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In These Last Days: The Message of Hebrews



It was at church when he first saw her. He was running an errand, absorbed in his thoughts, when the sight hit him. The painting was a little less than two meters high and three meters wide, but the girl portrayed in it exerted a strange captivating force over the young man. Why could he not take his eyes off of her? What was it? After some reflection, he realized that it was her eyes. The painting portrayed only her face, and she was looking at something intently. But what, and why was she so absorbed in it? For a long time afterward, he couldn't get the painting out of his head.

Several years later, the painter, Arnold Jiménez, revealed some of its secrets to the young man. The painting was made to attract viewers to her eyes, but the real secret was in her pupils. If you looked closely, you would find out that they reflected what she was looking at. Her eyes were fixed on Jesus on the cross.

The portrait of Jesus in the Letter to the Hebrews can exert a similar captivating force upon us. Jesus is described, first of all, as the Ruler of the universe, enthroned at God's right hand. Innumerable angels celebrate Him, worship Him, and serve Him (*Heb. 1:5–14, Heb. 12:22–24*). He has won the right to rule because He has ensured the destruction of the devil (*Heb. 2:14–16*) through His own death. Jesus also is the exalted High Priest. Sinless and perfectly holy, He

lives forever to minister in our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary (*Heb. 7:26–8:5*). He has won the right to do so because He offered Himself as a perfect, once-for-all sacrifice, effective for everyone and forever (*Heb. 10:1–14*). Jesus also has mediated a new covenant between God and His people that will stand forever (*Heb. 8:6–13*).

What captivates readers about the portrait of Jesus, however, is not simply what Jesus has done, but who He is. He was born from a woman, as we were, and He has been tempted and ridiculed, as we have been. Yet, still, He sits at the center of power in the universe. When we gaze at the heavenly scene, with its diverse and fantastic celestial beings, our eyes are attracted to the One in the center of it all, who, amazingly enough, looks like us because He has become one of us. Jesus, our Brother, is there, in heaven, representing us, despite the shame of our sin and fallenness.

*Jesus . . . has mediated
a new covenant
between God and His
people that will stand
forever (Heb. 8:6–13).*

In the person of Jesus, three dimensions of the story of Redemption intersect. The first is the local, personal dimension. For readers tired of the reproaches and hardships of Christian life (*Heb. 10:32–34*), Jesus is the Author and Perfector of faith. They need to look to Him who also suffered hostility from sinners (*Heb. 12:1–4*). The second is the corporate, national dimension. For the people of God, who are traveling toward God's Promised Land, Jesus is the new Joshua. They need to follow His lead (*Hebrews 3, Hebrews 4, Hebrews 11, Hebrews 12*). The third is the universal dimension. Jesus is the new Adam, the Son of man in whom God's purposes for humanity are fulfilled (*Heb. 2:5–10, Heb. 12:22–28*).

The portrait of Jesus, who captures the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love for us, is our subject this quarter. And just as the image of Jesus in the eyes of the girl in the painting captured the young man's gaze, may the image of Jesus as portrayed in Hebrews capture not just our gaze but our love and admiration for, yes, Jesus, our Brother in heaven.

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The Letter *to the Hebrews* *and to Us*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 2:3, 4; 1 Pet. 4:14, 16; Heb. 13:1–9, 13; 1 Kings 19:1–18; Heb. 3:12–14; Numbers 13.*

Memory Text: “For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (*Hebrews 10:36, NKJV*).

Have you ever imagined what it would be like to hear Jesus, or one of the apostles, preach? We possess written excerpts and summaries of some of their sermons, but these provide only a limited idea of what it was like to hear them. God, however, preserved in the Scriptures at least one complete sermon for us: Paul’s letter to the Hebrews.

Paul, the author of Hebrews, referred to his own work as a “word of exhortation” (*Heb. 13:22*). This expression was used to identify the sermon, both at the synagogue (*Acts 13:15*) and at Christian worship (*1 Tim. 4:13*). Thus, it has been argued that Hebrews is the earliest “complete Christian sermon” that we have. Hebrews was addressed to believers who accepted Jesus but then experienced difficulties. Some were publicly shamed and persecuted (*Heb. 10:32–34*). Others faced financial problems (*Heb. 13:5, 6*). Many were tired and had begun to question their faith (*Heb. 3:12, 13*). Can any of us today relate?

The apostle, in a stirring sermon, however, challenged them (and, by extension, us) to persevere in faith in Jesus and to fix their eyes upon Jesus, now in the heavenly sanctuary.

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

A Glorious Beginning

In order to understand the sermon and apply its message to ourselves, we need to understand the history of the congregation and their situation when they received the letter from the apostle.

Read Hebrews 2:3, 4. What was the experience of the audience of Hebrews when they were first converted?

This passage implies that the audience of Hebrews had not heard Jesus Himself preach; instead, they had received the gospel from other evangelists who had announced to them the news of “salvation.”

Paul also says that the evangelists had “confirmed” the message to them and that God Himself had borne “witness both with signs and wonders” (*Hebrews 2:3, NKJV*). This means that God had provided experiential confirmation of the gospel by signs and other powerful deeds—among them the distribution of the “gifts of the Holy Spirit” (*Hebrews 2:3, NKJV*). The New Testament relates that signs, such as miraculous healings, exorcisms, and the outpouring of spiritual gifts often accompanied the preaching of the gospel in new places.

At the beginning of the Christian church, God poured His Spirit upon the apostles in Jerusalem so that they were able to announce the gospel in languages previously unknown to them and to perform miracles (*Acts 2, Acts 3*). Philip performed similar wonders in Samaria (*Acts 8*), Peter in Joppa and Caesarea (*Acts 9, Acts 10*), and Paul throughout his ministry in Asia Minor and Europe (*Acts 13–28*). These powerful deeds were experiential evidence that confirmed the message of “salvation”—the establishment of the kingdom of God and a salvation from condemnation and freedom from evil powers (*Heb. 12:25–29*).

The Spirit gave early Christian believers the conviction that their sins had been forgiven; thus, they were not fearful of judgment, and as a result their prayers were bold and confident, and their religious experience was joyful (*Acts 2:37–47*). The Spirit also delivered those who were enslaved to evil powers, which was compelling evidence of the superiority of the power of God over the forces of evil and revealed that the kingdom of God had been established in their lives.

What is the story of your conversion? In what ways have you been confirmed in your faith and belief in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? Why is it good at times to remember how God first worked in your life to bring you to Him?

The Struggle

When believers confessed their faith in Christ and joined the church, they set a boundary marker that distinguished them from the rest of society. Unfortunately, this became a source of conflict because it implicitly passed a negative judgment on their community and its values.

Read Hebrews 10:32–34 and Hebrews 13:3. What was the experience of the audience of Hebrews after their conversion?

It is very likely that the readers of Hebrews suffered verbally and physically at the hands of mobs stirred up by opponents (*e.g.*, *Acts 16:19–22*, *Acts 17:1–9*). They also were imprisoned, and it is possible that they were beaten, as well, because officials had the power to authorize punishment and incarceration, often without following appropriate judicial norms, while they gathered evidence (*e.g.*, *Act 16:22*, *23*).

Read Hebrews 11:24–26 and 1 Peter 4:14, 16. How do the experiences of Moses and of the readers of 1 Peter help us understand why Christian believers were persecuted?

To “bear the reproach of Christ” simply meant to identify oneself with Christ and endure the shame and abuse that this association implied. Public animosity against Christians was the result of their distinctive religious commitments. People can get offended by religious practices that they don’t understand or by people whose lifestyle and morals could make others feel guilty or shamed. By the middle of the first century A.D., Tacitus considered Christians to be guilty of “hatred against mankind.”—Alfred J. Church and William J. Brodribb, trans., *The Complete Works of Tacitus* (New York: The Modern Library, 1942), *Annals* 15.44.1. Whatever the exact reason for that charge, certainly false, many early Christians, such as the ones that Paul had written this letter to, were suffering for their faith.

Everyone, whether a Christian or not, suffers. What does it mean, however, to suffer for the sake of Christ? How much suffering that we face is for the sake of Christ, and how much is brought about by our own choices?

Malaise

The readers of Hebrews were successful in keeping their faith and commitment to Christ, despite rejection and persecution. The conflict, however, took a toll in the long run. They fought a good fight and came out victorious but also weary.

Read Hebrews 2:18; Hebrews 3:12, 13; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 10:25; Hebrews 12:3, 12, 13; and Hebrews 13:1–9, 13. What were some of the challenges the believers were facing?

Hebrews tells us that the readers continued to experience difficulties. Verbal and probably other kinds of attacks against their honor continued (*Heb. 13:13*). Some believers were still in prison (*Heb. 13:3*)—something that may have drained the church financially and psychologically. They were tired (*Heb. 12:12, 13*) and could easily “lose heart” (*Heb. 12:3, NIV*).

It is usual among persons and communities that after the thrill of victory passes, psychological and other kinds of defenses are relaxed, and people become more vulnerable to the counterattack of their enemies. The strength that a person or community mobilized to face an impending threat is more difficult to summon a second time.

Read 1 Kings 19:1–4. What happened to Elijah?

“But a reaction such as frequently follows high faith and glorious success was pressing upon Elijah. He feared that the reformation begun on Carmel might not be lasting; and depression seized him. He had been exalted to Pisgah’s top; now he was in the valley. While under the inspiration of the Almighty, he had stood the severest trial of faith; but in this time of discouragement, with Jezebel’s threat sounding in his ears, and Satan still apparently prevailing through the plotting of this wicked woman, he lost his hold on God. He had been exalted above measure, and the reaction was tremendous. Forgetting God, Elijah fled on and on, until he found himself in a dreary waste, alone.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 161, 162.

Think about those times in which you failed in your Christian life, and try to understand the circumstances and factors that contributed to the collapse. What could you have done differently?

Press Together

What did the apostle advise the readers to do in view of their situation? What can we learn from Hebrews for our own benefit? Let us analyze how God helped Elijah recover from his discouragement.

Read 1 Kings 19:5–18. What did God do to restore the faith of Elijah, His servant?

The story of God’s dealings with Elijah after Carmel is fascinating because it shows the tender care and wisdom with which God ministers to those who are under distress and who struggle to regain faith. God did several things for Elijah. First, He cared for his physical needs. He provided food and let him rest. Then, in the cave, He kindly reproved him—“What are you doing here, Elijah?” (*1 Kings 19:9, NKJV*)—and helped him gain a deeper understanding of how He works and fulfills His purposes. God was not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire—but in a still small voice. Then, God gave Elijah a work to do and reassured him.

Read Hebrews 2:1, Hebrews 3:12–14, Hebrews 5:11–6:3, and Hebrews 10:19–25. What did Paul suggest that believers should do?

Throughout Hebrews we can find several instructions that the apostle gave the readers to help them recover their original strength and faith. One aspect that Paul emphasizes is the care of the physical needs of their fellow believers. He suggests that they should practice hospitality and visit those in prison, which implied providing for their needs. The apostle exhorts the readers to be generous, remembering that God will not abandon them (*Heb. 13:1–6*). Paul also reproved them and encouraged them. He warned them not to gradually “drift away” (*Heb. 2:1, ESV*) and not to have “an evil heart of unbelief” (*Heb. 3:12*), and he encouraged them to grow in their understanding of the faith (*Heb. 5:11–6:3*). He also remarked on the importance of consistent attendance at church meetings (*Heb. 10:25*). In summary, he not only suggested that they press together, encourage one another, and stir up love and good works, but he also lifted up Jesus and His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary in their behalf (*Heb. 8:1, 2; Heb. 12:1–4*).

These Last Days

Read Hebrews 1:2; Hebrews 9:26–28; Hebrews 10:25, 36–38; and Hebrews 12:25–28. What point is Paul stressing here, particularly regarding time?

There is a very important element that the apostle emphasizes that adds urgency to his exhortation: the readers are living in the very “last days” (*Heb. 1:2*) and the promises are about to be fulfilled (*Heb. 10:36–38*). It is interesting, as we will see, that throughout the document Paul compares his audience with the desert generation that stood right before the border of Canaan, ready to enter into the Promised Land. He reminds them, “‘For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry’ ” (*Heb. 10:37, NKJV*). And then he encourages them: “We are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul” (*Heb. 10:39, NKJV*). This last exhortation reminded the readers, and us, about the dangers that the people of God have historically experienced right before the fulfillment of the promises of God.

The book of Numbers talks about this very thing. The biblical record says that two times, right before entering the Promised Land, Israel suffered important defeats. The first time, recorded in Numbers 13 and 14, tells us about the doubts that several leaders spread through the congregation, which caused the faith of Israel to fail. As a result, the congregation decided to appoint a new leader and return to Egypt, just at the moment they were about to enter Canaan.

The second time, the Israelites got entangled with sensuality and false worship in Baal Peor (*Numbers 24, Numbers 25*). While Balaam was not able to bring a curse upon the Israelites, Satan used sexual temptations to lead Israel into false worship and sin and to bring God’s displeasure upon them.

Paul warns the readers of Hebrews against both dangers. First, he exhorts them to hold fast to the confession of their faith and to fix their eyes upon Jesus (*Heb. 4:14, Heb. 10:23, Heb. 12:1–4*). Second, he exhorts them against immorality and covetousness (*Heb. 13:4–6*). Finally, he exhorts them to observe and obey their leaders (*Heb. 13:7, 17*).

Considering our understanding of the state of the dead—and that as soon as we close our eyes in death, the next thing we know is the Second Coming—why can we say that all people have lived in the “last days”?

Further Thought: David A. deSilva explains clearly why the early Christians suffered persecution: “Christians adopted a lifestyle that . . . would have been considered antisocial and even subversive. Loyalty to the gods, expressed in pious attendance at sacrifices and the like, was viewed as a symbol for loyalty to the state, authorities, friends, and family. Worship of the deities was something of a symbol for one’s dedication to the relationships that kept society stable and prosperous. By abstaining from the former, Christians (like the Jews) were regarded with suspicion as potential violators of the laws and [as] subversive elements within the empire.”—*Perseverance in Gratitude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), p. 12.

“For the disheartened there is a sure remedy—faith, prayer, work. Faith and activity will impart assurance and satisfaction that will increase day by day. Are you tempted to give way to feelings of anxious foreboding or utter despondency? In the darkest days, when appearances seem most forbidding, fear not. Have faith in God. He knows your need. He has all power. His infinite love and compassion never weary. Fear not that He will fail of fulfilling His promise. He is eternal truth. Never will He change the covenant He has made with those who love Him. And He will bestow upon His faithful servants the measure of efficiency that their need demands. The apostle Paul has testified: ‘He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. . . . Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.’ 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 164, 165.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Is it possible to be “different” because of our Christian commitment and yet not be accused of “separation” from and disregard for others? If yes, how?
- ❷ The word “exhortation” in the Bible can refer either to reproof or to encouragement. What care should we take in reproving a person who is discouraged?
- ❸ What similarities do you find between the experience of the readers of Hebrews and that of the Laodicean church of Revelation 3:14–22? In what ways is our experience today, two thousand years later, similar to theirs, and what can we learn from the similarities?

Surprise Guardians

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Marriage usually is a joyful time when families celebrate. But Khome and her husband, Eung, only suffered in their remote village in Laos.

Khome, who belongs to the Laven people group, was the daughter of a spiritual medium. She had been groomed from childhood to take her mother's place. But she found the Lord and gave her life to Him against her mother's will. Even worse, she married a Christian man from another people group. Everyone seemed to oppose their marriage—even the evil spirits.

One day, an evil spirit appeared to Khome and laughed at her. Khome quickly knelt down and prayed. Rising, she tried to walk to her Bible to read it. The Bible lay only a few steps away, but her feet felt so heavy that she could hardly move. Her feet seemed to be stuck in the ground. As she struggled to walk, she prayed, "God, protect me. God, protect me." Finally, she reached the Bible and opened it. After reading a few passages, she prayed in the name of Jesus, and the evil spirit left.

The struggle with evil forces continued for years, but Khome and Eung worshiped God faithfully in their home. Their parents, siblings, and neighbors expressed open hatred of them. Someone reported them to the authorities on false charges of wrongdoing. When police officers arrived to detain the couple, they were met by mysterious, powerful figures in front of the house. The officers fled in fear. A second attempt to arrest the couple failed when the police officers were frightened away by the sight of two mysterious figures inside the house. Word spread that the couple had special supernatural guardians, and people began to respect them.

Meanwhile, the couple shared their faith with family and neighbors. They helped others at every opportunity and, although desperately poor themselves, assisted those who were even more impoverished. Slowly, people began to come to them for help. The sick and demon-possessed sought healing. One by one, people accepted God, and the couple's home became a house church. Khome's sister resisted the gospel for some time, but one night she saw a bright light shining in Khome's house. The next day, she asked her sister how she had light when nobody in the village had electricity. Khome did not know what to say. She had been asleep with her husband. The sister accepted Jesus.



Today, Khome and Eung are shining the light of God among the Laven people of Laos. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open an elementary school in the country. Please pray for the school project, Khome and Eung, and the precious people of Laos.

The Message of Hebrews



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 1:5–14, Luke 1:30–33, Ps. 132:1–5, Heb. 2:14–16, Heb. 5:1–4, 1 Pet. 2:9, Heb. 8:8–12.*

Memory Text: “This is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (*Hebrews 8:1, NKJV*).

A Jewish document written a few decades after Hebrews, around A.D. 100, contains a prayer: “All this I have spoken before you, O Lord, because you have said that it was for us that you created this world. . . . And now, O Lord, behold, these nations, which are reputed as nothing, domineer over us and devour us. But we your people, whom you have called your first-born, only begotten, zealous for you, and most dear, have been given into their hands.”—James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), p. 536.

The readers of Hebrews probably felt something similar. If they were God's children, why were they going through such suffering?

Thus, Paul wrote Hebrews to strengthen the faith of the believers amid their trials. He reminded them (and us) that the promises of God will be fulfilled through Jesus, who is seated at the right hand of the Father, and who will soon take us home. In the meantime, Jesus mediates the Father's blessings to us. So, we need to hold fast to our faith until the end.

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

Jesus Is Our King

The main point of Hebrews is that Jesus is the Ruler, who is seated at the right hand of the Father (*Heb. 8:1*). As God, Jesus always has been the ruler of the universe. But when Adam and Eve sinned, Satan became the ruler of this world (*John 12:31, John 14:30, John 16:11*). Jesus, however, came and defeated Satan at the cross, recovering the right to rule those who accept Him as their Savior (*Col. 2:13–15*).

The first two chapters of Hebrews focus especially on the inauguration of Jesus as King.

Read Hebrews 1:5–14. What is happening here?

These verses are arranged in three sections. Each section introduces an aspect of the enthronement ceremony of the Son. First, God installs Jesus as the royal Son (*Heb. 1:5*). Second, God introduces the Son to the heavenly court, who worship Him (*Heb. 1:6, 8*) while the Father proclaims the eternal creatorship and rule of the Son (*Heb. 1:8–12*). Third, God enthrones the Son—the actual conferral of power over the earth (*Heb. 1:13, 14*).

One of the most important beliefs of the New Testament is that in Jesus, God fulfilled His promises to David (*see 2 Sam. 7:8–16 and Luke 1:30–33*). Jesus was born from the line of David in the city of David (*Matt. 1:1–16; Luke 2:10, 11*). During His ministry people often called Him “son of David.” He was executed under the charge that He claimed to be “the king of the Jews” (*Matt. 27:37, NKJV*). Peter and Paul preached that Jesus had risen from death in fulfillment of the promises made to David (*Acts 2:22–36, Acts 13:22–37*). And John identified Jesus as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (*Rev. 5:5*).

