Lord of life; death, therefore, is the enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), against which we, as humans, have, on our own, no hope of defeating. In the end, if death is not conquered, all for which we have lived ends in the grave. Paul says that without the resurrection, our faith is in "vain" (1 Cor. 15:17), from a Greek word that means "useless" or "of no purpose."

On the other hand, Christ was raised from death, He conquered death, and we can by faith become partakers of that same victory. He paid the penalty for our sin—which is death itself. Because that penalty has been paid, we don't have to face it ourselves; instead, as He was raised, we will be raised, too, and given the eternal life that was lost through sin but regained for us through Jesus. All we face now is a temporary sleep; the final punishment, the eternal punishment that sin already brings, has been taken care of for us at the Cross. The redeemed, either awake or asleep, are simply waiting for the consummation of what Christ has done for them. Our resurrection to eternal life is that final consummation.

## Resurrection, Now and Then

**Read** John 5:24,25. Jesus seems to be talking about two *types* of eternal life here. What are they, and how are they tied together?

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The Bible talks about a *resurrection* that believers can experience even prior to death. The one who believes in Jesus now has passed from death to life. What is a passage from death to life other than a resurrection? In other words, those who believe in Him go through a radical change, not just when they are brought from the grave, but they go through a change now, a born-again experience in which Christ becomes the center and focus of their life. It's such a radical life-changing experience that Jesus Himself links it with something as radical as the dead being raised to life at the end of time.

**Read** Romans 6:4-6. What is Paul saying here that parallels Christ's words in John 5:24, 25? Why does Paul use the imagery of Christ's resurrection?

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For Paul, the death and resurrection of Jesus weren't just historical events, such as the death of Mary, Queen of Scots, is to us. Instead, they are living symbols of what we, ourselves, as followers of Christ, must experience in our own lives now.

Paul is saying that we, in a sense, must spiritually go through what Christ did: a death, not in a literal sense, but a death to self, a death to sin, a death to living for the flesh. But not only that, the same power that brought Jesus from the grave can bring us into "newness of life," a life where we are no longer under the dominion of sin and of the flesh. This is a crucial, inseparable part of the whole Christian experience.

**If someone were to ask you, "Have you gone through what Jesus and Paul both talked about in the above verses?" what would you answer? If your answer were Yes, and you were then asked "What was that experience like?" what would you say? Also, is what Paul talked about a one-time experience, or is it something that must go on continually? Explain your reply.**

**Further Study:** “During these days that Christ spent with His disciples, they gained a new experience. As they heard their beloved Master explaining the Scriptures in the light of all that had happened, their faith in Him was fully established. They reached the place where they could say, ‘I know whom I have believed.’ 2 Timothy 1:12. They began to realize the nature and extent of their work, to see that they were to proclaim to the world the truths entrusted to them. The events of Christ’s life, His death and resurrection, the prophecies pointing to these events, the mysteries of the plan of salvation, the power of Jesus for the remission of sins—to all these things they had been witnesses, and they were to make them known to the world. They were to proclaim the gospel of peace and salvation through repentance and the power of the Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 27.

“The miracle which Christ was about to perform, in raising Lazarus from the dead, would represent the resurrection of all the righteous dead. By His word and His works He declared Himself the Author of the resurrection. He who Himself was soon to die upon the cross stood with the keys of death, a conqueror of the grave, and asserted His right and power to give eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why didn't Jesus reveal Himself immediately to Cleopas and his friend as they walked mournfully to their home in Emmaus? Why did He first give them such a detailed study from the Scriptures concerning His death, burial, and resurrection? *Luke 24:13-32*.
- 2 Consider what a difference it made in the lives of the apostles that they served a risen Savior and not just a martyr whose memory they could revere. What difference does it make to you personally that you serve a risen Savior and are not merely honoring a deceased hero of ancient fame?
- 3 How do you understand the idea that those who believe in Jesus have eternal life now? What does that mean to you? How would you explain it, for example, at the funeral of a good Christian?

## Growing a Family

by Jessica B. Tunnell

Growing up I wanted a bigger family, more brothers and sisters. One sister just wasn't enough for me. Sure, she kept me company and gave me someone to argue with, but I wanted more. I wanted an older brother to protect me and some cute younger siblings to watch grow up. But, as life sometimes goes, I didn't get what I wanted.

At least I thought I didn't. This weekend we had a baptism in Mongolia. As I watched five people follow Jesus' example in baptism, I realized that I do have a large family—in fact, it's huge.

As my dad, the pastor, introduced the five new believers, I studied their faces: an 80-year-old grandmother with a pouty little face; a 70-year-old man whose deeply tanned skin testified to years working under the Mongolian sun; two young women in their 20s; and a blind woman. Their faces radiated God's love and joy. Each person had a story to tell about how his or her life has been changed by God's love.

After the baptism as my new brother and sisters changed clothes, my dad, Dale Tunnell, explained how each of us fits into the worldwide Adventist family, which numbers 13 million. I thought, 13 million Adventists around the world, and we had just added five more!

We are like a big family, connected by the common thread of our faith. And like a family, we do not always agree on how to do things or what standards to uphold. But we do agree on one thing: that Jesus is our Elder Brother, and He died at the hands of humans so that He could one day take us home to live with Him and His Father forever.

I have millions of brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, and I just got five more that I'll be proud to call family.

But do you know what? I want more. I'm selfish, I guess, but I can't help it. I have God's love in my heart and the loving family I always

wanted. Now I want to share this love with others. I encourage you to be selfish, too. Don't just wish for more brothers and sisters; do something to make it happen. Share God's love with those you meet. Let's grow our family!



JESSICA B. TUNNELL is a psychology major at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska. Her parents still live and work in Mongolia.



# The Heart *of the* Cross



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 18:22-33; Rom. 3:9-20; 5:12, 15, 18; 2 Cor. 5:14.*

**Memory Text:** “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

“**A**s the sin bearer, and priest and representative of man before God, He [Christ] entered into the life of humanity, bearing our flesh and blood. The life is in the living, vital current of blood, which blood was given for the life of the world. Christ made a full atonement, giving His life as a ransom for us. He was born without a taint of sin, but came into the world in like manner as the human family. He did not have a mere semblance of a body, but He took human nature, participating in the life of humanity. . . .

“Jesus Christ . . . clothed His divinity with humanity. . . . By coming as man Christ could die. By death He overcame death. The death of Christ bore to the death him who had the power of death, and opened the gates of the tomb for all who receive Him as their personal Saviour.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 925, 926.

**The Week at a Glance:** What happened at the Cross? Why did Christ have to die? How was the concept of substitution prefigured in the story of Abraham in which he and the Lord discuss the destruction of Sodom?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 5.*

## For the Sake of the Righteous

Though the Cross has stood at the center of the Christian faith from the earliest days up through today, debate has raged in the church over such basic questions as What happened at Calvary? Why did Jesus die? Did He have to die? What killed Christ? What did His death accomplish? Who was benefitted from His death? Though Paul said that he was determined not to know “any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (*1 Cor. 2:2*), the followers of Christ in the following centuries have not always agreed on just what “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” means.

