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BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

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Living the Advent Hope



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH



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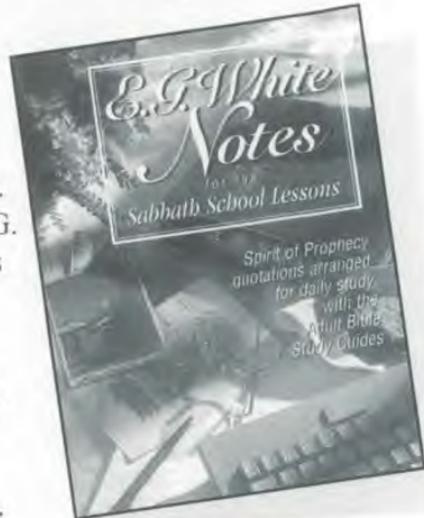
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Sisyphus and Christ

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus had been condemned by the gods to push a rock to the top of a mountain, where it would of its own weight fall to the bottom. Sisyphus would shove it back up, only to have it roll down, again and again, the process continuing forever. The idea was that no punishment could be worse than futile, hopeless labor.

A few millennia after the story was first told, Frenchman Albert Camus wrote a short book entitled *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Written during World War II, the book used Sisyphus as a metaphor of human existence itself. Because life has no meaning, Camus asked Is it worth living? If all the energy, effort, and passion needed to exist is like Sisyphus's labor, hopeless and futile, why bother?

Camus has a point, at least, given his premise: If there is no God, then this existence—with all its trials, pain, perplexities, and absurdities—is all that we have and are and, therefore, is meaningless. Our whole essence is contained in, and limited by, our own mortality. Nothing transcends it, nothing exceeds it. Our life is its own end, and because our end always dissolves into dust, what can it mean? Obviously, not much.

Camus, however, wasn't the only one to realize the futility of human life in and of itself. Centuries earlier, Paul said the same thing: If nothing is beyond this life—if death caps it, consummates it, and finalizes it—then it is all for nothing. If Christ does not come back and raise us from the dead to immortality, then all that we have believed in and hoped for is, he said, in “vain” (1 Cor. 15:17).

Both Paul and Camus both understood the ultimate issue: What is the meaning of this short span of existence known as human life? The crucial difference, then, is that while Camus had no hope, Paul did, because Camus (at least when he wrote his essay) did not have Christ while Paul did—and that's why Paul (and all the other Bible writers) could express in their writings a wonderful optimism and hope amid a world limping along in death, decay, and suffering.

This quarter, we look at that hope, a hope not in ourselves or in anything we can do but a hope rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ, who “gave himself for our sins” (Gal. 1:4), whose life and death at His first coming is our surety of resurrection and eternity at His second coming. As sure as we are that Jesus came and died for our sins at the First Coming is as sure as we can be that He will return and collect those for whom He died. That is hope!

Many thanks to Jonathan Gallagher of the General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department for pulling out of Scripture the places brimming with hope and sharing them with us. For it is our humble hope that, once done with these lessons, we'll all better know that however difficult our struggles and labor in this life often can be, because of Christ's atonement at the Cross and the hope that it brings us, our labors and struggles, unlike those of poor Sisyphus, are not in vain.

Living the Advent Hope

From the early days of the Advent movement, it has been our delight (not to mention sacred duty) to explain the hope that's implicit in the name *Adventist* itself: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Pet. 3:15, NIV). And the reason for our hope is Jesus, who, through His sacrificial death, has guaranteed that He will come, at the Second Advent (hence the name *Adventist*), and retrieve those who cost Him so much.

It is the precious blood of Christ Himself that's the surety of our hope, the one hope to which we are called (Eph. 4:4), the living hope (1 Pet. 1:3), a hope that's absolute, because it does not rest in us but in Jesus Christ, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). Our hope rests upon the One who "came unto his own" (John 1:11), who died for our sins, who was resurrected for our justification (Rom. 4:25), and who will return in the clouds of heaven to gather His elect (Matt. 24:31).

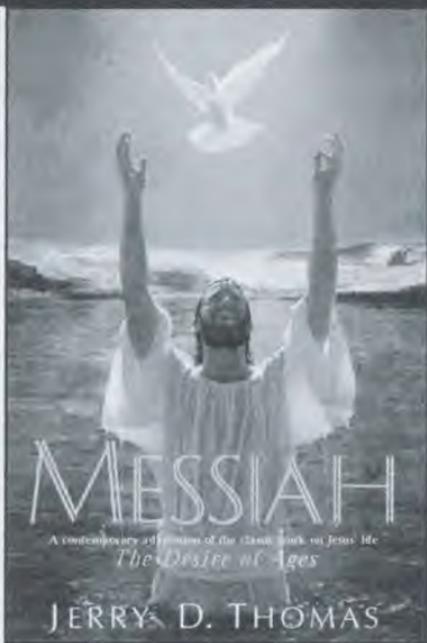
In these studies we will look at living the Advent hope—the hope explicit in the promise of His coming in the clouds of glory to take us once and for all out of this world of sin. This quarter will not so much be a doctrinal study as a realistic and experiential look at how we put this hope into practice. We'll look at what the Advent hope means, how it is essential to faith, how it answers questions and provides assurance in the present. We'll look, too, at how hope should impact our lives as we deal with others, with the church, and with those with whom we must share this hope.

Our desire is that, through this quarter's Adult Bible Study Guide, we will know better the wonderful God of hope who so loved this world that He gave Jesus, the express image of His own person (Heb. 1:3), as the ransom for our lost souls. Because to know God is to love Him, and to love God is to experience in our own lives His saving grace, a grace whose end leads to a hope far beyond what sinful fallen minds cannot even begin to imagine, even in their most extreme flights of heavenly fantasy.

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

And among those things freely given, what could be more precious than hope, particularly the Advent hope?

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Read
MISSION

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on December 28
supports projects in the Africa-Indian Ocean Division.

The Need for Hope



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Genesis 1–3.

MEMORY TEXT: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

KEY THOUGHT: As soon as there was the need for hope, there was hope.

HOPE IS AS FUNDAMENTAL AN ASPECT of the human condition as is breath. We all hope; maybe not for the same things, maybe not for the same reasons, maybe not with the same fervency, and maybe not even for the right things—but we all, nevertheless, hope. We have to.

This week, however, we will look at a time when there was no hope, because there was no need for it. Fortunately, once the need arose, so did hope. And that hope, in a very broad way, forms the essence of the *good news*. God, out of love for humanity, will renew all things that were disrupted and ruined by the Fall. While the early chapters of Genesis look at the Creation, the last chapters of Revelation point to the re-creation of all that had been spoiled and disrupted by sin (Rev. 21:1).

Our great hope points us not only to this new creation but to the promise—made certain through the atoning death of Jesus—that we, ourselves, will be part of it.

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, Oct. 5.

THE CREATION.

"And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31).

Genesis gives a brief outline of what was, unquestionably, an exceedingly complex event—that of the creation of the earth and all life on it, including humanity. One point, however, does come through, and that is how God regarded His creation of the earth and those whom He made to dwell upon it.

Read Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31. Though they all say the same basic thing about the nature of this Creation, how do you understand the word *good* here? Did it just mean well-done, as in finely crafted and made, or were there, perhaps, other meanings to the word *good*? If so, what might they have been?

It is hard for us, we who have been born in sin, steeped in sin, and reared in a world defined by sin, to imagine what it must have been like living in a world before sin. (Read Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 44–51.) Adam and Eve lived in an environment in which their lives were in perfect harmony with their Creator and the law of His creation. They had, ideally, no fears, no worries, no uncertainties—which meant that, in the end, they had no hope, because they had no need to hope.

At first that might sound like a rather stark idea (Adam and Eve, before sin, lived without hope?). Yet, think about it: In a world characterized by a perfect harmony with God, there was nothing in their present condition that would cause them to hope for something better in the future. A person, for instance, with strong, healthy lungs doesn't hope for good lungs; it is the person with weak, sickly lungs who hopes for something he or she does not now enjoy.

Hope, then, stems from the idea that what's bad now will one day change; that what is causing us pain, distress, or fear will, in the future, be alleviated. Hope points to something in the future, something anticipated, something expected, something, ultimately, that will cause us to be in a better situation than what we are in now.

Adam and Eve, in contrast, thriving in an existence in which all their needs were met, did not have to hope for *anything*, because they had *everything*. Thus, they lived without hope, because they did not need it.

Dwell on this notion, that Adam and Eve had no reason to hope. Write out how this idea helps you better to understand the nature of hope now.

THE FALL.

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19).

Suddenly, everything changed for Adam and Eve. How quickly their paradise disappeared right out from underneath them. Though we don't know how quickly the effects of sin were manifested, considering the insidious nature of sin, it probably did not take long.

Read Genesis 3 and write down a list of some of the negative consequences that Adam and Eve now faced because of their sin:

Though Adam's and Eve's rebellion belonged to the past, it now conditioned both their present and their future. Suddenly guilt, pain, uncertainty, and, worst of all, death (Gen. 2:17; 3:19) became their reality. Everything changed for them, and each of us, even today, lives with the results of those changes.

Take a look at the list you created on the lines above regarding the negative consequences of the Fall. On the lines below, write down what would be needed that could help bring hope to each of these negative things. For example, if "guilt" was one of your answers, "forgiveness" or "acceptance" could be your response. In short, now that Adam and Eve needed hope, what kind of hope did they need?

As you look at the two lists, ask yourself: In what ways do we, today, need the same kind of hope that Adam and Eve did after the Fall?

CRUSHING THE HEAD (Gen. 3:15).

There is a fancy theological word for the above verse. It's called the *protevangelium*, which means the "first good news." Both Christian and Jewish scholars have, for centuries, recognized in this verse the first promise of the Messiah, the first promise of redemption, the first promise of hope given to a world that now, suddenly and desperately, needed it.

Read carefully Genesis 3:1-15, looking at who is speaking to whom, over what. Only in this way can you see the promise, the hope, found in this text. Notice specifically the contrast between what the Lord says the serpent will do to the offspring of the woman and what it will do to Him. After you read these, write down where you see the hope.

There is more to Genesis 3:15 than first meets the eye. What does it say about the future? It talks about an ongoing conflict that we know from other scriptures goes even to the end of time (see Rom. 16:20; Rev. 12:9, 17). It also shows that the conflict is between two basic entities (Who are they?).

According to the verse, however, that conflict will eventually end. It is not something eternal, something that goes on without resolution. Ultimately the head of the serpent will be crushed, as opposed to the damage done to the heel of the woman's Seed. Though the text indicates pain for the woman's Seed, it will come out as the Victor in the end.

"This conflict will not continue forever, for one of the inflicted wounds is mortal. The struggle may be long and painful, but its outcome will be final victory when the head of the serpent will be crushed."—Niels-Erik Andreasen, in *The Advent Hope in Scripture and History*, ed., V. Norskov Olsen (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1987), p. 17. Thus, here, in Eden, amid God's condemnation of Adam and Eve because of their blatant transgression, God gave them hope for the future. In short, as soon as Adam and Eve needed hope, the Lord gave it to them.

In light of today's lesson, read this quote by Ellen White. "He was the Redeemer before as after His incarnation. As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. He has given light and life to all, and according to the measure of light given, each is to be judged."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 210. How do you understand that quote in the context of the promise given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15?

THE ESSENCE OF HOPE.

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jer. 29:11).

In a few different places around the world, people who have died have had their bodies frozen at exceedingly low temperatures, in order to halt as much as possible the decay of their flesh, tissue, and organs. They have done this *in the hope* that sometime, way in the future, science will have advanced so far that it will be able to bring them back from the dead, and they can live forever.

Good luck, folks.

Of course, they are going to need more than luck. Yet, the point is that whatever great achievements humans have made, or might make in the future, in the end, death always waits to swallow everything up, despite our best and most creative efforts to the contrary. That is why any hope short of answering the problem of death remains, essentially, a false hope or, at best, only a temporary one. Yet, we are beings who long for something eternal, so temporary patches can't solve our problem any more than a glass of orange juice can cure diabetes.

Look at the text for today. Dwell on what it is saying, for in it we can find the only ground for our hope. Write out why this text is so filled with hope and why, if it were not true, we would have no hope.

Because, ultimately, our problems as human beings go beyond anything that we as human beings can solve, our hope has to be in something, or Someone, outside of us, greater than us. That, of course, is God. But just because there is a God doesn't automatically mean that we would have hope. On the contrary, perhaps the only situation more hopeless than living in a world without God would be living in a world where there was a God who was malicious or who had evil designs on us. Fortunately, that is not our situation.

The King James Version of Jeremiah 29:11 does not give the full force of the text. The last part reads "to give you hope and a future" (NIV). What is the ultimate future and hope that God offers us? Why would God link the future and hope together? What does that promise tell us about the future? How can you, even now, draw hope and comfort from that promise, no matter your circumstances?

FALSE HOPES.

"He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch" (Prov. 11:28).

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" (Matt. 7:22).

How beautifully the message given in Genesis 3:15 (see Tuesday's lesson) is supplemented by the insight of Ellen White. As soon as there was a need for hope, there was hope, because as soon as there was sin, there was a Savior.

The Lord created humanity free, and freedom entailed the risk of sin, which did arise. God, however, was there, immediately, in order to remedy the problem of sin, even at such a great cost to Himself.

However, almost from the start, humans turned away from that hope.

Look up the following texts. Write down what each one is saying. What do they share in common?

Ps. 44:6 _____

Prov. 11:28 _____

Isa. 31:1 _____

Jer. 5:17 _____

Jer. 7:4 _____

Jer. 17:5 _____

God planted hope in the hearts of Adam and Eve, hope that rests only in Him. Unfortunately, all through history, people have set up their own systems, their own understanding, of what hope is and where it can be found. The above verses represent just a few examples of where people go to find hope and where, in the end, little or no hope exists.

Look at your own life, at your own struggles, and at your own fears. In what ways can you see yourself in the above texts, even in a subtle manner? At the same time, in what ways, if any, is it right to hope in something other than the hope that comes directly from God Himself?

FURTHER STUDY: "After his expulsion from Eden Adam's life on earth was filled with sorrow. Every dying leaf, every victim of sacrifice, every blight upon the fair face of nature, every stain upon man's purity, were fresh reminders of his sin. Terrible was the agony of remorse as he beheld iniquity abounding and, in answer to his warnings, met the reproaches cast upon himself as the cause of sin. With patient humility he bore for nearly a thousand years the penalty of transgression. Faithfully did he repent of his sin and trust in the merits of the promised Saviour, and he died in the hope of a resurrection. The Son of God redeemed man's failure and fall; and now, through the work of the atonement, Adam is reinstated in his first dominion."

—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 540, 541.

"Because man fallen could not overcome Satan with his human strength, Christ came from the royal courts of heaven to help him with His human and divine strength combined. Christ knew that Adam in Eden with his superior advantages might have withstood the temptations of Satan and conquered him. He also knew that it was not possible for man out of Eden, separated from the light and love of God since the fall, to resist the temptations of Satan in his own strength. In order to bring hope to man, and save him from complete ruin, He humbled Himself to take man's nature, that with His divine power combined with the human He might reach man where he is. He obtained for the fallen sons and daughters of Adam that strength which it is impossible for them to gain for themselves, that in His name they might overcome the temptations of Satan."—Ellen G. White, *Confrontation*, p. 45.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is there such a human tendency to hope in things that in the end really cannot give us the hope we really need?
2. Though we have not yet seen the final consummation of the hope that we have in God, has God left us any tokens of that hope? In other words, do we have this hope, because we believe that God loves us and wants to give us a good future? What things do you see that point us to that love, even though we await the final fulfillment of the hope that it promises us?

SUMMARY: As soon as there was the need for hope, there was hope, because as soon as there was sin, there was a Savior. Thus, the hope that we have goes all the way back to the beginning. From the Eden paradise until earth's last night, God has provided us with reasons to hope.



Nazier Finds a New Life in Russia

J. H. Zachary

Nazier was proud of his Muslim heritage. But in high school he discovered that his faith did not answer the deepest questions about life. It did not help him handle the insecurity and emptiness he felt. Nazier began looking into other religions. He studied some Eastern religions, but something about their teachings did not ring true to him.

After high school he entered a military academy. Then he found a small booklet on the life of Jesus. He was overwhelmed to realize that Jesus loved him enough to die for him. Nazier accepted Jesus as his Friend and Savior. Then, when he realized that the military was not the place for a follower of Jesus, he dropped out of military school.

Nazier bought a Bible and began to study it earnestly. He found peace he never dreamed possible. He found a Protestant church in which to worship, but for some reason he did not feel at home there. However, he continued to worship there for several years.

Then Moktier, one of his best friends in the Protestant church, told Nazier that he had become a Seventh-day Adventist. Nazier was troubled, for he had heard that Adventists were a dangerous sect. Finally the friends agreed to study the Bible together and follow whatever truths the Bible taught.

Nazier was amazed that everything Moktier believed had a basis in the Bible. Nazier had long felt that some teachings in the Protestant church had no basis in the Bible. Soon Nazier was sharing his newfound Bible truths with others in the Protestant church. But he was disappointed and hurt when they rejected the Bible's clear teachings in favor of their traditional teachings.

Nazier carefully checked every Adventist belief against what his Bible taught, and soon he could not argue. He was baptized into the Adventist Church.

Nazier has become a literature evangelist. "I thank the Lord for His kindness and patience in leading me to a church that truly follows the Bible," he exclaimed.

J. H. Zachary is coordinator of international evangelism for *The Quiet Hour* and a special consultant for the General Conference Ministerial Association.



Produced by the Office of Mission
Sabbath School-Personal Ministries department of the General Conference
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Old Testament Hope



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Genesis 6; 11; 12; Isa. 7:1-14.

MEMORY TEXT: "That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (Psalm 78:7).

KEY THOUGHTS: Hope is not just some abstract thing, some philosophical or theological concept that exists only as grand overarching principles that float around only in the sky or in the mind of God and never touch earth, particularly those of us living on earth. Hope needs to be something tangible, touchable, something that we experience ourselves or see in our lives or in the lives of others. Otherwise, why call it hope?

THIS WEEK'S LESSON looks at various examples of hope expressed in the lives and the experiences of those who are present in the Old Testament. It starts with Noah, looks at Abraham, and then scans over Israelite history through the great promises of the prophets for a new heaven and a new earth, the hope that we, living in post-New Testament times, share with those who lived in Old Testament times.

One thing should be clear: While we see that whatever the situation God is able to give people hope, the ultimate hope comes only through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of all the promises of hope found in the Hebrew Bible.

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, Oct. 12.

HOPE AMID THE DELUGE.

“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5).

Read Genesis 6:5-7. Though the account itself is short, it says much. Look specifically at verse 5, which depicts the moral condition of humanity. The Hebrew of the last part of the text reads like this: “And the whole framework of the thoughts of his heart was only evil every day.” Thus not only were humanity’s thoughts at their core evil, they were *only* evil, and they were only evil *all the time*. Also, Genesis 6:11, 12 show that not only were people’s thoughts corrupt but their actions as well (read Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 90–92 for more details).

Although through history people have tried to find various ways to deny it, the same God revealed to us through Jesus (John 14:9) was also the same God who said that He was going to “destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them” (Gen. 6:7). How can you reconcile the two?

What hope could remain for the inhabitants of a world whose Creator said not only that He was sorry He had made them but that He was going to wipe out all of them? It is one thing to worry about global warming or some sort of nuclear armageddon, which still would leave a glimmer of hope that some people might survive. In this case, however, it’s *God Himself* saying that He was going to destroy *everyone*, man and beast. That wouldn’t seem to leave anyone much hope for the future, would it?

Yet, the same God who offered Adam and Eve hope in Eden offered hope to the wretches of the pre-Flood world too. That hope came, of course, through the ark that God commanded Noah to build (Gen. 6:14-22). In other words, no matter how desperate the situation and no matter how drastic the consequences, the Lord still offered people hope.

Even amid the warning of global destruction, God offered hope. Yet only a few benefited from that hope. Was that hope for everyone or just a few? If it were for everyone, why did so few take advantage of it, and what does that tell us about the nature of the hope that God offers?

HOPE AND THE NATIONS.

"And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).

After the Flood, humanity did not seem to learn any lessons. Genesis 11:2 says that men "journeyed east" (NASB; see also Gen. 13:11). This was not just a historical statement but a theological one. "East" in the Bible can represent spiritual alienation and separation from God. Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, the place where they met with God, and went, apparently, east of the Garden (for on the east side is where the Lord put the angel with the flaming sword to keep them from coming back; see Gen. 3:24). Cain also separated from God and went east of Eden (Gen. 4:16).

The story of Babel also indicates that humanity was morally and spiritually degenerating, even to the point where they attempted to defy God (Gen. 11:3, 4). Nevertheless, the Lord was not going to leave them without hope. Read Genesis 12:1-3. Though God promised to bless Abram and make a great nation out of him, the blessing was not for him alone: "and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). The hope was for everyone.

What does that promise mean? What promise is being made here?

"The Hebrew word here translated 'earth,' *adamah*, means, essentially, 'ground,' or 'soil.' . . . It was the 'ground' that had been cursed after the Fall (Gen. 3:17), the same ground out of which man had originally been made. That curse had come because of the unfaithfulness of one man (Rom. 5:12), and now all families of the 'ground' were to receive blessing through the obedience of one who was found faithful. As his spiritual offspring, Christians today share in the blessing imparted to Abram (Gal. 3:8, 29). The blessing vouchsafed to him would finally unite divided families on earth, and change the dread curse pronounced upon the ground because of sin into a blessing for all men. 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."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, pp. 293, 294.