Hebrews, of course, concurs. God has fulfilled His promises to David in Jesus: God gave Him a great “name” (*Heb. 1:4*), installed Him as His own Son (*Heb. 1:5*), affirmed Him forever as Creator and Lord (*Heb. 1:8–12*), and seated Him at His “right hand” (*Heb. 1:13, 14*). Furthermore, according to Hebrews 4, Jesus leads the people into the rest of God, and we are reminded that Jesus is the Builder of the house of God (*Heb. 3:3, 4*).

Jesus, then, is the legitimate Ruler of this earth engaged in a war with Satan, the usurper, for our allegiance.

How can we draw comfort, especially amid trials, from knowing that Jesus is the Ruler of the universe?

Jesus Is Our Mediator

An interesting concept of the Old Testament theology is that the promised Davidic King would represent the nation before God.

Compare Exodus 4:22, 23 with 2 Samuel 7:12–14; Deuteronomy 12:8–10 with 2 Samuel 7:9–11; and Deuteronomy 12:13, 14 with Psalm 132:1–5, 11–14. What promises to Israel would be fulfilled through the promised Davidic King?

Israel was God's son, and God would give the Israelites a place where they would rest from their enemies. God also would choose a place among them where His name would dwell. These promises for Israel would now be fulfilled through the promised Davidic King. He would be adopted as God's son, God would give him rest from his enemies, and he would build a temple for God in Zion where God's name would dwell. This means that God would fulfill His promises to Israel through the promised Davidic King. The Davidic King would represent Israel before God.

The insertion of a representative in the relationship between God and Israel made the perpetuation of their covenantal relationship possible. The Mosaic covenant required the faithfulness of all Israel to receive God's protection and blessings (*see Josh. 7:1–13*). The Davidic covenant, however, secured God's covenantal blessings upon Israel through the faithfulness of one person, the Davidic King.

Unfortunately, for the most part the Davidic kings were not faithful, and God could not bless Israel as He wanted. The Old Testament is filled with accounts of just how unfaithful many of those kings actually were.

The good news is that God sent His Son to be born as the Son of David, and He has been perfectly faithful. Therefore, God is able to fulfill in Him all the promises He made to His people. When God blesses the king, all his people share in the benefits. This is why Jesus is the Mediator of God's blessing to us. He is the Mediator in that He is the channel through whom God's blessings flow. Our ultimate hope of salvation is found only in Jesus and what He has done for us.

Think about how often you have been unfaithful to your end of the covenant. What does this teach us about how we must rely solely on Jesus for salvation?

Jesus Is Our Champion

Compare 1 Samuel 8:19, 20 and Hebrews 2:14–16. What did the Israelites look for in a king, and how were these wishes fulfilled in Jesus?

The Israelites wanted a king to be their judge and their leader in battle because they forgot that God was their King. The complete restoration of God's rule over His people came with Jesus. As our King, Jesus leads us in the battle against the enemy.

Hebrews 2:14–16 describes Jesus as the Champion of weak human beings. Christ faces and defeats the devil in a solo combat and delivers us from bondage. This description reminds us of the battle between David and Goliath. After being anointed as king (*1 Samuel 16*), David saved his brethren from slavery by defeating Goliath. The terms of engagement determined that the winner of the combat would enslave the people of the other party (*1 Sam. 17:8–10*). Thus, David acted as a champion of Israel. He represented them.

Read Isaiah 42:13 and Isaiah 59:15–20. How does Yahweh describe Himself in these passages?

Hebrews 2:14–16 alludes to the notion that God would save Israel in a solo combat. Note this passage from Isaiah: “For thus says the LORD: ‘Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children’ ” (*Isa. 49:25, ESV*).

As Christians, we often think that we are engaged in a solo combat with Satan. When we read Ephesians 6:10–18, we see that, yes, we are in combat with the devil. But God is our Champion, and He goes to battle before us. We are part of His army; that is why we have to use His armor. Also, we do not fight alone. The “you” in Ephesians 6 is plural. We as a church take the armor and fight together behind our Champion, who is God Himself.

What does it mean to put on the armor of God? That is, in our daily struggles with self, temptation, and so forth, how can we avail ourselves of the power that enables us through God's strength to be faithful?

Jesus Is Our High Priest

Hebrews 5–7 introduces a second function of Jesus. He is our High Priest. The author explains that this fulfills a promise God had made to the promised Davidic King, that He would be “ ‘a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’ ” (*Ps. 110:4, as quoted in Heb. 5:5, 6, NKJV*).

Read Leviticus 1:1–9, Leviticus 10:8–11, Malachi 2:7, Numbers 6:22–26, and Hebrews 5:1–4. What functions did the priest fulfill?

The priests were appointed on behalf of human beings to represent them and mediate their relationship with God and the things pertaining to Him. The priest was a mediator. This was true of any system of priesthood, whether Jewish, Greek, Roman, or any other. The priest makes it possible for us to relate to God, and everything the priest does has the purpose of facilitating the relationship between us and God.

The priest offers sacrifices on behalf of human beings. The people cannot bring these sacrifices to God in person. The priest knows how we can offer an “acceptable” sacrifice so that our gifts may be acceptable to God or so that they can provide cleansing and forgiveness.

Priests also taught the law of God to the people. They were experts in God’s commandments and were in charge of explaining and applying them.

Finally, the priests also had the responsibility of blessing in the name of Yahweh. Through them, God mediated His goodwill and beneficent purpose for the people.

However, in 1 Peter 2:9, we see something else. We—believers in Jesus—are called “a royal priesthood.” This role implies incredible privileges. Priests could approach God in the sanctuary. Today, we can approach God through prayer with confidence (*Heb. 4:14–16; Heb. 10:19–23*). There are, as well, important responsibilities. We must collaborate with God in His work of saving the world. He wants us to teach and explain God’s laws and precepts to others. He also wants us to offer sacrifices of praise and good works, which are pleasing to Him. What a privilege and what a responsibility!

What difference should it make in our lives that we are, indeed, “a royal priesthood”? How should this truth impact how we live?

Jesus Mediates a Better Covenant

Hebrews 8–10 focuses on the work of Jesus as the Mediator of a new covenant. The issue with the old covenant was simply that it was only a foreshadowing of the good things that would come. Its institutions were designed to prefigure, to illustrate, the work that Jesus would do in the future. Thus, the priests prefigured Jesus, but they were mortal and sinners. They could not provide the perfection that Jesus did. And they ministered in a sanctuary that was a “copy and shadow” (*Heb. 8:5, NKJV*) of the heavenly sanctuary.

Jesus ministers in the true sanctuary and provides us access to God. The sacrifices of animals prefigured the death of Jesus as a sacrifice in our behalf, but their blood could not cleanse the conscience. Jesus’ blood, however, purifies our conscience, and through Him, having faith in Him and accepting His mediatory work in our behalf, we can approach God with boldness (*Heb. 10:19–22*).

Read Hebrews 8:8–12. What did God promise to us in the new covenant?

By appointing Jesus as our High Priest, the Father inaugurated a new covenant that will accomplish what the old covenant could only anticipate. The new covenant delivers what only a perfect, eternal, human-divine Priest can. This High Priest not only explains the law of God but also implants the law in our hearts. This Priest offers a sacrifice that brings forgiveness. This Priest cleanses and transforms us. He transforms our hearts from stone to flesh (*Ezek. 36:26*). He really creates us anew (*2 Cor. 5:17*). This Priest blesses us in the most incredible way, by providing us access into the very presence of the Father Himself.

God designed the old covenant in order to point to the future, to the work of Jesus. It was beautiful in its design and purpose. Yet, some misunderstood its purpose. Unwilling to leave the symbols, the shadows, and embrace the truths that the symbols were pointing to, they missed the wonderful benefits that Jesus’ ministry offered them.

“Christ was the foundation and life of the temple. Its services were typical of the sacrifice of the Son of God. The priesthood was established to represent the mediatorial character and work of Christ. The entire plan of sacrificial worship was a foreshadowing of the Saviour’s death to redeem the world. There would be no efficacy in these offerings when the great event toward which they had pointed for ages was consummated.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 165.

Further Thought: Despite all the good and hopeful truths in the book of Hebrews, there also is a series of warnings that reach their climax in chapters 10–12.

These sections have at least two common elements. First, they all compare the desert generation with the readers of Hebrews. Second, they exhort us to have faith.

The desert generation was the one that saw the amazing power of God unleashed in signs and wonders in their deliverance from Egypt. They also heard God speak, from Mount Sinai, the Ten Commandments. They saw the column of fire in the night and the protecting cloud during the day. They ate manna, bread from heaven. They also drank water that sprang from the rocks wherever they camped. But when they arrived at the border of the Promised Land, they were not able to trust God. They lacked faith, which is the core of what God requires. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (*Heb. 11:6, NKJV*).

Paul says that we, like the desert generation, also are at the border of the Promised Land (*Heb. 10:37–39*). Our privileges and responsibilities are greater, however. We did not hear God speak at Mount Sinai, but we have seen through Scripture a revelation of God greater than the one at Mount Zion: God in the flesh, Jesus Christ (*Heb. 12:18–24*). The question is: Will we have faith? Paul encourages us to follow the example of a great list of characters, which culminates with Jesus Himself.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ We have learned that Jesus is our Champion who goes before us into the battle against the devil. How can we fight together, united, as a church behind our Champion? What are those things that prevent this unity from happening? What are ways that Satan can weaken us as a church? How did Satan weaken Israel in the past?
- ❷ As believers, we are a community of priests under God’s direction. In what ways can your local church offer better sacrifices of praise and good works to God? Please be specific and practical.
- ❸ In what ways is our situation similar to the situation of the desert generation just before crossing into the Promised Land? What lessons can we learn from the similarities?

Miraculous Rock

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

A miracle rock stopped the pickup truck of Bounprany Vannady, who was serving as president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Laos.

It was just an ordinary creek. Any car could pass through its shallow waters easily. No car was known to have ever gotten stuck there. But the pickup truck decided to stop just as it entered the creek. It simply stopped.

Bounprany and two young pastors traveling with him found a rock blocking the way, but it seemed to be too small to stop the vehicle. Just to make sure, they moved the rock and tried to restart the vehicle. It refused to start. They hailed down a passing car and tried to jumpstart the battery, but the pickup truck still refused to start.

Since it was getting dark, Bounprany walked to the nearest village. Several villagers came back to the pickup truck to help, but they couldn't get it to start. The village chief invited Bounprany to spend the night in his house, while the young pastors stayed with the pickup truck.

"What are you doing in our area?" the village chief asked.

Bounprany explained that he was taking some sporting equipment to the next village. He was hoping to establish a connection with that village.

As he listened, the village chief sensed that Bounprany was a Christian, and he announced that he was a Christian. He pulled out a Voice of Prophecy correspondence school certificate issued by the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Laos several years earlier. He said he had reached out to a former church leader for support several years earlier but had been dismissed, so now he and about 200 other villagers were worshiping Jesus on their own. He asked Bounprany to teach him and the villagers about the seventh-day Sabbath.

It was at that moment Bounprany realized an angel must have stopped the pickup truck. It was like Balaam's donkey who refused to go farther because it saw an angel of the Lord. This car must have seen an angel of the Lord standing in front of it in the creek, so it decided to stop.

The next morning, the pickup truck started at the first turn of the key.



Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offering that will help spread the gospel to the people of Laos and the other countries of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open an elementary school in Laos.

The Promised Son



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 2:2, 3; Heb. 1:1–4; Exod. 24:16, 17; Isa. 44:24; Heb. 1:10; Luke 1:31, 32; Heb. 1:5.*

Memory Text: “But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (*Hebrews 1:2, 3, NIV*).

Right after Adam and Eve sinned, God promised them a “seed,” a Son who would deliver them from the enemy, recover the inheritance that had been lost, and fulfill the purpose for which they had been created (*Gen. 3:15*). This Son would both represent and redeem them by taking their place and, ultimately, by destroying the serpent.

“When Adam and Eve first heard the promise, they looked for its speedy fulfillment. They joyfully welcomed their first-born son, hoping that he might be the Deliverer. But the fulfillment of the promise tarried.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 31. The promise was later confirmed to Abraham. God swore to him that he would have a “seed,” a Son through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed (*Gen. 22:16–18, Gal. 3:16*). And God did the same with David. He promised David that his descendant would be installed by God as His own Son and would be established as a righteous ruler over all the kings of the earth (*2 Sam. 7:12–14, Ps. 89:27–29*). What neither Adam and Eve, Abraham, nor David probably ever imagined, however, was that their Redeemer Son would be God Himself.

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

In These Last Days

The first paragraph of Hebrews reveals that Paul believed he was living in “the last days.” Scripture employs two expressions about the future that have different meanings. The prophets used the expression “last days” or “latter days” to talk about the future in general (*e.g.*, *Deut.* 4:30, 31; *Jer.* 23:20). The prophet Daniel used a second expression, “the time of the end,” to talk more specifically about the last days of earth’s history (*Dan.* 8:17, *Dan.* 12:4).

Read Numbers 24:14–19 and Isaiah 2:2, 3. What did God promise He would do for His people in the “latter days”?

Several Old Testament prophets announced that in the “latter days” God would raise up a King who would destroy the enemies of His people (*e.g.*, *Num.* 24:14–19) and who would attract the nations to Israel (*e.g.*, *Isa.* 2:2, 3). Paul says that these promises were fulfilled in Jesus. He defeated Satan and, through the proclamation of the Gospel, is attracting all the nations to Himself (*Col.* 2:15, *John* 12:32). In this sense, then, “the last days” have begun because Jesus has fulfilled God’s promises.

Our spiritual fathers died in faith. They saw and greeted the promises from “afar,” but did not receive them. We, on the other hand, have seen their fulfillment in Jesus.

Let’s think for a moment about God’s promises and Jesus. The Father promised that He would resurrect His children (*1 Thess.* 4:15, 16). The wonderful news is that He initiated the resurrection of His children with the resurrection of Jesus (*1 Cor.* 15:20, *Matt.* 27:51–53). The Father also promised a new creation (*Isa.* 65:17). He has begun to fulfill that promise by creating a new spiritual life in us (*2 Cor.* 5:17, *Gal.* 6:15). He promised that He would establish His final kingdom (*Dan.* 2:44). He inaugurated that kingdom by delivering us from the power of Satan and installing Jesus as our Ruler (*Matt.* 12:28–30, *Luke* 10:18–20). This is only the beginning, however. What the Father began to do at Jesus’ first coming, He will bring to completion at His second.

Look at all the promises God fulfilled in the past. How should this help us to trust Him for the promises not yet fulfilled?

God Has Spoken to Us by His Son

Read Hebrews 1:1–4. What is the central idea of these verses?

In the original Greek, Hebrews 1:1–4 is only one sentence, and it has been argued that it is the most beautiful in all the New Testament from the point of view of its rhetorical artistry. Its main assertion is that God has spoken to us through His Son, Jesus.

For the Jews in the first century A.D., the Word of God had not been heard for a long time. The last revelation to be expressed in the Written Word of God had come through the prophet Malachi and the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah four centuries before. But now, through Jesus, God was speaking to them again.

God's revelation through Jesus, however, was superior to the revelation that God had made through the prophets because Jesus is a greater means of revelation. He is God Himself, who created the heaven and the earth and rules the universe. For Paul, the deity of Christ is never in question. It's all but assumed.

Also, for Paul, the Old Testament was the Word of God. The same God who spoke in the past continues to speak in the present. The Old Testament communicated a true knowledge of God's will.

However, it was possible to understand its fuller meaning only when the Son arrived on earth. In the author's mind, the Father's revelation in the Son provided the key to understanding the true breadth of the Old Testament, just as the picture on the box of a jigsaw puzzle provides the key to finding the correct place for every one of its pieces. Jesus brought so much of the Old Testament to light.

Meanwhile, Jesus came to be our Representative and our Savior. He would take our place in the fight and defeat the serpent. Similarly, in Hebrews, Jesus is the "pioneer" or "captain" and "forerunner" of believers (*Heb. 2:10, Heb. 6:20*). He fights for us and represents us. This also means that what God did for Jesus, our Representative, the Father also wants to do for us. He who exalted Jesus at His right hand also wants us to sit with Jesus on His throne (*Rev. 3:21*). God's message to us in Jesus includes not only what Jesus said but also what the Father did through Him and to Him, all for our temporal and eternal benefit.

Think through what it means that Jesus—God—came to this earth. Why should this truth bring us so much hope?

“He Is the Radiance of the Glory of God”

Read Hebrews 1:2–4. What are some of the things that this passage teaches us about Jesus?

In this section, we will focus on the portion that says, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (*Heb. 1:3, ESV*).

Read Exodus 24:16, 17; Psalm 4:6; Psalm 36:9; and Psalm 89:15. How do these texts help us understand what the glory of God is?

In the Old Testament, the glory of God refers to His visible presence among His people (*Exod. 16:7; Exod. 24:16, 17; Lev. 9:23; Num. 14:10*). This presence is often associated with light or radiance.

Scripture informs us that Jesus is the Light who came to this world to reveal the glory of God (*Heb. 1:3; John 1:6–9, 14–18; 2 Cor. 4:6*). Think, for instance, of how Jesus appeared in the Transfiguration. “And He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light” (*Matt. 17:2, NKJV*).

Just as the sun cannot be perceived except by the radiance of its light, God is known through Jesus. From our perspective, the two are one. Because God’s glory is light itself, there is no difference, in actual being and character, between God and Jesus, just as there is no difference between light and its radiance.

Hebrews also says that Jesus is the “exact representation” of the Father’s substance (*Heb. 1:3, NASB*). The point of the metaphor is that there is a perfect correspondence in being—or essence—between the Father and the Son. Note that human beings carry God’s image but not His essence (*Gen. 1:26*). The Son, however, shares the same essence with the Father. No wonder that Jesus said, “ ‘He who has seen Me has seen the Father’ ” (*John 14:9, NKJV*).

Why is it such great news that Jesus reveals the character and the glory of the Father to us? What does Jesus tell us about what the Father is like?

Through Whom He Made the Universe

Hebrews affirms that God created the world “through” or “by” Jesus and that Jesus sustains the world with His powerful Word.

Read Isaiah 44:24, Isaiah 45:18, and Nehemiah 9:6. Because in the Old Testament the Lord affirmed that He created the world “alone” and that He is the “only God,” how can we reconcile this affirmation with the affirmations in the New Testament that God created the universe “through” Jesus (*Heb. 1:2, 3*)?

Some think that Jesus was merely the instrument through whom God created. This is not possible. First, for Paul, Jesus is the Lord who created the world; He was not a helper. Hebrews 1:10 says that Jesus is the Lord who created the earth and the heavens, and Paul also applies to Him what Psalm 102:25–27 says about the Lord (*Yahweh*) as Creator. Second, Hebrews 2:10 says that the universe was created “by” or “through” the Father (exactly the same expressions that are applied to Jesus in Hebrews 1:2). The Father created and Jesus created (*Heb. 1:2, 10; Heb. 2:10*). There is a perfect agreement between Father and Son in purpose and activity. This is part of the mystery of the Trinity. Jesus created and God created, but there is only One Creator, God—which implies that Jesus is God.

Meanwhile, Hebrews 4:13 shows that Jesus also is Judge. His authority to rule and judge derives from the fact that God created all things and sustains the universe (*Isa. 44:24–28*).

