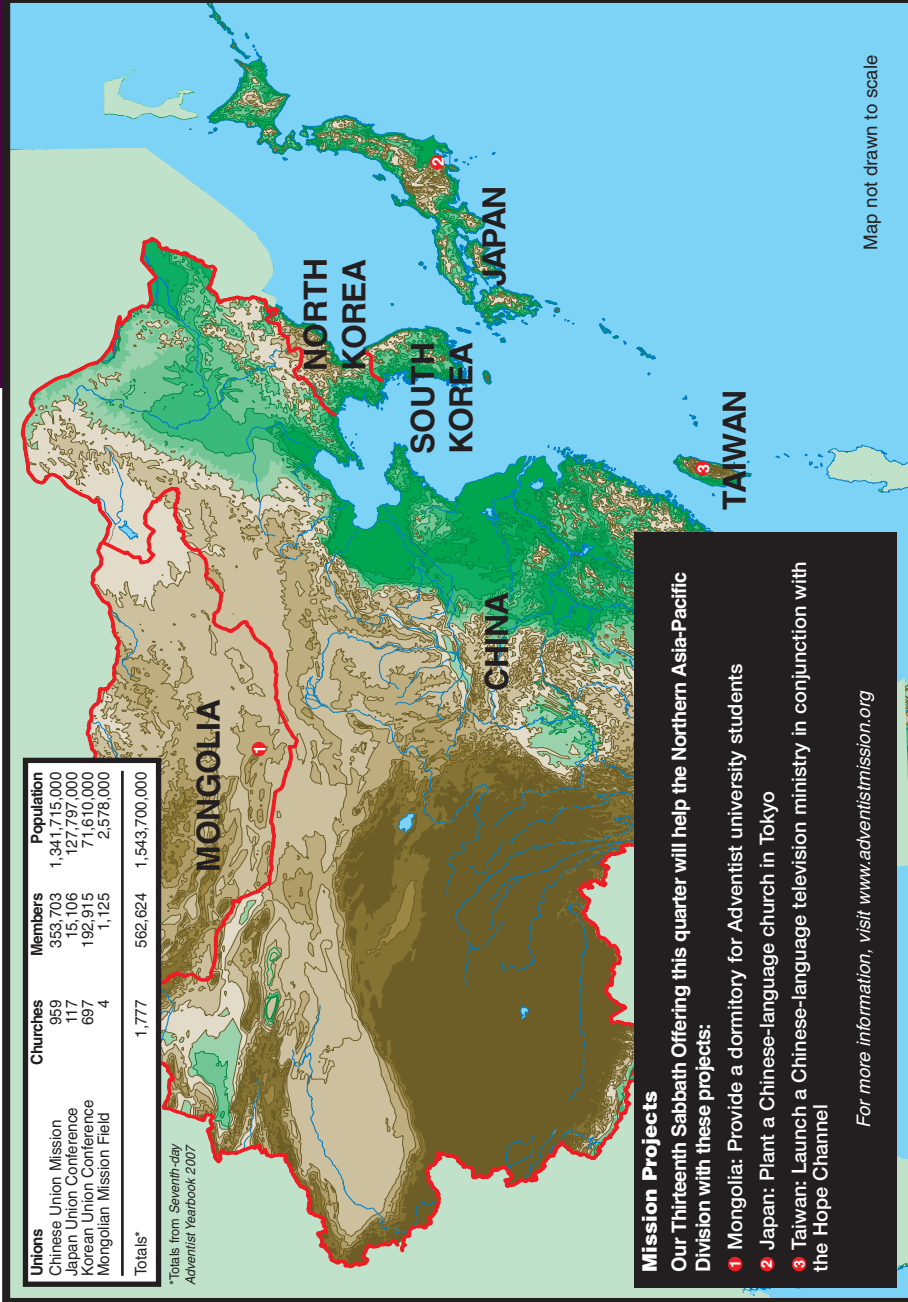


# Northern Asia-Pacific

## DIVISION



Map not drawn to scale

### Mission Projects

Our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help the Northern Asia-Pacific Division with these projects:

- 1 Mongolia: Provide a dormitory for Adventist university students
- 2 Japan: Plant a Chinese-language church in Tokyo
- 3 Taiwan: Launch a Chinese-language television ministry in conjunction with the Hope Channel

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ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

ATONEMENT AND THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Oct • Nov • Dec 2008

ADULT  
SABBATH SCHOOL  
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE  
Oct • Nov • Dec 2008

# Atonement and the Cross of Christ



Where legally possible, offerings will go to these projects; otherwise special arrangement will be made with the General Conference for distribution of funds based on the laws of the countries where these offerings are collected.



\*EAQ081001\*

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**Editorial Office** 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904  
Come visit us at our Web site: <http://www.absg.adventist.org>

**Principal Contributor**  
Angel Manuel Rodríguez

**Editor**  
Clifford R. Goldstein

**Associate Editor**  
Soraya Homayouni Parish

**Publication Manager**  
Lea Alexander Greve

**Editorial Assistant**  
Tresa Beard

**Pacific Press® Coordinator**  
Paul A. Hey

**Art Director and Illustrator**  
Lars Justinien

**Concept Design**  
Dever Design

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# The Doctrine

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When taken to the hospital, the old herdsman was sick, blind, and dying. While he was there, his granddaughter came every day and read to him; the old man enjoyed the soft sound of the child's voice. One day she found, in the room, a Bible left by a friend. She casually opened to 1 John 1 and began to read. He listened attentively, and when he heard the words "And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," he interrupted her.

*The atonement is  
the biblical doctrine  
around which all  
others revolve.*

"Tell me," he said, "is that really there?"

"Yes, Grandpa, it's there."

"Could you read it to me again?"

" 'And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' "

For a few seconds there was silence; then he asked, "Are you quite sure that's there, in that book?"

"Yes, Grandpa, quite sure."

"Please, take my hand and place my finger on that passage and read it to me again." As she did it, tears dripped down from his sightless eyes, and his voice was heard speaking with difficulty but with great assurance.

"My dear child . . . if anyone should ask you how I died, please tell them that I died . . . cleansed."

What this story shows is that the doctrine of atonement is not an abstract theory of salvation; it is, rather, the saving power of God in the lives of fallen, sinful beings.

What is atonement? In general, it could be said that the word *atonement* refers to the removal of any hindrance to fellowship with God. In a sense, atonement is the equivalent of reconciliation, but it also includes the idea of expiation, a fancy word that portrays the idea of removing any barrier that exists between God and us. The doctrine of atonement emphasizes the sacrifice of Christ as the exclusive expiatory means by which the barrier between us and God—which is sin—is removed, leaving us reconciled to Him.

# *of Atonement*

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The atonement, in fact, is the biblical doctrine around which all others revolve. It is centered in Christ's life, death, resurrection, ascension, mediation, and return. It presupposes the presence of sin, our fundamental and desperate need of salvation, and God's loving disposition to save us.

A proper understanding of the biblical doctrine of God is also indispensable for understanding the atonement. It was God's love that made it possible to restore us to union and fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ. We should never give the impression that the death of Christ was needed in order to persuade God to love us. God sent Christ to die for us because He *already* loved us. The biblical doctrine of atonement is grounded in God's love for sinful and rebellious creatures.

The fullness of the benefits of the atonement is enjoyed only by those who, after being touched by the Holy Spirit, accept God's offer of salvation in Christ as the exclusive means of forgiveness and reconciliation. Their hearts are possessed by love and gratitude to God and Christ for this infinite sacrifice.

Thus, it's our sincere hope that this quarter, as you study the meaning of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, you will be moved toward a greater commitment to the One who suffered so much for us, so that whether you live or die, you can, like the old herdsman, do so in peace.

*Dr. Ángel M. Rodríguez, a native of Puerto Rico, is the director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference headquarters, Silver Spring, Maryland.*

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# God's Nature: The Basis of Atonement



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Ps. 139:1–4; Isa. 46:10; John 1:4; Rom. 5:8; 8:37–39; 1 John 5:11, 12.*

**Memory Text:** “ ‘I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please’ ” (*Isaiah 46:10, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** God's work of salvation is a self-willed outflow of His very nature; it does not require sinners to persuade Him to love them.

There are many mysteries about God, things about Him, His nature, His holiness, and His power, that we just cannot understand. Yet, there is one aspect about Him that we can begin to understand; namely, His love, a love manifested to us through His Son's redemptive work, a work that touches us at the individual and personal level, a work that is the outgrowth of God's own nature and being.

This week we begin our study of the doctrine of salvation, and we do so with the recognition that the driving force in our salvation is the greatness and love of our God. Nothing outside God forced Him to do what He did for us through His Son. Instead, it is because of His very nature itself that He has poured out His love and grace toward this fallen world.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 4.*

## Eternal God

**What** do the words “in the beginning God created . . .” (*Gen. 1:1*) imply about the nature of God? Before you answer, read also **Genesis 21:33** and **Psalm 90:2**.

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The concept of eternity is difficult for us to understand. We are finite creatures (at least in this life). We know that we will die. In fact, everything that we relate to is transitory: It's here today but will one day be gone. Everything in this world had a beginning and will have an end. In contrast, the idea of God never having a beginning and never having an end isn't easy to understand, not with minds so used to thinking in finite terms.

**Read** **Psalm 102:25–27**. To whom is this passage applied in the New Testament? (*See Heb. 1:10–12.*) What's the message there, along with **Psalm 90:2**, about the length of God's existence?

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Because God is eternal, because He existed before all created things, He has to be self-existent. Creatures, in contrast, are not. We all need air, water, and food to preserve our existence (*Gen. 1:29*), while God needs nothing to exist. Throughout eternity, before He made anything, there was nothing else apart from God. He therefore existed by Himself, dependent upon nothing. *He is life in Himself*. And only He who is life in Himself, the Eternal Self-existing One, can restore life to repentant sinners. Created life, both now and for eternity, all comes from God, the great Life-Giver (*see John 1:4; 1 John 5:11, 12*). We are dependent upon Him for everything.

**Think about how dependent you are on God for your life here and now. How much more so for eternal life? How should your realization of this dependence help foster in you a sense of humility? Why is arrogance such a repulsive trait in the eyes of God?**



## A Loving God

The mystery of God lies beyond our full understanding. He is not an object that we can find by ourselves (*Job 11:7*). The Bible does not give us a systematic and philosophical description of His being. It presents a God who reveals Himself through His actions, through the way He relates to us. We come to know who He is by what He tells us about Himself; otherwise we would know little about Him.

The Scriptures tell us that God is by nature love; that is to say, the essence of His being is self-giving, and this is expressed in concern for the well-being of others.

**What** do the following texts tell us about the character and nature of God? *Ps. 118:1–4; Rom. 5:8; 8:37–39; 1 John 4:8, 9, 16.*

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The statement “God is love” takes us into the core of the divine and tells us (1) “God is love” means that an exploration into God’s essence would reveal that it is, by nature, love. This understanding of the nature of God is of extreme importance in the doctrine of atonement. (2) “God is love” means that He is a relational Being; He enjoys by nature fellowship with His creatures. It is precisely in that personal interaction that He reveals His love. If we want to know whether God loves us or not, we do not examine our feelings and emotions but look at the way He has treated us in spite of our sinfulness. (3) “God is love” means that there is nothing outside God that can move Him to love us. Because God is by nature love, it is unnecessary, even impossible, for us to make ourselves lovable in order to be accepted by Him. And nothing, of course, reveals His love toward us more than the plan of salvation. Indeed, the moment we fell into sin, Christ became our Mediator, Redeemer, and Savior—the ultimate expression of God’s love toward the fallen race.

**“Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another”** (*1 John 4:11, NIV*). What are practical ways in which you can express love toward others? What things in your own life hinder you from showing that love?

## God as Creator

“Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture” (*Ps. 100:3*).

Scripture is unequivocal: God is the Creator. Without this fundamental truth, the Bible message becomes meaningless. On the other hand, God as Creator means that He is to be distinguished from creation, that He is not part of the created order. God as the Creator means that there was nothing before Him or before His acts of creation (*Rom. 4:17, Heb. 11:3*). God as Creator means that everything belongs to Him and depends on His power and benevolence for subsistence (*Pss. 24:1, 2; 104:10–14*). God as Creator means that creation reveals the glory and power of its Creator (*Ps. 19:1–3, Rom. 1:20*).

**What** did the Creator promise to a world damaged by sin? *Isa. 65:17, Rev. 21:1*.

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The Bible explicitly states that God created and sustains everything through the power of His Son (*John 1:1–3; Heb. 1:2, 3*). The atonement is God’s solution to the problem of sin within this creation. Instead of leaving us to reap the ultimate rewards of sin and rebellion, which would be eternal ruin, He instituted the plan of salvation.

**How** does Paul describe those who are in Christ? *2 Cor. 5:17*.

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The power God displayed during the creation of the universe is the same power He employs in re-creating fallen human beings into His own image. He brought everything into existence through the power of His word (*Ps. 33:6*), and now it is also through the power of His incarnate word in Christ that He re-creates us (*John 1:1, 12, 13; 2 Cor. 4:16*).

**Is there something that you personally have created and sustained, something that you put a lot of work and care into? In what ways does your act of creating it give you ownership over it? How do you feel about what you have made? How, in a small way, might this comparison help us understand what we mean to God, our Creator?**

## Holy God

**Read** Isaiah 40:25 and Isaiah 57:15. What do these texts tell us about the nature of God?

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The holiness of God is not simply an attribute of God but, like love, reveals what He is in Himself. At least two fundamental ideas are associated with His holiness.

First, it describes God as unique. The term *holy* usually designates what has been placed at the exclusive and unique service of the Lord. But when *holy* is applied to God, it emphasizes the fact that He is unique and incomparable. There is no one in the universe like our sublime and majestic God (*see Isa. 46:5, 9*), and only He is worthy of our worship.

Second, God being holy does not mean that He is distant and inaccessible to us and unable to have fellowship with us. His holiness and His love are inseparable. His holiness reveals itself in His willingness to dwell with the contrite and lowly in spirit. By approaching them and dwelling among them, the Holy One allows His creatures to participate in His holiness.

**What** promise is found in the following verse? *2 Cor. 5:21*.

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God's holiness does not tolerate sin but actively reacts against it (*Isa. 5:24, Hos. 9:15, Rom. 1:18*). "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (*Hab. 1:13, NIV*). God's natural hatred for sin made necessary the role of a Mediator. God designed a way by which sinners could be sanctified and enjoy fellowship with Him again. This was possible through Christ, in whom atonement and holiness were mysteriously united. The Holy One was born as a baby on this planet of sin and impurity (*Luke 1:35*) to sanctify us through the power of His atoning death: "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ" (*Heb. 10:10, NIV*).

Someone says, "Why do I need a Savior? I'm not that bad, certainly not as bad as many others." How should our understanding of God's holiness help us answer this person correctly?

## Omniscient God

**What** do these texts tell us about God's knowledge? *Ps. 139:1–4, 15, 16; Isa. 46:10; Matt. 10:30.*

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God is omniscient; that is, “he knows everything” (*1 John 3:20, NIV*). Nothing is hidden from Him. “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes” of the Lord (*Heb. 4:13, NIV*). All the spheres of His creation are inundated by His presence, and therefore He knows every dimension of it (*Ps. 139:7–10*). His knowledge of us is perfect and complete. God alone possesses pure objectivity, because He alone knows everything from every possible perspective.

It is not only that the Lord fully knows what is; He also perfectly knows what will be in the future (*Isa. 46:10; Matt. 26:34, 74, 75*). The future is no more hidden from Him than is either the past or the present.

**What** does *1 Peter 1:19, 20* tell us about God’s foreknowledge regarding the rise of sin?

God’s omniscience is of great significance for the doctrine of atonement. Because God knows everything, sin was not something that caught Him by surprise. The God who perfectly knows all His creatures knew in advance about the fall of one of His cherubim, and so He formulated a plan to deal with the problem of sin, even before it arose in humans: “Where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (*Rom. 5:20, NIV*). Therefore, God’s decision to save us was hidden in eternity and revealed in Christ. This is “the mystery hidden for long ages past” (*Rom. 16:25, NIV*), “hidden in God, who created all things” (*Eph. 3:9, NIV*). Before God created anything, He had foreseen the origin of sin and decided to defeat it instead of fearfully running away from it. From the divine perspective, Christ is “the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world” (*Rev. 13:8*).

**God knows everything about you, things that no one else would even dare suspect. And despite that knowledge, He still loves you. How should that help influence how you treat others, despite their faults?**

**Further Study: God and Redemption:** “Only as we contemplate the great plan of redemption can we have a just appreciation of the character of God. The work of creation was a manifestation of His love; but the gift of God to save the guilty and ruined race, alone reveals the infinite depths of divine tenderness and compassion.” —Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 739.

**Forgiveness and Justice:** “When we study the divine character in the light of the cross we see mercy, tenderness, and forgiveness blended with equity and justice. We see in the midst of the throne One bearing in hands and feet and side the marks of the suffering endured to reconcile man to God. We see a Father, infinite, dwelling in light unapproachable, yet receiving us to Himself through the merits of His Son. The cloud of vengeance that threatened only misery and despair, in the light reflected from the cross reveals the writing of God: Live, sinner, live! ye penitent, believing souls, live! I have paid a ransom.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 333.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Go back over the main points of this week’s lesson. What other aspects of God’s essential nature can you think of, and what role would they play in the plan of salvation?
- ❷ What can we learn about God’s holiness that would help us better understand what it means for us to be holy?
- ❸ Some people struggle with the question of God’s foreknowledge and our free will. How free are we in our choices if God knew beforehand what choices we would make? Discuss.

**Summary:** The God who is life in Himself is the only One who can restore life to us. We are loved by Him, not because we earned that love but because He is love in Himself and continues to love us, in spite of our sin. He also wants to re-create us, and He is able because He is the Creator. As a holy God who cannot tolerate sin in His presence, He is able to sanctify us through Christ. His all-encompassing knowledge reveals that sin was not an unexpected phenomenon but something that He foresaw and was prepared to deal with.

# Angels Closed Their Eyes

by HOMER TRECARTIN

The pastor didn't notice the young man enter the church and sit down. In fact, no one noticed him. It was as though angels had blinded their eyes.

Parsa\* grew up in Central Asia, a faithful worshiper of the Creator God. His grandfather was a famous religious teacher. All his life Parsa had prayed to God and read the holy writings of His people. While reading he learned about the Sabbath and grew to love it, but no one else seemed to understand its importance.

Oh, there was a small group of Adventists who worshiped in a house church in town. But they were Christians, and everyone knew Christians were heathens. Christians ate pork, drank alcohol, prayed to idols, dressed indecently, and lived with one wife after another. Besides, Christians were foreigners. No, he wanted nothing to do with Christians, even if they kept the Sabbath.

But one Saturday as Parsa walked down the street, an unseen power pulled him into the little Seventh-day Adventist Church. Trembling he slipped in and sat down in the back row. He listened as the pastor preached a powerful message on Abraham. *Why would Christians talk about Abraham?* Parsa wondered. He thought Christians followed only the New Testament and didn't know that Abraham was a prophet of God. Parsa was so interested in what he heard that day that he returned the next Sabbath and the next. The messages touched his heart, and he wanted to know more.

For six months he slipped into and out of church without being seen. Then one week the Adventists saw him. It was as if scales had fallen from their eyes. They welcomed him and invited him to join a Bible study class.

After several months of intense Bible study, Parsa was baptized. His family and friends shunned him, but Parsa prays that they will find the truth as he has. He continues doing all he can to share God's love with others, and a number of his people have recently accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Pray for Parsa's people, many of whom are searching for greater truth. And remember, your mission offering helps make work in Central Asia possible. Thank you for having a part in spreading the gospel in difficult areas.

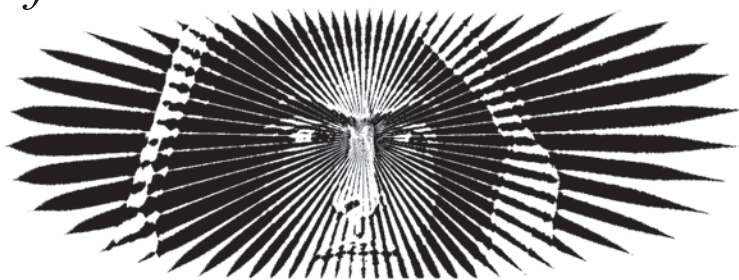
\*Not his real name.

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HOMER TRECARTIN is director of planning for the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission.



# Cosmic Crisis: The Disruption of God's Established Order



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 3:4, 5; Job 1:8–11; Isa. 14:13, 14; Ezek. 28:14–17; Rev. 12:7–9.*

**Memory Text:** “He [Christ] is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (*Colossians 1:17, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** To show the origins of Satan's fall and how he brought the battle to earth.

**N**o matter how much Lucifer had, no matter how exalted he was, it wasn't enough. He wanted more. Thus began the “mystery of iniquity” (*2 Thess. 2:7*), the origin of sin in God's universe.

The origin of evil within this perfect being will remain a mystery, because there was no reason for it. If it could be explained, it could be justified. It began with the first small step that Lucifer took in cherishing a particular emotion and desire. The conflicting emotions within Lucifer, together with the misuse of his God-given freedom, resulted in a cosmic conflict, a full-fledged rebellion against God in which suffering and death have impacted innumerable creatures. Today each one of us is living with the results of this conflict.

But don't despair. As we will see in future lessons, Christ came to bring a fair and just resolution to issues that caused this cosmic crisis.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 11.*

## Sin: Its Origin

**Read** Ezekiel 28:14–17. What does this tell us about the origin of sin? What was Lucifer like before he fell?

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Unlike God, who is eternal, evil and sin had a beginning; that is, there was a time they didn't exist. Because God is love and holy, and everything He created was good, sin did not originate in Him. Ezekiel makes it clear that sin mysteriously started in a creature who was created good: “ ‘ “You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you” ’ ” (*Ezek. 28:15, NIV*). “Blameless” (Heb. *tamim*, “complete”) designates the wholeness of this creature as he came from the hands of the Creator.

Notice, too, that sin began in a cherub, an exalted being. The cherubim were closer to God than any other angelic beings. Two were placed as guardians by the entrance of Eden (*Gen. 3:24*). A pair, made of gold, was placed on the ark of the covenant (*Exod. 25:18–20*). The position of the cherubim on the ark illustrates the high position of this cherub, who stood in the light of God's presence in God's dwelling (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 758). Sin originated, then, in a celestial being who was very close to the throne of God. The phrase “holy mountain of God” designates the heavenly temple, where God dwells among His creatures, the celestial center of government.

The self-corruption of this cherub, Lucifer, was rooted in a selfishness that misused the gifts of beauty and wisdom that God gave him. He mysteriously allowed his emotions and feelings to prevail over his reason, and consequently his wholeness was corrupted. “ ‘ “You corrupted your wisdom” ’ ” (*Ezek. 28:17, NIV, emphasis added*); God placed the blame squarely on Lucifer himself. Instead of holding to the divine order, according to which his gifts were to be used to enrich others, Lucifer perceived himself as superior to everyone else in beauty, splendor, and wisdom. “Little by little Satan came to indulge the desire for self-exaltation” and God's established order was disrupted.—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 66.

**How often has it been that no matter what you had, you still wanted more? Whose character are you manifesting? Why is that so opposite to the character of Christ?**

## Attack on God

**How** did Isaiah describe the true intentions of the rebellious cherub? What was in his heart, his inner being? What was his real motive? *Isa. 14:13, 14.*

As the strange, selfish feelings and emotions of the cherub gained ascendancy over his higher powers and reason, he became bolder. He perverted and misused the freedom that God had entrusted to him, even to the point where He wanted to usurp God's own authority.