Read Romans 5:12 and Galatians 3:8, 29 in the context of the promise made to Abram. How did Jesus fulfill that promise? In what way can you, thousands of years after this promise had been made, claim to have been blessed in Abram?

THE HEBREW HOPE.

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is" (Jer. 17:7).

The Hebrew Bible is filled with not only expressions of hope but examples of the fulfillment of that hope. It presents human needs and God's willingness to answer those needs for those who will let Him do so. The Hebrew Bible presents a powerful testimony of God's interaction for the benefit of His people, whatever their situation.

For example, the patriarchs hoped for new land (Gen. 48:21); the Hebrew slaves hoped for deliverance from slavery (Exod. 2:23-25); Moses and the freed slaves hoped for the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 34); Israel under the judges and then the kings hoped for rest (1 Kings 8:56) and peace (1 Chron. 22:9); Job hoped for personal restoration and a meeting with his Redeemer (Job 19:25-27); the psalmist looked to Jerusalem (Psalm 122); the prophets looked for a return home from Babylon (Isa. 51:9-11; Dan. 9:1, 2; Zech. 14:16-21), as well as for a new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65:17).

Look up each of the texts written above and see in what ways these hopes were fulfilled, will be fulfilled in the future, or perhaps weren't fulfilled in the past. If they weren't, why not? Which hopes can we, today, relate to, as well?

Through Revelation, God has made certain promises to His people, often depending upon their specific situation (after all, the promises that Abram hoped for were not the exact ones that Daniel leaned on). Yet, whatever the specific promises, Israel's hope consisted in nothing else than believing in those promises, whatever they were. That's why hope is a constant theme throughout the Old Testament, because the Lord was constantly making or renewing His promises to His people. Even amid the most dire threats, the Lord still offered them the hope and promise of deliverance. Where there is faith in God and His promises, there is hope; where there is a lack of faith, there is a lack of hope. It's that simple. Thus, all their hope—whether for land, for freedom, for rest, for peace, for restoration, for Jerusalem, for salvation—it is all really nothing other than hope in God. That is the great theme of the Old Testament, and it is the foundation of not only Israel's hope but all ours, as well.

Read aloud Psalm 39:7, 130:7, Isaiah 25:9, and Jeremiah 17:7 and ask the Lord to make the hope that is found in them your hope.

THE MESSIANIC HOPE.

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14).

In many ways, then, all Old Testament hope is, essentially, the Advent hope—the hope that God will come to get His people.

Take, for instance, the Messianic promise of Isaiah 7:14. In the midst of this desperate situation—two enemy kings have made an assault upon Jerusalem; the king has burned his own son as a sacrifice to foreign gods in order to seek some divine aid—the prophet Isaiah comes to Ahaz and promises that God will deliver Jerusalem, a promise that King Ahaz refuses (vs. 12). Then Isaiah gives him the wonderful prophecy concerning the coming Messiah.

Read Matthew 1:23, which talks about the fulfillment of this prophecy. What significance is found in the name Immanuel? How does that name contribute to the building of hope?

There is much theological speculation regarding the timing and the nature of this Messianic prophecy, which didn't have its real fulfillment until nearly eight hundred years later. Why would God give to Ahaz a promise for something that did not really address his immediate concern, which was at that time the military threat to the nation?

The answer seems to be that the Lord wanted Ahaz to understand that all his human attempts to find deliverance would fail, that his only hope was trusting in the Lord God, the One who created the heavens and the earth. Nothing that the king could do of himself or even with his nation could bring him the sought-for deliverance. They had to trust only in the Lord. Thus, whatever the immediate context, what the Old Testament teaches is that hope is, ultimately, a Messianic hope and that whatever God does for us now is only a precursor, or even a "type," of the ultimate deliverance that will come through the work of the Messiah. The ultimate hope for Israel will be upon the One who comes to them; that is, the Messiah Himself.

Think through the meaning of the name "Immanuel." Certainly those who lived in Jesus' time could believe that God was with them, because, after all, Jesus was there, in the flesh. What Bible promises can you find that show that God is "with us" even now, centuries after Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled? See, for instance, Matthew 18:20; 28:20.

JESUS AND THE OLD TESTAMENT HOPE (Isa. 53:6).

As Christians, we believe that the fulfillment of all the Old Testament hope was found, of course, in Jesus of Nazareth, the One prefigured and symbolized in the Old Testament (Matt. 16:16; Luke 24:27; John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). But what is that hope? What exactly did Jesus do, as the long-awaited Messiah, the Desire of Ages, that formed the basis of all hope?

Look up each of the following texts that deal with the work of Jesus at His first coming. Summarize what each one says about what He accomplished:

Isa. 53:11 _____

Mark 14:24 _____

John 1:29 _____

Col. 1:20 _____

1 Thess. 1:10 _____

Heb. 9:28 _____

As the first week showed, humanity through disobedience severed itself from God. Jesus, the Messiah, came and through His life and death made a way to restore that breach and bring humanity back into harmony with God. Through His ministry Jesus solved the ultimate dilemma of death, offering everyone the opportunity to have eternal life, no matter what happens to their bodies now. In short, the great hope that He offered by His first coming, in which He bore the penalty of our sins (Isa. 53:6), finally will be brought to fruition at the Second Coming, when death, the fruit of sin, will be overthrown once and for all (see Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; 1 Cor. 15:54).

We can hope for a lot of things, but whatever we hope for and whatever we get from the earth, in the end, death pulls it all back into the ground. Yet, Jesus offers us something beyond the earth and the conditionality of its gifts (for what the earth gives it *always* takes back). In contrast, what God gives, through Christ, is forever.

Look at the verses listed above and summarize in a paragraph the essence of what they are saying regarding what Jesus did for us.

FURTHER STUDY: "Plain and specific prophecies had been given regarding the appearance of the Promised One. To Adam was given an assurance of the coming of the Redeemer. The sentence pronounced on Satan, 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel' (Gen. 3:15), was to our first parents a promise of the redemption to be wrought out through Christ.

"To Abraham was given the promise that of his line the Saviour of the world should come: 'In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' 'He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.' Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 222.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

After a French office worker who had murdered an Arab on a hot, breathless Algerian beach was sentenced to have his "head cut off in a public square in the name of the French people," a chaplain entered the doomed man's cell. Not wanting to talk, Meursault said right away that he did not believe in God. The chaplain begged him to reconsider, asking if he really expected that when he died that was it? "Yes," Meursault answered. When the chaplain then offered to pray for him, Meursault shook him by the collar and screamed that all the chaplain's certainties were not worth even one hair on a woman's head. All people, even the chaplain, were condemned, and so it did not matter when or even how he died. All were going to, anyway, so what difference did it make? *Nothing*, Meursault screamed—not who was innocent or guilty, not whom one married, not even whom one's friends were—*nothing mattered!* This scene, exhumed from Albert Camus's book *The Stranger*, expressed the sentiments of a man who lived without hope. Based on what you have studied in the past two weeks, if you were the chaplain, what might you have said to Meursault that might have given him something to hold on to and to hope for? (Quoted from Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, translated from the French by Matthew Ward [New York: Vintage International, 1989], pp. 107, 115–117, 120, 121.)

SUMMARY: The Hebrew Bible is filled with premonitions of the hope that we can have through Jesus Christ. In fact, that hope is really nothing but the consummation of the promises first presented in the Hebrew Scriptures.



The Secret Christians

Philip Follett

As a boy growing up in a North African village, Abdel* learned the Muslim prayers and traditions from his family. He believed that Islam was the one true religion and that only a traitor would leave that faith. Abdel spoke the Berber language, as do 11 million people in North Africa.

When he was a teenager, Abdel met a man working with ADRA. He came to trust and admire him. The ADRA worker told Abdel about a radio broadcast called *Voice of Hope*. Although the program was not broadcast in Abdel's mother language, Abdel listened to the broadcasts and enjoyed what he heard. But he did not tell his parents. He was fascinated by the stories from the Bible and enjoyed the songs about Jesus. After listening for several months, Abdel asked his ADRA friend for a Bible and Bible lessons. He hid the Bible and lessons in his room, so no one would know he was studying Christian books.

In Abdel's culture the women clean the men's rooms. One day when his sister was picking up his things, she discovered the hidden Bible and lessons. Fascinated, she began studying them for herself, but she did not tell Abdel or their parents.

One day she found an announcement in Abdel's papers telling about a meeting of Adventist Christians in their country. She had overheard Abdel talking about making a trip, and she realized he was going to this meeting. She decided to attend the meeting too.

When Abdel arrived at the meeting, he was shocked to see his sister. She told him how she had learned about Jesus and that she wanted to follow Christ. Abdel promised to keep her secret from their family.

Abdel's sister met a Christian young man, and eventually the two were married. They moved to Europe, where they enrolled in an Adventist school. Abdel also left his homeland to study in Europe, but he could not get a visa to the same country his sister was living in, so he began studying in a small Adventist seminary. His parents still do not know that their children are Christians. If they did, they would be required to disown them.

Abdel wants to become a pastor and create radio programs in his own language. Although AWR broadcasts in more than 50 languages, at present they have no Berber speaker.

*Abdel is a pseudonym. His country of birth and present location are not revealed in order to protect his identity. Philip Follett is special assistant to the president of Adventist World Radio.

The Jesus Hope: Part 1



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matthew 24; John 14:14; Acts 1:1-11.

MEMORY TEXT: “‘This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:11, NIV).

KEY THOUGHTS: The past two weeks looked at hope in the Old Testament; it showed that this hope was based not just upon God but upon the promises of the Messiah, the promises of His coming. The hope in the Hebrew Bible was the Advent hope, the hope clearly expressed in the New Testament.

AFTER THE ERA OF THE EARLY CHURCH, the clear Advent hope faded, eventually becoming relegated to the backwaters of belief. As the church gained official recognition, the hope seemed to be less relevant, replaced more and more with the belief that the soul ascended to heaven at death.

Over the years various movements arose to reclaim the biblical perspective of hope, but even these were flawed by political involvement or extremism. In reality, it has been only since the Advent awakening of the 1830s and 1840s that the Advent hope has come to be widely appreciated again. This week we will look more at just how crucial and important this hope is to our faith.

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, Oct. 19.

THIS SAME JESUS.

“‘This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:11, NIV).

It may seem a little obvious, but sometimes we appear to forget that, at the Second Coming, it is Jesus Himself who will return. The most important point is that the Second Coming is not the return of someone we don’t know; on the contrary, it’s the return of our “Lord Jesus” (Acts 15:11), our “good shepherd” (John 10:11), “the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2), and the One who called us His “friends” (John 15:15). He is the One who is coming back.

Look up the following verses and write down what they all have in common, even though they express the same point in different ways. Write down, too, who is making the promise in each case:

John 14:28 _____

Col. 3:4 _____

Heb. 9:28 _____

2 Pet. 3:4, 10 _____

James 5:7 _____

1 John 2:28 _____

Rev. 22:20 _____

The Word of God is so clear: Whether it is Jesus Himself speaking, or Paul or Peter or James or John, all testify to the same truth, which is that the Lord Jesus Himself will return.

If it is Jesus Himself who returns, why is it so important that we know Him *now* personally? His coming in the clouds of heaven will, after all, be a very dramatic, earthshaking event that will cause many to flee, to run for their lives. Others, in contrast, will proclaim, “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord” (Isa. 25:9). What makes the crucial difference?

HOW CERTAIN WAS JESUS?

"I will come again" (John 14:3).

Many modern theologians have dismissed the Second Coming and the promise of Jesus that He will return in any visible, literal manner. His words have been reinterpreted in many ways to mean just about everything except precisely what He said: a literal, physical appearance from heaven that results in the end of this present world. Some claim that Jesus never said He would return; others that the disciples misunderstood His words. Others assert that even if He did say He would return, He was misguided or that He was referring to some invisible coming by the Spirit rather than any literal physical manifestation.

Look up these verses, where Jesus talked about His own return. Write down a few notes about what each one is saying. How clear and plain do they seem to you? Do you see anything in them that suggest anything other than a literal, visible, return? If so, write it out and share it with the class.

Matt. 24:27, 30 _____

Mark 13:26, 27 _____

Luke 9:26 _____

Jesus Himself certainly, and with unmistakable clarity, talked not only about His return but the manner in which He would return. Why, then, the skepticism, even among those who claim to believe in the Bible? Though many different reasons can be given, one of the main ones today is that we live in the age of rationalism, of science, of empirical verification. In other words, if it cannot be tested in a lab or with various scientific tools according to the strict rules of scientific methodology, many people just shrug it off as myth, even people who claim to be Christians. Besides, the argument goes, nothing like what Jesus talked about regarding His return ever happened before in the history of the world, so why should anyone believe it will happen in the future?

None of us are immune to the influences around us. Look at your own faith and ask yourself, Have I, perhaps, been too heavily influenced by the assumptions and claims of science, even to the point where it has caused me to doubt aspects of God's Word?

THE FIRST AND SECOND COMING.

Of all the reasons Christians have to believe in and trust in the great hope of the Second Coming, none is better than what happened at the First Coming. The First guarantees the Second.

After all, what good is the First Coming if it does not lead to the Second? What good was Christ's death on the cross if it does not lead to the resurrection of the dead and to immortality? To be justified, to be redeemed, to be pardoned—what are these apart from hope and promises we have been given regarding Christ's return?

Some have argued, however, that Jesus, by His life and death, left us a good example on how to live, nothing more. How would you respond to that position?

It is true that Christ left us a good example (1 John 2:6). But so did Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, and Mohandas Gandhi. We do not need just a good example. We need a Savior who died for us so that we can be justified and redeemed (Rom. 3:24-26; Titus 2:14). More than we need someone who can tell us to turn the other cheek, to go the extra mile, or to love our enemies, we need Someone who can raise our dried and crusted bones from the dirt (Isa. 26:19), who can clothe our mortality with immortality (1 Cor. 15:53), and who can exchange our corruption with incorruption (vs. 54). Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, and Mohandas Gandhi cannot do any of that for us. Only Jesus can, and He will, at the Second Coming—which is why all that we hope for becomes reality, and the final and ultimate promises made by God become fulfilled in our flesh.

Also, we like to say that Christ completed His work at the Cross. Maybe in one sense. But in another sense nothing is completed until all the redeemed are clothed with immortality in a world in which sin will never rise again. That is when everything, once and for all, is forever completed. That is our great hope, the hope that gives full meaning to everything we believe.

What can grace, justification, salvation, and redemption mean without the return of Christ to clothe His saints with immortality? That is why Scripture does not always separate the First Coming and the Second Coming (see, for example, Isa. 11:1-6). They are two parts of a whole. The First Coming is the "ultimate," but only as consummated in the Second. Dwell on this concept until it makes sense and gives you assurance about the certainty of the Second Coming.

NO DISAPPOINTMENT.

"Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Rom. 5:5, NIV).

We cannot be disappointed, because our hope is assured by God: "All things are assured to us in Christ, and only in him. Rom. 8:32. There is nothing in this world or in the world to come that we can have except through his cross. So the so-called hope for anything that is not to be found in him is sure to meet with disappointment; and the hope for everything that is in him, and that can be had with him, is as sure of fulfillment as that he lives." —Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, June 24, 1902.

Dwell on what Ellen White wrote here. What does she mean when she says that there is nothing, either in this world or the next, that we can have except through the Cross? How do you understand that statement?

Remember the times in your life you have been disappointed. People have let you down. Someone you trusted failed you. Such experiences are, unfortunately, all too common. But with God, your trust is well-placed, because God is totally trustworthy.

In fact, look at the words of Jesus Himself: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me" (John 14:1, NIV).

Similarly, Paul points the church in Rome to the trustworthy God who is the Source of hope: "May God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in him, so that your hope will continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13, TEV).

Life here is often so incomplete. Nothing lasts; we are often unable to achieve our desires, and lives all around us are cut short. But with the promise of hope in the resurrection, we need not be disappointed. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote that nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope. Whatever Niebuhr might have meant by that statement, how would you interpret it and apply the principle there to your own life and struggles as you await the fulfillment of the promise we have in Jesus?

UTOPIA?

In 1516, Sir Thomas More wrote about a nation with little crime and, absolutely, no poverty. In this wonderful land, everyone had enough work, the sick were adequately cared for, cities were perfectly planned and beautifully created, the people enjoyed complete religious freedom, and the greatest pleasure for those who lived there was derived from doing good to others.

The name of this land? *Utopia*, and it means, in the Greek, "No place."

Thomas More knew what he was doing; that is, naming his fantasy island "No Place," because there has never been (at least since the Fall) any place like Utopia, and until the Lord returns, there never will be.

Though it is certainly normal that people would hope for something better, nothing in Scripture promises anything remotely "utopian" for this world, at least nothing prior to the radical remaking of the heavens and the earth by God Himself (2 Pet. 3:13) after Christ returns. In fact, Jesus, in His famous discourse in Matthew 24, paints a picture of humanity that should dismiss any utopian fantasies as just that: fantasies.

Read Matthew 24 and focus in on one specific aspect of Jesus' discourse on the end time, and that is the state of the world prior to His coming. Look especially at verses 4-12, 21, 24, 36-39. Summarize, in your own words, the conditions He describes and then answer the questions, Is there any hope in this life in and of itself? Where must our ultimate and final hope rest?

"Faith in Jesus Christ without the expectation of His Parousia [Second Advent] is a voucher that is not redeemed, a promise that is not seriously meant. A Christian faith without expectation of the Parousia is like a ladder which leads nowhere but ends in the void." —Emil Brunner, *Eternal Hope* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1954), pp. 138, 139.

What is Brunner saying? Why do you agree or disagree with his words? Make up some other analogies (like his ladder) that describe what the Christian faith would be without the hope of the Second Coming.

FURTHER STUDY: How the Hope Grew Dim—Lessons From the Past. We know from the New Testament that the apostles and the early church really did look forward with an intense anticipation, expecting a very soon coming of the Savior. And the fact that Jesus had not been gone long made it easy, perhaps.

But soon that vivid desire, the blessed hope, had died away. By the middle of the second century, the hope of Christ's return had faded like a half-forgotten dream, and by the time of Emperor Constantine, in the fourth century, it was an outmoded part of belief that failed to have any impact.

Two thought systems of the time caused major difficulties: Greek philosophy and Jewish expectations.

With Greek philosophy comes the belief in the immortal soul. Linked to Christian thought, this produced the idea of the soul flying away to heaven at death. Perhaps this comforted the martyrs, perhaps it made the eternal kingdom seem closer, perhaps it just matched contemporary ideas and expectations (to a Greek the idea of a resurrection was impossible—the body was evil). Whatever the case, Christ's glorious return became the soul's flight to heaven.

Jewish expectations also play in the demise of the Advent hope. The hope of Messiah's earthly reign and Israel's supremacy is connected with the Christian hope to form what is known as millenarianism—the coming thousand-year reign of Christ on earth when all the faithful would have their desires fulfilled; a belief, like the Greek one, that is still held today.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Just because any attempt to establish a “utopia” here on earth is doomed to fail, does that mean we should not try to better our lot and the lot of fellow human beings? Discuss.

SUMMARY: The Advent hope is centered on “this same Jesus.” This fact gives us assurance, for however overawed we may be by the Second Advent, we can be assured that the Lord we love will be there to rescue and save us. Jesus is absolutely certain about fulfilling His promise; thus, we can be too.



Truly Home Missions

Margo Matthews

As a teenager I was thrilled to hear mission stories. While talking to my Sabbath School teacher one day, she told me that I could be a missionary wherever I was.

Later, when I moved into my own apartment, I remembered this woman's challenge to be a missionary at home. I stood in front of the building and said to myself, *This is my mission field. I am going to get the Word of God to everyone in this building.* Then I noticed a "No Soliciting" sign on the front door.

The following Sabbath when I went to church, I told the personal ministries leader my plan and asked for extra copies of *Signs*. She found enough copies for me, and I put them in the waiting area of the apartment complex. Each time I passed by, I glanced at the table and noticed that the pile was diminishing.

A few days after I put another batch of *Signs* on the table, I noticed that all the magazines were gone. When I found a small pamphlet from another denomination under my door, I realized that I was competing for readers with a neighbor. I began putting the *Signs* under each door too. I did this for several months.

When my church planned a Revelation Seminar, I placed invitation brochures under each door. The church I attend is large, and I did not recognize any of the visitors as being from my apartment complex.

One day several months later, I answered a knock on my door. There stood a smiling woman holding a copy of *Signs*. "Are you an Adventist?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. I learned that the woman lives in the same complex, that she had been a member of another denomination, but when she found the brochure inviting her to attend the Revelation Seminar, she went and was baptized.

"Praise the Lord," I stammered. I told her that I was the one who had placed the brochure under her door. During our conversation, she confessed that at first she had collected the *Signs* from the waiting area and had thrown them into the garbage!

My mission field has produced a convert and turned a competitor into an ally, without ever leaving home.

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The Jesus Hope: Part 2



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: John 14:1-3.

MEMORY TEXT: "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

KEY THOUGHTS: As a church, we put the word *Adventist* in our name to help identify ourselves. The word helps describe our goal and our motivation—indeed, even our reason for existence—because, more than anything else, the name proclaims our belief in the soon coming of Jesus Christ.