Hebrews 1:3 and Colossians 1:17 affirm that Jesus also sustains the universe. This sustaining action probably includes the idea of guidance or governance. The Greek word *pheron* (sustaining, carrying) is used to describe the wind driving a boat (*Acts 27:15, 17*) or God leading the prophets (*2 Pet. 1:21*). Thus, in a real sense, Jesus not only created us but also sustains us. Every breath, every heartbeat, and every moment of our existence is found in Him, Jesus, the foundation of all created existence.

Look up Acts 17:28. What does it say to us about Jesus and His power? Then think about the implications of this same Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. What does this truth teach us about the self-denying character of our Lord?

“Today I Have Begotten You”

Hebrews 1:5 reports the following words of the Father to Jesus: “ ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You’ ” (*NKJV*). What does it mean that Jesus was “begotten,” and when did this happen? Does not this show that Jesus was somehow created by God sometime way in the past, as many believe?

Read Hebrews 1:5; 2 Samuel 7:12–14; Psalm 2:7; and Luke 1:31, 32. What promise to David did Paul in Hebrews apply to Jesus?

Jesus was begotten in the sense that He was installed, or “adopted,” by God as the promised Ruler, the Son of David. The concept of the divine adoption of the ruler was common in the Greco-Roman world and the East. It gave the ruler legitimacy and power over the land.

God promised to David, however, that his Son would be the true, legitimate ruler of the nations. He would “adopt” David’s Son as His own Son. Through this process the Davidic King would become God’s Protégé and His Heir. The covenant is fulfilled in Jesus as the Son of David. God would defeat His enemies and give Him the nations as His inheritance (*Ps. 89:27; Ps. 2:7, 8*).

As we can read in Romans 1:3, 4 and Acts 13:32, 33, Jesus was publicly revealed as God’s Son. Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration were moments when God identified and announced Jesus as His Son (*Matt. 3:17, Matt. 17:5*).

Yet, according to the New Testament, Jesus became the “Son of God with power” when He was resurrected and seated at the right hand of God. It was at that moment that God fulfilled His promise to David that his Son would be adopted as God’s own Son and His throne over the nations would be established forever (*2 Sam. 7:12–14*).

Thus, Caesar (symbol of Rome) was not the legitimate “son of god,” ruler of the nations. Instead, Jesus Christ was. The “begetting” of Jesus refers to the beginning of Jesus’ rule over the nations, and not to the beginning of His existence, because Jesus had always existed. There was never a time when Jesus did not exist, because He is God.

In fact, Hebrews 7:3 says that Jesus has “neither beginning of days nor end of life” (*compare Heb. 13:8*) because He is eternal. Thus, the idea of Jesus as God’s “only begotten son” is not dealing with the nature of Christ as deity but with His role in the plan of salvation. Through the incarnation, Christ fulfilled all the covenant promises.

Further Thought: The coming of Jesus to this earth as the Son of God fulfilled several functions at the same time. In the first place, as the Divine Son of God, Jesus came to reveal the Father to us. Through His actions and words, Jesus showed us what the Father really is like and why we can trust and obey Him.

Jesus also came as the promised Son of David, Abraham, and Adam, through whom God had promised He would defeat the enemy and rule the world. Thus, Jesus came to take the place of Adam at the head of humanity and fulfill the original purpose God had for them (*Gen. 1:26–28, Ps. 8:3–8*). Jesus came to be the righteous ruler God always wanted this world to have.

“The word that was spoken to Jesus at the Jordan, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,’ embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our representative. With all our sins and weaknesses, we are not cast aside as worthless. ‘He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.’ Ephesians 1:6. The glory that rested upon Christ is a pledge of the love of God for us. . . . The light which fell from the open portals upon the head of our Saviour will fall upon us as we pray for help to resist temptation. The voice which spoke to Jesus says to every believing soul, This is My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 113.

Discussion Questions:

- ① We have learned that a better understanding of Jesus’ words and actions helps us understand God, the Father, better. In what practical ways should a better understanding of Jesus enrich your relationship with God, the Father?
- ② We learned that the way God spoke to and treated Jesus is the way He wants to speak to and treat us. What should that tell us about how we should treat others?
- ③ Dwell on the importance of the eternal deity of Christ. What is lost if we believe that Jesus were somehow, in some way, a created being, like us, who went to the cross? Contrast that thought with the reality that Christ was the Eternal God, and He Himself went to the cross. What is the big difference between the two ideas?
- ④ In class, talk about giving glory to God. Read Revelation 14:7. How is giving glory to God part of present truth and the three angels’ messages?

Drinking With Villagers

By KOO MINGJI

The villagers in rural northern Taiwan didn't seem interested in Bible studies. Many worshiped at one of the two Christian churches in the village, while others spent their time drinking alcohol. The churchgoers shunned the drinkers.

What could I do?

I resolved to follow Jesus' example and befriend the drinkers. "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me'" (Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

I decided to drink with the villagers. After all, Paul declared, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (*NKJV*) in his powerful description of how to be an effective missionary in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23.

The drinkers didn't have a problem drinking together. They wanted to drink with me. But I gave them tea instead of alcohol. After drinking copious amounts of tea, they didn't have any room left for alcohol. Gradually, they stopped drinking alcohol and began to study the Bible with me. A few months passed, and two former drinkers gave their hearts to Jesus and were baptized in August 2019.

Tragedy struck six months later. One of the newly baptized Seventh-day Adventists, a young man, fell ill and died. His death hit me hard, and I cried out to God, "Why?"

Shortly after the funeral, the mother and brother of the deceased young man unexpectedly came to me and asked for Bible studies. Then other villagers followed their lead. In late 2020, they and other villagers flocked to a one-day health fair organized by the health ministries department of the Adventist Church in Taiwan. The day after the fair, five villagers were baptized.

God has infinite mercy and compassion, and He has prepared a way of salvation for every person on earth. The Lord says, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways" (*Isaiah 55:8, NKJV*). All glory belongs to Jehovah God!



This mission story illustrates the following components of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: Mission Objective Number 1, "To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors, but every church member, young and old, in the joy of witnessing for Christ and making disciples" through "increased number of church members participating in both personal and public evangelistic outreach initiatives with a goal of Total Member Involvement (TMI)" (KPI 1.1); and Spiritual Growth Objective Number 5, "To disciple individuals and families into Spirit-filled lives." Learn more about the strategic plan at IWillGo2020.org.

Jesus, Our Faithful Brother



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Lev. 25:25–27; Heb. 2:14–16; Heb. 11:24–26; 1 Cor. 15:50; Heb. 5:8, 9; Heb. 12:1–4.*

Memory Text: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil” (*Hebrews 2:14, NKJV*).

Hebrews 1 talks of Jesus as the Son of God, the ruler over the angels, and “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person” (*Heb. 1:3, NKJV*). In Hebrews 2, Jesus is the Son of man, who was made lower than the angels and who adopted human nature with all its frailty, even to the point of death (*Heb. 2:7*).

In Hebrews 1, God says about Jesus: “‘You are My Son’ ” (*Heb. 1:5, NKJV*). In Hebrews 2, Jesus refers to human children as His “‘brethren’ ” (*Heb. 2:12*).

In Hebrews 1, the Father declares the Son’s divine sovereignty (*Heb. 1:8–12*). In Hebrews 2, the Son affirms His faithfulness to the Father (*Heb. 2:13*).

In Hebrews 1, Jesus is the divine Lord, Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign. In Hebrews 2, Jesus is the human High Priest, merciful and faithful.

In summary, the presentation of Jesus as a faithful and merciful Brother is depicted in the description of the Son as the ultimate manifestation of the eternal Creator God (*Heb. 1:1–4*).

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

The Brother as a Redeemer

Read Leviticus 25:25–27, 47–49. Who could redeem a person who had lost his property or his liberty because of poverty?

The law of Moses stipulated that when a person was so poor that he had to sell his property—or even himself—in order to survive, he would receive that property or his liberty back every 50 years, on the jubilee year. The jubilee year was a “grand” Sabbath year in which debts were forgiven, properties were reclaimed, and liberty was proclaimed to the captives.

Fifty years was a long time to wait, however. That’s why the Law of Moses also stipulated that the nearest relative could pay the part that was still owed and, thus, ransom his relative much sooner.

The nearest relative also was the one who guaranteed that justice was done in the case of a murder. He was the avenger of the blood who would pursue the murderer of his close relative and punish him (*Num. 35:9–15*).

Read Hebrews 2:14–16. How is Jesus and how are we described in this passage?

This passage describes us as slaves of the devil, but Jesus as our Redeemer. When Adam sinned, human beings fell under the power of Satan. As a result, we did not have the power to resist sin (*Rom. 7:14–24*). Worse, there was a death penalty that our transgression required, which we could not pay (*Rom. 6:23*). Thus, our situation was apparently hopeless.

Jesus, however, adopted our human nature and became flesh and blood like us. He became our nearest Relative and redeemed us. He was not ashamed to call us “brothers” (*Heb. 2:11, ESV*).

Paradoxically, by taking our nature and redeeming us, Jesus revealed His divine nature, as well. In the Old Testament, the true Redeemer of Israel, their closest Relative, is Yahweh (*e.g., Ps. 19:14, Isa. 41:14, Isa. 43:14, Isa. 44:22, Jer. 31:11, Hos. 13:14*).

What are ways that you can learn to experience more deeply that reality of just how close Christ can be to you? Why is having this experience so important to your faith?

Not Ashamed to Call Them Brothers

Hebrews says that Jesus was not ashamed to call us His brethren (*Heb. 2:11*). Despite being one with God, Jesus embraced us as part of His family. This solidarity contrasts with the public shaming that the readers of Hebrews suffered in their communities (*Heb. 10:33*).

Read Hebrews 11:24–26. In what way do Moses’ decisions exemplify what Jesus did for us?

Have you imagined what it meant for Moses to be called “the son of Pharaoh’s daughter”? He was a powerful figure in the most powerful empire of the time. He received the highest civil and military training and became a remarkable character. Stephen says that Moses was “‘mighty in words and in deeds’ ” (*Acts 7:22*). Ellen G. White also says that he was “a favorite with the armies of Egypt” and that Pharaoh “determined to make his adopted grandson his successor on the throne” (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 245). Yet, Moses abandoned all of this privilege when he chose to identify himself with the Israelites, a slave nation without education and power.

Read Matthew 10:32, 33; 2 Timothy 1:8, 12; and Hebrews 13:12–15. What does God ask from us?

This was part of the problem for the readers of Hebrews. After suffering persecution and rejection, many of them began to feel ashamed of Jesus. By their actions some were in danger of putting Jesus “to an open shame” instead of honoring Him (*Heb. 6:6*). Thus, Paul constantly calls the readers to “hold fast” the “confession” of their faith (*Heb. 4:14, Heb. 10:23, NKJV*).

God wants us to recognize Jesus as our God and our Brother. As our Redeemer, Jesus has paid our debt; as our Brother, Jesus has shown us the way that we should live in order that we will “be conformed to the image of [the] Son, [so] that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (*Rom. 8:29*).

Think for a moment about the decision that Jesus had to make in order to embrace us as “siblings.” Why was what Jesus did so much more condescending for Himself than what Moses did, and what does this teach us about God’s love for us?

Flesh and Blood Like Us

Hebrews says that Jesus adopted our human nature so that He could represent us and could die for us (*Heb. 2:9, 14–16; Heb. 10:5–10*). Here is the foundation of the plan of salvation and our only hope for eternal life.

Read Matthew 16:17, Galatians 1:16, 1 Corinthians 15:50, and Ephesians 6:12. To what deficiencies of human nature do these passages relate the expression “flesh and blood”?

The expression “flesh and blood” emphasizes the frailty of the human condition, its weakness (*Eph. 6:12*), lack of understanding (*Matt. 16:17, Gal. 1:16*), and subjection to death (*1 Cor. 15:50*). Hebrews says that Jesus was made like His brothers “in all things” (*Heb. 2:17*). This expression means that Jesus became fully human (*NIV*). Jesus did not simply “look like” or “seem to be” human; He truly was human, truly one of us.

Hebrews also says, however, that Jesus was different from us regarding sin. First, Jesus did not commit any sin (*Heb. 4:15*). Second, Jesus had a human nature that was “holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners” (*Heb. 7:26, ESV*). We all have sinned, and we all have evil tendencies. Our bondage to sin begins deep inside our own very nature. We are “carnal, sold under sin” (*Rom. 7:14; see also Rom. 7:15–20*). Pride and other sinful motivations often taint even our good actions. Jesus’ nature, however, was not marred by sin. It had to be this way. If Jesus had been “carnal, sold under sin,” like us, He also would have needed a Savior. Instead, Jesus came as a Savior and offered Himself as a sacrifice “without blemish” to God for us (*Heb. 7:26–28, Heb. 9:14, ESV*).

Then Jesus destroyed the power of the devil by dying as the sinless Offering for our sins, thus making possible our forgiveness and reconciliation with God (*Heb. 2:14–17*). Jesus also broke the power of sin by giving us the power to live a righteous life through His fulfillment of the new covenant promise to write the law in our hearts (*Heb. 8:10*). Thus, Jesus has defeated the enemy and effectively liberated us so that we can now “serve the living God” (*Heb. 9:14*). Satan’s final destruction, meanwhile, will come at the final judgment (*Rev. 20:1–3, 10*).

Since we have the promise of victory through Jesus, why do so many of us still struggle with sin? What are we doing wrong, and, more important, how can we start living up to the high calling we have in Christ?

Perfected Through Sufferings

Read Hebrews 2:10, 17, 18 and Hebrews 5:8, 9. What was the function of suffering in Jesus' life?

The apostle says that God made Jesus “perfect through sufferings.” This expression is surprising. The author has said that Jesus is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (*Heb. 1:3, ESV*) and that He is sinless, spotless, undefiled, and holy (*Heb. 4:15, Heb. 7:26–28, Heb. 9:14, Heb. 10:5–10*). Jesus did not have to overcome any kind of moral or ethical imperfection. He was perfect both morally and ethically.

Hebrews does say, however, that Jesus underwent a process of “perfecting” that provided Him with the means to save us. Jesus was perfected in the sense that He was equipped to be our Savior.

1. Jesus was “perfected” through sufferings in order to become the Captain of our salvation (*Heb. 2:10*). Jesus had to die on the cross as a sacrifice so that the Father could have the legal means to save us. Jesus was the perfect sacrificial offering, the only one. As God, Jesus could judge us; but, because of His sacrifice, Jesus also can save us.

2. Jesus learned obedience through sufferings (*Heb. 5:8*). Obedience was necessary for two things. First, obedience made His sacrifice acceptable (*Heb. 9:14, Heb. 10:5–10*). Second, His sufferings enabled Him to become our Example (*Heb. 5:9*). Jesus “learned” obedience because He never experienced it before. As God, whom would He have to obey? As the eternal Son, and one with God, He was obeyed as the Ruler of the universe. Therefore, Jesus did not progress from disobedience to obedience, but from sovereignty and dominion to submission and obedience. The exalted Son of God became the obedient Son of man.

3. Suffering temptation and being victorious enabled Jesus to be a merciful and faithful High Priest (*Heb. 2:17, 18*). Sufferings did not make Jesus more merciful. To the contrary, it was because of Jesus' mercy that He volunteered to die on the cross to save us to begin with (*Heb. 10:5–10; compare with Rom. 5:7, 8*). Yet, it was through sufferings that the reality of Jesus' brotherly love was truly expressed and revealed.

If the sinless Jesus suffered, we, as sinners, surely will suffer, as well. How can we learn to endure the tragedies of life while at the same time drawing hope and assurance from the Lord, who has revealed His love to us in so many powerful ways?

The Brother as a Model

Another reason Jesus adopted our human nature and lived among us was so that He could be our Example, the only One who could model for us what is the right way to live before God.

Read Hebrews 12:1–4. According to the apostle, how should we run the race of the Christian life?

In this passage Jesus is the culmination of a long list of characters whom the apostle provides as exemplars of faith. This passage calls Jesus “the founder and perfecter of our faith” (*ESV*). The Greek word *archegos* (“founder”) also can be translated “pioneer.” Jesus is the Pioneer of the race in the sense that He runs ahead of the believers. In fact, Hebrews 6:20 calls Jesus our “forerunner.” The word “perfecter” gives the idea that Jesus had displayed faith in God in the purest form possible. This passage teaches both that Jesus is the first one to have run our race with success and that He is the One who perfected the art of what living by faith is all about.

Hebrews 2:13 reads: “And again: ‘I will put My trust in Him.’ And again: ‘Here am I and the children whom God has given Me’ ” (*NKJV*). What is happening here is that Jesus said that He would put His trust in God. This reference is an allusion to Isaiah 8:17, 18.

Isaiah spoke these words in the face of a terrible threat of invasion from northern Israel and Syria (*Isa. 7:1, 2*). His faith contrasted the lack of faith of Ahaz, the king (*2 Kings 16:5–18*). God had exhorted Ahaz to trust in Him and to ask for a sign that He would deliver him (*Isa. 7:1–11*). God already had promised him, as a son of David, that He would protect Ahaz as His own son. Now, God graciously offered for Ahaz to confirm that promise with a sign from Him. Ahaz, however, refused to ask for a sign and, instead, sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, saying, “ ‘I am your servant and your son’ ” (*2 Kings 16:7, NKJV*). How sad! Ahaz preferred being the “son” of Tiglath-pileser to being the son of God.

Jesus, however, put His trust in God and in His promise that He would put His enemies under His feet (*Heb. 1:13; Heb. 10:12, 13*). God has made the same promise to us, and we need to believe Him, just as Jesus did (*Rom. 16:20*).

How can we learn to put our trust in God by daily making choices that reflect this trust? What’s the next important choice you need to make, and how can you be sure that it does reveal trust in God?

Further Thought: Hebrews 2:13 contains the words of Jesus to His Father talking about His brethren: “ ‘Here am I and the children whom God has given Me’ ” (*Heb. 2:13, NKJV*). Patrick Gray suggests that Jesus is described here as the Guardian of His brothers. The Roman system of *tutela impuberum* determined that at their father’s death, “a tutor, often an older brother, became responsible for the care of minor children and their inheritance until they reached the age of majority, thus heightening the older brother’s natural duty to take care of his younger siblings.” —*Godly Fear: The Epistle to the Hebrews and Greco-Roman Critiques of Superstition* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. 126. This explains why Hebrews refers to us both as the siblings of Jesus and as His children. As our older Brother, Jesus is our Tutor, our Guardian, and Protector.

“Christ came to the earth, taking humanity and standing as man’s representative, to show in the controversy with Satan that man, as God created him, connected with the Father and the Son, could obey every divine requirement.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 253.

“In His life and lessons, Christ has given a perfect exemplification of the unselfish ministry which has its origin in God. God does not live for Himself. By creating the world, and by upholding all things, He is constantly ministering for others. ‘He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.’ Matt. 5:45. This ideal of ministry God has committed to His Son. Jesus was given to stand at the head of humanity, that by His example He might teach what it means to minister.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 649.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Hebrews tells us that Jesus became our Brother in order to save us. Think about what that means in terms of what God did in order to save us. Why, then, would turning our back on this amazing reality be such a tragic mistake?
- ❷ Why is it important for us that Jesus was not born “sold under sin” as we are (*Rom. 7:14*)? Think about Moses, and why it was important for the Israelites that he was not a slave as they were. How does the story of Moses, in a small way, help us understand what Jesus has done for us?
- ❸ Dwell more on the role of suffering in our lives. Why must we never think that suffering, in and of itself, is good, even if sometimes some good can come out of it?