In Ezekiel 28:15, a contrast is made between the condition of the cherub as a good creature from the hand of his Creator and what he, the creature, had become. He was at first "blameless" (*NIV*), whole, lacking nothing, but something new was formed within him: The verse says that "iniquity," or "wickedness" (*NIV*), was found in him. This term in the Old Testament can be used to mean duplicity, unholy ambition, lying, and apostasy.

Ezekiel also said, " 'Your heart became proud [Heb. *gabah*, 'to be high,' 'to be exalted']' " (*Ezek. 28:17, NIV*). To be proud can include perceiving oneself as being more than one really is, or viewing oneself as superior to others. It also can lead to behavior that ignores God's will (*Ps. 10:4, Jer. 13:15*) and that opposes God Himself (*Ezek. 28:2*). One could easily conclude that the fallen cherub was being disloyal to God, attacking Him, speaking lies, and acting deceptively.

**How** did the serpent misrepresent God to Eve? *Gen. 3:4, 5.*

In order for Satan to persuade Eve to disobey God, he sought to attack the character of God. He said, basically, that God was fundamentally a selfish being who limits the development of His intelligent creatures, keeping them in a state of involuntary submission through a threat of death. He was not what He claimed to be, a God of love, but was camouflaging His true nature through the appearance of a loving attitude. Satan was projecting onto God His own deceitful nature and the real intentions of his corrupted heart. His attack in heaven against God and God's loving nature was now being transferred to this planet.

"Had Lucifer really desired to be like the Most High, he would never have deserted his appointed place in heaven; for the spirit of the Most High is manifested in unselfish ministry. Lucifer desired God's power, but not His character."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 435.

**How can we avoid falling into this same spiritual trap as these principles are played out around us more and more subtly?**

## Sin and the Law of God

The law is an expression of the character and will of the Lawgiver. The psalmist wrote, “I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart” (*Ps. 40:8, NIV*). Here the will of God has been internalized and has become part of the character of the psalmist. In other words, the character of God is being appropriated through submission to the divine will expressed in the law.

**How** do these texts help us understand the link between God’s love and His law? *Matt. 22:37–40; John 3:16; 14:15, 21; 1 John 5:3.*

When John wrote, “The devil has been sinning from the beginning” (*1 John 3:8, NIV*), he was saying that Satan, in heaven, rebelled against the loving will of God.

In contrast to loving obedience, there is lawlessness (*see 1 John 3:4*). The word *lawlessness (anomia)* refers to a deep-seated attitude in the heart of rebellious human beings. It speaks of chaos and anarchy as the substitutes for the divine law and for what it stands for, the divine character. The cosmic conflict is against God and what He is in Himself. Paul describes the end-time eschatological antichrist as “the man of lawlessness” (*2 Thess. 2:3, NIV*) and refers to the phenomenon of sin as the “mystery of *anomia*” (*vs. 7*).

**Review** God’s command to Adam and Satan’s words to Eve (*Gen. 2:17; 3:4, 5*). **What was going on here?**

Genesis 2:17 was a clear expression of God’s love for Adam and Eve and His intense desire to enjoy their fellowship forever. He clearly did not want them to experience death; otherwise, why alert them to the possibility of it? Created as free beings, Adam and Eve had to demonstrate their willingness to enjoy eternity with the Creator. Their obedience to the divine command would show that they were freely choosing to enjoy eternal life with Him. It is that clearly expressed divine will that Satan attacks and opposes, offering instead total “independence” from God. This was his basic agenda in heaven: independence from the divine command, being his own law without accountability to anyone.

**In what subtle ways is Satan still trying to get us to declare our “independence” from God? How can we protect ourselves from this deadly deception?**

## Sin as Rebellion Against God's Government

**How** does Paul describe the cosmic role of Christ? *Col. 1:16, 17.*

That which integrates creation into a harmonious unity are not the laws of nature, important as they are, but the power of a loving God in the person of Christ. Love is not only the bond that keeps Christians united (*Col. 3:14*) but the bond that holds the universe together. It is not an impersonal force but the very essence of God Himself. An attack against God is an attack against the way He rules the universe and, therefore, is an attempt to upset the divine order of creation.

**Read** Job 1:8–11. Where do you see in these verses an attack on God Himself by Satan?

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The charges Satan raised against both Job and God reflect the charges he raised against God in heaven. According to him, Job served God out of selfish concerns, not out of love. He served God in order to obtain things from Him, and God provided for Job in order to gain his service. Satan argued that God's government was characterized by selfishness—not by selfless love, as God claimed. According to him, the true nature of humans is revealed in the midst of chaos, and if given the chance, they would rebel against God.

“All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father's life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.

“In heaven itself this law was broken. Sin originated in self-seeking. Lucifer, the covering cherub, desired to be first in heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 21.

**How can you better fit in with this “circuit of beneficence”?**

## War in Heaven

Two words used by Ezekiel could help us understand the strategy of Lucifer's attack against God.

The first word is *trade* ("your widespread trade" [Ezek. 28:16, NIV]); he was involved in "widespread trade." The word translated "trade" also could be rendered "slander," suggesting that in heaven Lucifer was involved in raising false accusations against God and probably other heavenly beings. *Slander* is evil speech intended to damage the reputation of others, and it can describe the behavior of a person who has chosen to ignore the will of God and who stands under divine judgment (Lev. 19:16, Jer. 6:28–30). It results in division and disorder (2 Cor. 12:20). Satan is described in the Bible as the accuser or slanderer of God's people, the adversary (Zech. 3:1, Rev. 12:10). Satan did not hold " 'to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies' " (John 8:44, NIV).

This slander led Satan to *violence*, the second important word (Ezek. 28:16). *Violence* designates an antisocial behavior that violates God's established order. It is motivated by hate or egotism and could lead to physical and social attacks. In some cases it results in murder or in the exploitation of others for personal benefit (Gen. 49:5, Mic. 6:12). Satan was a " 'murderer from the beginning' " in that he introduced violence and death into God's creation (John 8:44).

**What** was the final result of the anti-God behavior of Lucifer in heaven? Rev. 12:7–9.

Slowly and mysteriously Satan's selfish feelings were transformed into a behavior that was an open attack against God and His Son. What was at first hidden soon became visible, creating confusion and disorder. There was war in heaven. This was the beginning of the cosmic conflict in which we all are involved. Satan and his supporters were defeated in heaven and on the cross, and they will be extinguished from the universe at the appropriate time. The resolution of the sin problem not only restores the fallen human race to perfect and permanent union with God but will reestablish a perfect moral harmony throughout all of God's creation.

**First come bad thoughts, which lead to bad words, which lead to bad actions. This happened to Satan, and unless we're careful, it will happen to us. What's our best defense (see Phil. 4:8)?**



**Further Study:** “There was one who perverted the freedom that God had granted to His creatures. Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven. Lucifer, ‘son of the morning,’ was first of the covering cherubs, holy and undefiled. He stood in the presence of the great Creator, and the ceaseless beams of glory enshrouding the eternal God rested upon him.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 35.

**Made a Final Choice:** “Lucifer in heaven had sinned in the light of God’s glory. To him as to no other created being was given a revelation of God’s love. Understanding the character of God, knowing His goodness, Satan chose to follow his own selfish, independent will. This choice was final. There was no more that God could do to save him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 761, 762.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think about the fact that Lucifer was a “perfect” being, and yet, iniquity was found in him. What does that tell us about the kind of freedom God has given to His intelligent creatures? What kind of moral responsibility does this freedom place on each of us?
- 2 Keeping the idea of our freedom in mind, discuss the role of the law. Why would law be so important for free beings? If we were not free, why would there be no need for law? That is, what’s the purpose of a law for beings who don’t have moral choices to begin with?
- 3 Go back to the question at the end of Tuesday’s lesson. What are the various ways Satan seeks to manifest his character in us, both individually and as a church? What are the things we do that show, at times, just how successful he has been?

**Summary:** Lucifer, a free being, abused the freedom that God gave him, and he cherished evil thoughts until those thoughts turned into action, action against God’s government and against God Himself. The result was a disruption of heaven’s established order. Truly, the issues of sin and rebellion have consequences beyond our mere earth.

## “God Was My Umbrella”

by ALEX ERIGA

I was called to the headmaster’s office in the high school I attended in northern Uganda. My school fees were due, and I had no money. I walked the 29 miles home and told my parents the problem. They asked relatives to help pay my fees then sent me back to school.

As I walked toward school, I saw storm clouds gathering. Rain would follow, and there was no place to take refuge. I hurried on, watching the dark clouds approach. Their feathery bottoms told me it was raining hard. With no shelter, I kept walking. I worried that my schoolbooks would get wet.

As the storm drew closer, I remembered God’s promise that He will not leave His servant to suffer. I knelt beside the road and prayed. I could hear the wind blowing and could smell the rain. “Thank You for the school fees, God,” I prayed. “Please protect me from the rain so my books won’t get wet.” I got up and hurried on. The rain clouds were closing in.

Two people walking toward me were soaking wet. Then I noticed that the ground was wet. The rain was in front of me as well as behind me. It was getting late, and I still had a long way to go. I kept walking. Two miles farther I felt a few drops of rain. The clouds above me were dark and heavy.

At last I approached the school and the nearby trading center. The mud puddles along the road told me that it had rained quite hard there. Some of my classmates returning from the trading center saw that my clothes were dry and asked, “Where did you wait out the storm?”

“Nowhere,” I said. “God was my umbrella.” I told them how I had prayed and God had protected me on my long walk to school.

When I arrived at school, other boys asked how I had stayed dry in the storm. Again I shared how God had protected me. As I told my story, I realized that God cares about the little things in my life; surely He also cares for the big things. As I told how God had kept me dry, I was able to witness to others who didn’t know how much God loves them.



I thank God for giving us miracles to share and faith to live by as we tell the world about God’s love. And thank you for supporting the mission offering each week, for it helps carry the gospel to the world.

ALEX ERIGA (left) lives in a Sudanese refugee camp in Adjumani, Uganda.

# The Fall Into Sin



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 1–3, Rom. 3:9–18, 5:10–21, 6:16, 2 Pet. 2:19.*

**Memory Text:** “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (*Romans 7:24, NASB*).

**Key Thought:** To look at the Fall and the horrible results it brought to humanity.

When used to designate the loss of human freedom caused by Adam's and Eve's sin, the word *fall* implies that sin lowered us from one level to another—in this case from a high moral and spiritual condition to one of corruption, oppression, and enslavement.

Though much is not revealed about the Fall in Eden, we have enough biblical information to understand that something happened that damaged not only human nature but even the planet itself. The result of that Fall is not encouraging. In fact, it would be all but hopeless were it not for the promise of the atonement in our behalf through Christ. Yet, we still need to see what has happened to us, because only when we see ourselves as we really are will the glory of the Cross reach us in its saving beauty and power.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 18.*

## Rebellion in the Garden

**What** biblical evidence can you find in Genesis 1–3 to support the view that Adam and Eve rebelled against God? (See, for instance, Gen. 2:16, 17; 3:2, 3, 6.)

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The word *rebellion* is not used in Genesis 1–3 to describe the sin of Adam and Eve, but the idea is nevertheless present. Not only did they openly violate a divine command, but in the process of disobedience, they shifted loyalties. Eve listened to the reasoning of the enemy and thought it more reliable than the explicit word of God. She concluded that the divine command was too restrictive and that in order to achieve her highest potential she had to claim independence from her Creator. This was rebellion. Adam listened to the voice of his wife instead of the voice of God and joined her in the rebellion.

**What** are some of the immediate results of sin, especially when understood as rebellion against God? Isa. 59:2; compare to Gen. 3:23, 24.

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Adam's and Eve's rebellion brought an end to the kind of intimate relationship that they had first enjoyed with God. The nature of their rebellion was such that it disrupted how they related not only to God but to each other. Instead of mutual love and commitment, their rebellion against God resulted in mutual shame (Gen. 3:7). Their interpersonal relationship was no longer harmonious (vs. 12). This rebellion resulted, above all, in their separation from God and the perception that God was someone to fear, someone from whom they needed to hide (vss. 8–10). God and humans were no longer united in love and harmony. *What was needed was an act of reconciliation.*

**What has been your own experience with sin and how it impacts your relationship with God and with others? In what ways can you see the same principles in your own experience as seen here in Genesis?**

## Slaves of Sin

**According** to 2 Peter 2:19 and Romans 6:16, what does sin do to sinners?

In order to illustrate the devastating power of sin, Paul sometimes personifies it as a tyrant. It “entered the world through one man” (*Rom. 5:12, NIV*), reigns over humans in death (*Rom. 5:21, 6:12*), deceives (*Rom. 7:11*), dwells in humans (*vs. 17*), enslaves (*Rom. 6:20*), and produces death (*Rom. 7:13*). The sin of Adam and Eve was unique in that it resulted in the subjection of everything to its corrupting power. Satan became the prince of this world (*John 12:31, 14:30*). In their search for autonomy, Adam and Eve exchanged the Lordship of God for the enslaving and corrupting lordship of Satan. Sin became a universal power from which human beings have not been able to escape by themselves (*Rom. 5:12*).

**According** to Romans 3:9–18, what has been the situation of the human race under the reign of sin?

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Paul also teaches that the fall of Adam and Eve brought the natural world under the power of sin: “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it” (*Rom. 8:20, NIV*). The damaging and corrupting power of sin reached God’s creation on this planet. The verb *subjected* indicates that nature is under the authority of some power that has robbed it of its true beauty and meaningfulness. This was the result not of its own doing but of something else: the entrance of sin (*Rom. 5:12*). Nature is now “subjected to frustration.” The word *frustration* designates here purposelessness and emptiness. *Futility* is used in Ephesians 4:17 to describe not nature but individuals who outside of Christ live “in the *futility* of their thinking” (*NIV*).

The point is that nature, as well as human beings, exists in a corrupted condition because of sin. What was needed was a manifestation of power from outside the sphere of human existence and outside of nature itself that could redeem the fallen world. This would happen through Christ.

**Try to imagine what this world would be like were it not fallen. How different would it be? How different would our lives be? What should the difference tell you about just how devastating the power of sin really is?**

## Spiritual Death

Sin damaged the inner life of human beings. The moral and spiritual values that ruled over God's universe no longer rule over the natural human heart. Humans know that there is something wrong with them, and they wish for something better. At times they try to do what is good and right only to discover that "the mind of sinful man is death. . . . The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (*Rom. 8:6, 7, NIV*).

Human nature is morally and spiritually weak. Humans cannot resist the power of sin and, consequently, wherever there is a human being, there is sin and wickedness. The phenomenon is so universal that "there is no one righteous, not even one" (*Rom. 3:10, NIV*). Sin is a condition of the human nature in its alienation from God. Because of the Fall, the human "heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (*Jer. 17:9, NIV*). The "heart," considered in the Bible to be the volitional and intellectual center of a human being, is now defined as essentially deceitful, insidious, and in itself unreliable.

Humans are almost incapable of fully comprehending the intricacies of their inner being and are unable by themselves to live a dignified life (*Eccles. 9:3*). They live in conflict with the depth of their beings in fear and loneliness, struggling in themselves to do what is right but often finding that they can't (*Gal. 5:17*). They are unable to fully comprehend themselves and the world in which they exist; thus, they live in darkness with respect to God (*Rom. 1:21–25*). This inner corruption and stupefaction expresses itself in sinful acts against oneself, against others, and against God (*Matt. 15:19*).

The corrupting power of sin knows no boundaries. Only God can set limits to its corrupting influence and ultimately eradicate it from the universe. If, after the Fall, there was something good left on the planet, it was because God did not allow Satan to take full control. He said to the woman, representing the human race, and to the serpent, the expression of evil powers, " 'I will put enmity between you and the woman' " (*Gen. 3:15, NIV*). They were not to coexist peacefully, one totally controlling the other. An element of freedom was preserved for humans that would allow them, if they so wished, to hate evil and choose life. God's decision to intervene in the human predicament made it possible for Him to limit the corrupting power of sin.

*Humans need a way out of the terrible situation brought about by sin.*

**Look up the verses listed in today's lesson. How should these texts help you better understand your need of a Savior?**



## Physical and Eternal Death

God's words to Adam—" 'When you eat of it you will surely die' " (*Gen. 2:17, NIV*)—indicate that death is the result of rebellion against God. Death and sin cannot be separated. This death is not only spiritual; it also designates the physical and eternal death of sinners. Because of its connection with sin, death is not a simple biological phenomenon but a fearful awareness of our eternal separation from the Source of life—a separation that leads to eternal extinction. In all of its expressions, death is like sin, universal and inevitable (*Rom. 5:12, Heb. 9:27*). With the entrance of sin into the world, the human race was an endangered species about to disappear from the universe. God's creation on planet Earth, human and nonhuman, was on its way to annihilation.

**Read** Romans 5:10–21. How did death enter? What caused it? What's our only way out?

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Death and suffering came together into the world as a result of sin. No one born and raised on this planet escapes pain and suffering. We may not be able to express in words what suffering is, but we have a deep experiential knowledge of it. In the Bible there appears to be a connection between our condition as mortal sinners and pain and suffering. Death is so powerful that even before we die it makes its presence felt among us through the physical, emotional, and psychological pain produced by sickness, uncertainty, and fear. As a result, the quality of life is weakened, and depression sets in.

The phenomenon of sickness, another result of sin, is described as coming "near the grave," as being "counted among those who go down to the pit" (*Ps. 88:3, 4, NIV*). The incursion of death in daily human existence is part of the human predicament directly associated with the phenomenon of sin. *Humans needed Someone who could give them life by dying in their place, freeing them not only from sin but from pain, suffering, and death.*

**What have you learned from your own experience with death, either facing your own or seeing others die? What is it about death that should show us our own utter helplessness? How can we use the reality of death to draw ourselves closer to the Lord?**

## God's Reaction to Human Sin

**Read** Genesis 3:8–13. How did the Lord approach Adam and Eve after they sinned? What was the purpose of the questions He asked them?

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The Lord approached them in order to evaluate—with them—the crime they had committed and to pass judgment on it. Through a process of judgment, in which questions were asked and answers given, God was leading them to recognize that they were indeed guilty and that their rebellion was unjustified. The result was separation from the Lord, represented by their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

**What** is God's reaction to sin? *Eph. 5:6*. How are we to understand the idea of God's wrath?

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We should keep several things in mind when we talk about God's wrath. First, human anger is not a model for understanding His wrath. Our anger is often irrational and damaging. God's wrath is untouched by sin and is primarily intended for healing (*Heb. 12:6, Rev. 20:15–21:1*). Second, God's wrath against human sin testifies that He takes us seriously, that He does not ignore us—even in our rebellion. Ignoring people can reveal disrespect, even unconcern. He reacts to our sin, and in so doing God tells us that we are important to Him. Third, God's wrath is not a permanent attribute of God but His reaction to the irrational presence of sin and evil. There is always a reason for it; sin provokes it (*Deut. 4:24, 25*). Therefore His wrath is momentary, while His love endures forever (*Isa. 54:8*).

*Because of sin, what was needed was Someone who could deliver us from "the coming wrath" (1 Thess. 1:10, NIV).*

**If you love someone and see him or her hurt, would you not feel anger about what is happening? How can this parallel help us understand the meaning of God's wrath?**

**Further Study: Sin and Separation From God:** “Christ knew that Adam in Eden, with his superior advantages, might have withstood the temptations of Satan, and conquered him. He also knew that it was not possible for man, out of Eden, separated from the light and love of God since the Fall, to resist the temptations of Satan in his own strength.”—Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p. 224.

**Sin and Lack of Harmony:** “In transgression Adam became a law to himself. By disobedience he was brought under bondage. Thus a discordant element, born of selfishness, entered man’s life. Man’s will and God’s will no longer harmonized. Adam had united with the disloyal forces, and self-will took the field.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 13, 1900.

**Sin and Rebellion in Nature:** “Among the lower creatures Adam had stood as king . . . ; but when he transgressed, this dominion was forfeited. The spirit of rebellion, to which he himself had given entrance, extended throughout the animal creation. Thus not only the life of man, but the nature of the beasts, the trees of the forest, the grass of the field, the very air he breathed, all told the sad lesson of the knowledge of evil.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 41.

## Discussion Questions:

❶ It’s obvious to almost anyone that things are not right in our world. As Christians, we believe things are this way because of sin and the Fall. Some folk, however, don’t believe in the idea of sin or the Fall. How do they explain the state of the world? What are some other explanations that people give? How, for example, would an evolutionist explain our present condition? What are these other views, and how would you answer them?

❷ No doubt, all around you the terrible impact of sin can be seen. Though we can never eradicate sin or its consequences in this world now, what practical steps can we take to try to help alleviate as much of the damage as possible? What are things you can do, both as an individual and as a church, to try to relieve some of the suffering?

❸ What is a “spiritual death”? How can someone know if they are spiritually dead? Would someone spiritually dead even know it? What can you do to help someone who feels that he or she is, indeed, spiritually dead?

**Summary:** The Fall was an act of rebellion against God, and it resulted in the spiritual, physical, and eternal death of sinners. Because the results were so bad, something drastic had to be done; otherwise, we would have no hope. As we shall see, the Cross was that drastic answer to the problem caused by the Fall.

## “I’m Free Behind Bars”

by HEIDEMARIE KLINGEBERG

Wolfgang was a successful businessman—a banker in fact. But before long, money and success meant more to him than family and friends. Soon it seemed that he never had enough.

He had a dream in which he saw two paths—one filled with riches but ending in a dark valley, and the other a path of service leading eventually to a bright place—he chose the route of riches and eventual darkness. He would remain on the path of self-gratification, no matter where it led.

Six months later Wolfgang was arrested and convicted of embezzlement. He was sent to prison. While behind bars he felt sorry—sorry for himself and sorry that he had been caught. He was transferred to another prison, and there he met a pastor he had known years earlier. The two spent many hours talking together about life and religious matters. He began taking part in the prison’s religious services, including discussion groups and Bible studies. Little by little he grew closer to God.

One day while reading the newspaper, he saw an advertisement for a Bible study course and sent away for it. When lessons arrived, he began studying them in earnest. Through the Bible course, Wolfgang met Friedhelm, a Bible instructor. Wolfgang asked many questions about what the Bible says on certain topics, and Friedhelm answered each question. Wolfgang’s journey to God was speeding up.

He was transferred to another prison where he began suffering bouts of depression. One evening while he battled despair, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, please take over in my life. I surrender to You.” Almost immediately he was confronted with the enormity of his sins, the trouble he had brought upon himself, his family, and his victims. He cried bitterly and long. Then he opened his Bible and found Jeremiah 30, in which he read, “ ‘I am with you and will save you,’ declares the LORD. . . . ‘I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice’ ” (verse 11, NIV).

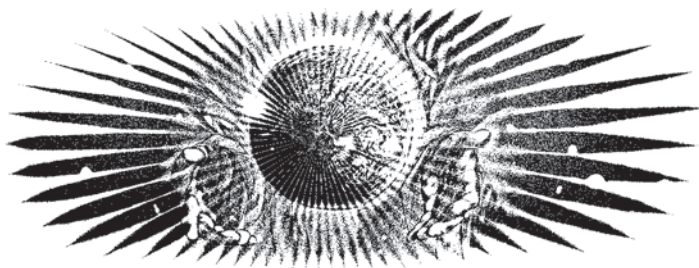
He felt a deep peace he had never known before, and he knew that God had granted his prayer and had replaced his despair with trust and hope in Jesus. He began spending hours with God, reading the Bible, praying, and worshipping. His desires and his goals in life have completely changed. “I am so happy and thankful, for even in prison I am free in Christ.”

