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In addition to being the principal contributor to this quarter's Sabbath School lessons, Pastor Bumgardner has written for *Celebration* magazine.

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Pastor Bumgardner is married to William Bumgardner and is the mother of Michael.

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In life the anticipation of an event often exceeds the reality we experience when the event itself occurs. We wait, hope, and plan for the coming event. When the time arrives, we are sometimes disappointed because the actuality falls short of our expectation.

God's people had long looked for the coming Messiah. Prophets spoke of His coming, and the longer they had to wait, the more distorted was their concept of the Messiah's mission. No amount of anticipation or planning adequately prepared God's people for the reality of the event. The incarnation of God in human flesh far exceeded in significance anything for which most people had hoped.

The simple, yet profound, words of Matthew are inadequate to express fully the meaning of Jesus' first advent. "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means 'God with us'" (Matt. 1:23, NIV). "God with us." What could this possibly mean?

To a people burdened with foreign oppression, it meant a mighty king who would free them from the yoke of bondage. To those afflicted with disease, it pointed toward healing and health. To the religious leaders, it meant a Messiah who would fulfill their political ambitions.

How different, and yet how much more significant, the coming of the Messiah proved to be! The King was born in a stable, and He later stated, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Those looking for physical healing often found in Him relief from their burden of sin. As the political expectations of the religious elite were dashed, they found themselves plotting the destruction of the One who declared Himself to be "God with us."

How different are we today? Are we still looking for a God who will fulfill our expectations? Are we anticipating the blessings God will bring without understanding the true nature of dedication to the Jesus we claim to serve?

The promise of "God with us" is just as certain today as it was in the days of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men. When Jesus left this earth, He promised, "I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20, NIV).

How important for us to gain a clearer understanding of Jesus' mission, to study the prophetic timetable of His coming, and to catch a glimpse of the wonder that filled the lives of those who were present at His first advent. Then we can come away from this quarter's study with our faith renewed and filled with awe at the lovingkindness and compassion of God, who left heaven to live with humans and to redeem us from the penalty and burden of sin.

The Time for Grace



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Rom. 3:9-18; 5:15-21; Heb. 4:14-16; John 1:14-17.

MEMORY TEXT: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: Considering all the New Testament instances of the term *grace*, we can define it as God’s infinite love for lost humanity and all that His love leads Him to do for our salvation.

GRACE INCARNATE. Throughout this world’s history, God’s grace has been evident. He has consistently rescued from sin those who have committed their lives to Him. God’s grace is not only His earnest *desire* to save lost humanity but also His *saving power* manifested in loving conviction for all and actual deliverance for those who believe.

The greatest revelation of God’s grace was in the coming of Jesus to this world. Through Him, we have a clear and undeniable testimony of God’s love for sinners. The sinless, perfect One died on the cross for sinners. During His life on earth, He demonstrated God’s grace in His attitude toward sinners. He healed them physically and restored them spiritually. God’s infinite love put on flesh and blood in the person of Jesus Christ—the incarnation of grace. As you study this quarter’s lessons, look for evidence of Christ’s love and forgiveness—His grace—in the daily events of your life.

WHAT IS GRACE? (2 Cor. 8:9).

What do the following texts reveal about the source and purpose of divine grace?

2 Cor. 8:9 _____

Titus 2:11 _____

Acts 20:32 _____

God's grace "is His unlimited, all-inclusive, transforming love toward sinful men and women."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 504.

"We ourselves owe everything to God's free grace. Grace in the covenant ordained our adoption. Grace in the Saviour effected our redemption, our regeneration, and our exaltation to heirship with Christ."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 250.

List four or five characteristics of God's grace revealed by the father in the story of the prodigal son. Luke 15:11-32.

The father showed constant vigilance toward the son who was lost. His acceptance of the returning son was not based upon the son's worthiness or merit but upon his own unconditional love. The father welcomed him, not as a servant, but as a son with all the benefits of sonship.

Even though the older son remained at home, he did not understand his father's character. But the father extended his grace to him by explaining that true service is a loving response to the love that has been offered.

How did you feel about God when you first recognized His grace toward you?

WHY WE NEED GRACE (Rom. 3:9-18).

Describe the condition of all people. Rom. 3:9-18.

When we remember that righteousness is the condition for entrance into God's kingdom (Matt. 25:46), it is obvious that apart from Christ none would enter. God's grace is most evident in His supplying humanity's lack.

How did God reveal His grace toward humanity? Rom. 5:8, 15-21.

In these verses, Paul contrasts the effect of Adam's offense and the effect of God's grace as shown through Jesus Christ. Whereas the sin of one led to condemnation and death for all, so the grace of God abounds for all and brings justification and life for "those who receive" (Rom. 5:17, RSV).

"Christ did not die to appease His Father or to induce Him to love us. It was divine love that conceived the plan of atonement and salvation in the beginning, and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have all worked together in perfect harmony to effect it (see John 3:16; 10:30; 14:16, 26; 15:26; 17:11, 22, 23; Rom. 3:24 . . .)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 527.

How can we reconcile such love with God's wrath? God's wrath is against sin and against those who identify themselves with it. If an individual chooses to remain in sin, separated from God, that person will experience God's wrath against sin. But through His grace, in Jesus Christ, God extends the gift of salvation to all.

Jesus' interaction with the woman caught in adultery teaches us a great deal about God's grace toward sinners. (See John 8:1-11.) "In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world had for this erring woman only contempt and scorn; but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. The Sinless One pitied the weakness of the sinner, and reaches to her a helping hand."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 462.

How does this story give you hope? What does the manner in which Jesus treats you, a sinner, indicate how you should treat others?

JESUS—GOD'S REVELATION OF GRACE (John 1:14-18).

"When the fullness of the time had come, the Deity was glorified by pouring upon the world a flood of healing grace that was never to be obstructed or withdrawn till the plan of salvation should be fulfilled."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 37.

How does John describe the role of Jesus in revealing God's grace? John 1:14-18.

God's people had lost sight of His gracious character. Jesus Christ came so humanity might regain an understanding of God's grace toward sinners. And this grace He manifested toward us. There is no end to our need of God's grace and no end to His supply.

Jesus revealed God's grace throughout His life and ministry on earth. But the greatest revelation of grace was His death upon the cross (Rom. 5:8). On the cross Jesus demonstrated the deadly nature of sin. And in addition, He showed us the vastness of His love. Instead of leaving us under the penalty of death, Jesus took that penalty upon Himself. He bore our sin with its guilt and penalty of death—eternal separation from the Father.

Tell in your own words what Jesus says is the greatest demonstration of love toward another. John 15:12, 13.

Even this demonstration does not equal Jesus' sacrifice. He gave His life for us before we became His friends, "while we were yet sinners" (Rom. 5:8). In John 15, He reminds us that we can share God's grace with others through our willingness to show sacrificial love.

"Sometimes we live as if we were sent into the world to compete with one another, or to dispute with one another, or even to quarrel with one another. But the Christian is to live in such a way that he shows what is meant by loving his fellow men. It is here [John 15:12, 13] that Jesus makes another of his great claims. . . . Many a man tells men to love each other, when his whole life is a demonstration that that is the last thing he does himself. Jesus gave men a commandment which he had himself first fulfilled."—William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), vol. 2, p. 177.

In what ways can you share the grace of God with others through sacrificial love?

THE RESULTS OF GRACE (Eph. 2:4-7).

Realizing our sinfulness prepares us to understand God's grace because we recognize that there is nothing we can do to merit His favor. God takes the initiative in every aspect of salvation, and we respond in faith. The incarnation of Jesus provides evidence of the lengths to which God is willing to go in order to save us. The provisions He made did not end with His forgiveness of sin. He gives us new life and a new future.

How does Paul describe our position in Christ? Eph. 2:4-7.

When we accept by faith God's provisions for our salvation, we are "in Christ" and share His holiness (1 Peter 1:1, 2). "We are crucified with Him, we die with Him, we rise with Him, we live with Him, we reign with Him, we are joint heirs with Him, we suffer with Him, we share His glory."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1007.

What privilege do we have in times of need? Heb. 4:14-16.

Because of Christ we can approach God with confidence. "We come boldly, not because God is indebted to us, but because God freely offers His grace to all who seek it."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 426.

Christ "can laugh and weep with us about life's foibles and pain because He has been through it all, yet without falling before any of it. Because we know that such a Priest and Prince is on the throne of grace disbursing favor far beyond what we deserve, we can approach without fear or cowering, walking erect and receiving whatever resources we need to live life victoriously, overcoming every obstacle."—Louis H. Evans, Jr., *The Communicator's Commentary: Hebrews* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), p. 105.

Describe how the conversion of the apostle Paul shows God's grace in action. Acts 9:1-19; 1 Cor. 15:8-10.

How would you describe the practical effects of God's grace operating in your life?

When have you reached out to God with boldness in time of need? How did you experience His grace during that time? Did His grace change your circumstances, or did it change you?

OUR RESPONSE TO GRACE (Eph. 2:8-10).

God takes the initiative in offering salvation. But He does not force any of us to accept its provisions. For His salvation to be ours, we must reach out in faith and accept the benefits of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and heavenly mediation.

Summarize the relationship of our faith to God's grace in salvation. Eph. 2:8-10.

"If you believe the promise—believe that you are forgiven and cleansed—God supplies the fact."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 51. The practical result is conformity to God's will (Rom. 8:1-4).

The story of the healing of the centurion's servant demonstrates the nature of saving faith. Read Matthew 8:5-13. This centurion is remarkable for at least two reasons: (1) Evidently he was well aware of a Jewish law mandating that no Jew could enter a Gentile's house (verse 8); all such houses were regarded as "unclean." Yet he knew enough about Jesus to believe He could help him. (2) The centurion's concern for his servant was uncommon, considering that slaves had no rights and were usually treated as mere possessions.

The centurion's "heart had been touched by the grace of Christ. He saw his own unworthiness; yet he feared not to ask help. . . . His faith took hold upon Christ in His true character. He did not believe in Him merely as a worker of miracles, but as the friend and Saviour of mankind."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 317.

Christ's offer of salvation is based upon His grace, not upon our worthiness. When we respond in faith, the gift is ours.

How will those who have experienced the grace of God in their lives respond to others? 1 Peter 4:8-10.

Charles Spurgeon once stated, "I have heard our Lord compared to a man carrying a waterpot. As he bore it upon his shoulder, the water, yielding to the movement of his body, fell dropping and spilling about so that one could easily track the water-bearer. So should all of God's people be carrying such a fullness of grace that everyone knows where they have been by the tracks they leave behind."

How has God transformed you into a channel for His grace?

FURTHER STUDY: Read Matthew 26:31-35; 69-75; John 21:15-19. How does Peter's experience illustrate the experience described in this week's memory verse?

Read "Transformed by Grace" in *The Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 55, pp. 557-567. How did the changes in John's life come about? How does God want to work in your life to bring about your transformation?

"Put away the suspicion that God's promises are not meant for you. They are for every repentant transgressor. Strength and grace have been provided through Christ to be brought by ministering angels to every believing soul. None are so sinful that they cannot find strength, purity, and righteousness in Jesus, who died for them. He is waiting to strip them of their garments stained and polluted with sin, and to put upon them the white robes of righteousness; He bids them live and not die."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 52, 53.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Do you agree with the following statements about God's grace? Why or why not? How would you improve each statement?

1. God's grace is available to anyone who desires it.
2. I need God's grace only when I first accept Jesus as my Saviour.
3. If God's grace is at work in my life, my friends and family will see positive changes in me.
4. God is gracious toward me because of my need.

SUMMARY: "Grace is a great word in the Bible. . . . It is most simply defined in these words—it is favour shown to people who do not deserve any favour at all. And the message of the gospel is that any one of us is saved and put right for eternity, solely and entirely by the grace of God, not by ourselves."—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Cross* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1986), p. 74.

We do not deserve God's grace, nor can we repay Him for the gift. He bestows His grace by pardoning and cleansing all who are willing. And no matter how desperate our condition, God's grace is always greater (Rom. 5:20). Thanks be to God for the gift of Jesus Christ, the incarnation of grace.



I Know He Cares for Me, Part 1

Indrani Ariyaratnam

Mother should have been happy. She had five healthy children, including little Baby Shamim. But sometimes Noreen noticed tears on her mother's face. "What is the matter?" she wondered. But her mother kept her fears and her questions to herself.

Then one day Mother gathered the children to her and said quietly, "I must go to my parents. Be good children. I love you." With that Mother left their little home. The children waited and longed for Mother's return, but Mother did not come back. When little Shamim cried inconsolably, Noreen rocked her and whispered, "I love you, *Kaaki* [little sister]."

As Shamim grew Noreen was like a mother to her. But one day while on her way to school, Shamim was stuck by a taxi. The car ran over her leg. When Shamim awoke in great pain, Noreen stood beside her. "Lie still, Shamim. Your leg is broken. But it will soon heal and you will be fine."

When Shamim's leg swelled badly, She tried not to cry, for she did not want to disappoint Noreen. Then one day, just as her leg was healing, a hammer fell from a shelf and hit the same bone that had been broken. Shamim's screams brought Noreen rushing to her side. She found her little sister holding her swollen leg! *Poor child*, Noreen thought as she tended her sister. *If only Mother were here. She would know what to do.*

Shamim was badly injured and required surgery. She was thankful to the doctors and nurses who cared for her, but even seven surgeries could not correct the problem. Shamim could not walk. Tears threatened to break through her brave exterior.

"Don't cry little Shamim," Noreen comforted. There is a God who cares for you. He loves you even more than I love you. Surely He will care for you."

Shamim's eyes grew wide. She had never heard her sister talk like that. "Noreen, who told you about a God who cares for us?"

"I heard a pastor in the hospital tell someone that Jesus loves and cares for little children."

Shamim thought for a minute. "So there is a God who loves me. Then I need not worry, for He will care for me." Comforted, Shamim prepared herself for still another surgery on her leg.

(continued next week)

Indrani Ariyaratnam is women's-ministries director in the Pakistan Union.

A Messiah Is Promised (Part I)



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Peter 1:10-12; Isa. 9:2-7; 11:1-5; 40:3-5; 42:1-4.

MEMORY TEXT: "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care" (1 Peter 1:10, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: When the time had come for the Messiah to arrive, Isaiah's prophecies confirmed that Jesus was the fulfillment of the sinner's hope.

THE GRACE THAT WAS TO COME UNTO YOU. It is easy to make predictions about the future, but more difficult to be accurate in every detail. When studying the prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah, we notice many detailed predictions. And as we study the next two lessons, we will discover how each prediction was fulfilled. Realizing how Jesus' birth, life, and death fulfilled these predictions strengthens our confidence in the accuracy of God's Word.

The prophecies of Isaiah reveal a Messiah who would meet our need for salvation from sin. And what a salvation it is! "Even angels long to look into these things" (1 Peter 1:12, NIV). "*The angels have great acquaintance with God, yet apparently they discern the greatest revelation of him here. . . . The angels have wonderful faculties of insight, yet there is more here than they can fathom.* Such is the fulness of the gospel that they are still far from comprehending it."—*The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 22, p. 48.

In viewing the life of Jesus, it becomes evident that He fulfilled the hope that the Messiah would come. Have you allowed yourself to be touched by His grace?

PROPHECIES REVEAL CHRIST (1 Peter 1:10-12).

As early as God's promise to Adam and Eve, humanity has looked forward to the Saviour. God said: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel" (Gen. 3:15, NASB). This prophecy pointed forward to the One who would break the power of Satan. As time passed, through His prophets, God continued to provide messages of hope in the coming Redeemer.

What do the following texts reveal about the purpose of these prophecies?

1 Peter 1:10-12 _____

Luke 24:25-27, 44, 45 _____

Even though the prophets did not fully understand the messages they conveyed, they did know God's promise that the coming Messiah would deal with sin and Satan.

The prophets' messages were to bring assurance that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. By comparing His life with the prophecies concerning the Messiah's birth, death, and mission, we can know that these prophecies reached their fulfillment in Jesus.

What should be our focus as we study the Scriptures? John 5:39, 40.

Jesus' warning to the Jews of His day is important for us also. If we are looking only for doctrine or prophetic timetables, we will miss the central message of the Bible. We must see Jesus.

The eyes of faith. "It was ancient Jewish thought that a knowledge of the law would itself assure a man of eternal life. Thus Hillel, a rabbi of the 1st century B.C., is reported to have declared: 'One who has acquired unto himself words of Torah, has acquired for himself the life of the world to come' . . . Had the Jews searched the Scriptures with eyes of faith, they would have been prepared to recognize the Messiah when He stood among them."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 955.

Be honest with yourself as you complete the following sentence: "I study the Bible so I can . . ."

THE PROMISED CHILD (Isa. 9:2-7).

A need for light. When Isaiah wrote the words of Isaiah 9:1-7, the armies of Assyria dominated the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, two of Israel's northernmost tribes. It was a time "full of dimness" and affliction. Certainly the people desired light in the midst of their darkness (Isa. 9:2). Before the first coming of Christ, spiritual darkness covered the earth. People desperately needed the Messianic message of light and hope. Isaiah's prophecy of the coming Christ child provided the assurance that God would reverse the misfortunes of His people.

Summarize the benefits the Messiah would bring to His people.
Isa. 9:2-5.

How frightening it is to be in darkness with no hope of light. And yet God promised that light would come in the midst of the darkness experienced by the people.

How do the following texts show the fulfillment of this prophecy in the life of Jesus?

John 1:4-9 _____

John 8:12 _____

John 9:5 _____

The coming Messiah would fill many roles. (See Isa. 9:6, 7.) He would be a ruler. Yet the characteristics of His rule would be of a spiritual nature. He would exhibit the compassion of a counselor and all the attributes of the mighty God. He also would replace Adam as the new, eternal Father of the human race. And He would bring peace resulting from the breaking of the penalty and power of sin. The Messiah's kingdom would outlast all earthly kingdoms (Dan. 2:44). It would be full of justice and righteousness and would bring hope and eternal blessing to believers. Only the life and ministry of Jesus fulfilled all these promises.

How has Jesus brought "light" out of the "darkness" in your life?

A WORK OF PREPARATION (Isa. 40:3-5).

Isaiah declares that before the “glory of the Lord” (Isa. 40:5, NIV) is revealed, a work of preparation is to be done. “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness” (Isa. 40:3) is to precede the coming of the Messiah.

Describe the type of work to be done by the one who was preparing the way. Isa. 40:3-5.

The writers of the Gospels identify this “voice” from the wilderness as that of John the Baptist. (See Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:2-4; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23.)

Preparing for the king. “When an Oriental monarch intended to visit parts of his realm he would dispatch messengers to each district to be visited, announcing his anticipated visit and summoning the inhabitants to prepare for his arrival. The local inhabitants of each district were expected to ‘prepare’ the highway over which he would travel, inasmuch as little was ordinarily done to maintain roads.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 296.

How did the work of John provide spiritual preparation for the ministry of Jesus? Luke 1:76-79; 3:3-18.

“Every mountain and hill made low” (Luke 3:5, NIV). “The work here described is an apt illustration of the transformation of character that accompanies genuine conversion. The high places of human pride and power were to be cast down.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 717.

“John was to go forth as Jehovah’s messenger, to bring to men the light of God. He must give a new direction to their thoughts. He must impress them with the holiness of God’s requirements, and their need of His perfect righteousness.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 100.

God never leaves His people without a message of preparation for His coming. Just as God called John the Baptist to prepare the people for the first advent of Jesus, so God calls us to prepare the world for the second coming of Jesus. Our responsibility is to share with others the joy of salvation and the power of God to forgive and cleanse the life from sin.

What similarities do you see between the message of John the Baptist and the distinctive end-time message of Seventh-day Adventists? List ways you can involve yourself in preparing others for the second coming of Jesus.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MESSIAH (Isa. 11:1-5).

What did God promise would come from the “stump of Jesse”? Isa. 11:1, NIV.

When it appeared that all that was left of the seed of Jesse was a stump or root, God promised to bring forth a new shoot that would bring life and vitality to God’s plans.

How do the following texts contribute to our understanding that this “branch” is Jesus?

Jer. 23:5, 6 _____

Rev. 5:5; 22:16 _____

Acts 13:22, 23 _____

Isaiah 11:2-5 provides us with a beautiful picture of the nature and character of the mission of the Messiah. The Spirit of the Lord would rest upon Him (Isa. 11:2). This was fulfilled in the life of Jesus at His baptism. (See Matt. 3:16, 17; Acts 10:38.)

We witness Jesus’ wisdom, understanding, counsel, and knowledge as He interacted with people. He often pointed to the importance of His dependence upon His father, His “fear of the Lord.” And unlike other religious leaders of His day, He did not base His judgment of people upon outward appearances but upon their hearts and motives.