**Read Genesis 18:22-33 (if not familiar with the story, read the whole chapter). Notice the specific interaction between Abraham and the Lord. What principle is being expressed here that, in a powerful way, teaches an important truth about the Cross?**

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To understand the significance of these texts, it’s crucial to see what Abraham *didn’t* ask the Lord. He didn’t ask that the righteous be spared instead of the wicked. He didn’t say “Lord, let the righteous go; destroy the wicked.” Instead, He asked that the Lord “spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein” (*Gen. 18:24*). And the Lord responded that “I will spare all the place *for their sakes*” (*vs. 26*). All the way through the dialogue, this same idea comes back: “for the sake of” the 45, the 40, the 30, the 20, or the 10 the Lord would spare the whole city, the wicked and all.

Here’s the Bible’s first clear explication of the crucial theme of the Cross: *Because of the righteous*, the wicked are spared. It was going to be the righteousness of another, of someone other than the “wicked” themselves, who would spare the wicked from the punishment that they deserved. For the sake of someone else, others are saved.

**Read again the dialogue between Abraham and the Lord. Notice how readily the Lord agreed to lower the terms of the agreement. What does that tell us about God’s desire to save us?**

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## The Human Condition

Yesterday's study opened up a crucial theme: the wicked saved for the sake of the righteous. In the story of Sodom, however, the righteous who were needed to save the city were not found. There weren't even ten people whose righteousness would have been deemed sufficient to spare these sinners from destruction.

In a sense, the inhabitants of the whole world are like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Maybe our sins aren't as outrageous or as violent as were those of the Sodomites (*Gen. 19:5*), but they're bad enough. (On the other hand, considering some of the horrendous crimes through which the world suffers now, maybe we're worse.) And, in a sense, too, the whole world faces the same judgment that Sodom and Gomorrah did.

The Bible is abundantly clear: Whether one lived in Sodom or elsewhere, every human being is a sinner; every human being has violated the law of God. No one, anywhere, has the righteousness to save himself or herself, much less anyone else, from judgment.

**Read** Romans 5:12, 15, 18. **What was the cause of our human sinfulness?**

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**How** is this sinfulness manifested in humanity? *Rom. 3:9-20.*

We are sinful, not only because of what we have done but because of what Adam had done. We are naturally the children of Adam. When he sinned, his nature became corrupted, fallen, sinful, and we inherited this same nature from him, somewhat in the same way that we inherit traits from our parents. We weren't literally in Adam when he sinned (as though we had some form of preexistence prior to our birth); we have simply reaped in ourselves the consequences of his fall, which is why we, having inherited sinful natures, commit sin. It's because of this connection with Adam that we all face the condemnation that sin brings.

**Peel away all social, cultural, and even religious façades and look at yourself: Are your natural tendencies, your natural drives, toward good or toward evil, toward God or toward self? How does the answer confirm the Bible teaching about human sinfulness?**

## One Man's Righteousness

**What** do these texts say about the character of Jesus? *John 8:46, Rom. 5:18, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Pet. 2:22, 1 John 3:5.*

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Yesterday we looked at the universal problem of humanity, and that's sin. In contrast to every other person, however, there's Jesus, whom the Bible teaches did not sin. In other words, He was the only Person not tainted or infected by sin in any way. He kept the law of God perfectly, always obeyed the Father's will, and never once fell. In this sense, He stands out as different from every other human being.

Now, let's go back to the principle we looked at Sunday: that of the guilty being spared for the sake of the righteous. There were no righteousness men found in Sodom and Gomorrah, nor are there any found in the world at large. Jesus, however, is the exception, and the Lord will accept Christ's righteousness alone as sufficient to spare the world. It's as though, instead of ten righteous men to save Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lord allowed for one righteous Man to save a guilty world—and that Man was Jesus. *See John 3:17.*

Romans 5:17-19 says that everything Adam had done through sin, Christ came to undo. Adam brought sin, death, condemnation, and disobedience; Christ brought righteousness, life, justification, and obedience. Thus, just as it was only through Adam that we all became sinners, it's only through Christ that we become righteous. Hard as it is to understand, His righteousness was so perfect, so complete and satisfactory, that it was enough to cover the sins of the whole world. And that's because His righteousness was "the righteousness of God" (*Rom. 3:21*). Because Jesus Himself was God, and only God Himself could provide the righteousness needed to save a fallen world.

**Sure, you're a wretch, and even if you hide that fact from everyone else, you can't hide it from God. But no matter how bad you are, isn't God's righteousness, which can cover the sins of the whole world, enough to cover even you? Think about the implications of your answer.**

## The Justice of God

So far this week we've seen that God will spare sinners for the sake of another's righteousness and that Jesus alone had the righteousness to cover the sins of the world. But if that's true, then why did Jesus have to die? Wasn't His righteousness alone enough? Why the terrible death at Calvary?

These are good questions, and part of the answer lies in the limits of the Sodom and Gomorrah story, which gives only one aspect of the principles involved in the science of salvation.

Suppose, indeed, that there were ten righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah, and, as a result, the cities were spared destruction. We would have seen here a great manifestation of God's mercy, for certain. Out of mercy, He spared these people the punishment that was justly theirs.

Now, in somewhat the same way, we've also seen that Christ's righteousness alone was enough to spare the whole world from the punishment of sin. This, too, represents an act of mercy.

Mercy, however, is only part of the picture. There's another element that cannot be overlooked regarding the character of God and His dealing with sin.

**Look up the following texts. What point are they making about the Lord? How can we reconcile them with our understanding of a merciful God? *Exod. 34:7, Job 8:3, Ps. 89:14, Jer. 23:5, Acts 7:52.***

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All these texts touch on a crucial issue regarding the plan of salvation: the justice of God. The Bible says that God is just, and this leads to an important point: Again, suppose there were ten righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah and the places were spared. That would be mercy, but it certainly wouldn't be justice, would it? There were some pretty vile, crude, violent people in those cities, were there not? Should they have gotten off free, with no punishment for their sins? Christ's righteousness is enough to cover every sin of every sinner in the world, no matter how vile, violent, and rude. If all were to go free, with no divine punishment, that would be mercy, but would it be justice?

**Put yourself in a situation in which you need to execute judgment. And though you want to be merciful, fairness and responsibility also demand justice. How does such a dilemma reflect the issue before God: how to be both merciful with fallen sinners and yet, at the same time, be just with them, as well?**

## One Died for All

Here's where we get to the heart, the mystery, the majesty, the shame, the justice, and the glory of the Cross.

God wanted to forgive sinful humanity, but to do it in a just manner, one that would not condone sin or leave it unpunished. But how could He do that? Only one way: He poured out against Him—in the Person of Jesus—His own righteous wrath against sin. In other words, because sin needed to be punished, *He punished it in Himself through Jesus at the cross*. That's what the Cross is all about: God taking upon Himself the punishment for our sins.

A just God will not let sin go unpunished, but the good news is that God punished all sin in the Person of Jesus, who died there in our stead. Every human being deserved what Jesus faced at the cross; but now, because of the Cross, no human being should, ideally, ever have to face this punishment.

“One died for all, and therefore all died” (2 Cor. 5:14, NIV). What Paul's saying is that Christ died as our representative; He died the death that we deserve. In that sense (and that sense only), Paul could say that we all died. What he means is that Christ's death stands as our death, the death we deserve for our sins but don't have to face because Jesus, as our representative, died it for us.

In the end, God would either inflict punishment on others for their sins, which would have resulted in their eternal death, or He would take that punishment upon Himself and save others from it. The Cross shows that which He chose to do: face His own judgment against sin.