Wolfgang was baptized and has made new friends in Christ. He has turned from his old life and faces a new life in Jesus. He is thankful that he found Christ through the Voice of Hope Bible correspondence school, which is sponsored in part by mission offerings. Thank you for helping one more prisoner of sin find freedom in Christ.

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HEIDEMARIE KLINGEBERG works with *Stimme der Hoffnung, the Voice of Hope Adventist Media Center in Darmstadt, Germany.*

# Atonement *and* the Divine Initiative



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 3:19–22; 5:6–8, 20, 21; Eph. 1:4; Col. 1:26, 27; 2 Tim. 1:8, 9; Titus 1:2.*

**Memory Text:** “And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (*Ephesians 1:9, 10, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** To show that the Godhead anticipated the Fall, and that a plan was crafted to solve the problem of sin long before it arose.

**H**uman beings were given moral freedom, something not found in any of the other creatures that God had created here on earth. Once God endowed them with this freedom, it was theirs, and He could not take it away from them without radically altering their very nature and being. They could use this freedom either to respond positively by rendering to Him, in love and gratitude, faithful obedience, or they could use that freedom and reject the gift of life and disobey the Lord. (After all, if humans didn't have the option to disobey, they really wouldn't be free.)

God—foreseeing that horrible possibility of disobedience—acted accordingly. Thus, the plan of salvation was conceived in the divine mind long before humans were created and before evil and sin actually appeared, a plan that centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 25.*

## The Mystery of God's Love

**Read** Romans 5:6–8. According to these texts, what prompted God to bring salvation to us through Jesus?

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God was not obliged to save the human race. It was not something that He was forced to do. It is difficult to imagine the Godhead saying, “Had We done this or that, Adam and Eve would not have fallen into sin. Therefore, now We should do something to save them from their predicament.” Instead, humans brought upon themselves the condition in which they found themselves after the Fall: “ ‘God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes’ ” (*Eccles. 7:29, NIV*).

If God felt obliged to save us, salvation would be something that we deserve. But the opposite is true; it is something that we *don't* deserve, and yet, God was willing to give it to us anyway. This makes His work of salvation in our behalf even more remarkable, because He did for us, not what He was forced to do but what He, out of love, chose to do. He, the Creator, was under no obligation to us, the creatures.

**Read** Romans 3:19–22. What is Paul saying to us here about how we are saved? What role does the law have in solving the problem caused by sin?

Because of sin, it is impossible for humans, through obedience to the law, to reconstruct their original relationship with God (*see Rom. 8:3, Gal. 3:21*). The law could no more save us than feeding a corpse could bring it back to life. If something was to happen, God Himself would have to take the initiative. And He did—through the revelation of His righteousness, revealed through Jesus on the cross. This righteousness comes to the believer by faith and not by works of the law. If salvation was something that we could earn through obedience, God would owe it to us to save us. Instead, God determined that humans will be forgiven and restored to permanent and eternal fellowship with Him only through the work and person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

**What means more to you (and why): someone doing something nice to you because he or she was obliged to, or purely out of love?**



## The Mystery of God's Grace

**“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace”** (*Eph. 1:7, NIV*).

It would not be difficult to imagine that with the entrance of sin into the world, the intelligent creatures of the universe were wondering how God was going to relate to this rebellious race. They were to be surprised. They were to witness something they probably had never seen before, an aspect of the love and power of God that would now be expressed in the context of humanity’s fall. God was going to defeat sin on this planet through the power of *grace*. Within that context, God showed Himself to be, by nature, kind and mercifully disposed toward these sinful and rebellious creatures. Jesus testified concerning the Father, “ ‘He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men’ ” (*Luke 6:35, NASB*).

**What** is the significance of the contrast Paul makes between the phenomenon of sin and the revelation of God’s grace? *Rom. 5:20, 21*.

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In the Bible, grace is an aspect of God’s love, and it is extended in a particular way to sinners. It seems to designate a dynamic, consistent, and permanent aspect of God’s nature, one that constantly seeks to restore sinful creatures to harmony with Him. The biblical concept of grace reaffirms the fact that the atoning work of Christ reaches us as a gift, a work of salvation that we did not deserve. God’s grace implies that our sin is inexcusable, unjustifiable, and deserving eternal death; yet, instead of that death we were given the hope and promise of life, even eternal life. Finally, this wonderful aspect of God’s nature was revealed to the universe in an unparalleled way in the person and work of Christ. It is only and exclusively in Him that we find and enjoy the benefits of “the riches of His grace” (*Eph. 1:7, NASB*).

**Read 2 Corinthians 8:9. What is Paul talking about here? More important, how have you experienced for yourself the kind of grace revealed in this text? How has your life changed as a result of what Christ has done for you?**

## An Eternal Plan

After the Fall, God was not obliged to save us. But He did so anyway. Moreover, this decision—which was extremely expensive for Him—was not an afterthought.

**Read** Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 1:26, 27; 2 Timothy 1:8, 9; and Titus 1:2. What do these texts tell us about when the plan to save us was instituted?

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The New Testament reveals several things about the mystery of God.

First, it was formulated before the “foundation of the world” (*Eph. 1:4, NASB*). This implies that long before humans fell into sin, the Godhead had created a plan to deal with that calamity.

Second, this divine mystery was “kept hidden for ages and generations” (*Col. 1:26, NIV*). Not only was the plan configured in advance, but it was also determined that it would be put into effect at a particular moment. Therefore, it remained hidden within the Godhead for ages.

Third, the mystery is specifically identified with Christ (*Col. 1:27*). This refers to the mystery of the person of Christ, His ministry, death, resurrection, and mediation on behalf of a sinful human race. It is fundamentally the good news of salvation through Christ, the Christian gospel (*Eph. 6:19*).

Fourth, this mystery is more precisely defined as God’s purpose in Christ “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (*Eph. 1:10, NIV*). The plan was to restore, in and through the person of Christ, the cosmic harmony that was ruined through sin. The effectiveness of this process is already visible in the unity of Gentiles and Jews in the church (*Eph. 3:6*). Fifth, the mystery secretly formulated within the Godhead before the creation of the world has now become known through the coming of Christ into human history.

**Even before the foundation of the world, God’s plan was to save the world, each one of us included. What hope can you draw, for yourself, from the amazing truth that God’s plan was to save you even before you existed?**

## The Way of the Cross

God could have dealt with human rebellion in several different ways. He could have immediately destroyed Adam and Eve, even the whole planet. Or He also could have decided to abandon them to their fate; that is, He could have just left them to face the inevitable results of sin, which would be eternal ruin.

But there was one thing He could not have done; He could not have ignored their rebellion, pretending as if nothing had happened and allowing their relationship to continue as before.

In the end, what did God do? He didn't destroy them, He didn't abandon them, and He didn't ignore them. Instead, He put into effect His eternal purpose of salvation through Christ.

**Read** Mark 10:45, Galatians 1:4, 2:20, Ephesians 5:2, and Titus 2:14. What key theme is repeated in these texts? What do they tell us about the plan of salvation?

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Once God committed Himself to save us, He didn't have several options on how to do it. In fact, there was just one. Sin could be solved only through the incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, and mediation of Christ. If we were to be spared eternal ruin, Jesus had to "give" Himself for us. The incarnation and the death of Christ were unavoidable if we were to be saved. In other words, there is only one road to heaven, and it passes through the heart of Christ on the cross.

When Jesus was in Gethsemane, experiencing the anguish of death (*Matt. 26:36–46*) and bearing the sins of the world, He approached the Father, asking Him, essentially, whether or not there was another option available to accomplish the salvation of humankind. The answer came wrapped in divine silence. There was no other way out for the human problem except through the sacrifice of Christ.

In the mystery of divine council, before the creation of the world, the Son of God offered Himself to die as our Substitute and Surety. He, as we saw in the above verses, "gave" Himself for us. There was no other way.

Again, He was not under compulsion to save us; He did it willingly, out of love. But once He decided to accomplish that salvation, His death was inescapable, even though a voluntary act. " 'I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord' " (*John 10:17, 18, NIV*).

## God's Plan Revealed in Jesus

**According** to these texts, what did Jesus “need” to do in order to accomplish His mission of salvation? *Luke 4:43; 9:22; 17:25; 19:5; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44.*

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In most of those passages we find a verb that could be translated “it is necessary” (Greek, *dei*). The verb expresses a very important aspect in the life of Jesus. The whole life of Jesus was oriented by what He needed to do in order to accomplish His mission: “ ‘We must [it is necessary for us to] do the work of him who sent me’ ” (*John 9:4, NIV*). At the beginning of His public ministry Jesus said to the disciples, “ ‘I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose’ ” (*Luke 4:43, NASB*). The ministry of Jesus clearly was determined by willingness to accomplish God’s plan for the salvation of the human race. Every aspect of His life was part of this plan. For instance, He saw Zacchaeus and said to him, “ ‘I must [it is necessary for Me to] stay at your house today’ ” (*Luke 19:5, NIV*).

But the real goal of the ministry of Jesus reached beyond the compulsion to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. There was a dark path that He “needed to” tread. He needed to go to Jerusalem. He could have chosen not to go, but He knew that this was indispensable for the divine plan. So, He said to His disciples “that he must [it was necessary for Him to] go to Jerusalem and suffer many things . . . , and that he must [it was necessary for Him to] be killed” (*Matt. 16:21, NIV*). He was going there because it was necessary for Him to be rejected by the evil generation (*Luke 17:25*), to be counted with the transgressors (*Luke 22:37*), and to be lifted up on the cross (*John 3:14, 12:34*). But dying was not enough to fulfill His mission. It was necessary for Him to be resurrected (*Acts 17:3*), to be received in glory, and to remain there until all the prophecies were fulfilled (*Acts 3:21*). He was following the eternal plan put together by the Godhead.

**What are the things in your life that you must do, that are necessary, and what are the things that aren’t? How do you make that distinction between them, and why is it so important to be able to?**

**Further Study: Defining Grace:** “We would never have learned the meaning of this word ‘grace’ had we not fallen. God loves the sinless angels who do His service and are obedient to all His commands, but He does not give them grace. These heavenly beings know naught of grace; they have never needed it, for they have never sinned. Grace is an attribute of God shown to undeserving human beings. We did not seek after it, but it was sent in search of us. God rejoices to bestow this grace on everyone who hungers for it, not because we are worthy, but because we are so utterly unworthy.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 100.

**Redemption: Not an Afterthought:** “The purpose and plan of grace existed from all eternity. Before the foundation of the world it was according to the determinate counsel of God that man should be created, endowed with power to do the divine will. But the defection of man, with all its consequences, was not hidden from the Omnipotent, and yet it did not deter Him from carrying out His eternal purpose; for the Lord would establish His throne in righteousness. God knows the end from the beginning. . . . Therefore redemption was not an afterthought.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 129.

“Not only was He to die, but he knew precisely the shame, the humiliation, He would have to suffer, the cruel treatment He should receive. There was no compulsion in bringing Him to the ignominious death on the cross; yet He made His soul an offering for sin. The mind of God to save the world was the mind of Christ. His own love was one with that of the Father, and that love constrained Him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Bible Echo*, November 25, 1895.

## Discussion Questions:

❶ In the second Ellen White quote above, she makes it clear that God knew beforehand about our fall, and hence all the pain and suffering that would come with it. And yet, He created us anyway? Why would He do that, knowing what would happen? How does the third quote above help answer that question? How does the suffering of Jesus Himself help us better understand why God allows our own suffering?

❷ Write out a page summarizing whatever point impressed you the most from this week’s lesson. Bring it to class and share it with others.

**Summary:** God not only took the initiative to save us but did it voluntarily out of His loving nature. That decision, which revealed the nature of His gracious character, was made in eternity, before we were created, and it required the sacrificial death of God’s Son. The plan was fully revealed and implemented in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

# The School Taught Me

by IVETTE RIVERA

My children attended a private school that only went through the tenth grade. I began looking for a good school where they could finish their education. A friend told me about the Adventist school in town, but she warned me that the school was not big or fancy. I visited the school and saw that my friend was right; it wasn't big or fancy. However, I was impressed with the teachers, and the students seemed happy. After talking with the director, I enrolled my son in the school and let my daughter finish her last year at the other school.

My son loved his new school and his teachers. He often talked about what he was learning, but I refused to let him talk about religion. I knew almost nothing about Adventists and thought that they worship someone called Ellen White on Saturdays.

One day while I was waiting at a stoplight, a man gave me a magazine. I took it, and laid it aside. When I found the magazine again and started reading it, I didn't trust what was printed there. So I looked up *Sabado* (Saturday) in the dictionary. It said that *Sabado* is the seventh day, and *Domingo* (Sunday) is the first day. I realized that these Adventists were not as crazy as I had thought. I read the articles and verified every fact in the magazine. I even looked up the change of Sabbath to Sunday. I was amazed that nothing in the magazine could be disputed. Even though I didn't want to admit it, this church was right.

I started keeping the Sabbath as I understood it. But I wondered how this Mrs. White fit into Adventist worship. I asked a teacher at the school, and she loaned me several books by Ellen White. There I found great truth.

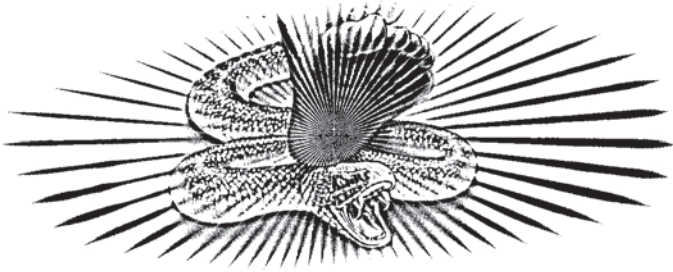
Because I didn't allow my son to talk to me about what he was learning about religion, I didn't realize that he already knew much of what I was discovering. When I told my children that I wanted to start attending the Adventist church, my son was excited, for he had wanted to go. I allowed my daughter to attend our former church until she was convinced, as I was, that the Adventists were right. She listened as I explained what I was learning, and soon she decided to join my son and me in the Adventist church. Eventually we all were baptized together.

I believe in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its school system, for through it God introduced us to His church. I believe in our publishing work, for it was a magazine that led me to the feet of Jesus. Our mission offerings support Adventist schools around the world and lead people such as us to God. Thank you for being a part in this great endeavor.

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IVETTE RIVERA lives in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico.

# Atonement Announced



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 3:15, 22:1–18, Exodus 32, 34:6–10, Daniel 9.*

**Memory Text:** “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (*Isaiah 53:5, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** To show the different ways that God, centuries before the Cross, had announced His plan of salvation.

Once the Lord had provided a solution to the deadly reality and power of sin, He immediately announced the good news to fallen human beings. (The first missionary in cosmic history was not a creature but the Creator Himself!) The Lord also made sure that this promise, that of redemption, was kept fresh and alive in their minds because He wanted His people to be ready when, through the person of Jesus, the promise would become a reality. Throughout the history of His people in the Old Testament, God created institutions and laws directly tied to His plan of salvation that illustrated its workings. By means of the sacrificial system, the priesthood, and even the king (himself a symbol of the Messiah), they could anticipate the supreme sacrifice, the coming of the true High Priest, and the reign of the Messianic King through whom God's saving purpose would be realized.

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

## A Promise to Adam and Eve

**Review** Genesis 3:1–15, focusing especially on verse 15. What is being said in verse 15, and what hope can be found there for us?

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Christians have correctly found in Genesis 3:15 a prophecy of the Messiah.

First, the context of Genesis 3:15 indicates that the serpent is an instrument of evil and rebellion against God (*Rev. 12:9*). In the Garden of Eden this evil power defeated Adam and Eve and extended its dominion over the descendants of the woman.

Second, Genesis 3:15 announces the destruction of the serpent by the Seed of the woman. It will “strike” the heel of the Seed, but the Seed will “crush” the head of the serpent. The Hebrew verb *šûp* (“bruise,” “strike at,” “crush”) is the same in both places, which suggests that the seriousness of the assault depends on the part of the body assaulted. The attack against the Seed (at its heel) is not fatal; the Seed, though, will crush the serpent’s head, indicating its ultimate demise.

Third, the Hebrew noun *zeraʿ* (“offspring”) usually designates “offspring, posterity, seed” in the sense of descendants as a single group. But it can also refer to a single descendant (*e.g., 2 Sam. 7:12, 13*). In Genesis 3:15 we find both usages present. We read about the descendants of both the woman (the faithful church) and the serpent/Satan (his followers) but also about a single male descendant of the woman (“He”) who will “crush” “your [singular] head”; that is, the serpent’s head. Whenever “seed” denotes a particular descendant, the pronoun that follows it is in the singular. The “Seed” of the woman is Jesus.

What Genesis 3:15 suggests is that as soon as sin entered the world, God’s eternal plan of salvation through Christ was put into effect. Adam and Eve did not experience eternal death because, from the divine perspective, Christ is the Lamb “that was slain from the creation of the world” (*Rev. 13:8, NIV*). Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, looking forward to the fulfillment of the wonderful promise of salvation.

**Right from the start, God’s plan was to redeem us and to destroy Satan. What are you doing, day by day, to avail yourself of this wonderful provision so that, when all’s finished, you’re among the redeemed and not among the destroyed? (Remember, in the end, it’s one or the other.)**



## Abraham Saw My Day

**Read** Genesis 22:1–12. What was the nature of the test that Abraham was subjected to? Why would the Lord ask Abraham to do this? What deep issues were at stake here?

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Genesis 22 does not inform us why the test was necessary, but the reason appears to be related to the covenant God made with Abraham. In the covenant relationship the Lord expected the patriarch to “ ‘walk before me and be blameless’ ” (*Gen. 17:1, NIV*), a standard that Abraham hadn’t always reached (*Gen. 16:1–4, 20:1–10*).

Isaac was the son of the covenant promise, the one through whom Abraham was to bless the world, and thus, without that son the promises that God had made to the patriarch could not have been fulfilled. In a sense, by asking Abraham to sacrifice him, God was telling Abraham that the covenant relationship had come to an end and that the special promises made to him were now over. Abraham was not going to be God’s instrument in blessing all the nations of the earth (*Gen. 12:3*), after all. But Abraham revealed his faith and commitment to the Lord, particularly in his willingness to return the gift of his son to God, fully trusting in His mercy and grace (*Heb. 11:19*).

**What** made it possible for the covenant to be renewed? *Gen. 22:13–18*.

By asking Abraham to sacrifice his son, God was pronouncing a sentence against him and bringing to an end His special purpose for him. All this, however, changed in a radical way when a ram was offered in place of Isaac. God provided what Abraham desperately needed, a sacrificial animal that could take the place of his son, making it possible for the Lord to renew the covenant with him. The human sacrifice (i.e., the death of a sinner) was substituted by the sacrificial victim provided by the Lord, not by Abraham. Thus, Abraham saw the mystery of the gospel, of substitutionary atonement, because through Jesus, “ ‘it [the sacrificial offering] will be provided’ ” (*Gen. 22:14, NIV*).

**Our minds tremble at the faith of Abraham. What things are you being called to sacrifice, *by faith*, before the Lord? What things, if any, might you need to surrender in order for the covenant blessings to remain yours?**

## Moses and the Revelation of Salvation

**What** was God’s reaction to the act of idolatry of the people of Israel on Mount Sinai? Why was it so strong? *Exod. 32:7–10.*

This act of idolatry was an act of rebellion against God, a breaking of the covenant that God had just made with them. Like Adam and Eve, the Israelites were left in a state of alienation—and they would have been left to perish had it not been for Moses’ intercession in their behalf (*Exod. 32:11–14*).

**What** did Moses say to God after this incident? *Exod. 32:30–32.* How is the promise of the gospel seen here?

Moses did not excuse the people; he made it clear to them that they had sinned against God. But he also told them that he was going to approach the Lord to ask Him to forgive them. Moses knew that forgiveness is very costly and that it should not be confused with indifference to sin. (The Lord’s reaction to their idolatry more than proved that!) Moses himself became the mediator of the people, their intercessor before the Lord, seeking to obtain for them redemption from their sin. He then did the inconceivable: He offered himself to the Lord as a means of atonement! He was willing to have his name deleted from the book of life (*Exod. 32:32; see also Ps. 69:28, Phil. 4:3*) if that would make it possible for the people to be restored to harmony with the Lord.

Obviously, the Lord could not accept that unselfish offer. Moses’ life could not atone for sin.

**How** would the Lord finally solve the problem? *Exod. 34:6–10.*

The Lord revealed Himself to Moses as a forgiving God. This forgiveness is all-inclusive: “ ‘forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin’ ” (*vs. 7, NIV*). The Hebrew word translated “forgiving” literally means “bearing.” The way God deals with our sin is by removing it from us and bearing it Himself. Moses could not do that; God had already decided that He would do it through His Servant. What Moses and the children of Israel needed was provided by God.

**God was ready to wipe them out for their idolatry! What should this reaction tell us about how God views sin? What should this tell us about how we must get sin out of our own lives?**

## The Servant of the Lord

**Read** Isaiah 52:13–53:12. What great hope and promise are found here for us?

These verses present one of the most majestic passages of the Old Testament. This section establishes, without explicitly stating it, the limits and ineffectiveness of the Israelite sacrificial system as a means of expiation (the removal of the barrier between humanity and God). The problem of sin was so serious that only the Servant of the Lord could solve it. The passage describes the experiences of both the people and the Servant.

**The People:** The people went through two experiences, one of disbelief and misjudgment, the other of confession and contrition. Initially, the Servant was perceived as unattractive, almost like a leper (*Isa. 52:14*) and as someone “stricken by God, smitten by him” (*Isa. 53:4, NIV*). Because God appeared to have rejected Him, they, too, despised and rejected Him (*vs. 3*). Then they realized that there was a divine purpose in the experience of the Servant; that He was taking their sorrows and infirmities (*vs. 4*) on Himself. He was bearing their sins, and as their Substitute, He was dying for them. In the light of the sacrifice of the Servant, they saw themselves as they truly were: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (*vs. 6, NIV*). Only by looking at the Cross can we perceive the distortions of sin in our lives.

**The Servant:** The experience of the Servant was extremely painful. He was lonely, rejected by all (*vs. 3*), loaded with sorrows and suffering, oppressed and afflicted (*vs. 7*), and even “cut off from the land of the living” (*vs. 8, NIV*). Yet, there was no justification for this treatment because “he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth” (*vs. 9, NIV*). Why was this innocent Person suffering? It was because the Lord was presenting the Servant’s life as a “guilt offering” (*vs. 10, NIV*). He was bearing the iniquities of the people, dying in their place in order to declare them righteous and innocent (*vss. 11, 12*). But after that sacrificial death, He was to see light again (*vs. 11*) and to be highly exalted (*Isa. 52:13*).

This prophetic depiction of the sacrificial death of Christ was offered by Isaiah as the only effective way of expiation from sin. Christ became what we are in order for us to be restored to fellowship with God.

**Read again Isaiah 52:13–53:12, paying special attention to all that Jesus has done for us on the cross. What hope do you see in there for yourself?**

## Announced in Daniel

**Read** Daniel 9:7–11. In his prayer, how did Daniel describe the condition of the people?

In order to experience divine healing and freedom from sin, we must first recognize our condition as sinners and as violators of God's revealed will. A fundamental human problem is our unwillingness to acknowledge that there is something seriously wrong with us, that we are in desperate need of forgiveness and reconciliation with our Creator. Even forgiven sinners constantly must recognize, as Daniel did, that we are in daily need of God's forgiving grace.