LAST WEEK, WE LOOKED AT HOW Jesus formed the foundation of hope by what He did at the First Coming. And what He did then is what paved the way for what He will do at the Second Coming. That is our great hope.

However central this great truth is, that of the hope found in the promise of the Second Coming, keeping such a hope alive in the church and in our individual lives takes effort and demands attention. Otherwise, the cares and needs of this life will, naturally, like weeds, choke it out.

This week we will look at a number of verses that, in various ways, in various contexts, express the hope that we have through Jesus, that help explain why we have it and show why we need to cling to it—no matter the stresses, strains, and pressure to the contrary. Because, in the end, without this specific hope, there's no hope at all.

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, Oct. 26.

LIVING AND DEAD GODS.

"We have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men" (1 Tim. 4:10, NIV).

A young man, down and out in Paris, considered his options: among them, jumping off the Eiffel Tower. Things had gotten that bad. It could be over so soon. All his problems would be solved—on impact! Yet he hesitated and hesitated, not so much out of fear of dying or the pain of death; no, he hesitated because amid all his suffering, amid all his problems, there was still a glimmer of hope, the hope that there might be a God who not only exists but who loves and cares about him. And it was that glimmer of hope that kept him from jumping.

Today, that young agnostic is a Seventh-day Adventist minister, sharing that hope with the world.

Why do we all need some sort of "hope" to keep us going? How could one live in this present world without hope at all? Or, maybe, even why should anyone live in this present world without hope?

Our hope is based on God and on God alone. Our hope has no confidence in anything or anyone else, only because anything that anyone else can offer us is only temporal, transient, and, ultimately, fleeting; only God can offer us an eternal hope, one that does not fade with time but, in fact, gets better and better over time. What other hope offers so much? This is the hope that is offered in both the Old and the New Testament. This is the whole essence of our faith in God. To have faith in God, the God of the Bible, is to have hope. What purpose is there to faith if it doesn't lead to hope? There is none. Faith and hope, though not the same, are closely parallel. One leads to the other; it is hard to imagine faith without hope or hope without faith.

How do you understand Paul's words that Jesus is the Savior of all men? What does that mean? What does that *not* mean?

Read carefully 1 Timothy 4:10. Why did Paul write these words? What sense does it make to put our hope in anything else other than "the living God"? What do you understand as a "dead god"? Are you, perhaps, following some "dead gods"?

THE ULTIMATE HOPE.

Read John 14:1-3. Name at least three specific things that Jesus, within these verses, promises us.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Summarize in just a few lines, in your own words, what those three promises ultimately mean. What is the hope contained in them, and why is that unlike any other hope we could possibly have?

The second coming of Christ is an absolutely indispensable doctrine in the Biblical teaching of redemption. Apart from His glorious return, God's work will forever be incomplete. At the center of redemption past is Christ on the cross; at the center of redemption future is Christ returning in glory.”
—George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 6.

There can be no question: The great hope of Christians is found in the promise of the Second Coming. The Second Coming, and all that it contains, is in many ways not *a* hope—but *the* hope, the final purpose of all that we believe. Only at the Second Coming (and all that it entails) will our faith be utterly and ultimately vindicated. Only then will all that we have gone through, suffered, and believed come to fruition. Only then are all our hopes finally and forever realized. Until then, it remains just a hope. And hope is fine, but sooner or later it needs to be realized, or else it becomes nothing but a false hope, and what is a false hope other than a lie? And who wants to believe a lie?

Take a few minutes to think about your faith in Christ and all that you believe. Why, in the end, is it all useless without the promise and hope of the Second Coming? Or is it useless? In what ways could you possibly justify your faith without the promise and hope of the Second Coming?

HOPING FOR WHAT WE DO NOT YET HAVE.

Read Romans 8:24, NIV.

Paul says that we are saved in hope. What hope? The answer is found in the verses before, starting in verse 18. What is Paul ultimately talking about in verses 18-24? What does he mean when he says “the glory that will be revealed in us” (vs. 18, NIV) or the “redemption of our bodies” (vs. 23, NIV) or when “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay” (vs. 21, NIV)? What one specific event is he referring to, and why does that provide us with so much hope?

In the same way that our faith is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1, NASB), our hope exists not in anything we can do for ourselves. This is a crucial point: Despite all of these self-help fads and trends and books and tapes about self-improvement, the bottom line is that our ultimate hope rests in something completely outside of us, something that we have not seen. And that is in the eternal God, not only our Creator but our Redeemer, Jesus. It is in His act of redemption for us that we have this hope, an act that will be consummated at the Second Coming, when all those things that Paul talked about in Romans 8:18-23 will be fulfilled.

What does Paul mean when he says that a “hope that is seen is no hope at all” or that a person cannot hope in what “he already has”?

If you have a dictionary, look up the meaning of *hope*. Many definitions of *hope* contain the word *expectation*, the implication being toward the future. The very concept of *hope* implies something we do not yet have but expect (or want) to have. That is Paul’s point: We do not have what we ultimately are looking for (if we already had it, we would not need to hope for it), but we can hope for it now—and this hope is what keeps us going. In the Hebrew Bible, the words for hope also contain this same idea: that of a future expectation and anticipation.

Our great hope exists in something we have not yet seen, something we do not already have, and that is the Second Coming. Yet, we have many reasons to possess this hope in what we have not yet seen. It is not a blind or foolish hope.

UNBLAMABLE AND UNREPROVABLE.

"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled, in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprovable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:21-23).

In just a few verses, Paul captures another facet of "the Jesus hope," a hope grounded not in ourselves but only in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Look at the sequence of events here: (1) We are enemies of God in our mind by wicked works; (2) thanks to Jesus, through His death, we—sinful, unholy beings—have been reconciled to a holy God; (3) we are now presented before God as being "unblameable and unreprovable" in His sight; (4) this hope remains ours just as long as we continue in the faith, a hope that will end in glory at the Second Coming.

What does it mean that we are "unblameable and unreprovable" in His sight? What is the only way that sinful beings, even those living a life of faith, can be presented "unblameable and unreprovable"?

Here, clearly, is a manifestation of the hope we have in Jesus. No matter our obedience, no matter how faithful we live, no matter how much fruit we bear to the glory of God, none of us can ever stand before God, ourselves, unblamable and unreprovable in His sight. That is why we have Jesus, who, through His life and death, presents us in the spotless robe of His righteousness, the only righteousness that is indeed "unblameable and unreprovable." This righteousness is ours—by faith alone. Talk about a reason to hope!

"But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 62. Do you really believe these words? If so, how can this hope not change your life? If it has not, seriously ask yourself: Do I really believe it?

THE FINAL EVENT.

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44).

We are Seventh-day Adventists. The Adventist in the name testifies that we believe in the return of Christ. Only when one understands just what the return of Christ is all about can one realize just how crucial this teaching is, not just to Christians but to every human being, both the living and the dead. Where would we be without it? What hope would we ultimately have? It is hard to imagine any.

The following texts all refer to the second coming of Jesus in one way or another. Write down a few points about what happens at this event:

Dan. 2:44 _____

Dan. 7:27 _____

Matt. 24:27 _____

1 Thess. 4:16, 17 _____

Rev. 14:14-16 _____

On the lines below, summarize what these texts say about the Second Coming:

The crucial point is this: The Second Coming ends the world as we know it. It will lead to the deaths of many and to eternal life for many others. Dwell on this biblical promise; grasp its overwhelming importance. With such an incredible event looming on the horizon, we have to ask, How should we live in anticipation of it? What is our only hope in it (see Wednesday's lesson)?

FURTHER STUDY: Read the following dramatic statement of the importance of the Advent hope for Adventists. Ask yourself, Is this still true? Do I believe this for myself?

"The importance of the Second Advent doctrine to Seventh-day Adventists cannot be overemphasized. It is in very truth a life-or-death matter to our movement.

"Seventh-day Adventists are irrevocably committed to belief in, and proclamation of, the imminent second coming of Christ. Should we for any reason whatever repudiate this truth, or cease to proclaim it with sincerity, we would destroy ourselves. Openly or secretly to deny the nearness of our Lord's return would be to invite the disintegration of our cause.

"The great second Advent movement was founded upon the conviction, resolutely and uncompromisingly held by our pioneers, that the long-anticipated return of Christ was near at hand. Without this conviction there would have been no Seventh-day Adventists or any Seventh-day Adventist movement. . . .

"Belief in the imminent second coming of Christ is the reason for, and basis of, our existence. . . . If we do not believe that Christ's second coming is nigh at hand, we do not belong to the Advent movement. Furthermore, if we no longer hold this belief we have no business here today."—Arthur S. Maxwell, "The Imminence of Christ's Second Coming," in *Our Firm Foundation* (a record of a Bible Conference) (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1953), pp. 186, 187.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Can Adventists still hope without the Second Advent hope? If there were no Second Advent, what would we hope in? What sense, if any, would our faith make, apart from the Second Advent? What reasons, if any, could you find to be a Seventh-day Adventist, or even a Christian, if you did not have that hope? Are there any? If you think so (for there might be some), share them with the class.
2. The Advent hope is the same as the Jesus hope. Why? In your own words, write out why Jesus' accomplishments at the First Coming give you hope regarding the Second Coming. Compare notes with the class.

SUMMARY: The Jesus hope is the hope of eternal life that we have been given through Jesus. By His death and resurrection after the First Coming, we have been promised eternal life and glory at the Second Coming.



Growing by Leaps and Bounds

J. H. Zachary

When Pastor Claudio Familia arrived in his district in the Dominican Republic in March 2001, he had six churches and 170 members. He had been studying the dynamics of small groups and decided to put his new knowledge to use. He helped the members form themselves into 36 small groups and challenged them to work and pray for 130 new members before the end of the year.

Pastor Familia began training the members for leadership. The members decided to set another goal of planting small groups of new believers in six unentered communities nearby.

The team members began visiting homes, making friends, and starting scores of Bible studies. Pastor Familia planned to have a baptism every Sabbath, and just one month after the small-group system was put into place, God gave the members 18 new believers.

In May, 88 persons asked for baptism, and church leaders decided to have daily baptisms to keep up with the demand and to encourage others to take a stand for Jesus.

Every Sabbath afternoon Pastor Familia conducted training classes for the small-group team leaders and suggested ways to strengthen new small groups that were forming. Enthusiastic members reported on the thrilling things that they saw God doing through their efforts.

In June, 151 were baptized, and by August, the district had grown from a membership of 130 to 541 and from 6 congregations to 11!



Claudio Familia testifies, "Both old and new members have a passion for souls. We know that Jesus is coming soon, and we will continue soul winning until He returns. We still have several unentered communities to reach."

The members are eager to continue sharing their faith and bring more new members into God's kingdom.

Left: Pastor Claudio Familia. J. H. Zachary is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour.

The Hope of Our Hope



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Corinthians 15; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 21:3, 4.

MEMORY TEXT: “But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior” (Micah 7:7, NIV).

KEY QUESTIONS: We say that we have hope, but what is that hope? What does it entail? What does it mean? What is the hope of our hope?

WHATEVER GOOD THINGS WE ENJOY in this life, whatever their pleasures, whatever their accomplishments, they are all always temporary and always tempered by the bad. No one, not even the *happiest*, lives without some pain, some fear, some suffering.

Our great hope, however, is that this life isn't all that we have; whether good or bad, whether long or short, whether happy or sad, our earthly sojourn is only a spasm compared to what awaits us.

This is the hope of our hope, and it is a powerful hope. So powerful, in fact, that it should change us from how we live now.

This week we'll look at a few lives, lives that in many respects might not be that different from our own, in that these people, like us, faced trials, pain, and death. The hope of their hope, like ours, was that something wonderful awaits them after all the bad things they endured. If that hope can't change us, nothing will.

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, Nov. 2.

THE IMPACT OF HOPE.

Frenchman Blaise Pascal wrote: "One needs no great sublimity of soul to realize that in this life there is no true and solid satisfaction, that all our pleasures are mere vanity, that our afflictions are infinite, and finally that death . . . threatens us at every moment. . . ."

"Let us ponder these things, and then say whether it is not beyond doubt that the only good thing in this life is the hope of another life, that we become happy only as we come nearer to it."—*Pensées*, Dr. A. J. Krailsheimer, translator (England: The Penguin Group, 1995), p. 129.

What is Pascal saying? Do you agree or disagree? How do the following texts relate to the above quote? What do these texts say, and how do they fit in with the overall picture of the Advent hope?

Eccles. 1:14 _____

Lam. 3:26 _____

Luke 21:28 _____

James 4:14 _____

The Advent hope is not just a doctrine, not just a future event; it is, rather, a belief that should make a difference in how we live, here and now. Or, at least, we say that it should. But why should it?

Write down at least three reasons why the hope in the Second Coming, in a new life in a new world, should impact our life in this world now. In Sabbath School, compare answers. (For example, how does this hope impact our response to death?)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

In the past few days (or weeks), what was something you did that you would have done differently, or perhaps not at all, had you not the hope and promise of the Second Coming? If you can't think of anything, what should that tell you about the status of your walk with the Lord?

THE BLESSED HOPE.

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Annie Smith, sister of Uriah Smith, was an early Adventist who had experienced the disappointment of 1844. She drifted away from religion but then became associated with the Adventists who were keeping the Sabbath. She assisted in publishing pamphlets and papers, preferring this work to a well-paid teaching post. She seems to have had a sad experience in love and then developed tuberculosis, which took her life when she was twenty-seven years old.

A sad life? Perhaps, at least from a rather narrow humanistic perspective. On the other hand, Annie wrote many hymns and poems that captured her assurance of hope—a truly living hope that transcends anything life itself as now lived in this sinful world could ever offer.

For example, there is her hymn on the blessed hope, "I Saw One Weary" (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* [Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assoc., 1985], p. 441). The last verse reads:

While pilgrims here we journey on
In this dark vale of sin and gloom,
Through tribulation, hate, and scorn, . . .
O! what can buoy the spirits up?
'Tis this alone—the blessed hope.

Here is the verse that inspired these words: "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). The Greek word for "blessed" (*makarion*) can be translated "happy." What is it about the promise of the returning King that can make us happy, even now, even amid "this dark vale of sin and gloom"?

The day before she died, Annie penned her own epitaph: "I long now to rest in the lone, quiet tomb; for the footsteps of Jesus have lightened its gloom; I die in the hope of soon meeting again the friends that I love, with Him ever to reign."

Unless we are translated when Christ returns, one thing is certain, and that is our death. Keeping in mind the *blessed* or *happy* hope that awaits us, pen (as Annie Smith did) your own epitaph, but do it in light of Titus 2:13.

HOPE IN THE MIDST OF GRIEF.

James White pointed to the blessed hope when he wrote a letter to a friend whose wife had just died: "What can I say to cheer your mind and bind up your wounded spirit? I can point you to the Kingdom of immortal glory when Jesus shall come to raise your dear companion, and change you and your children, if you are all faithful till Jesus comes. To that bright prospect I invite, I beseech, you to look."—James White, unpublished letter to Leonard Hastings, March 18, 1850.

James seems to be saying this: No matter how tired, how discouraged, how sorrowful and sore you become, do not give up, do not stop hoping, do not stop trusting, do not stop believing, because the moment you do, you are in danger of making it all for nothing when according to God's purposes it is all for something, something in the end so wonderful and perfect and happy and harmonious that we can only begin to dare to envision. He seems to be saying do not go by moods, by feelings, by the flow of hormones, but only by the raw, naked promises of a God who cannot lie and who has promised—a promise sealed in the blood of Jesus—that we will live again in a world without a single element of what makes this one so painful.

Look at these verses: "I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: 'Now God's home is with mankind! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared'" (Rev. 21:3, 4, TEV). Study these words in the context in which they were written, analyze them, and answer the following questions:

1. Has not God made His home with humanity before? (See Exod. 25:8; John 1:14.) What did it mean then, and what does it mean in the above verses?

2. "They shall be His people." Have there already, even before heaven (Lev. 26:12; 2 Cor. 6:16-18), been those who have been His people? If so, then what does the above text mean when God calls those in heaven "His people"? Is the promise in Revelation, perhaps, merely the fullest manifestation of the promise as it appeared earlier?

3. The text says that "the old things have disappeared." What "old things" is it referring to?

THE PROMISE OF LIFE.

"And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:17-22).

What is Paul teaching here? To get the fuller picture, read his words in the context of the entire chapter. Write down a quick summary of his main point:

José, a lay member from a church in the highlands of Guatemala, shares his perspective on hope. "I have believed for a long time that Jesus will come. But I have not stopped hoping. I know that Jesus will come in His time, and so I think of that every morning and evening as I have my time of prayer. Sometimes, when I get discouraged, I like to think about what happened at Jesus' resurrection, and I claim the promises that just as He was resurrected from death, I will one day be too. Otherwise, what hope do I have, either for myself or to share with others? Most of all, this hope gives life meaning now. We are here to think and learn and read the Bible, so that when Jesus comes we can be together with Him and be happy forever. Hope is simple, but it's very important."

What did José mean when he said that "most of all, this hope gives life meaning now"? Why does the hope of eternity with Christ give our lives meaning? Think of your answer in the context of the verses quoted above from 1 Corinthians, particularly in light of Paul's notion that if our hope is in vain, we are the most miserable of men. Was not Paul, in his own way, saying something similar to José? How does Christ's resurrection from the dead give meaning to our lives, even now? Just as important, how should your life be changed because you have that hope?

FAITH, HOPE, LOVE.

“Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel” (Col. 1:4, 5).

Romanian teenager Lena spoke of her excitement in discovering hope. “I never knew before that God would come back to this planet Himself, real and personal. At first I was scared of the thought that God would come, but now I know He is coming to take His faithful ones back home with Him. I am so happy to think of that day, and I am telling all my friends that this will be the best thing for them, too. Thanks to Jesus, I have so much faith, hope, and love.”

Notice how Lena linked together faith, hope, and love. Read Colossians 1:4, 5. Notice that Paul does the same thing. How do you understand the link between them? See also 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:5, 6; 1 Thessalonians 5:8, and then write a few lines on what you see as the relationship between faith and hope and love.

Faith, hope, and love are internal attributes; they are movements of the heart, hues and tones of the mind. They aren't, however, natural attributes. They come only from God, who does not force these into us but, instead, offers them to those who are willing to receive. We have to, day by day, surrender ourselves to the Lord, who can, because of what Jesus did, give us the hope that will express itself in faith and love. But to have that hope, we must make it our own; we may internalize and personalize it, drawing for ourselves the peace, happiness, and sense of purpose that come from such a hope. Only then will it make a dramatic difference in our lives; only then can we fully appreciate the hope that we have in Jesus.

Read Galatians 2:20. Notice how personal Paul made his understanding of what Christ did for him, how personal this hope was. What can you do for yourself to help personalize and internalize the hope that we have in Jesus, as did Paul? How can you make it your own?

FURTHER STUDY: The Hope of Hope: Testimonials.

"This is the 'lively hope,' the living hope, that we have by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3. There is no element of doubt or uncertainty in it. The Christian's hope is no vague longing after something in the dim and uncertain future, but a firm grasp of that which is, as well as is to come. This is not simply 'the larger hope,' but the largest hope; for we are taught to believe that God's mercy is upon us according as we hope in him. Ps. 33:22. Then let abiding hope abound."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, June 24, 1902.

"We are glad that our Lord, in whom we believe and trust, will soon return to earth for His waiting people; that then we shall be forever with Him, our loving Redeemer; that then there will no longer be sin to separate from God; that then we shall meet the dear loved and lost ones, never again to say, 'Farewell.' An eternal life, an eternal home, in the kingdom of our God! 'Blessed hope!'

"Oh, we long to be there! We are tired of the sins, and temptations, and weariness, the painful disappointments, the separations, and the tears, of this sin-burdened earth. We want to go home to our Father's house."—J. M. Hopkins, *Review and Herald*, May 13, 1920.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Write a paragraph or two, a personal testimonial, about what the hope and promise of Christ's return means to you. Or, as Ellen White did in the above letter to her children, write a paragraph to someone you care about very much that expresses your feelings about Christ's promised return.
2. Notice the certainty of Ellen White's words in the above quote. What did she base it on? What are some things we can do to possess that same certainty, as well, in our own experiences?

SUMMARY: Living the life of hope means making hope central. Hope as a perspective on our future is essential and gives meaning and purpose. It says where we are going and gives us confidence to make a difference and help those around us.



A Dream Finds a Home

Barbara Huff

Galena lives in the former Soviet republic of Georgia. During Communist times, she had no use for God or religion. She had held a good position with a handsome income. She thought she was happy. Then Communism fell; her income ceased, and her life seemed to crumble. Then her precious grandson became seriously ill, and the doctors didn't think he would survive. Galena spent everything she had trying to save his life, but still the boy remained dangerously ill.

One night she had a dream. She saw a radiant-looking Person who asked her, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

She replied, "Heal my grandson. I will give you four lambs in four different holy places," she said, reflecting the Orthodox church's tradition of giving sacrificial lambs as in the Old Testament.

"I don't want anything from you except love," the radiant Person replied. Galena glanced at her grandson sleeping in the corner and realized that he already had been healed.

How should I worship God? she wondered. Then she saw herself sitting in a room in a house where someone was talking about the Bible. She awoke quite shaken by the dream but with no idea what it meant. She tried to remember details of the dream, but she could not.