With righteousness as His standard, He fairly judged all, bringing life and salvation to those who accept His righteousness and predicting judgment and death for those who trust in their own righteousness.

“The judges were corrupt, taking advantage of the poor and the unfortunate, and the rich were grinding down widows and orphans (Isa. 1:23; 10:1, 2; Jer. 5:28; Amos 2:6; 4:1; 5:10, 11; 8:4-6; Zech. 7:10). The spirit of the promised Messiah was in striking contrast with the spirit of the times. Justice, equity, mercy, and a sympathetic consideration for the needs of the poor and downtrodden are the principles constantly set forth as characterizing the ideal king.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 158.

Which character quality listed in Isaiah 11:2-5 is the most meaningful for you, and why?

THE MISSION OF THE MESSIAH (Isa. 42:1).

List several things the following texts reveal about Jesus' mission.
Isa. 42:1-7, 14-16, 21.

Jesus' compassion. Prominent in Jesus' mission is His compassion and tenderness toward those bruised and damaged by sin. Matthew applies these verses to Jesus (Matt. 12:15-21) immediately after relating that Jesus healed the man with a withered hand and many others who followed Him. Then Matthew describes Jesus' healing the blind man who could not speak and who was possessed by a demon.

Many stories in the Gospels reveal Jesus' compassion toward those whose lives were damaged and hopeless. "Messiah will minister tenderly to the weak, the bruised, and the oppressed. He is a friend to the humble, contrite sinner—to every man who finds himself in need. Men who appear to themselves and to others almost beyond hope will find in Him the comfort, strength, and courage they so much need."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 256.

Explain how Jesus' life and death established "justice on earth" (Isa. 42:4, NIV). Justice vindicates and establishes what is right.

Part of God's plan was for Jesus to restore "the just law of the universe to this earth."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 256. And He did so by magnifying the law and making it honorable (Isa. 42:21; Matt. 5:17). "Christ magnified the 'law' . . . both by precept and by example, proving it to be wise and just. . . . In His Sermon on the Mount, Christ magnified the law by applying its principles [Matt. 22:37-40; Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18] to the motives of the heart as well as to the outward acts."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 257.

God's law is a transcript of His character. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 52.) The principles of His law are based on love (Matt. 22:37-40) because His character is love. But Satan had so misrepresented God's character that it was necessary for Jesus to reveal anew what God and His law are all about. (See Exod. 20:5, 6; 34:6, 7; Jonah 4:2; Micah 7:18; John 1:18; 14:8, 9.) This He did as He ministered compassion and forgiveness to the bruised reeds and smoldering wicks of human society (Luke 4:18).

How has Jesus' compassion touched your life? How does His compassion help you to view others?

FURTHER STUDY: What parallels do you see between John's preparation for the first advent of Jesus and the preparation needed by those awaiting His second advent? Read "The Voice in the Wilderness" in *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 10, pp. 97-108. Also read Psalm 34:12-14; Matthew 25:1-13; 26:41; 28:19, 20; Mark 13:33.

"He [Christ] will not be like the teachers of His day. The ostentation and show and parade of piety revealed in the priests and Pharisees is not His way. [Isa. 42:3, 4 quoted.] Christ saw the work of the priests and rulers. The very ones who needed help, the afflicted, the distressed, were treated with words of censure and rebuke, and He forebore to speak any word that would break the feeble reed. The dimly burning wick of faith and hope, He would encourage, and not quench. He would feed His flock like a shepherd; He would gather the lambs with His arms, and carry them in His bosom."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1146.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. **What promises of the Bible have special meaning for you?**
Share with your class one or two promises that have given you comfort or assurance.
2. **The prophecies of the first advent of Jesus were largely misunderstood by the people of that day. Is it possible for those looking for the second advent of Jesus to misunderstand the prophecies given about that event? Why or why not?**
3. **What other prophecies of the first advent of Jesus do we find in the book of Isaiah? How were these fulfilled in the life of Jesus?**

SUMMARY: How thankful we can be that God does not leave His people without a message of hope for the future. The prophecies of the Messiah in the book of Isaiah pointed forward with hope to the coming Saviour. The Promised One was to rule with compassion, bringing light in the midst of the world's darkness and providing a way of salvation for lost humanity. The fulfillment of these predictions in the life of Jesus gives us hope that the unfulfilled prophecies concerning His second advent will also come to pass.

We can live our lives on this earth with eager anticipation of the fulfillment of God's Word.



I Know He Cares for Me, Part 2

Indrani Ariyaratnam

Young Shamim awoke slowly. The ache in her leg reminded her that she had just undergone her eighth operation on her leg, which had been injured in an accident. Would this surgery allow her to walk again?

Shamim remembered something her sister Noreen had told her just before her surgery. Jesus loves and cares for little children. The thought comforted the young girl now as she lay still, waiting for nurses to attend to her.

Soon Shamim was able to go home, but she still could not walk. "Never mind," she comforted herself. "God cares for me."

Shamim's father yearned for his youngest child. She had a bright mind and was eager to learn. How could he help her? One day Father came to Shamim's bedside, smiling broadly. "I have found a school where children with physical problems can study and learn. And perhaps the teachers can even teach you to walk!"

Shamim's eyes danced with delight. "Teach me to walk?" When Father left her alone, Shamim turned her face to the wall. She wanted to talk this over with the God whom Noreen had told her about. "God, will You really help me to walk?" she pleaded.

Shamim studied eagerly. Her brother had helped her to keep up with her studies while she was confined to bed. Staff members exercised her legs, and soon Shamim took her first steps. After three years she could walk again!

Then one day Shamim noticed that her leg had begun to swell again. "Oh, no!" she thought. "Please, God. Don't let my leg get bad again! I know You love me. Please take care of me."

She was determined to complete her education, even when she had to withdraw from the school because of her leg. "I must not give up," she determined. With her brother and sister's help, she studied at home and received high marks on her exams.

Shamim was grateful that while many parents do not value education for girls, who traditionally care for a home and family, her family supported and helped her toward her dream of becoming a teacher. She studied typing and primary education, and soon had certificates in both, but could not find a job. Employers liked her, and her credentials were excellent, but her handicap made it easier for them to hire someone else instead. "Never mind," Shamim thought to herself. "God cares for me."

(continued next week)

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A Messiah Is Promised (Part II)



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 1:18-2:23; 26:47-27:66.

MEMORY TEXT: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet" (Matthew 1:22, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: God's prophets revealed details about the life of Jesus, beginning with His birth and continuing with His life, death, and resurrection. The New Testament records the fulfillment of these prophecies and thus assures us that God is worthy of our trust.

PROPHETIC MESSAGE FULFILLED. Zinzendorf asked Wesley: "Do you think it was self-denial for the Lord Jesus to come down from heaven to rescue a world? Was it self-denial?" "No," came the answer, "it was love—love that swallows up everything, and first of all self."

At the appointed time all was ready for that love to touch the earth—an event toward which the Old Testament pointed, the coming of the Messiah. The Godhead planned it before the creation of the world (1 Peter 1:19, 20). God's promise shone through Adam and Eve's despair (Gen. 3:15) and sparkled in the night skies for Abraham (Gen. 22:17, 18). God's promise was marked in blood upon the doorposts of the Hebrew slaves, assuring freedom from the bondage of toil and sin (Exod. 12:1-13).

Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah were but a few of the prophets who foretold the Messiah's coming. We can turn the pages of the New Testament and find these prophecies fulfilled. Because these predictions came to pass, we can be confident that God's promises for us will be fulfilled.

THE BIRTH OF THE MESSIAH (Isa. 7:14).

The Old Testament gives us a detailed picture of our Saviour's ministry on earth. The primary application of some of the prophecies is to the time in which the prophet wrote. But the New Testament application to Jesus shows that God intended them to have an expanded meaning. (For a discussion of prophecies with dual applications, see *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, pp. 1017-1019.)

Who would be the Saviour's mother, and where would He be born? Isa. 7:14 (compare Matt. 1:22, 23); Micah 5:2 (compare Matt. 2:1).

The Hebrew word for "virgin" is also translated "a young woman." In Genesis 24:43 the word refers to "a woman about to be married." (See also Prov. 30:19.) Through divine inspiration, Matthew understood the woman mentioned in Isaiah 7:14 to be a type of the virgin Mary.

The name *Immanuel* (Isa. 7:14) means "God with us" and was meant to help Ahaz understand that God could rescue him from his enemies. Jesus was the fulfillment of this prophecy, for he was "God with us" in the fullest sense (Isa. 9:6, 7).

What do the following texts reveal about the lineage of the Messiah? Gen. 12:1-3; 17:17-19; 2 Sam. 7:12-16 (compare Matt. 1:1-17).

Matthew knew how important it was to trace Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham. "Because the coming of Messiah is a matter of prophecy, he [Matthew] shows that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the One to whom Moses and the prophets bore witness. Inasmuch as Messiah was to be the seed of Abraham (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16), the father of the Jewish nation, and of David, founder of the royal line (Isa. 9:6, 7; 11:1; Acts 2:29, 30), Matthew presents evidence that Jesus qualifies as a descendant of these two illustrious men."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 276. (To study the differences between Matthew's and Luke's genealogies, see *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 721, 722.)

Look for verses in this week's Scripture passages that tell how these additional prophecies about the birth of Jesus were fulfilled. Jer. 31:15; Hosea 11:1.

JESUS' MINISTRY (Mal. 3:1; 4:5, 6).

A number of Old Testament prophecies announced Jesus' ministry. Malachi joins Isaiah in telling about the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah. Malachi also predicts the Messiah's cleansing ministry.

Summarize the identity and work of the one who would come before the Messiah. Mal. 3:1; 4:5, 6.

The messenger. Malachi prophesied of the "messenger" who would prepare the way for the coming Messiah. He went on to identify him as Elijah the prophet. Taking this literally, many Jews were looking for a return of Elijah himself. "However, this is a prophecy of someone who was to come in 'the spirit and power' of Elijah (Luke 1:17), that is, who would preach a message similar to that of Elijah."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1134.

When the angel announced to Zacharias the birth of John the Baptist, he used Malachi's words to state his mission. And in referring to this prophecy, Jesus clearly identified John the Baptist as the one expected (Luke 7:24-28).

According to the psalmist, what is one of the methods the Messiah would use to communicate His message? Ps. 78:2, 3; Matt. 13:34, 35.

"Jesus desired to awaken inquiry. He sought to arouse the careless, and impress truth upon the heart. Parable teaching was popular, and commanded the respect and attention, not only of the Jews, but of the people of other nations. No more effective method of instruction could He have employed. If His hearers had desired a knowledge of divine things, they might have understood His words; for He was always willing to explain them to the honest inquirer."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 20, 21.

In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses spoke of yet another work the Messiah would perform—the work of the prophet, speaking to the people for God. Such work includes giving messages of warning, counsel, and hope. In his sermon recorded in Acts 3, Peter applied this prophecy to Jesus' role as God's spokesperson (verses 22, 23).

How has God called you to speak for Him this week? How can you use the Old Testament prophecies to convince people that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-awaited Messiah?

THE FINAL DAYS (Zech. 9:9).

Old Testament prophets reveal details about the close of Jesus' life. How does the prophet Zechariah describe the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem? Zech. 9:9 (compare Matt. 21:1-5).

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, shouts of praise greeted Him. As the people spread the branches before Him, they fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy. When the Pharisees tried to rebuke the people, Jesus reminded the leaders that if they would not praise Him, "the stones would immediately cry out!" (Luke 19:40). For had not Zechariah prophesied that there would be shouts of rejoicing?

In just a few short days the praises would turn to shouts of "Crucify him" (Luke 23:21). The Messiah, who was the foundation of the Israelite system of worship, was rejected. This, too, the psalmist prophesied: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone" (Ps. 118:22, NIV).

Psalm 41:9 and 55:12-14 indicate who would betray the Messiah. The betrayer would not be a stranger but one of His close friends. Judas, who had spent more than three years in close companionship with Jesus, betrayed Him for 30 pieces of silver (Matt. 26:14, 15). Zechariah even foretold the amount of money Judas would receive for the act and the final use to be made of it. (See Zech. 11:12, 13 and Matt. 27:3-10.)

How were the following texts fulfilled during the final days of Jesus?

Zech. 13:7 _____

Ps. 35:11; 27:12 _____

Ps. 38:13, 14 _____

Is your confidence in the Bible based on these fulfilled prophecies? What else gives you confidence in God's Word?

"When God's written word was given through the Hebrew prophets, Satan studied with diligence the messages concerning the Messiah. . . . These prophecies caused Satan to fear and tremble."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 686.

THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST (Mark 15:1-41).

As we review the events of the crucifixion, we discover that the prophets of the Old Testament foretold them.

Compare the New Testament fulfillments with the Old Testament predictions listed below.

Old Testament Predictions	New Testament Fulfillments
Isa. 50:6—The Messiah would be beaten and spat upon.	Matt. 27:26, 30
Ps. 109:4, 24, 25—The Messiah would be accused. Weakened by fasting, He would be an object of scorn.	Matt. 26:60-66; John 19:17; Luke 23:26
Isa. 53:12—The Messiah would suffer with transgressors.	Mark 15:27
Zech. 12:10—The Messiah would be “pierced.”	John 19:18, 34, 37
Ps. 69:9, 21—The Messiah would be insulted and given vinegar to drink.	Mark 15:29, 30; John 19:28, 29
Ps. 34:20—The Messiah’s bones would not be broken.	John 19:33
Isa. 53:9—The Messiah would be buried in a rich man’s tomb.	Matt. 27:57-60

The predictions of modern psychics fail to come true. Yet the prophets who wrote about the crucifixion of Christ did so centuries before it occurred. The fact that all their predictions came to pass gives us confidence in the inspiration of the Bible.

Today, many people base their plans upon their horoscope or the advice of a clairvoyant. To Christians, this is sinful nonsense. Yet to what extent do you trust God’s sure Word? What can you do when you find yourself questioning God’s plans for your life? How does Romans 10:17 help you?

THE RESURRECTED CHRIST (Isa. 53:9-12).

Summarize what Isaiah says about the Messiah's burial place. Isa. 53:9. How was this prophecy fulfilled? Matt. 27:57-60.

"With the wicked." "The righteous Servant . . . was given the burial of a sinner, not of a saint. Having given up His life for transgressors, He was placed with them in death."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 291.

How do the following texts describe the promise of the resurrection of the Messiah and of those who trust in Him? Ps. 16:10; 49:15.

"He shall receive me." "Better, 'He shall receive me for Himself.' In this short clause, all the more powerful because of its brevity, is a suggestion of the doctrine of a future life and the resurrection from the dead. . . . In Gen. 5:24 another form of the same verb describes the translation of Enoch (see 2 Kings 2:10)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 750.

Jesus was crucified on Friday, and the following Sunday morning, when the women went to the tomb to anoint His body with spices, they found that He had already risen (Mark 16:6, 7). His body had not experienced the decay of death, just as foretold by the psalmist (Ps. 16:10; compare Acts 2:24-28). In his sermon in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, Paul preached about the resurrection of Jesus and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Acts 13:34-38).

Psalm 68:18 and 110:1 describe Jesus' ascension and reinstatement in heaven. After His resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of His Father. His work on earth in providing a sacrifice for the sins of humanity was completed. A period of heavenly ministry would precede His second advent.

When Jesus ascended, He promised that the Holy Spirit would give spiritual gifts to His people (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). He assured us that His ministry in heaven would continue until His promised second coming (John 14:1-3). Each of these promises, and many more, we accept by faith—faith that is strengthened by fulfilled prophecy.

How does the following text apply to your life? "Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:19-21, NASB).

FURTHER STUDY: Read Psalm 22, sometimes called "The Psalm of the Cross." Make a list of the verses that contain events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus.

Read "The Coming of a Deliverer" in *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 58, pp. 681-702, and "Thessalonica" in *The Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 22, pp. 221-230.

"The Saviour of prophecy was to come, not as a temporal king, to deliver the Jewish nation from earthly oppressors, but as a man among men, to live a life of poverty and humility, and at last to be despised, rejected, and slain. The Saviour foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures was to offer Himself as a sacrifice in behalf of the fallen race, thus fulfilling every requirement of the broken law. In Him the sacrificial types were to meet their antitype, and His death on the cross was to lend significance to the entire Jewish economy."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 227, 228.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does fulfilled prophecy contribute to your confidence in the Bible as God's inspired Word?
2. What other Bible prophecies have strengthened your faith in God's Word?
3. How can you use this week's lesson to help you witness to others regarding the inspiration of the Bible?

SUMMARY: God inspired the Old Testament prophets to write of the coming Messiah's life and ministry on this earth. Their expectations were fulfilled just as prophesied. For the Jews living in the time of Jesus, this could have provided the evidence they needed to recognize Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. But many chose to close their eyes to the evidence and reject the Messiah.

The prophecies assure us that Jesus is the Messiah and that we can trust God's Word in every detail. As we await the fulfillment of the prophecies of Jesus' second advent, we do so with the confidence that all God's promises are certain.



I Know He Cares for Me, Part 3

Indrani Ariyaratnam

Shamim was disappointed as she left the job interview. "Noreen," she confided in her sister as she hobbled toward the street. "I thought if I worked hard enough and did well enough, I could be independent, but now no one will let me work."

Noreen did not know what to say. What would happen to her younger sister? She drew Shamim close to her. "God cares for you. He has plans for you." Shamim closed her eyes tight against the tears that threatened to fall. "Yes," she whispered to God. "*I believe You care for me. Please help me.*"

One day her brother, Stephen, came home with news. "Shamim, I heard of a job you might be able to do." Shamim listened intently as her brother explained the work of taking marketing surveys. "You will have to walk," he said. "Are you strong enough?"

"Yes!" she nearly shouted. "I will do it!" Shamim would not allow even one doubt to creep into her mind. She would make her crippled legs walk so that she could earn her own way!

Shamim joined the marketing group and worked hard, in spite of discomfort and swelling in her leg. But she wondered, "Is this all life holds for me? What will happen when this job ends?"

One afternoon while Shamim visited with her friend Martha, a young man came to the door. "I am Yousaf," he said to Martha. "I sell health magazines and books that I would like to show you." He noticed Shamim sitting in the corner, listening intently. As Yousaf showed Martha the books, Shamim thought, *I can do this kind of work! I can sell books and magazines!* Shamim excused herself and left Martha and Yousaf to talk about the books.

Some time later Shamim met Yousaf at another friend's home. Shamim wanted to talk about Yousaf's work. But Yousaf wanted to know more about Shamim.

"Yousaf likes you, Shamim," whispered her friend. "He is a convert from Islam. His family has disowned him, and he has no one." Butterflies danced inside Shamim's stomach. Could it be that God was sending her someone special to care for her?

"Please, God," Shamim whispered. "You have taken care of me all these years. Please do not stop now!"

(continued next week)

Indrani Ariyaratnam is women's-ministries director in the Pakistan Union.

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Inside Story

The Time Is Right



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Gal. 4:4, 5; Daniel 9.

MEMORY TEXT: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:4, 5).

KEY THOUGHT: The coming of Christ to earth is the greatest event in history. God did not leave us without information concerning the time of Christ's appearance. A study of Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 9 gives us confidence that Jesus began His ministry when the time was right.

THE FULLNESS OF TIME. A man was working on what was at the time the world's largest earthen-filled dam. He was atop a 130-foot surge tank when a crane struck him in the back with a cable, plunging him toward the concrete below. But halfway to his death a fellow worker, wearing a safety belt, reached out and grabbed the plummeting man by the neck as he passed by, thus saving his life.

When studying the life of Jesus, we are reminded that He appeared at just the right time. Jesus Himself said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). What did He mean by the words "The time is fulfilled"?

There are many Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. In the book of Daniel we find an explicit time prophecy regarding the start of His public ministry. When we understand this prophecy, it gives us added confidence that "truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54).

THE TIME IS HERE (Mark 1:14, 15).

The world needed Jesus. The time was right to clarify the misconceptions humanity had about God's character. Even His own people had lost sight of the Messiah's mission. The time had arrived for God to intervene and restore knowledge concerning His salvation.

What does Jesus declare to be the purpose of His coming? Mark 1:14, 15.

Jesus knew it was necessary for people to understand that the prophets foretold His mission. "Thus the gospel message, as given by the Saviour Himself, was based on the prophecies. The 'time' which He declared to be fulfilled was the period made known by the angel Gabriel to Daniel."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 233.

Summarize in your words why it was necessary for Jesus to come. What was humanity's greatest need? Gal. 4:4, 5.

Satan's lies held humanity captive. People everywhere had come to believe that God was a tyrant. Believing they could save themselves by their own works, they worshiped the creation, not the Creator. They needed to know that the Messiah would free them from the burden of trying to save themselves by keeping the law in their own strength. They needed to understand that Jesus could free them from sin and its penalty, thus enabling them to be adopted into God's family as His children.