**What** is Daniel's specific request to the Lord? On what basis is Daniel making this request? *Dan. 9:16–19.*

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Once we realize our condition as sinners, one of the most important discoveries we can make concerning our relationship with God is that the only thing we have to do to receive forgiveness is to ask for it. Daniel was totally relying on God's mercy, on His wonderful grace, as the only way out of His status as sinner.

In this chapter we also find a prophecy in which God revealed not only *how* He was planning to address the problem of sin but also the time frame within which this would happen, the *when* (see *Dan. 9:24–27*). The *how* was through His Anointed One, the Messiah, the King to which all the other kings of Israel pointed and represented. The *time* for His sacrificial death and the initiation of His priestly work (the anointing of the sanctuary) is given in terms of 70 weeks (490 years). The prophetic period runs from 457 B.C. to A.D. 34. God expected His people to be ready for the coming of the Messiah. What this incredible prophecy shows, in a very clear way, is not only that God is in absolute control of every aspect of His work of salvation but that He will make sure it accomplishes its eternally intended purpose.

**How important is it for you to remain aware that, although you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, you are in constant need of His forgiving grace? Is that a threat to your assurance of salvation or a way of affirming that assurance? Give reasons for your answer.**

**Further Study: Instant Substitute:** “The instant man accepted the temptations of Satan, and did the very things God had said he should not do, Christ, the Son of God, stood between the living and the dead, saying, ‘Let the punishment fall on Me. I will stand in man’s place. He shall have another chance.’ ”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1085.

**Sacrifice of Isaac:** “The sacrifice required of Abraham was not alone for his own good, nor solely for the benefit of succeeding generations; but it was also for the instruction of the sinless intelligences of heaven and of other worlds. The field of the controversy between Christ and Satan—the field on which the plan of redemption is wrought out—is the lesson book of the universe. Because Abraham had shown a lack of faith in God’s promises, Satan had accused him before the angels and before God of having failed to comply with the conditions of the covenant, and as unworthy of its blessings. God desired to prove the loyalty of His servant before all heaven, to demonstrate that nothing less than perfect obedience can be accepted, and to open more fully before them the plan of salvation.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 154, 155.

**Importance of Isaiah 53:** “This chapter 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.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 Go back through the week’s lesson. Take everything that’s taught each day and write a summary of all that we can learn about the plan of salvation from what God has revealed in these Old Testament accounts. Bring what you’ve learned and share it with the class.
- 2 Read the first Ellen White quote listed above. What does that tell us about the character of God? What does it mean to have “another chance”?
- 3 As a class, go over the story of Abraham on Mount Moriah. What other lessons can we take from it about what it means to live by faith?

**Summary:** Centuries before Christ was on this earth the Lord gave us promises of salvation. Those promises were fulfilled in a very precise way. The question remains, How should we respond to the reliability and trustworthiness of the Lord as revealed in the fulfillment of those promises?

## The Radiant Light

Hidemi Sugawara stopped halfway down the aisle of her church and blinked in stunned silence. Her seat was taken. In fact, the front half of the church was full. Where could she sit? How would she hear?

Hidemi was a faithful Adventist Christian. She had lived in rural Japan for years, but as she grew older and had more trouble getting around, she decided to move to the city. She found an Adventist church near a subway stop and began attending. She missed her old friends from her country church and found it difficult to make new friends in the large city.

She sat in the front of the church to hear better. But this Sabbath the front pews of the church were full. She found a seat toward the back. But she couldn't hear the service. She watched as people stood and knelt, but she heard only mumbled noises. *What's the use of coming if I can't hear?* She asked herself. *I may as well stay home and pray and sing alone.*

As the pastor prayed the benediction his face suddenly shone with a radiant light. Then as the worshipers walked down the aisle toward the door, she saw that everyone wore that same radiant light. *Am I dreaming?* she wondered. *Or are my eyes going bad too?*

She walked out of the church and started toward the subway. She examined the faces of the people who passed by. They looked normal enough. But when she turned and looked at the church, she saw that same radiant light on it. *What is happening?* she wondered. She saw some church members at the subway station and noticed that they still wore the radiant light.

Then she understood. God wanted her to continue attending church, and He wanted her to know that He had a special blessing for His people and His church. If she continued attending church, surely God would bless her as well.

Hidemi realized that as she fretted over her inability to hear, she had missed the blessing God had for her by simply being with believers in His church. It was not so important to hear everything that was said; just being there was enough. She continued attending church and brought her friends as well. In time she made many friends in the church, young and old.



Mission begins in our homes and our churches and spreads like beams of light around the world. Tell a neighbor; tell the world that Jesus loves them.

HIDEMI SUGAWARA (left) lives near Chiba, Japan.

# Atonement *in* Symbols: Part 1



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 3:21; 4:3–5; Lev. 17:11; Rom. 3:23; Eph. 2:11–13; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.*

**Memory Text:** “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (*1 Peter 1:18, 19, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** To show how the Old Testament sacrificial system pointed to the sacrifice of Christ.

**I**n the Bible the sacrificial system was established in order to illustrate how God was going to solve the problem of sin. At the center of the service was the blood of the sacrificial animal. The life of the animal was poured out so that the life of the repentant sinner could be saved. The animal was a symbol of Jesus, who would give His life in place of ours.

When repentant sinners brought their sacrifices to the Lord, they were acknowledging that they were sinners who deserved death. But they also were manifesting faith, trusting that the Lord would grant them forgiveness by accepting the life of the sacrificial victim in their stead. Assuming responsibility for our sin is indispensable (this is known as repentance and confession). Only those who, in the light of the Cross, see themselves as sinners in need of forgiveness and humbly find in Christ the Lamb of God that takes away their sin will experience cleansing.

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

## Atonement and Animal Sacrifices

**How** far back can we trace the origin of animal sacrifice in the Bible?

See *Gen. 3:21, 4:3–5*.

In the Bible, the sacrificial victim and the repentant sinner who brought it were identified with each other so closely that the life of the animal stood for the life of the person, and the animal's blood became a means of atonement (*Lev. 17:11*).

**Read** **Leviticus 17:11**. What is the important message of this text to us?

A lot of symbolism is found in the biblical sacrificial system. First, because the death of an animal stood for the death of the individual, the sacrificial act was an act of salvation, a manifestation of God's grace and love. He was willing to accept the death of another creature in order to preserve the life of humans and to continue fellowshiping with them. Second, according to the Bible, the life of an animal could not really atone for the life of a sinner; consequently, the death of sacrificial victims had a symbolic function only. It pointed beyond itself to the death of the Seed of the woman, Jesus, who would give His life as a ransom in place of many (*Mark 10:45*). Third, the killing of the sacrificial animal also illustrated the seriousness of sin and the costliness of forgiveness. Taking the life of an animal must have been very painful to Adam and Eve; probably to most Israelites, as well. The process helped them understand that sin is inseparable from death and that forgiveness is not the same as overlooking sin. The price God will pay for our redemption will be the "precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (*1 Pet. 1:19, NIV*).

At the moment sin entered into the world, God instituted a sacrificial system that had these symbolic and teaching functions. The first sacrifice that Adam and Eve offered was a wonderful explosion of hope in the coming Redeemer, a hope offered in the midst of the pain of guilt and death.

**How seriously do you take the problem of sin? The answer can be found by how you answer the next question: How much suffering do you put yourself through trying to overcome sin? See *1 Pet. 4:1*.**



## Sin and Impurity

The book of Leviticus deals, in detail, with the problem of sin and impurity, but it especially emphasizes the topic of purity/impurity or purification/contamination. Impurity is considered as damaging to the covenant relationship as a moral sin itself. The instructions concerning impurity have the purpose of motivating the Israelites to avoid anything that could contaminate them. The laws regarding purification instructed them concerning how they could be restored to a state of purity before the Lord.

There are several sources of impurity, some of which are unavoidable. For example, there is the contamination that a woman incurs during childbirth (*Leviticus 12*). In this case the contamination is the result of the blood discharge that accompanies the childbirth (*Lev. 12:4, 5, 7; see also Lev. 15:19–30 for another kind of uncleanness*). A man with a blood discharge was also considered unclean (*Lev. 15:1–15; see also vss. 16–18*).

In those cases the individual was a carrier, a contaminating agent; therefore, he or she was forbidden to contact anybody else or any holy thing. Obviously, the emphasis on washing and quarantine suggests a hygienic concern. But there was also a theological interest. The impure person was not allowed to come into contact with other people and was excluded from the sanctuary. “Impurity” thus becomes a metaphor to express a person’s alienation from God and others. In fact, impurity is usually associated with death. It is connected with dead bodies (*Num. 6:6, 7, 11*), diseases (*Leviticus 13, 14*), blood discharge (a way of letting life run away), and the emission of semen, which is the “seed” of life. The leper was totally impure and considered as dead (*Num. 12:9–12*).

The impure person was in the realm of death and could be removed from that place only through a cleansing ritual. Otherwise, he or she would be permanently separated from God and the rest of the people of God (*Lev. 15:31*). The biblical concept of impurity indicates that humans are almost in a natural state of contamination existing in an environment that is fundamentally unclean. They need cleansing in order to be free to approach the Lord. This cleansing was primarily possible through the blood of the sacrificial victim (*Lev. 12:8*).

**Read Ephesians 2:11–13. Although the language of impurity is not used, how is the concept, as explained above, present in these texts? What kind of “impurity” do we face today? How can we be cleansed of it?**

## The Sacrifices

**Read** Leviticus 4:3, 13, 22, 27. What do these verses tell us about sin and about who needs atonement for their sin? See Rom. 3:23, 5:12.

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We can learn a number of lessons from these sin offerings.

First, the type of animal brought as a sin offering depended on the financial condition of the individual (*Lev. 5:7–12*), which showed that the Lord was sensitive to the financial situation of the people. For us, the point shouldn't be missed: Salvation through Christ is for all people, regardless of their status in the world.

Second, the sacrificial victim was expected to be unblemished, healthy, and without physical defects (*Lev. 4:3*). The sinner was defective and morally blemished, but the sacrificial victim that represented the Lamb of God wasn't.

**Read 1** Peter 1:18, 19. What important aspect of Jesus was prefigured in those unblemished sacrifices, and why is that aspect so important to us and the plan of salvation? *Rom. 5:19, 2 Cor. 5:21, Heb. 4:15.*

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Another important point to remember: The sin offering atones for both unintentional and intentional sin (*Lev. 5:1–5*) and ritual impurity (*Lev. 12:6, 7*). What's the moral lesson for us? It's that there was no sin that God could not forgive if the sinner repented from it. Moral and ritual impurity was symbolically removed from repentant sinners through the sacrificial blood. But, in fact, only the blood of Christ could cleanse from sin. The great news for us, prefigured in these sacrifices, is that no matter our past, no matter how badly we have fallen, we can, through Jesus, find restitution, healing, forgiveness, and cleansing.

**It's easy, at times, to doubt your salvation. Maybe at times it's even good to question your standing before God. After all, there will be those who thought they were saved who, in the end, won't be (*Matt. 7:22, 23*). How can you find the assurance you need while, at the same time, not be presumptuous?**

## Removal of Sin/Impurity

**What** were the roles of the priest and the individual in the sacrifices depicted in the following verses? *Lev. 4:5–7, 28–31.*

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Several rituals are important when seeking to understand the sacrificial offerings. When the repentant sinner brought the sacrificial victim to the sanctuary, the sinner placed a hand on the head of the animal and leaned on it. In the daily sacrifices the laying on of hands was associated with the phrase “be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him” (*Lev. 1:4, NIV*), indicating that the sinner fully identified with the sacrificial victim. The sacrificial victim was at that moment standing for him or her before God, bearing the sin of the individual.

The sacrificial victim was commonly killed by the individual, although there were exceptions (*Lev. 1:14, 15; 5:8*). This sacrificial act is especially meaningful when placed in the context of the state of guilt and alienation in which repentant sinners found themselves. Because of the violation of the covenant, sinners were heading toward death, but that death was actualized in the sacrificial victim, not in the repentant sinner, whose life was then spared by God. Sin and penalty cannot be separated from each other. The transfer of the one implies the transfer of the other. This found its fulfillment in Christ’s death on the cross, where our sin was transferred to Him and where He died the death that should have been ours.

Besides the laying on of hands and the death of the animal, another ritual was the bringing of the blood into the sanctuary, the means by which sin was brought there. In some cases it was sprinkled inside the tabernacle (*Lev. 4:6*), and at other times it was applied to the horns of the altar of sacrifices (*vs. 30*). When sin was not taken inside the sanctuary in this manner, sin was transferred to it through the priest. On those occasions he had to eat the flesh of the sin offering, thus bearing the sin of the people in his own person (*Lev. 10:17*). God was assuming responsibility for the sin of repentant sinners. This pointed to Christ’s high-priestly ministry on our behalf.

**Think through the meaning of these sacrifices and what they were pointing to: Christ dying in our stead for our sins. How should the reality of His death impact our daily life? More important, how does that death impact it in your own case?**

## Other Sacrifices

**What** was the function of the burnt offering? *Lev. 1:3–9, 22:17–22.*

In Leviticus the burnt offering is an atoning sacrifice, but other functions predominate. Because the sacrifice was totally burned on the altar and was accepted for the person, it represented total consecration to the Lord. It also was offered as a votive or freewill offering (*Lev. 22:17–22*). The votive offering was brought after a vow was fulfilled to express gratitude to the Lord. The freewill offering was an expression of personal devotion, thanksgiving, and joy.

**What** was the function of the peace/fellowship offering? *Lev. 7:12, 16.*

The peace offering could be offered as a thanksgiving offering, a votive offering, and a freewill offering (*Lev. 7:12, 15, 16*). This suggests that the sacrificial act was a joyful occasion (*1 Sam. 11:14, 15; 1 Kings 8:62, 63*). The fact that the Lord gave back the flesh of the sacrifice to the worshiper to eat it with relatives and friends in His presence (*Deut. 12:17, 18*) indicates that the sacrifice strengthened the covenant relation through communion with God and other Israelites (*Deut. 27:7, 1 Kings 8:63*).

**What** was the function of the meal offering? *Lev. 2:1–10.*

The meal offering was from the fruits of the land and was a recognition of God's gracious provision for His people. Everything belonged to God, but He requested that a small portion of it be brought by the people as an expression of gratitude (*Deut. 26:9, 10*). It was accompanied by the "salt of the covenant" (*Lev. 2:13, NIV*). Salt was used in the ancient Near East as a preservative and therefore was an appropriate symbol of the binding nature of the covenant (*2 Chron. 13:5*). The offering was an expression of the person's willingness to preserve the covenant relationship with the Lord.

**In the Old Testament we find so many different offerings with complementary functions, while in the New Testament we find only one single sacrifice. What does that suggest concerning the nature and efficacy of Christ's sacrifice? What assurance can you take for yourself from this one sacrifice?**

**Further Study:** “The very system of sacrifices was devised by Christ, and given to Adam as typifying a Saviour to come, who would bear the sins of the world, and die for its redemption. Through Moses, Christ gave definite directions to the children of Israel in regard to the sacrificial offerings. . . . Only clean and precious animals, those which would best symbolize Christ, were accepted as offerings to God. . . .”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 225.

“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 to be kept before men, and imprinted upon mind and heart, was this, ‘Without shedding of blood is no remission.’ In every bleeding sacrifice was typified ‘the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 932.

“Since the announcement to the serpent in Eden, ‘I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed’ (Gen. 3:15), Satan had known that he did not hold absolute sway over the world. . . . With intense interest he watched the sacrifices offered by Adam and his sons. In these ceremonies he discerned a symbol of communion between earth and heaven. He set himself to intercept this communion. He misrepresented God, and misinterpreted the rites that pointed to the Saviour. Men were led to fear God as one who delighted in their destruction. The sacrifices that should have revealed His love were offered only to appease His wrath.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 115.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ According to the third Ellen White quote above, Satan perverted the meaning of the sacrifice. In what ways could we be in danger of perverting the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice? What views of the Cross distort its meaning?
- ❷ Unlike the Israelites, we don’t have daily physical reminders of the cost of sin; that is, we don’t live in the constant presence of sacrifice, as did the Israelites in the wilderness. In what ways, however, can we help keep the amazing death of Jesus in our behalf always before us so that we never forget what Christ has done to give us the hope of eternal life?
- ❸ Explain in practical terms how you can consecrate everything you have to the Lord. What does that mean, and how can you do it?

**Summary:** God instituted the sacrificial system after the entrance of sin in order to remind people about the costliness of forgiveness and the future sacrifice of His Son. Different sacrifices were offered in order to expiate specific sins, to cleanse from impurity, and to express the deepest feelings of humility and adoration of the repentant sinners.

# Faithful, No Matter What

by KIRAN KUMAR PANDA

Asish lives in eastern India. Asish, like everyone in his village, worshiped idols. For years Asish and his wife prayed for a child, but no child blessed their home. Asish began searching for the true God who could answer his prayer. He heard a lay evangelist talk about Jesus. He invited the evangelist to study the Bible with him. Asish accepted Jesus as his Savior and asked the evangelist to hold prayer meetings in his house.

Some of Asish's relatives saw the changes in him and asked him what had happened to him. Asish invited them to the prayer meetings, and many came. In time his brothers and sisters accepted Jesus as their Savior. Neighbors also came to hear about the true God, and some of them believed.

Asish's sister was married to a man who continued worshiping idols. There was no peace in their home. Then she became sick and was admitted to the hospital. The doctors gave her little hope of surviving and told the family to let her die. But Asish prayed for her, and within days she recovered. When her husband saw God's power, he gave up his idols and became a Christian.

But as more and more people accepted Christ and worshiped with the Christians, trouble brewed in the village. Some villagers complained to their leaders, and the leaders pressured the new believers to leave their new faith and return to idol worship. Some gave in, but Asish refused to renounce his faith, no matter what it might cost him.

Leaders from the surrounding area tried to force Asish to reconvert, but he refused. They beat him, and still he refused. Then they forced him to leave the village. The family was not allowed to have the village firewood or water from the village well; and they had to go to another village to buy their necessities.

Asish began having strange pains in his body and became convinced that devils had entered him. He asked the lay evangelist to pray for him, and soon he was feeling well again. Soon Asish and his wife had their longed-for child. Another Hindu couple who was childless came for prayer, and they also conceived.

Asish and his fellow Christians still are not allowed to enter the village. But Asish tells them he will die serving the true and living God. He invites those who want a powerful God to come and learn about Jesus.

Our mission offerings help provide lay evangelists tools to reach into remote areas such as Asish's village. Thank you for giving generously so that we can tell the world about our powerful God.

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KIRAN KUMAR PANDA is a pastor in Sambalpur District in Orissa State, India.



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Just 15 years ago the Adventist Church in Mongolia reorganized after many years of oppression. Today the majority of believers are under the age of 35.

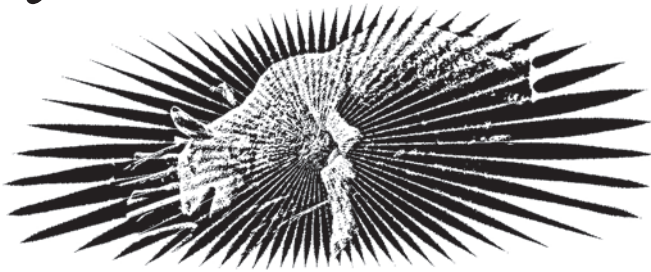
Some 250 of these young believers study at state universities in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city. Most live in government-run dormitories. Living and studying in a secular environment makes it tough for them to maintain their faith. Because of this, many students' spiritual lives erode during their university years.

The Adventist Church wants to change that. A dormitory for Adventist students will provide a safe environment for them to live and study, an environment that will strengthen their faith instead of destroy it.

Part of my Thirteenth Sabbath offering this quarter will help this project and strengthen the future Church leaders in Mongolia. I'm glad that I can help my church care for its youth. For me, it's personal.



# Atonement *in* Symbols: Part 2



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Leviticus 16, Num. 18:1–8, Pss. 28:2, 132:7, 138:2.*

**Memory Text:** “ ‘Let us go to his [God’s] dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool’ ” (*Psalm 132:7, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** To look at the atoning work of Christ as revealed particularly in the Day of Atonement sanctuary service.

The Israelite sanctuary was cleansed once a year from the sin and impurities of Israel, which were transferred there through the daily sacrifices. The yearly ritual symbolically represented the time when God, from His heavenly dwelling place, would bring an end to the problem of sin and restore the whole universe to its original harmony.

During this week, we will study not only the symbolic meaning of the Day of Atonement but also how the Israelite sanctuary pointed to God’s heavenly dwelling, the throne room of the universe.

We will also discuss the priests in the Old Testament and how their work of mediation prefigured the work of Christ as our Mediator and Intercessor in the heavenly sanctuary.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 15.*

## Sanctuary and Atonement

**What** do the following verses teach us about the role of the sanctuary in the experience and life of the Israelites? *Exod. 25:8, 22; 29:42, 43; Pss. 28:2; 132:7; 138:2.*

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The Israelite sacrificial system was centered on and operated within the sanctuary, the earthly dwelling of God. It was the center of life and of holiness in Israel. Within that unique space God dealt with the problem of sin. He commanded the Israelites to build an altar in the courtyard of the sanctuary, and it was upon this altar that the sacrificial blood was placed in order to make atonement for the people (*Lev. 17:11*). Blood, as a tangible expression of life, belonged to God, and it was to be returned to Him there, on the altar.

In the plan of salvation, the life of the animal stood for the life of the repentant sinner, and God would accept the death of the innocent animal in place of the sinner's death. The altar was a symbol of God's presence (*Ps. 43:4*), and by accepting the sacrifice, God was assuming responsibility for the sin of the person. In other words, the Lord was telling the Israelites, "If you have sinned and want to get rid of this enslaving power, bring it to Me, to My dwelling place, and I will take care of it. Bring it to Me!" The Israelites left the sanctuary blessed by the Lord and justified by His grace (*Pss. 24:3-5, 118:26*).

All this was symbolic of the work of Jesus, our real High Priest. The heavenly sanctuary is the dwelling of God within the cosmos and the place from which He rules as King of the universe; it's also the place in which the sin problem is being resolved. The cross was the altar on which the sacrifice was offered for us. Today God says to us, "If you want freedom from sin, and forgiveness of sin, come to the altar of sacrifice where My Son paid the penalty for your sins!"

Someone asked a friend, "How can I know what God is really like?" The person responded, "Look at Jesus on the cross, dying for the sins of the world." How does the Cross tell us what God is really like? What comfort and hope can you draw for yourself from that revelation of God?

## Priestly Work and Atonement

**Why** was it necessary to have a priesthood who operated in His temple? *Num. 18:1–8*.

The fundamental work of the priests was to mediate between God and the people. The priests represented God before the people in their teaching ministry (*Deut. 33:10*). Closely related to that work was the priestly duty of revealing God’s will to those who sought divine guidance (*Num. 27:21*). The priests also functioned as judges in the sanctuary. In fact, the highest tribunal of the land operated at the central sanctuary (*Deut. 17:8–13, 21:5*). They were especially responsible for blessing the people (*Deut. 10:8, 21:5*). They represented the people before God. In their representative role they took the people with them to the presence of the Lord (*Exod. 28:9–12, 29*).

Their role as mediators was particularly visible during the daily services. They were in charge of the altar of the burnt offering and were to keep the sacred fire burning on it, removing the ashes and bringing new wood (*Lev. 6:10–13*). They placed a burnt offering on that altar in the morning and then another in the evening (*Num. 28:3–8*). During daily services the high priest went into the Holy Place to dress the lampstand and to burn incense before the Lord (*Exod. 30:7, 8*). Also, whenever an Israelite brought a sacrifice, the priests sacrificed it on his or her behalf to make atonement for the sinner (*Lev. 1:5–9; 4:25, 26, 34, 35*).