Jesus, Miracle Doctor

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Sengphet was a highly regarded medical doctor at the largest hospital in one of the provinces of Laos. But he was powerless to cure his son's disease.

His adult son came down with the mysterious illness while working in Bangkok, Thailand. The young man was treated by Bangkok physicians but did not get better. So Dr. Sengphet (not his real name) brought his son back to Laos and treated him at his hospital. The young man's condition, however, did not improve. Fellow physicians suggested seeking treatment at a big hospital in Laos's capital, Vientiane. Dr. Sengphet brought his son to the Vientiane hospital, where he underwent multiple tests.

In the end, the physicians could find nothing wrong with his physical health. They concluded that the problem was psychological and that he had suffered a mental breakdown.

All the medical tests took more than a year. Dr. Sengphet and his wife spent all their money on their son, but to no avail. If they had known the Bible, they would have been able to relate to the story of the woman with the flow of blood, who "had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse" (*Mark 5:26, NKJV*).

They brought their son home and, in a desperation similar to the woman with the blood issue, finally turned to the heavenly Physician, Jesus. They prayed in their bedroom for Jesus to heal their son.

As they prayed, their son walked into the bedroom. "What happened?" he asked. "Why do I feel peace all of a sudden?"

Dr. Sengphet and his wife kept praying. Then the son had what he described as a vision. He saw an evil spirit leaving his body, saying, "I can no longer stay because Jesus has laid claim over your life. You belong to Jesus."

That day, the son returned to normal, and Dr. Sengphet and his family started worshipping Jesus. For months, Dr. Sengphet made no secret about his love for Jesus, telling everyone who would listen, "Dr. Jesus Christ healed my son, and my family and I have accepted Him as our Savior."

After some time, however, Dr. Sengphet stopped worshipping Jesus. He seemed to forget how Jesus had healed his son, and he returned to his former ways. Please pray for him and others who have been touched by Jesus but no longer worship Him. Please pray that they will return to Him again.

This mission story illustrates some of the challenges that Seventh-day Adventists face in fulfilling the church's "I Will Go" strategic plan, including Mission Objective Number 2, "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions"; and Spiritual Growth Objective Number 5, "To disciple individuals and families into Spirit-filled lives." Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will go toward opening an elementary school in Laos, helping to fulfill Mission Objective Number 4, "To strengthen Seventh-day Adventist institutions in upholding freedom, wholistic health, and hope through Jesus, and restoring in people the image of God." Learn more at IWillGo2020.org.

Jesus, *the* Giver of Rest



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 15:13–21; Heb. 3:12–19; Heb. 4:6–11; Heb. 4:1, 3, 5, 10; Deut. 5:12–15; Heb. 4:8–11.*

Memory Text: “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God” (*Hebrews 4:9, NKJV*).

Hebrews 1 and 2 focused on the enthronement of Jesus as the Ruler and Liberator of God's people. Hebrews 3 and 4 introduce Jesus as the One who will provide rest for us. This progression makes sense once we remember that the Davidic covenant promised that God would give the promised king and his people “rest” from their enemies (*2 Sam. 7:10, 11*). This rest is available to us now that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God.

Hebrews describes the rest both as a rest that belongs to God and as a Sabbath rest (*Heb. 4:1–11*). God made this rest, which was His, available to Adam and Eve. The first Sabbath was the experience of perfection with the One who made that perfection possible. God also promises a Sabbath rest because true Sabbath observance embodies the promise that God will bring that perfection back.

When we keep the Sabbath, we remember that God made perfect provision for us when He created the world and when He redeemed it at the cross. True Sabbath observance, however, besides first and foremost pointing us back to Creation, offers us a foretaste, in this imperfect world, of the future that God has promised.

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

The Land as a Place of Rest

Read Genesis 15:13–21. What did God promise Abraham?

When God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, His purpose was to bring Israel to the land of Canaan, where they would be able to serve and obey Him freely (*Exod. 8:1; Ps. 105:43–45*), including enjoying the Sabbath rest that Pharaoh had prohibited (*Exod. 5:5*). The land of Canaan was the inheritance that God had promised to their father Abraham because he had obeyed God's voice and left his country to go to the Promised Land (*Gen. 11:31–12:4*).

God's purpose in giving the land to Israel was not simply for the people to possess it. God was bringing them to Himself (*Exod. 19:4*). God wanted them to live in a land where they would be able to enjoy an intimate relationship with Him, without any hindrance, and would be a witness to the world of who the true God was and what He offered His people. Like the Sabbath of Creation, the land of Canaan was a framework that made possible an intimate relationship with their Redeemer and the enjoyment of His goodness.

In Deuteronomy 12:1–14, the Lord told the people that they would enter the rest, not simply when they entered the land—but when they had purged the land from idolatry. After that, God would show them, the chosen, a place where He would dwell among them.

Read Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. What two things does the Sabbath rest commemorate, and how are they related?

God connected the Sabbath of Creation with the deliverance from Egypt. He instructed Israel to observe the Sabbath as a memorial of Creation and as a memorial of their redemption from Egypt. Creation and Redemption are both enshrined in the Sabbath commandment. Just as we did not create ourselves, we cannot redeem ourselves. It's a work that only God can do, and by resting we acknowledge our dependence upon Him, not only for existence but also for salvation. Sabbath keeping is a powerful expression of salvation by faith alone.

How should keeping the Sabbath help us understand our complete dependence upon God, not only for existence but also for salvation?

Because of Unbelief

Read Hebrews 3:12–19. Why was Israel unable to enter into the promised rest?

The sad story is that those who were delivered from Egypt were unable to enter into the rest that God had promised them. When the Israelites arrived at Kadesh barnea, at the border of the Promised Land, they lacked the faith that they needed. Numbers 13 and Numbers 14 explain that the Israelite spies “brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land” (*Num. 13:32, ESV*). They affirmed that the land was good, but they warned that the inhabitants were strong and the cities were fortified and that they would not be able to conquer it.

Joshua and Caleb agreed that the land was good and did not dispute the fact that the people there were strong and the cities were fortified. But they said that God was with them and that He would bring them into the land (*Num. 14:7–9*). Yet, the people who saw God destroy Egypt through plagues (*Exodus 7–12*), annihilate Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea (*Exodus 14*), and provide bread from heaven (*Exodus 16*) and water from the rock (*Exodus 17*), as well as manifest His continuing presence and guidance through the cloud (*Exod. 40:36–38*), failed to trust in Him now. It is a tragic irony that the generation who saw such mighty displays of God’s power became a symbol of faithlessness (*Neh. 9:15–17, Ps. 106:24–26, 1 Cor. 10:5–10*).

God promises His children gifts that are beyond human reach. That is why they are based on grace and are accessible only through faith. Hebrews 4:2 explains that the promise Israel received “was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed” (*Heb. 4:2, NIV*).

Israel traveled to the borders of the Promised Land as a people. When the people were faced with contradictory reports, they identified with those who lacked faith. Faith, or lack of it, is contagious. That is why Hebrews admonishes its readers to “exhort one another” (*Heb. 3:13*), “to stir up one another to love and good works” (*Heb. 10:24, ESV*), and to “see to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God” (*Heb. 12:15, ESV*).

In what ways can you help build the faith of fellow believers? How can you make sure that you never say or do anything that could weaken another’s faith?

Today, If You Hear His Voice

Read Hebrews 4:4-8. What is the meaning of entering rest “today” in connection with keeping the Sabbath?

The unbelief of the desert generation prevented them from entering into the rest God promised. But God kept urging His people to enter this rest and not to harden their hearts. Paul repeats several times that God’s promise “remains” (*Heb. 4:1, 6, 9, NKJV*). He uses the Greek verbs *kataleipō* and *apoleipō*, emphasizing that “the promise of entering his [God’s] rest still stands” (*Heb. 4:1, ESV*). The fact that the invitation to enter this rest was repeated in the time of David (*Heb. 4:6, 7, referring to Psalm 95*) implied both that the promise had not been claimed and that it was still available. In fact, Paul suggests that the experience of true Sabbath rest has been available since the time of Creation (*Heb. 4:3, 4*).

God invites us “today” to enter into His rest. “Today” is a crucial concept throughout Scripture. When Moses renewed Israel’s covenant with God at the border of the Promised Land, he emphasized the importance of “today” (*Deut. 5:3, compare Deut. 4:8, Deut. 6:6, etc.*). It was a moment of reflection to recognize God’s faithfulness (*Deut. 11:2–7*) and a time of decision to obey the Lord (*Deut. 5:1–3*). Similarly, Joshua called on the people of his time to “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (*Josh. 24:15, NKJV*).

In the same way, “today” is a time of decision for us, a time of opportunity as well as danger, as it has always been for God’s people (*See 2 Cor. 6:2*). “Today” appears five times in Hebrews 3 and Hebrews 4. It emphasizes the importance of listening to God’s voice (*Heb. 3:7, 15; 4:7*) because failing to listen and believe God’s Word leads to disobedience and the hardening of our hearts. It could even delay our entrance into the heavenly Canaan, just as it kept the wilderness generation from entering the earthly Canaan.

But Jesus has defeated our enemies (*Heb. 2:14–16*) and inaugurated a new covenant (*Hebrews 8–10*). Thus, we can “come boldly to the throne of grace” (*Heb. 4:14–16*). The appeal “today” invites us to recognize that God has been faithful to us and has provided us with every reason to accept His invitation right away without delay.

What spiritual decisions must you make “today,” that is, not put off for another time? What have been your past experiences when you have delayed doing what you knew God would have you do right away?

Entering Into *His* Rest

Read Hebrews 3:11 and Hebrews 4:1, 3, 5, 10. How does God characterize the rest He invites us to enter?

Both the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8-11 and Moses' restatement of it in Deuteronomy 5:12-15 invite us to remember what God has done for us. As we have seen, what God wrote on tablets of stone point us to the finishing of His work of creation (*Exod. 31:18; 34:28*). In Deuteronomy Israel is commanded to keep the Sabbath in view of God's finished work of deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The Exodus from Egypt pointed forward to the ultimate work of deliverance from sin that Christ would accomplish on the cross when He said, "It is finished!" (*John 19:30*). So the Sabbath is doubly blessed and, in fact, is especially meaningful for Christians.

Read Hebrews 4:9–11, 16. What are we called to do?

The Sabbath rest celebrates the fact that God ended, or finished, His work of Creation (*Gen. 2:1–3, Exod. 20:8–11*) or Redemption (*Deut. 5:12–15*). Similarly, Jesus' enthronement in the heavenly temple celebrates that He finished offering a perfect sacrifice for our salvation (*Heb. 10:12–14*).

Notice that God rests only when He has secured our well-being. At Creation, God rested when He had finished the Creation of the world. Later on, God rested in the temple only after the conquest of the land He had promised Abraham was completed through the victories of David, and Israel "lived in safety" (*1 Kings 4:21–25, ESV; compare with Exod. 15:18–21, Deut. 11:24, 2 Sam. 8:1–14*). God had a house built for Himself only after Israel and the king had houses for themselves.

How can we enter into His rest even now? That is, how can we, by faith, rest in the assurance of the salvation that we have in Christ, and not in ourselves?

A Foretaste of New Creation

Compare Exodus 20:8–11, Deuteronomy 5:12–15, and Hebrews 4:8–11. What differences do you find regarding the meaning of the Sabbath rest?

As we already have seen, these texts in Exodus and Deuteronomy invite us to look to the past. They exhort us to rest on Sabbath in order to celebrate God's accomplishments at Creation and at Redemption. Hebrews 4:9–11, however, invites us to look to the future. It tells us that God has prepared a Sabbath rest that is in the future. It suggests a new dimension for Sabbath keeping. Sabbath rest not only memorializes God's victories in the past but also celebrates God's promises for the future.

The future dimension of Sabbath observance has always been there, but it has often been neglected. After the Fall, it came to imply the promise that God would one day restore creation to its original glory through the Messiah. God commanded us to celebrate His acts of redemption through Sabbath observance because Sabbath pointed forward to the culmination of Redemption in a new creation. Sabbath observance is an anticipation of heaven in this imperfect world.

This has always been clear in Jewish tradition. Life of Adam and Eve (in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, [New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1985], p. 18), a work composed between 100 B.C. and A.D. 200, said: "The seventh day is a sign of the resurrection, the rest of the coming age." Another ancient Jewish source said: The coming age is "the day which is wholly Sabbath rest for eternity."—Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah, A New Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 873. *The Othiot of Rabbi Akiba*, a later source, said: "Israel said before the Holy One, Blessed Be He, 'Master of the World, if we observe the commandments, what reward will we have?' He said to them: 'The world-to-come.'" They said to Him: "Show us its likeness." He showed them the Sabbath."—Theodore Friedman, "The Sabbath Anticipation of Redemption," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal*, vol. 16, pp. 443, 444.

Sabbath is for celebration, for joy and thanksgiving. When we keep the Sabbath, we indicate that we believe God's promises, that we accept His gift of grace. Sabbath is faith alive and vibrant. As far as actions go, Sabbath observance is probably the fullest expression of our conviction that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus.

How can we learn to keep the Sabbath in a way that, indeed, shows our understanding of what salvation by faith, apart from the deeds of the law, is about? How is resting on the Sabbath an expression of salvation by grace?

Further Thought: It is very significant that Paul in Hebrews used the Sabbath rest, and not Sunday, as a symbol of the salvation through grace that God offers us. The use of Sabbath rest in this way implies that Sabbath was cherished and observed by believers. From the second century A.D. forward, however, we find evidences of a decisive change in the church. Sabbath observance ceased to be considered a symbol of salvation and was, instead, considered a symbol of allegiance to Judaism and the old covenant, one that had to be avoided. To keep the Sabbath became the equivalent of to “Judaize.” For example, Ignatius of Antioch (around A.D. 110) remarked: “Those who lived according to the old order have found the new hope. They no longer observe the Sabbath but the day of the Lord—the day our life was resurrected with Christ.”—Jacques B. Doukhan, *Israel and the Church: Two Voices for the Same God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), p. 42. Similarly, Marcion ordered his followers to fast on Sabbath as a sign of rejection of the Jews and their God, and Victorinus did not want it to appear that he “observed the Sabbath of the Jews” (See *Israel and the Church*, pp. 41–45). It was the loss of the understanding of Sabbath observance as a symbol of salvation by grace that led to its demise in the Christian church.

“The Sabbath is a sign of Christ’s power to make us holy. And it is given to all whom Christ makes holy. As a sign of His sanctifying power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the Israel of God. . . .

“The Sabbath points them to the works of creation as an evidence of His mighty power in redemption. While it calls to mind the lost peace of Eden, it tells of peace restored through the Saviour. And every object in nature repeats His invitation, ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.’ Matthew 11:28.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 288, 289.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What is the relationship between Sabbath observance and justification by faith?
- ❷ What is the difference between true observance of the Sabbath and a legalistic observance of the Sabbath? How can we not only know the difference but also experience that difference in our own Sabbath observance?

Finding Peace

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

It was the worst day of Yean's life.

The witch doctor approached him in their village in southern Laos and announced that he was going to die.

"And there is no one who can help you," the witch doctor said solemnly.

Yean was scared. People in his village believed that the witch doctor always spoke the truth. He could not lie.

Yean did not want to die. He was so frightened that he could not eat or sleep.

Soon his wife noticed that something was terribly wrong.

"What happened?" she asked.

Yean told her about his encounter with the witch doctor.

"I am going to die," he said.

He didn't know what to do. His wife didn't know what to do.

Then he heard about a small group of Christians who gathered on Saturdays to worship. He had never been inside a Christian church, but he decided to find out whether the Christians could ask their God to help him.

Next Sabbath, Yean and his wife showed up at the Seventh-day Adventist church. He told the church members about the witch doctor and his fear of dying.

After listening, the members told him about Jesus. They said Jesus had the power not only to save him from the witch doctor's prediction of death but also to offer him eternal life. In their Bibles was the promise: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (*John 3:16, NKJV*).

Yean was overjoyed when he heard about Jesus! He could claim the peace that only Jesus offers: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (*John 14:27, NKJV*).

When he left the church, he was so happy that he could not keep the good news to himself. He eagerly shared the peace that Jesus had given him with other villagers. He walked home with a big smile on his face. It was the best day of his life!

Today, Yean is alive and well, and he is attending the church where he first found Jesus.

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel to people in Laos and other countries of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, which will receive this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

This mission story illustrates Mission Objective Number 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions." Learn more at IWillGo2020.org.

Jesus, *the* Faithful Priest



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 5:1–10; Gen. 14:18–20; 1 Pet. 2:9; Heb. 7:1–3; Heb. 7:11–16, 22, 26.*

Memory Text: “For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens” (*Hebrews 7:26, NKJV*).

The gulf that existed between God and us was caused by sin. The problem was compounded because sin also implied the corruption of our nature. God is holy, and sin cannot exist in His presence; so, our own corrupted nature separated us from God, just as two magnets in the wrong orientation repel each other. In addition, our corrupted nature made it impossible for human beings to obey God's law. Sin also involves misunderstanding. Human beings lost sight of the love and mercy of God and came to see Him as wrathful and demanding.

This week, we are going to study the amazing things the Father and the Son did to bridge that gulf. Hebrews 5–7 provides a careful analysis of Jesus' priesthood. The author analyzes its origin and purpose (*Heb. 5:1–10*) and then exhorts readers not to disregard it (*Heb. 5:11–6:8*) but rather to hold fast to the assurance of hope it provides (*Heb. 6:9–20*). He also explains the characteristics of Jesus' priesthood (*Heb. 7:1–10*) and its implications for God's relationship to believers (*Heb. 7:11–28*). This week we will focus specifically on Hebrews 5:1–10 and Hebrews 7:1–28.

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

A Priest on Behalf of Human Beings

Read Hebrews 5:1–10. What is the role of the priesthood and, according to this passage, how does Jesus fulfill that role?

The basic purpose of the Levitical priesthood was to mediate between sinful people and God. Priests were appointed by God in order to minister in behalf of human beings; therefore, they needed to be merciful and understanding of human weaknesses.

In Hebrews 5:5–10, Paul shows that Jesus perfectly fulfills those purposes: God appointed Him (*Heb. 5:5, 6*), and Jesus understands us because He also has suffered (*Heb. 5:7, 8*).

There are some important differences, however. Jesus was not “chosen from among men” (*Heb. 5:1, ESV*). Instead, Jesus adopted human nature in order, among other things, to serve as a priest in our behalf. Jesus did not offer sacrifices for His own sins (*Heb. 5:3*), but only for our sins, because He was sinless (*Heb. 4:15, Heb. 7:26–28*).

Hebrews says that Jesus prayed “to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard” (*Heb. 5:7, NKJV*). Hebrews was referring to the second death, from which God saved Jesus when He resurrected Him (*Heb. 13:20*). Hebrews also says that Jesus “learned obedience through what he suffered” (*Heb. 5:8, ESV*). Obedience was new to Jesus, not because He was disobedient but because He was God. As Sovereign over the universe, Jesus did not obey anyone; instead, everyone obeyed Him.