The time was now. "Like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God's purposes know no haste and no delay."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 32. Daniel's prophecy, rightly understood, pointed God's people to the time when the Messiah would come. And if they had been observant, they would have known that the time was present.

"When the world was destitute of the knowledge of God, Jesus came to impart this inestimable blessing—a knowledge of the paternal character of our heavenly Father. This was His own gift to our world; and this gift He committed to His disciples, to be communicated by them to the world."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 193. Because it is His gift to the world, it is His gift to you. Think of specific ways you can increase your knowledge of God's character and how you can share that knowledge with others.

DANIEL'S PRAYER FOR GRACE (Dan. 9:1-19).

Daniel 9 opens with Daniel's need to understand God's plan for the chosen people. The 70 years of Israel's exile were nearing an end, and Daniel expected they would soon return to the Promised Land. But could it be that the prophecy of chapter 8, which predicted further desolation of the sanctuary, meant additional captivity?

"Although the Lord had promised deliverance to His people at the time appointed, Daniel knew of the conditional nature of many of God's promises (see Jer. 18:7-10). He may have feared that the impenitence of his people might postpone the fulfillment of the promise."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 849.

How did Daniel approach God through prayer? Dan. 9:3.

We can talk to God as a friend at any time, in any place. But Daniel did not treat his communication with God lightly. The nature of his preparation "is a judgment on our tendency to approach God easily and carelessly. . . . Prayer has its disciplines, and the more serious our need the more agonizing must be our prayer."—*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6, p. 485.

As you read Daniel 9:4-19, jot down words Daniel used to describe God's character and the nature of the people.

God's Character**The Nature of the People**

"Great and dreadful God" (Dan. 9:4). The Hebrew word translated "dreadful" means "awe-inspiring" or "revered." (See Neh. 1:5; 9:32; Ps. 111:9.) Daniel's basis for trust was God's attributes, all of which inspire awe in the believer. Surely God will do what is right toward His people. On the other hand, the people had no basis upon which to ask for God's favor. Yet Daniel boldly asked for God's continued favor toward His people, not because of their righteousness, "but for thy great mercies" (Dan. 9:18). This is the key to all our requests to God. All that we have in Christ is not because of our own goodness or because we deserve any of these blessings but because of God's goodness and grace toward us.

When have you experienced God's goodness in spite of your own attitude of disobedience or unfaithfulness?

GOD'S RESPONSE (Dan. 9:19-23).

What does Daniel ask God to do for His people? Dan. 9:19.

Daniel's concern for the people. "Concluding that Israel's transgression as a nation was responsible for what he evidently took to be an extension of the 70 years . . . Daniel interceded most earnestly with God for forgiveness, for the return of the captive exiles, and for the restoration of the now desolate sanctuary in Jerusalem."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 850.

How did God respond to Daniel's intercession on behalf of Israel? Dan. 9:20-23.

God did not want Daniel to fear that He was extending the captivity of His people. Thus He sent Gabriel with the answers Daniel needed. While Daniel was speaking, God answered His questions about the supposed delay in His promise to restore His people. While God does not always respond to prayer in the exact manner we would wish, He always answers when and as He knows is best.

Summarize the following texts concerning God's willingness to hear and answer your prayers.

Isa. 58:9 _____

Ps. 32:6 _____

Isa. 65:24 _____

"Before they call." "In their sin and distress the Israelites had called upon God. . . . But God had plainly told them that it was because of their sins that He could not hear their prayers. . . . Now, with hearts renewed by divine grace, sending up petitions according to the will of God, there would be no delay in response."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 334.

Has God sometimes answered your prayer "while you were yet speaking"? How did this make you feel about God's willingness to answer prayer?

THE PROPHETIC TIMETABLE (Dan. 9:25).

Gabriel pointed to a prophetic time period of 70 weeks. Using the principle of a day in prophecy representing an actual year (see Ezek. 4:6 and Num. 14:34), this would represent a period of 490 years.

What event marked the beginning point of this prophecy? Dan. 9:25.

The command of King Artaxerxes I to "restore and to build Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:25) is recorded in Ezra 7:11-26. It was the third and final decree that gave the exiled Jews the right to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the authority to appoint civil officials. This decree was issued in the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign, the year 457 B.C.

How long a period of time would there be until the coming of "Messiah the Prince"? Dan. 9:25.

A score is twenty, so "threescore and two weeks" added to the "seven weeks" make a total of sixty-nine weeks. With each day representing a year, the total is 483 years. Since the beginning date of the total seventy years was 457 B.C., the sixty-nine years extended to A.D. 27, when the Messiah, or "Anointed One," would appear. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism in the "fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar" (Luke 3:1, 21, NIV). Tiberius reigned from A.D. 14 to 37. Following the nonaccession-year method of reckoning the reign of kings, used in the early Roman Empire, Tiberius' first year was from the death of Augustus to the next New Year's Day, August 19–October 14, A.D. 14. (See *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 245-247.) Hence, Tiberius' fifteenth year was autumn to autumn, A.D. 27/28. Jesus was baptized in the autumn of A.D. 27, the very date foretold by Daniel. The final week of the prophecy would begin in A.D. 27 and end in A.D. 34. (See the chart in *Prophets and Kings*, p. 698.)

Daniel 9:26 establishes that the Messiah would be put to death after 62 weeks, that is, after the 434 years that follow 408 B.C. (compare verse 25; 457 B.C. + 7 weeks, or 49 years = 408 B.C.). In three and one-half years after A.D. 27, the Messiah was crucified, halfway through the final week (verse 27). Following the Messiah's death, Jerusalem and the temple were to be destroyed (verses 26, 27).

THE PROPHETIC MISSION (Dan. 9:24, 27).

The prophecy of Daniel 9 is more than just a timetable of prophetic dates. It is a message replete with the beauty of the mission of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

How did Gabriel describe the purpose of the 490-year prophecy? Dan. 9:24.

While Daniel was concerned about the future of his people, God wanted him to understand that the prophetic message he received was to encompass *all* people. In this verse is a revelation of God's plan to deal with the sins of all humanity and bring in everlasting righteousness through the Messiah's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

"The most Holy." "In view of the fact that the Hebrew phrase cannot elsewhere be shown to refer definitely to a person, and in view of the fact that the heavenly sanctuary is under discussion in the larger aspects of the vision . . . it is reasonable to conclude that Daniel is here speaking of the anointing of the heavenly sanctuary prior to the time of Christ's inauguration as high priest."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 852.

What would occur during the final week of the prophetic period? Dan. 9:27.

This final week of the prophecy would focus on God's covenant people. For the first three and one-half years, Jesus would preach the message of salvation to the Jews. The disciples would continue to preach to them for another three and one-half years. In the midst of the prophetic week, the Messiah would "cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease" (Dan. 9:25). The sacrifices and services of the temple pointed forward to the Messiah's ministry.

"In the spring of A.D. 31, Christ the true sacrifice was offered on Calvary. Then the veil of the temple was rent in twain, showing that the sacredness and significance of the sacrificial service had departed. The time had come for the earthly sacrifice and oblation to cease.

"The one week—seven years—ended in A.D. 34. Then by the stoning of Stephen the Jews finally sealed their rejection of the gospel."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 233.

Write a prayer of praise and gratitude to God for the ministry of Jesus to you as revealed in Daniel 9.

FURTHER STUDY: Read "The Fullness of the Time" in *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 3, pp. 31-38. What conditions on earth contributed to the time's being right for the coming of the Saviour? What changes would have been necessary for the Jews to be ready to receive the Messiah? What will conditions on earth be like when Christ returns? Matt. 24:3-14; Luke 17:22-30; 2 Tim. 3:1-5.

"Christ urged upon His disciples the importance of prophetic study. Referring to the prophecy given to Daniel in regard to their time, He said, 'Whoso readeth, let him understand.' Matt. 24:15. . . .

"As the message of Christ's first advent announced the kingdom of His grace, so the message of His second advent announces the kingdom of His glory. And the second message, like the first, is based on the prophecies. . . .

"The Jews misinterpreted and misapplied the word of God, and they knew not the time of their visitation. . . . Earthly ambitions absorbed them, and the offer of the spiritual kingdom came to them in vain. So today the kingdom of this world absorbs men's thoughts, and they take no note of the rapidly fulfilling prophecies and the tokens of the swift-coming kingdom of God."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 234, 235.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How are the conditions in our world today similar to those at the time of Jesus' first advent? Why does this mean that the fullness of time for the second coming of Jesus is near?
2. What principles of prayer did you learn from Daniel's prayer of intercession for his people?
3. How would you explain the message of the prophecy of Daniel 9 to a non-Christian friend?
4. What changes do you think you will have to make in order to be ready when Christ comes again? Ask for His grace to help you make those changes.

SUMMARY: How full of meaning are the words of Jesus, "The time is fulfilled" (Mark 1:15). After centuries of waiting, the prophetic timetable of Daniel 9 was nearing completion. The mission of grace was at hand as Jesus began His three-and-one-half-year ministry.

The fulfillment of this prophecy gives us assurance that unfulfilled prophecies will be fulfilled. Just as the earthly ministry of Jesus came at the "fullness of time," so His second coming will occur at just the right time.



I Know He Cares for Me, Part 4

Indrani Ariyaratnam

"Noreen, Noreen! Where are you?" Shamim's voice held an excitement her sister had not heard before.

"What is it?" Noreen said as she hurried into the room.

"I must talk to you!" Excitedly Shamim poured out the story of Yousaf, a book salesman whom she had met at a friend's home. He had become a Christian and his family had disowned him. Her eyes sparkled as she told her sister about him. Then she asked, "Do you think this could be God's way of caring for me?"

"Yes, little sister. God is caring for you," Noreen said.

From the Bible, Yousaf shared truths Shamim had not known before. "This is wonderful! I always knew God cared for me, but I never really knew Him." Yousaf invited Shamim to visit the publishing director of the Pakistan Section, with whom Yousaf worked. The two young people began studying the Bible together, and Shamim's eager mind made her an excellent student. As she learned more about the God who had loved and cared for her all her life, she accepted the pastor's invitation to be baptized.

Eager to begin her new Christian walk, Shamim joined the colporteur ministry and began helping Yousaf with his work. As they worked together, they realized God had more in store for them than a life work, and they invited the pastor who baptized Shamim to unite their lives in marriage.

Shamim's heart overflowed with joy to her Saviour and her God. "But I want more, God," she whispered. "I want to teach!"

One evening Pastor D. S. Ariyaratnam, president of the Northern Section of Pakistan, came to Shamim and Yousaf's home. "Shamim, you have talents that you can use for God. We would like to invite you to join our teaching staff at Adventpura Church School. Please pray about it and ask God for His will."

But Shamim did not have to pray. She already knew God wanted her to teach. And with joy in her heart, she answered, "Yes, I will teach. God has taken care of me all my life. I must give Him my best!"

Her heart is filled with joy to God, who stood by her when she was injured, loved her when she was lonely, and gave her more happiness than she knew possible.

Indrani Ariyaratnam is women's-ministries director in the Pakistan Union.

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The Suffering Servant



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Isaiah 53.

MEMORY TEXT: “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: Jesus willingly suffered the penalty for our sin, so that we might receive God's gift of His righteousness, thereby experiencing salvation and healing.

TRUE SERVANTHOOD. Jane Addams (1860-1935), cowinner of the 1931 Nobel peace prize, dedicated her life to serving others. At the age of six she traveled with her father to one of the many pioneer towns in the United States. The squalor in this town was so appalling that she stated, “When I grow up, I want to live . . . near the poor people so I can help them.”—Charles L. Wallis, ed., *A Treasury of Sermon Illustrations* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), p. 60. Thus was planted the seed that would grow into the Hull House ministry of Chicago—a ministry that now supports child care, counseling, and housing services.

Many have served others sacrificially. But none can compare to the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. In this chapter, Isaiah, the gospel prophet, points to the ministry of the Messiah as the remedy for sin.

The New Testament reveals that the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 is Jesus Christ. He is the only One able to save humanity from sin. In His life He demonstrated true servanthood. Through His suffering and death on the cross, He makes eternal life available to all. Isaiah's portrayal of the Messiah gives everyone hope of redemption.

A SAVIOUR IS NEEDED (Isa. 53:4-6).

Although created perfect and in close fellowship with God, Adam and Eve sinned and thereby separated humanity from God. "All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one that does good, not even one" (Ps. 14:3, NIV).

How does Isaiah 53:5, 6 describe the human condition?

Without God's intervention, humanity would be eternally lost. "It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them. . . . There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 18.

Our natural tendency is to deny our own sinfulness. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). We must not evaluate ourselves, but should accept what God declares our condition to be. When we do, we also will see the provisions He has made for our escape from sin.

We cannot trust our own power, resources, and natural abilities to deal with the sinfulness of our nature. "Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 18. We must look outside of self for a solution to the sin problem.

**What is the answer to the dilemma in which we find ourselves?
Isa. 53:4-6; 1 Peter 2:21, 24.**

"The marvelous result of Christ's love for us is that we were once like sheep going astray but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. . . . This is the ultimate example of love, given to us by Jesus Christ. Martin Luther summarized the example of Christ well when he wrote, 'When I consider my crosses, tribulations, and temptations, I shame myself almost to death thinking what are they in comparison to the sufferings of my blessed Savior Christ Jesus.' "—Paul A. Cedar, *The Communicator's Commentary: James, 1, 2 Peter, Jude* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1984), p. 151.

What experience or event in your life has led you to see most clearly your need of a Saviour? How did God use that experience to bring you closer to Jesus?

JESUS, THE SUFFERING ONE (Isa. 53:1-3).

Summarize the reception Jesus would receive when He came as our Saviour. Isa. 53:1-3.

Looking back on the evidence Jesus gave of His identity, it may be difficult for us to understand why His people did not recognize Him as the Messiah. In his Gospel, John applies this prophecy of Isaiah to Jesus when he records that many, even rulers, believed in Jesus but were afraid to acknowledge their belief. "They loved praise from men more than praise from God" (John 12:43, NIV; see also verses 37-42).

The servanthood of Jesus. Jesus came in a role far different from what the Jews expected. They were not looking for one who would serve. But throughout His ministry Jesus revealed His willingness to serve. His act of washing the feet of His disciples at their final meal together showed that no act was beneath Him (John 13:1-17). Then through His death on the cross He displayed His willingness to give up everything for our salvation.

How does Philippians 2:5-8 contribute to our understanding of Jesus' willingness to give up all for us?

"Men were not to be attracted to Christ by a display of supernatural glory, but by the beauty of a righteous life."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 290. In His wisdom, God knew how easily women and men could be attracted to the physical appearance of the Messiah and overlook the spiritual message He came to bring.

All through His life Jesus encountered opposition to His work and message. Even His own disciples did not understand the work He came to do. At His crucifixion how few of His followers were there to provide comfort and encouragement! Most fled in fear for their own lives.

Even Jesus recognized that His life would be full of suffering when He stated to His disciples, "Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?" (Mark 9:12, NIV).

Describe a time when you experienced the feeling of being abandoned by your family or friends. How does this help you understand how Jesus may have felt when His followers deserted Him during His time of suffering? What example for us is provided by Jesus' attitude toward His loved ones who had deserted Him?

JESUS, OUR SUBSTITUTE (Isa. 53:4-12).

How does Isaiah describe the substitutionary nature of Jesus' sacrifice in the following verses?

Isa. 53:4-6 _____

Isa. 53:8 _____

Isa. 53:11, 12 _____

Jesus did not deserve the suffering and death He experienced. It was for our sake that He willingly endured the punishment for sin. And He did so that we might receive His righteousness as a gift from God. Through Jesus, all that was lost because of sin can be restored. Through faith in Him we can share His triumph, along with all those redeemed by His sacrifice.

"Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. 'With His stripes we are healed.' "—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

How does Peter emphasize the substitutionary nature of Jesus' suffering and death? 1 Peter 2:22-24.

Left to ourselves, we would find our condition hopeless. As Isaiah states, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). It is through His death for us that we can be assured of eternal life.

In what ways does the following quotation challenge you? "Through the sacrifice made in our behalf, sins may be perfectly forgiven. Our dependence is not in what man can do; it is in what God can do for man through Christ. When we surrender ourselves wholly to God, and fully believe, the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. . . . We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute."—*Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 32, 33.

THE LAMB OF GOD (Isa. 53:7, 8).

As the Ethiopian eunuch read Isaiah while traveling, the Spirit led Philip to aid him in understanding what he was reading. Acts 8:32, 33 records that the Ethiopian was reading Isaiah 53:7, 8. These verses introduce the imagery of Jesus' exhibiting the qualities of a lamb. New Testament writers use this imagery a number of times.

How do the following texts contribute to our understanding of Jesus, the Lamb of God?

John 1:29, 35, 36 _____

1 Peter 1:18, 19 _____

Rev. 5:5-7 _____

Jesus came to fulfill the role of the lamb without spot or blemish as sacrificed in the services of the sanctuary. Each animal brought for sacrifice was to be pure and unblemished, reminding the sinner that only by the death of the perfect "Lamb of God" could sin be forgiven. Each service pointed forward to the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross for the sins of the world.

List ways Jesus specifically fulfilled the words of Isaiah 53:7. Matt. 26:63; 27:12-14.

During Jesus' trial, witnesses brought testimony to condemn Him. "Patiently Jesus listened to the conflicting testimonies. No word did He utter in self-defense." "Standing behind Pilate, in view of all in the court, Christ heard the abuse; but to all the false charges against Him He answered not a word. . . . He stood silent, but His silence was eloquence. It was as a light shining from the inner to the outer man."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 706, 726.

Jesus knew that the testimony brought against Him was false. Yet He did not rise to His own defense.

How does the title "Lamb of God" help you understand the mission of Jesus?

When confronted by verbal abuse, why is it sometimes wise to remain silent?

THE RESULTS OF HIS SACRIFICE (Isa. 53:5, 10-12).

What are the results of the Messiah's sacrifice? Isa. 53:5, 10-12.

Righteousness offered. It was not in vain that Jesus came to this earth to live and die. The greatest need of human beings is for righteousness. And yet "as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). Were it not for the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, all would be lost. But God foresaw the need and provided Jesus, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). Through this provision God now offers the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ to all.

Describe Jesus' attitude toward the sacrifice He made upon the cross. Isa. 53:11, 12. What is your attitude toward His sacrifice?

"By his knowledge." "The meaning of this phrase is not entirely clear. It seems to refer to Christ's intimate knowledge of the character and will of the Father, which He came to reveal to men (see Isa. 11:2; 50:4; Matt. 11:27; John 1:18; 5:19; 8:28; 10:15; 17:3)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 292.

"What sustained the Son of God in His betrayal and trial? . . . He caught a view of the expanse of eternity and saw the happiness of those who through His humiliation should receive pardon and everlasting life. He was wounded for their transgressions, bruised for their iniquities. The chastisement of their peace was upon Him, and with His stripes they were healed. His ear caught the shout of the redeemed. He heard the ransomed ones singing the song of Moses and the Lamb."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp 43, 44.

Throughout eternity we will worship and praise Jesus for His self-sacrificing love. For suffering shame and humiliation on earth, He will have the place of supreme honor and esteem for eternity. (See Phil. 2:9-11.)

Isaiah 53:5 states, "With his stripes we are healed." In what area of your life do you most need to experience God's healing? What benefits do you have because of Jesus' suffering and death? How is Jesus' healing virtue made available to us in our daily struggle to fulfill His divine purpose for our lives?

FURTHER STUDY: In the book of Revelation, the apostle John often uses the imagery of the lamb when referring to the ministry of Jesus. Using a Bible concordance, locate these passages. How do these passages help you understand the mission of Jesus? Why is the imagery of the lamb appropriate to Jesus' work?

Read "Calvary" in *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 78, pp. 741-757.

Of Isaiah 53, Ellen White wrote, "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, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1147.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How would you explain Jesus' role as our substitute to a non-Christian friend?
2. How does the suffering Jesus endured help you when you experience suffering?
3. Write a letter to God in which you express your response to the realization that Jesus was treated as you deserve so you might be treated as He deserves.

SUMMARY: The picture of Jesus shared by the prophet Isaiah gives reason to praise God for the wonderful plan instituted for our salvation. Jesus, the Lamb of God, died the death we deserve so that we might have His perfect righteousness.

Because of our sin, we deserve death. Through Christ, God gives us life.



God Won! Jodie Bratcher

International Teacher Service sends English teachers around the world. While they are sent to teach English, the difference they make in lives usually occurs outside the classroom.

My family was serving in Magadan, Russia. It was October--winter in Siberia. Workers struggled to get the roof on the new church building before the snows halted work until spring.

One day in English class we sang, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." One student, Alexander, asked "Who is 'He'?" I explained that the song was about God, then continued with class discussion. After class Alexander walked home with me. As we passed the new church building, Alexander asked me whether I believed in God. "Oh, yes," I said. Alexander said he believed in *logic*.