“The cross was an act simultaneously of punishment and amnesty, severity and grace, justice and mercy.”—John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 159.

**Read** each of these texts: **Isaiah 53:5, Romans 5:8, Galatians 3:13, Ephesians 5:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:10.** In what ways do you see revealed in these texts the substitutionary aspect of what Christ has done for us?

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It's so important that we understand what the Cross is about. God took upon Himself the punishment of sin that we deserve. Whatever imagery or symbolism or metaphor is used to talk about the Cross, we must never get away from this fundamental truth, that of substitution. Any theology that downplays or marginalizes the substitutionary aspect of Calvary downplays and marginalizes the heart of the plan of salvation.

**Further Study:** “Our sins were laid on Christ, punished in Christ, put away by Christ, in order that his righteousness might be imputed to us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Although sin was charged to his account on our behalf, yet he remained perfectly sinless.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, May 30, 1895.

“Hating sin with a perfect hatred, He yet gathered to His soul the sins of the whole world. Guiltless, He bore the punishment of the guilty. Innocent, yet offering Himself as a substitute for the transgressor. The guilt of every sin pressed its weight upon the divine soul of the world’s Redeemer. The evil thoughts, the evil words, the evil deeds of every son and daughter of Adam, called for retribution upon Himself; for He had become man’s substitute. Though the guilt of sin was not His, His spirit was torn and bruised by the transgressions of men, and He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 322.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** Think about this whole idea of substitution. What aspects of this concept do you find disturbing? How fair is it that someone else should suffer the penalty for your wrongdoing? At the same time, considering the perfect holiness of God in contrast to the sinfulness of humanity, why is substitution the only way the Lord could have forgiven human beings their sins while, at the same time, maintaining His justice?
- 2** Why is the deity of Christ so important in order to understand the Cross? After all, even if Jesus were only a man, why would the death of a single man, even one who was sinless, not be adequate to atone for the sins of the world?
- 3** Go back and review the Old Testament–sacrificial system. Where do you see the concept of substitution prefigured in those sacrifices?

## Kapi's Transformation

by Bonnie Norton

In 1999, Robin Kasi, district pastoral director in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, made a trip into the bush to visit and encourage the Adventist congregations scattered in the mountains. He decided to visit the village of Kapi to see if the people would receive a missionary to work among them. But the villagers angrily chased Pastor Kasi away with bush knives, bows, and arrows. Kasi barely escaped with his life. For days he trekked through rugged terrain, arriving home half starved and bedraggled.

Not long after this, Trevor Robinson, then director of Adventist Aviation Services in Papua New Guinea, flew some pastors to different isolated churches for Sabbath services. At one village a Protestant missionary approached and told him about a woman who needed immediate medical care in Kapi. Other air services refused to fly her out without payment, and the family could not pay the fare. "I know it is your Sabbath," the missionary said, "but could you fly this woman out?"

"Absolutely!" Robinson said, and he took off for Kapi.

When Robinson, a registered nurse, arrived in Kapi, he found the woman so badly injured that parts of her skull and spinal cord were exposed. He was not sure whether she would survive the trip, but he flew her to the hospital.

Amazingly, the woman recovered, and the villagers were so touched by Robinson's kindness that they agreed to let a nursing team visit their village once a quarter.

When Pastor Kasi learned that the nursing team was going into Kapi, he insisted on accompanying them, even though they had tried to kill him earlier. This time, because he was with the nursing team, they left him alone. All day long the nurses ministered to the various health needs of the village. That evening Pastor Kasi tacked a felt board to the side of a hut and told Bible stories to the villagers. The villagers who had tried to kill him before now listened attentively.

Each time the nursing team visits Kapi, they end their visit with Bible stories. Slowly the barriers are breaking down. Recently the village elders told the nursing team, "Our entire village wants to become Adventists. Will you please send a missionary to come and live with us and teach us?"

Similar experiences in other villages prove that the medical work, coupled with a heart for souls, is one sure way to open doors in the uttermost parts of God's kingdom.

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# The Cross and Justification



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom.* 3:20, 28; 4:13; 5:14-18; 6:23; 8:33, 34; 9:31, 32; *2 Cor.* 9:15; *Gal.* 2:16; 3:8-11; *Eph.* 2:7-9.

**Memory Text:** “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (*Romans* 3:28).

Paul wrote that Jesus “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (*Rom.* 4:25). Few topics are more controversial among Christians than that of “justification.” From the time of Paul, who struggled with this issue in the early church, up through Martin Luther, whose battle with the papacy first arose over the question of justification, up through even today among Seventh-day Adventists (not to mention other Christians), the question of justification still foment discussion and debate.

It’s a crucial, powerful topic, one that we need to approach in humility, not just before the Lord but before one another. It’s a topic that we need to approach on our knees, our hearts and minds open to the Spirit, who alone can teach us from the Word.

This week we explore this rich and fruitful teaching, which stems directly from, and only because of, the Cross.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why must salvation be a gift from God to us? What is the meaning of *to justify*? Why weren’t Abraham’s works good enough to justify him? Why can the law not save us? What does it mean that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us?

\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 12.

## The Gift

Last week we saw that, at the cross, God bore in Himself the punishment for sin. That is, to be true to Himself and to the grand principles that He Himself had established, sin had to be punished. This is God's justice. But in order to be merciful (for God is also merciful), He took that punishment on Himself, in the Person of His Son, thus satisfying the claims of justice while, at the same time, rendering mercy and forgiveness to those who deserve neither (*Rom. 3:26*). This amazing provision forms the basis of the Cross, the foundation upon which we are forgiven our sins, cleansed from our sins, and ultimately given a new body in a new world.

With this background in mind, can you see why salvation has to be free? Think about it: If salvation is based on anything that we can do, then God's Son taking on human flesh, living in that flesh a life of perfect obedience to the Father, and then going to the cross, where He faced divine wrath against sin, where all the sins of the world fell on Him, where He became sin for us, where He was judged and condemned in our place, where He died as a substitute for all the world—*all this still wasn't good enough?* Was it still lacking something that we, as sinners, can add in order to finish what Christ's life, death, and resurrection didn't complete? Please! The mere idea of earning our salvation automatically weakens in our minds just what God accomplished for us. What could anyone—that is, any *sinner*—do to add to what was done for him or her at the Cross?

**LOOK** up these few texts. Write out what they're saying about salvation: *Rom. 5:14-18, 6:23, 2 Cor. 9:15, Eph. 2:7-9.*

“Every soul may say: ‘By His perfect obedience He has satisfied the claims of the law, and my only hope is found in looking to Him as my substitute and surety, who obeyed the law perfectly for me. By faith in His merits I am free from the condemnation of the law. He clothes me with His righteousness, which answers all the demands of the law. I am complete in Him who brings in everlasting righteousness. He presents me to God in the spotless garment of which no thread was woven by any human agent. All is of Christ, and all the glory, honor, and majesty are to be given to the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 396.

**Rephrase in your own words what Ellen White wrote.**

## Justified

“By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities” (*Isa. 53:11*).

**Read** the above text. How does the righteous Servant justify many? How does that answer fit in with what we have studied so far?