The priest’s role of mediator served at least three main purposes. First, it suggested that despite the fundamental distance between God and humans, there was a way to close the gap. Second, it revealed God’s desire to be with His people. It manifested God’s love seeking a way to become accessible to them, despite their sin. Third, from the perspective of the Israelites, the priesthood gave them access to the Holy One of Israel and the opportunity to be cleansed from sin and impurity. The priestly mediators were always available in order to make it possible for the people to approach God and find grace and mercy.

The whole system, of course, pointed to the ultimate Mediator between God and humans, the Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

**Through the work of Christ we are part of the “royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9). What is your role in that priesthood? How can you function as “priest” for other people?**

## Day of Atonement: Part 1

The Day of Atonement ritual illustrated the final resolution of the sin problem, the consummation of the salvation as experienced through the daily services. The whole tabernacle was to be cleansed, the Holy and Most Holy Places. They needed cleansing because of the “uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been” (*Lev. 16:16, NIV*). These sins had been transferred to the divine dwelling through the sacrifices brought by repentant sinners. During the Day of Atonement the tabernacle was restored to its original pristine cleanliness and holiness. On that day, once a year, there was a fragment of space that, like the Garden of Eden, was free from the presence of sin and impurity. This “return” to Eden, celebrated at the end of the year, provided a fresh beginning for the people of Israel. It pointed to a new beginning of cosmic proportions (*compare Dan. 8:14*).

**Read** specifically **Leviticus 16:16, 17, 21, 30, 33, 34**. What specific emphasis can you find there? Whose sins are being dealt with on that day, in contrast to the daily ritual? *Lev. 1:1–4*.

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The texts indicate the all-encompassing nature of the cleansing, because *all* the sins of *all* the people were dealt with. It was a corporate act, dealing with Israel as a whole. This was God’s final disposition of the sin problem in Israel for that year, and it prefigured the final disposition of sin at the end of time (*Heb. 9:28*).

**What** did God expect from His people during that day? *Lev. 23:26–31*.

However much the Day of Atonement was a corporate event, involving the whole nation, each individual had a role to play in giving himself or herself over to the Lord completely. Those who were not found resting in the Lord and humbling themselves before Him were to be “cut off from his people” (*Lev. 23:29, NIV*). However harsh that sounds, the point is to emphasize how solemn the work of salvation was. The passage is, among other things, promoting perseverance in one’s walk with the Lord.

**How, in a sense, are we to “afflict” our souls on a daily basis? What does that mean?** See *Matt. 16:24, 25; Rom. 6:1–13; Heb. 12:4*.

## Day of Atonement: Part 2

**Read** the scapegoat ritual as found in Leviticus 16:20–22. What is taught by this ritual? Focus especially on the fate of that animal as compared to all the others used in the service.

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The “scapegoat” (Heb. *azazel*) is not a means of atonement but a vehicle through which sin and impurity are carried to the wilderness. How do we know this?

First, the transfer of sin and impurity to this animal takes place after the high priest finished the work of atonement in the sanctuary. Second, the goat is not offered as a sacrifice; it is not slaughtered, and therefore no blood is available for atonement. Third, although it “carries/bears” the sins of the people, that does not mean that it carries them vicariously, as in the sense of a substitute, like Jesus. In this case the context shows that the verb means “to carry” to another place, i.e., “the wilderness” (*Lev. 16:22, NASB*). When the same verb is used to describe the work of the Servant of the Lord, it stands alone: “he bare the sins of many” (*Isa. 53:12*). He is not carrying them anywhere, but assuming responsibility for them Himself and, through that act, forgiving us. That is what atonement is, and that’s not what the scapegoat does.

Instead, the scapegoat ritual is an elimination rite; in other words, the scapegoat is a means of eliminating or removing from the camp of Israel something that should not be there—sin and impurity.

During the Day of Atonement there was a confrontation between the Lord and another power. The goat for the Lord represented God; the goat for *azazel* represented the opposing power, a demon, the ultimate source of sin and impurity. By sending the sins of the people to *azazel* through the goat, this power was being named as the originator of sin. God had accepted the sin and impurity of His people in order to atone for them and to forgive their sins, but that did not mean that He was the originator of evil. The Day of Atonement announced in symbols the final victory of holiness and purity over the forces of sin, impurity, and evil. It anticipated the moment when the charges raised by Lucifer in heaven will be once and for all resolved, and Lucifer will have to assume responsibility for originating sin. Through this ritual God was instilling hope in His people by pointing to a future in which, through the power of Christ, a new creation will come into existence, one free from death and pain, free from the power of sin (*Rev. 21:3, 4*).

## Atonement: What Is It?

**Which** ideas are associated with the verb “to make atonement” in the following passages? *Lev. 4:31; 16:18, 19, 30; 17:11.*

In Leviticus, though the priests officiate in the atoning rituals as mediators, they are not the ones who atone for sin. After the ritual is performed, God grants the forgiveness (*Lev. 4:26*; the passive form of the verb implies that God is the One who forgives). Atonement is something that God performs for His people. He is the One who “make[s] atonement for his land and people” (*Deut. 32:43, NIV*; also *Pss. 65:3, 79:9*). Through atonement, God allows His love to flow to sinners.

The Hebrew verb translated “to make atonement” in Leviticus (Heb. *kipper*) expresses the idea of wiping off or purging. Atonement is made for the tabernacle, the altar, the horns of the altar, meaning that they are purged, cleansed from the defilement of sin and impurity. The implication is that through atonement they are restored to the original condition, one free from defilement. When applied to repentant sinners, the verb still retains the idea of cleansing from sin or impurity.

Because the cleansing takes place through the blood of a sacrificial animal, atonement also can express the idea of ransoming. Freeing a person from sin is done at the cost of the blood/life of the sacrificial victim (*Lev. 17:11*). It was offered in place of the sinner, substituting for him or her, and therefore it ransomed the life of the person (*see Matt. 20:28, 1 Tim. 2:6*).

The verb *to make atonement* also is employed in Leviticus in a variety of rituals, making it impossible to conclude that it designates a single act. That is, atonement is a process rather than something that happens at a single point in time. The whole sanctuary activity throughout the year was understood as atonement; from the daily sacrifices (*Lev. 5:10*) to the Day of Atonement (*Lev. 16:34*), and all the rituals in between. In other words, atonement was the totality of the cleansing action of God for Israel all year, including the sacrificial act, the mediation of the priest, and the final disposal of sin and impurity during the Day of Atonement. Thus was typified as the all-inclusive nature of the work of atonement that Christ is doing for us.

**Only God could atone for sin, and it took the life of Christ to do it. What should that tell us about how bad sin must be? Why, then, don't we abhor sin more than we do? How does the practice of sin deaden our abhorrence of it?**

**Further Study:** “Since Satan is the originator of sin, the direct instigator of all the sins that caused the death of the Son of God, justice demands that Satan shall suffer the final punishment. Christ’s work for the redemption of men and the purification of the universe from sin will be closed by the removal of sin from the heavenly sanctuary and the placing of these sins upon Satan, who will bear the final penalty. So in the typical service, the yearly round of ministration closed with the purification of the sanctuary, and the confessing of the sins on the head of the scapegoat.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 358.

“Blood and life are associated as lexical pairs and thus understood as parallel in meaning in . . . Hebrew. Because of this close association blood is considered the source of life, and because blood represents life (Gen. 9:4, Deut. 12:23), it may expiate for life. Because the life of a creature is in the blood, blood makes atonement for one’s life. One life is sacrificed for another. The shedding of substitutionary blood on the altar makes atonement, since the blood of the innocent victim was given for the life of the one who has sinned.”—Mark F. Rooker, *The New American Commentary: Leviticus*, vol. 3A (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2000), p. 236.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Review the process of atonement and cleansing in the earthly sanctuary and then compare it to how, in reality, Christ destroys our sin without destroying us, as well.
- 2 Many people find it hard to understand why innocent animals had to die in order to make a point about sin. What’s the important lesson from these deaths for us? What should it tell us about the nature of sin?
- 3 All during the week we talked about “cleansing” from sin. What does that mean on a practical level; that is, in the life of someone who claims the blood of Christ? *1 John 1:7*. What does it mean to be cleansed of sin?
- 4 Take your answer to Monday’s final question and bring it to class on Sabbath. Compare responses. How can we, both as individuals and as a church, better fulfill our role as “priests”?

**Summary:** The Day of Atonement was the consummation of the daily cleansing of the Israelites from sin. It illustrated the time the cleansing power of the sacrificial death of Christ would be consummated through a work of judgment.

# Stubborn Daughter

by SAYORN HENG

I live in Cambodia. We were very poor; our house had a plastic tarp for a roof. Then in 2001 my family became Christians. But I refused. I wouldn't listen to them talk about this Jesus.

I needed to work to help support my family, so I applied at a garment factory. But I was told I was too young. I asked a Christian missionary how to find a job, and he told me I should ask Jesus to help me. I didn't believe in Jesus, so I prayed to God instead. God answered my prayer, and I got a job. The man who worked next to me in the garment factory talked to me about Jesus. It seemed that I was surrounded by Christians!

During my family's evening worships, I sat outside. But I could hear them singing and reading the Bible. One night I heard my mother and sister pray for me. Then I heard them read from the Bible that those who are not born again shall not see the kingdom of God (John 3:3, NIV). I didn't want to be the only one in my family who didn't go to heaven. I told my mother that I wanted to be a Christian, and she prayed with me as I gave my heart to God.

After that I joined the family worship. When I learned about tithing, I struggled. I worked long hours but earned only \$15 a month. How could I return tithe on that? I prayed that God would help me find a better job, one that paid by the piece instead of by the day. I promised to return tithe if God found me a better job, and He did!

I began returning tithe and was offered a better job with better pay. My wages continued to increase as I faithfully returned tithe. When I realized the importance of Sabbath, God gave me a job where I could have Sabbaths off—in an industry that works seven days a week. This is a weekly miracle!

I am amazed that God has been so good to me. One Sabbath I was afraid for my job, so I went to work. But every few minutes the needle broke, and I earned nothing that day. I think God was trying to tell me that He couldn't bless me if I didn't honor His Sabbath.

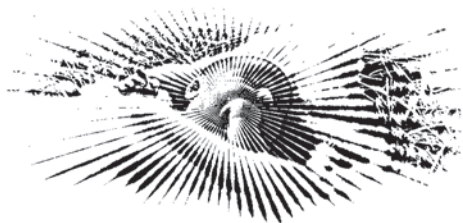


My faith is growing, and God is blessing. Now we have enough to eat. I thank God that He is so patient with me, His stubborn daughter. We must tell everyone that our God is great and good! Our mission offerings help do that.

SAYORN HENG lives in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



# Born of a Woman—Atonement *and the* Incarnation



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 1:18–25; 3:13–17; 4:1–11; 9:35; Mark 1:12, 13; John 1:1, 2, 14; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3.*

**Memory Text:** “But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin” (*1 John 3:5, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** To show that in the person and work of Christ, God was bringing humans back to harmony with Him and with each other.

Scientists concede that no matter how much they are learning, the universe remains full of mystery. The Bible, too, is full of mystery—the greatest one being God's work for our salvation. This week we will concentrate on a central theme of that work: the incarnation of the Son of God, possibly the greatest mystery in all the cosmos. That the Creator condescended to become a creature in a world of sin and death boggles the mind. How did that amazing event occur? Only the Godhead knows! One thing we do know, however, is that without the Incarnation there would not be forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. The incarnation of the Son of God into human flesh was an indispensable element in God's plan for the salvation of the race.

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

## Mystery of Incarnation

When told that she would bear a special child, Mary responded in wonderment. “‘How will this be . . . since I am a virgin?’” The angel then said, “‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you’” (*Luke 1:34, 35, NIV*). This Child came into our history through the creative power of the Spirit in the womb of Mary (*Matt. 1:18*). The verb *overshadow* reminds us of Exodus 40:35, where we find a description of the glory of the Lord on the cloud coming down to dwell among men in the tabernacle. The Lord was coming down in a mysterious way in order to be conceived in the womb of this woman.

The coming of Jesus into humanity is precisely about the union of the divine and the human. Although the two natures remain distinct, what took place was not simply the indwelling of the divine in the human but a *real* incarnation. That is, Christ is truly God and truly man. The Bible does not tell us what took place at the moment the two natures were united in the womb of Mary. In the Incarnation God became human, and the fullness of God dwelt in humanity. This is precisely what Paul says.

**Read** Colossians 2:9. What does it tell us about who Jesus is?

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The point is that Jesus is fully God! Had one or several of the divine attributes been lost during the Incarnation, we would have had less than the incarnation of God. Paul states that the preincarnated Christ was “in very nature God” (*Phil. 2:6, NIV*), equal to God, but in the Incarnation He took “the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (*vs. 7, NIV*).

Though fully God, Jesus placed everything He had under the authority of the Father, but in doing that He did not divest Himself of any of His divine attributes. During the Incarnation there was a concealment of the divine in Jesus, yet Deity was always fully present. For the purpose of the atonement it was indispensable to have God in human flesh, because only God could save us.

**Read Matthew 1:18–25.** How many miraculous things occurred there, things that can’t be explained other than by the supernatural intervention of God? What should this tell us about just how limited we are, in and of ourselves, to understand the most important truths? Why, just because we can’t understand something, must we not automatically dismiss it as untrue?

## God and Humanity Reunited

**What** evidence do we have that Christ was not only divine but also human? *Matt. 26:38, Luke 2:40, Gal. 4:4.*

Ancient Greek philosophy considered human flesh to be intrinsically evil, a prison for the soul. Accepting this view, some early Christians concluded that the Son of God could not have come in a material body but only seemed to have done so. The New Testament, however, makes it indisputably clear that Jesus was a real human being. He was born of a woman, grew and developed as a child, learned obedience (*Heb. 5:8*), and suffered and died (*Matt. 26:38, Luke 23:46*). The Bible also is clear that Jesus was divine, God in human flesh (*John 1:1, 2, 14; Heb. 1:3*). The reality of the union of the human and the divine in Christ is indispensable for the atonement.

Why? Because after the Fall, Adam and Eve and all of their descendants were separated from God, a separation that threatened their existence. Because it was impossible for humans by themselves to be reunited with God, the Lord took the initiative and reunited Himself with humans, and this He did with the Incarnation, when God became human. Christ became the “place” where the divine intersected the human in a permanent reunification. In the Incarnation, “divinity and humanity were mysteriously combined, and man and God became one.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, July 30, 1896. This unity was deeper than the unity that originally existed between God and humans.

**How** does Paul refer to Jesus (*1 Cor. 15:45*), and what does that mean?

In Jesus there was a new beginning for the human race, a “new” humanity that was united to God. He was the Creator and the Head of that new humanity; He was the new Adam from whom a new human race was coming into existence. Outside of Him there was, and still is, the old humanity, the one in fallen Adam, the one separated from God and heading to extinction (*1 Cor. 15:22*). The only hope for that humanity is the incarnated God, in whom the divine and the human were united in eternal bonds of love. Through Christ every human being who so wishes it can be brought into complete harmony with God.

**Look up at the stars at night. Think about the incredible truth that the Power who created all those stars (and so much more) took upon Himself humanity and in that humanity died for your sins! How should this incredible truth change your life?**

## The Baptism of Jesus

**Read** Matthew 3:13–17. What important truths can we learn from the story of Jesus’ baptism by John?

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The significance of Christ’s baptism cannot be overemphasized. First, by requesting baptism, Jesus was identifying Himself with sinners. He who was not in need of baptism requested it—not for Himself but for us, for our benefit, and by so doing He left an example for those who want to follow Him. But His baptism was more than an example; it made it possible for us to be joined to Him through our baptism and to receive the benefits of His at the hands of John.

Second, as Jesus was coming out of the water, He knelt down and prayed to the Father (*Luke 3:21, 22*). The Bible does not record the content of that prayer, but the answer given by the Father gives us an idea of its content. By declaring, “‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased’ ” (*vs. 22, NIV*), God was telling Him that His prayer was heard. More so, “To every one of us they are words of hope and mercy. Through faith in the provision God has made in the behalf of man, you are accepted in the Beloved—accepted through the merits of Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, Nov. 12, 1894.

**What** great hope can you find for yourself in those words by Ellen White?

Third, the Godhead was involved and present in the baptism of Jesus. The Father’s voice was heard from heaven, and the Holy Spirit made Himself visible through the symbol of a dove. God’s love was flowing down to His Son as a member of the human race, accepting Him as its Representative. Humans were no longer separated from the love of God, because in Christ a channel through which divine love could reach them was found.

**What is the essential message to us from today’s lesson about how we, though fallen, can have acceptance with God? Is that acceptance found in ourselves, in how well we perform or keep the commandments, or in Jesus? Why must we always keep that answer before us, especially on “bad days”?**

## Temptations of Jesus

**Summarize** the three temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness after His baptism. *Matt. 4:1–11; Mark 1:12, 13.*

The temptations of Jesus reveal some contrasting parallels with those of Adam and Eve. First, the fact that Adam was tempted while in the Garden of Eden, in an environment free from the corrupting reality of sin; Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, in an environment under the influence of evil powers. Second, Adam had an abundance of food, while Jesus was deprived of food. Third, Adam was not fasting; Jesus was. Fourth, both Adam and Jesus were tempted to satisfy their desire for food apart from the will of God; Adam accepted the food, Jesus didn't. Fifth, Adam was tempted to question what God had said and showed a lack of trust in God's word. Jesus also was tempted to question the trustworthiness of the word of God, but He rejected the temptation. Sixth, Adam openly went against the Lord and joined Satan in his rebellion against God and His government. Jesus was offered the kingdoms of this world if He would only worship and join Satan in his struggle against the kingdom of God. Jesus, however, remained loyal to the Father.

By overcoming Satan on the fundamental points in which Adam failed, Jesus was undoing Adam's failure and making His (Christ's) victory available to those who will put their faith in Him. The new humanity will not receive from the Head of the race a spirit of disobedience and rebellion, as the old humanity did from Adam, but one of humble submission to God's will.

**Read** 2 Corinthians 5:21. What does Jesus' victory over all sin mean for us and for the process of atonement?

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That deep bond of unity between the Father and the Son was not broken through the temptations and attacks that Satan launched against the Son of God. He overcame every one and remained totally dependent on the Father. No other human being has been, is, or will be exactly like Him. He was by nature and by personal election sinless. It is there that we find the very ground of His capacity to save us. The Sinless One became sin for us in order for us to receive by faith the righteousness that was not ours but His. The perfect sacrificial Lamb took on Himself our sin in order to restore us to unity and harmony with the Creator.

## Ministry of Healing

**“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people”** (*Matt. 9:35*).

Through His healing ministry Jesus was overcoming the incursion of death in the fabric of suffering humanity. His future victory over the very kingdom of death was anticipated in His daily healing works. The power of death that came into the world from sin was being defeated. This was particularly illustrated in cases of the various resurrections, including the resurrection of one who had been dead for four days (*Mark 5:35–43, Luke 7:11–17, John 11:38–44*).

His miracles also served to break down social barriers. The leper felt accepted by Him (*Mark 1:41*), the Samaritan came back to give thanks (*Luke 17:11–17*), and the Syro-Phoenician woman’s daughter was healed (*Mark 7:29, 30*). The alienation of humans from each other created by sin was being broken down through Jesus’ reconciling ministry. He was creating a new humanity at peace with one another.

But His miracles also served to restore people to harmony and communion with the Father. Very often His victory over the powers of death led people to believe in Him (*John 4:53; 20:30, 31*).

**Which other methods did Jesus use in His ministry to restore harmony in society and with God?** *Mark 2:15–17, John 4:39–42.*

The gulf of separation between God and humans was bridged not only in His own person—the human and divine Savior—but also through the power of Christ’s words of salvation. To those who received Him, “he gave the right to become children of God” (*John 1:12, NIV*). These individuals were born not of the will of the flesh but of God (*vs. 13*). Jesus Himself was gathering a new humanity reconciled to God, in and through Him. He sought to reconcile humans, not only with God but also with one another, and He did this by eating with them in open fellowship. Through these encounters Jesus was proclaiming that God accepts any person who comes to Him and that His followers should do likewise.

**Take a look at your relationships and ask yourself, In what daily, practical ways is my reconciliation with God reflected in the way I treat and accept others?**

**Further Study: Purpose of the Incarnation:** “Christ in counsel with His Father laid out the plan for His life on earth. . . . He clothed His divinity with the garb of humanity, that He might stand at the head of the human family, His humanity mingled with the humanity of the race fallen because of Adam’s disobedience.”—Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work*, p. 85.

“Christ’s work was to reconcile man to God through His human nature, and God to man through His divine nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Confrontation*, p. 38.

**Prayer at Baptism:** “He received baptism at the hands of John, and in coming up out of the water he bowed upon Jordan’s banks, and offered up a prayer to Heaven. . . . Jesus was accepted of Heaven as a representative of the human race. With all our sin and weakness, we are not cast aside as worthless; we are accepted in the Beloved; for heaven has been opened to our petitions through the Son of God. The gates are ajar, and the light of heaven will shine upon all those whom Jesus came to save, if they will but come within the circle of the beams of the Sun of Righteousness; for ample provision has been made for the salvation of every soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, July 28, 1890.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Give as many possible answers as you can to this question: Why was the Incarnation indispensable in Christ’s work of atonement?
- ❷ Why is the humanity of Christ so important to us? Why is the divinity of Christ so important to us, as well?
- ❸ As we saw in Sunday’s lesson, there are many mysteries about the incarnation of Jesus. What other mysteries are there, such as in nature, and why should these other mysteries help us understand what it means to live by faith?
- ❹ What are ways that we can, as a church, as the body of Christ, follow Christ’s healing and reconciliation ministry? What does your local church do? What more can and should it do? Most important, how can you be more involved?

**Summary:** In the incarnation of Jesus we witness the only human Being who was born on this planet in complete and perfect union with God. Although tempted by the enemy in ways that no other human being has been or will be tempted, Jesus remained loyal to the Father and overcame where Adam failed, thus paving the way to bring salvation to all who surrender to Him in faith and obedience.

# The Reluctant Student

by NELIDA ESPINOSA

I had just become an Adventist and wanted to share with my sister what I had learned. I visited my sister and her children and shared my testimony. But only my niece, Laura, wanted to know more. We studied the Bible together in the living room and invited other members of the family to join us if they wished. But they didn't respond.

Laura's brother, Sergio, was devoted to his family's church and found excuses not to join us for our Bible studies, so Laura and I prayed earnestly for the family, and especially Sergio. I knew that God could touch his heart even when I could not.

I returned home before Laura made a decision for Christ. But every day I prayed for the members of this family, committing them to God. And whenever I could, I visited to encourage them in their faith. During one of my visits I again invited Sergio to join Laura and me for our study, and this time he did. I asked him to pray for us, and he agreed. I rejoiced to see that God was working in Sergio's heart.

When Laura decided to be baptized, I invited her to come to my home church to be baptized so she could see that the Adventist Church is a large denomination. She invited Sergio to come with her, and he agreed. Laura and I knew that God was speaking to him. During the baptismal program the pastor invited those who would like to give their lives totally to God and prepare for baptism to stand. Sergio stood.

The next day as Sergio and Laura returned home, Sergio told Laura that he wished to be baptized into the Adventist Church. Laura studied the Bible with him, and a few months later Sergio was baptized. The next time I visited, I learned that Sergio was sharing his faith with his classmates and neighbors—everyone who would listen.