We looked at the church. I pointed out that the snows were unusually late this year, and that I thought it was because people were praying that the roof could be completed before the snows came. Alexander said it was chance that it hadn't snowed.

"I'm going to ask God to hold the snow until the roof is finished to show you He can do it!" I said. Alexander just smiled. Every day as we passed the church on our way home I said, "It hasn't snowed yet." This went on for two weeks.

Then Alexander's mother was hospitalized and scheduled for surgery. I told him we would ask God to heal his mother. He rolled his eyes and said "Yes, I know, just as you asked God to keep the snow away."

"Maybe God is trying to talk to you," I said. We walked home in silence. Each day I prayed for the roof and for Alex's mother. On the fourth day the roof was snowproof, and Alex's mother was released from the hospital without having surgery! That night we walked home from school--in two feet of snow! When we passed the church, I said, "The roof was finished yesterday."

Alex said, "I know. You won."

I said "Oh, no, I didn't win. God did!" Since then Alex has had lots of questions about God and the Bible.



Jodie and Greg Bratcher served with International Teacher Service in Russia and in China. They now live in Michigan, where Jodie is nursing and Greg is studying toward an advanced degree.

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A Compassionate Mission



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Isaiah 61; Luke 4.

MEMORY TEXT: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: Isaiah clearly recognized the mission of the Messiah as one that would bring healing, liberty, and restoration. Early in His mission, Jesus applied Isaiah's message to His own ministry, thus identifying Himself as the Messiah.

HOPE FOR ALL. For those caught in the grasp of sin, the message of liberty and healing is revitalizing. For those weighed down with the burden of hopelessness, the "good tidings" of forgiveness and hope for the future bring renewed vigor. The coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, brings all this and more. Isaiah's message concerning the Messiah's mission is one of the most hopeful in all the Bible. He offers a reversal of the mourning, brokenheartedness, and captivity that are a result of sin.

Jesus extends His compassion to every woman, man, and child and meets every need of our lives. Do we emulate His concern for the suffering? What are our attitudes toward the poor and homeless, toward those sick because of sin, those suffering from diseases resulting from moral impurity, and toward the aged and the handicapped?

THE MESSIAH'S MISSION (Isa. 61:1-3, 10).

Israel looked for the coming of the Messiah with eager anticipation. And Isaiah paints a reassuring picture of the merciful nature of the Messiah's mission.

List the blessings God's people would experience from the ministry of the Messiah. Isa. 61:1-3, 10.

"Anointed me." "At the ceremony of anointing, an individual was set apart for some particular office or mission. Aaron was anointed by Moses to be high priest (Exod. 40:13). . . . Christ was to be anointed by God the Father (Ps. 45:7) through the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38) at the time of His baptism (Mark 1:10; Luke 3:21, 22)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 317.

The imagery of "trees of righteousness" (Isa. 61:3) brings to mind people who are firmly planted in the ways of righteousness, not those who are blown about like chaff. (Compare Psalm 1.) Christ's ministry is to bring firmness of purpose and a new life.

How do the following texts contribute to your understanding of God's work in clothing you "with the robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10)?

Zech. 3:1-5 _____

Luke 15:22 _____

Rev. 19:7, 8 _____

Righteousness available to all. In each of these references, the robe of righteousness is freely given to the sinner. "This robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising. Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 311.

Jesus lived a perfect life so that He might offer His perfect righteousness to us. In exchange, He took our sinful, filthy garments (Isa. 64:6) upon Himself when He died on the cross (Isa. 53:5).

How is Jesus' compassion evident in His giving you His robe of perfect righteousness? Have you accepted His robe?

GOD'S PEOPLE RESPOND (Isa. 61:4-9).

What results are seen in the lives of God's people in response to His goodness toward them? Isa. 61:4-9.

God's gifts of healing, liberty, and freedom result in the hope and dedication of His people. Because of their acceptance by God, they are now ready to fulfill His purposes for them. Even though physical and spiritual ruin lie around them, they are ready for rebuilding. They desire to let God use them as His agents in bringing revival and restoration.

What specific role does God envision for His people? Isa. 61:6.

This promise in Isaiah 61:6 is a repetition of the promise God gave to Israel when He freed them from captivity in Egypt. (See Exod. 19:6.)

How does Peter describe the function of the Christian believer as priest? 1 Peter 2:9.

The wonderful promises God made to ancient Israel could not be fulfilled in detail because of national apostasy. These promises are now the cherished possession of the Christian church. They are fulfilled in part now but in fullness at the second advent of our Lord. (See Rev. 1:5, 6; 21:24.)

"Peculiar" (1 Peter 2:9, KJV). "The expression translated 'peculiar people' reads, literally, 'a people into possession,' meaning 'a people whom God has come into possession of', or 'a people God has acquired for Himself.' . . . Christ has acquired the church and considers it to be in a special sense His own purchased possession."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 562.

God calls those who have experienced His grace to share the good news with those who are still in darkness. Just as in the time of Isaiah, today there are men, women, and children all around us who are unacquainted with the compassionate mission of Jesus to bring them salvation. God's desire is for all Christians to share the story of His grace with those within their sphere of influence.

There is no limit to the gratitude felt by those whom God has rescued from death and brought into newness of life. The praise they give is the natural result of recognizing their inability to free themselves from bondage to sin and of accepting the gift of salvation freely offered to them.

In what ways are you ministering His grace to those in need?

JESUS TEACHES IN GALILEE (Luke 4:14, 15).

Galilee is the land north of Judea and Samaria and includes the city of Jesus' upbringing, Nazareth. It was in this area that Luke began his record of Jesus' public ministry. He states, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (Luke 4:14).

"Galilee was a more favorable field for the Saviour's work than Judea. . . . Wherever Jesus went, 'the common people heard him gladly' (Mark 12:37)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 726.

It was at His baptism that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, and the Father affirmed His identity (Luke 3:21, 22). And "being full of the Holy Ghost" (Luke 4:1), Jesus was empowered to resist the temptations of the devil in the wilderness.

How did the presence of the Holy Spirit prepare Jesus to begin His ministry in Galilee? Acts 10:38.

"The power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14). From the Greek word translated "power" comes the English word *dynamite*. Luke records that the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus resulted from Jesus' prayer (Luke 3:21, 22). If His ministry was to be effective, Jesus knew He needed the Spirit to direct and empower Him.

At the direction of the Spirit, Jesus entered the wilderness where He encountered the evil one and overcame his temptations. Again the Spirit was at work in the life of the Saviour. Through the demanding circumstances of His ministry, the Spirit was actively with Him at all times.

As the Spirit qualified Jesus for His earthly ministry, so He will qualify us for our ministry. (See John 14:16-23.) Only through His power is gospel teaching effective. (See Acts 4:31-34.)

What was the response of those who heard Jesus' Spirit-empowered message? Luke 4:14, 15.

Without serious opposition to His message at this time, Jesus was able to bring the good news of salvation to receptive hearts.

Just as Jesus promised the power of the Spirit to His followers (Acts 1:8), so He promises power for ministry today through the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. When we share the good news of salvation through the power of the Spirit, lives will change, and those hearing the message will experience salvation.

**How do you know the Holy Spirit is working in your life?
How can you be more receptive to the Spirit?**

JESUS PROCLAIMS HIS MISSION (Isa. 61:1, 2; Luke 4:16-21).

One of the cities Jesus visited during His ministry in Galilee was His hometown of Nazareth. The residents of this city had watched the Son of Mary and Joseph grow from a small child to adulthood. Jesus continued His custom of worshiping in the synagogue, and the leaders there invited Him to read and comment upon the Scriptures.

What did Jesus' reading of Isaiah 61:1, 2 tell His hearers about His mission? Luke 4:16-21.

This passage held hope for Israel. They understood Isaiah 61:1, 2 to be an obvious Messianic prophecy. "His impressive manner and the wonderful import of His words thrilled the hearers with a power they had never felt before. The tide of divine influence broke every barrier down; like Moses, they beheld the Invisible. As their hearts were moved upon by the Holy Spirit, they responded with fervent amens and praises to the Lord."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 237.

By applying these verses to His ministry, Jesus clearly identified Himself as the Messiah and revealed the compassionate nature of His work. He had not come to establish an earthly kingdom or to gain the popularity of the masses. His mission was to meet more than physical needs. He would mend broken lives and hearts.

Jesus' statement in verse 21 startled His listeners. By stating that He was fulfilling this ministry that day, Jesus drew their attention to their own spiritual condition. It would be difficult for them to miss His point that *they* were poor, blind, downtrodden, and captive. They were in need of His healing and release from bondage.

How does the message to the church at Laodicea apply to the condition of Jesus' hearers? Rev. 3:17, 18.

"Need of nothing." "The climax of the Laodiceans' boast is that their situation could not be improved. Such self-satisfaction is fatal, for the Spirit of God never enters where a need for His presence is not felt, yet without that presence newness of life is impossible."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 762.

When do you find it the most difficult to admit your true condition and your need of God's healing? How does the message to Laodicea give you hope?

RESPONSE TO JESUS' MINISTRY (Luke 4:23-44).

While those gathered spoke well of Jesus and "wondered" at the words He spoke, they were unwilling to acknowledge Him as the Messiah. Even though there was ample evidence of His power in the teaching and healing He performed in Galilee, their question "Is not this Joseph's son?" revealed their reluctance to accept Him fully.

His directness in identifying their spiritual need alienated them. "Their pride was offended, and their fears were roused. The words of Jesus indicated that His work for them was to be altogether different from what they desired."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 237.

What did Jesus further imply about the spiritual condition of His hearers? Luke 4:23-27.

Jesus saw through the outward appearance of religiosity and spoke to the unrepentant hearts of His hearers. "The words of Jesus to His hearers in the synagogue struck at the root of their self-righteousness, pressing home upon them the bitter truth that they had departed from God and forfeited their claim to be His people. Every word cut like a knife as their real condition was set before them."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 239.

Jesus' reference to the widow of Zarephath and to Naaman further angered those gathered in the synagogue. They prided themselves on their heritage as children of Israel. Yet Jesus pointed to Gentiles as examples of faithful hearers. They did not miss the implied rebuke. They responded quickly and angrily by seeking to destroy Him.

The compassionate nature of Jesus' mission compelled Him to take every opportunity to reach the hearts of those in his hometown. Even though they rejected Him, they also were in need of the salvation He so freely offered.

How do Jesus' actions after this encounter show His fulfilling the mission outlined in Isaiah? Luke 4:31-44.

Luke records the activities of Jesus in teaching with authority, casting out demons, and healing those who came to Him. His divine mission of compassion to those caught in sin was fulfilled in both word and deed.

When did you first realize the compassion of God toward you? How did you respond to this revelation? List ways you can reveal the compassionate nature of God to others.

FURTHER STUDY: Read Isaiah 60 and 61. Compare the message of the two chapters. What does each chapter reveal about the mission of the Messiah? How does each reveal God's purpose for His people? What is the result of God's work in the lives of His people? What is the impact on those who do not know God?

Read "The Kingdom of God Is at Hand" in *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 23, pp. 231-235, and "'Is Not This the Carpenter's Son?'" in *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 24, pp. 236-243.

"Few realize the full meaning of the words that Christ spoke when, in the synagogue at Nazareth, He announced Himself as the Anointed One. He declared His mission to comfort, bless, and save the sorrowing and the sinful; and then, seeing that pride and unbelief controlled the hearts of His hearers, He reminded them that in time past God had turned away from His chosen people because of their unbelief and rebellion, and had manifested Himself to those in heathen lands who had not rejected the light of heaven. The widow of Sarepta and Naaman the Syrian had lived up to all the light they had; hence they were accounted more righteous than God's chosen people who had backslidden from Him and had sacrificed principle to convenience and worldly honor."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 416.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Are there times when it is more compassionate to allow people to experience the natural consequences of their decisions? How do you know when it is appropriate to intervene in the lives of those who are in need?
2. Express in your own words the thoughts put forth in Isaiah 61:4-8, indicating as you do so the responses you have to God's goodness.
3. How can people in your church work together to demonstrate God's love and compassion?

SUMMARY: When Jesus announced that His mission was the fulfillment of Isaiah 61, He identified Himself as the Messiah. His mission was to bring healing and freedom to those caught in sin and suffering. While His hearers at the synagogue in Nazareth responded with disbelief and hostility, others received the ministry of Jesus with belief and acceptance. As Christ's people, we are to continue His mission of extending compassion and hope to the world.



25 Years to Decide!

Adly Campos

The sun's burning rays seemed hotter than usual that morning in Mexico City. Dust from the street sifted in through the car's open windows as we wound through the streets. A few minutes later we arrived at the Estrada home. Mrs. Estrada, a sweet, young, woman, greeted us at the door and ushered us into the livingroom.

After greeting the family, I faced Mr. Estrada. "I understand that your wife and daughters have accepted Jesus and been baptized, but you have not. What has kept you from this important step?"

He was silent a few minutes, then said, "I learned about the gospel as a boy in my parents' home, but I have never felt ready for baptism. I quit my job to keep the Sabbath; I pay my tithe, and God has blessed me. But I don't feel ready for baptism. Perhaps when my daughter turns 15, I will get baptized."

"Mr. Estrada," I asked. "Do you believe that faith in Jesus is based on sentiments or on principle?" I read 1 Samuel 15:22. "Do you think God should wait until we feel like obeying Him? (John 14:15, 21). Finally, can you be sure you will live until your daughter's 15th birthday?" Then I turned to the daughter and asked if she would like her father to be baptized when she is 15 years old, or would she prefer for him to do it now.

She replied, "I want my father to be baptized now so we can worship God as a family together."

After we prayed, Mr. Estrada requested baptism. The whole family was present at the remaining meetings, and at the end of the evangelistic series Mr. Estrada joined his family as a member of the Adventist Church. That evening Mr. and Mrs. Estrada renewed their marriage vows in a solemn ceremony.

Everyone was so happy that after 25 years of delay, Mr. Estrada finally made his full surrender to the Lord. "Now I can be the priest and leader in my family," he smiled.

Adly Campos is secretary in the Ministerial Department of the General Conference. She conducts "Family Well-being" evangelism, focusing on family- and home-centered relationships.



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Inside Story

Adventist View (kūl' măg'ā·zēn')

n. 1: A publication for Adventist young adults (18-35) circulating 25,000 copies worldwide 2: A communication tool to keep young adults connected to the church, each other 3: A great resource for youth leaders

v. 1: Reaching young adults 2: Encouraging a relationship with Jesus Christ 3: Recognizing active Christians making a difference 4: Discussing issues, news, lifestyle, religion

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AND YE GAVE ME DRINK; I WAS A
STRANGER, AND YE TOOK ME IN;
NAKED AND YE CLOTHED ME; I WAS
SICK AND YE VISITED ME; I WAS
IN PRISON, AND YE CAME UNTO ME."**

MATTHEW 25:35,36 (KJV)

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DECEMBER 23, 1995

**FOR HEALTH/TEMPERANCE - PRISON MINISTRIES
NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION**

A Pastoral Christ



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Psalm 23; John 10:1-5, 11-15.

MEMORY TEXT: "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (John 10:14, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: Psalm 23 is a psalm of comfort and trust. Spoken from the perspective of the sheep, it is a reminder to meditate upon God's constant presence and care for us, His sheep. When we recognize Jesus as our Shepherd, we know our lives are in the hands of One who willingly died for us.

JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD. How beautiful are the comparisons of the good shepherd to our Saviour, Jesus. As sheep are dependent upon the shepherd to supply all their needs, so Christ makes provisions to fulfill our needs, both physical and spiritual.

Sheep are followers, not leaders, so the shepherd leads them in right paths. We too need the guidance of God as we face difficulties and times of decision. And even when we face death, it is with the assurance of the protection, guidance, and comfort of our Lord.

The Good Shepherd shelters us from the dangers and pitfalls we encounter. We live with the assurance that as we continue to follow Jesus, He will dwell with us now and throughout eternity.

"A little girl, not yet fully prepared, got up to recite Psalm 23 in a church-school program. She didn't recite the psalm as most of us know it, but what she said is true: 'The Lord is my Shepherd; that's all I want.' "—Charles L. Wallis, ed., *A Treasury of Sermon Illustrations* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), p. 145. **Is He all you want?**

THE SHEPHERD PROVIDES FOR OUR NEEDS (Ps. 23:1-3).

David wrote about the shepherd's care for the sheep from his own experience in tending the flocks of his family (1 Sam. 16:11) and from his experience of knowing God as his Shepherd. David knew what dangers the sheep faced and how to offset these dangers (1 Sam. 17:34, 35). From this background, he was able to understand our human need for a caring Shepherd to watch over us and guide us.

For what specific needs of the sheep does the shepherd make provision? Ps. 23:1-3.

"The wise shepherd knows that the sheep must not drink when it is hot, neither when its stomach is filled with undigested grass."—Charles L. Allen, *God's Psychiatry* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1953), p. 18. So the shepherd finds a pasture of tender grass where the sheep can digest their food undisturbed.

Because sheep are fearful of rapidly moving water, the shepherd then leads them to a quiet pool from which they can quench their thirst. "The shepherd does not laugh at the sheep's fears. . . . If there are no still waters available, while the sheep are resting, the shepherd will gather up stones to fashion a dam across a small stream to form a pool from which even the tiniest lamb may drink without fear."—Allen, pp. 19, 20.

The New English Bible translates verse 3: "He renews life within me, and for his name's sake guides me in the right path." When the sheep are tired or in need of guidance, the shepherd leads them in the right paths. How willing the shepherd is to provide the guidance the sheep need. And yet because they can see only a short distance, it is not difficult for a sheep to wander down an unfamiliar path and become lost, as the parable of the lost sheep reminds us (Luke 15:4-7). It is then the shepherd's responsibility to find the sheep and return it to the flock.

Compare the sheep's eyesight to some people's spiritual eyesight. In what ways can we all be spiritually nearsighted? Prov. 14:12; Luke 12:16-34.

How does the shepherd's meeting the physical needs of the sheep compare to the way God meets the physical and spiritual needs you experience? Are you able to testify to your Sabbath School class of God's daily provision for your needs?

THE GUIDANCE OF THE SHEPHERD (Ps. 23:4).

Of what is the sheep not fearful as it walks through "the valley of the shadow of death"? What is the source of its assurance during this journey? Ps. 23:4.

"The Basque Sheepherder describes an actual Valley of the Shadow of Death. . . . It leads from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea and is a very narrow and dangerous pathway through the mountain range. The path is rough, and there is danger that a sheep may fall at any moment to its death."—Allen, p. 26.

When have you experienced walking through "the valley of the shadow of death"? In what ways were you conscious of God's presence?

"Thy rod and thy staff." In caring for the flock, no shepherd would be without these two implements. "Whereas the rod conveys the concept of authority, of power, of discipline, of defense against danger, the word 'staff' speaks of all that is longsuffering and kind." —Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 99.

When natural predators approach, the shepherd uses his rod to protect both himself and the sheep. The shepherd also uses the rod when a rebellious sheep needs discipline or when he needs to examine the sheep for injuries. As the instrument of compassion, the staff is used by the shepherd to provide direction, to draw the sheep together or to himself, and to rescue them from danger.

Summarize how each of the following verses enlarges our understanding of God's protection, care, and guidance.

Ps. 119:105 _____

Isa. 43:2, 3 _____

Rom. 8:32 _____

How have you responded when God has used the "rod" and the "staff" in your spiritual growth and development?

PROTECTIVE ACTIVITIES OF THE SHEPHERD (Ps. 23:5).

List additional ways the shepherd provides for the needs of the sheep. Ps. 23:5.

"In the pastures of the Holy Land grew poisonous plants which were fatal to the sheep if eaten. Also, there were plants whose sharp thorns would penetrate the soft noses of the sheep and cause ugly sores."—Allen, p. 30.

When preparing a place for the sheep to graze, the shepherd needed to be especially vigilant. This "table" from which the sheep would eat might present dangers for which they were unprepared. The shepherd traveled ahead of the flock to remove these dangers before the sheep arrived.

If there were poisonous plants, he pulled them up and destroyed them. If predators lurked, he would remove or kill them. Thus, when the sheep arrived at the pasture, the shepherd had "prepared a table for them in the presence of their enemies."

Protective oil. Because the nose of a sheep can be easily injured or infected by insects, the shepherd used oil as a healing and protective agent. When flies were present and caused distress among the sheep, this oil would be most soothing. "Once the oil had been applied to the sheep's head there was an immediate change in behavior. Gone was the aggravation; gone the frenzy; gone the irritability and the restlessness. Instead, the sheep would start to feed quietly again, then soon lie down in peaceful contentment."—Keller, p. 116.