Jesus’ sufferings and death on the cross are an essential part of His priestly ministry. Sufferings did not perfect Jesus in the sense that He improved morally or ethically. Sufferings did not make Him merciful. To the contrary, Jesus came to this earth because He always was merciful, which is why He had compassion on us (*Heb. 2:17*). What Hebrews means is that it was through sufferings that the reality of Jesus’ brotherly love, the authenticity of His human nature, and the depth of His submission as Representative of humanity to the will of the Father were truly expressed and revealed. He was “perfected” in the sense that His sufferings qualified Him to be our High Priest. It was His life of perfect obedience, and then His death on the cross, that constitute the sacrificial offering that Jesus presented before the Father as our Priest.

First Peter 2:9 says that we are “a royal priesthood.” What does Jesus’ life tell you that your relationship with other human beings should be because we are in this sacred role?

According to the Order of Melchizedek

Read Genesis 14:18–20 and Hebrews 7:1–3. Who was Melchizedek, and how did he prefigure Jesus?

Melchizedek was both a king and a priest. He also was superior to Abraham, since Abraham paid him tithe. Likewise, Jesus is King and Priest (*Heb. 1:3*); unlike Melchizedek, however, Jesus was sinless (*Heb. 7:26–28*).

Hebrews 7:15 explains that Jesus was Priest “in the likeness of Melchizedek” (*NKJV*). This is what the earlier expression in Hebrews, “according to the order of Melchizedek” (*Heb. 5:6, NKJV*), means. Jesus was not a successor of Melchizedek, but His priesthood was similar to his.

For instance, Paul says that Melchizedek was without father, mother, genealogy, birth, and death. Some have suggested that Melchizedek was an incarnation of Jesus in the time of Abraham. But this thought does not fit the argument of Hebrews. Melchizedek “resembles” Jesus (*see ESV*), which implies that he was different from Jesus (*Heb. 7:3*).

It also has been suggested that Melchizedek was a heavenly being, but this would destroy the argument of Hebrews. If Melchizedek were without father, mother, beginning, or end, he would be God Himself. This poses a problem. Melchizedek’s heavenly, fully divine priesthood would have preceded the ministry of Jesus. If this were the case, as Hebrews says, “what further need would there have been for another priest to arise” (*Heb. 7:11, ESV*)?

Instead, Hebrews uses the silence of Scripture regarding Melchizedek’s birth, death, and genealogy to build a *typology*, a symbol, for Jesus’ priestly ministry (*Gen. 14:18–20*) and reveals that Jesus Himself was eternal. In short, Melchizedek was a Canaanite king-priest who served as a type of Christ.

“It was Christ that spoke through Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God. Melchizedek was not Christ, but he was the voice of God in the world, the representative of the Father. And all through the generations of the past, Christ has spoken; Christ has led His people, and has been the light of the world.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 409.

What does the revelation about Melchizedek teach us about how God works among those who have never had human missionaries preach to them?

An Effective Priest

“Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron?” (*Heb. 7:11, NKJV*).

Priests are mediators between God and human beings. Hebrews says, however, that Levitical priests could not provide complete, confident access to God because they could not provide *perfection* (*Heb. 7:11, 18, 19*). After all, they themselves weren’t perfect; so, how could they somehow bestow perfection upon others?

Nor could the animal sacrifices cleanse the conscience of the sinner. Their purpose was to point forward to the ministry of Jesus and His sacrifice, which alone would provide true cleansing from sin (*Heb. 9:14; Heb. 10:1–3, 10–14*). The function of the Levitical priests and their sacrifices was temporary and illustrative. Through their ministry, God wanted to lead the people to put their faith in the future ministry of Jesus, “ ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (*John 1:29, NKJV*).

Read Hebrews 7:11–16. Why was there a need to change the law?

Hebrews 7:12 explains that the change of priesthood made a change in the law necessary. Why? Because there was a very strict law that prohibited a person who was not of the line of Levi through Aaron from serving as a priest (*Num. 3:10; Num. 16:39, 40*). Hebrews 7:13, 14 explains that Jesus was from the line of Judah, and so this law prohibited Him from being a Levitical priest. So, Paul argues that the appointment of Jesus as Priest meant God has changed the law of the priesthood.

Jesus’ coming also implied a change in the law of sacrifices. Sinners were required to bring different kinds of sacrifices to obtain atonement (*Leviticus 1–7*), but now that Jesus has come and offered a perfect sacrifice, the law of animal sacrifices also has been put aside (*Heb. 10:17, 18*) as a result of the new covenant and the fuller revelation of the plan of salvation.

Think about the endless number of animal sacrifices offered through antiquity, all pointing to Jesus, and yet not one of them—or all of them—could truly pay for our sins. Why could only the death of Jesus pay for them?

An Eternal Priest

Read Hebrews 7:16. On what basis did Jesus become priest?

Jesus received the priesthood on the basis of an indestructible life and because He holds an eternal ministry. The implication of these facts is astounding. It means that Jesus' ministry will never be surpassed or outclassed. Jesus saves completely, eternally, "to the uttermost" (*Heb. 7:25*). The salvation that Jesus provides is total and final. It reaches the innermost aspects of human nature (*Heb. 4:12, Heb. 9:14, Heb. 10:1–4*). Jesus' intercession before God involves all the benefits granted under the new covenant.

It includes much more than the forgiveness of sins, too. It implies putting the law in our hearts, making us new people in Him, and leading us to the dissemination of the gospel to the world (*Heb. 8:10–12*). As one with God and with human beings, He represents us before the Father. As One who offered His life as a sacrifice, Jesus has unwavering favor before God.

Read Hebrews 7:22. What is Jesus in relation to the new covenant?

Jesus is the surety of the new covenant because God swore an oath that Jesus would be a priest "forever" (*Heb. 7:21*). It is very easy to fail to understand the importance of this oath. Paul already had referred to the oaths God made to the desert generation and to Abraham (*Heb. 3:7–11, Heb. 6:13–15*). The difference between those oaths and the oath that God has sworn to the Son is that those oaths were made to mortal human beings. Oaths stay in force as long as the beneficiaries are alive. God's oaths to the desert generation and to Abraham were binding as long as there was a desert generation and there were descendants of Abraham (*see Gal. 3:29*).

In the case of the Son, however, whose life is "indestructible," the oath God made to Him will be binding forever. A person who stood in surety or guarantee of another was liable to the same penalties as the person for whom he stood in surety, including death. Yet, the Father established Jesus as a guarantee to us that He will not default on His promises. That's how certain we can be of the salvation that we have been given in Jesus.

A Sinless Priest

Read Hebrews 7:26. What are the five characteristics of Jesus in this passage?

Jesus was “holy.” This means that Jesus was without fault in relationship to God (*Heb. 2:18; Heb. 4:15; Heb. 5:7, 8*). The Old Greek translation of the Old Testament used the same Greek term to designate those who maintain their covenant relationship with God and with others.

Jesus was “undefiled.” He remained pure and untouched by evil, despite being tempted in “all points” (*Heb. 4:15, Heb. 2:18*). Jesus’ perfect sinlessness is important for His priesthood. The old covenant stipulated that sacrificial victims had to be “without blemish” to be acceptable to God (*Lev. 1:3, 10, etc.*). Jesus’ perfect obedience during His earthly life made it possible for Him to offer Himself as an acceptable sacrifice to God (*Heb. 9:14*).

Jesus was “separated from sinners” when He ascended to heaven. The Greek verb tense suggests that this is a present state for Jesus, which began at a specific point in time. Jesus endured hostility from sinners during His earthly life, but He was victorious and then was seated at the right hand of God (*Heb. 12:2, 3*). Jesus also is “separate from sinners” in that He was perfectly sinless (*Heb. 4:15*).

Jesus was “exalted . . . above the heavens” (*ESV*). It means that Jesus has been exalted above everything there is and, therefore, He is one with God. In the Psalms, God is the One who is “exalted above the heavens” (*Ps. 57:5, 11; Ps. 108:5*).

Jesus was fully human, but He was not a sinful human being, as we are (*Heb. 2:14–16, Heb. 4:15*). Jesus is perfect, not simply because He never sinned but because He was not corrupted by sin as we are.

Yet, because He also was fully human, He also is our Example. He shows us how to run the race of life (*Heb. 12:1–4*). He is the example that we must follow (*1 Pet. 2:21–23*). Because He is “holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners” (*Heb. 7:26, ESV*), He is our Savior, and we, too, can reflect His character.

Though Jesus was a human being, like us, He never sinned. How do we wrap our minds around this amazing thought? Think about just how holy He must be! Why, then, should the promise of His holiness being credited to us by faith help assure us of salvation?

Further Thought: “Christ is watching. He knows all about our burdens, our dangers, and our difficulties; and He fills His mouth with arguments in our behalf. He fits His intercessions to the needs of each soul, as He did in the case of Peter. . . . Our Advocate fills His mouth with arguments to teach His tried, tempted ones to brace against Satan’s temptations. He interprets every movement of the enemy. He orders events.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 931 (letter 90, 1906).

“It was Satan’s purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen. In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. . . . This is the pledge that God will fulfill His word. ‘Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder.’ God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son, and has carried the same into the highest heaven. It is the ‘Son of man’ who shares the throne of the universe. It is the ‘Son of man’ whose name shall be called, ‘Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.’ Isaiah 9:6. The I AM is the Daysman between God and humanity, laying His hand upon both. He who is ‘holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners,’ is not ashamed to call us brethren. Hebrews 7:26; 2:11. In Christ the family of earth and the family of heaven are bound together. Christ glorified is our brother. Heaven is enshrined in humanity, and humanity is enfolded in the bosom of Infinite Love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 25, 26.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ The first quotation above says, “He [Jesus] fills His mouth with arguments in our behalf.” What does that promise mean to you? Think about what this teaches us about God’s love for us. Why is this idea so encouraging? Why do we need someone arguing in our behalf?
- ❷ The second quotation above says that “in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen.” What does that mean? How can we experience that closeness, and what comfort can you draw from that experience? In class, describe what this closeness means and what it is like to experience it. How do His “arguments in our behalf” help us have this experience?

Brave Missionary

By DAISY JUNG

I always was a coward.

When I first moved into an academy dormitory in South Korea, I had to listen to Christian music to fall asleep at night. When some unkind students robbed me of 10,000 South Korean won (about US\$10) in the bathroom at the train station, I was scared to enter the train station's bathroom again.

My fears peaked when I served for a year as a student missionary in the rural Philippines. Young men who were curious about me—a young foreign woman—gathered around my candlelit house at night, whistling and sometimes peering into the windows. I began to suffer insomnia and could fall asleep only at dawn after listening to Christian music and reading the Bible.

My anxiety followed me to southern Asia, where I now live with my husband and two sons. Many times my husband watched me carefully check my surroundings on buses or trains before closing my eyes to sleep.

“Daisy,” he said, “I’m really curious how a person as scared as you ever signed up to be a missionary.”

It was true. I was a coward missionary. I preferred to stay in safe places.

But something changed my mind. One day, my sons and I were discussing war over a meal. I told the boys that many wars were going on around the world, and seven-year-old Saint, who has many fears like his mother, asked with interest, “Mom, then we can’t go to places like that as missionaries, right?”

“Yes, we can’t go to dangerous places,” I said.

“Then does that mean that people there don’t know Jesus?” Saint asked.

“Yes, many people are dying without knowing Jesus.”

Saint said firmly, “Mom, then let’s go to those places. Let’s go there and be missionaries.”

How could I object to such conviction? “Let’s do that someday,” I agreed.

Deep down in my heart, however, I had many questions. I wondered: *I’m here as a missionary, but am I too worried about myself? I say I believe in God, but do I trust Him only when I feel that my own safety is secure?*

My daily prayers have changed since that conversation with my sons. Now I pray, “God, please give me a mighty faith. Give me a heart and a faith to love people, to go near them, and to take care of them that is bigger than my fears about my safety.”



This mission story illustrates Mission Objective Number 1 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan: “To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors but every church member, young and old, in the joy of witnessing for Christ and making disciples.” Learn more at IWillGo2020.org.

Jesus, *the Anchor of the Soul*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 6:4–6, Matt. 16:24, Rom. 6:6, Heb. 10:26–29, Heb. 6:9–13, Heb. 6:17–20.*

Memory Text: “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both secure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek” (*Hebrews 6:19, 20, NKJV*).

Hebrews 5:11–6:20 interrupts the theological exposition about Jesus’ priesthood in our behalf. Paul inserts there a severe warning about the danger of falling away from Christ.

Apparently, the people were in real danger of going down the slippery slope of self-pity and faithlessness. The apostle Paul is concerned that his readers and hearers may have had their spiritual senses dulled because of the difficult situations they were facing, and thus they had stopped growing in their understanding and experience of the gospel.

Is not this a potential danger for us all, getting discouraged because of trials, and thus falling away?

The severe warning culminates, however, in an affectionate encouragement. Paul expresses faith in his readers and exalts Jesus as the embodiment of God’s unbreakable promise of salvation to them (*Heb. 6:9–20*). This cycle of warning and encouragement is repeated in Hebrews 10:26–39.

We will study this cycle and focus on the strong words of encouragement that Jesus provides for us.

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

Tasting the Goodness of the Word

Read Hebrews 6:4, 5. What were believers given in Christ while they were faithful to Him?

To have been “enlightened” means to have experienced conversion (*Heb. 10:32*). It refers to those who have turned from the “darkness” of the power of Satan to the “light” of God (*Acts 26:17, 18*). It implies deliverance from sin (*Eph. 5:11*) and ignorance (*1 Thess. 5:4, 5*). The verbal form here suggests that this enlightening is an act of God achieved through Jesus, “the brightness of His glory” (*Heb. 1:3, NKJV*).

To “have tasted the heavenly gift” and “have become partakers of the Holy Spirit” (*NKJV*) are synonymous expressions. The “gift” of God may refer to His grace (*Rom. 5:15*) or to the Holy Spirit, through whom God imparts that grace (*Acts 2:38*). Those who have “tasted” the Holy Spirit (*John 7:37–39, 1 Cor. 12:13*) have experienced the “grace” of God, which includes the power to fulfill His will (*Gal. 5:22, 23*).

To taste “the goodness of the word of God” (*Heb. 6:5, ESV*) is to experience personally the truth of the gospel (*1 Pet. 2:2, 3*). “The powers of the age to come” refers to the miracles God will perform for believers in the future: resurrection (*John 5:28, 29*), transformation of our bodies, and eternal life. Believers, however, are beginning to “taste” them in the present. They have experienced a spiritual resurrection (*Col. 2:12, 13*), a renewed mind (*Rom. 12:2*), and eternal life in Christ (*John 5:24*).

Paul probably has in mind the wilderness generation, who experienced the grace of God and His salvation. The wilderness generation was “enlightened” by the pillar of fire (*Neh. 9:12, 19; Ps. 105:39*), enjoyed the heavenly gift of manna (*Exod. 16:15*), experienced the Holy Spirit (*Neh. 9:20*), tasted the “good word of God” (*Josh. 21:45*), and “the powers of the age to come” in the “wonders and signs” performed in their deliverance from Egypt (*Acts 7:36*). Paul suggests, however, that just as the wilderness generation apostatized from God, despite those evidences (*Num. 14:1–35*), the audience of Hebrews was in danger of doing the same, despite all the evidences of God’s favor that they had enjoyed.

What has been your own experience with the things that these verses in Hebrews have talked about? For instance, how have you experienced the enlightening that the text refers to?

Impossible to Restore

Compare Hebrews 6:4–6, Matthew 16:24, Romans 6:6, Galatians 2:20, Galatians 5:24, and Galatians 6:14. What does this comparison suggest about what it means to crucify Christ?

The original text in Greek emphasizes the word “impossible.” It is impossible for God to restore those who have “fallen away” because “they are crucifying once again the Son of God” (*Heb. 6:6, ESV*). Paul wants to stress that *there is no other way of salvation except through Christ (Acts 4:12)*. Salvation by any other means is as impossible as it is “for God to lie” (*Heb. 6:18*) or to please God “without faith” (*Heb. 11:6*).

To crucify again the Son of God is a figurative expression that seeks to describe something that happens in the personal relationship between Jesus and the believer.

When the religious leaders crucified Jesus, they did it because Jesus posed a threat to their supremacy and autonomy. Thus, they hoped to eliminate Jesus as a person and destroy a powerful and dangerous enemy. Similarly, the gospel challenges the sovereignty and self-determination of the individual at the most fundamental level. The essence of Christian life is to take up the cross and deny oneself (*Matt. 16:24*). This means to crucify “the world” (*Gal. 6:14*), the “old man” (*Rom. 6:6*), and “the flesh with its passions and desires” (*Gal. 5:24, ESV*). The purpose of the Christian life is that we undergo a kind of death. Unless we experience this death to self, we cannot receive the new life God wants to give us (*Rom. 6:1–11*).

The struggle between Jesus and self is a struggle to the death (*Rom. 8:7, 8; Gal. 5:17*). It is a difficult battle that is not won at once. This passage does not refer to the person who sometimes fails in the battle against the “old man” and the “flesh.” This sin refers to the person who, after having experienced genuine salvation and what it implies (*Heb. 6:4, 5*), decides that Jesus is a threat to the kind of life he or she wants to have and moves to kill their relationship with Him. That is, as long as the person does not fully choose to turn away from Christ, there is still the hope of salvation.

What does it mean to die to “self,” to take up the “cross”? What is the thing that you find most difficult to hand over to the dominion of Christ?

No Sacrifice for Sins Left

The warning of Hebrews 6:4–6 is very similar to the warning found in Hebrews 10:26–29. Paul explains that the rejection of Jesus’ sacrifice will leave the readers without any means for the forgiveness of sin because there is no other means for that forgiveness besides Jesus (*Heb. 10:1–14*).

Read Hebrews 10:26–29. In what three ways does the author describe the sin for which there is no forgiveness?

The author does not say that there is no atonement for any sin committed after receiving the knowledge of truth. God has appointed Jesus as our Advocate (*1 John 2:1*). Through Him we have forgiveness of sins (*1 John 1:9*). The sin for which there is no sacrifice or atonement is described as trampling underfoot the Son of God, profaning the blood of the Covenant, and outraging the Holy Spirit (*Heb. 10:29*). Let’s review the meaning of these expressions.

The expression “trampled the Son of God underfoot” (*Heb. 10:29, NKJV*) describes the rejection of Jesus’ rule. The title “Son of God” reminded the audience that God has installed Jesus at His right hand and promised to make His enemies “a footstool” for His feet (*Heb. 1:13; see also Heb. 1:5–12, 14, ESV*). The trampling of Jesus underfoot implies that the apostate has treated Jesus as an enemy. In the context of the argument of the epistle (*Heb. 1:13*), it could be implied that, as far as the life of the apostate is concerned, Jesus has been taken off the throne (which is occupied now by the apostate himself) and set as the footstool instead. This is what Lucifer wanted to do in heaven (*Isa. 14:12–14*) and what the “lawless one” would attempt to do in the future (*2 Thess. 2:3, 4, NRSV*).

The expression “has profaned the blood of the covenant” refers to the rejection of Jesus’ sacrifice (*Heb. 9:15–22*). It implies that the blood of Jesus is devoid of cleansing power.

The expression “insulted the Spirit of grace” is very powerful. The Greek term *enybrisas* (“insult, outrage”) involves the manifestation of hubris, which refers to “insolence” or “arrogance.” This term stands in stark contrast to the description of the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of grace.” It implies that the apostate has responded to God’s offer of grace with an insult.

The apostate is in an untenable position. He rejects Jesus, His sacrifice, and the Holy Spirit.