Sergio was taking night classes and faced difficulties with one teacher who refused to excuse him from class. Sergio knew he couldn't convince this teacher, so he explained the Sabbath to the head teacher, who agreed to help him. He arranged for Sergio to change his exams that fell on Friday night, and Sergio completed his studies.

Sergio loved playing soccer and was invited to play for a major team in Argentina. But he knew that God had other plans for his life. He turned down the lucrative offer that could have paid his way through college and worked instead to pay his tuition while attending the Adventist seminary to become a pastor.

Because of Sergio's and Laura's commitment to God, other members of their family have given their lives to Christ. Today Sergio is a pastor leading others to Christ.

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NELIDA ESPINOSA, *Sergio Choque's aunt, lives in Salta, Argentina.*



# Metaphors of Salvation



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 2:1–29, 3:19–26, 2 Cor. 5:18–21, 1 John 4:7–11.*

**Memory Text:** “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished” (*Romans 3:25, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** To summarize some of the ways that the New Testament interprets the death of Christ.

No one image, or one idea, is grand enough to capture the full meaning of Christ's death. Some people have argued that Christ's death was a ransom paid to liberate us from evil powers; others claim that it was a sublime revelation of God's love, one that transforms us. Some say that it was an expiatory sacrifice and removes sin as a barrier between us and God; some insist that it was a reconciling act, others that it was a declaration of acquittal. The truth is that the death of Christ is all of these, and much more. It's not possible to bring the full meaning of Christ's death under one all-encompassing concept, although some images are central, such as sacrificial substitution. This week we'll look at some of the key images used to express the wonderful gift we've been given through Jesus' death on the cross.

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

## Redemption

**Read** Mark 10:45; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7; and 1 Peter 1:18, 19. From these texts, how do you understand the concept of “redemption”?

Redemption is deliverance from debt or slavery through the payment of a ransom, and it’s an image used in the New Testament to interpret Christ’s death. In this thinking, the whole world became a prisoner of sin, and the law was the gatekeeper (*Gal. 3:22, 23*). As slaves of sin, humans were heading to eternal death (*Rom. 6:6, 23*). The debt could be paid only by relinquishing their own life. Then Christ came and paid the price for our redemption, making life available for all who believe in Him. Such persons “used to be slaves to sin” but have now “been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (*Rom. 6:17, 18, NIV*).

Christ also redeemed us from the “curse of the law” (*Gal. 3:13, NIV*). The curse of the law was the claim it made against the life of those who violated it (*vs. 10*). The law itself could not save us from its sentence of death, because it could not give us back life (*vs. 21*); it simply provided the legal basis for the death of the culprit. God’s solution was revealed when He “sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (*Gal. 4:4, 5, NIV*).

Christ also “gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (*Titus 2:14, NIV*). Redemption, therefore, includes the process of sanctification, the purification of our lives. This presupposes that on the cross Christ paid our debt and granted us forgiveness of sin (*Eph. 1:7*) and gave us the gift of justification (*Rom. 3:24*). In other words, free from the condemnation of our sin through the gift Christ bought for us (the forgiveness of our sins), we were justified by faith in Christ.

God could not ignore sin by pretending that it never existed. He satisfied His own moral demands by paying the ransom Himself. He bought back the right of existence for the human race and the whole planet. Whether humans acknowledge it or not, we all belong to God.

**Read 1 Corinthians 6:20. What impact should our redemption through the blood of Christ have on our daily life? What is the value of a gift if the one who is offered it never accepts it?**

## Reconciliation

**Read** carefully 2 Corinthians 5:18–21. What does it say about reconciliation?

Reconciliation is the restoration of peaceful relationships between individuals or groups once at enmity. Usually a mediator or negotiator is needed. This practice was used by Paul to explain the Cross.

First, God took the initiative in reconciling sinners to Himself; in other words, despite our sin, God still loved us.

Second, God used a Mediator through whom reconciliation was possible. He “reconciled us to himself through Christ” (2 Cor. 5:18, NIV); He “was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (vs. 19, NIV). This implies an unbridgeable distance between God and humans, one that required a Mediator.

Third, the object of reconciliation is defined as “us” and the “world.” God “reconciled us to himself through Christ” (vs. 18, NIV). The verb is in the past, indicating that the action it expresses is complete. This means that believers enjoy the benefits and fullness of reconciliation right now. Concerning the world, we read that “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (vs. 19, NIV). The context indicates that the reconciliation of the world is still in progress; it is not, as it is with believers, a completed event.

Fourth, reconciliation as a process is formed by two divine actions. One is the divine act of reconciliation on the cross, defined as “not counting men’s sins against them” (vs. 19, NIV). Sin was the barrier that made it impossible for God to reconcile humans to Himself. Hence, we were by nature objects of His wrath. But He decided to allow His love to flow freely toward us by removing the barrier of sin. From the divine perspective, reconciliation is the removal of that barrier. The other aspect of reconciliation is the ministry of reconciliation (vs. 18, NIV), the proclamation of the message of reconciliation (vs. 19, NIV) entrusted to us. “We are ambassadors for Christ” (vs. 20), and as such it is God Himself who is “making his appeal through us. . . . Be reconciled to God” (vs. 20, NIV). It is through this ministry that reconciliation reaches its ideal goal, which is the end of human animosity against God.

**Is there anyone you need to be reconciled with? If so, how can understanding the reconciliation wrought by Jesus in your behalf help you to be reconciled to others?**

## Justification

Justification is, fundamentally, a legal term that refers to the acquittal of someone accused of a crime but who is found innocent in a court. This concept also was used in the New Testament to explore the significance of the Cross.

**Why** does Paul contrast justification by faith with obedience to the law, and how does this help us understand justification? (*Rom. 3:19–24*).

A few points can be noted from these verses: First, the legal image implies that humans have been charged with a crime. In this particular case, humans have been found guilty as charged; that is to say, they are all under the condemnation of the law (*Romans 2*).

Second, God has provided for humans a way out of their predicament. “Now,” with the coming of Christ, “a righteousness from God, apart from law,” that is to say, not determined by our obedience to the law, “has been made known,” or revealed (*Rom. 3:21, NIV*). Paul explains that “this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” (*vs. 22, NIV*). Righteousness designates here not simply the divine declaration of acquittal but particularly our participation by faith in God’s saving deed in Christ.

Third, this justification is intended for both Jews and Gentiles (*vss. 22, 29*). God does not make distinctions between peoples: All are sinners, and all are being justified “freely by his grace” (*vs. 24, NIV*). Hence, the solution to the human predicament is the justification that comes by faith to all who believe. This gift of salvation is accompanied by the reception of the Spirit, who enables us to walk in newness of life (*Rom. 6:4; Gal. 3:2, 3*).

Fourth, God’s decision is justifiable through Christ’s redemptive work. We have here the combination of two images, redemption and justification, that describe and provide a legal basis for God’s decision to justify those who accept the righteousness of Christ (*Rom. 4:3–6*). God can do the unimaginable because Christ took our sin and died in our place (*2 Cor. 5:21*).

**Read again Romans 3:19–24. Apply the message there to yourself, personally. What can you take away, right now, for yourself that can help you realize how you can be right with God?**

## Expiatory Sacrifice

**Read** Romans 3:25, 26. How does Paul explain what Christ's sacrifice did for us?

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The specific use of the word *sacrifice* (*NIV*; “propitiation,” *KJV*) to designate the death of Christ is not symbolic or metaphorical but expresses the reality of what happened; Christ *sacrificed* Himself for us. The Old Testament sacrifices were mere reflections of this true and genuine sacrifice, which sits at the core of what God has done for us.

First, this sacrifice was provided by God Himself to restore our relationship with Him (*Rom. 3:25*). What we could not do, God did for us in the person of His Son. Second, this was an act of substitution. Christ is described as sinless, without any defect; yet, He was offered as a sin offering (*Rom. 8:3, 2 Cor. 5:21*). He bore our sin on the tree, and died for us and in our place (*1 Pet. 2:21–24*). By taking our sin upon Himself, He cleansed us from it and brought us back to unity with God.

Third, Christ's sacrifice is propitiatory in the sense that it liberated us from the wrath of God. In Romans Paul introduces the sacrifice of Christ after establishing that the world was under sin and legally under the condemnation of God (*Romans 1–3*). The wrath of God was already making itself present against the injustices and perversions of humans (*Rom. 1:18*). Through the sacrifice of Christ we are liberated from that wrath, and God's love reaches us in salvation. Propitiation does not mean that Christ persuaded the Father to love us; it means that Christ's sacrifice made it possible for God's love to reach us. Christ experienced God's wrath against sin so that we don't have to experience it ourselves. Consequently, the Cross is not only the place where God's love is revealed but also the place where His wrath against sin was manifested.

Fourth, the sacrifice of Christ expresses, actualizes, and provides the legal foundation for God's will to save us. Our redemption and reconciliation would not have been possible without the sacrificial blood of Christ (*Acts 20:28, Col. 1:20, Rev. 5:9*). It is because of His death on the cross as the only and unique sacrificial victim that God is able to justify those who believe in Christ (*Rom. 5:9*). By condemning sin in Christ, God demonstrated that He is righteous when justifying those who believe in Christ (*Rom. 3:26*).

## Display of God's Love

The engine that configured the plan of salvation and put it into effect was divine love, the very essence of God (*1 John 4:8*). Every aspect of God's redemptive work is embedded in the divine matrix of love. God sent the Son to die for us because He loved the world (*John 3:16*). The Son came to this world to give His life for us because He loves both the Father (*John 14:31*) and us (*John 13:1*). Those who are united by faith to Christ love God (*James 2:5*), Jesus (*John 14:21*), and one another (*1 John 3:11*). In fact, the life of obedience to the commandments of God is our expression of love to Christ for what He has done for us (*1 John 5:3*). The whole life and death of Christ was a magnificent display of God's character, the most sublime revelation of love.

**What** should be our reaction to the display of God's love in the death of Christ? *1 John 4:7–11*.

The significance of God's love, as revealed in the sacrifice of Christ, is better comprehended when placed in the context of the cosmic conflict. Satan's charges against God cast doubts in the minds of heavenly beings concerning the nature of God. Was God indeed a loving, self-sacrificing God, as He claimed to be, or did He have a selfish nature hidden under the appearance of self-denial? The cross of Christ dispelled, forever, all doubts concerning the character of God. That the Creator willingly chose to become human and suffer and die on a cross in order to save a race that did not deserve it revealed that God's love was beyond the full comprehension of the heavenly intelligences. The unselfish nature of the unfathomable sacrifice is precisely displayed in the fact that what God did through Christ was done for the benefit of others, not for His own personal benefit or gain.

The manifestation of God's love on the cross of Christ served also to dispel humans' misconceptions concerning the nature of God. "By presenting Jesus as the representative of the Father, we shall be able to dispel the shadow that Satan has cast upon our pathway, in order that we shall not see the mercy and inexpressible love of God as manifested in Jesus Christ. Look at the cross of Calvary. It is a standing pledge of the boundless love, the measureless mercy of the heavenly Father."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 156.

**Read again 1 John 4:7–11 and contrast what it says to your own life and relationships with others. In what ways can you better manifest the love talked about here? What things are standing in your way, and how can they be removed?**

**Further Study: Reconciliation:** “Reconciliation means that every barrier between the soul and God is removed, and that the sinner realizes what the pardoning love of God means. By reason of the sacrifice made by Christ for fallen men, God can justly pardon the transgressor who accepts the merits of Christ. Christ was the channel through which the mercy, love, and righteousness might flow from the heart of God to the heart of the sinner.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 396.

**Wrath of God:** “Christ was to take the wrath of God which in justice should fall upon man. He became a refuge for man, and although man was indeed a criminal, deserving the wrath of God, yet he could by faith in Christ run into the refuge provided and be safe. In the midst of death there was life if man chose to accept it.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, February 24, 1874.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Of the various images talked about this week, which ones can you relate to the best? Why? In class, talk about the different images and share with one another the reasons for your choice.
- 2 Dwell on this idea of reconciliation. What can we learn from human accounts of reconciliation that can help us better understand it as a metaphor for salvation?
- 3 In what ways is the Cross the greatest manifestation and expression of God’s love? What comfort can we draw from the Cross about the nature of God that can help sustain us during hard times?
- 4 God’s wrath against sin just couldn’t be turned off; what should that tell us about sin’s nature? In other words, why didn’t God just forget about sin instead of having to pour out His wrath against it?

**Summary:** The Bible employs different images to help us grasp Christ’s death. Redemption indicates that His death liberates us from the power of sin. His death restores a peaceful relationship with God; it reconciles us by overcoming our rebellion. Through the death of Christ we are declared innocent before the heavenly court because He died in our place as a substitute. His death on the cross is the place where God shouts and tells us, “Look, this is how much I love you!”

# Conquering the Deceiver

by HEATHER TREDOUX

Justinia stood outside the big tent in Swaziland, listening intently to the speaker. She wanted to go in and listen, but she was afraid. Someone had said that these meetings were sponsored by satanists. She needed God's help, but her fears held her back.

As she listened, she could find nothing that pointed to Satan. The sermons and even the songs were straight from the Bible. She took a deep breath, entered the tent, and sat down.

After that Justinia never missed a meeting. *How could this be bad?* She wondered as she listened. Bravely she approached the speaker, David Tembe, and asked him to visit her home. "The spirits of our ancestors are troubling us," she told him.

When the pastor visited the family, they told their troubles. "The ancestors are angry with us because we don't have money to hold a feast for them. We hear strange noises, like a telephone ringing, but we don't own a telephone. At night we hear the sound of running footsteps on the metal roof when no one is there, and lately stones are being hurled at our front door."

The family explained that they had consulted a *sangoma* (witchdoctor), who declared that the ancestors were angry and told them to slaughter a goat or an ox to appease the spirits. But the family had no money to buy one. When the family returned home, they found a small green snake with black markings near their front door. They knew that this snake meant that the ancestors had come to visit them. The snake would disappear and reappear, changing color and growing larger. The family was terrified.

The evangelist told the family that God is their only hope. He read the Bible story of the serpent that deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), and then he explained that God is more powerful than Satan and has conquered Satan already. They needed only to trust in God.

The family sighed with relief and asked the evangelist to pray for them. They knelt together and pleaded with God to take control.

During the closing meeting, Justinia shared her testimony. "We have been troubled and threatened by demons, but when Pastor Tembe prayed, God sent away the demons, and they have not come back. We lived in darkness and fear, but now we live in the light of God!"

Our mission offerings help people around the world find the light of God that shines into their sin-darkened lives. Thank you for doing your part to make world evangelism possible.

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HEATHER TREDOUX is fund-raising for the 4,000 AIDS orphans in the Maluti Adventist Hospital service area in Lesotho. Swaziland and Lesotho are small countries in southern Africa.



# Atonement *at the* Cross



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 26:37, 38; 27:46; Mark 14:33, 34; Luke 22:40–44; John 19:28–30.*

**Memory Text:** “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (*Colossians 1:13, 14, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** To describe the experience of Jesus in Gethsemane and on the cross in order to understand better the meaning of His atoning death.

A man sued a fast-food company, claiming that his obesity, and the health problems that followed from it, resulted from his four or five meals a week at the fast-food restaurant. He blamed the company, not himself, for his problems!

We all tend to be like that, though, blaming others for our misdeeds. But God does not accept excuses; He considers each one of us accountable for our sins. However, here's where the mystery of atonement begins to appear in its beauty. If we assume responsibility for our sins and have true faith in Jesus, God is willing to forgive us those sins. When we acknowledge our responsibility, we are liberated from the penalty of our rebellion. What happened to that penalty? God did not overlook it. No, instead He allowed it to fall on Jesus, and Christ's experience of that punishment will be our theme this week.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 6.*

## Anguish: Heading to Gethsemane

**Read** Matthew 26:37, 38; Mark 14:33, 34. What was Jesus experiencing here at Gethsemane?

Jesus knew exactly what He would be facing within the next few hours. The experience was extremely painful and disturbing. At the moment He reached Gethsemane He could no longer contain His emotions and began to share them with Peter, James, and John (*Matt. 26:37, 38; Mark 14:33, 34*). The language He used is very important.

“He began to be deeply distressed and troubled” (*Mark 14:33, NIV*). The Greek verb *ekthambeo*, translated “deeply disturbed,” designates a highly emotional condition of deep excitement caused by something perplexing, amazing, or disorienting. It often is accompanied by fear, even terror and trembling. Matthew uses the verb *lupeo*, translated “overwhelmed by sorrow,” to designate a high level of emotional distress, sadness, and anxiety (*Matt. 26:38*). The second verb in Mark 14:33, *troubled* (Greek *ademoneo*), expresses more clearly anxiety, distress, and horror. The emotional and physical condition of Jesus was reaching new and unknown depths of discomfort and upheaval. The peace that characterized Him appeared to be waning; fear, trembling, and anxiety were taking over instead. Notice that Mark says that Jesus “began” to feel that way as He got to Gethsemane. This emotional turmoil was going to get worse.

Also, although no specific reason is given for the physical and emotional state of Jesus, through the light of the New Testament we can conclude that this is the result of bearing the world’s sin, not from fear of what humans would do to Him.

“ ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death ’ ” (*Mark 14:34, NIV*). This is the way Jesus Himself described His condition to the disciples. “My soul” could be interpreted as an emphatic expression, “I, myself,” or as designating the all-inclusive nature of His experience. The expression “overwhelmed with sorrow” is the translation of the Greek word *perilupos*, which usually designates a sorrow or affliction measureless in intensity and depth. In this particular case the intensity of the sorrow was bringing Jesus to the borders of the second death. He was already starting to suffer the fate that should have been ours.

**Look at the sufferings of Jesus here and realize that this should have been you, not Him. How does this make you feel? How should those feelings be translated into a changed life?**

## The Cup: Willing Submission

**Read** Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (*Matt. 26:39–42; Mark 14:35, 36; Luke 22:40–44*). What is the essence of the prayer? What major element stands out regarding Jesus' attitude concerning what He was about to face?

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While in the Garden, Jesus used the metaphor of the cup to help us understand His inner feelings. The cup is used in the Bible to designate blessings received from the Lord (*Pss. 16:5, 23:5*) or the salvation He offers us (*Ps. 116:13*). But more often it refers to God's judgment against sin and sinners (*Ps. 75:8*). This cup contains the wine of His anger against His enemies, His judicial wrath (*Jer. 25:15, 16*). It is to this cup that Jesus was referring when He asked the Father to let it be taken away from Him, if possible (*Matt. 26:39, Mark 14:36*). He was experiencing loneliness—the abandonment of the disciples and particularly the abandonment of God. He sought the company and support of the disciples but didn't get it. And now, all by Himself, He asked the Father not to forsake Him. The answer that came back to Him from within the darkness of the divine silence was, "There is no other way to save the human race." Jesus voluntarily acquiesced to the will of the Father.

**When** the mob came to take Him, Peter tried to protect Him. How do Jesus' words to Peter (*John 18:11*) help us better understand Christ's willingness to suffer for us?

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Jesus came to this planet to die: " 'The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' " (*Mark 10:45, NIV*). God by definition cannot die, but in order for Him to accept our sin and its penalty He became a human, a creature, and creatures do not have life in themselves; they can die. In Gethsemane Jesus was ready to die, to surrender His life for undeserving sinners everywhere.

**When was the last time you purposefully allowed yourself to endure great suffering, purely on behalf of another person and with no personal gain for yourself? What can you learn about yourself from your answer? And what can you learn about Jesus from your answer too?**

## Darkness: Handed Over to the Enemy

In Gethsemane, and now in the events leading to the Cross, Jesus faced as never before the forces of evil. The struggle against satanic powers was to reach indescribable dimensions, testing the Savior to the very core of His being.

Among the indignities, He was being “‘betrayed into the hands of sinners’” (*Matt. 26:45, NIV*). The verb *betrayed* (Greek *paradidomi*, “to hand over”) is used several times to describe what would happen to Jesus. Here the context suggests that Judas is the one who betrays Him, but behind the wicked and voluntary decision of Judas the divine plan was being mysteriously fulfilled. It was God who “delivered [Christ] over to death for our sins” (*Rom. 4:25, NIV*). But Christ also gave Himself up for us, as seen in Galatians 2:20 and Ephesians 5:2—clear references to His sacrificial death on the cross.

According to Matthew 26:45, 46, Jesus was handed over into the hands of sinners. The verb expresses the idea of a transfer of a possession from one to another. Indeed, already “the light of God was receding from His vision, and He was passing into the hands of the powers of darkness.”—Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, August 1, 1892. Now He was going to be delivered totally into the hands of sinners; that is, into the hands of evil powers. For Him this was the hour “‘when darkness reigns’” (*Luke 22:53, NIV*), when He was to experience total separation from the Father’s love. Christ was going into the kingdom of darkness by Himself; and yet, it was there, in that kingdom, that He would defeat evil once and for all. As the incarnate God in human flesh, He overcame the kingdom of Satan.

**How** does Jesus describe His victory over the power of darkness?  
*Luke 11:20–22.*

Luke says that Jesus was facing the hour of the dominion of darkness (*Luke 22:53*), and Paul adds that God “has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (*Col. 1:13, 14, NIV*). Christ went into the realm of darkness and experienced what we should have experienced, and He did it in order to deliver us from the power of Satan (*Acts 26:18*). While there He “disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (*Col. 2:15, NIV*).

**How should our knowledge of Christ’s victory over these evil forces encourage us in our daily struggles amid the great controversy? What does His victory mean for us? How can we avail ourselves of that victory in our lives?**

## The Cry: Exploring the Mystery

On the cross, Jesus was suffering intensely. But so was the Father. God was in Christ, consequently, “the omnipotent God suffered with His Son.”—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 223. One could even say that “God Himself was crucified with Christ; for Christ was one with the Father.”—Ellen G. White in *Signs of the Times*, March 26, 1894. What was the nature of the suffering experienced by the Godhead that caused Christ to ask, “‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (*Matt. 27:46, NIV*).

### How do you understand Jesus’ cry in that verse?

On the cross God experienced something He had never before experienced: The penalty for sin. “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. . . . 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.

This statement indicates, first, that the Father withdrew His love from the Son not because He did not love Him but because Jesus was dying in our place. There was no one available to mediate God’s love to His Son! Second, there was no vindictiveness in the heart of the Father as His Son was dying for the sins of the world. He did not rejoice in the death of the Son but was suffering with Him. Third, the real penalty God paid for our sins was “the sundering of the divine powers.” Ellen White is taking us inside the mystery of the relationships between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, describing for us what the Godhead underwent as Jesus was on the cross. The verb *to sunder* means “to break or force apart.” That which should have remained united was torn apart.

In short, through Christ’s sacrifice the Godhead was accepting responsibility for the world’s sins and, more so, the Godhead was suffering the consequences of these sins. Could it be that the Godhead, who cannot die, felt in a unique way—through the temporary sundering of the divine powers—the full intensity of the eternal death of the fallen race, through the temporal exclusion of the Son from the unity of the Godhead? The plan of salvation, the atonement, pulled the Trinity apart but momentarily. This experience of extreme “pain” within the Godhead took place only once and will never occur again.

That’s what our salvation cost.

## It Is Finished: From Death to Life

**Describe** Jesus' last experiences just before He died (*John 19:28–30*). What did Jesus mean when He said that “it is finished”? What was finished?

Though the enemy, Satan, in conjunction with some of the leaders, had orchestrated Christ's death, at the crucial moment Jesus voluntarily surrendered His life to the Father: “He bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (*John 19:30, NIV*). The language suggests that He went to sleep, trusting in the goodness, benevolence, and love of the Father. He had said to the disciples, “ ‘I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord’ ” (*John 10:17, 18, NIV*). Now when the proper moment arrived, He did just that.