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Two words translated “justify” are *sadaq* (Hebrew) and *dikaioo* (Greek), and they have basically the same meaning. They are legal terms. Both are to be understood in the context of a pronouncement that a judge renders in a court case. If the judge rules in favor of the accused, the accused is “justified”; if the judge rules against the accused, the accused is condemned. “Justification” is, therefore, a legal declaration. A person is justified when he or she is declared acquitted by the judge.

**Look** up the following texts; notice the contrast expressed in them between being justified and being condemned. How does this contrast help us understand what justification means? *Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15; Matt. 12:37; Rom. 5:16; 8:33, 34.* (Read also **John 3:17**: What does the contrast between condemnation and being saved teach us about the meaning of justification?)

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In all these examples, there are only two options. There’s no gray area, no middle ground, no compromise. People are either declared justified; that is, acquitted, or they are condemned. By its nature, the concept of justification (as well as condemnation) doesn’t allow for degrees. You can’t be partially justified or partially condemned. A decision can be changed, a person’s status can be reversed, but in the end a person is either justified or condemned.

**Keeping in mind today’s study, what do these words mean to you: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (*Rom. 8:1*)? How would you explain this to a non-Christian?**

## The Reckoning of Righteousness

So far, in looking at the Cross, we've see that God Himself, in the person of Jesus, bore the penalty for our sins. Jesus paid the penalty; we, therefore, don't have to. We are spared what's due us, because Jesus took what's due us upon Himself.

Yet, there's more to our salvation. The good news is that we can stand justified before God—not on the basis of our good works (for however good they are, they aren't good enough) but because of the righteousness of Jesus. Jesus alone lived a sinless life, and His perfect life is credited to us as if it were our own. In other words, not only did Jesus take our sins, our filthy rags, upon Himself, but He offers us the opportunity to be dressed in His perfect robe of righteousness (*Matt. 22:1-14*).

**Read** prayerfully Romans 4:1-8 and then answer the following questions:

- What is Paul's reasoning in the first five verses? Why, if justification is by works, can it not be by grace? Why can it not be both?
- How was Abraham justified? What does it mean that "it was counted unto him for righteousness"?
- Read Paul's use of Psalms in verses 6-8. What elements are found there when God "imputeth righteousness without works"? How are sins forgiven and covered?

The great news of these verses is that if the works of someone as holy and righteous and faithful as Abraham aren't good enough to save, what about the rest of us? And that's Paul's point: Even Abraham, esteemed among the Jews as a great man of God, needed a righteousness to be "imputed" to him, a righteousness credited to him, in order for him to be justified before God.

**All through the Bible Abraham is exalted in Scripture as a faithful man of God (see, for instance, Gen. 18:19, 26:5). And yet he didn't have the works to stand before God alone? What should that tell you about yourself and your only hope of being accepted by God?**

## Christ Our Righteousness

Abraham, no matter how pious and faithful, still wasn't pious and faithful enough to be justified before God. If he were to be saved, it would have to be because of something other than his own works or his own righteousness. And here again is where Jesus comes in. Not only did He die as our Substitute, paying the penalty for our sins, but the Lord offers to all who will claim it the perfect righteousness of Jesus in place of each person's sinful record. This is the wonderful provision of the plan of salvation: Not only are our sins forgiven, but the righteousness of Jesus is credited to us as if it were our own!

**Read Romans 3:25,26. Whose righteousness allows for the remission of sins, and by whose righteousness are we justified?**

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In Romans 3:21-26, Paul makes it clear that the righteousness of Christ is the righteousness of God Himself, and this is the righteousness that allows sinners to be justified before God. No human being's attempt to keep the law can save him or her, for the righteousness that obedience produces is never the righteousness of God Himself.

**Read Romans 10:1-3 and Galatians 2:21. In what way are both texts saying the same thing? Why can righteousness never come about by our obedience to the law?**

“The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner's account. Christ's righteousness is accepted in place of man's failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son. This is how faith is accounted righteousness.”  
—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 367.

**Look at your own self, and your own attempts, however sincere, at obedience and righteousness. Can't you see how futile salvation by the law is? In what ways does your own experience show to you the great truth of Christ's merits, instead of your own, as the basis of salvation?**

## Justification by Faith

So far, what we have seen is that we are all sinners, incapable of ever achieving the righteousness needed to be justified. Jesus, however, has that righteousness, and through the wonderful provision of the gospel, that righteousness is available for all those who make it their own—by faith.

**Read** **Romans 3:20, 28; 4:13; 9:31,32; Galatians 2:16; 3:8-11.** Notice the contrast Paul places there between the law and faith. What point is he making? Why can the law never save us? Why must salvation be by faith?

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These texts are so often misread as teaching that Christians are no longer obligated to keep the law (see next week's lesson); yet, that is not Paul's point. The immediate issue here isn't obedience (at least our obedience); it's salvation, something that the law can never produce in sinful human beings. Indeed, it's precisely because humans have violated the law that they face death, and it was to spare us from this death that Jesus came, obeyed the law perfectly, and offers us His record in place of our own. In the context of fallen humanity, the law isn't the solution—Jesus is.

**Look** at the above verses again. What evidence do we have there that salvation by faith was taught in the Old Testament, as well as in the New?

From Adam onward, all human beings (with the exception of Jesus) have been under the condemnation of the law, because all have violated the law. Hence, salvation always had to be by faith, because no one, even in the Old Testament times, could find salvation in the law; on the contrary, the law is the very thing that condemns sinners. Seeking salvation in the law is like trying to douse a fire with gasoline.

However, by centering salvation on Jesus and what He has done for us, God has shifted the center of attention off ourselves, who are the problem to begin with, and places it upon Jesus, the only solution. By realizing our total inability to do anything to save ourselves, we're forced to rely upon something outside of us, something greater, holier, and more powerful than we are, which is, of course, "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (*Jer. 23:6*).

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, pp. 19–30.

“Moreover, Christ became sin for us, in order that ‘in him we might become the righteousness of God.’ In other words, our sins were imputed to the sinless Christ, in order that we sinners, by being united to him, might receive as a free gift a standing of righteousness before God. Christian disciples down the centuries have meditated on this exchange between the sinless Christ and sinners, and have marvelled at it. The first example is probably in the second-century *Epistle to Diognetus*, chapter 9: ‘O sweet exchange! O unsearchable operation! O benefits surpassing all expectation! that the wickedness of many should be hid in a single Righteous One, and that the righteousness of One should justify many transgressors.’ Then here is Luther writing to a monk in distress about his sins: ‘Learn to know Christ and him crucified. Learn to sing to him and say “Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, I am your sin. You took on you what was mine; yet you set on me what was yours. You became what you were not, that I might become what I was not.” ’—John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 200.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① **Read the above section. What is it saying? How does this help us understand the concept of justification by faith? How do you understand the “sweet exchange”? What is that, and why is it “sweet”?**
- ② **Imagine being in a school in which there are only two grades, pass and fail, and the only way to get the passing grade is to have a perfect score on every test, every quiz, every time. Even one question wrong on any test, and you get the same failing grade as someone who got every question wrong on every test. It makes no difference: If you get all the questions wrong or only one wrong, you still fail. How, in a sense, does this analogy help us understand why, as sinners, we need the righteousness of Jesus (who was the only Person ever to get every question right on every test) credited to us in order for us to be just before God?**

## Bury Me as a Christian

by J. H. Zachary

A young man in Thailand was killed in a terrible accident. The grieving father, a wealthy businessman, had lost not only his son, but his business partner.