What do the following texts contribute to your understanding of God's willingness to give you a "cup that runneth over"?

Matt. 7:7-11 _____

Eph. 3:17-21 _____

Phil. 4:19 _____

When have you recognized that God has gone before you to prepare the way? What dangers are present for which you realize the need to pray for God's protection?

BLESSINGS OF THE SHEPHERD (Ps. 23:6).

Note how David's words of praise, "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Ps. 23:6), are a summary of verses 1-5.

Meditating on all the benefits the sheep receive from the shepherd causes David to praise God for His goodness and mercy. David's early experience as a shepherd helped him to appreciate all God's tender care.

What do you learn about the goodness and mercy of God from a study of the following texts?

Exod. 34:5-7 _____

Psalm 107 _____

Isa. 63:7-9 _____

Rom. 2:4 _____

It is helpful to share with one another the many ways God expresses His goodness and mercy toward us. Then He will strengthen our own faith in Him, and we will become more conscious of the ways He is present in our lives.

"The house of the Lord." When David refers to the "house of the Lord," his mind is turned toward the tabernacle (Ps. 27:4). His great desire is to dwell with God in His Holy Sanctuary for all his days. And there is no better place for the Christian to dwell, for it is here we see the God of grace revealing His love in the plan of salvation.

Describe how the words of Revelation 7:15-17 reflect the message of Psalm 23.

"The ways of Providence will be made clear; the mysteries of grace through Christ will be unfolded. That which the mind cannot now grasp, which is hard to be understood, will be explained."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1091.

JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD (John 10:1-5, 11-15).

In his Gospel, the apostle John records the familiar story in which Jesus applies the imagery of the shepherd to Himself. He reminds His listeners that a difference exists between the attitude of the Good Shepherd and the thieves and hirelings.

What contrasts does Jesus present between the Good Shepherd and the thief and hireling? John 10:1-5, 11-15.

"It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They behold the Saviour's matchless love, revealed throughout His pilgrimage on earth, from the manger of Bethlehem to Calvary's cross, and the sight of Him attracts, it softens and subdues the soul. Love awakens in the heart of the beholders. They hear His voice, and they follow Him."

—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 480.

Just as Psalm 23 reminds us of the tender care of our heavenly Shepherd, so this picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is filled with assurances of His love for the sheep. While not using the word *grace*, both passages of Scripture provide us with pictures of God's grace in action. His grace guides us, protects us, and "daily loads us with benefits" (Ps. 68:19, NKJV).

How is the relationship of the shepherd and the sheep described in John 10:1-5, 11-15?

"Of all creatures the sheep is one of the most timid and helpless, and in the East the shepherd's care for his flock is untiring and incessant. . . .

"As the shepherd leads his flock over the rocky hills, through forest and wild ravines, to grassy nooks by the riverside; as he watches them on the mountains through the lonely night, shielding from robbers, caring tenderly for the sickly and feeble, his life comes to be one with theirs. A strong and tender attachment unites him to the objects of his care. However large the flock, the shepherd knows every sheep. Every one has its name, and responds to the name at the shepherd's call."

—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 478, 479.

In your experience, how have you come to know the voice of the Shepherd? What are some of the false shepherds that seek to draw you away from Jesus? How might you learn to follow the Good Shepherd more closely?

FURTHER STUDY: How does the parable of the lost sheep relate to the criticism that Jesus ate with sinners? How does this parable exhibit God's grace? (See Luke 15:1-7.)

Also read "This Man Receiveth Sinners" in *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 185-197. Reflect on the way Jesus found you when you were lost.

"Every soul is as fully known to Jesus as if he were the only one for whom the Saviour died. The distress of every one touches His heart. . . . He came to draw all men unto Himself. He bids them, 'Follow Me,' and His Spirit moves upon their hearts to draw them to come to Him. Many refuse to be drawn. Jesus knows who they are. He also knows who gladly hear His call, and are ready to come under His pastoral care. He says, 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.' He cares for each one as if there were not another on the face of the earth."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 480.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. List the areas of your life in which you most need the care and guidance of the Shepherd. What one thing can you do this next week to let Jesus meet these needs?
2. How does Psalm 51 contribute to your understanding of the phrase "He restoreth my soul"? When have you felt a need for restoration? How did God help?
3. In today's society the imagery of the shepherd caring for the sheep is not as familiar as it was when David wrote Psalm 23. Name current relationships you have that provide this same sense of caring and guidance.
4. How does Psalm 23 contribute to your understanding of God's grace? Compare Psalm 23 with Isaiah 53.

SUMMARY: How often during periods of stress, turmoil, and loss we turn to the familiar words of Psalm 23. The imagery of the shepherd tenderly caring for the needs of his sheep assures us of God's grace in our lives. Whether our needs are physical, emotional, or spiritual, the psalm inspires us with confidence in God's ability to provide.

Knowing that Jesus identified Himself as the Shepherd reminds us of the close bond that exists between the shepherd and the sheep. The Good Shepherd is now clearly seen as One who walked before us and laid down His life for our eternal salvation. What a joy to know that we can trust our lives to One who cares so deeply.



Indonesian Women Plant A Church: The Dream Rose Otis

In a miracle, or rather, a series of miracles, the women of the East Java Conference in Indonesia planted an Adventist church in Ngawi (NOW-ee), a city of more than a million, where 95 percent of the population was Muslim.

With funds from Global Mission and the General Conference Office of Women's Ministries, the women bought property and refurbished an old garage to create a lovely chapel that seats 275. For 18-20 months more than 150 women worked for one to six weeks in outreach programs. The women lived in a garage behind the church, sleeping on mats and hanging their clothes on ropes around the room. They cooked their meals while squatting at a little stove, and washed their dishes under a spigot.

When the church renovation was complete the women invited Ngawi city officials to help celebrate the dedication of the renovated "meeting hall." They had feared calling it a church, because of prejudice. But the women were surprised when officials from the mayor's office congratulated the women on having "built such a lovely church in our city."

Soon after the dedication the women hosted a stop-smoking clinic, and the city's director of health completed the class successfully. When he told the mayor and other employees what he had learned about the harmful effects of secondary tobacco smoke, the mayor moved to ban smoking in the city government offices.

Two floods, the worst in 50 years, devastated parts of Ngawi. ADRA provided funds, and the women's-ministries team bought clothing, bedding, and staples for flood victims. Their humanitarian efforts won many friends for the church.

One day Mrs. Ellen Missah, women's-ministries coordinator of the the East Java Conference, was called into the mayor's office.

Knowing that prejudice existed against the church, she wondered what the mayor wanted. But when she arrived, he told her, "All our citizens need what you are teaching."

(continued next week)

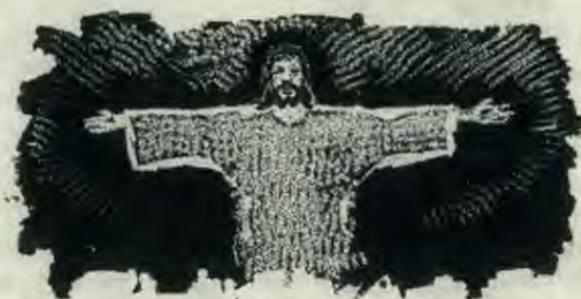


The Ngawi Church. Rose Otis is director of Women's Ministries at the General Conference.

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An Inclusive Saviour



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Isa. 56:3-8; Matt. 21:12-16.

MEMORY TEXT: "Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isaiah 56:7).

KEY THOUGHT: In cleansing the temple, Jesus reveals that His grace extends to all who desire to worship Him.

JESUS OPENS WORSHIP TO ALL WHO WILL COME. When Jesus came to the temple, He became angry to find an exclusive system that barred many from participating in worship. Jesus could not allow the merchandising in the temple courts to detract from the sacredness of the worship experience. Anything that would prohibit inclusive worship He must deal with.

Today, divisions of race, gender, religion, social and economic status pervade our world. What can we learn from Jesus about appropriate attitudes toward those who differ from us? How can the church model an attitude of inclusiveness toward all who would come to worship? How can we structure our worship services so those from different backgrounds or cultures will not feel excluded? What can we do to make our church "an house of prayer for all people" (Isa. 56:7)? These are important questions that require thoughtful, considerate answers. As you study this week's lesson, ask yourself what you can do on an individual basis to make your church more inclusive without compromising the church's doctrinal distinctives.

AN HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLE (Isa. 56:5, 7).

By the time Jesus came to earth, Israel had lost sight of God's purpose for the temple and its services. An attitude of religious elitism had replaced Israel's mission to be "a light to the Gentiles" (Isa. 49:6).

Describe how the following texts contribute to an understanding of God's purpose for the temple.

1 Kings 8:41-43 _____

Isa. 56:3-8 _____

Micah 4:1, 2 _____

The temple services were to teach the plan of salvation to those who did not know God. And the Israelites were to share their experiences of God's love and grace. In this way, those who did not know God would learn about His covenant and devote themselves to it.

"Had Israel been faithful, men from all nations would have come to Jerusalem to worship God."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 300.

What would the "son of the stranger" know of God's grace after worshiping in the temple? Isa. 56:5, 7.

God's inclusive nature is evident in the blessings showered upon the children of strangers who learned to worship Him. Participation in the temple services would replace their experience of exclusion.

Some wished to separate and divide. But God wanted His temple to be a place where Jews and Gentiles worshiped together. "Had a Gentile presumed to enter the inner enclosure, he would have desecrated the temple, and would have paid the penalty with his life. But Jesus, the originator of the temple and its service, drew the Gentiles to Him by the tie of human sympathy, while His divine grace brought to them the salvation which the Jews rejected."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 193.

How can you represent God's inclusive nature in your dealings with those who do not share your beliefs?

THE NEED FOR CLEANSING (Matt. 21:12, 13).

God desired that the temple would draw all people to worship Him. But Jesus realized that the people were not responding to this purpose. "In the temple at Jerusalem a low wall separated the outer court from all other portions of the sacred building. Upon this wall were inscriptions in different languages, stating that none but Jews were allowed to pass this boundary."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 193.

What was the condition of the temple prior to its cleansing by Jesus? Matt. 21:12, 13.

Temple authorities sanctioned the activity these verses describe for two reasons. First of all, the worshipers who came from long distances would find it difficult to transport their sacrifices. And second, the authorities made a comfortable profit. But all involved showed "they had a gross misconception of the character of God and of the requirements He made of those who love and serve Him."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 471.

How were the temple leaders fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament? Micah 6:6-8; Ps. 40:6-8.

A form of worship. Through the prophetic voice God had warned His people that the mere bringing of sacrifices was not His desire. The sacrifices were to be an outward sign of the inward condition of the repentant heart.

"Numerous ceremonies were enjoined upon the people without the proper instruction as to their import. The worshipers offered their sacrifices without understanding that they were typical of the only perfect Sacrifice. And among them, unrecognized and unhonored, stood the One symbolized by all their service. He had given directions in regard to the offerings. He understood their symbolical value, and He saw that they were now perverted and misunderstood. Spiritual worship was fast disappearing. No link bound the priests and rulers to their God."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 157.

God's desire is the same today as when Jesus cleansed the temple. He would have us replace formalism and routine with worship that comes from a heart full of thanks for His gift of grace.

If Jesus were to speak to you about the way you worship God, what would be His message?

JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE (Mark 11:15, 16).

The need for Jesus to cleanse the temple near the end of His earthly ministry is surprising when we remember that He had cleansed it earlier in His ministry (John 2:12-22). But instead of learning from their previous encounter with Jesus, the temple leaders had become even more involved in unholy activities.

**What actions did Jesus take to restore the sanctity of the temple?
Mark 11:15, 16.**

Jesus would not allow the actions of the buyers, sellers, and moneychangers to continue. He must stop their exploitation of true worshipers.

For many, the temple courts had become the shortcut for their business errands, and these people Jesus would not allow to carry their common vessels through the sacred courts.

Summarize the claim Jesus made about His relationship to the temple when He quoted Isaiah 56:7. Matt. 21:13.

Jesus' anger against the desecrators ran deep because they were trampling upon the very sacredness and holiness of God's house. They had lost sight of His holy character and the recognition of His sacred presence within the temple.

Read Jeremiah 7:1-11. Jeremiah's words were appropriate to the circumstances of Jesus' day. Throughout history the worship of God has been in danger of being corrupted. Just as in the days of Jeremiah and Jesus, so we are in danger of falling into a form of worship without the Spirit and power of God. It is only through close fellowship with Jesus Christ that our worship comes from the heart.

"Evidently the false prophets maintained that God would never allow the Temple, His dwelling place, to fall into profane hands; that the presence of that Temple in Jerusalem would serve as a kind of charm to protect the city and its inhabitants. . . . Similarly today many church members trust in external church connections for salvation. They are more ready for outward religious activities than for the inner preparation of the heart."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 387.

How can you make your own activities in God's house more worshipful? What connection do you see between your state of mind and the meaningfulness of your worship?

THE PRIESTS AND SCRIBES RESPOND (Matt. 21:15, 16).

Jesus directed His anger toward the ones who, by their activities, were interfering with those who wanted to worship God. His words to them, "My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matt. 21:13), struck the chief priests and scribes deeply. Jesus had unmasked their use of God's house for their own profit.

Summarize the religious leaders' response to Jesus' words of rebuke. Matt. 21:15; Luke 19:47, 48.

Instead of allowing the words and actions of Jesus to impact their hearts and bring about a change in their lives, these leaders further developed their plans to destroy Jesus. Yet even in this they felt frustration over their immediate inability to act, because of the peoples' attentiveness to Jesus.

How did the chief priests and scribes attempt to turn Jesus' wrath away from themselves? Matt. 21:16.

In an attempt to mask their own guilt, the chief priests and scribes sought to draw Jesus' condemnation away from their own actions to the children in the temple.

"The sound of these happy, unrestrained voices was an offense to the rulers of the temple. They set about putting a stop to such demonstrations. They represented to the people that the house of God was desecrated by the feet of the children and the shouts of rejoicing. Finding that their words made no impression on the people, the rulers appealed to Christ."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 592.

The priests' and scribes' perceptions of the workings of God were so distorted that what was an honor to God, they viewed with indignation. Thus they continued to justify their own unholy actions.

As the religious leaders in Jesus' day were blinded to His true mission and the genuine praise offered by those remaining in the temple, it is also possible for us to be self-deceived in our beliefs. Our only safeguard is to be open-minded in allowing God to speak to us through the Bible and to be receptive to honest observations from fellow Christians.

What occasions have there been in your life when you preferred not to hear words of correction from God? How was God able to break through your resistance?

THE TEMPLE RESTORED (Matt. 21:14-16).

How did Jesus respond to the blind, the lame, and the children who were in the temple? Matt. 21:14, 15.

It is apparent that not everyone fled from the presence of Jesus when He cleansed the temple. Those people stayed whose hearts' desire was to worship God. Unlike the religious leaders, Jesus would not turn them away. "Those who call themselves His followers may despise and shun the outcast ones; but no circumstance of birth or nationality, no condition of life, can turn away His love from the children of men."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 194.

These people, in turn, did not abandon Jesus. They looked to Him not only for restoration of true temple worship but for physical healing and restoration. The children were drawn to Jesus and found themselves filled with the praise and hosannas due the Son of David.

How were the children fulfilling the prophecy quoted by Jesus? Matt. 21:16.

"Prophecy had foretold that Christ should be proclaimed as king, and that word must be fulfilled. The priests and rulers of Israel refused to herald His glory, and God moved upon the children to be His witnesses."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 593. The day before, the multitude that preceded Jesus into Jerusalem had declared His praise. Again in the temple God inspired the people present to proclaim, "Hosanna to the Son of David."

How does the cleansed and restored temple now reveal God's purpose for the temple? Hosea 6:6.

The prophet Hosea states well God's desire for the worship of His people. Through His cleansing of the temple, Jesus revealed that the mere ritualistic offering of sacrifices was not God's intent. Jesus revealed what it means to show mercy and compassion, the true intent of worship. Organization in worship services is essential, but unless the services facilitate God's direct access to human hearts, their primary purpose is not achieved.

Have some elements of your worship become mere rituals? How can your worship be more expressive of your desire to show mercy and compassion?

FURTHER STUDY: What can we learn about true worship from the following verses? Ps. 46:10; 77:12; 95:1, 2; 96:8.

Read "In His Temple" and "The Temple Cleansed Again" in *The Desire of Ages*, chapters 16 and 52, pp. 154-166, 589-600. List the lessons about true worship that you gain from reading these chapters.

"To the humble, believing soul, the house of God on earth is the gate of heaven. The song of praise, the prayer, the words spoken by Christ's representatives, are God's appointed agencies to prepare a people for the church above, for that loftier worship into which there can enter nothing that defileth. . . .

"Nothing that is sacred, nothing that pertains to the worship of God, should be treated with carelessness or indifference."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 491.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What words of thanks would you like to share about the inclusive nature of God's salvation revealed in His words "Mine house shall be an house of prayer for all people"?
2. List specific suggestions that would make the worship service in your church more inclusive of all people.
3. How does the following statement aid your understanding of God's purpose for the temple?

"From eternal ages it was God's purpose that every created being, from the bright and holy seraph to man, should be a temple for the indwelling of the Creator. . . . God designed that the temple at Jerusalem should be a continual witness to the high destiny open to every soul."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 161.

4. How can you more effectively be "a temple for the indwelling of the Creator"?

SUMMARY: God's desire was that the services of the temple would reveal His character and plan of salvation for humanity. But through the misrepresentations of the religious leaders, Israel had lost sight of this plan. Jesus' cleansing of the temple was one way in which He sought to return the worship of God to its rightful place.

Our goal in worship should always be to uplift Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world and to foster an atmosphere of openness so that our churches will be houses "of prayer for all people."



Indonesian Women Plant a Church: VBS Rose Otis

Women's Ministries in Indonesia had taken on an enormous challenge: Raise up a church in the Muslim city of Ngawi. They renovated an old building and began to hold outreach programs.

The women sponsored a Vacation Bible School, and 125 children, most from Muslim homes, came daily to learn Scripture and sing Christian songs. On graduation night the proud parents sat in the audience as their children, wearing little crowns, sang "Allah loves the little children, all the children of the world."

But when the children took their graduation certificates home, Muslim parents discovered a picture of Jesus on it. This angered them. Then, some children refused to go to the mosque to pray, insisting that they kneel by their beds and pray to Jesus instead. Muslim parents went to the mayor to demand that the Adventists be closed down. "If you don't do it we will," they threatened.

The phone rang in the home of Ellen Missah, East Java Conference director of women's ministries. "The chairman for religion in East Java would like to see you in his office Monday morning," a voice on the other end said. Over the weekend Pastor and Mrs. Missah pleaded with God to intervene. On Monday morning as they drove the four hours to Ngawi, they rehearsed answers to questions they would likely be asked. Their greatest fear was that after coming so far with the program, the government might close it down.

When the Missahs arrived they were prepared to answer for the Vacation Bible School, but the head of the Ngawi department of religion defended the women's program. "This office represents all recognized religions in Indonesia, not just Islam," the man reminded those present. "The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a recognized religion in Indonesia. The women have gotten the permission to carry out all of their activities. They have been a blessing to our people." Surprised by this response, the East Java director of religion asked why the meeting had even been called, and dismissed the Missahs. Again, God had intervened.

(continued next week)



Ellen Missah, East Java Conference women's-ministries director. Rose Otis is director of Women's Ministries at the General Conference.

For Current Newsbreak, Call 1-800-648-5824.

A Genealogy of Grace



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 1:1-16, 20, 21.

MEMORY TEXT: “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: We can clearly see God's grace in the lives of the people Matthew includes in his genealogy of Jesus. In fact, it would seem that God has gone out of His way to assure us that His grace extends even to those we would consider the worst of sinners.

JESUS' FAMILY TREE. The reconstruction of family genealogies is an important activity for some families. Tracing back through family history provides interesting and helpful information and can give family members a sense of identity. But what about those ancestors whose lives are less honorable than most? Might there be a desire to pluck some of these more “colorful” individuals from the family tree?

God inspired Matthew to trace the lineage of Jesus from Abraham through his legal line to Joseph, Jesus' earthly “father.” Matthew includes some individuals we might have left out. Yet by including these people, God reminds us of the words He spoke to Samuel, “God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7, NASB).

As you study this week's lesson, pray that God will help you to value people more for what is in their hearts than for their outward appearance.

JESUS, SAVIOUR OF HIS PEOPLE (Matt. 1:1-17).

The name Jesus means “Jehovah is salvation.” In his introductory chapter, Matthew reveals to us God’s plan for the salvation of sinners. He included in his genealogy persons whose lives reveal the grace of God at work in sinful humanity.

How do the following texts reveal the purpose of Jesus’ mission to this earth?