A short time later a friend invited Galena to attend church with her. Galena was surprised to see that the Christians met in a room of an ordinary house. She wondered if this was the house she had seen in her dream. She continued attending the church.

One Sunday the pastor introduced Pastor Namoradze, who would preach in the pastor's absence. Galena stared at the visitor in disbelief. This was the man in her dream!

When Galena learned that Pastor Namoradze was an Adventist minister with his own house church, she asked if she could worship with his congregation. He warmly welcomed her. When she arrived, she recognized it as the one she had seen in her dream. Galena knew she was home!

Conditions in Georgia are difficult. Unemployment, crime, drugs, and poverty are common. The average wage is \$3 a month, but a loaf of bread costs 25 cents. Four of the seven young men in Pastor Namoradze's church are former drug addicts. "Our life is not easy," Pastor Namoradze said. "We have no electricity, no gas, no heat, no water. But we will survive; we have Jesus."

Barbara Huff recently retired as administrative secretary in the Euro-Asia Division. She and her husband, Lee, live in Florida.

Hope: Motivation for Mission



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 8:5-13; 9:1-8; Mark 5:1-19; John 5:1-17; Acts 4:1-22.

MEMORY TEXT: "Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold" (2 Corinthians 3:12, NIV).

KEY THOUGHTS: As we consider the gospel commission, we ask, "Is this to be a feeble, fearful, and fragile witness?" Certainly not. Our outreach is to be "very bold," because it centers on the God-given hope we share. We are a community of hope; we have become heirs of the hope of eternal life. How can (or dare) we keep such a hope to ourselves?

IN THIS STUDY WE WILL SEE HOW hope inspires us to share. The expectation of the soon coming of Jesus has always been a vibrant force for mission. As hope is brought back into focus, as it is placed at the forefront of our message to the world, then we can be sure that God will ensure that His promises are understood.

As a community of hope, we may be "jars of clay," but we have the priceless treasure of faith and hope given us, not to keep and hoard, like some modern-day miser, but to give away to whomever will receive. We are encouraged to speak words of encouragement to all we meet.

Despite the troubles and trials, tragedy and grief, we do not grieve like those who have no hope. In the words of the English proverb, it is told that "In the land of hope there is never any winter."

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, Nov. 9.

HOLY BOLDNESS.

"Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold" (2 Cor. 3:12, NIV).

Without being arrogant and proud in ourselves, we are to be bold in spreading God's good news of hope. After all, how can we convince others of the importance of living the hope if it is not vivid and essential in our own lives?

Imagine: You are out selling brushes door-to-door. How many brushes do you think you will sell if this is your sales pitch?

"Oh, I'm here selling brushes. I don't think they're that good, though. I mean, they're OK and all. I use these brushes myself sometimes, but not always. I suppose you could buy one if you really wanted. It's better than nothing."

Before long, you will be in the employment office looking for a new job.

Salespeople recognize the importance of enthusiasm and conviction. The best testimony is word of mouth, the recommendation of someone you know and trust.

So it is to be with Christians as we share the hope. We can be truly bold, because "we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Cor. 4:5, NIV).

Look at 2 Corinthians 4:5, just quoted. What principle is found there that should give us boldness, assurance, and incentive to witness for our faith? What is our faith *not* centered on?

Read Acts 4:1-22. What is going on here? Peter and John were seized, jailed, and the next day hauled before the religious leaders, who demanded to know (vs. 7), "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" Considering whom Peter and John had been with the past few years, there's no better question that could have been asked. Verse 13 says that the leaders marveled at the "boldness" of these men in their response.

Review Acts 4:1-22 and make a list of the things that John and Peter said or did that revealed their boldness and then ask the question, Why did they display this boldness? What happened that gave them the courage to witness so openly and fearlessly for their Lord? The answers are all found within the texts themselves.

Read again Acts 4:13. What does it mean when it says that the leaders saw that these men "had been with Jesus"? What do people who have "been with Jesus" look and act like, and how can that be a powerful tool for sharing our hope?

MESSAGE AND MISSION.

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

Jesus, when upon the earth in human flesh, spent a great deal of time healing diseases and ministering to the needs of fallen humanity. As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that we, too, have been called, as followers of Christ, to do the same. That is why we have hospitals and medical missionary workers all over the world. It is part of who we are, what we do, and why we are here.

But we must remember, too, that healing was not for Jesus an end in and of itself. Sure, it was good that He brought relief to these suffering ones, but every one of those people whom He healed probably got sick again and, of course, all died. Even those whom He raised from the dead eventually died again. Jesus' healing was a means of reaching people with something greater than temporary physical relief, and that is the promise of salvation in Him, the promise of a world where there will never again be sickness, death, and suffering. Without that promise, what Jesus did in healing the sick might have been nice but, in the long run, what ultimate good did it do for them personally?

Look at the following accounts of Jesus' healing. In each one, focus not just on the healing itself but on the spiritual lessons that came with the healing: Matt. 8:5-13; 9:1-8; Mark 5:1-19; John 5:1-17.

At various points in His ministry, Jesus faced the problem of those who—so excited about His potential to supply their earthly needs—lost sight of the spiritual purpose of His mission, expressed so clearly in Luke 4:17, 18. In fact, after seeing His miracle of feeding the five thousand (John 6:1-15), the crowd wanted to, by force, declare Jesus king, that is, an earthly king. As a result, He had to depart. The people missed the real point of who He was and what He was trying to accomplish for them.

As Adventist Christians, we know that we have been called to minister to people's needs, as did Jesus. At the same time, in what ways do we face the danger of confusing the means with the ends? Even secular people, just as much as Christians, can minister to the immediate needs and wants of humanity. But what can we offer to a sick, sinful, dying world that others, doing humanitarian work, cannot? The moment we forget that answer is the moment we are in danger of forgetting our real mission.

HOPE—AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MISSION.

"When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand" (Ezek. 3:18).

Study this text from Ezekiel. What is he saying? What kind of motivation does this present for us to witness to others?

You are not to shut yourselves up to yourselves, and be content because you have been blessed with a knowledge of the truth. Who brought the truth to you? Who showed the light of the Word of God to you? God has not given you His light to be placed under a bushel. I have read of an expedition that was sent out in search of Sir John Franklin. Brave men left their homes, and wandered about in the North Seas, suffering privation, hunger, cold, and distress. And what was it all for?—Merely for the honor of discovering the dead bodies of the explorers, or, if possible, to rescue some of the party from the terrible death that must surely come upon them, unless help should reach them in time. If they could but save one man from perishing, they would count their suffering well paid for. This was done at the sacrifice of all their comfort and happiness.

"Think of this, and then consider how little we are willing to sacrifice for the salvation of the precious souls around us. We are not compelled to go away from home, on a long and tedious journey, to save the life of a perishing mortal. At our very doors, all about us, on every side, there are souls to be saved, souls perishing,—men and women dying without hope, without God,—and yet we feel unconcerned, virtually saying by our actions, if not by our words, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' These men who lost their lives in trying to save others are eulogized by the world as heroes and martyrs. How should we who have the prospect of eternal life before us feel, if we do not make the little sacrifices that God requires of us, for the salvation of the souls of men?"—Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, pp. 93, 94.

Compare these words of Ellen White with these of Jesus: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). What are both saying, and why especially should we—who have been given such wonderful truths, especially the Adventist hope—take heed to listen?

"IN HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE."

"Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:1, 2).

In hope of eternal life." Talk about encapsulating in a few words the essence of our faith. "In hope of eternal life." What better hope for beings who are always, potentially, just a heartbeat away from death? No wonder we have been called to spread this truth to a dying world. Whatever else we might be able to give people—light on how to eat healthier, how to keep the Sabbath, how to stop smoking—nothing could possibly compare with showing people how to live "in hope of eternal life."

Paul said this hope of eternal life was based upon a promise of God "before the world began." Why would God need to make the promise of eternal life even before there were fallen human beings? See also Matt. 25:34; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rev. 13:8.

Whatever the exact meaning of this promise, given even before the world began, one thing is sure: The promise existed even before we did. That is how foundational it is. The promise was not something cooked up after the problem occurred; it was already there to meet the problem when it happened. God—having created free beings—had a plan already in place in case those free beings should stray. Talk about assurance, talk about security, talk about hope!

And that is why we should be so zealous in spreading this assurance, security, and hope to others.

Too often the comment is made that the Advent hope is not featured frequently in our presentations. If we truly are whom we claim to be, the blessed hope must be at the forefront as we tell people about our God and what He promises, for without it, what hope do we really have?

Dwell more on the biblical teaching that "the hope of eternal life" comes to us from a promise made even before the world began and that it is "the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Rom. 16:25). In *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White said "it was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God's throne" (p. 22). What principles do you think these are? What do they tell us about God?

GIVING WHAT YOU DO NOT HAVE.

A man told the story of his first encounter with Seventh-day Adventists. At a used book sale, he bought a paperback, *The Great Controversy*. It sat on his shelf for two years. Then one day, being bored, he picked it up, started reading, and for three days was enthralled, looking up texts, marking the book, and feverishly scribbling down many questions. He was so excited that he called the nearest Adventist church and talked to an elder, who invited him to a Wednesday-night prayer meeting. Thrilled by what he read, he went, Bible and *The Great Controversy* firmly in hand. He met the elder at the front door, and together they entered to meet—a church full of excited, worshipful Adventists awaiting their Lord's return? Not quite. There were just two elderly women, instead. The elder, seeing the man's disappointment, wanted to make him feel better, so he offered to take him out and buy him an ice-cream cone.

Look at these following texts. What do they say about what the knowledge and experience of God does to those who truly possess it?

Rom. 6:4 _____

2 Cor. 5:17 _____

Titus 2:14 _____

Heb. 12:10 _____

It is a basic spiritual principle, one that we should never forget: You can't give what you don't have. And to have the Advent hope is more than just to know it intellectually. That is not enough. Even Satan knows about the Second Coming.

Instead, our message is something that needs to permeate all aspects of our lives, simply because it covers all aspects of our lives. Think about it. Is there anything about us, anything in our personal existence, that is not influenced by Jesus? We would not even be here if it were not for Him (Acts 17:28; Col. 1:16). Our usefulness in witnessing to others will be proportional to the degree that we are willing to surrender ourselves to the Lord, who alone can make us His instruments for spreading the Advent hope.

Take an honest look at yourself. Are you engaged, in one way or another, in sharing with others the hope that you claim to have? Only you can answer honestly. If you're not happy with the answer, what can you do to change?

FURTHER STUDY: Mission of Hope—What We Tell the World.

See Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 220 and *Reflecting Christ*, p. 220.

Read these words of counsel from Ellen White and see what they tell you about our mission of hope:

"This hope does not disappoint. That is the force of the expression, 'Hope maketh not ashamed,' in Rom. 5:5. Real hope does not deceive us; we are not made ashamed by being obliged to admit that we have not received that of which we spoke so confidently. Often have we been embarrassed when we have been asked where a certain thing is, which we have spoken about expecting to receive. We were disappointed, and would be glad to have the matter forgotten. We feel perhaps a little ashamed of our former enthusiasm, and do not like to have it mentioned. But nothing of this sort happens when we have 'the blessed hope' which comes with the experience of justification by faith."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, June 24, 1902.

"Our Saviour went from house to house, healing the sick, comforting the mourners, soothing the afflicted, speaking peace to the disconsolate. He took the little children in His arms and blessed them and spoke words of hope and comfort to the weary mothers. With unfailing tenderness and gentleness, He met every form of human woe and affliction. Not for Himself, but for others did He labor."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 188.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Though we certainly should not be scared into working to point others to the hope we have, can the fact that we could be held responsible for lost souls help motivate us to witness? Should fear have a part at all in our motivation? Defend your position in class.
2. Can you find examples in our church in which, perhaps, being busy dealing with the temporal needs of people, some institutions have lost sight of the ultimate goal of our work? Discuss.

SUMMARY: Hope motivates us to mission—not just the preaching of the soon coming of Jesus but the whole message of hope that is God's good news. Nevertheless, pitfalls are always in our path, as we always face the danger of forgetting what our real purpose is. Only by focusing on the final end of what we believe can we avoid this real danger.



Finding Jesus in the Qu'ran

J. H. Zachary

Kachimad and Ramzan Berve were earnest Muslims. They attended the calls to prayer and studied the Qu'ran. As they did, they noticed a name kept coming up, a name that became familiar to them, "Jesus, the Son of Mary."

Kachimad was impressed by the way Jesus treated people, and he realized that one day Jesus would judge humanity. He yearned to know more about this Prophet of God. He sensed the power and love of Jesus.

"Where can we learn more about this Jesus?" Kachimad asked his wife. His wife did not have an answer, but God did. About that time the local Adventist pastor visited the family and invited them to attend a Bible class. The couple joined the class.

The couple was thrilled to learn that the stories they loved in the Qu'ran were in the Bible too. Kachimad's Muslim training had taught him to treat holy things with reverence, and he was awed when he held a copy of the Bible for the first time. He recalled that the Qu'ran urged Allah's followers to study the Psalms, the prophets, and the Gospels, all of which were in the Bible. He began reading them with excitement.

When the couple learned about the Sabbath, they accepted it as the holy day of Allah, for it was also mentioned in the Qu'ran. When Kachimad and Ramzan were baptized, they asked their pastor to help them choose new names to reflect their new status as Christians. They chose Robert and Grace.

The couple accepted the challenge to become volunteers for The Quiet Hour's village evangelism program. During 1999 they visited house-to-house in their town, making friends for Jesus. They found 100 people who eventually accepted Jesus as their Savior.

In 2000 the couple was assigned to another village, where they began visiting their Muslim, Hindu, animist, and Christian neighbors. They prayed for another 100 new believers, but they know God can give them far more as long as they keep their hearts and minds fixed on Jesus.

J. H. Zachary is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour.



Produced by the Office of Mission
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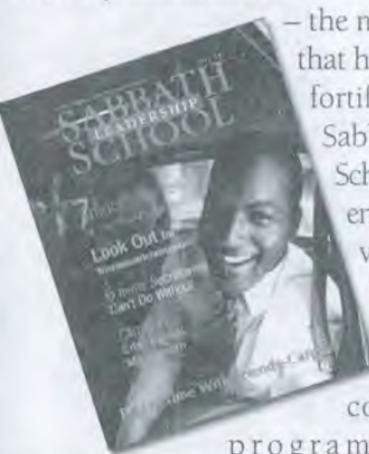


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How many girls can you fit in a dorm room?



At Gitwe Adventist Secondary School, in Rwanda, this is not the first line of a joke. It is a problem that school administrators struggle with daily as they find ways to provide Christian education to hundreds of young people seeking it.

The housing facilities at the school are beyond capacity. As many as 20 girls share one dormitory room. Beds occupy halls, and even shower rooms. (Bathing facilities have been moved outside.) Would you—could you—study in that setting?

Help provide adequate housing at Gitwe so students can focus on learning.

Read

MISSION

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on December 28 supports projects in the Africa-Indian Ocean Division.

Hope: Too Much or Not Enough?



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Luke 24:13-25.

MEMORY TEXT: "Hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13).

KEY THOUGHTS: Hope must be like an anchor: permanent, enduring, immovable. Hope is not to be overanticipated at one time, only to be lost sight of at another. Hope must be neither "too much" nor "not enough."

SOMEONE ONCE SAID that at first we hope too much and then, later, not enough. In our own experiences, this problem is often true. In our early years of faith, hope can be so real and exciting. But, as time passes, it seems to fade, and we do not hope enough. The Bible points to balance: not an overemphasis on hope that can damage us but neither an underemphasis that leaves us aimless and wandering, blown around by every trend, fad, and wind of doctrine.

How do we avoid swinging from a hope we overanticipate early in our Christian experience, only to lose the vibrancy of hope later on? That is the question!

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, Nov. 16.

TOO MUCH HOPE?

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first" (2 Thess. 2:3).

Hope is a wonderful thing. But can we have too much of it? It is like this bit of impeccable logic: "If a little salt is good for you, then a whole lot of salt must be even better."

Could it be the same with hope? Can we ever have too much hope?

As Adventists, our great hope lies in the promise of His coming; yet we have to be careful about overanticipation. At different times, in different parts of the world, overzealous saints—perceived in the signs of the times evidence that they believed proved Christ was about to come—have caused hurt, pain, and disappointment not only for themselves but for others and for the church as a whole. Sure, we all want Jesus to come, but is it possible to be too zealous in our pronouncements, causing agitation, stirring hopes, and releasing a fervor that is not tempered with caution, prudence, and humility?

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4. What issue is Paul addressing? On what specific issues does he say to them, "Let no man deceive you by any means"?

Having received Paul's epistle (called 1 Thessalonians), in which he so strongly points to the great and glorious hope in the return of Jesus (1Thess. 5:1-7), some had the idea that Paul was preaching that the Second Coming was imminent (some believed that it had already taken place!). Paul, in response, was telling the readers that No, the day had not come yet and would not come until certain events, such as the revealing of the man of sin, occurred. The point is that even in the earliest days of the Christian church there were those who had to be counseled on harboring "too much hope." Similar problems have occurred all through Christian history.

A rural church struggled with some church members who, in their desire to reach the lost, began putting ads (using their own money and not adhearing to protests from the church board and pastor) in the local paper about the nearness of Christ's return. Using various time prophecies, they all but set specific dates about everything from Sunday laws to the close of probation. Discuss with the class the best ways to deal with a problem like that without (1) being unkind to the overzealous saints, (2) without appearing not to believe in the Second Coming, and (3) without doing any more damage to the church's overall credibility.

COME, LORD JESUS . . . (JUST NOT YET).

Read for today Matthew 24:45-51.

On the other side of the spectrum are those who basically aren't too concerned about the timing of Christ's return. In fact, talking to them about all their exciting plans for the future, one could almost get the impression that they don't want Jesus to come back, that His return would indeed interrupt their future dreams.

After reading Matthew 24:45-51, answer these questions:

1. What was Jesus talking about before He told the parable? How does that help us put the parable in context?
2. Is the evil servant an agnostic, an atheist, or someone who truly believes in the Advent hope?
3. How does this parable reveal the relationship between faith and works?
4. Is it possible for a follower of Christ to fit in neither category of servant? If so, write a few lines that would describe what that servant would be like.

Let us be fair. We are now about one hundred sixty years after 1844. It is not hard to see how we, as a people, could weary with the promise of His return. There's a certain paradox here, however: Every day we wait is one day closer to His return—so the longer we wait, the closer we are to that great day. Thus, the delay should make us more excited about the Advent hope, not less.

The righteous dead, we know, sleep until Christ returns. Whether they die a week before He comes back or thousands of years before, to them it is the same: They die, and the next immediate thing they know is Christ coming in the clouds, the fulfillment of the Advent hope. Thus, some say that Christ's return is never farther away than an instant after death, and because death can come at any time, Christ's return is always, potentially, imminent. How valid, if at all, do you think that approach is?

"HEARTS BURNED WITHIN."

Read the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) and then answer the following:

1. Notice what one of the two said to Jesus: "But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel" (vs. 21). In what sense was their understanding of His mission correct? In what sense was it wrong? What did they understand the redemption of Israel to mean? (Hint: See Acts 1:6.)
2. Read Luke 24:20, 21. What irony can you see there? Why was the very event they decried the very event that brought what they had hoped for?
3. When did their "hearts burn within"—when Jesus actually revealed Himself to them or when He talked with them regarding the Bible prophecies? Discuss the implications of the answer in the context of how we can share the hope or even keep it alive within ourselves.

Put yourself in the place of those disciples. You see that you were not wrong to hope in Jesus. Your heart burns within you as you realize what these texts mean—for the very scriptures Jesus pointed to concerning Himself are also the same ones that give the promise of hope to every one of His children.

What was the disciples' reaction to their reborn hope?

"They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem" (Luke 24:33, NIV). After the long journey, feeling tired and footsore, they could have waited before going back the way they had just come. Instead, with the excitement of their hope restored, they begin walking immediately—even though most of their seven-mile journey would be at night.

Imagine this: You have been chosen to teach a Sabbath School class for burned-out Adventists, those who "believe" the message but have no zeal for it. What approaches could you use to try to rekindle hope in them, the way Jesus rekindled hope for the two on the road to Emmaus?

"CHILDREN OF THE LIGHT."

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

Notice what is happening here. In the six verses just prior to chapter 5, Paul told them not to be like those who "have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13); he then gives them a vivid description of what will happen when Christ returns (vss. 14-18), the fulfillment of that hope. Then, immediately, he stresses the idea (which they seem to already be aware of) that they do not need to know the "times and the seasons" of when that day will come.

Compare 1 Thessalonians 5:1 to Acts 1:7 and Matthew 24:36. What is the specific point in all these texts? (Notice, too, how those in Acts 1:6 had the same problem as the two men on the road to Emmaus.) Why does God not tell when Christ will return? Write a few reasons why it is better for us not to know (see, for instance, Matt. 24:48).

Paul then continues, saying that they know the day of the Lord will be like a thief in the night. The point Paul seems to be making here is not the manner of His coming (for it will definitely *not* be like a thief in the night) but the unexpectedness of the event. (See also Matt. 24:43; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3.)

What is Paul's specific point in 1 Thessalonians 5:2-8? Though neither group, the children of the light nor those of the night (and of darkness), knows when Jesus will return, one group is surprised and overtaken by the event, and the other is not. What makes the crucial difference between the two?