Although the family was Buddhist, the son had recently begun learning about Jesus. One day just before his death, he had made a request of the father. "If I die before you do, Father, promise me that you will bury me in a Christian cemetery as a Christian."

The broken-hearted father was determined to honor his son's request, but his son had not yet joined a church, and Christian churches reserve their limited burial plots for members of their faith. The father contacted one church after another inquiring about burying his son in their cemetery, but denomination after denomination denied his request for a grave site. For one long month the boy's body lay in the Buddhist temple awaiting burial. Finally the father visited the pastor of the Chinese Adventist church in Bangkok, Thailand, Pastor Songrit Detwinya.

"We have very little space in our cemetery," the pastor said, "and normally we reserve it for our church members. But I will take your request to the church board. If they agree, then your son can be buried here."

The father's face lit up when he later learned that the church board had accepted the request and agreed to the Christian burial of this man's son. At last a grieving father would be able to keep his promise to his son. A funeral service was planned and the burial took place in the Adventist church's cemetery.

The businessman was touched by the kindness of the Adventist congregation. After the funeral he began to visit the church, curious to discover why his son had been so interested in the God of the Christians. He was impressed with the message of Jesus and the kindness of the believers. In time he asked the pastor to teach him more about the Christian faith. After four months of study, the grieving father accepted Jesus as his own Savior and was baptized. He finds hope in the promise that he and his son will be reunited when Jesus comes, and he prays that his wife and two remaining children will accept Jesus as their Savior as well.

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# The Cross *and* Sanctification



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 6:1-16, 1 Cor. 6:11, Gal. 5:16-25, Col. 3:1-4.*

**Memory Text:** “**For this is the will of God, even your sanctification**” (*1 Thessalonians 4:3*).

A few years ago, a young man read these famous words by Ellen White, “Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25. Imagine if gratitude and happiness for the wonderful news of this glorious and costly provision prompted one man to say, “Because I am accepted through His righteousness alone, now I can go out and do whatever I want. Wow! the good news is better than I thought!”

Instead, this is what the young man really said: “Wow! Because of what Jesus did for me, because I am accepted through His righteousness alone, I so hate the sin that is in me. O, Lord, I love You so much; please change me, purify me, make me more like You!”

This week we'll take a look at another aspect of the Cross: what it does to the life of the one who accepts it as his or her own.

**The Week at a Glance:** What is *cheap* grace? What does sanctification mean in the Bible? In what ways is sanctification complete at conversion? In what ways is it an ongoing process? How are we sanctified? What role does the law play in the Christian life?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 19.*

## Cheap Grace and the Cross

Last week we studied justification by faith, the good news that the perfect life of Jesus, His perfect righteousness, is credited to us as though it were our own, as though we ourselves have lived His sinless life even though we haven't even come close. We saw, too, that this declaration of righteousness in our behalf is by faith, not by works. We believe—and Christ's righteousness becomes our own in the sight of God. Aware of our own utter need, we come to the foot of the Cross and claim something that's not ours; and we get it, not because we're worthy but because God is a God of grace and, through Christ's death, gives us what we never could earn ourselves, no matter how faithfully and diligently we sought to obey the law, or even the spirit of the law.

Yet, the good news of salvation doesn't end with the declaration of righteousness. God doesn't just declare a sinner righteous and then is done with that person. On the contrary, this declaration of righteousness is only the beginning. Something else happens to a person who has been justified. It's what's known as sanctification, and it's an inseparable part of the gospel.

**Read** the following texts and then summarize the essence of what they are saying: **Romans 6:1-16, 1 Corinthians 6:11, Galatians 5:16-25.**

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There's no question that those who are justified by faith will have a new life in Christ, a life of obedience and sanctification. Justification by faith, without sanctification (which is by faith, as well), is a false justification, a false gospel. It's cheap grace, which is not God justifying the sinner but the sinner justifying sin. It's a gospel that, in the end, saves no one.

**Imagine two people. The first person believes that she has to strive with all her God-given might to achieve the righteousness she needs to be saved, because she's not quite sure she has that salvation to begin with. Thus, she strives for a life of obedience. The second works from the premise that she is already saved in Christ, that His righteousness covers her, and now out of love and gratitude she strives with all her God-given might for a life of obedience. Who's more likely to succeed in the Christian life, and why?**

## Set Apart

**“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”** (*Heb. 10:10*).

In the Hebrew language, the word often translated “sanctify” (*kadosh*, or *hakodesh*) appears in various forms more than eight hundred times in the Old Testament. In the Greek, *hagaizo* or *hagios*, often translated as “to sanctify” and “holy” and “saint” appears about two hundred-forty times in the New Testament. In both cases, the words are translated not only as “sanctify” but also as “holiness,” “to make holy,” or “holy.” Thus, through the original meanings alone, we are given a powerful indicator that sanctification is tied to the idea of holiness.

But what is holiness? In Hebrew, the basic meaning is “to set apart for holy use,” or even “to be set apart from sin unto God.” Thus, those who are sanctified belong to God and to His service.

**With this understanding of the word in mind, read Leviticus 19:2; 20:7, 26. How do these texts help us understand the meaning of holiness?**

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It’s interesting that in the Bible, not just people are sanctified, or made holy. The place where God manifests His presence is on “holy ground” (*Exod. 3:5*); the Sabbath is holy because it was a day set apart by God (*Exod. 20:8-11*); the sanctuary is called the “holy place” because it, too, was set apart by God for His use (*Exod. 26:33*).

It’s important to note, however, that none of these things has holiness, or is sanctified, by anything internal to them. The seventh day, were it not deemed holy by the Lord, would be just any other day. Holiness, or sanctification, is something bestowed by a holy God; it’s something that God Himself does, either to a person or to a thing. In the case of ancient Israel, for instance, He set them apart, called them away from slavery and even from the influence of the pagan nations around them in order that they could be a people that He could use in His service, that of teaching the world about the true God (*Exod. 19:6*).

**In what sense is the church today sanctified (see 1 Cor. 1:2)? Also, look at your own experience with the Lord. In what ways have you been set apart for holy use by God? How do you understand this idea in practical, everyday terms and experiences?**

## The Sanctified State

**Read** 1 Corinthians 1:2. Notice that Paul calls the church “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” The Greek word for “sanctified” appears in a tense that means a completed action in the past that has continuing results in the present. Yet, if you read about the Corinthian church, you discover that it struggled with many serious ethical and theological problems (see 1 Corinthians 5, 6). How, then, are we to understand that this church has been “sanctified”? How does the definition of *sanctification* we learned yesterday help answer this question?

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In the Bible, there is no such thing as partial sanctification. We belong to Christ entirely from the moment we are born again, and we remain that way as long as we stay connected to Him by faith. Sanctification always signals a total experience of God’s ownership. This ownership is complete at conversion and should continue this way throughout the Christian life.

**How, then, do we understand the idea that “sanctification is the work of a lifetime”?**—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 560.

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There are different facets to the idea of sanctification. In the relational sense, that of our being set apart by God, the work is complete. We belong to God. We have been sanctified by Him. Because of what Christ has done on the cross, the Lord has the right to claim us as His own.