Matt. 9:12, 13 _____

Luke 19:10 _____

1 Tim. 1:15 _____

The mission of Jesus. Remember that the Jewish nation was looking for a messiah who would release them from Roman bondage. But when Jesus came He revealed that His mission was far different from what His people expected.

As you read Matthew 1:1-17, note any individuals whom you are surprised to find listed. What is Matthew trying to say to us by including these people in the genealogy of Jesus?

Matthew reminds us that Jesus’ human ancestors were sinners who needed grace. Their stories reveal God’s grace at work in restoring broken lives. The history of their lives reminds us that Jesus is the Saviour of all.

“How devastating this genealogy is when we see it for what God intended it to be! It strikes a blow in the face of legalism, self-righteousness, and human religion. It underscores the truth that Jesus identified with sinners. It puts a holy spotlight on God’s grace. . . .

“The same grace that was evident in the genealogy is active today, and the same Jesus is saving His people from their sins. No sin, no matter how heinous, puts sinners beyond His reach.”—John F. MacArthur, Jr., *God With Us* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), p. 35.

What response do you want to make to a God who is willing to identify Himself with sinners in order to save them?

ABRAHAM, FRIEND OF GOD (Gen. 12:1-3, 10-20).

Matthew begins his genealogy identifying Jesus as "the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). In so doing, Matthew seeks to establish the identity of Jesus, the Messiah, as heir to the promises God made to Abraham. This was important to the Jews who looked askance at impure blood lines.

What promise did God make to Abraham, and how was it fulfilled? Gen. 12:1-3; 22:15-18; Gal. 3:8, 16.

It was in this promise that Abraham believed and trusted, a promise that included forgiveness of sin. "All further promises to the patriarchs and to Israel either clarified or amplified the promise of salvation offered the entire human race in the first promise made to Abram."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 294.

What do the following incidents in the life of Abraham reveal about his ability to trust God?

Gen. 12:10-20 _____

Gen. 16:1-4 _____

Gen. 20:1-18 _____

God did not base His promises to Abraham upon Abraham's faithfulness, but upon His own faithfulness. Scripture even refers to Abraham as "the Friend of God" (James 2:23) and includes him in Hebrews 11:8-11, 17-19 as a pillar of faith. God never stopped revealing Himself to Abraham as the God of grace and forgiveness.

"Faith may be genuine and yet prove to be weak in moments of stress and perplexity. A vigorous faith will cling to the promise, and to that alone, trusting entirely to God for its accomplishment. Such was Abram's faith, except upon three or four brief occasions, throughout a long and eventful life. God had no need of Abram's devices for the accomplishment of His promise. Trust and obedience alone were required."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 317.

What do you most appreciate about God's dealings with His friend Abraham?

ISAAC AND JACOB REVEAL GOD'S GRACE (Gen. 24:62-67; 32, 33).

Review the following events in the life of Isaac, and identify what each event reveals about his character.

Gen. 24:62-67 _____

Gen. 25:21, 28 _____

Gen. 26:6-11 _____

In the life of Isaac we see again one who, though blessed by God, at times revealed human weakness. God continued to reveal His grace by accepting Isaac and renewing His covenant promises with him (Gen. 26:2-5; 26:24, 25).

God also revealed His grace to Jacob. As Jacob anticipated his return home and his encounter with Esau, anxiety overcame him. How did God reveal His presence and protection to Jacob before his meeting with Esau? How did Jacob's night of wrestling with God result in an attitude of trust and confidence? Genesis 32, 33.

Jacob first recognized God's presence through "the angels of God" who met him as he traveled with his family (Gen. 32:1). However, as he received the message that Esau was approaching with a band of soldiers, Jacob's heart filled with fear. He prayed to God about what seemed to be a hopeless situation.

Soon he found himself in hand-to-hand combat with one he believed to be an enemy. "Helpless and unworthy, he pleaded God's promise of mercy to the repentant sinner. That promise was his assurance that God would pardon and accept him. Sooner might heaven and earth pass than that word could fail; and it was this that sustained him through that fearful conflict."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 201.

"Yet Jacob's history is an assurance that God will not cast off those who have been betrayed into sin, but who have returned unto Him with true repentance."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 202, 203.

GOD'S GRACE TO WOMEN (Gen. 38:6-26).

In his genealogy of Jesus, Matthew includes four women. While we might expect the names of such prominent women as Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, these are not the women Matthew chose. Instead, he points us to the lives of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba.

Summarize the background and character of these women:

Tamar: Gen. 38:6-26

Rahab: Joshua 2:1-21; 6:17, 22, 23, 25

Ruth: Ruth 1-4

Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah: 2 Sam. 11:2-5, 26, 27

God's grace revealed. The inclusion of these women in Matthew's genealogy most likely raised questions in the minds of Matthew's Jewish readers. Why would God list these women in a genealogy of His Son? "Because the people in the Messianic genealogy are not on display; God's grace is."—MacArthur, p. 34. Their inclusion is proof that Jesus is the sinner's friend (Luke 7:34) and that He did not come to "call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:13).

The lives of these women are an example of God's desire to break down the prejudice that views Him as the Saviour of those only who are thought to deserve His grace. We see in the stories of these women God's willingness to include in His kingdom even the most broken outcasts of society.

"With the exception of Ruth, scandals were attached to the names of all these women. A merely human historian might have chosen to pass over their names in silence for fear that the honor of the Messiah be tarnished. . . . [But] Matthew quotes the Master as saying [to the Pharisees] that He came not 'to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' (ch. 9:13)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 278.

Describe your view of God's willingness to include these four women in the genealogy of Jesus. How might you use their inclusion in Matthew's genealogy to encourage people who feel their lives are too full of sin for God to accept them?

DAVID'S EXPERIENCE OF GRACE (2 Sam. 12:1-13).

Matthew reminds us again of God's grace when he states in his genealogy, "And to David was born Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah" (Matt. 1:6, NASB). While Matthew could have easily overlooked David's sin with Bathsheba, he gave it prominent mention so again we can understand God's mercy toward sinners.

How did David compound his sin of adultery with Bathsheba? 2 Sam. 11:6-17.

When Bathsheba sent word to King David that their adulterous liaison had resulted in the conception of a child, David did not turn to God in repentance and sorrow for his sin. Instead he engaged in behavior that he hoped would keep his adultery a secret.

He needed to see and acknowledge the true nature of his actions and return to the God of grace, who would willingly forgive and cleanse.

Describe the method God used to confront David with the sinfulness of his actions. 2 Sam. 12:1-13.

"For the sake of Israel also, there was a necessity for God to interpose. As time passed on, David's sin toward Bathsheba became known, and suspicion was excited that he had planned the death of Uriah. The Lord was dishonored. He had favored and exalted David, and David's sin misrepresented the character of God, and cast reproach upon His name."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 720. As a result of Nathan's intervention, David realized the seriousness of his sin.

Note how Psalm 51 shows us the depth of David's repentance after Nathan confronted him.

When we acknowledge and accept responsibility for our sin, God willingly forgives and cleanses. We then experience the joy of restored fellowship with Him.

How does Psalm 51 express your repentance and desire for God's cleansing from sin?

"Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. We shall not renounce sin unless we see its sinfulness; until we turn away from it in heart, there will be no real change in the life."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 23.

FURTHER STUDY: Study the lives of other people listed in Matthew's genealogy, and reflect on how God has revealed His grace through them. You might include Judah, Solomon, several of the kings of Judah, and Zerubbabel.

The following selections from Ellen G. White's writings deal with some of the names found in Matthew's genealogy: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, "The Call of Abraham," pp. 125-131; "The Night of Wrestling," pp. 195-203; "The Last Years of David," pp. 746-755.

"The children of Israel were to occupy all the territory which God appointed them. Those nations that rejected the worship and service of the true God were to be dispossessed. But it was God's purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel men should be drawn unto Him. To all the world the gospel invitation was to be given. . . . All who, like Rahab the Canaanite, and Ruth the Moabitess, turned from idolatry to the worship of the true God, were to unite themselves with His chosen people. As the numbers of Israel increased they were to enlarge their borders, until their kingdom should embrace the world.

"God desired to bring all peoples under His merciful rule. He desired that the earth should be filled with joy and peace. He created man for happiness, and He longs to fill human hearts with the peace of heaven."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 290.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What experiences have led you to recognize God's grace toward you?
2. After studying this lesson, has your opinion changed regarding Matthew's wisdom in including certain questionable characters in his list of Jesus' ancestors? If so, how?
3. What do you think of a God who includes ex-adulterers, prostitutes, idolators, and deceivers as "His people"?
4. Summarize the message of Psalm 51, expressing your repentance for sin and confidence in God's forgiveness.

SUMMARY: In his genealogy, Matthew has opened the door for a new understanding of what it means to be God's people. Through the lives of those included in his listing, we see a God who looks upon the heart, not upon outward appearances. We can be confident that, just as God showed His grace to these erring humans, He will reveal His grace to us.

Indonesian Women Plant a Church: The Parade Rose Otis

They targeted Moslem Ngawi to plant a church. They remodeled a building, held a Vacation Bible School and stop-smoking clinic. They distributed blankets, clothing, and food to flood victims, and they had caught the attention of the city. Now it was time for evangelistic meetings.

Adventist marching bands paraded through Ngawi's streets with trumpets blaring and batons held high to herald the meetings. What a contrast to the scene earlier!

Some weeks before we had fasted and prayed when the program's survival was threatened; and even as we flew in to Ngawi, our believers were praying that the government would issue permits allowing foreigners to speak at the meetings. Just three days before the meetings began, officials issued the necessary permits!

On opening night bicycle rickshaws delivered people to the church. Traders lined the sidewalks to sell their wares. And every night the chapel was full, and hundreds watched on closed-circuit television in the churchyard.

During the series, two women provided food for the guests. One woman, Shaundra, told me, "We didn't have a place to cook or sleep. But a neighbor invited us to use her home. They are attending the meetings." God had opened the doors of unbelievers to provide accommodations for these workers.

On Sabbath 1,000 people crowded into and around the chapel. But the rows reserved for the baptismal candidates were empty. Would they come? Would these lifelong Moslems hear the call of the Saviour-King? Would they accept the love that the women had shown all these months? Would they accept the gift of salvation that Jesus wanted to give them?

(continued next week)



Adventist bands marched through Moslem Ngawi to announce the evangelistic meetings. Rose Otis is director of Women's Ministries at the General Conference.

For Current Newsbreak, Call 1-800-648-5824.

Joseph's Marriage to Mary



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 1:18-25; 2:13-23.

MEMORY TEXT: “**Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit**” (Matthew 1:20, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: Although initially ready to divorce Mary, Joseph responded to the message of the Lord’s angel to marry her instead. In following God, Joseph became the earthly guardian to the Son of God.

JOSEPH, MAN OF CHARACTER. The Bible reveals little about Joseph, the husband of Mary. Yet from the information we do have about him, we can see a man who was willing to follow God’s leading and instruction in providing a home for Mary and her child, Jesus.

From outward appearances, Joseph would have had every reason to divorce Mary. She was pregnant with a child he knew was not his. However, his actions show us his compassion and dedication to following God.

God revealed His grace toward this faithful man by sending a heavenly messenger to share with him the truth about Mary’s pregnancy. God continued to communicate with Joseph, giving him guidance about the steps necessary to protect the life of his young charge.

How willing are you to follow God’s instructions? Would you be as willing as Joseph was, even if God’s guidance apparently contradicted the traditional conventions of the society in which you live? As you study this week’s lesson, pray that God will help you develop the strong faith Joseph exhibited.

JOSEPH'S CHARACTER (Matt. 1:18-25).

Based on what you read in Matthew 1:18, 19, how would you describe Joseph's character?

The Bible tells us very little about Joseph. We know that he was of the line of David (Luke 2:4) and a carpenter by trade (Matt. 13:55). Through his actions as recorded in the Bible, we can better understand his character.

Because a "just man" was one who carefully observed rabbinical tradition and the laws of Moses, Joseph may have questioned the moral soundness of marrying someone who had apparently committed adultery. But despite this, he decided to do what he believed would be the least damaging to Mary. He would quietly sign the required legal papers, but he would not have her judged publicly and stoned. (See Deut. 22:23, 24.)

Joseph did not act hastily. After learning of Mary's condition, "he thought on these things" (Matt. 1:20). Surely he must have considered all the serious and lasting consequences his actions would have, not only for him but also for Mary.

What does Joseph's response to the angel's instruction reveal about his faith and trust in God's leading? Matt. 1:20-25.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and revealed to him that the Child Mary was bearing was the promised Messiah, he responded quickly and without hesitation. Because of his love for God and for Mary, he chose to take Mary as his wife. He decided not to be concerned about his own reputation and the accusations that would surely arise from his actions. His greatest concern was to provide a home for Mary and the Child she was carrying.

In the selection of a man to be the earthly father of Jesus, God did not choose someone with wealth or fame. More important, God wanted a man of integrity, compassion, and faith. The presence of these qualities in the home where Jesus would grow would provide the best possible atmosphere for His early development. Joseph possessed these qualities.

List the character qualities you believe necessary for adults to have as they nurture children. Do you feel that any one of these is more important than the others? Why?

JOSEPH'S DILEMMA (Matt.1:18, 19).

What was the relationship of Mary and Joseph at the time Joseph became aware of Mary's pregnancy? What action did he plan to take? Matt. 1:18, 19.

A knowledge of the marriage customs of the day will aid us in understanding the dilemma Joseph faced when he learned that Mary was expecting a child. Matthew 1:18 tells us that Mary was "espoused" or engaged to Joseph. According to Jewish custom, the engagement period was a time in which the couple were bound to each other, but did not yet live together. Even though the man and woman were not yet married, this relationship could be terminated only by divorce. At the end of this time of engagement, the wedding would take place and the couple would live together as husband and wife.

During the time of engagement, it became apparent that Mary was expecting a child. This must have seemed out of character for her, and Joseph likely felt bewildered, hurt, and betrayed. He had two options. He could bring Mary to trial and judgment publicly, or he could divorce her quietly.

What a difficult decision for Joseph to make. And yet certainly he could not marry a woman who was having another man's child. Should he publicly accuse Mary and bring her into open ridicule and shame? Or should he simply write a bill of divorce? His desire to do the kind thing would not allow him to bring her to public disgrace, so "he had in mind to divorce her quietly" (Matt. 1:19, NIV).

How does Joseph's decision to divorce Mary quietly reveal his compassion toward her?

Whatever decision Joseph made about Mary would bring difficulty to her. A public trial would lead to open disgrace, humiliation, and possibly death. A quiet divorce would leave her to rear the Child on her own, as other men would no doubt be reluctant to marry an adulteress. Joseph chose what he believed would cause Mary the least hardship and shame. What he did not know at this point was that God would unfold His plan to him and bring understanding and hope.

When have you experienced a time of difficulty in a relationship with a family member or friend? What means did you use to determine God's will for you and for the other person involved in the situation?

GOD COMMUNICATES WITH JOSEPH (Matt. 1:20-23; 2:13, 19, 20).

What message did the angel of the Lord bring to Joseph? Matt. 1:20-23. Why do you think God waited until after Joseph had decided to divorce Mary to reveal the truth about the situation?

Matthew indicates that, even after deciding to divorce Mary, Joseph continued to think about the situation. It was "while he thought on these things" (Matt. 1:20) that God sent a heavenly messenger to speak to him in a dream. What relief and excitement he must have felt upon learning the truth about Mary's Child.

It was now time for Joseph to exhibit the same kind of trust that Mary had shown when the angel came to her with the news that God had chosen her to bring forth the promised Messiah.

As God's plan for this family unfolds, how does He continue to communicate His will to Joseph? Matt. 2:13, 19, 20.

Certainly a man of Joseph's character spent time in prayer in order to know God's will for his life and the lives of his family. Just as in times past when God responded quickly to the prayer of faith, so He did not leave Joseph in doubt about what he should do. He instructed him to flee to Egypt in order to avoid Herod's attempt to take Jesus' life. Then God again communicated with Joseph when it was time for him to return to the land of Israel.

God is just as willing to communicate with us as He was to reveal His will to Joseph. If we will take time to seek His will through prayer and a study of His word, we will find the guidance and direction we need in our lives.

How does God communicate His direction to you when you are faced with uncertainty? How has God specifically answered your prayers for guidance?

Meditate on the following: "Whatever our position, we are dependent upon God, who holds all destinies in His hands. He has appointed us our work, and has endowed us with faculties and means for that work. So long as we surrender the will to God, and trust in His strength and wisdom, we shall be guided in safe paths, to fulfill our appointed part in His great plan." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 209.

JOSEPH RESPONDS TO GOD (Matt. 1:24, 25).

Describe Joseph's response to the communication he received from God. Matt. 1:24, 25.

Joseph's response exhibits his deep and abiding trust in God. He may not have seen all that lay ahead, and yet he did not hesitate to respond to God's direction. "In this perhaps more than in any other aspect of the character of Joseph is it apparent why he was suited to be the earthly protector of Mary and her child Jesus. In taking Mary to his house, Joseph acted on faith. Such an event as that announced by the angel was unknown in the annals of human experience, but Joseph believed that 'with God all things are possible.' "—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 286.

Note that Joseph's action in following God is an example of believing the promise: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28, NIV).

God's guidance. Joseph's example of trusting God's plan even though the future was uncertain is instructive for us. The ability to trust God for daily guidance comes because His past leading in our lives gives us confidence that He will continue to guide us today. We know that God has full knowledge of what is best for us, and we can live one day at a time trusting the future to His leading.

"Christ, in His life on earth, made no plans for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will. As we commit our ways to Him, He will direct our steps."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 479.

Through the record of God's revelation to Joseph of His plan for the birth of the Messiah, we continue to see God's grace. His communication with Joseph and His guidance as Joseph makes a crucial decision about his future relationship with Mary show us God's desire to be involved in every aspect of our lives, if we will only turn to Him for guidance.

What most hinders you from following God's leading in your life? By what means can you know the direction the Lord would have you take in any situation? How can you be more responsive when God reveals His direction for you?

JOSEPH'S CARE FOR JESUS (Matt. 2:13-15, 19-23).

How does Joseph continue to exhibit his willingness to follow God's leading? Matt. 2:13-15, 19-23.

"Out of Egypt I called my son" (Matt. 2:15, NIV). Hosea 11:1 refers to the Hebrew people's deliverance from Egypt. When urging Pharaoh to let them go, Moses said, "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn" (Exod. 4:22). Matthew understood that this prophecy was another indication that Jesus was the Messiah.

"So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene'" (Matt. 2:23, NIV). Critics of the Bible often point to the fact that there is no prophecy in Scripture resembling the one Matthew refers to in verse 23. "However, it is worthy of note that in previous instances where Matthew quotes a specific prophecy he speaks of 'the prophet' . . . His use of the plural form of the word 'prophets' in this instance clearly implies reference, not to a particular prophetic statement, but to several, which, taken together, led to the conclusion here stated. . . . It is possible, also, that Matthew quotes inspired writings that did not become a part of the canon of Scripture."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 293.

In Isaiah 11:1, a Messianic prophecy, the Hebrew word for "sprout" or "branch" is similar to the Hebrew word for Nazarene. It is possible "that the prophecies of Jesus as the 'Branch' could appropriately be applied to the fact that He grew up in the city of Nazareth."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 293.

Although Joseph was not Jesus' biological father, Matthew 2 reveals the seriousness with which he took the rearing of Mary's Child.

The influence of the father in the lives of his children is crucial. What guidance does Scripture give to fathers about their responsibilities toward their children?

Deut. 6:6, 7 _____

Eph. 6:4 _____

Prov. 13:24 _____

How can the church at large and mothers assist fathers in fulfilling their responsibilities to their children?

FURTHER STUDY: To find additional character traits of godly fathers, study the lives of other fathers in the Bible. In your study you might include Abraham, Jacob, Eli, and David.

Read "Eli and His Sons" in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, chapter 56, pp. 575-580; *The Adventist Home*, chapters 34-37, pp. 211-228.

"Abraham's affection for his children and his household led him to guard their religious faith, to impart to them a knowledge of the divine statutes, as the most precious legacy he could transmit to them, and through them to the world. All were taught that they were under the rule of the God of heaven. There was to be no oppression on the part of parents, and no disobedience on the part of children. God's law had appointed to each his duties, and only in obedience to it could any secure happiness or prosperity."

"His own example, the silent influence of his daily life, was a constant lesson. The unwavering integrity, the benevolence and unselfish courtesy, which had won the admiration of kings, were displayed in the home. There was a fragrance about the life, a nobility and loveliness of character, which revealed to all that he was connected with Heaven."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 142.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What new insights have you gained about Joseph and the importance of the role he played in Jesus' life? What does God expect of fathers today?
2. Does God reveal His will for your life today as directly as He did for Joseph? Why or why not?
3. In accordance with the custom of his times, Joseph could have been quite cruel to Mary. But because of his belief in God, he broke with tradition. Do you think it was easy for Joseph to break with tradition? Are there some traditions regarding women in your part of the world that Christianity could very well overrule?