What we can find in these verses is a balance between overzealousness (date setting and the like) on one hand and lethargy and darkness on the other. Paul is saying that although we do not know when that day will come, it almost does not matter. What matters, instead, is that you, "children of the light," need always to be ready, awake, sober, at all times, so whenever He comes, you are not deceived and surprised by the event.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11. In what ways do these verses encapsulate the essence of the Advent hope? On what event do they put the hope of the Second Coming?

JUDGE NOTHING BEFORE THE TIME.

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5).

All of us, even those of us who live for and long for the Advent hope, struggle with the pain and suffering in the world, either with our own pain or with that of others. And though we have never been promised freedom from pain or suffering, we have been promised power, grace, and Christ's presence to endure whatever comes our way.

Look up the following verses and write down how they contain promises that could help us deal with our struggles, whatever they are (What others can you find?):

Matt. 28:20 _____

1 Cor. 10:13 _____

Phil. 4:13 _____

Luther surely spoke very good sense when he compared humanity to a drunkard who, after falling off his horse on the right, falls off it the next time on the left. I am convinced that those who find in Christ's apocalyptic [the talk about His second coming and the end of the world] the whole of His message are mistaken. But a thing does not vanish—it is not even discredited—because someone has spoken of it with exaggeration. . . . The only difference is that if it has been exaggerated, we must now not overlook it; for that is the side on which the drunk man is now most likely to fall off."—C. S. Lewis, Earth's Last Night (New York: Harvest Books, 1987), pp. 94, 95.

Take apart 1 Corinthians 4:5. What promises are there? How can it help us rest and trust in the Lord now, amid a world of suffering, while at the same time give us hope in the promise of His coming?

FURTHER STUDY: "All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's redeemed. Unfettered by mortality, they wing their tireless flight to worlds afar—worlds that thrilled with sorrow at the spectacle of human woe and rang with songs of gladness at the tidings of a ransomed soul. With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings. . . . With undimmed vision they gaze upon the glory of creation—suns and stars and systems, all in their appointed order circling the throne of Deity. Upon all things, from the least to the greatest, the Creator's name is written, and in all are the riches of His power displayed.

"And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise. . . .

"The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 677, 678.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read carefully what the Lord's servant has written here. Do you really, with all your heart, believe in this hope? If so, recount the reasons and be prepared to share them with your class.
2. Ask yourself which way you lean, toward too much hope or not enough. Ask some in your class in which camp they would (nonjudgmentally) put you in.

SUMMARY: We need to keep hope in balance. It must neither be too much nor not enough. Hope is to be seen as a primary motivator in the Christian's life but not taken to any extremes in thought or behavior. The firm believer in the Advent hope waits for the fulfillment of hope and actively invites others to participate in this hope. The example of the disciples shows how meeting Jesus is both the meaning for life in the present and the expectation for the future.



The Visit

Llewellyn Juby

She stood alone out on the wind-swept steppes of Mongolia. With a rakeslike appliance, she scooped up dried manure and tossed it into the willow-branch basket on her back. I stopped the jeep and asked if I could take her picture. She agreed.

After I took her picture, Nara, my interpreter, continued to talk with the woman. Nara explained that we were from ADRA International and were trying to help those affected by the *dzud* (the unusually harsh Mongolian winter) that had killed some 2.3 million livestock in the country. Nara interpreted as this woman shared her story.

Her family had lived a fairly comfortable life before the *dzud* had wiped out their entire herd of ten milking cows. Without the cows, there would be no dairy products during the summer and no milk to make traditional cheese for the coming winter. There was no money for school, medicines, or household needs. Things looked bleak.

The woman and her six children lived in a yurt (a round portable house made of animal skins) against the side of a nearby hill. Even from a distance I could see that the yurt was patched and weatherworn.

The ADRA truck stopped beside us, and I asked the driver to give this woman two boxes of food—flour, rice, noodles, milk powder, oil, and some canned goods. We gave her a canvas cover to help protect the family's yurt from Mongolia's harsh weather. We loaded the supplies into the jeep and invited the woman to ride with us to her yurt.

When the woman's youngest daughter, about five, saw her mother in the jeep, she began crying hysterically. I was puzzled by her reaction until Nara explained the outburst. The last time the child had seen her father, he was ill and was being taken to a hospital in a jeep. He died in the hospital, and the child was convinced that we had come to take her mother away too.

I dug into my pocket and handed the mother \$15. It was not much, but I knew it would be spent wisely. I was amazed and humbled to realize that God had used a simple desire for a photo to lead us to this destitute family. But even more sobering was the woman's parting words to us. She said, "It feels as if God has visited my house today."

Mongolian woman (left). Llewellyn Juby is director of ADRA in Mongolia.



Produced by the Office of Mission
Sabbath School-Personal Ministries department of the General Conference
Email: gomission@gc.adventist.org

A Living Hope



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Pet. 1:3-21.

MEMORY TEXT: “In his [God’s] great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: The Bible says we have a living hope, and that is because we have a living Savior, One who shed His blood for our sins and, having been resurrected, now stands as our living Representative before the Father in heaven.

A **LIVING HOPE!** That is what God, through Christ, gives to us. Most religions are experiments in hope—trying to provide answers to the hard questions of life, to give meaning and purpose, and, most of all, reasons to continue the struggle that life often is. But what other system of belief focuses on a God who comes to His children in their own form, lives among them, dies at their hands, atones for their sins, and then through His great gift of salvation and resurrection provides them with the hope of eternal life?

That is why the Advent hope is called the living hope—for it gives assurance of God’s constant presence in our lives now and the guarantee of a future life with Him when He comes. This week we will look at that hope through the eyes of someone who knew it well, the apostle Peter. How did Peter understand the living hope?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, Nov. 23.

NEW BIRTH INTO A LIVING HOPE.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3, NASB).

Talk about a rich text, a full text, a text worth devouring. Here in one verse is captured the essence of the gospel, the essence of God’s love for us, and thus the essence of our great hope.

Notice, first, that it is not because of us, or anything that we deserve, that we have this hope; it comes only because of God’s “great mercy.”

How do you understand *mercy*? Look up the definition in a dictionary. What does mercy mean? How does one give mercy to someone? What conditions are needed for mercy to exist? Write down some examples of when mercy has been exhibited, along with some description of its characteristics:

The text then says that it was God’s mercy that has caused us to be “born again.” This is crucial, because Jesus Himself made it utterly clear in John 3:3 that we must be “born again.” Peter here shows that the new birth is something that God *does for us*. We can no more do it ourselves than we can save ourselves. And it is this “new birth” that leads us into “a living hope.”

According to the text, what historical event has made this “living hope” possible?

The direction of this text ultimately ends up at Jesus, to His resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:10, 11). In short, we have a living hope, because we have a living Savior, One who not only died for our sins but now lives; and because He lives, we have the hope that we will live, now and forever. Thus, our great hope, this living hope, is based not on ourselves but on the living God, who is the Source of life and who alone imparts life (Col. 3:4).

Dwell more on this idea of a living hope. Based on what you have read today, write a paragraph or two on how you would explain “living hope” to someone who is not a believer in Jesus. Help them understand what you have that they don’t and why they should want to have it and even how they can get it.

AN INHERITANCE INCORRUPTIBLE.

"To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4).

This text helps complete the thought of the verse that precedes it. First Peter 1:3 says that through God's great mercy we have been born again in a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus. But what does that mean for us, personally? How is this hope finally realized? A better life here, only then to die and end up as food for worms? To be reincarnated into another existence, again and again through an endless cycle of births and deaths? Where, ultimately, is our faith supposed to take us?

In 1 Peter 1:4, what points does Peter make about the quality of our inheritance? What do you understand those points to mean? Look up the following texts and write down how they help clarify just what a wonderful hope it is that we have:

Matt. 6:19, 20 _____

1 Cor. 15:42 _____

1 Cor. 15:52-54 _____

1 Pet. 5:4 _____

All around us, in every way, we see corruption, we see decay, we see a descent toward dissolution. In fact, the second law of thermodynamics teaches, basically, that every day the physical world around us is heading toward decay, chaos, and disorder. It is a natural law.

Fortunately, as believers in Jesus, we have a hope that is not in nature, is not in anything just natural. We have a supernatural hope, one based on the supernatural acts of God, who transcends the natural world we, as fallen beings, find ourselves trapped in. Because of Jesus, because of what He has done for us, we are promised a way out of this downward slide toward oblivion. We are promised literal, physical bodies that will not get sick, will not get hurt, will not decay, will not fade, and will not die. Talk about hope!

"Oh, you Christians just believe in some myth, some fantasy of a better world in order to help you not feel so bad about this one." How would you respond to that charge? And, despite the charge, how, indeed, does this wonderful hope help us cope with the problems that life presents to us here and now?

RESERVATIONS IN HEAVEN (1 Pet. 1:4).

Perhaps the most exciting part of this verse, one brimming with hope for us, is the last part, which talks about our reservations in heaven. Because of God's mercy, we have been born again into a living hope (through the resurrection of Jesus) that leads us to an inheritance of eternal life—an inheritance that is reserved, or kept, for us in heaven. Talk about safekeeping! There isn't a bank or a vault in the world that can offer that kind of security. Of course, considering what is being safeguarded, i.e., our inheritance of eternal life, absolutely the most important possession anyone can have, it is no wonder the Lord has placed it in such a safe location.

Look up the following verses. Write out how you understand these texts to help us see just what it means to have our inheritance in heaven: Jer. 33:16; Rom. 3:24, 25; 8:34; 1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:12; Heb. 6:19, 20.

Our inheritance is in heaven because Jesus, our Savior, our Righteousness, and our Redeemer is in heaven—and our salvation, our hope, and everything is found only in Him. After Jesus died, having wrought out in His life perfect righteousness by His perfect obedience to all of His Father's commands, after suffering death in our stead (having borne in His flesh all our sins), He ascended to heaven, where He now ministers that perfect righteousness in our behalf before the Father. Our inheritance is in heaven, because *He* is in heaven, the One alone in whom we have the promise of "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." We now have a living hope, because we have a living Representative standing before the Father in our stead, pleading the merits of His perfect righteousness in our behalf. It is clear, then, that our inheritance is secure, because it is based solely on Jesus and what He has done for us.

Thus, as long as we cling to Him in faith, our inheritance is as secure as the promises of God Himself.

HOPE DESPITE GRIEF AND TRIAL.

Of course, though our hope is in heaven, in Jesus our Savior and High Priest, we still have the battle here on earth, where the great controversy rages around us. And, sometimes, the problems and troubles of the battle seem to be overwhelming. Fears over job security, financial worries, war, family crises, revolution, damaged relationships, health worries, bereavement—all can lead to so many kinds of grief. To be human is, to some degree or another, to sorrow. Peter was aware of this reality, and thus after talking about the great hope we have in heaven, he shifted to some more immediate earthly problems.

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Pet. 1:6, 7, NIV). What is Peter saying here? Keep in mind the verses that preceded these.

Peter's not saying that all trials come from God in order to refine our faith. That would be too simplistic. Instead, our response to whatever trials come, that is what is most important to the Christian. If we cling to the Lord in faith, whatever happens, we can still have a wonderful hope beyond what this life now offers.

Look at what Peter wrote next: "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:8, 9, NIV).

Thus, after talking about the trials of life, Peter then shifts the focus back on Christ and the hope that believers can have because of Him, no matter their present situation.

Why? Because of the promise of salvation. The joy we experience is in recognizing that God is saving us, that He is right now fulfilling His promises, and that the blessed hope will be that glorious reality.

This is not some passing excitement or foolish sense of fun. This is the deep-seated joy that is totally sure of the objective of hope. In the words of Annie Smith in her Advent hymn, "I Saw One Weary":

"O! what can buoy the spirits up? 'Tis this alone—the blessed hope."

For the next few days, write down every time you think of the promise of eternal life that we have because of Jesus. Write down, too, the situation that sparked that thought. How many times did it come? What caused it? What comfort did it bring?

HOPE INSIDE.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13).

In the end, no matter what Christ has done for us, no matter the fullness and completeness of His sacrifice in our behalf, salvation comes down to our choice. Do we accept or reject it? All of us, indeed, make one choice or another. Because we make this choice only with our minds, it is no wonder Peter emphasizes the need to control our thoughts. For here, ultimately, the battle for individual souls is won or lost, because here is the place where our choice is made.

Look up these verses. What do they say about our thoughts and what should go on in our minds? Gen. 6:5; Ps. 10:4; Prov. 5:10; Isa. 55:7; Matt. 5:8; Phil. 2:5; 4:8; 1 Pet. 4:1.

Read the rest of 1 Peter 1:13. What point is he making? How can this point help us deal with what he says to do earlier in the verse?

The original Greek reads that this grace “is being brought to you,” as in even now they are partakers of God’s grace. Peter here sets forth the Christian walk as a *growing* realization of the presence of Jesus Christ, a deepening fellowship that surpasses the closest earthly friendship. Day by day the life and work of the Savior will be increasingly revealed to the child of God until the final “revelation” occurs at the Second Coming. Those who adoringly view Him then will be those who have already come to know Him in this life.

Thus, we are told to focus on God’s grace toward us, which should be the foundation of all our actions and motivations. It is through the graciousness of God that we even live, that we receive His salvation, that there is an eternal life to look forward to. When Jesus is revealed at His second coming, then grace is made complete in the transformation from mortal to immortal, from perishable to imperishable (see 1 Corinthians 15).

In what ways, even now, are you benefiting from the grace that is “being brought to you”? How, in your own experience, is that grace being brought, how are you experiencing it, and how has it changed your life?

FURTHER STUDY: "The power of Christ alone can work the transformation in heart and mind that all must experience who would partake with Him of the new life in the kingdom of heaven. 'Except a man be born again,' the Saviour has said, 'he cannot see the kingdom of God.' John 3:3. The religion that comes from God is the only religion that can lead to God. In order to serve Him aright, we must be born of the Divine Spirit. This will lead to watchfulness. It will purify the heart and renew the mind, and give us a new capacity for knowing and loving God. It will give us willing obedience to all His requirements. This is true worship."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 37.

"There we shall know even as also we are known. There the loves and sympathies that God has planted in the soul will find truest and sweetest exercise. The pure communion with holy beings, the harmonious social life with the blessed angels and with the faithful ones of all ages, the sacred fellowship that binds together 'the whole family in heaven and earth'—all are among the experiences of the hereafter."—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 548, 549.

"There every power will be developed, every capability increased. The grandest enterprises will be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations will be reached, the highest ambitions realized. And still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of body and mind and soul."—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 549.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is your understanding of what it means to be born again? How important is the new birth to the Christian experience? Can a person really be Christian without it? Discuss.
2. Albert Camus wrote these words: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy."—"An Absurd Reasoning: Absurdity and Suicide," in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, translated by Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1983), p. 3. Considering his atheism, why do these words make sense?

SUMMARY: Our hope is real, and it is assured to us by God Himself. And this hope does make a real difference in life and can be appealed in all situations. As we accept Jesus, we are reborn into this *living* hope, a hope that is relevant and meaningful. In both the joys and sadnesses that we each experience, God's hope remains the constant source of encouragement and gives direction to the way we live.



Prisoner of Hope

Philip Follett

Habib* huddled in his dark prison cell, trembling with fear. A fellow prisoner, sensing Habib's desperation, secretly offered him a copy of a holy Book. It was the New Testament. Habib had always considered the Koran to be the most holy book, and he wondered whether he should read this Christian Book. But, in his loneliness and despair, he began to read. The Bible brought him peace and hope.

When Habib was transferred to another prison, he had to leave the Bible behind. But he did not forget the power of this Book to bring him hope and peace.

After his release from prison, Habib tried to find a Bible, but Bibles are not available in his country. However, while listening to his shortwave radio one day, he found the *Voice of Hope* program on Adventist World Radio. In his country listening to Christian radio can be dangerous, but Habib began to listen regularly. Soon he found the same peace and hope that he had experienced while reading the Bible.

He took another risk and wrote to AWR thanking the producers for the programs and for helping him learn about Christ. "How attractive these subjects are!" he exclaimed. "You encourage us to have hope and trust in God. You pour the holiness of Christianity into our thirsty hearts. I am a new traveler in this way, the way of worshiping God. Many events have transpired in my life that have changed my thinking."

It is impossible to know how many people are listening to the Christian messages presented via Adventist World Radio in the 10/40 window, because many of the listeners live in areas where they cannot safely send a letter. Each time Habib writes, he risks being discovered.

Habib still does not have a Bible or other Christ-centered literature in his own language. But God is working in his life. "I see the world differently than I saw it before," he said. "I'm sure that this change was God's doing, because He will lead those who are willing to be led. God's word is like a gem that I present as a gift to my dear friends."

Pray for Habib and the thousands like him who are discovering peace and hope in Jesus Christ in spite of difficult circumstances.

*Habib is a pseudonym; the man lives in a country whose identity cannot be revealed. Philip Follett is special assistant to the president of Adventist World Radio.

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Hope and “The Delay”: Part 1



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 25:1-13.

MEMORY TEXT: “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour” (Matthew 25:13, NIV).

KEY THOUGHTS: Though it may be difficult to continue to hope in the “time between,” the story of the ten virgins makes it clear that we need to be ready and prepared and not to lose hope. We are in the waiting time, and hope is what keeps us alive until the coming of the Bridegroom.

REFLCTING ON THE SITUATION of waiting for the Advent, James White commented, “The position of suspense is not the most happy one.”—*Life Incidents* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1868), vol. 1, p. 337. The “waiting time” is one of tension—living between the “already” and the “not yet”—the “already” being Christ’s death in our behalf that is already complete, the penalty for all our sin already being paid, and the reconciliation between God and humanity already being accomplished, as opposed to the “not yet,” the Second Coming, when all that Christ had accomplished at His first coming is brought to fruition.

In this study we will examine the parable Jesus told about the waiting time and how we should react to this “position of suspense” and understand what God wishes us to do.

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, Nov. 30.

A LONG TIME COMING.

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:3, 4).

The wreck, eroded with rust, rotted in an empty, unkempt field, its tail fins testified to the glory of another era. Stripped by hoodlums who, if caught in their act, would have been out of jail long ago, the car was so old that even the birds had abandoned it. The only signs of life near it were a prickly bush that had grown up through a hole in the bottom of the trunk and a few scattered weeds that had circled the wreck like some sort of macabre garden. The car's front bumper carried a sticker with a message that, though worn with age, faded and eroded by the weather, could still be seen, and it said—"Jesus is coming soon!"

Jesus is coming soon? How soon is soon? After all, it has been almost two thousand years since He left the first time, and we are still here.

It was the apostle Peter, in the New Testament, who predicted that "there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:3, 4).

Well, Peter, according to your contemporary, John, Jesus did promise to "come quickly" (Rev. 22:20) and that was about . . . 1900 years ago; and, after all those centuries, things are kind of, well, continuing "as they were"; thus, to be fair, Peter, the scoffers do, it would seem, have a point.

Or do they? Though some verses seem to indicate the nearness of Christ's return, even in Bible times (see Rom. 13:12; 1 Pet. 4:7), others indicate that it could, indeed, be a long time yet coming. The parable that we focus on this week, that of the ten virgins, makes it clear that the Bridegroom will be "a long time in coming" (Matt. 25:5, NIV; see also Matt. 24:48; 25:19). The question is, How then do we, those who are waiting in that time, maintain our hope during this period? What should and what shouldn't we do? This parable gives some answers.

Look again at those verses in 2 Peter for today. What was Peter saying that should, almost two thousand years later, strengthen our faith in the promise of Christ's return and the hope that is contained in it? In other words, in what ways do his words show that the "delay" is nothing unexpected?

BE READY! (Read Matt. 25:1-13).

As we read this parable, we must understand it in the context in which it was given. It comes immediately after Jesus' answer to the disciples about the signs of the end. Thus, Jesus is talking about the Second Coming—and our relationship to this dramatic and conclusive event. He had just finished explaining all about His return. But like most of us, the disciples needed some help understanding what He meant.

Read the parable (Matt. 25:1-13). Ignoring the details, focus, instead, on its basic message. If you could describe its message *in one word*, what would it be? Write down the word and then explain why you chose that word:

The women were classified as virgins. In the Bible that image is often used to represent a faithful people, in contrast to harlot imagery, which symbolizes apostasy and rebellion (see Jer. 3:6; Rev. 17:5). Thus, this parable is not about atheists or New Agers or pagans; instead, it is about followers of Jesus.

Notice, too, other similarities between the women: They all took their lamps, they all went out to meet the bridegroom (so they all were expecting him), they all became drowsy, they all fell asleep, they all woke up at the announcement of his coming, and they all trimmed their lamps. From the outside, they all pretty much looked and acted alike. To anyone watching, there would not seem to be much difference between them.

They were all living in anticipation of the Advent hope. All were hoping for and, indeed, expecting and waiting for the bridegroom to return. These women, then, represent Christians who not only expect Christ's return but make preparations to meet Him. None of them, not even the foolish ones, represent those professed Christians who do not believe in a literal return of Christ or those who believe His coming is so far off they do not make any preparations for it.

Look again at the basic characteristics that all these women share. How do those characteristics represent our church today? What outward things are we doing or possess that seem to match the attributes of all these women?

SLEEPERS.

All the women in the parable fell asleep. What does that mean? What does that tell us about the Lord's foreknowledge about the state of His church?