But in a moral sense, in the sense of growing in grace, we are still in the process of being sanctified. In these two verses—“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (*John 17:17*) and “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly” (*1 Thess. 5:23*)—the verb for “sanctify” appears in the present tense, as in a continuous process by which we partake of Christ’s holiness in a distinct moral and practical sense. Through faith, and in total dependence upon God, we are changed by the power of God working in us, to cleanse us, to purge us of sin, so that the character of Christ is formed within us.

**In the context of today’s study, read Galatians 4:19. What is that text saying to you?**

## “Your Life Is Hid With God in Christ”

**Read** Colossians 3:1-4 and summarize in your own words what is being said about the Christian life.

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These are such beautiful verses, and they so clearly capture the relational aspect of our new life in Christ. We are risen with Jesus, because we first died with Him. That is, at the moment of conversion, we died to our old self and now live a new life in Jesus, a life in which we, by faith, through the power of the Holy Spirit, manifest, in our own flesh, our own heart, our own words and deeds, the character of Christ, “who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (*1 Cor. 1:30*).

**Where** do you see in these verses the hope of the Second Coming? How is that hope tied in with the basic theme of these verses? Why would it be mentioned there in this specific context?

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Last week we looked at the concept of *imputed righteousness*, that is, a righteousness that is credited to us. But these texts are talking more about the experience of *imparted righteousness*; when the righteousness of Jesus is revealed in us. We’re not talking here about a slavish obedience to rules or laws but the experience of having died to the old man in order that God can impart to us His own character. It’s crucial to remember that we are fallen beings, and our fall included more than condemnation by God because of sin. Our fall included the degeneration of the race—morally, physically, and spiritually. Christ died and rose and is ministering in heaven in order to restore us to what we were before the Fall. Sanctification, which begins the moral restoration of the image of God in humans, is part of the process.

**Read again Colossians 3:1-4.** What does it mean that we should seek those things that are “above”? In what practical ways can we do this? How do what we read, watch, dwell upon, and talk about influence how well we will succeed in following this biblical admonition?

## The Law and the Gospel

We love God because of the salvation that is ours through the Cross. And, as a result, we want to follow the Lord in faith and obedience. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do this, resulting in a new life in Christ (*2 Cor. 5:17*).

Yet, the questions remain: How do we know if we really are obeying God? How do we know if the Spirit is leading us in a particular way or if we are being prompted by some other power? If we love God because we have been justified by faith and we want to obey Him (*Matt. 7:24, Rom. 1:5, 16:26, Gal. 3:1, Heb. 5:9, 1 Pet. 4:17*), we should know what God expects from us.

**Read the following texts. What's the one clear message they have for us as Christians?** *John 8:11, 34; Gal. 2:17; John 8:34; Rom. 6:13; 1 John 2:1; 3:8; Heb. 3:13; 12:4.*

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How could there be all these admonitions against sin for the Christian, unless there was a law to define sin (*Rom. 7:7, 1 John 3:4*)? The existence of sin automatically means the existence of the law. You can't have sin without law, any more than you can have a crime without law. For the New Testament to demand that we refrain from sin, and yet to weaken or nullify the law, makes about as much sense as a nation demanding that citizens not steal cars while, at the same time, annulling or weakening laws against auto theft.

God's law is spiritual (*Rom. 7:14*), and it is made for spiritual beings, beings who are moved by the Holy Spirit to obey the Lord. The law was made not to save anyone but to frame, as it were, safe borders for us, to help us understand how we are to reveal in our lives the love for God that we profess. Anyone can profess that he or she loves God, and people through the years, claiming to be "led by the Spirit," have sought to express this "love" in some very strange and even hurtful ways. The Bible, however, without ambiguity, tells us how we are to reveal that love: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (*1 John 5:3*). The Spirit is going to lead us, not contrary to the law but in a way that "the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (*Rom. 8:4*).

**Why do you think, based on your own walk with the Lord, that God wants us to keep His law? How is God's love revealed to us through His law?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 309–322; *Faith and Works*, pp. 29–32.

“In order to receive help from Christ, we must realize our need. We must have a true knowledge of ourselves. It is only he who knows himself to be a sinner that Christ can save. Only as we see our utter helplessness and renounce all self-trust, shall we lay hold on divine power.

“It is not only at the beginning of the Christian life that this renunciation of self is to be made. At every advance step heavenward it is to be renewed. All our good works are dependent on a power outside of ourselves; therefore there needs to be a continual reaching out of the heart after God, a constant, earnest confession of sin and humbling of the soul before Him. Perils surround us; and we are safe only as we feel our weakness and cling with the grasp of faith to our mighty Deliverer.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 455, 456.

“With many, sanctification is only self-righteousness. And yet these persons boldly claim Jesus as their Saviour and Sanctifier. What a delusion! Will the Son of God sanctify the transgressor of the Father’s law—that law which Christ came to exalt and make honorable?”—*Faith and Works*, p. 29.

## Discussion Questions:

**1** A man (let’s call him Stanley) said that a leader of a small religious group kept on trying to win him over to Jesus, but he refused to listen. Then the leader of the community gave Stanley his wife for the night. Stanley later gave his testimony, saying, “That night changed my life, for that was when I learned about God’s love for me.” Stanley and his pastor may have been sincere in their faith, but sincerity alone is no safeguard against error and presumption. The pastor’s so-called generosity in sharing his wife undermines the very principle it claims to uphold: the sacrificial love of Christ. A true understanding of the gospel leaves no room for condoning or engaging in such a practice. In particular, what would the law of God say here to Stanley? How could the law have helped him form a better judgment about his experience? What does this story tell us about the importance of the law for all Christians?

**2** Most Christians understand that justification is by faith. Why must sanctification be by faith, as well? *See Acts 26:18.*

**3** Ellen White wrote that all our good works are dependent upon a power “outside of ourselves” (see above). What is the key we need in order to have this outside power work in our lives?

## Lesson From the Lettuce Garden

by Charlotte Ishkanian

Salomé is a faithful Christian steward. She has always believed in returning a faithful tithe and giving other offerings to God. Recently she learned that God is ever faithful to those who trust Him.

Last year she planted a garden of lettuce to sell in the marketplace. She planted 11 rows of lettuce and marked off one and a half rows on one side of the garden as God's lettuce. The rest would be hers to use or to sell. She watered and weeded and prayed over her garden, and the plants grew.

As harvest time neared, Salomé noticed that God's part of her garden was growing well, but her nine and a half rows were not doing as well. The plants in her part of the garden, which received the same care and the same water as God's portion, were far smaller than God's plants. She knew God had something to do with this, but she was not sure just what.

When the lettuce was ready to be picked, she harvested God's plants first and sold the crop for about \$56. She left her own lettuce plants in the ground several more days, hoping that they would grow a little more. But when she finally sold the lettuce she earned only \$14 for her efforts, one-third as much for seven times as much lettuce. She sensed that the devil was tempting her to refigure her tithe and keep some of the money she had received for selling God's portion of lettuce. But she determined to give every cent of God's lettuce money to Him.

The next growing season she again marked off the garden and planted 11 rows. She gave God the same row and a half, and she took the other nine and a half rows. She watered and weeded them all the same. And when harvest time came, God's portion produced small heads, while her portion grew very well. God's portion brought about \$7, while her portion grew round and fat and sold for \$120! Salomé realized that God was blessing her for her faithfulness to Him. She gave God His portion plus a Thank-you offering from her portion of the harvest.