“It is finished” meant that the perfect atoning sacrifice had once and for all been offered and that heaven and earth had been reconnected through it. The plan of salvation, kept secret for ages, was now fully revealed to the universe in the obedient death of the Son of God on the cross. God had provided the sacrifice, and now its atoning power was available to every human being who will look to the Cross as the exclusive way of salvation. Consequently, the sacrificial system of the Old Testament ended. At the moment Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn apart, from top to bottom (*Matt. 27:51, Mark 15:38*), indicating that the presence of God and His accessibility to us was now located in the sacrifice and person of His beloved Son.

“It is finished” was a triumphal shout. He came to defeat Satan, and He accomplished this in the weakness of human flesh and in the midst of a mortal confrontation (*Heb. 2:14*). The ultimate destruction of Satan and his angels was fixed at the Cross.

This victory was revealed and sealed through His resurrection, when the forces of evil were unable to retain the Son of God inside the tomb. That glorious Sunday morning the words of Jesus were fulfilled: “ ‘I have authority to lay it [my life] down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father’ ” (*John 10:18, NIV*). Jesus is “ ‘the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades’ ” (*Rev. 1:18, NIV*).

**What hope does the fact that Christ finished His work at the Cross offer us? What does that tell us about resting in Him and His works for us? How should this reality be expressed in our lives and behavior?**

**Further Study:** “Man has not been made a sin-bearer, and he will never know the horror of the curse of sin which the Saviour bore. No sorrow can bear any comparison with the sorrow of Him upon whom the wrath of God fell with overwhelming force. Human nature can endure but a limited amount of test and trial. The finite can only endure the finite measure, and human nature succumbs; but the nature of Christ had a greater capacity for suffering; for the human existed in the divine nature, and created a capacity for suffering to endure that which resulted from the sins of a lost world. The agony which Christ endured, broadens, deepens, and gives a more extended conception of the character of sin, and the character of the retribution which God will bring upon those who continue in sin. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ to the repenting, believing sinner.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1103.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read carefully the Ellen G. White quote above. In essence she is saying that nothing any one of us, as finite creatures, has ever suffered could match the suffering of the Son of God on the cross. What does that tell us about what sin cost God? How does this idea, of Christ’s suffering being worse than anything we could face, help us understand how suffering could exist in a world created by a loving God? What comfort can you draw, if any, from knowing that God has suffered worse from sin than any of us ever had or ever could?
- 2 Dwell on Wednesday’s lesson, the idea of the temporal sun-dering of the Godhead. What can you take from that which can help you understand the depth of the atonement? How was that experience in the Godhead “the penalty” for our sin? Discuss your answer in class on Sabbath.
- 3 What does it mean to give of yourself unselfishly for others? What examples from everyday life can you find of this principle in operation? How can we, both as individuals and as a church, better manifest such unselfish giving?

**Summary:** On the cross, Jesus experienced the fullness of the sinner’s eternal separation from God. God Himself was in Christ paying the penalty for sin, atoning for our sins.

# Advertising Misprint Brings Two to Church

by PHIL WARD

A misprinted ad in an Australian newspaper had a surprising result. Pastor Laurie McMurtry advertised his “Focus on Prophecy” seminar in three local newspapers. But one newspaper mistakenly printed the starting date as Monday night rather than Tuesday.

When Pastor McMurtry realized the error, he wondered what to do. He had a lot of preparation to do for the seminars, and he could hardly afford to spend the evening at the church. But what if someone came to the church on Monday evening for the seminar?

The pastor felt convicted to go to the church on Monday night. He packed his projector, his computer, and the seminar materials and drove to the distant Adventist church where the meetings were to be held.

When he arrived, the parking lot was empty. He waited some time, and still no one came. Then, as he was about to leave, a car drove into the parking lot. The pastor greeted the couple and explained the situation to them. “The seminar is actually tomorrow night,” he said.

“What a pity,” the couple replied. “We can’t come tomorrow night.”

“Then come inside, and I’ll hold the seminar just for you!” Pastor McMurtry said. He set up his equipment and presented the seminar topic to John and Pat Paynter. When the pastor gave the Paynters the printed material for the second week’s seminar, they told him that they couldn’t come on Tuesday nights. Pastor McMurtry offered to hold a seminar just for them on Wednesday mornings.

The Paynters, members of another church, were delighted with the strong emphasis on the Bible. They began attending the Adventist church two months later and are now actively involved.

“I’m sure that the Lord had a hand in that newspaper misprint,” says Pastor McMurtry, who never told the newspaper about the mistake.



JOHN and PAT PAYNTER (left) attend the Ballina Adventist Church in Australia. PHIL WARD is the author of *The Bible as Poetry*; he edits an evangelism newsletter for the Australian Union.



# Benefits of Christ's Atoning Sacrifice



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 8:34–39; 1 Cor. 15:16–18; Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 7:25; 1 Pet. 3:21, 22; 1 John 1:9.*

**Memory Text:** “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (*Hebrews 7:25, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** To examine the priestly work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary in order to show that it is part of His work of salvation in our behalf.

The finality of the Cross is not threatened by the indispensable work of mediation of Christ for us in the heavenly temple. Without Him the infinite richness of grace would not be at our disposal as a gift from God. Believers receive the fullness of the redemptive power of the Cross through the mediation of Christ. All the benefits of the Cross are at our disposal through faith in His atoning sacrifice.

“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth” (*Isa. 45:22, NIV*). That's the message of Christ's death on the cross. And that redemptive efficacy is available to us through Christ's work of mediation. This week we'll examine the wonderful benefits of Christ's high-priestly ministry in order to better understand God's saving grace.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 13.*

## Resurrection and Ascension

The doctrinal significance of the bodily resurrection of Christ is of utmost importance, because without it there is no forgiveness of sin, no salvation, and no hope of eternal life.

**Read** 1 Corinthians 15:16–18. How closely does Paul link atonement with the resurrection of Jesus?

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The death of Christ would not have had any atoning or forgiving power had it not been followed by the resurrection of the Lord. Consequently, we should not restrict the atoning work of Christ to a single event within God's plan of salvation. The Cross and the Resurrection are two parts of one inseparable work of redemption.

**How** would you explain the close connection between the Resurrection, the Ascension, and Christ's work of intercession? *1 Pet. 3:21, 22; Rom. 8:34–39.*

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Jesus took to heaven our glorified human nature, thus opening the portals of heaven to the human race. His resurrection and ascension mean, first, that He finished the work He came to do on earth (*John 17:4, 5; 19:30*). Second, through His resurrection and ascension, Christ permanently united to God those who will put their faith in His sacrificial death. No power in the universe could separate them from God. Since Christ removed the barrier of sin, God's love constantly and eternally will flow to His people. Third, the ascension of Christ also testifies that His defeat of evil powers on the cross was final. After His ascension, He was enthroned as co-Regent with God, sitting at His right hand, "with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him" (*1 Pet. 3:22, NIV; see also Heb. 10:12, 13*). He will remain with the Father until His enemies are subjected to Him. Then He will return to save those who are waiting for Him (*Heb. 9:28*), thus consummating His work of salvation (*Phil. 2:10, 11; Rev. 17:14*).

**What hope does Christ's resurrection from the dead offer you? That is, in what ways does His resurrection guarantee that death does not have to be your final end? If it is, who can you blame but yourself? Why not make the choices now that can spare you from the biggest mistake you could ever make?**

## Mediation of Christ and Atonement

**What** is the relationship between the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross and His mediation in the heavenly sanctuary? *Heb. 7:25; 1 John 1:9; 2:1, 2; 4:10.*

The death and resurrection of Christ make possible the mediation of Christ before the Father. Christ's mediation means that human sin and guilt are not irrelevant before the Lord in heaven. It's only through Christ's work for us that we receive the benefits of His sacrificial death. Guilt and sin continue to be part of the human experience in the sight of God. That makes the role of our Mediator before the Father an indispensable element in the plan of salvation.

In the Bible the mediation of Christ before the Father is never separated from His atoning sacrifice. The sacrifice was offered on behalf of the human race, but its forgiving power continues to be effective in behalf of those who, in response to the invitation of the Spirit, repent and are converted. Forgiveness is mediated from God to us through Christ (*Eph. 4:32*). But it is also through Christ that repentance reaches the human heart (*Acts 5:31*). It also is effective for the forgiveness of sins committed by believers after conversion, because even after conversion sin can beset us. In such cases, John says we have an advocate who can represent us before God and through whom we can be forgiven (*1 John 2:1, 2*).

It is perhaps for that reason that Hebrews 2:17 uses the verb *to make atonement* (*NIV*) in the present tense, suggesting that Christ's work of reconciliation continues in His high-priestly ministry. This means that although on the cross Christ obtained salvation for all, through His work as Mediator in the heavenly sanctuary He is applying the benefits of the Cross to those who believe in Him. Without the mediation of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, the atoning effectiveness and power of the Cross would not be available to sinners. His mediation is rooted in the Cross. This mediation is not a supplement to Calvary but is in fact the unfolding of the meaning and significance of God's forgiving power, an unveiling of the depth and permanent atoning power of His sacrificial death.

**Have you sinned, even after you've accepted Jesus as your Savior? If so, what comfort do you get from knowing that Christ is mediating God's forgiveness on your behalf in heaven? Why is that knowledge so important for us to have?**

## Mediation of Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary

**What** do the following texts tell us about what Christ is doing for us as our Mediator in heaven? *John 16:23, 24; Acts 5:31; Eph. 1:3; 2:18; Heb. 1:2; 4:16; 13:20, 21.*

If the death of Christ could not be separated from His resurrection, neither should we separate His enthronement and mediation after the Resurrection. The forward-looking purpose of the Resurrection was His installation as our High Priest. Jesus finished His sacrificial work on the cross and is now working as King and Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. The movement from humiliation to exaltation indicates a further development of His work as Redeemer. This does not affect the finality of His atoning sacrificial death (*Heb. 10:12*) but, rather, reveals more benefits from it.

Christ began His intercessory work immediately after His enthronement, and this event had a direct impact on the church. As a result of that work of mediation, “Christ’s toiling, struggling ones on earth [His disciples] are ‘accepted in the Beloved.’ Eph. 1:6. Before the heavenly angels and the representatives of unfallen worlds, they are declared justified.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 834. This objective justification of Christ’s followers in heaven was immediately accompanied by the outpouring of the Spirit. Jesus promised the disciples that He will request from the Father another Counselor (*John 14:16, 17*), and at Pentecost Peter interpreted the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as indicating that Christ had begun His intercessory work on behalf of those who believed in Christ (*Acts 2:33*).

The good news is that Jesus is still working on behalf of His people. Peter stated that Christ must remain in heaven “until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (*Acts 3:21*). There are prophecies that still need to be fulfilled, and then Christ’s work before the Father will end. The ultimate restoration is still in the future, and Christ’s intercessory work is leading toward it. We are still living within salvation history, between His ascension and His return. The time between those two events is filled by His mediation and the fulfillment of the mission of the church.

**Read Revelation 8:2–5. What is the meaning of the imagery there? More important, what hope do those verses, a reference to Christ as our heavenly Mediator, offer you, who at times might feel that God cannot accept your prayers?**

## Mediation of Christ and the Preservation of Life

**How** does the mediation of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary impact the natural world? *John 3:35; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:3.*

Earth probably would be as desolate as Mars if not for the Cross of Christ and for Christ's mediation before the Father. As indicated already, sin had a negative effect on the natural world; it became an expression of the rebellious nature of sin. And yet, God did not abandon the natural world. The psalmist says, "The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made" (*Ps. 145:9, NIV*). The way the Lord provides for the sustenance of the earth is interpreted to be a revelation of God's love.

If there is a particular element of God's creation that sin threatens in a direct way, it is the mysterious phenomenon of life on our planet. Out of His love, God decided to preserve the life He created in spite of its contamination with sin. Paul says, " ' "For in him we live and move and have our being" ' " (*Acts 17:28, NIV*). The preservation of our lives is not the result of mechanical laws working independently of God: "The physical organism of man is under the supervision of God, but it is not like a clock, which is set in operation, and must go of itself. The heart beats, pulse succeeds pulse, breath succeeds breath, but the entire being is under the supervision of God. . . . Each heartbeat, each breath, is the inspiration of Him who breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life—the inspiration of the ever-present God, the great I AM."—Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, p. 9. Although sinners deserve death, their natural life is preserved through God's grace, all made possible only through the Cross. Paul and Barnabas said to some pagans, " 'He [God] has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy' " (*Acts 14:17, NIV*). He "makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth" (*Ps. 104:14, NIV*). All of this is totally undeserved by His creatures and is an expression of God's loving grace through Christ (*Matt. 5:45, Luke 6:35*). God's kindness is not limited to those who serve Him; it reaches out to every human being.

**Think about the implications of today's lesson: Everyone owes his or her existence to Christ's grace. How should this fact influence how you deal with other people? How does this fact help us understand the value of all human life?**

## Mediation of Christ and the Work of the Spirit

In order to understand better the dynamic nature of grace, theologians usually talk about *common grace* and *sanctifying grace*. From the Adventist perspective, common grace is the kind disposition of God manifested toward sinners in the preservation of life on the planet and in the work of the Spirit in the human heart calling us to repentance, confession, and conversion. Sanctifying grace is usually understood as the work of the Spirit in the heart of the person who accepted Christ as Savior. The death of Christ on the cross released an atmosphere of grace that surrounds the planet: “In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 68. This is common grace, available to all who choose to accept it for themselves.

**What** did Christ promise the disciples, and what was the function of that gift? *John 14:16, 17; 16:8–11; Rom. 8:9–14.*

Jesus said to the disciples that after His departure He was going to send them the Spirit and that the Spirit would “reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (*John 16:8*). This is common grace. It is the task of the Spirit to make sinful human beings fully aware of their sin, guilt, and separation from God. At the same time, He points them to the Cross of Christ as the only way out of their desperate condition. Without this work of the Spirit, the Cross becomes ineffective in itself. But it is precisely because of the Cross that the Spirit is active in the world, constantly pointing sinners to Jesus for their salvation.

Grace is not irresistible; that is, humans can reject it, and many do. Grace would hardly be grace (would it?) if it were forced upon people. The Lord respects the freedom of His creatures; nothing proves that better than the Cross.

**In what ways do you find yourself resisting the prompting of the Spirit? Why do we do that? Why is this resistance, even in “little” things, so dangerous? Most important, how can we learn day by day to surrender ourselves to the promptings that come from on high?**

**Further Study:** “The Saviour presents the virtue of His mediation before the Father, and pledges Himself to the office of personal Intercessor. By proclaiming Himself as our Intercessor, He desires us to know that He places in the golden censer His merits and efficiency, that He may offer them with the sincere prayers of His people. How essential, then, that we pray much; for as our prayers ascend to the throne of God, they are mingled with the fragrance of Christ’s righteousness. Our voice is not the only voice heard. Before it reaches the ear of God, it blends with the voice of Christ, whom the Father always hears.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 7, p. 166.

“But so long as Jesus remains man’s intercessor in the sanctuary above, the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit is felt by rulers and people. It still controls to some extent the laws of the land. Were it not for these laws, the condition of the world would be much worse than it now is. While many of our rulers are active agents of Satan, God also has His agents among the leading men of the nation. The enemy moves upon his servants to propose measures that would greatly impede the work of God; but statesmen who fear the Lord are influenced by holy angels to oppose such propositions with unanswerable arguments.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 610.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ If God loves us and sent His Son to die for us, why is it necessary for Jesus to function still as a Mediator before the Father?
- ❷ Review the book of Hebrews. What does it tell us about the reality, and importance, of Christ’s mediation in our behalf in heaven?
- ❸ How does the reality of Christ’s ministration in heaven answer the question, What has Jesus been doing all these years since His resurrection?

**Summary:** After His resurrection and ascension, Christ continues His saving work through His mediation in the heavenly sanctuary. From there He mediates material blessings to human beings and preserves life on the planet. As our Mediator, He applies the full benefits of His atonement on the cross to those who respond to the invitation of the Spirit to find in Him their Savior.

# Flower Blooms in the Desert

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Jasmine\* grew up in Europe, but her family moved to her father's country in the Middle East when she was ten. She knew little Arabic and wasn't interested in learning, so she never mastered the language. By the time she was ready to enroll in high school, her Arabic was still so poor that she couldn't study in a government school. She would have to study in an English-medium school, and the only English school that offered boarding was the Adventist school. So her parents enrolled her.

"From the moment I stepped onto the campus, I loved this school!" Jasmine said. "Everyone was so friendly, I felt at home.

"I didn't know much about God, but I wanted to fit in. So I went to worship and Sabbath services, even though I was excused because of my family's religion. I love singing, and the Christian songs spoke to me. But I didn't listen to the sermons. However, God got my attention in other ways.

"The words, 'God is love,' were painted in the chapel. But in my mind God was vengeful and would punish me if I didn't follow Him. I wanted to know more about this Jesus. Who is He? Why is He different from the other prophets? I decided to attend the religion classes to find answers to my questions. There was so much I didn't understand. Sometimes at night I woke my roommates up to ask questions that swirled in my head.

"I went to every church service on campus, to Bible studies on Sabbath afternoon, and I even stopped people in the halls to ask them questions. I just *had* to know!

"But when I went home, my father suspected my interest in Christianity and told me I couldn't take Bible class anymore. I cried, but I obeyed, but I still attended church and sang in the choir, and I went to the Sabbath Bible studies. But my thirst for truth sent me back to Bible class.

"The principal told me that I could get into serious trouble for being there, but I told him I wasn't attending the class; I was just using the room for a study hall—during Bible class! I pretended to study, but I listened.

"I am still learning, but I know that I want to follow Jesus all the way. My mother knows that I want to be a Christian, and she's OK with that. She wants to learn more about Jesus too.

"Last year I should have graduated, but I failed one of my classes. What a blessing! Another whole year to study the Bible and learn more about Jesus! I can't be baptized in this country, but one day I will stand for Christ in the baptismal waters. I can't wait!

"Thank you so much for your mission offerings that support the Adventist school where I learned about Jesus."

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JASMINE (*not her real name*) lives in a country that is unfriendly to evangelism. CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN is editor of Mission.



# United to Christ



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 5:19, 6:3–6, 8:9, 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 4:5–7, 6:15, Eph. 4:24, Col. 3:10.*

**Memory Text:** “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (*2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** To demonstrate that Christ's work of reconciliation continues as He calls us to become members of the new humanity instituted by Him in His own person.

The sacrifice of Christ provides all that we need for salvation. This includes the possibility of union and permanent attachment to Him as Savior and Lord. This incorporation into Christ, through the ritual of baptism, is our participation in His death and resurrection; it's our recognition that His death is our death because He died as our Substitute. Thus, we become united to Him. In this unity, we not only appropriate all the infinite benefits of His sacrifice but also become members of the new humanity instituted by Him in His own person. This union with Christ is, through the work of the Spirit, embodied in our incorporation into the church as the body of Christ. Thus, to be incorporated into Christ is to have a personal communion with Him and to be united to one another in the mystery of His church.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 20.*

## The Two Humanities

**Study** the parallels and contrasts below and summarize the nature of the humanity made sinful by Adam and the new humanity made by Christ:

ADAM	CHRIST
1. Son of God ( <i>Luke 3:38</i> )	1. Son of God ( <i>Luke 3:22</i> )
2. Was disobedient ( <i>Rom. 5:19</i> )	2. Was obedient ( <i>Rom. 5:19</i> )
3. Introduced sin ( <i>Rom. 5:12</i> )	3. Brought grace for all ( <i>Rom. 5:20–22</i> )
4. Introduced reign of death ( <i>Rom. 5:17</i> )	4. Made possible the reign of life ( <i>Rom. 5:17</i> )
5. All his descendants are sinners ( <i>Rom. 5:19</i> )	5. Through Him many will be made righteous ( <i>Rom. 5:19</i> )
6. Brought condemnation ( <i>Rom. 5:18</i> )	6. Brought justification ( <i>Rom. 5:18</i> )
7. In him all die ( <i>1 Cor. 15:21</i> )	7. In Him all will be made alive ( <i>1 Cor. 15:21</i> )

The fall of Adam resulted in his spiritual death and separation from God. All of his descendants found themselves in the same situation as Adam, unable to overcome sin and death. Humans are, by natural birth, part of the humanity that belongs to Adam, a sinful humanity separated from God.

How then does one become part of the new humanity instituted by God through Christ? There's only one way, and that is through the new birth. The new humanity is formed by those who were born from above and not from the flesh (*John 3:3, 5, 6*). These are those who saw in Christ God's only means of salvation, believed in Him, and now have eternal life (*vs. 15*). They now belong to the new creation, liberated from the enslaving power of sin (*2 Cor. 5:17*). They have become children of God, members of the heavenly family. Paul describes this as adoption into God's family (*Gal. 4:5–7*). Jesus was pronounced Son of God at His baptism, and we participate in His Sonship through adoption at baptism. Adoption does not suggest that we are less than children; on the contrary, "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (*Rom. 8:16*).

**How should our lives in this new humanity differ from how they were in the old one? What tangible differences can you find? What does your answer tell you about yourself?**

## Making All Things New: A New Humanity

The ultimate goal of Christ's work of salvation is to make all things new, thus permanently undoing the damage caused by sin. This hope for the "new" was announced by the prophets of the Old Testament, particularly by Isaiah, who talked about the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (*Isa. 65:17*). The Old Testament concept of newness is developed more fully in the New Testament, now from the perspective of the work of redemption through Jesus. Consequently, the "new" is not only what we anticipate through our hope in Christ but also what we are already experiencing now, as Christians. For instance, we have already entered into a new covenant with Christ (*Mark 14:24*); we are already walking in *newness* of life (*Rom. 6:4*). The new is here because Christ initiated it through the power of His death and resurrection.

The work of redemption is essentially one of re-creation, one so radical that it will result in a new heaven and a new earth. Yet, this work of re-creation does not begin with the new literal heaven and earth, or even with the re-creation of our old physical bodies. It begins with the creation of a new humanity. We must remember that the problem of sin is primarily and directly related to the fall of humans. The resolution of the problem begins with the eradication of its controlling power in the human heart. This has been possible through the work of Christ for us. This new humanity was initiated by Christ, in whom the divine and the human were permanently united. The new humanity is, therefore, the participation of humans in the humanity inaugurated by Christ.

This new humanity is not an invisible abstract phenomenon that lacks a concrete expression in history. It expresses itself in the church as the body of Christ. This new humanity is determined not by ethnic or social differences but only by the power of Christ to make us one in Him. Paul states that through Christ God brought together into the church Jews and Gentiles, and that it is His purpose "to create in [Christ] himself one new man out of the two" (*Eph. 2:15, NIV*). This new "man" or humanity is created in Christ in the sense that it participates in the unity with God made possible through Christ.

**Read Galatians 6:15, Ephesians 4:24, and Colossians 3:10. What do these verses mean to you? How have you experienced the promises in them? What can you do to help see these promises brought to fruition in your own life?**

## Union With Christ

**How** does Paul describe the incorporation of humans into Christ?

*Rom. 6:3–6, 2 Cor. 5:17.*

No one is automatically in Christ apart from a personal faith commitment to Him. Our incorporation by faith into Christ expresses itself in baptism. The importance of this rite is vast.