The fact that all the women fell asleep doesn't seem to be presented in this parable as the problem, for even the wise ones snoozed. The Lord, obviously, knew the impact that His timing would have upon His people (more proof that the "delay" isn't really a delay). In fact, if He had come when they had expected Him, then all would have been ready, because all would have had enough oil in their lamps, and there would have been no need for this parable.

Jesus, however, knowing that His followers would grow tired awaiting His return, used this parable to warn us that even in our weariness, even in the long delay, we need to be prepared for His coming, we need to be ready so that when it happens, we have enough "oil" in our lamps.

What does the oil and the light and the lamp imagery represent? (See Ps. 119:105; Zech. 4:1-14; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 5:14.) Why are all needed? What good is oil without a lamp to burn it in, or what good is a lamp without oil? And how can one have light without the other two elements?

Although on the surface all looked the same and even had some of the same experiences (all, in fact, had oil, light, and lamps), the women were different in what really mattered, and that was in being prepared to meet the bridegroom.

Obviously, Jesus is warning here that without the Spirit of God, we can know some truth, but that is not enough. However much the Spirit (oil) works through the Word (the lamp) to bring truth (light) to a person, even to the point where that person awaits the Second Coming, more is needed. Those who have not surrendered themselves in faith and obedience to the Lord will suddenly, in the time of crisis, find themselves unready and unprepared for the event.

Notice that the *only* difference between these women is that some had more oil than others. They took extra. What does that mean, in a practical sense? Suppose you have studied this parable and felt convicted by it; what can you do to change your life so you will have enough "oil in your lamp"?

NOT ENOUGH OIL.

"With that the girls all got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the prudent, "Our lamps are going out; give us some of your oil." "No," they said; "there will never be enough for all of us. You had better go to the shop and buy some for yourselves." While they were away the bridegroom arrived'" (Matt. 25:7-10, NEB).

At first glance, this situation seems strange. Would it not have been a Christian gesture of kindness for the wise girls to share their oil with those so desperate in their need?

But from the story, it is clear there would not have been oil enough to light ten lamps. So why give oil to another and then have your own light go out? It would make no sense.

What essential message is contained in the refusal of those to give others of their oil? (See also Ezek. 14:14, 20.)

The parable shows that the "oil supply" is personal. It cannot be transferred. This applies to spiritual aspects of our relationship with Christ. Salvation is no more transferable than bloodtype. The same with hope. You cannot take your hope and implant it into someone else. Hope has to be personally experienced, personally believed. This is the "oil of gladness" (Heb. 1:9).

In Israel, oil was a much-valued commodity. So, too, taking oil as the symbol of hope and salvation, we have a great need for oil. More than anything, this is what is required in the church and in our individual lives.

The "position of suspense" was not easy for any of the girls in the parable. But those who were wise made sure they had supplies of oil; they maintained their hope. So when their hope was realized, they were ready.

Of course, as the parable shows, we cannot give others the things they need to be prepared for Christ's return. But does that mean we cannot do something for them? Whatever the parable is saying, it is not saying that we need to neglect the spiritual needs of others, that the spiritual welfare of others is not our concern, or that we need to keep our own lamps filled with oil at the expense of others. What can you do to help those around you get enough oil for their lamps?

THE MOST FRIGHTFUL WORDS.

Notice what the bridegroom said to the women who were not ready to meet him: “‘‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you’’” (Matt. 25:12, NIV).

Wow! *I don’t know you!* How could Jesus, who knows all hearts (John 4:17-19; 8:7-9; 1 John 3:20); Jesus, the express image of His Father’s person (Heb. 1:3); Jesus, the One who made and upholds the worlds (Col. 1:16, 17)—how could He say to these women that He did not know them? See also Matthew 7:23.

What did Jesus mean when He said “I don’t know you” or when He said to others “I never knew you”? What point was He making? Look up these following verses, summarize what they are saying, and see how they might help us understand the point that Jesus was stressing in Matthew 25:12.

Gen. 4:1 _____

Hos. 4:1 _____

John 17:3 _____

Know in the Bible does not mean just head knowledge; it is not merely the ability to recite a list of facts. Instead, it can take on a relational aspect, one that’s reciprocal. Adam “knew” his wife; this meant, obviously, more than just having a few facts about her stored in his head. Thus, the words of Jesus to these women seem to imply that there was no relationship between them and Him, one through which He could work in them His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Matthew 25:13 makes the meaning clearer. What Jesus is saying is that you always need to be ready, because you don’t know when I am coming. And the essence of preparedness comes down to “knowing” God, not just a bunch of facts about Him but a knowledge that comes only from a relationship with Him, one in which He could rightly say to you, *Come in, for I know you.*

With this concept of what it means to “know,” could you honestly say that God “knows” you? Do you have that kind of relationship with Him? If so, write down why. If you cannot say so, what changes need to be made so you can?

FURTHER STUDY: Please read Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Oct. 24, 1893; *The Upward Look*, p. 89.

"Those who profess to be waiting for the coming of Christ, are represented in the parable by the five wise and the five foolish virgins. The wise virgins had oil in their vessels with their lamps; they had their lamps trimmed and burning, and were ready to go out and meet the bridegroom. But the foolish virgins had no oil in their vessels; and when the solemn cry was sounded, they were found unprepared, and could not go forth to meet the bridegroom. Many profess to be wise; but have they the Holy Spirit? As a people, we profess to know the truth, but of what avail will this be if we do not carry out its principles in our life? How many say, 'Oh, yes, the coming of Christ is at the door. The end is so near that there is no time to carry the message to those who sit in darkness. There is no need of spending money on foreign work; for the end will come before it will be accomplished.' Is this the way that you carry out the injunction of your coming Lord, to preach the gospel in all the world for a witness to all nations? It is your business to be ready for the coming of the Lord, and you cannot be ready while failing to carry out his commands. There are some who seem to feel no responsibility concerning paying their tithes into the treasury of the Lord. They withhold from Him who has given them everything else, the small portion He has named as His own. They say they cannot see that it is their duty to pay tithe; but there is no reason why they should not see it, except that self is before their eyes."

—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 1, 1892.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is your understanding of the concept of "knowing God"? We are told to love God; in fact, we are commanded to "love God" (see Deut. 6:5; Mark 12:30). How is that idea linked to that of knowing God? How can someone love God without first knowing Him?
2. Make a list of some of the things that can cause someone to be one of the foolish virgins. What are the daily, mundane things that can keep us from being ready? Compare your list with others in the class.

SUMMARY: Though time continues, we need to keep watching for the fulfillment of our hope, for "it will surely come" (Hab. 2:3). The parable of the ten virgins helps us to see that this is not a time of idle waiting but of preparation. Jesus' call is to remain faithful to our hope and to "Watch!"



If Only

Hannah Z.

Inky blackness gripped young Prakash as he lay prostrate on his sleeping mat. Silent tears traced patterns on his sallow cheeks. "Oh Ama, I hurt so badly! Help me!" he cried to his mother.

Prakash's mother crept silently to his side. "Son, I don't know what to do." Her voice sounded tired. Her son had been sick for years. How much longer would it go on? "If only we were Christians, all would be well," she whispered. "Christians have magic that makes them well when they get sick." She lighted a candle and sat silently beside her son until he fell asleep.

Slowly Prakash's health and strength returned, but the strange illness left him the size of a seven- or eight-year-old. Sadness further engulfed the family when Prakash's teenage brother, then his small sister, died. Life seemed so cruel.

Prakash grew up and married. Because of his small size, it was difficult to find work that would support his family. One day Prakash learned that some Christians lived in a nearby village. He recalled his mother's wish and decided to visit them. Perhaps they could help him. A nurse who ran a clinic and visited the sick told him about Christ. Prakash wanted to learn more about the Christian God. But to do that he had to go to India, for he could not study religion freely in his homeland.

Prakash and five others were baptized and returned home to their village. They met quietly in their homes to avoid problems. But in spite of their precautions, one Sabbath the police burst into their meeting, took their Bibles, and arrested Prakash and three others.

While he was imprisoned, Prakash's wife had to work hard to feed herself and their young son. After a year Prakash was finally released from prison. But his joy was short-lived, as his wife died, leaving Prakash alone to raise his young son. Then he and several other owners of small farms were swindled out of their land. The others who lost their land could find work on tea plantations, but Prakash was too small to get such work.

Prakash married a woman who had lost her family during an epidemic. Together they are working for God and their family, faithfully sharing their faith as they are able.

Pray for Prakash and the other believers in their homeland, where freedom of religion is not yet a reality.

Hannah Z. is a pseudonym for a missionary wife who is working in a Hindu country.

Hope and “The Delay”: Part 2



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Pet. 3:3-15.

MEMORY TEXT: “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:5, NIV).

KEY THOUGHTS: As we touched on last week, all of us who have the hope of the Second Coming have to deal with the problems caused by the “delay.” Sometimes delay becomes doubt and doubt denial. Some may even question the validity of the promised hope, saying it has been preached for so long it can no longer be valid. This week we'll explore that challenge a little further.

THE YEARS, THE DECADES, THE CENTURIES, and soon the millennia can weaken the resolve of those who await the Lord's return (and all the hope contained therein).

The Bible's answer is that the Lord is not slow, that He will do what He has promised, and that continued readiness is essential. To give up on hope is to give up on the vital aspect of the Christian message; indeed, for without the hope of the Second Coming, very little, if anything, of the Christian message makes sense.

To identify a delay suggests the passing of some definite time. But God has not expressed a definite date; *delay* is a term that comes from only the human perspective. Time has continued longer than *we*—but not the Lord—may have expected.

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, Dec. 7.

THE CHILDREN OF THE CHILDREN'S CHILDREN.

A young Adventist man and woman, hopelessly in love with each other, decided to get married, despite counsel from caring, loving relatives that they should think carefully about their decision, because, after all, the Lord was coming soon. "However," they were told, "if you believe you should get married, go ahead. But don't even think about having children—time is too short."

Well, they not only thought about having children, they had them (five, to be precise); eventually, too, their children had children. And, if the Lord does not come soon, the children of the children they were told not to even think of having because time was too short will probably be having children, as well!

No doubt, while we can argue about whether there is a delay or no delay, this remains certain—the longer we wait, the longer the shadow of time stretches over our churches and homes; the longer we keep saying "time is short," the greater the chance we have of doubting the Second Coming, especially when we are sure the Lord will be back before a certain time, only to find that time has long ago passed.

Ask yourself this question, you who are now well into the new millennium: Have you had doubts about the Second Coming? If you have, think through logically for a moment the implications of that thought. Take it to its logical conclusion. In other words, if there were no Second Coming, what would the alternatives be?

French secular intellectual Jean-Francois Revel said that he did not think that any human being who knew himself or herself to be mortal and did not believe in an afterlife could experience a feeling of total fulfillment. (See *The Monk and the Philosopher* [New York: Shocken Books, 1998], p. 339.)

What a quote! One, at least, can admire Revel's honesty and ability to take his premises to their logical conclusion. In the context of today's lesson, the point is this: When you doubt the Second Coming, you are doubting away the whole reason for your Christian faith, the whole foundation of the hope that you have, because, without it, what do we have?

Read 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's argument, ultimately, for the Second Coming. Follow his line of reasoning (perhaps outline it) until you clearly understand what he is saying. How could focusing on these points help alleviate the doubt that, considering the passing of time, is understandable, if not justifiable—not in light of the Cross?

WHEN A DELAY ISN'T A DELAY.

As some texts have shown, the “delay” is nothing unforeseen. In fact, it is probably not the best word to describe the unexpected continuance of time before the coming of the Lord. The word is loaded with associations of imperfection, changeability, adjustment—even error and unwillingness.

Unforeseen circumstances cause a “delay.” A mistake on someone’s part results in a “delay.” Technical problems are the reason for a “delay.” Unpleasant tasks are avoided or “delayed.” This list of negative implications could be extended, but it well illustrates the danger of using the term as a description of the work of God. Do we really want to associate the divine coming of Christ with such dubious connotations?

Can we really term God’s actions as “delayed”? If He is eternal and outside of time, how can He “delay”?

“But do not forget one thing, my dear friends! There is no difference in the Lord’s sight between one day and a thousand years; to him the two are the same” (2 Pet. 3:8, TEV). What point is Peter making here that can help us put things in perspective regarding the time of Christ’s return?

Albert Einstein proved that time is elastic. Depending on where you are and how fast you are moving, time can move at one rate for one person and at a different rate for another. Though it is not an easy concept for us to grasp, time is relative, depending on where you are and how fast you are moving.

Imagine, then, how different time must be for God, the Creator, than it is for us, mere finite beings whose only knowledge of time is what we can ourselves experience.

Thus, implicit in Peter’s words is the notion that we cannot speak of a delay, at least not from God’s perspective. It is from our perspective that we see time continuing longer than anticipated. But that says more about us than about God and His plans. Of course, we are keen for hope to be fulfilled. But we must learn not to limit God and His actions, not to set any times in our minds apart from the Bible’s answer of “Soon”!

Skim through the Bible and look at such things as the time the children of Israel were in Egypt (Exod. 12:40), the time from the command to build Jerusalem until the coming of the Messiah (Dan. 9:24-27), the time when the saints were persecuted by the little horn (Dan. 7:25). What is the one thing they all have in common, at least, from our narrow perspective, and how can these time periods help us put the “delay” in its proper perspective?

HOPE DEFERRED AND DEFERRED AND DEFERRED . . .

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12, NIV).

For many Christians, January 1, 2000, was surely going to bring the end of the world, the Second Coming, and the end of all our suffering.

Well, as we all know, January 1, 2000, came and went, and the world is still here, there was no Second Coming, and suffering remains.

Hope again deferred?

No question—waiting is not always fun, especially when there's so much pain, suffering, and disappointment in the interim. We are, in fact, in between the promise and its fulfillment; and, no doubt, as time continues, we feel that the end is not coming as fast as we want. Thus, many of us are just being set up for one disappointment after another in regard to the Second Coming.

There is, however, one solution that could help us. Look up the following verses: What do they all have in common that could help spare us from the pain of hope deferred and deferred and deferred . . . ?

Matt. 24:36 _____

Mark 13:32 _____

1 Thess. 5:2 _____

2 Pet. 3:10 _____

In one sense, there should not be any disappointment on the part of those who hope for Christ's return—that is, if we take the Bible for what it says. Jesus is clear—no one knows when He will come back; thus, to speculate, to produce charts with dates, to give any generalized time setting in regard to His coming, is (as it has always been) a guaranteed way of setting yourself (not to mention others) up for a disappointment. And there's no need for that, not with clear Bible testimony that we simply don't know; the day will come unexpectedly.

It is clear that Christ's return is very important. Without it, in fact, nothing we believe as Christians has any enduring value. But does it really matter, *really*, when Christ returns? If so, why? What difference does it make when He returns (just as long as He eventually does)?

PATIENCE MEANS SALVATION.

"Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation" (2 Pet. 3:15, NIV). What is the apostle saying here?

If our Lord's patience means salvation, why cannot our patience follow suit? We are impatient people, and, at times, we fail to see that patience on our part is also required. If God is not willing to rush and hurry and force but patiently allow His children to come to His salvation, why should we do any differently?

From this perspective, God is seen as allowing further time so people may accept His promises and enter into a covenant relation with Him, based on love. God is patient, supremely patient, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). This is the same God we should recognize and not "show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance" (Rom. 2:4, NIV).

The parallel of the Exodus experience is useful here. God's will was for Israel to go in and occupy the land given by promise. Yet, God cannot save people without their assent. The Israelites erred in their hearts (Heb. 3:10), and most did not enter their promised rest. Their participation in salvation depended upon their response. They spent 40 unnecessary years wandering over the rocky wilderness of southern Palestine. This was not the result of the will of God but of the rejection of His promises by His covenant people. Ellen White remarks on this subject: "The same sins have delayed the entrance of modern Israel into the heavenly Canaan. In neither case were the promises of God at fault. It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration, and strife among the Lord's professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 69.

God is patient with us, because He is a saving God. It pains Him to give up on any of His children. Yet, in the end, the end will come. Opposition to God will not prevent the ultimate fulfillment of hope.

Dwell more on the often-controversial question of why we are still here. Ellen White, more than once, indicated that were it not for the sins and unbelief of God's church, we could have already been home. How do you understand what she meant? Could it really be that it is because of us, we who long and look for the hope of the Second Coming, that the Second Advent has not yet occurred (talk about irony)? Be prepared to discuss (and, no doubt, debate) in class the implications of that teaching.

LEARNING TO WAIT PATIENTLY.

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Perhaps time has "continued longer" than we expected, but that is only because our expectations are faulty. That disappointment is absolutely no reason to reject the blessed hope, the great and precious promises of the Savior—promises made certain by the death of Christ at the Cross. By bearing God's wrath against sin (Isa. 53:4, 5), by facing the Father's judgment against sin in Jesus Himself (vs. 6), by offering Himself as our Substitute (1 Pet. 2:24), by becoming our Sacrificial Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7)—Jesus is our absolute surety. Without that surety, without the Second Coming, the future offers us nothing but a cold hole in the ground, hardly a fitting or glorious end for all the toils, struggles, and problems that precede it. Though we came from dust, and though we return to dust, our hope—sealed in the blood of Christ—is that we do not remain in the dust.

How crucial, then, that we practice the "long patience" mentioned by James (5:7), that we "hope to the end" (1 Pet. 1:13), and that we "abide in him" so that "when he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 2:28; 3:2).

Notice the many times the psalmist commands waiting on God:

- **"Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord" (Ps. 27:14, NIV).**
- **"We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield" (Ps. 33:20, NIV).**
- **"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope" (Ps. 130:5, NIV).**

If you have a concordance, look up the word *wait* in Psalms and Proverbs and see how often we are admonished to wait upon the God of our hope and our salvation.

Suppose you had the opportunity to speak to the entire church, every Seventh-day Adventist in the world. Suppose your topic was "How Not to Lose Hope as We Wait and Wait and Wait. . ." Suppose you had three minutes to give your speech. Using Christ's blood atonement as the foundation of your message, what would you say? Write it out and share it with your Sabbath School class.

FURTHER STUDY: "When a love for the Savior's appearing begins to grow weak, and the attractions of this present life begin to grow stronger, it becomes easy to imagine that the time is to be prolonged, and that there are so many things to be accomplished, and so much yet to be fulfilled, that the coming of Christ cannot be very near. This is the sophistry of unbelief. Beware of it."—Uriah Smith, *Review and Herald*, Aug. 31, 1897.

"The thrilling truth that has been sounding in our ears for many years, 'The Lord is at hand; be ye also ready,' is no less the truth today than when we first heard the message."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 14.

"There are those who say not only in their hearts but in all their works, 'My Lord delayeth His coming.' Because Christ's coming has been long foretold they conclude that there is some mistake in regard to it. But the Lord says, 'The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come.' . . . Shall we be found among the number who, having ceased to cooperate with God, are found saying, 'My Lord delayeth his coming'?"—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, June 18, 1901.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

In regard to the question of why the Lord hasn't yet returned, someone once gave this answer: "All the universe, maybe even newly created beings, must be able to look back—no matter how far removed chronologically from the great controversy—and see the results of disobedience. Evil has to unfurl itself so completely that billions of years after it's gone the heavenly intelligences in the farthest crannies of creation will have no questions regarding God's handling of evil. Its demonstration needs to be so dramatic, so consummate and terminal, that God's love, mercy, and justice in dealing with it will satisfy all creation, over all the cosmos, for all eternity."

Until then, the hard questions remain; it will take time to answer them fully, precisely, because they are so hard. All we can do, in the meantime, is reach out on faith and trust God, knowing that He will return at the right time." Discuss that answer.

SUMMARY: God in His wisdom continues to be patient with us, not wanting any to perish but for us to come to repentance. This is in no way a denial of hope—because hope is part of the salvation God offers. But we should be careful not to set any kind of time limits, because if we begin to doubt the time of the Second Coming, we may doubt the Second Coming itself. Doubt must be driven out by the blessed hope, and recognizing God's patience, we must also be patient.



Sabbath Keeping in a Rwandan Prison

J. H. Zachary

"The president of Rwanda wants to talk with you. Come with me," the soldier ordered. Amon Rugelinyange, president of the Rwandan Union Mission, picked up his pocket Bible as he left his home. He could read while he waited for the president.

The officers interrogated Amon at some length then took him to an adjoining room that held more than fifty persons.

The next day the prisoners were loaded into a bus and taken to a prison where 800 men were being held, many of whom had no charges brought against them and none of whom had lawyers. One by one they were interrogated. By Friday afternoon the interrogators had not questioned Amon. As they left for the day, they told him to be ready to appear the next morning.

"Sir," Amon said, tomorrow is the Sabbath. I do not take part in secular activities on the Sabbath."

"You could be released after the interrogation," the officer said. "You'd better show up."

The next day the officer took Amon to his supervisor and reported that the pastor refused to be interrogated on his Sabbath. The supervisor replied, "I will see that you are called for interrogation only on Saturdays."

"The Sabbath is not mine," Amon replied. "It belongs to God."

When the supervisor left, the officer said, "You do not know my supervisor! You could spend the rest of your life in prison if you do not come when you are summoned for questioning."

"But I know my God," Amon replied. "And I must obey Him."

Amon spent his days studying the Bible with interested prisoners who gathered around. Sometimes nearly everyone in the prison listened in.

One Christian told Amon, "Pastor, I believe that God sent you to prison to do His work right here. You teach us the Bible, you pray with us, you visit the discouraged. Priests from my church who are in prison do not offer help or consolation to the prisoners."