SALOMÉ ETOUNDI (left) is a colporteur who lives in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of Mission.



# The Cross *and the* Great Controversy



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## SABBATH *Afternoon*

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Job 1, 2, 42; Isa. 53:4; Matt. 4:1; John 12:31-33; 1 Pet. 5:8, 9; Rev. 5:11-14; 12:7-19.*

**Memory Text:** “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (*John 12:31, 32*).

However central our salvation was to the Cross, we limit our understanding of the Cross if we limit its import to humanity. Only in the context of the great controversy can we fully understand the Cross and why Christ died. Were it not for issues involving the unfallen universe, the Lord instantly could have wiped out Satan after his rebellion, or He could have chosen to save humankind without resorting to sacrificing Himself. However, because the questions surrounding sin, salvation, God's law, and love go beyond this world, the Lord chose to demonstrate what principles and issues are at stake in this cosmic drama. He not only exposed Satan for what He was but revealed to unfallen worlds, in a way never seen before, what their Creator is really like.

At the center of that revelation is the Cross. If we, who see through a “glass, darkly” (*1 Cor. 13:12*), marvel at the Cross, what about those who knew Jesus face to face, before His incarnation and humiliation? Christ's death was for the benefit of them, as well.

**The Week at a Glance:** How does the Bible reveal the great controversy? What are the issues? What did Jesus experience at the cross? How were His sufferings greater than what we could know? How does the Cross answer issues in the great controversy?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 26.*

## The Cosmic Conflict

**Read** the following texts and write out what they reveal about the great controversy, such as who is involved? In what different ways is the controversy being made manifest? What are some of the issues? Where was, and is, it being fought? Who wins? See *Gen. 3:15; Job 1:6-12; Isa. 14:12-15; Zech. 3:1-10; Matt. 4:1; 25:41; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 15:57; Eph. 6:12; 1 Pet. 5:8, 9; Rev. 12:7-17.*

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Along with the powerful and insightful views given to us by the Lord through the ministry of Ellen White, there are scattered all through the Bible, in both Testaments, allusions and references to the great controversy. It's there! Indeed, the above verses are only a sampling of what Scripture says about what can be deemed only as a "cosmic conflict," a literal battle that began in another part of the cosmos and that is now being waged here on earth.

Manifestations of this battle are seen from the beginning to the end of Scripture, from the *enmity* between Satan and God's people first implanted by the Lord in human hearts (*Gen. 3:15*), up through the satanic *wrath* manifested at the end of time against those who "keep the commandments of God" (*Rev. 12:17*).

The great news, though, is that the outcome of this battle was assured from the foundation of the world (*Eph. 1:4, Rev. 13:8*). The question facing God wasn't whether He was able to defeat Satan but rather *how* He was going to defeat him and at what cost to Himself. The Cross, more than anything else, reveals what that cost to Himself really was.

**In what ways in everyday life do you experience the reality of the great controversy? How should the knowledge that the outcome is assured help you stand firm amid your own struggles in this often painful, trying conflict?**

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## The Cross and the Defeat of Satan

**Read** John 12:31-33, Hebrews 2:14, 1 John 3:8. How do these texts relate the Cross to the final destruction of Satan in the great controversy?

At the cross, the pivotal moment in the great controversy arrives. Satan has been “cast out,” repudiated, exposed. In vision (*Rev. 12:10*) the apostle John heard “a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.” Only when the Saviour died “for the sins of the whole world” (*1 John 2:2*) could heaven proclaim that *Salvation has now come*. At Calvary the divine promise, first mentioned in Scripture back in Genesis 3:15, became a reality.

**How** do we relate Christ’s sacrificial death to the great controversy?

As we saw earlier, though Christ Himself was sinless, He died under divine judgment as our Sin Bearer (*Isa. 53:6, 11, 12; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18*). At the Cross, God assumed His own judgment on sin. The Creator took upon Himself our humanity so that His life—more than equal to lives of created beings—would atone for the sins of all humanity. In this manner the death of Christ upheld the validity of the moral law and demonstrated that God could be both just and merciful in character. The apostle Paul explains the significance of the Cross, particularly in light of the great controversy, with these points: “God [the Father] presented him [Christ] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate [before humanity and unfallen worlds] his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished [that is, moral sin in Old Testament times could not really be atoned by animal blood (*Heb. 10:4*)]—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (*Rom. 3:25, 26, NIV*).

**At the Cross, Jesus upheld the validity of God’s law, provided a sufficient substitutionary sacrifice for every sinner, exposed Satan’s true character to the universe, and provided the means in which everyone could be saved. What does each one of these things mean to us as individuals immersed in the great controversy? Which one of these accomplishments do you believe is the most important, and why?**

## The Cross and Human Suffering (Part 1)

The Cross, and the salvation offered to us because of the Cross, are key to the great controversy. The means by which the Lord upheld the validity of the law, while at the same time saving those who had transgressed that law, were crucial in answering Satan's charges against Him before intelligences in the universe, which themselves have a stake in the outcome of the great controversy (*see Rom. 8:22*).

**Read Revelation 5:11-14. Where is this scene taking place? Who is involved? Whom are they praising, and why? How do these verses help show the centrality of the Cross to the great controversy?**

However deeply involved and interested the universe is in the Cross and the great controversy, we must never forget that redemption was accomplished here on earth, for the sake of human beings. Christ took upon Himself a human, not angelic, nature (*Heb. 2:16*), because He came to save humans, not angels. Without the Cross and all that it entails (including the Resurrection), all humanity would, one way or another, face only eternal oblivion.

**In John 12:32, Jesus talked about His death drawing all men toward Him. What does that mean? What was it about the Cross that draws us to Jesus?**

Christ's assumption of humanity, of human nature, however crucial to the plan of salvation, wasn't enough to save humanity. According to the eternal plan (*2 Tim. 1:9*), Christ would die for the world, taking on Himself, in His Personhood and in His deity, the sins of the world, and all the guilt and suffering inherent in those sins. Every sin was there, at the Cross, falling on the Son of God. What an incredible spectacle to the universe, to see their sinless Commander suffering in Himself for a fallen race. Though the main purpose of the Cross was to save us, it also revealed much about the character of God to the universe.

**All our suffering, as humans, results from sin, does it not? Keeping that thought in mind, what do Paul's words that "he hath made him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (*2 Cor. 5:21*) tell us about what Christ suffered on the cross in our behalf? How does this knowledge help draw us toward Him?**

## The Cross and Human Suffering (Part 2)

One of the greatest challenges that Christians face is the question of suffering. Why, if there is an all-powerful and all-loving God, does so much suffering exist? What Christian hasn't at some point felt the power of that daunting question assault his or her own faith?

Of course, the great controversy motif, with the battle between good and evil explained to us, certainly helps us understand the big picture behind suffering. And we know, too, that one day it will all end, and in a way that will vindicate the character of God. Even so, the question of suffering continues to confront us simply because so often there are no real answers to it, at least not answers that make sense to us now.