First, it is a public declaration that the death of Christ was our death and that through His resurrection we are part of a new creation, a new humanity. Second, we did not die “in Christ,” but we were “baptized into his death.” Through baptism we joined Him in His sacrificial death, thus establishing a permanent relationship with Him. Third, the phrase “baptized into Christ” is interpreted by Paul to mean that we died “with Christ” (*Rom. 6:3, 8, NIV*) and that we were made alive “with Christ” (*Col. 2:13, NIV*). This is participatory language, indicating that our death to sin and our new life take place only and exclusively in union with Christ and never apart from Him.

In other words, the full benefits of Christ’s death are appropriated by us *only* when we by faith join Him in His death and resurrection. *Dying* with Him means recognizing Him as our Savior. To recognize Him as Savior means that we see in Him the Son of God dying on the cross for our sins and rebellion and that we experience repentance, baptism, and the forgiveness of sin (*Acts 2:38*). True conversion requires more than recognizing and accepting biblical truth. It calls for an acknowledgment of our true condition as sinners in order to help us realize that, separated from Christ, we are destined to a life of total slavery to sin and death and that our desperate condition can be radically changed only by coming to Jesus. This happens as we are united to Christ’s death.

Finally, our incorporation in the *resurrection* of Christ means that He has become our only Lord. Our participation in the power of His resurrection indicates that sin no longer rules over us. Paul asked, “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (*Rom. 6:2, NIV*). For him it is inconceivable that Christians will be controlled by the power of sin. Yet, he is aware of the fact that sin, though dethroned in our lives, is still attempting to rule over us again. Hence he writes, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires” (*Rom. 6:12, NIV*). This is possible through the power of the Holy Spirit received at our baptism. Our participation by faith in His death and resurrection are inseparable and testify to the fact that we belong to Him (*Gal. 3:27, 29; Col. 2:12*).

## “In Christ”

**From** the following texts, how do we understand the phrase “in Christ”? *Rom. 16:7, Gal. 3:28, Eph. 1:1, Col. 1:28, 1 Thess. 4:16.*

The expression “in Christ” is used by Paul in a variety of ways. In some instances Paul uses “in Christ” to refer to something that God does in Christ. For instance, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (*2 Cor. 5:19, NIV*). Here the phrase conveys two main ideas; namely, that Christ is God’s exclusive instrument of reconciliation and that reconciliation is located in the person and work of Christ. The implication is that we can enjoy it only in union with Him. In fact, all the benefits of salvation found in the sacrifice of Christ are available to us only in Him. These include grace (*Eph. 1:2*), the gift of eternal life (*Rom. 6:23*), God’s call to a holy life (*Phil. 3:14*), election (*Eph. 1:4*), redemption (*Col. 1:14*), justification (*Gal. 2:17*), forgiveness (*Eph. 4:32*), and sanctification (*1 Cor. 1:2*). In Him we were created for good works (*Eph. 2:10*), we have access to God (*Eph. 3:12*), we are now seated in heavenly places (*Eph. 2:6*), we have an inheritance (*Eph. 1:10, 11*), we are triumphant (*2 Cor. 2:14*), we can do all things (*Phil. 4:13*), we are rooted and built up (*Col. 2:7*). All of these and much more are ours only in union with Christ.

The phrase is also used to indicate that everything the Christian does is done in union with Him: We rejoice in Him (*Phil. 3:1*), boast and glory in Him (*Rom. 15:17*), stand firm in Him (*Phil. 4:1*), are strong in Him (*Eph. 6:10*), and do works of faith in Him (*Gal. 5:6*).

The phrase “in Christ” also addresses one of the most damaging effects of sin. Sin decentralized and disoriented us, placing us under the controlling influence of evil. Christ is now our original center of existence and orients everything that we are and do. That center is now located outside us, in Christ, and it is in Him that we come to know ourselves and the glorious destiny prepared for us. Everything we do is to be determined by our union with Him, not by selfish concerns.

**Go back and look over all those things that we have been given in Christ and then ask yourself, Am I availing myself of all that we have been promised through Christ? If not, why not?**

## In Christ: The Spirit and the Church

**Study** Romans 8:9, read the following comments, and then try to explain in your own words the meaning of the passage.

There is a very close connection between the Spirit and Christ. Several ideas in Romans 8:9 deserve some attention. First, there is a contrast between being in the flesh and being in the Spirit. Believers are not in the flesh; that is, they are not controlled by their fallen nature, not in a state of rebellion against God and unable to submit to the divine will (*vss. 6–8*). They are, rather, in the Spirit; that is, they are spiritually alive (*vs. 10*) and have become children of God (*vs. 14*), and sin does not rule over them. The passage describes two incompatible ways of life: One belongs to the old creature and the other to the new creation, the new humanity in Christ.

Second, being in the Spirit means that one belongs to Christ. This indicates that to be in union with Christ is synonymous with being in the Spirit. The Spirit and Christ are not being equated, but it is suggested that Christ relates to believers through the Spirit. Union with Him is union with the Spirit. The gifts that are ours in Christ are also said to be in the Spirit. For instance, we are justified and sanctified by the Spirit (*1 Cor. 6:11*), we have “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (*Rom. 14:17, NIV*), and we have fellowship in both the Spirit and Christ (*1 Cor. 1:9, Phil. 2:1*).

It’s also crucial to remember that union with Christ through baptism cannot be separated from union to the body of Christ, the church. To be baptized into Christ is at the same time to be “baptized by one Spirit into one body”—namely, the church (*1 Cor. 12:13, NIV*). The image of the church as the body of Christ designates the unity and the interdependence of believers with one another and with Christ. Such union is reflected or manifested in a life lived in Christ/in the Spirit. The members of the church often are identified as those who are “in Christ,” indicating that sometimes the phrase simply means “to be a Christian” in the sense of living a life totally determined by what Christ has done for them.

**Look at your life in the past 24 hours. What practical evidence exists that you are living “in Christ”? How is your union with Christ reflected in the way you relate to other church members who are also part of the body of Christ?**

**Further Study:** “Christ gave to humanity an existence out of Himself. To bring humanity into Christ, to bring the fallen race into oneness with divinity, is the work of redemption. Christ took human nature that men might be one with Him as He is one with the Father, that God may love man as He loves His only-begotten Son, that men may be partakers of the divine nature, and be complete in Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 251.

Are you in Christ? Not if you do not acknowledge yourselves erring, helpless, condemned sinners. Not if you are exalting and glorifying self. If there is any good in you, it is wholly attributable to the mercy of a compassionate Saviour. Your birth, your reputation, your wealth, your talents, your virtues, your piety, your philanthropy, or anything else in you or connected with you, will not form a bond of union between your soul and Christ. Your connection with the church . . . will be of no avail unless you believe in Christ. It is not enough to believe about Him; you must believe in Him. You must rely wholly upon His saving grace.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 48, 49.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 At the present time the new and the old creations coexist in us. How do you, day by day, experience the reality of these two creations? Which one comes most naturally and easily to the surface, and why?
- 2 Scripture promises a new heaven and a new earth; that is, all that’s here is going to be swept away, gone forever. How should the awareness of the temporality of all things help us set priorities in our lives?
- 3 Describe in practical terms what it means for you to be “in Christ.” How does that experience impinge on the way you relate to God and to others?
- 4 How should the image of the church as the body of Christ impact the quality of the life of the church? What is it that keeps the members together as one body in Christ? *Col. 3:14*. How can you better contribute to the unity of the church in its message and mission?

**Summary:** Adam, through his sin, initiated a humanity separated from God. Christ came in union with God, overcame the enemy, died for our sins, and instituted a new humanity, one in union with God free from the enslaving powers of sin and death. We are by nature part of the old humanity but become members of the new through faith in Him. Thus, we begin a new life in union with Jesus and His church.

# Power of Forgiveness

by MEENAL THIRUPDUVANAM

I grew up in a traditional Indian home and was married when I was 15. We had three children when my husband decided to leave India and work abroad. He said he could earn more money in a month than he could earn in India in a year, so I agreed. But he stayed away for 12 years and never once sent us money. I struggled to feed the children. Then I learned that my husband was wasting his money on gambling, drinking, and lavish living.

I visited every temple in the area asking the gods to send my husband home, but nothing worked. My mind wasn't at peace as I watched my children suffer for lack of food. They attended school and worked hard, but still we lacked money.

I moved to a larger town where wages were higher, for the children's tuition had increased, and they needed school supplies and books. After years of struggle, my children completed their education and married. At last life became a little easier.

Then I learned that my husband had returned to India and was living in my former town. People there knew where we were, but he did not look for me. I went to his home and offered him money to return home and unite with the family once more. He came to live in my home, but he drank heavily and worked little.

Some lay people held evangelistic meetings near my home, and I went. I was impressed by the message I heard and by the love I saw in the eyes of the young couple who led the meetings.

My husband did not want me to attend the meetings and even hid my Bible from me. This irritated me, but I was learning to be patient and calm with him in spite of his criticism.

I started attending the Adventist church, but I wanted to wait to be baptized until my husband was ready. He told me he might become an Adventist someday, but I should not wait. So I was baptized.



I know my husband watches my life and sees the difference Jesus makes. He stopped drinking and chewing betel nut, and sometimes he attends church with me. My neighbors tell me that since I have become a Christian I am more loving and kind than I was before.

I thank God for giving me a new heart, a heart that can love my husband and share my faith with others. And I thank the believers who give their mission offerings every week so that people like me can hear the message of God's love.

MEENAL THIRUPDUVANAM lives near Madurai, India.



# Atonement *and* Universal Harmony



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Dan. 8:13, 14; 1 Cor. 4:5; 15:51–54; Heb. 9:23; Rev. 20:1–4, 11–15; 22:3–6.*

**Memory Text:** “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away’” (*Revelation 21:3, 4, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** To look at how God will consummate our salvation in Christ and restore harmony to the universe.

Christ's work of salvation in our behalf will reach its ultimate goal when the earth will be fully reintegrated into the loving harmony and safety of the universal kingdom of God. The Lord is, even now, transforming sinners into saints who will one day populate this kingdom. His redemptive plan includes the transformation of society and nature through an act of re-creation that will also bring the cosmic conflict to an end. The Lord alone will establish that ideal society, one ruled by the love and justice of a God who sent His Son to die for sinful creatures, and He did it all in order to make it possible for these sinful creatures to be part of His universal and eternal kingdom one day. This process, before being fulfilled, will include the ultimate eradication of all evil.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 27.*

## Universal Cleansing

The restoration of God's creation to its original condition, once free from sin and uncleanness, was represented in the Day of Atonement ritual. On that day the high priest came closer to the presence of God than on any other day of the year. The daily cleansing of the people that day reached its consummation and therefore pointed to the time when the whole universe will be free from sin.

**How** does Daniel describe the final triumph of God over the forces of evil? *Dan. 8:13, 14.*

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Daniel uses Day of Atonement symbolism to describe the consummation of God's redemptive work in Christ. The heavenly temple is where God has been—through the mediation of Christ—dealing with the sin problem. This work of mediation will come to an end through the final cosmic cleansing from sin and rebellious sinners—a process that began at the end of the 2,300 “days.” This cleansing is associated with God's end-time judgment. In Daniel 7 this work of judgment takes place before His angelic host (*Dan. 7:9, 10, 22*) in the context of a court of law, showing that their final destruction has a legal foundation.

**How** does the high-priestly work of mediation and judgment in the Old Testament find its fulfillment in Christ's mediation? *Heb. 9:23.*

The cleansing power of the sacrifice of Christ has also a future expression, represented in the cleansing ritual performed by the Levitical high priest during the Day of Atonement in the earthly sanctuary. In fact, Christ's work of mediation reaches its climax in the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, which is His work of judgment. By referring to the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, Hebrews points back to the cleansing effectiveness of the sacrifice of Christ while pointing forward to its ultimate completion in the experience of His faithful people at the Second Coming (*Heb. 9:28*). This cleansing also looks forward to the establishment of the kingdom of God (*Heb. 12:28*), when all the enemies of Christ, who have already been defeated (*Heb. 2:14*), will “be made his footstool” (*Heb. 10:13, NIV*). This cleansing will result in an executive judgment “that will consume the enemies of God” (*vs. 27, NIV*), an act that will be the final cleansing of the universe from the presence of sin and evil.

## Vindication of God's People

**Read** 1 Corinthians 15:51–54 and Hebrews 9:27, 28. What is being described here, and what hope does it offer us?

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The realization of our ultimate hope in Christ consists, first, in the radical transformation of human nature (*1 Cor. 15:53*), when we go from our corrupted and disfigured self to our true self, one no longer distorted and perverted by sin. We will be rid, too, of our wretched mortality.

Second, the realization of our hope at the Second Coming will consist in our being removed from the presence of evil in all its forms. This will lead to a new mode of existence, one permanently detached from the sphere of sin. Removed from the sinful social conditions that predominate all societies and cultures, we will be restored to the conditions originally created by God for the human race.

Third, the realization of the Christian hope at the return of Christ will consist of a permanent, unhindered, and visible access to our Savior. Believers look forward to a time when they will exist in the immediate presence of the Savior, never to be separated again (*1 Thess. 4:17*). This permanent union with our Lord and Redeemer will enrich the quality of human life in dimensions that we cannot even begin to anticipate now.

Finally, the consummation of the Adventist hope at the Second Coming will also consist of a harmonious social interaction. That will be a moment of reunion, a reencounter. The separation from loved ones occasioned by the power of death comes to an end through the re-creative power of the Savior (*1 Cor. 15:54–57*). The individual hope merges here with the collective hope of those who, throughout the ages, died in Christ while embracing the promises of God. This is the consummation of our reconciliation and will not be threatened by the presence of sin.

**Why are all of the promises described above so important to us? What would our faith be without them? Why must our hope be “other-worldly”; that is, beyond anything that this present world offers, no matter how much good we seek to do here and now?**

## Judging the Evil Powers and the Wicked

**When** and how will God deal with the phenomenon of sin in His rebellious creatures? *1 Cor. 4:5, 6:3, Rev. 20:1-4.*

The resolution of the sin problem takes place in stages because of the complexity of the problem of sin and God's interest in revealing to the universe His justice. First of all, in the Bible the millennium is an indispensable event that will lead to a cosmic revelation of God's justice, and it will result in the full reconciliation of all the things on earth and in heaven (*Col. 1:20*).

The millennium indicates that at the Second Coming the cosmos is not yet ready for the annihilation of unrepentant sinners, of Satan, and of his fallen angels. The extinction of a fragment of God's intelligent creation must take place at the appropriate moment, when it will result in the healing of the universe and the restoration of perfect harmony. Otherwise, the result could be a fragmentation deeper than the one that Satan first caused. The millennium provides the needed time to create universal support for God's solution to the great controversy.

Second, the millennium is a time of cosmic reflection and analysis. Time will be spent, by both the redeemed and Satan, reviewing the results of the great controversy. Satan and his angels, imprisoned on a desolated planet, will have plenty of time to think about what they have done. Together Satan and his angels will reflect on the results of their rebellion against the loving government of God. This introspection will contribute to the reconciliation of the universe.

Third, the reflection in heaven takes place in the setting of the judgment of the wicked (*1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Rev. 20:4*). The redeemed ones will join the heavenly court and will participate in the examination of the lives of those who persisted in their rebellion against God. They will reign with Christ for one thousand years, in the sense that they will participate with Him in His judicial capacity. They can witness in the throne room of the universe the fact that God did all He could do to save repentant sinners and that the lost should now assume responsibility for their decisions. In short, we will all be convinced of the rightness of God's final actions toward the lost.

**What does it tell us about the character of God given that He will have this whole process unfold before the final destruction of the lost? How can you take this knowledge of God's character and apply it to your life today, in that you can learn to trust Him in all things, no matter how bad they are now?**

## Cosmic Reconciliation

**How** does the Bible describe the final resolution of the problem of sin in the universe? *Rev. 20:11–15, 22:3–6.*

Biblical hope embraces the universe, and it anticipates the moment when the reconciliation obtained through the blood of the Lamb will reach universal dimensions. This will happen at the end of the millennium, when the wicked are restored to life and Satan prepares to fight against God and His people in a last-ditch effort to gain the supremacy he's always wanted. But it will be precisely after the millennium, when all the questions have been answered to the satisfaction of the redeemed, that the enemies of God will be confronted with the record of their sin and rebellion. At this time the conclusion reached by the heavenly family during their reflections in the millennial kingdom will coincide with the conclusion reached by the forces of evil on earth. There, before the throne of God, God's justice and love will be publicly acknowledged by all the parties involved, including Satan, his angels, and the lost, who will publicly and voluntarily recognize that they were fighting for the wrong cause. They all will confess the righteousness of God, acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, and accept the divine sentence pronounced against them by the righteous One (*Phil. 2:9–11*), thus admitting that they deserve to die. This is the verdict reached by the people of God during the millennial judgment. The whole universe is finally in perfect agreement: The forces of evil must be eradicated. At that time the universe will be cleansed from any doubts there may have been concerning the justice and love of God, and every intelligent creature will be united in praising God's love and justice.

The evidence against the lost will be so overwhelming that even "Satan sees that his voluntary rebellion has unfitted him for heaven. He has trained his powers to war against God; the purity, peace, and harmony of heaven would be to him supreme torture. His accusations against the mercy and justice of God are now silenced. The reproach which he has endeavored to cast upon Jehovah rests wholly upon himself. And now Satan bows down and confesses the justice of his sentence. . . . With all the facts of the great controversy in view, the whole universe, both loyal and rebellious, with one accord declare: 'Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints.'"—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 670, 671.

**Read 1 Corinthians 4:5. How can you learn to trust the promise found there?**

## The Triumph of God's Love

However much we anticipate our new existence, we for now, knowing only a world of sin and death, find it hard to imagine what one without those things would be like.

**Read** 1 Corinthians 13:9–13. What is Paul saying to us here?

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“To dwell forever in this home of the blest, to bear in soul, body, and spirit, not the dark traces of sin and the curse, but the perfect likeness of our Creator, and through ceaseless ages to advance in wisdom, in knowledge and holiness, ever exploring new fields of thought, ever finding new wonders and new glories, ever increasing in capacity to know and to enjoy and to love, and knowing that there is still beyond us joy and love, and wisdom infinite—such is the object to which the Christian hope is pointing.”—Ellen G. White, *Healthful Living*, p. 299. We eagerly wait for the moment when “every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 677.

Such hope only can imagine the human race ranging “from world to world” and employing much of their time “in searching out the mysteries of redemption. And throughout the whole stretch of eternity, this subject will be continually opening to their minds.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 990. Nothing will bring more joy to the redeemed ones than exploring the mystery of their salvation, the significance of the cross of Christ. The glorious subject of the atonement will keep on challenging our deepest intellectual and spiritual capacities throughout eternity as we attempt to gain a more complete understanding of the love of God revealed on the cross.

**How much time do you spend dwelling on the Cross? What useless thing could you do without, using that time instead to contemplate what we have been given in Jesus through the Cross?**

**Further Study:** “Shall we not then exalt the cross of Christ? The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden, the paradise of bliss. All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God. The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Our only hope is perfect trust in the blood of Him who can save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. The death of Christ on the cross of Calvary is our only hope in this world, and it will be our theme in the world to come. Oh, we do not comprehend the value of the atonement! If we did, we would talk more about it. The gift of God in his beloved Son was the expression of an incomprehensible love. It was the utmost that God could do to preserve the honor of his law, and still save the transgressor.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, December 30, 1889.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell on the implications of Ellen White’s words that even the angels are not secure except by looking at the Cross. What does that mean? What should that tell us about how central the Cross should be to our daily lives and walk with the Lord now?
- ❷ Though our ultimate hope is other-worldly, how should this hope impact how we live here; that is, in how we seek to better live for others here?
- ❸ Think about what God offers us. How foolish, how incredibly short-sighted, to squander that hope on anything that this life offers us. How can you learn to wean yourself away from the things of this world that could jeopardize your hope of a new life in God’s eternal kingdom?

**Summary:** The Day of Atonement pointed to the consummation of Christ’s work of salvation. It will result in the cleansing of the universe from sin and evil. That consummation begins with the vindication of the people of God and their removal from the presence of sin and Satan. The cosmic impact of the problem of sin will be dealt with through the millennial judgment and will result in the extermination of the forces of evil. After that, there will be a permanent union with God and the heavenly family, all made possible only through the atoning death of Christ. God’s love will be triumphant.

## Tricked Into the Truth

by AUGUSTINA APPIAGYEI

Growing up in Ghana, I attended church with my family. Then my father said, “Augustina, I want you to attend the Adventist church.”

I knew that Adventists had helped our community during a famine, and I had met some Adventists who had visited our house, but I had never attended their church. However, my father asked me to go, so I started worshipping with Adventists on Saturday. I did not know it at the time, but my stepmother had wanted me to stay home from church on Sunday to clean the house and prepare dinner for the family after church. My father wanted me in church, so he suggested the Adventist church.

I was welcomed warmly at the Adventist church, and I liked the way the people studied the Bible. The only thing I didn’t understand was the Sabbath. If the Sabbath was still a binding commandment, then I wanted to obey.

My parents wanted me to work after church on Sabbaths, but as I realized that the Sabbath was truly God’s binding appointment with His people, I finished my work on Friday before sundown and stayed at church all day on Sabbath. My parents didn’t understand why I suddenly wanted to spend the entire day in church.

I didn’t mind preparing my family’s meals on Sunday, for it was no longer a special day to me. And I hoped that as they saw my willingness to work for them, they would allow me to keep the Sabbath in peace. The arrangement worked well most of the time.

I continued cooking and cleaning for my family until I was married a few years later to a fine Adventist man. Sadly, my husband died, leaving me with four young children. But my faith is strong, and I have the love and support of my church family to see me through. Church members are even paying the school fees for my two eldest children.



My parents tricked me into attending the Adventist church, but God turned the trick into a blessing. For in this church I found more than a message of truth; I found a family to love.

Your mission offerings help bring people to the feet of Jesus. Thank you for your generosity.

AUGUSTINA APPIAGYEI (left) lives in Kumasi, Ghana.



A great deal of discussion and debate have centered around the prophetic gift and inspiration throughout church history and within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. How were prophets inspired? How do inspiration and revelation work? How much, if any, of culture and personal views appear in the writings of the prophets? In our study this quarter, we will attempt to examine some of these questions.

While examining inspiration and revelation, we will also be reminded of our Lord Jesus Christ's great sacrifice on the cross to justify us before Him. This is the very nature of the God we serve and seek to reveal in this Bible study guide

## Lesson 1—Heaven's Means of Communication

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: In the Beginning (*Gen. 3:8*)

Monday: In Nature (*Ps. 19:1-6, 33:6-9*)

TUESDAY: Through Prophets (*1 Sam. 23:2, Jer. 1:5, Hos. 4:1*)

WEDNESDAY: Through the Word (*Matt. 1:22, 2:15, 17; 4:14*)

THURSDAY: Through Christ (*John 1:9*)

**Memory Text**—*Hebrews 1:1, 2*

**Sabbath Gem:** God reveals His power and purpose through nature, conscience, Scripture, and the prophets. However, the most powerful way He chose to reveal Himself was through His son Jesus.

## Lesson 2—The Prophetic Gift

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Patriarch and Prophet (*Gen. 20:7*)

Monday: The Prophet of the Exodus (*Deut. 34:10*)

TUESDAY: Prophets in Israel (*Deut. 18:15*)

WEDNESDAY: Prophetesses in Israel (*Exod. 15:20, 21; Judg. 4:4-10*)

THURSDAY: New Testament Prophets (*Luke 1:67; John 1:6, 7*)

**Memory Text**—*Numbers 12:6*

**Sabbath Gem:** Throughout the centuries, the Lord has been able to use prophets in a special way because of their personal relationship with Him.

**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.