Better Things

After the strong and sincere warning of Hebrews 6:4–8, Paul expresses confidence that the readers have neither fallen away from the Son, nor will they in the future. He believes that his audience will receive the warning and produce the appropriate fruits. They are like the “earth,” which is cultivated by God and produces the fruits He expects. These people will receive the blessing from God (*Heb. 6:7*), which is “salvation” (*Heb. 6:9*).

Read Hebrews 6:9–12. List the good things that the audience has done and continues to do, and explain what they mean.

Believers show their love toward God’s “name,” that is, toward God Himself, by their service to the saints. These were not isolated actions in the past, but sustained actions that have extended into the present. Exceptional acts do not reveal the true character of a person. The weightiest evidence of love toward God is not “religious” acts per se, but acts of love toward fellow human beings, especially those who are disadvantaged (*Matt. 10:42, Matt. 25:31–46*). Thus, Paul exhorts believers not to “forget” to do good (*Heb. 13:2, 16*).

Look at Hebrews 6:12. It warns against becoming “dull” or “sluggish” (*ESV*), which characterizes those who fail to mature and who are in danger of falling away (*Heb. 5:11, Heb. 6:12*). Hope is not kept alive by intellectual exercises of faith, but by faith expressed in acts of love (*Rom. 13:8–10*).

Paul wants the readers to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. He already has presented the wilderness generation as a negative example of those who, through lack of faith and perseverance, failed to inherit what was promised. He then presents Abraham (*Heb. 6:13–15*) as an example of one who through “faith and patience” inherited the promises. The list of positive exemplars is lengthened with the people of faith in Hebrews 11, and it climaxes with Jesus in Hebrews 12 as the greatest example of faith and patience (*Heb. 12:1–4*). In Revelation 14:12, faith, patience, and commandment keeping are characteristics of the saints in the last days.

Sometimes we have to give words of warning to those people whom we love. What can we learn from the apostle regarding warning and encouraging others?

Jesus, the Anchor of the Soul

Paul culminates his warning against apostasy and encouragement toward love and faith with a beautiful, soaring exposition of assurance in Christ.

Read Hebrews 6:17–20. How did God guarantee His promises to us?

God guaranteed His promises for us in several ways. First, God guaranteed His promise with an oath (*Heb. 6:17*). According to Scripture, God's oaths to Abraham and David became the ultimate basis of confidence in God's permanent favor toward Israel. When Moses sought to secure God's forgiveness for Israel after the apostasy with the golden calf, he referred to God's oath to Abraham (*see Exod. 32:11–14, Gen. 22:16–18*). The implied strength of his plea was that God's oath was irrevocable (*Rom. 9:4; Rom. 11:28, 29*).

Similarly, when the psalmist interceded before God for Israel, he claimed God's oath to David. God had said: “ ‘I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies’ ” (*Ps. 89:34–37, ESV*). According to the New Testament, both oaths were fulfilled in Jesus, the seed of Abraham, who ascended and was seated on the throne of David (*Gal. 3:13–16; Luke 1:31–33, 54, 55*).

Second, God has guaranteed His promises to us by the act of seating Jesus at His right hand. Jesus' ascension has the purpose of corroborating the promise made to the believers because Jesus ascended as a “*forerunner* on our behalf” (*Heb. 6:20, ESV*). Thus, the Ascension reveals to us the certainty of God's salvation for us. God led Jesus to glory through the suffering of “death for everyone,” so that He might bring “many children to glory” (*Heb. 2:9, 10, NRSV*). Jesus' presence before the Father is the “anchor of the soul” (*Heb. 6:19*), which has been fastened to the throne of God. The honor of God's rule has been waged on the fulfillment of His promise to us through Jesus. What more assurance do we need?

What do you feel when you think about the fact that God has made an oath to you? Why should that thought alone help give you assurance of salvation, even when you feel unworthy?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “John the Beloved,” pp. 539–545, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; “Judas,” pp. 716–722, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 43.

“John desired to become like Jesus, and under the transforming influence of the love of Christ he did become meek and lowly. Self was hid in Jesus. Above all his companions, John yielded himself to the power of that wondrous life. . . .

“It was John’s deep love for Christ which led him always to desire to be close by His side. The Saviour loved all the Twelve, but John’s was the most receptive spirit. He was younger than the others, and with more of the child’s confiding trust he opened his heart to Jesus. Thus he came more into sympathy with Christ, and through him the Saviour’s deepest spiritual teaching was communicated to the people. . . .

“The beauty of holiness which had transformed him shone with a Christlike radiance from his countenance. In adoration and love he beheld the Saviour until likeness to Christ and fellowship with Him became his one desire, and in his character was reflected the character of his Master.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 544, 545.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ The lives of John, the beloved disciple, and Judas Iscariot provide an important contrast. When Jesus saw John and his brother, He called them Boanerges, sons of thunder. John had grave defects. Judas also had defects, but they were not more dramatic or serious than John’s. Why did John come to be transformed into the image of Jesus while Judas committed the sin against the Holy Spirit? What was the difference?
- ❷ Jesus invites believers to take up their crosses and follow Him. What is the difference between taking the cross and submitting to abuse from others?
- ❸ Why does God require a total surrender of our lives to Him? What is the relationship between free will and salvation?

Sugar Shock

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Oung, a sugar factory worker in Laos, was baptized, but he lost interest in Jesus after about three years. The pastor visited him at home with an invitation to return to church to worship on Sabbath.

“Yes, I will come,” Oung promised. But he didn’t.

When the pastor returned to invite him again, Oung explained that he had missed church services because a friend had stopped by his house unexpectedly.

“I’ll come next Sabbath,” he said. But he didn’t.

When the pastor returned again, Oung explained that his bicycle had broken down. The pastor visited many times, and Oung always had an excuse. Church members prayed, and the pastor kept inviting him. But Oung seemed to drift farther away from Jesus.

After some time, he started to drink and cause problems at home. He often beat his older sister, leaving bruises on her face, arms, and legs. His sister, a faithful church member, finally had to move out of the house, leaving him with his wife and children. The sister came to church with tears in her eyes. She loved her brother. “Please don’t stop praying for Oung,” she said.

One day, while Oung was working at the sugar factory, he climbed a steel ladder to fetch sugar from a giant steel container.

The activity was a normal part of his job. But on this day, an electric wire connected to the steel container malfunctioned. As he reached out his hands to grasp the top edge of the container, a shock of electricity coursed through his hands and body.

The electric current welded him to the container. He couldn’t remove his hands from the edge. At that moment, he thought of his family.

Then he remembered God. “God, please help me!” he prayed.

Suddenly, the electric current stopped, and he fell down to the floor.

Only one thought filled his mind: *God has given me a new life to live again.* Oung should have died, but he was alive. His left hand was burned badly in the incident, but otherwise he was fine.

Villagers couldn’t believe that he was still alive.

Oung told his wife that he planned to recommit his life to Jesus. “I must go back to church for God has given me a new life,” he said. “I must be a witness for Him because I should have died but I am alive. I must go back to Him.”

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel to people in Laos and other countries of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, which will receive this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

Jesus, *the* Mediator of *the* New Covenant



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 7:11–19; Heb. 8:10–12; Jer. 31:31–34; Heb. 8:1–6; Exod. 24:1–8; Ezek. 36:26, 27.*

Memory Text: “But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises” (*Hebrews 8:6, ESV*).

By living a perfect life, and then by dying in our place, Jesus mediated a new, better covenant between us and God. Through His death, Jesus canceled the penalty of death that our trespasses demanded and made possible the new covenant.

This truth is explained in *Hebrews 10:5–10*, which identifies Jesus as having manifested the perfect obedience required by the covenant. It references *Psalm 40*, referring to the Messiah's desire to render to God total obedience: “ ‘Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart’ ” (*Ps. 40:7, 8, ESV*). “In the original context this phrase [‘to do your will’] described moral obedience to the will of God. The author of *Hebrews* uses the phrase to show that the sacrifice of Christ fulfilled the will of God in providing an acceptable atonement, which the animal sacrifices had not provided.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 460.

For Paul, this psalm acquired special significance with the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus embodied the obedience of the new covenant. He is our Example. We have been saved, not only because of His death but also because of His perfect obedience.

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

The Need of a New Covenant

Read Hebrews 7:11–19. Why was a new covenant needed?

According to Hebrews, the fact that Jesus was appointed Priest according to the order of Melchizedek implied that a new covenant had been inaugurated. The old covenant had been given on the basis of the Levitical priesthood (*Heb. 7:11, NASB*). The Levitical priests acted as mediators between God and Israel, and the law excluded anyone else from the priesthood. The author concludes, then, that a change of priesthood implies a change of the law of the priesthood, as well as the change of the covenant (*Heb. 7:12, 18, 19*).

The issue with the old covenant was that it could not provide perfection (*Heb. 7:11*). Paul is talking about the Levitical priesthood and its ministry (sacrifices, feasts, etc.). The animal sacrifices offered through them could not provide true, total cleansing from sin, or access to God (*Heb. 10:1–4; Heb. 9:13, 14; Heb. 10:19–23*).

The fact that a new covenant was necessary does not mean that God was unfair with Israel when He gave them the old covenant. The Levitical ministry and the services of the tabernacle were designed to protect them from idolatry and also to point them to Jesus' future ministry. Hebrews stresses that the sacrifices were "a shadow of the good things to come" (*Heb. 10:1, NKJV*).

By pointing them to Jesus, the sacrifices should have helped the people put their hope and faith in "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (*John 1:29, NKJV; compare with Isaiah 53*). This is the same point that Paul makes when he says that the law was "our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith" (*Gal. 3:24, NASB*) or that "Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (*Rom. 10:4, NIV*).

In other words, even the Ten Commandments, as good and perfect as they are, cannot provide salvation (*Rom. 3:20–28, Rom. 7:12–14*). They provide a perfect standard of righteousness, but they do not provide righteousness, any more than looking in a mirror can erase the wrinkles of age. For perfect righteousness, we need Jesus as our Substitute.

Why can't the law save us? After all, if we keep all the commandments, and keep them well—even flawlessly—why shouldn't that save us?

New and Renewed

Compare Hebrews 8:10–12 with Deuteronomy 6:4–6, Deuteronomy 30:11–14, and Jeremiah 31:31–34. What does this teach us about the nature of the new covenant?

The promise of a new covenant in Hebrews refers back to Jeremiah. According to Jeremiah, God's promise of a new covenant was, in fact, a renewal of the covenant that He had first made with Israel through Moses (*Jer. 31:31–34*). It could be argued, then, that Jeremiah 31 was not strictly speaking of a “new” covenant but of a “renewal” of the original covenant with Israel. In fact, the Hebrew word for new, *hadashah*, can have both the sense of “renew” and “brand new.”

The issue with the old covenant was that the people broke it (*Heb. 8:8, 9*). The covenant was not faulty; the people were. If Israel had seen through the symbols to the coming Messiah and put their faith in Him, the covenant would not have been broken. Yet, to be fair, there were many believers throughout Israelite history in whom the purposes of the covenant were fulfilled and who had the law in their hearts (*Ps. 37:31, Ps. 40:8, Ps. 119:11, Isa. 51:7*).

While the new covenant is a renewal of the old covenant, there is a sense in which it is, indeed, new. Jeremiah's promise of a “new covenant” did not simply envision a renewal of the conditions that existed before the exile, which had been broken and renewed several times because the nation had lapsed several times into apostasy. And that's because the people were simply unwilling to keep up their end of the covenant with God (*Jer. 13:23*).

Instead, God promised to do a “new thing” (*Jer. 31:22*). The covenant would not be like the covenant that God had made “with their fathers” (*Jer. 31:32*). Because of the unfaithfulness of the people, the promises that God made under the Mosaic covenant were never fulfilled. Now, in virtue of the guarantee given by the Son (*Heb. 7:22*), God would fulfill the purposes of His covenant. God did not change His law or lower His standards; instead, He sent His Son as a guarantee of the covenant promises (*Heb. 7:22, Heb. 6:18–20*). This is why this covenant does not have curses. It has only blessings because Jesus fulfilled it perfectly, becoming a curse for us (*Gal. 3:13*).

Read 2 Timothy 2:13. What can we learn from God's faithfulness to His people and to His plans as we consider our relationships with others and our plans?

The New Covenant Has a Better Mediator

Read Hebrews 8:1–6. Why is Jesus a better Mediator of the covenant?

The Greek term *mesitēs* (mediator) derives from *mesos* (“middle”) and denotes the one who walks or stands in the middle. It was a technical term that referred to a person who fulfilled one or more of the following functions: (1) an arbiter between two or more parties, (2) a negotiator or business broker, (3) a witness in the legal sense of the word, or (4) one who stands as a surety and, thus, guarantees the execution of an agreement.

The English term “mediator” is too narrow a translation for *mesitēs* in Hebrews because it focuses only on the first two or three uses of the Greek term. Hebrews, however, emphasizes the fourth function. Jesus is not conceived of as “mediator” in the sense that He settles a dispute between the Father and humans or as a peacemaker who reconciles parties in disaffection or as a witness who certifies the existence of a contract or its satisfaction. Instead, as Hebrews explains, Jesus is the *Guarantor* (or *Surety*) of the new covenant (*Heb. 7:22*). In Hebrews, the term “mediator” is equivalent to “guarantor.” He guarantees that the covenant promises will be fulfilled.

Christ’s death makes the institution of the new covenant possible because it satisfies the claims of the first covenant with Israel (and even with the first humans in Eden), which had been broken (*Heb. 9:15–22*). In this sense, Jesus is the Guarantor who took upon Himself all the legal obligations of the covenant that had been broken. In another sense, Jesus’ exaltation in heaven guarantees that God’s promises to human beings will be fulfilled (*Heb. 6:19, 20*). Jesus guarantees the covenant because He has shown that God’s promises are true. By resurrecting Jesus and seating Him at His right hand, the Father has shown that He will resurrect us and also bring us to Him.

Jesus is a greater Mediator than Moses because He ministers in the heavenly sanctuary and has offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for us (*Heb. 8:1–5, Heb. 10:5–10*). Moses’ face reflected the glory of God (*Exod. 34:29–35*), but Jesus is the glory of God (*Heb. 1:3, John 1:14*). Moses spoke with God face to face (*Exod. 33:11*), but Jesus is God’s Word personified (*Heb. 4:12, 13; John 1:1–3, 14*).

Yes, Christ has satisfied the demands of the covenant for obedience. In this light, what is the role of obedience in our life, and why is it still so important?

The New Covenant Has Better Promises

We may be tempted to think that the new covenant has “better promises” in the sense that it has greater rewards than the old covenant had (a heavenly homeland, eternal life, etc.). The truth is that God offered the same rewards to Old Testament believers as He has offered us (*read Heb. 11:10, 13–16*). In Hebrews 8:6, the “better promises” refer to *different* kinds of promises.

The covenant between God and Israel was a formal exchange of promises between God and Israel. God took the initiative and delivered Israel from Egypt and promised to lead them into the Promised Land.

Compare Exodus 24:1–8 and Hebrews 10:5–10. What are the similarities and differences between these two promises?

The covenant between God and Israel was ratified with blood. This blood was sprinkled both over and beneath the altar. The people of Israel promised to obey all that the Lord had spoken.

“The condition of eternal life is now just what it always has been,—just what it was in Paradise before the fall of our first parents,—perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness. If eternal life were granted on any condition short of this, then the happiness of the whole universe would be imperiled. The way would be open for sin, with all its train of woe and misery, to be immortalized.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 62.

God satisfies the absolute demands of the new covenant for us because He gave His own Son to come and live a perfect life so that the promises of the covenant might be fulfilled in Him, and then offered to us, by faith in Jesus. Jesus’ obedience guarantees the covenant promises (*Heb. 7:22*). It first requires that God give Him the blessings of the covenant, which are then given to us. Indeed, those who are “in Christ” will enjoy those promises with Him. Second, God gives us His Holy Spirit to empower us to fulfill His law.

Christ has satisfied the demands of the covenant; therefore, the fulfillment of God’s promises to us is not in doubt. How does this help you understand the meaning of 2 Corinthians 1:20–22? What wonderful hope is found here for us?

The New Covenant Has Solved the Problem of the Heart

Compare the new covenant promises of Jeremiah 31:33 and Ezekiel 36:26, 27. How are they related?

The first covenant document was written by God on tablets of stone and was deposited in the ark of the covenant as an important witness of God's covenant with His people (*Exod. 31:18, Deut. 10:1–4*). Documents written in stone, however, could be broken; and scrolls, as Jeremiah had experienced, could be cut up and burned (*Jer. 36:23*).

But in the new covenant God now will write His law in the hearts of the people. The heart refers to the mind, the organ of memory and understanding (*Jer. 3:15, Deut. 29:4*), and especially to the place where conscious decisions are made (*Jer. 3:10, Jer. 29:13*).

This promise did not simply secure access to and knowledge of the law for everyone. It also, and more important, was to bring about a change in the heart of the nation. The problem of Israel was that their sin was engraved “with a pen of iron . . . with a point of diamond . . . on the tablet of their heart” (*Jer. 17:1, NKJV*). They had a stubborn heart (*Jer. 13:10, Jer. 23:17*); therefore, it was impossible for them to do the right thing (*Jer. 13:23*).

Jeremiah did not announce a change of the law, because the problem of Israel was not the law but the heart. God wanted Israel's faithfulness to be a grateful response to what He had done for them; thus, He gave the Ten Commandments to them with a historical prologue, expressing His love and care for them (*Exod. 20:1, 2*). God wanted Israel to obey His laws as an acknowledgment that He wanted the best for them, a truth revealed in their great deliverance from Egypt. Their obedience was to be an expression of gratitude, a manifestation of the reality of their relationship.

The same is true today for us. Jesus' love and care in dying for us is the prologue of the new covenant (*Luke 22:20*). True obedience comes from the heart as an expression of love (*Matt. 22:34–40*). This love is the distinguishing mark of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. God pours His love on us through His Spirit (*Rom. 5:5*), the reception of whom is expressed by love (*Gal. 5:22*).

If ancient Israel was to love God, even without the understanding of Christ's death, why shouldn't we love God even more than they did? How does obedience make manifest the reality of that love?

Further Thought: “If our hearts are renewed in the likeness of God, if the divine love is implanted in the soul, will not the law of God be carried out in the life? When the principle of love is implanted in the heart, when man is renewed after the image of Him that created him, the new-covenant promise is fulfilled, ‘I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.’ Hebrews 10:16. And if the law is written in the heart, will it not shape the life? Obedience—the service and allegiance of love—is the true sign of discipleship. Thus the Scripture says, ‘This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.’ ‘He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.’ 1 John 5:3; 2:4. Instead of releasing man from obedience, it is faith, and faith only, that makes us partakers of the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience. . . .

“The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature. This is evidence that Satan’s delusions have lost their power; that the vivifying influence of the Spirit of God is arousing you.

“No deep-seated love for Jesus can dwell in the heart that does not realize its own sinfulness. The soul that is transformed by the grace of Christ will admire His divine character; but if we do not see our own moral deformity, it is unmistakable evidence that we have not had a view of the beauty and excellence of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 60, 64, 65.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Think about the statements of Ellen G. White above. What does the fact that the closer we come to Christ the more sinful we will appear in our own eyes tell us about how we must not let the realization of our own defects cause us to give up faith in despair?
- ② Dwell more on the idea that the law is being written in our hearts. What does that mean for the spiritual life of a Christian? How could understanding and experiencing this truth help us avoid the kind of “obedience” that is really only legalism, obedience that has been called “dead works” (*Heb. 9:14*)?