**Read Job 1, 2, and 42. How does this story help us understand the background of the great controversy that's such a part of human suffering? Yet, what questions about Job's sufferings were left unanswered that still don't make sense?**

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If you look at the sufferings of Job, or of any human being, one point mustn't be missed: All human suffering is individual suffering. Whether we are weeping for ourselves or for others, it's only our own tears that we shed. We can never splice into another person's nerves to feel a spasm of their pain, a prick of their woe, no matter how close or intimate we are. Other people's pain comes to us only as our own; our own, then, is all that we can ever know. Each of us experiences only our own pain, only our own suffering, never other people's. Whether we are suffering and dying alone or en masse, our pain can never exceed what our personal metabolism allows; we will never experience more suffering than what our own delirious cells can carry. No one ever ached beyond what he or she, individually, could; the moment the threshold was crossed, death struck.

**We're often horrified, and rightly so, by the great numbers of people who suffer in tragedies. Yet, no matter the numbers (whether one or one million), each person's suffering is limited by the fact that he or she could suffer no more than an individual could suffer. How does this idea help you understand better the question of human tragedy?**

## The Cross and Human Suffering (Part 3)

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (*Isa. 53:4*).

So far we have seen that all human pain and suffering come from sin. We saw, too, that, as humans, we experience only our own pain, only our own suffering, never another’s. Human suffering is always, and only, individual suffering. And finally we saw that, at the Cross, the sins of the whole world (and the cause of the whole world’s suffering) fell on Jesus, the Sin Bearer.

**With** these few points in mind, read Isaiah 53:1-12. Notice particularly verse 4. In the context of what we’ve been studying the past few days, what does this chapter, especially verse 4, tell us about what God Himself suffered in the great controversy because of sin?

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The point is that although we know only our own pain, only our own suffering, at the Cross, God felt it all, at once. What we know only *individually*, the Lord felt *corporately*, at the Cross. At Calvary, the Lord linked Himself to us through the essence of our humanity; that is, through our pain—only the level He experienced was greater and more intense than any other human being has ever known.

Thus, when the great controversy is over and all the issues resolved, no human being ever will be able to say that he or she suffered worse than did God Himself. At the Cross, the Lord showed humanity and the onlooking universe that in order to deal with the issues raised by Satan in a just, fair, and merciful manner, He Himself was willing to suffer worse than any fallen being ever had or ever could. He bore our griefs and our sorrows—that is, all our griefs and all the sorrows that we feel only as individuals, He felt at once!

Who can even begin to comprehend this incredible reality? No wonder the universe looks upon the Cross with awe, praise, and wonder (*Rev. 5:11-14*).

**How does this idea, that God in Christ, at the Cross, suffered worse than any human ever could, put the whole question of human suffering in a perspective that helps us better understand it?**

**Further Study:** “It will be seen that He who is infinite in wisdom could devise no plan for our salvation except the sacrifice of His Son. The compensation for this sacrifice is the joy of peopling the earth with ransomed beings, holy, happy, and immortal. The result of the Saviour’s conflict with the powers of darkness is joy to the redeemed, redounding to the glory of God throughout eternity. And such is the value of the soul that the Father is satisfied with the price paid; and Christ Himself, beholding the fruits of His great sacrifice, is satisfied.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 652.

“Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings. The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** As a class, discuss the idea presented this week about the individuality of human suffering as opposed to what Christ suffered corporately at the Cross. What does this idea tell us about the character of God? What does it mean that God Himself would suffer all the woes of the whole world? What would this truth reveal about God to unfallen worlds, as well?
- 2** How should the idea of Christ as our Sin Bearer—as the innocent One suffering for the guilty—impact how we treat others? How does the idea of bearing “one another’s burdens” (*Gal. 6:2*) reflect, in a small way, what Christ did for us at the Cross?
- 3** There are many Bible-believing people who attempt to understand sin, suffering, and salvation apart from the great-controversy motif. Put yourself in their shoes and try to explain some of these things another way, apart from the great controversy. How well does it work?

## Freed to Tell Others

by James Mace\*

Kumar lives in a Hindu country surrounded by the beauty of nature. But 19-year-old Kumar saw little of it. A year earlier he had become possessed by a demon and often writhed on the floor of his family's home for days at a time. His family had sought doctors, sorcerers, anyone who was willing to try, to come and help their son. But no one could free Kumar from the unseen demons that terrorized the family.

Then someone in the village learned that Bupendra was home for a visit. Everyone knew that Bupendra was a Christian. His family had disowned him when he gave his life to Jesus, but perhaps Bupendra's God could help Kumar. Someone asked Bupendra to come and pray for Kumar. When Bupendra and his wife arrived, four men held Kumar down, but he thrashed until he freed himself from their grip.

"Do you believe that Jesus can heal your son from the evil spirits?" Bupendra asked Kumar's family. They nodded hopefully, and Kumar's father answered Yes. "If you all believe, then we will pray for him. With Bible in hand Bupendra and his wife prayed that God would show His power over Satan and deliver Kumar from the demon that troubled him. When Bupendra said Amen, Kumar opened his eyes, calmly got up, and took something to eat. Bupendra left that home rejoicing.

Bupendra returned to the city in which he taught. A week later a young man walked in. At first Bupendra did not recognize him. "I'm the one you prayed for last week, and God delivered me from Satan's power." Kumar's face radiated peace and joy. "I want to serve the Creator God that delivered me from the devil," Kumar said humbly.

Kumar studied the Bible and accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He returned to his home village to teach his family and friends what he had learned. Today Kumar's entire family rejoice in the love of Christ and the hope of His soon coming.

Worshippers in Kumar's village sit on straw mats that cover rough stones in the floor of the little stone church that the villagers built. They cannot afford to buy cement for the floor. They study and pray and sing praises to God together.

Kumar's village is the only one within ten days' walk that has an Adventist congregation. There is so much to do; so many need to hear the good news that Jesus brings. Pray for the believers in Kumar's village and those who would believe if they could only hear. Pray that they will hear the words of God before it's too late.

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\*JAMES MACE (*pseudonym*) and his family work in an Asian country that does not welcome Christian missionaries.



This quarter's study, *Jesus Through the Eyes of Mark*, by William G. Johnsson, will take us on an exciting journey to the Holy Land, to Galilee in particular. With John Mark as our guide, we will retrace the steps of the greatest Man who ever lived, Jesus Christ, the One who gave His life as a ransom for ours.

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## Lesson 1—Introducing Jesus, the Son of God

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Writer, John Mark.

MONDAY: The Gospel Begins (*Mark 1:1*).

TUESDAY: The Messenger (*Mark 1:2–8*).

WEDNESDAY: The Commissioning.

THURSDAY: The Ministry Begins (*Mark 1:14–20*).

Memory Text—*Mark 1:11*.

**Sabbath Gem:** This week we'll take a look at Mark's inspired opening and the special emphasis he conveyed. Throughout his Gospel we are conscious that Jesus is the Word made flesh, "full of grace and truth" (*1:14*).

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## Lesson 2—Amazing Miracle Worker

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Demon-possessed Man (*Mark 1:21–28*).

MONDAY: Peter's Mother-in-law (*Mark 1:29–39*).

TUESDAY: The Leper (*Mark 1:40–45*).

WEDNESDAY: The Paralytic (*Mark 2:1–12*).

THURSDAY: Levi Matthew (*Mark 2:13–21*).

Memory Text—*Mark 1:41*.

**Sabbath Gem:** What proof did Jesus start giving of His power? In what ways did the healing of Peter's mother-in-law reveal the principles of a Christian life? How did Jesus show the link between the spiritual and the physical life? In what ways did Christ break down some of the long-standing religious traditions of His day?

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.