SUMMARY: Studying Joseph and the way God led him provides us with insight into the character of this dedicated follower of God. Certainly God could safely trust His Son to one who exhibited such trust and obedience. Joseph's care for Mary and her Child serves as an example for all fathers in providing for the needs of the family.

Joseph's attitude in responding to God's guidance is one from which we all can learn. If we will daily turn to God, He will direct us. Our part is to study the Bible and commune with Him through meditation and prayer.



Indonesian Women Plant Church: The Baptism Rose Otis

This was it. The months of planning, praying, and ministering were past. The evangelistic meetings had gone well. Would anyone sit in the seats reserved for baptismal candidates? An elderly man walked quietly to the front of the chapel, carrying a change of clothes. Soon a Muslim couple arrived, smiling happily. Then three men in their twenties took seats in the front. How had they become interested in the message, I wondered? Would they suffer because of their decision to follow Christ? What a blessing they would be to this little church in days ahead. Others arrived—entire families; single women, small in stature but with eyes shining brightly.

I will never forget standing before this precious group that Sabbath morning. Their eager joy was reflected on the weary faces of the women whose ministries had made these meetings possible. Then 59 men, women, and young people were baptized. They were welcomed into the church with flowers, a new Bible, and a hymnal. Then a worker announced that there would be one more baptism.

During the service we had heard shouting in the churchyard. An angry husband had followed his wife to the church, threatening her life if she was baptized. She pleaded with him not to make her choose between him and her Saviour. She wanted both of their love. Finally he left, promising not to harm her. Tearfully she stepped into the baptismal font, the sixtieth gem plucked from Islam. She was crying; I was too! I think God was too!

A local representative to parliament read a message honoring the work of these women. Before he took his seat he said, "I believe in Jesus Christ too. You cannot be a true Muslim unless you can accept Jesus Christ, unless you get ready for Him to come again to this earth." Had these devoted, humble women given this man a closer look at who Jesus is and what He wants to do for all who claim His saving power? I'm convinced they did.



The sixtieth baptismal candidate begged her husband not to make her choose between him and her Saviour. Rose Otis is director of Women's Ministries at the General Conference.

For Current Newsbreak, Call 1-800-648-5824.

Mary and Elizabeth Called by God



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Luke 1:5-7, 24-55; 2:16-19.

MEMORY TEXT: " 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said' "(Luke 1:38, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: By studying God's call to Mary and Elizabeth and the responses they made, we can gain greater understanding of how we can respond in faith to God when He calls us to a special task or responsibility.

MOTHERS DEDICATED TO GOD. The lives of Mary and Elizabeth reveal two women so dedicated to God that He trusted them to be the mothers of the Messiah and His forerunner, John the Baptist. A study of their lives gives evidence of their openness to God's plan for them.

When she looks upon her baby for the first time, a mother believes that the child is unique and special, with infinite potential. This tiny miracle is like no other that has ever been born. For Elizabeth and her cousin Mary this was especially true. Their children came into the world after God chose these women to perform a unique role. Elizabeth was to be the mother of the one who would fulfill the prophetic role of preparing the way for the Messiah. Mary accepted the responsibility of being the mother to God's Son.

As we learned in last week's lesson, Mary's consent to God's will could have placed her in a precarious position culturally. Yet she did not count the cost. How willing are you to follow God's design for your life? Only if it doesn't cost too much? But then, what is "too much" to do for Someone who gave His all for you?

ELIZABETH'S READINESS (Luke 1:5-7).

While Zacharias is the main character in Luke's record of the conception and birth of John the Baptist, details are revealed about Elizabeth that help us gain insights into her character and her readiness to fulfill her role as mother to John the Baptist.

What do the following verses reveal about the background and character of Elizabeth? How did these character qualities prepare her for the responsibilities of motherhood?

Luke 1:5-7 _____

Luke 1:24, 25 _____

Luke 1:41-45 _____

Luke 1:57-66 _____

Perhaps Elizabeth secluded herself for five months in order to "give thought and study to the responsibility of rearing a child to whom so important a task as that assigned John was to be entrusted. Such a motive would seem to be fully in harmony with Elizabeth's character."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 678.

In looking for a couple to bear and train the forerunner of the Messiah, God chose a husband and wife who exhibited total dedication to the revealed will of God. "In their quiet and holy lives the light of faith shone out like a star amid the darkness of those evil days."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 97. For a woman in Israel, no curse was greater than being barren. And even though Zacharias and Elizabeth had no child, their faith and trust in God did not waver.

Their child was to be a Nazarite. (See Luke 1:15; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 102.) He was never to "take wine or other fermented drink," and he was to be "filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth" (Luke 1:15, NIV; compare Num. 6:2). Alcohol has no place in the life of a Spirit-filled believer.

"It was through faith that the child of promise was given. It is through faith that spiritual life is begotten, and we are enabled to do the works of righteousness."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 98.

MARY'S CALL (Luke 1:26-29).

Just as an angel announced to Zacharias the birth of John the Baptist, so the angel Gabriel visited Mary to reveal God's plan for her to be the mother of the Messiah.

Describe Mary's initial response to Gabriel's message. Luke 1:26-29, 34.

In addressing Mary, the angel first spoke words of assurance. Although we rightly view Mary as a woman of great faith, the presence of the angel with his unusual message brought the realization that there would be many questions and misunderstandings on the part of her family, neighbors, and friends.

How did Gabriel's words give Mary hope and encouragement? Luke 1:30-38.

How quickly Mary's humble faith turned her perplexity into acceptance and belief. "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38, NIV). "The matter was settled with Mary as soon as it became clear to her what God's will was, and as soon as sufficient information had been imparted to her to enable her to carry out her part intelligently....

"Mary gives further expression to a meek and submissive spirit. The unaffected dignity, purity, simplicity, and delicacy with which Luke relates the story bears the mark of historical fact, not of imaginative writing. Efforts of some to shame Mary, and of others to deify her, are equally unjustified by the facts of Scripture."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 684.

Even though from the human perspective the plan would be impossible, the angel reminded Mary that with God all things are possible. And with confidence Mary stated her willingness to be the instrument of God's will.

Mary's trust in God is an example for Christians today. How often we find ourselves in situations we believe are impossible for God, trusting in our own wisdom and planning to work out difficulties. God's desire is for us first to turn to Him for guidance and then to trust His leading.

In what area of your life do you most need to be reminded that "nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37)? How can you learn to trust God in that situation?

MARY AND ELIZABETH MEET (Luke 1:36, 37, 39-45).

When the angel spoke his words of encouragement to Mary, he told her of the child to be born to her cousin Elizabeth. Knowing that Zacharias and Elizabeth had gone so many years without children, Mary received this information with joy and praise to God.

Consider how the message of Elizabeth's pregnancy would have strengthened Mary's trust in God's plan for herself. Luke 1:36, 37.

Upon hearing the news of the child expected by Elizabeth and Zacharias, Mary quickly set out to visit the couple. What a joyful meeting they experienced! Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth proclaimed a blessing upon Mary.

What specific blessings did Elizabeth share with Mary? How do these blessings reflect the message of the angel to Mary about her coming Child? Luke 1:42-45.

Elizabeth blessed Mary because she was favored of God in His selection of her to be "the mother of my Lord," and because she had exhibited faith in God's revelation to her. Mary's faith in God's ability to fulfill His promises is a model for Christians today.

"Faith is trusting God—believing that He loves us and knows best what is for our good. Thus, instead of our own, it leads us to choose His way. In place of our ignorance, it accepts His wisdom; in place of our weakness, His strength; in place of our sinfulness, His righteousness. Our lives, ourselves, are already His; faith acknowledges His ownership and accepts its blessing."—*Education*, p. 253.

This is the quality of faith Mary revealed in her life. The depth of her faith is evidenced in her willingness to trust God's plan for her life. The blessings in the life of Mary were not to come without difficulties, but she was assured the Lord was with her (Luke 1:28). She would face the accusations about her pregnancy, the difficult journey to Bethlehem, the flight to Egypt, and finally the painful death of her Son on Calvary. These trials she would encounter, but not without the presence of the God she loved. He would sustain her.

When has your faith in God's plan for your life been tested? How did you know the Lord was with you?

MARY'S SONG OF PRAISE TO GOD (Luke 1:46-55).

Mary's visit to Zacharias and Elizabeth confirmed all that the angel had spoken to her. Elizabeth was expecting a child, and her words of blessing added to Mary's confidence in God. She was filled with such adoration and love for God that she broke forth in words of praise (Luke 1:46-55).

God's goodness. Mary's inspired words begin with personal praise to God. She thanks Him because "he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant" (Luke 1:48, NRSV). Mary recognizes that God has favored her, not because of her own worthiness, but because of His grace. She is blessed because of the great things God has done for her. Her response is one of recognition and thanks for God's goodness.

Mary's prayer also acknowledges God's presence with all His people. She remembers that God has always acted on behalf of His own. She contrasts God's activity against the proud, the powerful, and the rich with His care for the lowly and the hungry.

What does Mary's song reveal about the character and work of God? Luke 1:46-55.

Summarize how Mary's song prefigures Jesus' mission.

As we compare the message of God's activities in this song with the life of Jesus, we notice striking parallels. In His life on earth Jesus brought hope and life to the disadvantaged as He challenged the proud and powerful. For each His desire was to bring the message of eternal life through acceptance of His life and death for them.

"These are the most revolutionary words ever spoken. Through the Messiah, the mighty will be brought low; the humble, the lowly, will be exalted. . . . Jesus, the ultimate revolutionary, completely reverses all human values. What Mary was prophesying about her unborn son is terrifying to the establishment, whoever and wherever they are. They cannot hear these words gladly. We may attempt instead to spiritualize these verses, but deep down we all know that Jesus has come to instigate the kind of revolution we need."—Bruce Larson, *The Communicator's Commentary: Luke*, Lloyd J. Ogilvie, gen. ed. (Waco, Tex.: Word, Inc., 1983), pp. 39, 40.

Take time today to share with a friend or family member something for which you would like to sing a song of praise to God.

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS (Luke 2:16-19).

List the qualities Mary exhibited that prepared her to be the mother of Jesus.

Luke 1:26-38 _____

Luke 1:39-45 _____

Luke 2:16-19 _____

Servant of God. Mary exhibited a simple dependence upon God and complete trust in His leading for her life. She saw herself as “the Lord’s servant” (Luke 1:38, NIV). When God revealed His plan to her, Mary accepted it. Because of her quick and heartfelt acceptance of God’s plan, we can assume Mary had close fellowship with God through past experience.

When the shepherds came with their report of the angels’ visit, “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19, NIV). We might assume she spent time during her pregnancy studying the Scriptures for evidence of her Child’s mission. And when she heard the shepherds’ account, she accepted it as further evidence of God’s plan.

Simeon’s words to Mary (Luke 2:33-35) warned that Jesus’ mission to humanity would result in pain for her. Her precious Child would bring not only joy but sorrow as He fulfilled the destiny to which He was called.

How would the character qualities Mary exhibited early in life aid her in relating to Jesus’ ministry and death?

Mary’s trust in God’s plan for her life and her willingness to give God the praise and glory for His goodness provide an example from which all Christians can learn.

How much time do I spend in daily study of God’s Word and in prayer so that I can discern His communication to me? How willing am I to trust His leading in my life, even if His plan seems impossible? Do I respond to God’s grace toward me by praising Him daily, even though I cannot see exactly where He is leading me?

FURTHER STUDY: Study the prayer of praise Hannah offered in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Compare it with the prayer of thanks Mary offered in Luke 1:46-55. How do both prayers reflect God's activities on behalf of these godly women and His people?

Read *The Adventist Home*, "Influence of the Mother," chapter 39, pp. 240-243.

"Women have need of great patience before they are qualified to become mothers. God has ordained that they shall be fitted for this work. The work of the mother becomes infinite through her connection with Christ. It is beyond understanding. Woman's office is sacred. The presence of Jesus is needed in the home. . . . What a world we would have if all mothers would consecrate themselves on the altar of God, and would consecrate their offspring to God, both before and after its birth!"—*The Adventist Home*, p. 255.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Using Mary's song of praise (Luke 1:46-55) as an example, write your own message of thanks to God for what He has done in your life.
2. In what ways has God helped you in times of need?
3. How can the lives of Zacharias, Elizabeth, and Mary provide guidance for prospective parents?

SUMMARY: A study of the lives of Mary and Elizabeth helps us to realize that God does not need men and women of wealth, fame, or human authority in order to fulfill His plan. God's greatest need is for those who are willing to commit their lives fully to Jesus Christ. He wants us to know that "nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37, NIV), and He wants us to respond to His plan by saying, "May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38, NIV).



Ordinary Women Perform Extraordinarily

C. S. Marandi

In the Southern Asia Division teaching the illiterate to read has become a Sabbath School outreach project. Local churches hold literacy classes to help members learn to read their Bibles, which would help them spiritually, and to reach out in love and concern to those who are not in the church.

Sushilabai Prakash Bhalerao is a young widow living in Maharashtra, India. She was illiterate and felt she had little to offer until her pastor introduced an adult-literacy program in her church. In less than a year Sushilabai learned to read her Bible. Her whole outlook in life has changed.

She saw what a difference reading had made in her life and decided to help other women in her own village. She began conducting a literacy program, and watched other women change their lives, as well. Then she began to teach them about Jesus.

Sushilabai looks happy and self-confident as she reads the Scripture passage for worship service. And the faces of the women in church brighten as they see one of their own participating during worship, a tremendous testimony of the effectiveness of this adult ministry.

Sushilabai invited us to her home, where ten women meet for adult-literacy class. Five of these women are taking Bible studies; three have already been baptized.

One field in Southern Asia Division reports that hundreds have learned to read through the adult literacy program. Twelve persons have been baptized, and 18 are taking Bible studies as a direct result of the adult-literacy program outreach. Teaching members to read will help them to witness more effectively.

Our ordinary women and men can do extraordinary work for the Lord.



*Sushilabai's adult-literacy class.
C. S. Marandi is Southern Asia
Division associate director of
church ministries.*

For Current Newsbreak, Call 1-800-648-5824.

The Call of the Shepherds



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Luke 2:8-20.

MEMORY TEXT: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

KEY THOUGHT: God reveals the message of the Messiah to anyone receptive of the good news and willing to share it with others.

A SAVIOUR IS BORN. God first revealed the news of His Son's birth to a group of shepherds. Why did He entrust this news to a group of men looked down upon by society's more favored class? Why was the good news first announced to a group of men unlikely to be able to influence those in authority? God knew that these humble shepherds studied the prophecies and prayed for the coming of the Messiah. Thus they were prepared to receive the message "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

This Christmas season, where is your focus? Are you so involved with shopping for just the right present that you are missing the gift of Heaven? In your rush to decorate the house, prepare holiday treats, and travel to visit family, are you in danger of ignoring the story of the Christ Child? Or are you looking for opportunities to share the glory of the Christmas message with others? How can you be more like the shepherds in your readiness to receive the message of a Saviour who has come and who has promised to come again?

THE SHEPHERDS RECEIVE A VISITOR (Luke 2:8, 9).

Instead of religious leaders, earthly rulers, or rabbis, God chose shepherds as the first to tell the news of His Son's birth. This is especially unusual "because shepherds were among the lowest and most despised social groups. The very nature of their work kept them from entering into the mainstream of Israel's society. They couldn't maintain the ceremonial washings and observe all the religious festivals and feasts."—MacArthur, p. 75.

What does Luke 2:8, 9, 15-20 reveal about the shepherds that would indicate why God revealed to them the good news of Jesus' birth?

While most of God's people seemed indifferent to the prophecies that pointed to the first advent of the Messiah, there were a few who were ready for the announcement of His birth. Although viewed as outcasts by others, God knew that these shepherds would eagerly receive and share this blessed message. As they tended their flocks in the fields, they utilized the time in personal preparation. "Through the silent hours they talked together of the promised Saviour, and prayed for the coming of the King to David's throne."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 47. Thus God knew they would receive the news with joy and gladness.

How was the message of Isaiah 9:2, 3 partially fulfilled in the story of the shepherds?

The light of God. Certainly at this period of Israel's history there was great darkness among the people. Their understanding of the prophecies that could have prepared them for the birth of the Messiah was clouded. Yet among those who were searching, God revealed the birth of the One who is the light of the world.

God also desires us to be prepared and eager to share the good news of His second advent. He is looking for people who are spending time in personal preparation so that they will be ready to announce His coming.

"To those who are seeking for light, and who accept it with gladness, the bright rays from the throne of God will shine."
—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 47. How are you preparing for God to use you in sharing the good news of Jesus' second advent?

THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE (Luke 2:10, 11).

List at least five elements of hope in the "good news" the angel brought. Luke 2:10, 11.

The angel frightened the shepherds, a reaction the angel was quick to dispel. His message was one of good news that would result in great joy for the listeners and for all humanity. As revealed in the Incarnation, God's love did not bring fear, but hope. (Compare 1 John 4:18.)

The waiting was over. The promises were fulfilled. The long-looked-for Messiah had been born in the city of David. How could the shepherds be certain? The certainty resulted from the realization that the prophecies had been fulfilled. "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah . . . from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2, NASB).

The angel's message identified the Child as the Saviour. Here the message of God's grace to humankind is most evident. We are no longer destined to be eternally lost, but to find salvation through Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:21).

While the religious leaders were looking for a Messiah who would establish an earthly kingdom for Israel, the King had arrived who would include the whole world in His ministry.

The title *Christ the Lord* "identifies Christ with 'the Lord' of OT times."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 700. In this Child all the hope of humanity reached fulfillment. The incarnation of God in human flesh is now complete. Surely the shepherds could receive no greater news.

We have read and heard the words of Luke 2:10, 11 "so often that the first surprise has gone from them. . . . Yet the wonder and mystery of the Incarnation is precisely in the fact that those things were so. For in the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, and in all that the life of Jesus was afterwards to reveal, there is the message that not only is there a God, but that God comes very near. To believe that God is above us is one thing. To believe that God is a strength sufficient for us is another and still more inspiring confidence. But to believe that God is not only almighty, that he is not only all-sufficient, but that he is God with us, God the near, the understanding and the intimate—that is best of all."—*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 8, p. 54.

What elements of the good news to the shepherds are the most encouraging to you? How can you best share this good news when others desire to know about Jesus?

THE HUMBLE SIGN, THE CONTRASTING GLORY (Luke 2:12-14).

How did the message of the angel prepare the shepherds to find Jesus? Luke 2:11, 12.

In the excitement of the moment, the shepherds are not left without directions for finding the Child. As the angel speaks, "visions of glory fill the minds of the listening shepherds. The Deliverer has come to Israel! Power, exaltation, triumph, are associated with His coming. But the angel must prepare them to recognize their Saviour."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 47.

What phrase in Luke 2:13, 14 emphasizes the great significance of the song sung by the heavenly host?

Heaven could no longer retain its joy over the birth of the earth's Redeemer. The importance of this event was not lost on the heavenly host, and their desire to spread the news to humanity found voice in their song of praise.

The song underlines the need for us to turn our attention and praise toward heaven. "The plan of salvation originated with God, and it is fitting that both angels and men should ascribe glory and praise to Him. . . . The plan of salvation reconciles God and men, so bringing peace to men and glory to God."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 700. The plan to reveal the great mercy and grace of God toward humankind was in progress. The shepherds needed only to travel to the manger in Bethlehem to see the Son of God made flesh. There could be no greater reason to sing praises.

The order of the angel's proclamation is important. Peace among earth's citizens is one of the goals of God's grace. But such peace cannot be accomplished unless earth's citizens first learn to praise God. The improvement of our condition is not the result of any earthly strategy. It is the consequence of accepting God's salvation and of being thankful for it.

When we comprehend something of God's grace as revealed in Jesus' birth, the result will be a change of attitude toward others. The peace of Christ will reign in our hearts. (Compare Eph. 2:14.) In what ways has the good news of Jesus Christ broken down walls separating you from others? Why should this good news be the most unifying factor among God's professed people today?

THE SHEPHERDS RESPOND (Luke 2:15-20).

Choose single words or short phrases from Luke 2:15-17 that describe the shepherds' response to the angel's message.

The light and glory accompanying the heavenly host dimmed, and the shepherds were again alone in darkness on the hillside. Yet it was not the same. They now had the good news of the Saviour's birth. Their joy must achieve expression. Nothing could stand in their way of finding this Child.

As with the heavenly host, the shepherds could not keep the news to themselves. In their excitement they related their discovery to anyone who would listen. And as is typical with good news, the message spread quickly, even to the skeptical religious leaders.