A month later Amon was called for interrogation. It was on a Thursday. When the officer began questioning him, Amon learned that he was in prison because a "friend" had brought charges against him. One day the warden called him to his office. "Gather all your belongings," he said. "You are free to go home."

J. H. Zachary is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour.

Too Rich to Hope?



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Rev. 3:14-22.

MEMORY TEXT: "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17, NIV).

KEY THOUGHTS: Remember the first week's lesson, which looked at Adam and Eve in Eden, before the Fall? They didn't have hope, because they did not need it. In contrast, this week's lesson will look at those who really need hope but are so self-satisfied they don't even realize their need. Talk about a dangerous position!

OUR PROPHETIC VIEW places us in the time of the church of Laodicea. This is nothing to be proud of, for the church is portrayed as saying it is rich and doesn't need a thing! Sadly, this characterization of the church today reveals an attitude of self-sufficiency, a confidence in what it has achieved. The church of Laodicea thinks it has arrived! But God's analysis is that it is pitiful, not recognizing its spiritual poverty, blindness, and nakedness.

Yet, the good news of the gospel is that, thanks to the blood shed on the cross, there's hope even for Laodicea; through God, whatever they lack can be more than provided for. And that is their great (if not their only) hope.

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, Dec. 14.

HOT OR COLD (Rev. 3:15, 16, NIV).

Look at the words of the Lord to His church. "I know your deeds." Not surprising, not for a God who promises to "bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccles. 12:14) and who "will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6). After all, in order to bring every work into judgment, He would have to know our every move.

What is surprising, instead, is what comes after, when He says that He would rather we be cold as opposed to lukewarm in those deeds. It is understandable that He would rather us be hot than lukewarm—but cold over lukewarm? Why?

Is not even a little energy, a little zeal, a little enthusiasm for our faith, better than none at all? What is it about being lukewarm that would cause God to say what He does here? Read the following comment and then, from your own understanding, write down your answer to the above questions.

*T*he tepid spiritual condition of the Laodicean church was more dangerous than if the church had been cold. Lukewarm Christianity preserves enough of the form, and even of the content of the gospel, to dull the perceptive powers of the spirit and renders men oblivious to the earnest effort necessary to the attainment of the high ideal of a victorious life in Christ. The typical Laodicean Christian is content with things as they are and proud of the little progress he has made. It is almost impossible to convince him of his great need and of how far he is from the goal of perfection."—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 761.

The modern curse is usually neither mistaken theological views of one extreme or another nor misguided programs or interpretations or positions. Rather, it is that so few really seem to care at all. Apathy is the spiritual nerve gas that paralyzes the church and prevents its achieving God's goals. That is why it offends Him so much, and He would prefer any other temperature than lukewarmness!

Look at your own life. Hot? Cold? Lukewarm? Write down a few examples of how lukewarmness, as opposed to outright coldness, has negatively influenced your own local church.

HOPE FOR THE WRETCHED “RICH.”

“‘You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked’” (Rev. 3:17, NIV).

Look up each of these verses: Isaiah 65:5, Matthew 7:21-23, 19:24, Luke 12:16-21, 18:10-14. In what ways do the principles taught in these texts help us understand the principle behind what the Lord is saying in Revelation 3:17?

What kind of “riches” may we think we have in the church but are of no true value? Could such things include positions of authority, doing good works, having read many books about the Bible, paying tithe regularly, being part of a witnessing team? No one is denying that all these things have their roles, but they are not an end in themselves. Having a wonderful library of religious books does not of itself make you a spiritual person. Being a spiritual person does not make you a righteous person. Sure, paying tithe is essential, but it is not a way of achieving salvation.

Perhaps the scariest part of this warning is that the Laodiceans think they “do not need a thing.” What Christian, who understands the fallen state of humanity, who understands the ravages of sin, and who has been given a glimpse of the righteousness of Christ and the high standard of God’s law, could ever think that he or she does not “need a thing”? How can anyone who claims faith in Jesus ever think like that? God can work with those who—however depraved, fallen, and steeped in sin—feel their need and want help to escape it. But what can He do for those who feel they need *nothing*?

What must we keep before us in our minds that will guarantee us protection from this, the most dangerous of spiritual deceptions? (See Phil. 2:5-7.)

The Lord said that they are really wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. Look specifically at the aspect of their nakedness, because in many ways that captures the essence of Laodicea’s problem. What does it mean that they are naked? What are they missing that is the cause of all their problems? What do they need to be clothed with? (See Zech. 3:3-5; Matt. 22:11.) In short, what is Laodicea’s essential problem?

THE GOLD OF HOPE (Rev. 3:18, NIV).

Fortunately, as long as there is breath and life, there is hope. The Lord, who shed His blood for humanity, who bore the world's sins in His own human flesh and then took that flesh back with Him to heaven (where He will keep His humanity forever [see Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 25; *Steps to Christ*, p. 74]), this Lord is not going to give such a dire warning without also giving hope (After all, why bother with a warning if there is no remedy?). He suffered too much in our behalf just to let the people in His church (or anyone, for that matter) perish without an opportunity to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9). Even to the pathetic Laodiceans, He offers hope.

Notice, they should get gold in order to become rich, because they are poor (Rev. 3:17, 18); clothes because they are naked (vss. 17, 18); and "eyesalve," because they are blind (vss. 17, 18). He will provide all they need in order to be rescued from their wretched and pitiful state. Ellen White says that the gold tried in the fire is "faith that works by love."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 158. What about the "white clothes" (vs. 18, NIV) to cover their nakedness? What nakedness does that cover? (Matt. 22:1-14; Gal. 3:27). What about the "eyesalve"? What could that do for them? (John 16:8-11; 2 Cor. 4:4).

The Lord tells them to "buy" these things. How can they be purchased? Isaiah gives a bit of insight: " 'Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare' " (Isa. 55:1, 2, NIV, italics supplied).

There is a mixture of "conflicting" imagery here: You, who have no money, come and buy? Come and buy "without money and without cost"? Why spend money (that you do not have) for what can't satisfy? In the same way, God tells the Laodiceans to buy what can't be purchased, at least by anything humans can pay. What they need was already acquired for them by the Lord Himself, through Jesus, who paid, in a sense, the bill for their salvation. Perhaps the Lord used this language to stress the idea that these things they need are, indeed, not without great cost and price, a cost and price greater than they could, of themselves, ever pay. Perhaps He wanted to make them realize that salvation, though free for them, came with a great price.

JESUS AT THE DOOR.

“‘Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me’” (Rev. 3:20, NIV).

Talk about words filled with hope! Here is this miserable, proud, blind, and naked church; yet, nevertheless, the Lord stands before the door of their hearts and says *I'm knocking; I want to come in; I want to be with you.*

Writers often explore such themes as “Man in Search of God” and so forth. Yet, in reality, that is all backward. From the fall of Adam and Eve in Eden, when God came in search for them (Gen. 3:9), up through the advent of Christ, who came to rescue fallen humanity (John 3:16; Gal. 1:4; 2:20), through the message to Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-21), and finally to the Second Coming, when God again comes to humanity (John 14:3; Acts 1:11), the Bible theme is that of the Lord seeking out humanity. We do not come to Him; we, of ourselves, would flee from Him, just as surely as did Adam and Eve. Instead, because of a love that we can only barely glimpse, the great Creator of the universe, the One who uttered into existence infinity, eternity, and matter and wrapped them together and draped the result across nothingness—He has been seeking us, even knocking at our own doors. Amazing!

What other examples from the Bible can you find that show this theme, that of God coming down and seeking out human beings? What do they tell us about His love for humanity and the hope that we should have because of God and His love toward us? (See, for example, Gen. 18:1; Exod. 3:5; Job 38:1.)

Look again at the text for today. His offer is not to come in and rearrange the furniture or to evict us but to sit down and eat with us. In the same way as we share over a meal, God wants to come in and talk with us, to be our truest Friend. What an incredible offer from the God of hope!

The question is: What are the things in our lives that cause us not to open the door or to be afraid to open the door? Doubt? Love of sin? Fear of having to give up certain things? A lack of a sense of need? Examine yourself in the faith and ask yourself, Have I opened the door to Christ—all the way—or is He still outside knocking? Or, looking at it from another angle, In what sense is He always knocking at our doors?

THE OVERCOMERS.

“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev. 3:21, NIV).

As He spoke to the other churches, ending his different messages to each of them with words about overcoming (see Rev. 2:7, 17; 26; 3:5, 12), the Lord speaks the same to Laodicea, as well.

“To him who overcomes.” This isn’t just a command; it contains a promise. God is not going to ask people to do what is not possible. He is not going to present to them a goal or objective they cannot, through Him and His power, reach.

What promises are implicit or explicit in these texts?

Judg. 1:24 _____

Ps. 55:22 _____

Rom. 8:38, 39 _____

1 Cor. 10:13 _____

Rev. 12:11 _____

No question—whatever trials, whatever temptations, whatever struggles we face, God promises us power to *overcome*. A great theme of the book of Revelation deals with enduring oppression and persecution through the ages and staying faithful unto the end. In other words, overcoming means staying loyal, faithful, and obedient to the Lord despite trial, temptations, and persecution. This is God’s message to His church in every age. And the great hope contained therein is that, through Him, we can all be “overcomers,” even those in Laodicea who, heeding the Lord’s words, accept rebuke and discipline and who (as commanded) “repent” (Rev. 3:19).

Of course, not all Christians are facing overt persecution. Satan has other means at his disposal. His ultimate goal is to separate us from Christ, to keep us from salvation. He will always throw things in our way to try to trip us up. In what ways, other than persecution, does he try to trip us up, to get us to separate ourselves from Christ? In short, what are some of the things we need to overcome?

FURTHER STUDY: "The 'blessed hope' of the second coming of Christ is not a fringe doctrine. It is the very fabric that holds the Christian faith together. Hope is the warp and woof of human experience. The hope of the second coming of Christ is an experience that keeps Christians looking up. The apostle Peter calls it a 'lively hope.' It gives vitality to the Christian experience. The life of those having this hope is shaped and governed by it.

"Those who have a firm hope of heaven, who believe that Christ is coming again, will be better citizens here and now. Those who have a genuine hope for a new earth will seek to live its principles here on the old earth. Those who sing about the 'fair and happy land by and by' and the 'evergreen shores over there' will do their part to keep the shores green over here. Those who talk about the streets of gold 'over there' will also pay their taxes over here so that the streets can be kept in good repair. Parents who believe in the new earth where all will be 'bliss and joy' will also build a little heaven here on earth by loving each other and their children. . . . The Second Advent is not a theory, but should touch every facet of our life's experience here and now."

—R. R. Bietz, *Review and Herald*, centenary issue, June 8, 1961.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Here is what *The SDA Bible Commentary* has to say on the issue of overcoming, as found in the messages to the seven churches: "The form of the verb in Greek implies that the person 'continues to overcome,' or 'keeps on winning.' The thought of overcoming is a recurring theme in Revelation. The promises of Revelation have been especially precious to God's persecuted children in all ages. However, the context (vss. 2-6) implies that the overcoming here referred to is, in a special sense, victory over the false apostles and teachers who had been tempting believers to eat of the tree of human knowledge. How appropriate that their reward for overcoming should be access to the tree of life!"—Vol. 7, p. 745. Do you agree or disagree with the interpretation? Give reasons for your answer.

SUMMARY: Too rich to hope? How can people be so blind? Yet to even the arrogant and proud Laodicean church, the Lord offers hope—hope of victory, hope of security, hope of salvation.



The Visitor Who Snored

Salleh Suli

My partner and I had just begun our year of teaching in the village of Log Deck 5. One night I was awakened by loud snoring. At first I thought that it was my partner, but the sound seemed to be coming from a different location. The snoring was so loud that I found it difficult to go back to sleep.

The next morning I forgot about the midnight noise, but that night the snoring awoke me again. I knew it was not my partner, so I looked around, but I could see nothing in the darkness and the fog that covered the mountainside. I was puzzled, but soon I fell asleep again. Early the next morning, I looked around but saw nothing that could be the source of the sound. *I'll see you tonight,* I silently said to the unseen noise.

I told Darren about the offending noise, and that night we stayed up late to investigate. We talked, sang, and studied God's word until quite late. Suddenly we felt something bump the side of our little house. Instantly we became quiet. We could hear something moving under the house. It stopped right under my bed. Soon we heard the snoring sound that had awakened me the previous two nights. We peeked through a hole in the floor of our house and burst into laughter. There under the floor under my bed lay a huge pregnant pig belonging to our neighbor!

The people in the mountains of Mindanao raise pigs. The children play with the pigs and take baths with the pigs in the mud. We cannot blame them, for they do not know any better. But as we get to know our new neighbors in the village of Log Deck 5, after we win their confidence, then we can begin to tell them of God's better way. We will tell them about Jesus, who left the glories of heaven to come to this dark world and show us how to live better lives. We pray that one day, not too long from now, the 62 families living in Log Deck 5 will no longer raise pigs in their village.



Salleh Suli and his partner are students at Mountain View College in southern Philippines. They served for one year as student missionaries in the village of Log Deck 5, where they taught in the new mission school.

Called to One Hope



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Eph. 4:1-6, 11-13.

MEMORY TEXT: "The hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time" (Titus 1:2, NIV).

KEY THOUGHTS: We are encouraged to live a life worthy of our calling. Our calling as Adventists is to the "one hope" (Eph. 4:4). In this hope we are united; we recognize that there is no other way, no other future, apart from God and His promised hope, made certain through Christ's death in our stead. As a result, we work toward this hope together and wish to help others find it, as well.

IN THIS STUDY WE SEE the unifying power of this hope to which we have been called, a hope that leads us to act, not out of fear but out of love. We are to be a "spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men" (1 Cor. 4:9, NIV) as God's ambassadors at the end of time. United in this hope, God's church can rightly represent God to a dying world. As Seventh-day Adventists, we need to be true to this calling, and this means being faithful representatives of the God who wishes to lead all to truths that have given us so much hope. In doing so, our lives need to reflect what we believe, while our church must demonstrate the oneness that this hope brings. As a worldwide community of faith, it is our privilege to call everyone to the unity of faith that looks forward to the soon arrival of Jesus, the completion of the Advent hope.

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, Dec. 21.

A WORTHY LIFE.

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Eph. 4:1, 2, NIV).

We are all corrupt, greedy, foul sinners (Rom. 3:10-18). Helpless to save ourselves (Eph. 2:12), we are doomed—on our own—to perish in our lusts (1 John 2:17). Yet, we are saved by the mercy of God (Titus 3:5; Jude 21) because of Jesus, who not only took upon Himself the punishment for our sins (Isa. 53:6) but who offers us the gift of His perfect righteousness, a righteousness that we otherwise could never possess, the righteousness of God Himself, which alone can give us eternal life (Rom. 3:21-26). The point being that we are, indeed, beings totally dependent upon the mercy and grace of God, having nothing in ourselves to boast of.

Keeping the above paragraphs in mind, read again Ephesians 4:1, 2. What calling have we received? How can we, as such helpless sinful beings, live a life worthy of this calling? Why should we be humble, gentle, patient, and bearing with each other in love? What do these things have to do with our calling?

Notice what is spelled out as a life worthy of the calling: humble, gentle, patient, and bearing with one another in love. Sometimes we have the idea that God calls us to some staggering task or overwhelming achievement. Or, perhaps, we have the notion that the stricter our diet, the stricter we keep the Sabbath, the more rules we follow—the more worthy our life is. Though all these things have their place, these texts indicate that what God is looking for is on the inside, such as attitudes that reflect the way we treat one another and that display a true understanding of who we are in relationship to God and our fellow human beings. Only then can He call us to the work He wishes us to do.

Humble? Gentle? Patient? Bearing with each other in love? How much easier a life worthy of the Lord would be if all we had to do was eat a more stringent diet, dress more modestly, keep the Sabbath more strictly. How can dwelling on the Cross, what Christ did for us on the cross, and using that as our sole source of motivation enable us, indeed, to live a life worthy of the Lord as depicted by Paul in these verses?

BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE.

Read again the verses from yesterday's lesson, focusing on the last part, where Paul says to bear "with one another in love." The Greek word translated "bear" can also mean to "endure, forebear, suffer." In other words, though we are a people of hope and though through Christ we all share the same hope, we do have brothers and sisters in the faith who at times can be hard to deal with, people who require a little extra grace on our part. Paul says not only to bear with them, which could be hard enough—but to do so "in love." Perhaps it is only through love that we can bear with them.

Read Matthew 10:8. Though, of course, the context is different, how does the principle revealed in that text help us understand how it is that we can have the strength, the power, and the will to bear with each other "in love"?

Our faith, if it can do nothing else for us here and now, should, at least, make us open and receptive and sympathetic to the needs of others, especially those among us who struggle in hope. Read what Ellen White wrote to someone going through a time of severe doubts and fears:

"I want to say, my sister, you need not cast away your confidence. Poor, trembling soul, rest in the promises of God. In so doing, the enemy's fetters will be broken, his suggestions will be powerless. Heed not the whisperings of the enemy. Go free, oppressed soul. Be of good courage. Say to your poor, desponding heart: 'Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.' I know that God loves you. Put your trust in Him. Think not of those things which bring sadness and distress; turn from every disagreeable thought and think of precious Jesus. Dwell upon His power to save, His undying, matchless love for you, even you. I know that the Lord loves you. If you cannot rely upon your own faith, rely upon the faith of others. We believe and hope for you. God accepts our faith in your behalf."—Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 319.

Study the above statement from Ellen White. Break it down into major points. Though expressed in different ways, what was the gist of Ellen White's words to her? To what did she keep pointing her to? If you know someone now whose faith and hope are fading, take the essence of what Ellen White wrote and rephrase it in your own words and share it. You might even find it will be helpful to you, as well.

CALLED TO ONE HOPE.

"There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called" (Eph. 4:4, NIV).

Notice what the text specifically says. We are also called to *one* hope. Not many hopes, but one. As Christians we can hope for many things: hope that our prayers for healing will be answered, hope that the Lord will help our marriages, hope that our witnessing efforts will bear fruit, hope that we will live a "life worthy of the calling we have received" (Eph. 4:1, NIV), hope for victory over sin. The Bible, Old and New Testaments, is filled with promises of all sorts of hope: deliverance from enemies (Ps. 18:3), peace (Ps. 29:11), guidance (Ps. 48:14), and power to overcome sin (1 Cor. 10:13), to name only a few.

All these, as wonderful as they are, are not the "one hope" that Paul was talking about. What is that "one hope," and why, without it, are all the other things we hope for vain, hollow, and ultimately meaningless? Write down your answer and any texts you have that could support it. See, for example, Titus 2:13.

Notice again our text for today and the basic theme. Paul is talking about unity—one body, one Spirit, one hope. We are one body (see also 1 Cor. 12:12-31), guided by one Spirit that leads us to this one hope. We are one as we look together for the same hope. Though each of us have our own personal hopes, we are a community of hope that looks expectantly to God for the fulfillment of His promise. We may be made up of many different parts, but hope unites us, motivates us, and gives us direction; we are (ideally, anyway) one in thought and purpose, for our united goal is clear.

One hope? One body? How can so many different elements such as culture, language, and ethnicity be brought together in unity? Think about your own experience: How has your personal hope in Christ's return helped you unite in one purpose with the church? Or has it?

ONENESS OF FAITH AND HOPE.

“One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:5, 6, NIV).

Whatever one wants to say about Paul, he was not a pluralist; that is, he was not someone who believed there were different paths to salvation or that one belief system was just as valid or verifiable as another. On the contrary, Paul displayed a very firm commitment to what he understood as the *only* path to salvation, a view that would be seen in many contemporary societies as narrow.

Read carefully Ephesians 4:5, 6. What is the basic point that Paul was making? What theme reappears here that we have already been looking at this week?

When we think of what baptism means (Rom. 6:4), why would Paul include baptism in this text? See also Galatians 3:27-29. Why, in many ways, does baptism indicate what the foundation of our unity as a people really rests upon?

God is One; He is “over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:6, NIV; see also Rom. 11:36). God is sovereign, and His intention is to bring all who will come back to Himself through the blood of Christ, shed for the sins of the world. God’s plan is that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10, 11, NIV). Here, too, in a strange way, when all creation, even the lost, confess Christ, there will be seen a kind of, if not *unity*, then certainly a unanimity of thought.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:6, NIV. How does that fit in with the point that Paul is making in Ephesians 4:5, 6? See also John 17:20-23.

The idea of unity is important to God. Clearly, it is not hard to understand why. God is One, His truth is one, the hope is one; thus, His church, that which represents Him on earth, should be one, as well.

What does Jesus really mean about being one—God in Him and He in God and He in us? If this is not a literal, physical presence, what was Jesus telling us?

THE UNITY OF THE FAITH.

“So that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12, 13, NIV).

Faith—that is, saving faith, the faith that leads to righteousness (Rom. 4:13)—is, of course, a very personal thing. We are not saved in bunches; we are saved by grace through faith that comes from a personal surrender of the soul to God. No one can do this for another; you might be able to transfer blood or a heart or some other organ to another person in need. You can witness for your faith, teach others about it, and demonstrate it to men and angels, but you can never give it to someone else. They can get it only from above, through the individual choice of a sinner to follow the Lord.