Sabbath or Scholarship?

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

It was an offer the Seventh-day Adventist girl could not refuse: a full scholarship to study at a private non-Christian school.

Malevelev grew up in an Adventist home and had been taught to remember God in all her decisions. She planned to enter Taiwan Adventist Academy when she finished sixth grade. Then recruiters from a private school showed up in her village and offered her a full scholarship.

Tuition was high at Taiwan Adventist Academy, and it would be difficult for her parents to afford it. They asked the girl to go to the private school.

During summer vacation, Malevelev visited the school and saw she would be required to attend classes on Sabbath. She wouldn't be able to go to church to worship God. A conflict erupted within her: Should she accept the scholarship or keep the Sabbath? She knew she should choose the Sabbath.

At the end of the summer, Malevelev's parents insisted she go to the private school. The girl felt dreadfully discouraged, and she prayed fervently.

"God, help me," she prayed. "Show me what to do."

Taking courage, she spoke kindly but firmly to her parents. "I want to go to Taiwan Adventist Academy," she said. "I will not go to classes on Sabbath because I want to go to church."

She explained her desire to remain faithful to God by keeping all ten commandments, including the fourth, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (*Exodus 20:8, NKJV*).

"I don't want to betray the truth taught by my grandfather," she said.

Seeing the girl's determination, her parents allowed her to study at the Adventist academy. Malevelev has studied for five years at the school and is in the 11th grade. "I have wonderful teachers and classmates, and we are like a big family," she said. "I have made many Christian friends. We have morning and evening worship together, we pray together, and we study together. I cherish every moment at the school."

Malevelev is hopeful for the future. "I know God will lead me and fulfill His wonderful plan for me," she said. "When you need to make an important decision, believe in God and choose according to His will and pleasure. I encourage myself with [Ecclesiastes 12:1] all the time. Now I am sharing my secret with you, and may God bless you."



This mission story illustrates the following components of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: Spiritual Growth Objective Number 7, "To help youth and young adults place God first and exemplify a biblical worldview." Learn more about the strategic plan at IWillGo2020.org.

Jesus, *the* Perfect Sacrifice



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 9:15, Gen. 15:6–21, Jer. 34:8–22, Eph. 3:14–19, Heb. 7:27, Heb. 10:10, Heb. 9:22–28.*

Memory Text: “For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (*Hebrews 10:14, NKJV*).

The idea that a man found guilty and executed on a cross should be worshiped as God was offensive to the ancient mind. Sparse reference to the cross in Roman literature shows their aversion to the idea. For the Jews, the law declared that a man impaled on a tree was cursed by God (*Deut. 21:23*).

Thus, the first motifs that we find in the Christian paintings of the catacombs were the peacock (supposedly symbolizing immortality), a dove, the athlete's victory palm, and the fish. Later, other themes appeared: Noah's ark; Abraham sacrificing the ram instead of Isaac; Daniel in the lions' den; Jonah being spit out by the fish; a shepherd carrying a lamb; or depictions of such miracles as the healing of the paralytic and the raising of Lazarus. These were symbols of salvation, victory, and care. The cross, on the other hand, conveyed a sense of defeat and shame. Yet, it was the cross that became the emblem of Christianity. In fact, Paul simply called the gospel “the word of the cross” (*1 Cor. 1:18, ESV*).

This week we will look at the cross as it appears in the book of Hebrews.

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

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Why Were Sacrifices Needed?

Hebrews 9:15 explains that the death of Jesus as a sacrifice had the purpose of providing “redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant,” in order that the people of God might “receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (*NASB*).

In the ancient Near East, a covenant between two persons or nations was a serious matter. It involved an exchange of promises under oath. It implied the assumption that the gods would punish those who broke the oath. Often, these covenants were ratified through the sacrifice of an animal.

For example, when God made a covenant with Abraham, the ceremony involved cutting animals in half (*Gen. 15:6–21*). The parties would walk between the parts as an acknowledgment that those animals represented the fate of the party who broke the covenant. Significantly, only God walked between the animals, for the purpose of communicating to Abraham that He would not break His promise.

Compare Genesis 15:6–21 and Jeremiah 34:8–22. What do these texts teach about the covenant?

The covenant with God gave Israel access to the Promised Land as their inheritance. It involved, however, a set of commandments and the sprinkling of blood upon an altar. This sprinkling implied the destiny of the party who broke the covenant. This is why Hebrews says that “without the shedding of blood there is no remission [of sins]” (*Heb. 9:22, literal translation*).

When Israel broke the covenant, God faced a painful dilemma. The covenant demanded the death of the transgressors, but God loved His people. If God should simply look the other way or refuse to punish the transgressors, His commandments would never be enforceable, and this world would descend into chaos.

The Son of God, however, offered Himself as a Substitute. He died in our place so that we “may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (*Heb. 9:15, 26, ESV; Rom. 3:21–26*). That is, He was going to uphold the sanctity of His law while at the same time saving those who broke that law. And He could do this only through the Cross.

How can we see here why the law is so central to the gospel message?

Diverse Kinds of Sacrifices

Jesus' death provided forgiveness, or remission, for our sins. The remission of our sins, however, involves much more than the cancellation of the penalty for our transgression of the covenant. It involves other elements just as important. That is why the Israelite sacrificial system had five different kinds of sacrifices. Each was necessary to express the richness of the meaning of the cross of Christ.

Read Ephesians 3:14–19. What was the prayer request of Paul in behalf of believers?

The *holocaust offering* (or burnt offering) required that the whole animal be consumed on the altar (*Leviticus 1*). It represented Jesus, whose life was consumed for us. Expiation required Jesus' total commitment to us. Even though He was equal with God, Jesus "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant" (*Phil. 2:5–8, ESV*).

The *grain offering* was a gift of gratitude for God's provision of sustenance for His people (*Leviticus 2*). It also represents Jesus, "the bread of life" (*John 6:35, 48*), through whom we have eternal life.

The *peace or fellowship offering* implied a communal meal with friends and family to celebrate the well-being provided by God (*Leviticus 3*). It represented Christ, whose sacrifice provided peace for us (*Isa. 53:5, Rom. 5:1, Eph. 2:14*). It also emphasizes that we need to participate in Jesus' sacrifice by eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood (*John 6:51–56*).

The *sin or purification offering* provided expiation for sins (*Lev. 4:1–5:13*). This sacrifice emphasized the role of the blood of the animal—which represented its life—to provide redemption from sins (*Lev. 17:11*) and pointed forward to the blood of Jesus who redeems us from our sins (*Matt. 26:28, Rom. 3:25, Heb. 9:14*).

The *guilt or reparation offering* (*Lev. 5:14–6:7*) provided forgiveness in cases where reparation or restitution was possible. It tells us that God's forgiveness does not free us from the responsibility to provide reparation or restitution, where possible, to those whom we have wronged.

The sanctuary sacrifices teach us that the experience of salvation is more than just accepting Jesus as our Substitute. We also need to "feed" on Him, share His benefits with others, and provide reparation to those whom we have wronged.

Jesus' Perfect Sacrifice

Read Hebrews 7:27 and Hebrews 10:10. How is Jesus' sacrifice described in these passages?

The Levitical priests—who were “many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office” (*Heb. 7:23, ESV*)—are contrasted with Jesus, who lives forever and has an eternal priesthood (*Heb. 7:24, 25*). Levitical priests “daily” (*Heb. 7:27*) and “every year” (*Heb. 9:25*) offered gifts and sacrifices “that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper” (*Heb. 9:9, ESV; Heb. 10:1–4*).

Jesus, however, offered Himself “once for all” a “single sacrifice” (*Heb. 10:10, 12–14, ESV*) that cleanses our consciences (*Heb. 9:14, Heb. 10:1–10*) and puts away sin (*Heb. 9:26*). Jesus' sacrifice is superior to the sacrifice of animals because Jesus was the Son of God (*Heb. 7:26–28*), who perfectly fulfilled God's will (*Heb. 10:5–10*).

The description of the sacrifice of Jesus as having occurred “once for all” has several important implications.

First, Jesus' sacrifice is perfectly effective and never to be surpassed. The sacrifices of the Levitical priests were repeated because they were not effective; otherwise “would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins?” (*Heb. 10:2, ESV*).

Second, all the different kinds of sacrifices of the Old Testament found their fulfillment at the cross. Thus, Jesus not only cleanses us from sin (*Heb. 9:14*), but He also provides sanctification (*Heb. 10:10–14*) by putting sin away from our lives (*Heb. 9:26*). Before the priests could approach God in the sanctuary and minister in behalf of their fellow human beings, they had to be cleansed and sanctified, or consecrated (*Leviticus 8, Leviticus 9*). Jesus' sacrifice cleanses us and consecrates us (*Heb. 10:10–14*) so that we may approach God with confidence (*Heb. 10:19–23*) and serve Him as “a royal priesthood” (*Heb. 9:14, 1 Pet. 2:9*).

Finally, Jesus' sacrifice also provides nourishment for our spiritual life. It provides an example that we need to observe and follow. Thus, Hebrews invites us to fix our eyes upon Jesus, especially the events of the cross, and follow His lead (*Heb. 12:1–4; Heb. 13:12, 13*).

The Cross is the basis for all the benefits that God bestows upon us. It provides purification from sin, sanctification to serve, and nourishment to grow. How can we better experience what we have been given in Jesus?

The Cross and the Cost of Forgiveness

Read Hebrews 9:22–28. What does this passage say about the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary?

The idea that the heavenly sanctuary needs cleansing makes sense in the context of the Old Testament sanctuary. The sanctuary is a symbol of God's government (*1 Sam. 4:4, 2 Sam. 6:2*), and the way God deals with the sin of His people affects the public perception of the righteousness of His government (*Ps. 97:2*). As ruler, God is the Judge of His people, and He is expected to be fair, vindicating the innocent and condemning the guilty. Thus, when God forgives the sinner, He carries judicial responsibility. The sanctuary, which represents God's character and administration, is contaminated. This explains why God bears our sins when He forgives (*Exod. 34:7, Num. 14:17–19*, the original Hebrew for "forgiving" [*nōśē*] in these verses means "carrying, bearing").

The system of sacrifices in the Israelite sanctuary illustrated this point. When a person sought forgiveness, he brought an animal as a sacrifice in his behalf, confessed his sins over it, and slaughtered it. The blood of the animal was daubed upon the horns of the altar or sprinkled before the veil in the temple in the first apartment. Thus, the sin was symbolically transferred into the sanctuary. God took the sins of the people and bore them Himself.

In the Israelite system, cleansing from, or atonement for, sins occurred in two phases. During the year, repentant sinners brought sacrifices to the sanctuary, which cleansed them from their sin but transferred the sin to the sanctuary, to God Himself. At the end of the year, on the Day of Atonement, which was the day of judgment, God would cleanse the sanctuary, clearing His judicial responsibility by transferring the sins from the sanctuary to the scapegoat, Azazel, who represented Satan (*Lev. 16:15–22*).

This two-phase system, represented by the two apartments in the earthly sanctuary, which were a pattern of the heavenly sanctuary (*Exod. 25:9, Heb. 8:5*), permitted God to show mercy and justice at the same time. Those who confessed their sins during the year showed loyalty to God by observing a solemn rest and afflicting themselves on the Day of Atonement (*Lev. 16:29–31*). Those who did not show loyalty would be "cut off" (*Lev. 23:27–32*).

Think of what you would face if you had to face the just punishment for your sins. How should that truth help you understand what Christ has done for you?

Judgment and the Character of God

Read Romans 3:21–26; Romans 1:16, 17; and Romans 5:8. What does Redemption in the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins reveal about God?

The forgiveness of our sins implies two phases in Jesus' mediation in the two apartments of the heavenly sanctuary. First, Jesus removed our sins and carried them Himself on the cross in order to provide forgiveness to everyone who believes in Him (*Acts 2:38, Acts 5:31*). On the cross, Jesus won the right to forgive anyone who believes in Him because He has carried their sin. He also has inaugurated a new covenant, which allows Him to put God's law in the heart of believers through the Holy Spirit (*Heb. 8:10–12, Ezek. 36:25–27*).

A second phase in the ministry of Jesus consists of a judgment, the pre-Advent judgment, which was still future from the point of view of Hebrews (*Heb. 2:1–4; Heb. 6:2; Heb. 9:27, 28; Heb. 10:25*). This judgment begins with God's people and is described in Daniel 7:9–27, Matthew 22:1–14, and Revelation 14:7. Its purpose is to show the righteousness of God in forgiving His people. In this judgment, the records of their lives will be open for the universe to see. God will show what happened in the hearts of believers and how they embraced Jesus as their Savior and accepted His Spirit in their lives.

Speaking of this judgment, Ellen G. White wrote: "Man cannot meet these charges himself. In his sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus our Advocate presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause and vanquishes their accuser by the mighty arguments of Calvary. His perfect obedience to God's law, even unto the death of the cross, has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims of His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man. . . . But while we should realize our sinful condition, we are to rely upon Christ as our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. We cannot answer the charges of Satan against us. Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 471, 472.

Why do the cross and the ministry of Jesus in our behalf suggest that we should look confidently, but with humility and repentance, toward the judgment?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Calvary,” pp. 741–757; “‘It Is Finished,’” pp. 758–764, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Professor Jiří Moskala has explained the nature of this pre-Advent judgment. God “is not there in order to display my sins like in a shop window. He will, on the contrary, point first of all to His amazing transforming powerful grace, and in front of the whole universe He, as the true Witness of my entire life, will explain my attitude toward God, my inner motives, my thinking, my deeds, my orientation and direction of life. He will demonstrate it all. Jesus will testify that I made many mistakes, that I transgressed His holy law, but also that I repented, asked for forgiveness, and was changed by His grace. He will proclaim: ‘My blood is sufficient for the sinner Moskala, his orientation of life is on Me, his attitude toward Me and other people is warm and unselfish, he is trustworthy, he is My good and faithful servant.’ ”—“Toward a Biblical Theology of God’s Judgment: A Celebration of the Cross in Seven Phases of Divine Universal Judgment,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15 (Spring 2004): p. 155.

“Both the redeemed and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song. It will be seen that the glory shining in the face of Jesus is the glory of self-sacrificing love. In the light from Calvary it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven; that the love which ‘seeketh not her own’ has its source in the heart of God; and that in the meek and lowly One is manifested the character of Him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 19, 20.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Human beings have always had the tendency to offer different kinds of sacrifices to God as an exchange for forgiveness or salvation. Some offer God heroic acts of penance (long journeys, etc.), others offer a life of service, or acts of self-deprivation, et cetera. How should these acts be considered in the light of Jesus’ sacrifice and the assertion of Scripture that the cross has put an end to all the sacrifices (*Dan. 9:27, Heb. 10:18*)?
- ② At the same time, what is the role of sacrifice in the life of the believer? What did Jesus mean when He said that we need to take our cross and follow Him (*Matt. 16:24*), or the apostle Paul when he said that we should offer our bodies as “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (*Rom. 12:1, ESV*)? What is the relationship between the instructions of Jesus (*Matt. 16:24*) and Paul (*Rom. 12:1*) and Hebrews 13:15, 16?

Gospel Calling

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Khamla, the breadwinner of his family, fell ill in rural Laos. His legs became so heavy that he could not walk. He was confined to his house for three months.

With no money to see a doctor, Khamla (not his real name) resorted to all sorts of herbal medicine and traditional healers, including the shaman, or spirit doctor, in his village. Nothing helped.

Finally, seeing his desperation, someone told him about a Seventh-day Adventist pastor who had helped many people by cell phone. The man called up Pastor Sadua Lee (pictured) and asked for help.

Now, it wasn't simply a phone call. Phone calls were something of a luxury, costing 700 Laotian kips (8 US cents) per minute. At the time, a third of the population was living on less than US\$1.25 a day, and nearly two-thirds were living on less than \$2 a day.

The ill man begged Pastor Sadua to heal him.

"I am nobody," the pastor replied. "I cannot heal you. But my God, who is called Jesus, can heal you if it is His will. All we have to do is ask Him."

Khamla requested prayer, and the pastor prayed for him over the phone.

The next day, the pastor called the man to offer prayer for him again. Khamla was so excited. "I can walk!" he exclaimed.

Although his legs were weak, he was able to walk for the first time in three months. He had already gone out to work on his farm.

"Your God is so powerful," he said. "How can I worship your God, who is called Jesus?"

The pastor told him that he could, and should, worship Jesus all the time and added that Jesus had set aside a special day for worship, the seventh-day Sabbath. The man agreed to stop work on Sabbath to worship Jesus. Seeing that he lived far from a church, he asked the pastor to help him worship on Sabbaths. That meant that the pastor would have to call every Sabbath—but he didn't mind. If Jesus could provide Khamla with healing, He also would provide the means to pay for the calls.

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel to people in Laos and other countries of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, which will receive this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.



This mission story illustrates Mission Objective Number 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions." Learn more at IWillGo2020.org.

Jesus Opens *the* Way Through *the* Veil



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 9:24; Exod. 19:3, 4; Heb. 12:18–21; Lev. 16:1, 2; Heb. 10:19–22; Col. 3:1.*

Memory Text: “For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (*Hebrews 9:24, NKJV*).

When the disciples returned from the Mount of Olives, right after Jesus had ascended to heaven, they were filled with joy and triumph. Their Master and Friend had ascended to a position of power over the world and had invited them to approach God in His name with the absolute confidence that God would respond favorably to their prayers (*John 14:13, 14*). Even though they continued in the world, attacked by the forces of evil, their hope was strong. They knew that Jesus had ascended to prepare a place for them (*John 14:1–3*). They knew that Jesus was the Captain of their salvation and that He had opened a way into the heavenly homeland through His blood.

The ascension of Jesus to heaven is central to the theology of Hebrews. It marks the beginning of Jesus' rule and the beginning of His High Priestly ministry in our behalf. And more important, Jesus' ascension marks the moment that the new covenant, which provides the means through which we can approach God boldly through faith, has been inaugurated. It is our privilege now to approach God with confidence through Jesus and the merits of His righteousness.

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

Jesus Before the Father

Read Hebrews 9:24. According to this passage, what was the purpose of Jesus' ascension to heaven?

God instructed Israel that their males should go three times every year up to Jerusalem to “appear before the Lord” with an offering. The appointed times were the feast of Passover (Unleavened Bread), the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of Booths (*Exod. 23:14–17, Deut. 16:16*). Passover celebrated Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Pentecost celebrated the barley harvest, and by the time of the New Testament, it was associated with the giving of the law at Sinai. The Feast of Booths celebrated God’s care for Israel during their sojourn in the desert. According to the New Testament, all the Old Testament feasts also have prophetic significance.

Hebrews 9:24 describes Jesus’ ascension into the presence of the Father. He arrived at the heavenly sanctuary, “the true one,” in order to “appear” before God with a better sacrifice (*Heb. 9:23, 24, NIV*)—His own blood.

Jesus fulfilled the pilgrimage feasts’ prophetic significance with amazing accuracy. He died on the day for the preparation of the Passover at the ninth hour, the moment in which Passover lambs were sacrificed (*John 19:14, Matt. 27:45–50*). Jesus was resurrected on the third day and ascended to heaven to receive assurance that His sacrifice had been accepted (*John 20:17, 1 Cor. 15:20*), when the priest was to wave the sheaf of ripe barley as the firstfruits (*Lev. 23:10–12*). Then, He ascended 40 days later to sit at the right hand of God and inaugurate the new covenant on the Day of Pentecost (*Acts 1, Acts 2*).