"The priests and elders of Jerusalem were not as ignorant concerning the birth of Christ as they pretended. The report of the angels' visit to the shepherds had been brought to Jerusalem, but the rabbis had treated it as unworthy of their notice."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 62.

What aspect of their experience do you think the shepherds were most eager to share? What were the reactions to the shepherds' message? Luke 2:18, 19. What were the shepherds' reactions when they had confirmed the angel's announcement? Luke 2:20.

There was much they could tell: the visitation of the angel with the heavenly host, the words of praise they heard, the fulfillment of prophecy, and the message of salvation through the Saviour.

"Heaven and earth are no wider apart today than when shepherds listened to the angels' song. . . .

"The story of Bethlehem is an exhaustless theme. In it is hidden 'the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.' Rom. 11:33. We marvel at the Saviour's sacrifice in exchanging the throne of heaven for the manger, and the companionship of adoring angels for the beasts of the stall. Human pride and self-sufficiency stand rebuked in His presence. Yet this was but the beginning of His wonderful condescension."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 48, 49.

As you reflect on what Jesus has done for you, with whom would you most like to share the message of salvation? For what would you like to praise Him today?

PREPARING FOR THE ADVENT (Matt. 24:14).

When the shepherds received the salvation message, they experienced a desire to share the good news. Those who are awaiting the second advent of Jesus also will have a desire to share with others the news of His salvation and coming.

How do the following texts contribute to your understanding of the role God calls you to act as you await Jesus' second advent?

Matt. 24:14 _____

John 17:22, 23 _____

1 Peter 3:8, 9 _____

If we desire to share the message of salvation with others, we must first commit our own lives to Jesus Christ. It is possible to share effectively only what is a part of our own experience. When we know Christ as our personal Saviour, we will naturally desire to share this joy with those who are unacquainted with Him.

"No sooner does one come to Christ, than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. If we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and are filled with the joy of His indwelling Spirit, we shall not be able to hold our peace."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 78.

As the early Christians awaited the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they came close together in unity. "Putting away all differences, all desire for the supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37. We too must experience the unity and fellowship brought by the Spirit of God if we are to represent Christ rightly to the world.

Meditate upon the following statement: "To the end of time, the presence of the Spirit is to abide with the true church. But near the close of earth's harvest, a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 55.

What evidence do you see in the church today of that "spiritual grace"? What evidence do you see in yourself?

FURTHER STUDY: Read "Unto You a Saviour" in *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 4, pp. 43-49. What lessons do you learn about preparing for the second coming of Jesus? Also read Matthew 24:42-44; 25:1-13; Luke 21:34-36; 1 Peter 4:7, 8; 2 Peter 3:10-12. Consider the relevance of the following statement as we make ready for Christ's second advent:

"The class represented by the foolish virgins are not hypocrites. They have a regard for the truth, they have advocated the truth, they are attracted to those who believe the truth; but they have not yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit's working. They have not fallen upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, and permitted their old nature to be broken up. . . . They receive the word with readiness, but they fail of assimilating its principles. Its influence is not abiding. The Spirit works upon man's heart, according to his desire and consent implanting in him a new nature; but the class represented by the foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work. They do not know God. They have not studied His character; they have not held communion with Him; therefore they do not know how to trust, how to look and live. Their service to God degenerates into a form."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 411.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the message that the angel gave to the shepherds compare with the message the angel gave to Joseph in Matthew 1:20-23?
2. In what way does the song of the heavenly host (Luke 2:14) reveal the principles of God's law? (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 308.)
3. What role does the Holy Spirit play in preparing the church to share the gospel with the world? (Read "The Gift of the Spirit" in *The Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 5, pp. 47-56.)

SUMMARY: God found the shepherds willing to share with others the revelation of Jesus' advent. They responded to the announcement of the heavenly host with joy and gladness. Today God seeks those who will share the joy of salvation with others in need. God does not determine His selection on the basis of race, gender, or class but on our willingness for Him to use us.

House Churches in China

Since 1987 the Adventist church in Harbin, China, has shared a Three-Self church building with a Sunday-keeping congregation. But when Adventists were told not to preach their doctrines in the church, many Adventists refused to worship there.

One woman started a church in her home. She had no materials except her Bible. Someone gave her a church hymnal, but she could not read music, so she asked a Sunday-keeping pastor to help her learn the songs. When he saw the Adventist hymnal he scolded her and refused to help her. She left his home in tears.

Why, she wondered, did people become so angry when they heard the name Seventh-day Adventist? If this church was God's true church, why did others refuse to accept it? She began to study her Bible to prove that her church really followed the whole Bible. The more she studied, the more convinced she was that her church had the truth. If the Sunday-keeping pastor refused to preach this message, she would preach it herself!

When she began holding meetings in her home, only three or four women came to read the Bible and pray together. But their numbers grew, with many young people joining the group. As the group grew, it multiplied into two groups, then into four.

The Adventist pastor in a nearby town heard about the house churches in Harbin. He sent them tapes and invited the house-church leaders to come to his home for further Bible study. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the women changed from hesitant, weak speakers to buoyant, powerful, preachers!

The house churches continue to increase. By 1994 there were 15 house churches, with the largest group of 200 people meeting in the first house church. In 1992 some 400 people were baptized. In 1993 more than 600 joined the church in this city.

Members have applied for a permit to build their own church, but permission has not been given. Today more than 1,500 members in Hardin desperately need suitable places to worship.



Part of the first house church in Harbin, China. This story was provided by the Hong Kong office of the Eastern Asia Committee.

The Birth of Jesus



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: John 1:14-18; Luke 2:1-7, 22-38; Matt. 2:1-13.

MEMORY TEXT: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." John 1:14.

KEY THOUGHT: After so many years of waiting, the Messiah was born. In a variety of ways, people responded to this event that so clearly revealed God's grace and mercy to humanity. Likewise today, people react in many different ways to the news of salvation.

A JOYFUL EVENT. What an exciting event is the birth of a baby. After months of preparation, the joyful event occurs. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends rejoice with the new parents. Friends and family deliver gifts and offer congratulations.

While missed by the world at large, the significance of the birth of Jesus did not go totally unnoticed. The wise men, Herod, Simeon, and Anna were among those who paid special attention to the birth of this Child. Their varied reactions to the One sent of God were a reflection of the responses each of us make to the incarnation of God's grace.

As you study this week's lesson, try to determine how you have responded and are responding presently to your Saviour. Does your reaction to Him more nearly reflect that of the wise men, Herod, Simeon, or Anna?

THE WORD BECAME FLESH (John 1:1-5, 14-18).

The greatest event in earth's history takes place in the city of Bethlehem. A Baby is born. But unlike other births, the birth of this Child marks the further unfolding of God's plan for redeeming the human race. God has become flesh. Who is this Child? What makes Jesus different from all other children born before and after?

The apostle John assists us in understanding just what made the birth of Jesus unique. How does he describe the "Word" that became flesh? John 1:1-5, 14-18.

There was no doubt in John's mind that the Baby born in Bethlehem was none other than God, the Creator of all, become flesh. No matter what else we believe about the story of Christ's birth, this fact is central. The greatest revelation of the grace and mercy of God is the fact that Jesus, the eternal God, came to dwell among us.

What do the following texts contribute to your understanding of the Incarnation?

Col. 1:15-20 _____

Phil. 2:5-11 _____

Heb. 1:1-3, 6-8 _____

Heb. 10:5-9 _____

In coming to this earth, Jesus took upon Himself the form of humanity, uniting it with His divinity, so that we might have salvation. "Christ was to identify Himself with the interests and needs of humanity. He who was one with God has linked Himself with the children of men by ties that are never to be broken. . . . And all this that man might be uplifted from the ruin and degradation of sin that he might reflect the love of God and share the joy of holiness."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 14.

Of what special significance for us is the truth that Jesus is now and forever tied to humanity?

THE BIRTH OF JESUS (Luke 2:1-7).

Describe the circumstances leading to the presence of Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem. Luke 2:1-7.

How were these circumstances a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy? Why was it important for Jesus, of the lineage of David, to be born in the City of David? Micah 5:2.

The long months of waiting were over. Joseph and Mary had completed their weary trip to Bethlehem. The time had arrived for the birth of the Baby. Since "there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7), Mary and Joseph found themselves housed with the animals. And Mary, a first-time mother, gave birth to the Son of God. There were no fancy clothes or attractive cradle. Only swaddling clothes and a manger.

The hope for humanity's freedom from sin and its penalty was born. God's plan for the redemption of humankind was being fulfilled. The birth of Jesus marks God's greatest revelation of His grace and mercy toward women, men, and children. Without this demonstration of God's love, humanity would be eternally lost.

God's plan for the salvation of humanity does not stop with the birth of Jesus. The birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus have no effect until we accept Him personally. God is interested in the rebirth of each of His children. Jesus emphasizes this point in His dialog with Nicodemus.

What importance does Jesus place upon the rebirth experience? John 3:1-8.

During the Christmas season it is easy to overlook the true message of the holiday. The message is not only about the birth of Jesus; it is also a message about the need for each person to consider again why Jesus came to this earth. The message of His birth speaks to us of God's mercy and grace in providing a substitute for us. It shows us God's willingness to go to any length to provide for our salvation. The message of Christmas asks for our response.

How can you more closely reflect the meaning of Christmas in your own life? How can you communicate to your family and friends the true meaning of Christmas?

SIMEON AND ANNA RECOGNIZE JESUS (Luke 2:22-38).

What brought Joseph and Mary to Jerusalem? Luke 2:22-24.

The time had arrived for Mary and Joseph to fulfill the specifications of the law in presenting Jesus to the Father. As Mary's firstborn, Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise that His firstborn Son would be the salvation of humanity.

Summarize the role the Holy Spirit played in bringing Simeon and Anna to Jesus. Luke 2:25-27, 36, 37.

The leading of the Holy Spirit. Luke makes it plain that the encounter of Simeon and Anna with Jesus was not mere coincidence. They were both open to the Holy Spirit's guidance during their lives. When Mary and Joseph presented Jesus to the Father in the temple, the Spirit guided Simeon and Anna to meet with them.

List specific words Simeon spoke that described the mission of Jesus in coming to this earth. How did Anna's behavior corroborate Simeon's testimony? Luke 2:29-38.

We know very little about Anna, but what Luke does tell us about her is quite important. First of all, she was a widow. And like the shepherds, widows were among the lower classes of society. Yet her station in life did not matter to God, who entrusted her with the all-important message of the gospel. Furthermore, as a widow and a member of a low social class, Anna was well acquainted with sorrow. But it does not seem that this sorrow caused her to be bitter or resentful. Second, Anna was old. But she never gave up hope. Age robs us all of strength and energy. But far worse, age, like sorrow, can turn our optimism and idealism into cynical despair so that we become resigned and even a bit content with "the way things are."

How, then, was Anna able to keep her faith alive? She worshiped God at every opportunity. She never failed to pray. Anna's hope burned brightly because she determined not to lose her connection with the Source of her hope.

Anna and Simeon were both elderly, yet their service to God was vital. What can your local congregation do to encourage its senior members to use their talents for the advancement of the gospel?

THE WISE MEN'S VISIT (Matt. 2:1-12).

Visitors from the East. Matthew records the visit of wise men. Who were these mysterious men? For what purpose did they come looking for this newborn King of the Jews? Some Bible scholars believe the Magi were from Persia. They were seekers of truth, men of integrity, and learned in their country's philosophy, medicine, and natural science. Most likely they also were astronomers, and as they "studied the starry heavens, and sought to fathom the mystery hidden in their bright paths, they beheld the glory of the Creator. Seeking clearer knowledge, they turned to the Hebrew Scriptures. In their own land were treasured prophetic writings that predicted the coming of a divine teacher. Balaam belonged to the magicians, though at one time a prophet of God; by the Holy Spirit he had foretold the prosperity of Israel and the appearing of the Messiah. . . . But in the Old Testament the Saviour's advent was clearly revealed. The magi learned with joy that His coming was near, and that the whole world was to be filled with a knowledge of the glory of the Lord."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 59, 60.

How did the appearance of the star (Matt. 2:2, 9) and the prophetic message in Matthew 2:6 encourage the wise men?

How did God reward the faithfulness of the wise men in their search for the Child? Matt. 2:9-12.

As they approached Jerusalem, the anticipation of the wise men must have grown. They would soon be able to worship the Child-King they had come so far to find. How surprised they must have been to find that Jerusalem seemed uninformed of this event. How they must have wondered at the humble surroundings of the Child, for this was the One "born King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:2)! Yet the constant guidance of the star left no doubt in their minds that they had found the One for whom they had searched.

God's guidance did not cease after they had found Jesus. He warned them in a dream that Herod's interest in the Child was, not to worship, but to harm Him. Thus they were led to return to their own country without further contact with Herod.

When has your own searching for Jesus led you to fall down and worship Him? What "gift" have you offered Him?

HEROD'S REACTION (Matt. 2:1-18).

What does Herod's response to the news of Jesus' birth say about his character and how he viewed the importance of this event? Matt. 2:3-8, 16.

Herod was the only ruler of Palestine who could keep the peace. Being a great builder, he even rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem. And there were occasions when he used his power and wealth toward charitable ends. Once during difficult times, he excused the people from their taxes. And during the famine of 25 B.C., he melted down his own gold to purchase corn for the starving people.

But Herod was highly protective of his throne. His reaction to Jesus' birth is not surprising when one considers his reputation for killing people he even slightly suspected of treason. Thus he had his wife, mother-in-law, and three sons executed.

When, at the age of 70, he felt his death was imminent, he ordered that some of the most distinguished citizens of Jerusalem be arrested and put to death when he died. Thus he was assured that tears would flow when he passed away.

But Herod's one action that is best known to history is his slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem. But by His superior power God protected His Son so that the plan of salvation could go forward.

How did God's continued guidance interfere with Herod's plans for the Child? Matt. 2:12-18.

"Through the wise men, God had called the attention of the Jewish nation to the birth of His Son. . . .

Satan was bent on shutting out the divine light from the world, and he used his utmost cunning to destroy the Saviour. But He who never slumbers nor sleeps was watching over His beloved Son. He who had rained manna from heaven for Israel and had fed Elijah in the time of famine provided in a heathen land a refuge for Mary and the child Jesus. And through the gifts of the magi from a heathen country, the Lord supplied the means for the journey into Egypt and the sojourn in a land of strangers."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 64, 65.

How do you feel about a God who will go to such great lengths to protect His Son? What does this tell you about God's willingness to guide and protect your life?

FURTHER STUDY: Compare and contrast the reactions of the wise men, Simeon, Anna, and Herod to the birth of Jesus. What do their responses reveal about their characters? How was it possible for the wise men, Simeon, and Anna to understand the meaning of Jesus' birth? Why did Herod, along with the scribes and Pharisees, miss this significance?

Read "The Dedication" and "We Have Seen His Star" in *The Desire of Ages*, chapters 5 and 6, pp. 50-67.

"Simeon and the priests represent two classes—those who are guided by the Spirit of God because they are willing to be instructed, and those who, refusing to receive the light which would lead them into all truth, are guided by the spirit of the power of darkness, and are daily being led into deeper darkness."

"By divine illumination Simeon understood Christ's mission. The Holy Spirit impressed his heart. But the priests and rulers were imbued with the spirit of the enemy of God; and today the same spirit influences human minds, controlling with power the hearts of men, and making of none effect the appeals of the Spirit."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1116.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What further biblical evidence can you find to show that Jesus was God in human flesh?
2. When Mary and Joseph presented Jesus to the Father in the temple, they offered two doves because they were too poor to offer a lamb. Why is it significant that Jesus was born into such a home?

SUMMARY: The "incarnation of grace" was complete. While all heaven rejoiced at the birth of the Son of God, few on earth were prepared for this event. Pride, selfishness, and closed-mindedness prevented them from meeting with joy the news of the Saviour's birth.

But God was not without the faithful who were looking with eagerness for the birth of the Messiah. The wise men, Simeon, and Anna represent this group. God led each of them to a personal encounter with the Christ child.

As many were not ready for His first appearance, so many will not be ready for His second coming. Today, as then, God is looking for people who will respond to Jesus with gratitude, joy, and a desire to share the message of salvation with others. There is no greater revelation of God's grace toward humanity than the incarnation of Jesus Christ. How will you respond?



He Saw Me

Katarina Cakova

Sometimes in my life I have wondered whether God exists. For years we were taught that religion was irrelevant in our Communist country of Slovakia. But God knew my needs, and when I did not know He was there, He saw me.

My husband and I have had a stormy marriage. During a time when my children and I were alone, we wondered whether God existed, and if so, could we ever know about Him. Soon after that, we found an invitation card in the mail box from an American evangelist.

My 17-year-old son Kamil attended the first lecture by the evangelist. His younger brother joined him at the second lecture, and from the third one all of us went together. That is when I held the Bible in my hands for the first time. I read about the struggle between the spiritual powers—God and Satan. At first I found the preacher's words hard to believe, but then he told an experience that convinced me that God sees me.

One day as the minister was praying and asking the Lord to lead him, he said he saw a woman banging her fists on a glass wall, bleeding and crying, "Come and preach for us." As he told the audience this, a shiver ran down my spine. I had pounded a glass wall just that way when my husband had left us. In tears and despair, I had been asking for God's help. I asked myself a question: "Could this evangelist have seen me crying for help from the Lord?"

I realized that God was calling me to Him. That same evening I decided to follow Jesus Christ. Soon after, my sons and I were baptized. I'm so grateful that God saw me and showed me to this evangelist, and that He opened His arms to someone who had turned to Him only when she needed help. Since then our life has a purpose and is full of joy. When I see my sons living with Jesus and my little daughter singing about "bright stars," I am overwhelmed with happiness. I thank God for His messenger and for the love of Jesus Christ.

Katarina Cakova lives in Slovakia.



1995-Year of the Adventist
WOMAN

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Lessons for First Quarter, 1996

The first quarter Sabbath School lessons, entitled "*How to Study Your Bible*," focus on how to apply new skills in Bible study.

Lesson 1: The Centrality of the Bible.

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Tim. 3:14-17; John 8:31, 32; Prov. 2:1-15.

MEMORY TEXT: Proverbs 2:4, 5.

KEY THOUGHT: The Bible provides the basis for doctrinal truth, motivation for personal faith, and information about God's plans.

OUTLINE:

The Bible As Teacher (2 Tim. 3:14-17; John 8:31, 32).

Made Free by the Word of God (John 8:31-47; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18).

The Nature of the Scriptures (Prov. 2:1-15).

The Bible As God's Revelation (2 Peter 1:16-21; Eph. 3:1-6).

The Richness of God's Word (James 1:22-25; Ps. 119:96-105).

Lesson 2: The Purpose of Bible Study.

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ps. 119:1-18; Matt. 4:1-11; 7:24-27; 28:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 8.

MEMORY TEXT: Matthew 7:25, 26.

KEY THOUGHT: The Bible challenges us to learn: (1) what God is like; (2) how God acted in history; (3) how we can grow in grace.

OUTLINE:

Building of Strong Footings (Matt. 7:24-27; Rom. 2:13).

Study Systematically (Acts 17:10-14).

Hearing to Understand (Matt. 22:23-33).

Study for Life Application (Matt. 28:18-20).

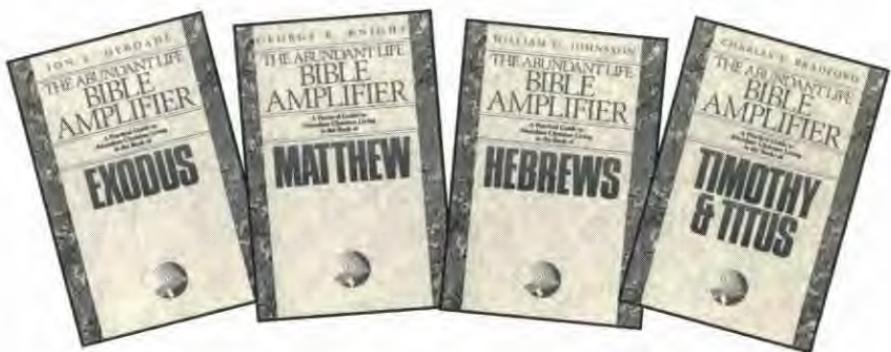
Defense Against Falsehood (Matt. 25:1-13).

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2. Mobilize 200 prison ministry teams to reach prisoners in North America.

Unions	Churches	Membership	Population
Atlantic	398	75,788	32,098,135
Canada	332	43,377	28,106,000
Columbia	574	95,352	45,730,425
Lake	469	67,521	31,882,120
Mid-America	481	52,715	22,141,790
North Pacific	384	75,452	10,670,430
Pacific	613	188,026	39,968,910
Southern	875	156,478	46,453,850
Southwestern	505	58,416	29,479,330
Totals June 30, 1994	4,631	813,125	286,530,990



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