However, look at the verses for today. They are talking about a unity of faith centered in the “knowledge of the Son of God,” but they do so not so much in a personal, individual sense (the way we are used to thinking about this) but as in a “corporate” sense. The body of Christ (that is, His church) may be built up until “we all reach unity in the faith.” Paul isn’t talking here just about the individual experience of the believer but the corporate experience of a church uniting around the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Read Ephesians 4:14. Why is Paul saying that unity of faith and spiritual maturity are so important? What do they protect us against?

Unity helps us avoid extremes, as we have the whole body to help keep us in balance. As we demonstrate love for one another, recognizing the grace of God to each of us, then we grow together in oneness. No doubt, a church exhibiting selfless love for each other within the body and love for the lost world without is truly one reaching “unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.”

Such unity of the faith does not come about by accident. It comes by making our hope and faith a priority and actively working to bring each other together. “Strive earnestly for unity,” writes Ellen White. “Pray for it, work for it.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 188.

Think for a moment about your own local church as a corporate body. Do you see it maturing in faith in the knowledge of the Son of God as a whole? Has progress been made corporately over the years? Or is it going, in your estimation, backwards? Or stagnating? Whatever your answer, what positive role can you play to help it?

FURTHER STUDY: "Ministers of Christ should be united—of one heart and one mind. They should counsel with one another. None should require their brethren to labor exactly after their plan, but each should preserve his individuality, and all labor for the good of others, esteeming their brethren better than themselves. It is Satan's work to excite envy and jealousy, to alienate affection, weaken confidence, and engender distrust and suspicion. All this hinders unity of faith in intercession with God for the weak and the desponding, for the grace of Christ, for the conversion of sinners, and thus shuts away the blessing which might be ours.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, July 10, 1883.

"Jesus, who died for us, loves us with a love that is infinite; and we must love one another. We must put away all selfishness, and work together in love and unity. We have loved and petted ourselves, and excused ourselves in waywardness; but we have been unmerciful toward our brethren, who are not as faulty as ourselves. The Lord loves us, and bears with us, even when we are ungrateful to Him, forgetful of His mercies, wickedly unbelieving; but consider, brethren, how relentless we are to one another, how pitiless; how we hurt and wound one another when we should love as Christ has loved us. Let us make a complete change. Let us cultivate the precious plant of love, and delight to help one another. We must be kind, forbearing, patient with one another's errors; we must keep our sharp criticisms for ourselves, but hope all things, believe all things, of our brethren."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 22, 1884.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. A group of sincere Adventists, concerned over what they believed were big problems in Adventism, decided to break away and start their own fellowship, apart from the body of the church. Based on the theme of this week's lesson, what would you say to them to attempt to change their minds? What kind of gentle warnings could you give them that might help them realize the potential dangers they could face?
2. On the other hand, unity is important, but do we want it at all costs? Discuss whatever answer you give.

SUMMARY: Since we are called to one hope, we must be united and live lives worthy of our calling. Hope brings us to oneness, pointing out our goal that is far more important than the petty things that so often divide us. As we allow God's hope to work in us, we will live to God's glory, anticipating the day when we will be home eternally with Him.



The Gate Ajar

Birthie Tyers

"There is a gate that stands ajar" are words from one of the favorite hymns sung by prisoners at the Windhoek Central Prison in Namibia, in southern Africa. But this is a place where gates are not left ajar.

I first visited this prison several years ago in response to a letter asking for a visit by an Adventist. While I waited, the warden went from cell to cell shouting, "Church, church, church!" Whoever wanted to attend was let out of his cell and herded into the courtyard.

A few months after I began holding worship services in this prison chapel, three brothers joined our group. They were serving seven years each for having killed someone out of revenge. Each of the men became a spiritual pillar in the fledgling church. One made a fine song leader; they all became leaders in the group. These men began distributing Voice of Prophecy enrollment cards, and with their help we formed our first baptismal class.

Soon eight prisoners were ready for baptism. But our request to hold the baptism in the prison was turned down. After many requests, we were at last granted permission. Then the day before the baptism, we learned that the warden had changed his mind; the baptism could not be held.

Discouraged, I asked a colleague for advice. He suggested we "pray a lot and play it low." We placed the baptism in God's hands, trusting Him to open the gates. On Sabbath morning we approached the prison with several union and local church officers. After lengthy negotiations, the ministers were allowed into the prison to officiate in the baptism.

As the baptismal candidates stood to take their vows, I realized that the Lord had indeed touched these lives and opened the gates to a new life. That day six souls were added to the church of God. The three brothers were released from prison. Two of them returned to their homes, where they serve as local elders. The third brother, Hastings, returned to prison, not as a prisoner but as a spiritual worker.

Birthie Tyers is a layman living in Windhoek, Namibia. He continues working for souls behind prison walls.



Produced by the Office of Mission
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Ultimate Things



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Thess. 4:13-18.

MEMORY TEXT: "Encourage each other with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18, NIV).

KEY THOUGHTS: Hope keeps us alive, not as some vague desire for something better in this life now but as the promised redemption found in Christ Jesus, who, having paid such a dear price for our souls, will come back again and retrieve these souls. Just as the disciples felt their hearts burn within them on the road to Emmaus, as we walk the road toward God's eternal kingdom, His promises of hope keep faith alive and burning in our hearts. "We have this hope that burns within our hearts—hope in the coming of the Lord."

EVERYTHING IN HUMAN LIFE AND HUMAN HISTORY," wrote Reinhold Niebuhr, "moves toward an end." He is right. Whether sooner or whether later, *the end*, or at least *an end*, is coming. As Christians, we know what that end is. And even if we don't know when the end will come, we know how it will come and why it ends as it does. That is why we have such a great hope, because not only do we know how it will end, we also know the promise—sealed with "the death of the testator" (Heb. 9:16)—that will be unfurled and presented at the end, the promise that we shall "meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). It does not get any better than that!

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, Dec. 28.

WITH NO HOPE.

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13).

Read this text in the context of the verses for the week. What is Paul specifically talking about? Why should they not sorrow over those who are asleep? Why do some have "no hope"? No hope for what?

American author Benjamin Franklin once said that only two things were certain, death and taxes (and though not everyone pays the same taxes, everyone faces death).

All people—no matter their race, age, religion, gender, economic status, or tax bracket—confront the reality of death. Whether it comes slowly and anticipated or quick and unexpectedly, death strikes, taking us into the tomb.

Though many questions about death remain unanswered, one thing is certain: It remains our most inflexible and uncompromising enemy. It accepts no surrender, it takes no prisoners, it offers no truces, but, instead, it strafes, snipes, and shells until every cell wall crumbles and all within drains out and decays. Death is a foe impossible for us to hunt out and destroy, because it is made out of what we are. In a universe without God and without hope, what is life, what is death but different mixes of the same stew? If everything that we live for, struggle for, and hope for ends in the grave, forever, life becomes so meaningless, so pointless. If the grave is the ultimate end, what are living human beings, other than pubescent versions of the dead?

Peter wrote: "**H**ope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). Hope to the end? What end is he talking about? How does this text fit in with the one we have looked at today? (See also Matt. 10:22.)

Shakespeare once wrote that life is "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." In light of today's lesson on those who have "no hope," why does Shakespeare have a point? How might you rephrase the same idea? How did Paul express the same idea in 1 Corinthians 15?

A HOPE OUTSIDE OURSELVES.

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

Read the above verses and, in your own words, with as much detail as you can, write down what they are saying that will happen sometime in the future:

At least two things stand out from these promises, two things that can help us keep this hope in perspective. First, the Second Coming is something totally out of the ordinary. Nothing in nature, history, or logic portends or even hints at it; on the contrary, in and of themselves, nature and history tell us that when we die we turn into nothing but carbon and dust and that the closest we will come to life again is when we fertilize a tree or feed the bacteria that dissolve our corpses. This tells us that the most important hope we have, the only hope that gives life any real meaning, is a hope in something that is impossible for us to accomplish on our own. We are totally helpless, totally dependent, totally at the mercy of God. If this doesn't keep us humble, nothing will.

Second, and tied to the first, is that we have this great hope only because we *have been told about it*. No amount of pure logic, science, reasoning, or study of the natural world could tell us about the Second Coming. We couldn't figure it out on our own; no scientific experiments will teach us about it. It is a supernatural event, an event that transcends anything in nature itself. We know about it only because we have been told about it by God, who has revealed this truth to us through His Word. Without that revelation, how else could we know about this wonderful hope? We could not.

Read again the two texts for today. In light of the above discussion, what do they tell us about our ultimate hope? In other words, because our hope is utterly dependent upon something outside ourselves or anything that we can ever accomplish, how should we relate to it? Hint: An answer can be found, perhaps, in what we are supposed to do on the Sabbath.

THE ULTIMATE HOPE.

Read again 1 Thessalonians 4:14. Paul's point is that Jesus died and rose from death; thus, because of His death and resurrection, we who die in faith will rise from death, as well. This has to be our ultimate hope, because whatever else we have, whatever we accomplish, whatever we gain, sooner or later it ends with our death. If death is the end, everything we do would all come to nothing. Fortunately, thanks to Jesus, death is not our final stop.

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). Paul said that Christ died for every man. Think about the implications of that statement. *Every person?* What does that mean?

From Cain to the world's worst mass murderers, from the homosexual rapists in Sodom to the pornographers in California, from the person who stuck a spear in Christ's side to the one who lighted the fire that burned John Huss, from Adam's first sin to the last man's final sin *and every one in between*—the legal penalty for the most outrageous and sadistic and lustful deeds has been paid, in full, by Jesus at the Cross. There, at Calvary, He bore the righteous judgment of a righteous God against all sin, with not one transgression—from the rape of Nanking to John the Baptist's most sinful thoughts—left out or unpaid for. If even one sin were overlooked, then the person who had committed it would have no hope of salvation, no chance at the promises found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. Yet, that is impossible because Christ died for everyone, and for that death to save anyone, all sin had to be covered by Christ's death, no exceptions allowed. "No sin can be committed by man for which satisfaction," wrote Ellen White, "has not been met on Calvary."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 343. To borrow an analogy from accounting, the books had to be perfectly balanced, down to the penny.

Because those sins have been paid for, those who by faith claim the merits of Jesus can have the precious hope that because Jesus rose from the dead they have the promise that they will rise, as well.

Dwell more on this idea that Christ died for every human being. That includes the world's worst. Yet, all their sins were there, at the Cross. What does that tell us about the unfathomable love that God has toward us? How does this truth give you hope that, whatever evil you might have done, the penalty already has been paid by Jesus?

SHARING THE HOPE.

"Therefore encourage each other with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18, NIV).

Christianity is nothing if not a religion of hope. Christ's whole time here on earth was spent, in one way or another, giving fallen sinful beings encouragement, hope, and the promise of something better.

Pick one Gospel story, any one, scan through it, and mark down the places where Jesus spoke words of hope and encouragement to people. Note what the words were and the specific situation that was being addressed.

We, as His professed followers, should also speak words of cheer and hope to those in need. And though most of us never raise the dead or heal lepers, we still have the privilege (not to mention the sacred responsibility) to sharing hope to those around us as did Jesus. And while we might not be able to perform the kind of miracles that Jesus did, we all are able to perform acts of kindness, of self-sacrifice, and of self-denying love that could give our words a power that otherwise they might not have.

Basing his message on Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, Paul, here in 1 Thessalonians, was able to give hope and encouragement to those who were reading this letter. Should we not be able to do the same for others?

Look at the text for today. Paul said to "encourage each other" with these words. Paul was talking to other Christians, those who believe in Jesus, those who were in the church already. In other words, even Christians at times need to encourage and inspire the gift of hope in each other.

Are there those whom you know, right now, who are going through some terrible struggles: death, sickness, loss of employment, whatever? If so, taking in the sweep of this entire quarter's lesson, what could you say that might be able to give them hope? Look at this particular situation in light of the great hope we have as Christians and see if there is not only something you can say but something you can do as you say it that could help these people believe the words that you are speaking. In short, do not just say something kind to them—do something kind, as well! It could make all the difference in impacting people with what you say.

THE GOD OF HOPE.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13, NIV).

As we conclude these studies on living the Advent hope, let us always remember the source of hope and the destiny of hope: God Himself, the "God of hope."

The God of hope. What a short, concise, and accurate description of the God who came to us so that one day we can come to Him. He is the God who lived close to humanity, as the Son of man, so that one day we can live close to God, as the sons and daughters of God. He is the God who, as Ellen White famously wrote, "was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves"; the God who "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"; the God who "suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His." —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 25. No wonder He is called the God of hope.

Look at the text for today. The verb translated here "overflow" also can mean "exceed, abound, increase, have more than enough of." Thus, we are to overflow in or exceed in or increase in or even have more than enough hope, not by anything we can do but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Is this talking about always being happy, in a good mood, cheerful (was Paul?); or is it talking about something else? If so, what? How should we understand the phrase? How can we abound in hope even in stressful, painful times?

Frederick Nietzsche wrote that hope is the worst of all evils, because it prolongs the torments of man. In contrast, Paul told us to "overflow in hope" through the love and mercy coming from "the God of hope."

In many ways, these two statements encapsulate the two basic choices that all people face: life or death, glory or shame, hope or hopelessness. There is no middle ground.

One day the universe will be clean of sin, sinners, and evil, completely. Thus, this leaves us, as human beings, with only one of two final ends. When all is said and done, either we will be removed once and for all with sin, sinners, and evil; or we will live, forever, in a closeness with the God of hope, who, through Jesus, opened the way for all of us, even the worst of us, to dwell with Him in paradise.

The options are that clear, that stark, that different, that ultimate; for we are dealing here with, indeed, ultimate things.

FURTHER STUDY: "Someday, and soon, the skies will disclose their glorious Maker. Someday we who often watch the sky will see a cloud such as we have never seen before. . . . A cloud will one day be seen that will be the chariot of heaven's King of glory when He comes to refresh His saints.

"What a sight it will be! How it enraptures the faithful ones who 'love His appearing,' and who have hoped to the end 'for the grace that is to be brought unto' them 'at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' Of a sudden the blazing light of day will take on a new brightness, above all the glory of the sun, and grow still more light, more bright, and more dazzling, until there is revealed to us the advancing glory of the King of Kings. And on a glory cloud of myriads of angels the all-conquering Christ will come again to earth."—Carlyle B. Haynes, *Present Truth*, Mar. 15, 1940.

"One of the most solemn and yet most glorious truths revealed in the Bible is that of Christ's second coming to complete the great work of redemption. To God's pilgrim people, so long left to sojourn in 'the region and shadow of death,' a precious, joy-inspiring hope is given in the promise of His appearing, who is 'the resurrection and the life,' to 'bring home again his banished.' The doctrine of the second advent is the very keynote of the Sacred Scriptures."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 299.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Look at the above quote by Ellen White. What does she mean when she says that at the Second Coming the work of redemption will be complete? Didn't Jesus complete it at the Cross? Discuss.
2. Using Hebrews 2:9 as the background, make a list of some of history's worst characters, those who are known for having committed the greatest, most heinous crimes. Think about these people (and their crimes). Then, in light of Hebrews 2:9 and other texts (such as Isaiah 53, John 1:29, 1 Pet. 2:24), think what it means that Jesus, at the Cross, paid the penalty for *all* those sins and *all* those crimes. Pray and meditate on the implications of what that act means and prepare to discuss it in class, particularly with an emphasis on the hope that His death offers us.

SUMMARY: "Encourage each other with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18, NIV).

God's Gentle Leading

J. H. Zachary

Rathna was a carpenter living with his wife and young daughter in a small village in North Andhra, India. Then the couple's three-year-old daughter fell seriously ill, and they took her to several doctors for treatment. But the doctors gave them no hope. "Your daughter will not live for more than a week," they said. The couple turned to their Hindu priests for help, but the priests could offer no hope for the child either.

Then the couple remembered Ludian, who had visited the village and told the people about Jesus. Some said that when Ludian prayed, Jesus healed them.

The couple took their little girl to Ludian's home in a distant village. As Ludian prayed, the child seemed to improve slightly. Ludian told the couple to fast and pray to Jesus for three days, and their daughter would be healed. The couple fasted and prayed for five days. They rejoiced when their daughter was completely healed.

A short time later Ludian, the wife of a Protestant pastor, held evangelistic meetings in their town. The couple attended every night and accepted Jesus as their Savior in response to Ludian's invitation.

They were deeply in love with Jesus and began sharing their faith with others. A Protestant pastor urged them to work full time for God and start a Christian church in their village.

Rathna began sharing God's love with his neighbors. Their testimony of the power of Jesus was a powerful influence in their village. Within a few months they had raised up a congregation of 80 members. The pastor and his congregation worked and prayed for three years to build a church.

One day an Adventist naturopath visited homes in Rathna's village and met the pastor. The doctor began visiting Rathna and slowly revealed further Bible truth. Rathna was amazed that he had never noticed the biblical command to keep the Sabbath holy. The doctor led them into greater truth, and early in 2000 the couple was baptized.

The Rathnas invite members of their church to study with them and keep the Sabbath. They plan to give the church they built to the Adventists. Pastor Rathna receives a small stipend from The Quiet Hour to continue ministering in his village.

This couple is one of 400 independent pastors who have accepted the Sabbath and joined God's growing army of pastors in India. Pray for them as they reach others with the full gospel message.

J. H. Zachary is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour.

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Bible Study Guide for First Quarter, 2003

Murderers, adulterers, bigots, liars, thieves, even the incestuous, can, through Jesus, enter into a covenant relationship with God. Such forgiveness is made possible by the cleansing and healing power of the blood of Jesus. This quarter we will study the covenants of the Word in this set of lessons by Gerhard Hasel, entitled *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant*.

Lesson 1: What Happened?

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: "Turtles All the Way Down . . ." (see Gen. 1:11).

Monday: In the Image of the Maker (see Gen. 1:27).

Tuesday: God and Humanity Together (see Gen. 1:28, 29).

Wednesday: At the Tree (see Gen. 2:16, 17).

Thursday: Breaking the Relationship (see Gen. 3:1-6).

MEMORY TEXT: Genesis 1:26, 27, NRSV.

SABBATH GEM: This week's lesson looks at the creation of the first man and woman and then at what happened to that perfect creation. Finally, it touches on our theme for the rest of the quarter: What is God doing to make things right again?

Lesson 2: Covenant Primer

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: Covenant Basics (see Gen. 17:2).

Monday: Covenant With Noah (see Gen. 6:18).

Tuesday: The Abram Covenant (see Gen. 12:3).

Wednesday: The Covenant With Moses (see Exod. 6:6).

Thursday: The New Covenant (see Jer. 31:31-33).

MEMORY TEXT: Exodus 19:5.

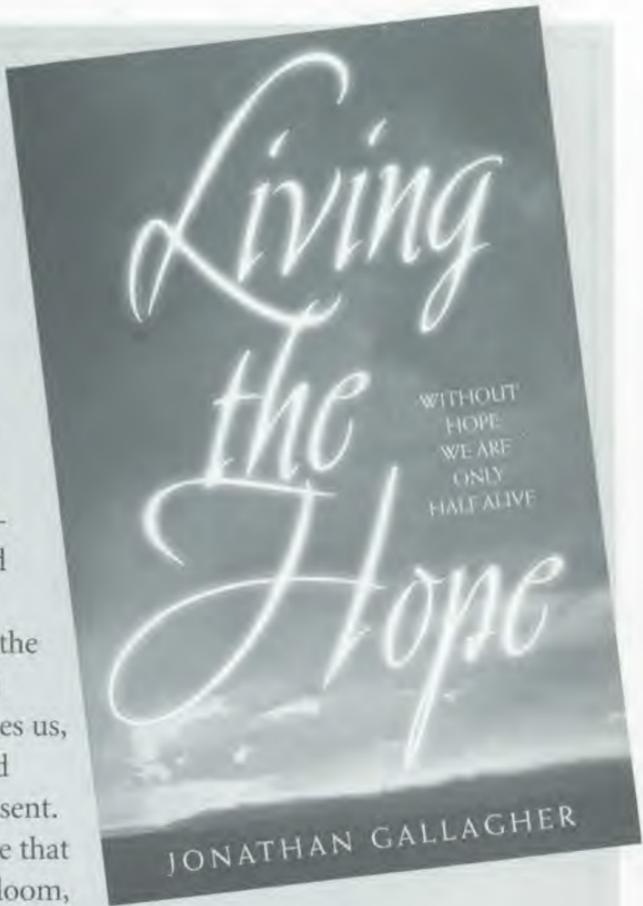
SABBATH GEM: This week's lesson is a sneak preview of the whole quarter, as we daily look at the early covenants to be studied in depth.

Lessons in Braille

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

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East Congo	855	1,432	216,805	24,952,800
Ghana	728	1,489	257,852	19,534,000
Indian Ocean	354	789	74,760	16,845,000
Nigeria	662	776	192,251	123,338,000
Rwanda	1,101	571	342,664	7,229,000
Sahel	109	305	23,178	81,882,000
West African	93	95	30,192	9,702,000
West Congo	367	542	204,005	27,032,200
Attached Field: Burundi Association	143	174	69,022	6,054,000
Totals	5,311	6,604	1,521,307	347,991,000

Totals as of June 30, 2001

Mission Projects:

- ① Evangelistic center in Conakry, Guinea.
- ② Girls' dormitory, Gitwe Adventist College (secondary school), Rwanda.
- ③ Churches in Butare and Kibuye, Rwanda.
- ④ Better Living Centers , on Mayotte in the Comoros Islands and on La Digue, in the Seychelle Islands.