The purpose of pilgrimage in ancient Israel was to “behold the face of God” (*Ps. 42:2, NRSV*). This meant to experience God’s favor (*Ps. 17:15*). Similarly, the Hebrew expression to “seek the face of God” meant to ask God for help (*2 Chron. 7:14, Ps. 27:8, Ps. 105:4*). This is the sense, in Hebrews, of Jesus’ ascension. Jesus ascended to God with the perfect sacrifice. Jesus also ascended to heaven as our Forerunner into the presence of God (*Heb. 6:19, 20*). He has made real the promise for the believers who journey, “seeking a homeland,” desiring “a better country,” looking “forward to the city . . . whose architect and builder is God” (*Heb. 11:10, 13–16, NRSV*).

Again, why should the reality of what Christ has done, not only on the cross but also what He is doing now in heaven, give us assurance of salvation?

God's Invitation

Read Hebrews 12:18–21. What was the experience of Israel at Mount Sinai?

When God called the Israelites from Egypt, His plan was to create a personal, intimate relationship with them. He said, “ ‘ “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself” ’ ” (*Exod. 19:3, 4, NKJV*).

Thus, through Moses, God gave the necessary instructions to prepare the people to meet with Him. The people needed to consecrate themselves first (*Exod. 19:10–15*). Those who ascended to the foot of the mountain without preparation would die. Nevertheless, once the people had prepared themselves for two days, then “ ‘when the trumpet sounds a long blast’ ” on the third day, God instructed that the people “ ‘shall come up to the mountain’ ” (*Exod. 19:13, ESV*). He wanted them to have the experience Moses and the leaders of the people would have when they ascended the mountain and “beheld God, and ate and drank” in His presence (*Exod. 24:9–11, ESV*). The people later recognized that they had seen God’s glory and that it was possible for God to speak “ ‘ “with man, and man still live” ’ ” (*Deut. 5:24, ESV*). But, when the moment came, they lacked faith. Moses explained years later: “ ‘You were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain’ ” (*Deut. 5:5, ESV*). Instead, they asked Moses to be their intermediary (*Deut. 5:25–27, compare with Exod. 20:18–21*).

God’s manifestation of His holiness at Mount Sinai was to teach the people to learn to “fear,” or respect, Him. The “fear of the LORD” leads to life, wisdom, and honor (*Deut. 4:10; compare with Ps. 111:10, Prov. 1:7, Prov. 9:10, Prov. 10:27*)—and also to the lesson that He is merciful and gracious (*Exod. 34:4–8*). Thus, while God wanted Israel to come to Him, the people became afraid and requested for Moses to be their intermediary. The description in Hebrews of the events at Sinai follows, primarily, Moses’ reminder to the people of their lack of faith and their apostasy with the golden calf, and how he was afraid of meeting God because of their sin (*Deut. 9:19*). The people’s reaction was not God’s plan for them; it was, instead, the result of their faithlessness.

Because of Jesus, why should we not be afraid to draw near to a holy God? What are the conditions, however, for us to be able to draw near?

The Need for a Veil

Veils have a double function. The term Hebrews uses for veil (*katepetasma*) could refer to the screen of the court (*Exod. 38:18*), the screen at the entrance of the outer apartment of the sanctuary (*Exod. 36:37*), or the inner veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (*Exod. 26:31–35*). These three veils were both entrances and boundaries that only some people could cross.

Read Leviticus 16:1, 2 and Leviticus 10:1–3. What warning do we have in these passages?

The veil was a protection for the priests as they ministered before a holy God. After the sin of the golden calf, God said to Moses that He would not accompany them in the way to the Promised Land lest He consume them because they were a “ ‘stiff-necked people’ ” (*Exod. 33:3, NKJV*). Thus, Moses moved the tent of meeting and pitched it far off, outside the camp (*Exod. 33:7*). After Moses interceded, however, God agreed to go with them in their midst (*Exod. 33:12–20*), but He established several measures to protect the people as He dwelled among them.

For instance, Israel camped in a strict order that created a hollow square in the middle, where the tabernacle was pitched. In addition, the Levites camped around the tabernacle in order to protect the sanctuary and its furniture from encroachment by strangers (*Num. 1:51, Num. 3:10*). They were, in fact, a kind of human veil that protected the people of Israel: “ ‘But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the testimony, so that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the people of Israel. And the Levites shall keep guard over the tabernacle of the testimony’ ” (*Num. 1:53, ESV*).

Jesus, as our Priest, also has been our veil. Through His incarnation, God pitched His tent in our midst and made it possible for us to contemplate His glory (*John 1:14–18*). He made it possible for a holy God to live in the midst of an imperfect people.

Think about what it meant that the Creator God, the One who made the universe, would dwell among His people, who at that time were a nation of escaped slaves. What does that teach us about how close God can be to us?

The New and Living Way Through the Veil

Read Hebrews 10:19–22. What invitation do we have in this passage?

The book of Hebrews argues that Jesus has entered into the heavenly sanctuary and invites us to follow His lead. This idea agrees with the conception introduced before that Jesus is the “captain” and “forerunner” of believers (*Heb. 2:10; Heb. 6:19, 20; Heb. 12:2*). The “new and living way” is the new covenant that Jesus inaugurated with His sacrifice and ascension. The expression “new and living” contrasts with the description of the old covenant as “obsolete and growing old” (*Heb. 8:13, NKJV*). It is the new covenant, which has provided forgiveness of sin and has put the law in our hearts, that makes it possible for us to approach God with confidence, not because of ourselves or anything we have done, but only because of what Jesus has done for us by fulfilling all the covenant obligations.

Hebrews noted that the inauguration of the old covenant involved the inauguration of the sanctuary and the consecration of the priests (*Heb. 9:18–21; compare with Exodus 40, Leviticus 8, Leviticus 9*). The purpose of the covenant was to create an intimate relationship between God and His people (*Exod. 19:4–6*). When the Israelites accepted this relationship, God immediately commanded that a sanctuary be built so that He could live among them. The inauguration of the sanctuary and God’s presence in the midst of His people marked the moment when the covenant between God and Israel was completed.

The same is true of the new covenant. The new covenant also implies the inauguration of Jesus’ priestly ministry in our behalf (*Heb. 5:1–10, Heb. 7:1–8:13*).

Jesus’ ascension before God has inaugurated a new era for the people of God. Zechariah 3 mentions that Satan was in the presence of God to accuse God’s people, who were represented by the high priest Joshua. This accuser is the same that raised questions about Job’s loyalty to God (*Job 1, Job 2*). With the sacrifice of Jesus, however, Satan has been cast out of heaven (*Rev. 12:7–12, compare with John 12:31, John 16:11*). Now it is Jesus who intercedes for us and through His sacrifice and faithfulness claims salvation for us!

What accusations could Satan make against you before God, if he were allowed? Though he is a liar, how much would he have to lie about you in order to seek your condemnation? What’s your only hope?

They Will See His Face

Read Hebrews 12:22–24. In what sense have we arrived at the heavenly Jerusalem into the presence of God?

It is argued that believers “have come” to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, through faith. In this sense, their experience anticipates the future. Thus, the heavenly Jerusalem belongs to the realm of the things “hoped for” and “not seen” but nevertheless assured to us through faith (*Heb. 11:1*).

While true, this is not the whole meaning of this passage. We also have arrived at Mount Zion, in the very presence of God, through our representative Jesus (*Eph. 2:5, 6; Col. 3:1*). Jesus’ ascension is not a matter of faith, but of fact. It is this historical dimension of Jesus’ ascension that provides compelling force to the exhortation of Hebrews to hold fast to our confession (*Heb. 4:14, Heb. 10:23*). Paul says: “Since . . . we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, . . . let us . . . with confidence draw near” (*Heb. 4:14, 16, ESV*).

Thus, we already have arrived through our Representative and, therefore, should act accordingly. Through Him, we “have tasted the heavenly gift . . . and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come” (*Heb. 6:4, 5, ESV*). The reality of Jesus’ ascension and ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (*Heb. 6:19, ESV*), the guarantee that the promises have substance and are worthy of confidence (*Heb. 7:22*). For us, faith has a historical anchor.

God’s purpose will be fulfilled not only in Jesus, however, but also in us. We have said that Jesus’ ascension fulfilled the typology of the first two yearly pilgrimages of Israel, Passover and Pentecost. According to Hebrews and the book of Revelation, the last pilgrimage, the Feast of Booths, is yet to be fulfilled. We will celebrate it with Jesus when we are in the “city . . . whose architect and builder is God,” in the heavenly homeland (*Heb. 11:10, NIV; see also verses 13–16*). We will not build booths, but God’s booth, or tent, will descend from heaven, and we will live with Him forever (*Rev. 7:15–17, Rev. 21:1–4, Rev. 22:1–5, Num. 6:24–26*).

How can we learn to make the promise of eternal life real to ourselves now, amid a world so full of pain and suffering? What answer can you give to those who say that this all is just a fantasy to help us feel better about our life here and now?

Further Thought: “Christ’s ascension to heaven was the signal that His followers were to receive the promised blessing. For this they were to wait before they entered upon their work. When Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was enthroned amidst the adoration of the angels. As soon as this ceremony was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents, and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity. The Pentecostal outpouring was Heaven’s communication that the Redeemer’s inauguration was accomplished. According to His promise He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to His followers as a token that He had, as priest and king, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people. . . .

“They could speak the name of Jesus with assurance; for was He not their Friend and Elder Brother? Brought into close communion with Christ, they sat with Him in heavenly places. With what burning language they clothed their ideas as they bore witness for Him!”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 38, 46.

Discussion Questions:

① The psalmist said, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” (*Ps. 42:2, ESV*). How can we have the same thirst to come into the presence of God? If we don’t rejoice now in the presence of God as we worship Him and come before His presence in faith, will we rejoice in the future? What are the factors that lead to joy before God?

② In a book mocking faith, someone created a robot that supposedly did our believing for us. Though this was a spoof, how can we be careful not to do as Israel did in the desert, and that is to make a request for intermediaries between us and God? We tend to allow other people to study the Bible in our behalf and find the gems of truth in the Bible. Some people may feel tempted to think that the prayers of others in their behalf carry more weight before God than their own prayers. Why should we avoid this spiritual trap? Why, because of Jesus, can we approach God without the need of anyone else?

③ Hebrews is about assurance of salvation. How, though, must we be careful not to mistake presumption for assurance?

God Is the Best Witness

By ANNA LIKHOLET

At the age of 18, I longed to share Jesus with others. But I was afraid.

Then I needed surgery, and I was hospitalized in Tula, a city about two and a half hours by car from Russia's capital, Moscow. Three of the six beds in my room were occupied when I arrived. My operation was scheduled for the next day. *What should I do? What does someone do before an operation?* I thought. I opened my Bible.

The woman across from me immediately asked, "Are you a Christian?"

"Yes," I said.

She then wanted to know which church I went to. I didn't want to be mocked for being a Seventh-day Adventist. Many Russians belong to another Christian denomination and dismiss Adventists as members of a sect. "I'm a Protestant," I said.

The woman wasn't satisfied. "Which Protestant church do you belong to?" she said.

What could I say? "I'm a Seventh-day Adventist," I said.

"Wow, a Seventh-day Adventist!" she exclaimed. "I know Adventists! They are the best people!"

The woman spoke enthusiastically about the church, its work, and Zaoksky Adventist University located outside Tula. The two other patients listened silently. They had never heard about the Adventist Church.

"Adventists are good Christians!" the woman said. "My father knows some nice Adventists."

As she spoke, the physician entered the room. He was surprised to see her. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" she replied.

"I ordered you to be discharged yesterday," he said. "You should already be at home."

Her husband picked her up within 30 minutes.

God had answered my prayers in an unexpected way. He revealed Himself on His own in my hospital room. God had done everything. As a result, the other patients knew I was an Adventist and that Adventists love Jesus. If you long to share Him, He can arrange it. He will do everything for you.



This mission story illustrates Mission Objective Number 1 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors but every church member, young and old, in the joy of witnessing for Christ and making disciples."

Learn more at IWillGo2020.org.

Jesus, Author *and* Perfecter of Our Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 10:35–39, Rom. 1:17, Hebrews 11, Josh. 2:9–11, Heb. 12:1–3.*

Memory Text: “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (*Hebrews 12:2, NKJV*).

Hebrews 11 and 12 are probably the most-loved chapters of the book. They describe the Christian life as a race in which we all participate and in which all who stay faithful will receive the reward. They also describe the drama of Redemption as a race in which people of faith from the past persevered, despite sufferings, but have not yet received the reward.

And that's because the story ends with us, as well, not just them. We are the concluding act. The drama culminates with our entering and running the last part of the race, and with Jesus seated at the goal line at the right hand of God. He provides inspiration as well as the ultimate example of how the race is run. He is the ultimate Witness that the reward is true and that He is the Forerunner who opens the way for us (*Heb. 6:19, 20; Heb. 10:19–23*).

Hebrews 11 explains that faith is confidence in God's promises, even if we cannot see their fulfillment yet. This lesson will explore what faith is and how it is obtained through the examples of the past and, especially and centrally, through the example of Jesus, “the founder and perfecter of our faith” (*Heb. 12:2, ESV*).

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

The Righteous Will Live by Faith

Read Hebrews 10:35–39. What is God saying to us in these verses?

Endurance is a characteristic of God's end-time people, without which they will not be able to receive the promises (*Rev. 13:10, Rev. 14:12*). In order to endure, however, believers need to "hold fast" their faith (*Heb. 10:23, Heb. 4:14*). Paul has shown that the desert generation was not able to receive the promise because they lacked faith (*Heb. 3:19*). Hebrews portrays believers as also at the threshold of the fulfillment of the promises (*Heb. 9:28; Heb. 10:25, 36–38*) and as needing to exercise faith if they want to receive the promises (*Heb. 10:39*).

Paul introduces his exposition on faith with a quotation from Habakkuk 2:2–4. Habakkuk had asked God why He tolerated the treacherous people who oppressed the righteous (*Hab. 1:12–17*). The prophet and his people were suffering; thus, they wanted God to act. God answered, however, that there was an appointed time for the fulfillment of His promise, and they needed to wait (*Hab. 2:2–4*). Habakkuk and his people lived, like us, between the time of the promise and the time of its fulfillment. God's message continued in Hebrews, " 'He who is coming will come and will not delay' " (*Heb. 10:37, NIV; see also Hab. 2:3*).

The message refers to Jesus. He is the righteous one, the embodiment of faith, who pleases God and provides life (*Heb. 10:5–10*).

Why, then, would He "delay"? He won't. He already has come to die for us (*Heb. 9:15–26*), and He will surely come again at the appointed time (*Heb. 9:27, 28; Heb. 10:25*).

God's message continued: " 'My righteous one shall live by faith' " (*Heb. 10:38, ESV*). Paul states the same in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. Romans 1:16, 17 is especially enlightening because it explains that the righteousness of God is "revealed from faith to faith." What Paul means is that God's faithfulness to His promises comes first, and His faithfulness produces, as its result, our faith and/or faithfulness.

Thus, because God remains faithful to His promises (*2 Tim. 2:13*), the righteous, in response to God's faithfulness, will remain faithful, as well.

Why is it important to recognize that our faith results from and feeds on God's faithfulness? How can we learn more to trust in His faithfulness to us and to the promises He has made to us?

By Faith, Abraham . . .

Hebrews defines faith as “confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (*Heb. 11:1, NIV*). Then it provides a list of faithful people from the history of Israel who exemplify what faith is, and it shows how they manifested that faith by their deeds.

Read Hebrews 11:1–19. What did these “heroes” of faith do that exemplified their faith? How are their actions related to the hope of things not seen?

Abraham is probably the most important character in this chapter. Abraham’s last act of faith is especially instructive regarding the true nature of faith.

Hebrews notes that God’s instruction to Abraham that he offer Isaac as a sacrifice seemed to imply a contradiction on God’s part (*Heb. 11:17, 18*). Isaac was not the only son of Abraham. Ishmael was the firstborn of Abraham, but God had told Abraham that it was all right for him to accept Sarah’s request and cast Ishmael and his mother out because God would take care of them, and because Abraham’s offspring would be named through Isaac (*Gen. 21:12, 13*). In the next chapter, however, God asks Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. God’s instruction in Genesis 22 seemed to flatly contradict God’s promises in Genesis 12–21.

Hebrews concludes that Abraham amazingly solved the conundrum by arriving at the conclusion that God would resurrect Isaac after he had offered him. This is amazing because no one had yet been resurrected. It seems, however, that Abraham’s previous experience with God led him to that conclusion. Hebrews 11:12 notes that Isaac was conceived by the power of God from one who was “as good as dead.” Paul also noted that despite Abraham’s being “as good as dead” and Sarah barren, Abraham believed “in hope . . . against hope, that he should become the father of many nations” because he believed that God “gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (*Rom. 4:17–20, ESV*). Thus, Abraham must have assumed that if God in some sense already had given life to Isaac from the dead, He could do it again. In God’s leading in the past, Abraham saw an intimation of what He could do in the future.

Why is meditating on how God has led our lives in the past so crucial for maintaining our faith and trust in Him now?

Moses: Believing in the Unseen

Read Hebrews 11:20–28. What did these men of faith do? How are their actions related to hope and to things not seen?

Moses is the second major example in this chapter of faith. The life of Moses is introduced and concluded by two actions of defiance to the king. His parents hid him when he was born, because “they were not afraid of the king’s edict” (*Heb. 11:23, ESV*), and Moses left Egypt, “not being afraid of the anger of the king” (*Heb. 11:27, ESV*). The most significant action of Moses was, however, that he “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter” (*Heb. 11:24*). The reference to Moses’ adoptive mother as “Pharaoh’s daughter” suggests that he was slated to be the next Pharaoh. Moses, however, was willing to leave behind the prospect of becoming the ruler of the most powerful nation at that time and to become, instead, the leader of newly freed slaves—refugees, actually.

Compare Hebrews 11:24–27 and Hebrews 10:32–35. What were the similarities between the situation of the original recipients of Hebrews and the experience of Moses?

The greatness of Moses was that he was able to see beyond the promises of the king of Egypt and look toward the unseen, namely, the promises of God. Hebrews says the key was that Moses’ sight was fixed on “the reward,” not on the riches of Egypt. This reward is the same reward mentioned in Hebrews 10:35, which God has promised to all who believe in Him.

Paul’s words about Moses’ decision must have echoed powerfully in the hearts of his original readers. They had been enduring reproaches and insults because of their faith in Christ. They also had been afflicted and lost their possessions (*Heb. 10:32–34*). Some were in prison (*Heb. 13:3*). In parallel sense, Moses chose to be mistreated with God’s people, exchanging the wealth of Egypt for bearing the insults associated with Christ because he believed that the reward of Christ was greater than whatever Egypt could offer.

What are some of the struggles that you have faced because of your faith? What have you had to give up for it? Why, ultimately, is the reward worth it, even if you can’t see it now?

By Faith, Rahab and the Rest . . .

Read Hebrews 11:31 and Joshua 2:9–11. Why was Rahab, a pagan prostitute, included in this text of sacred biblical characters?

Rahab is probably the most unexpected character whom we find in Hebrews 11. Rahab is one of two women mentioned by name. She is the tenth in the list, the first being forefathers and patriarchs of Israel, and each one is regarded as being righteous. When we come to her, we find that she not only is a woman but also a Gentile prostitute.

The most surprising thing is that she also is the thematic center and climax of the chapter. The list is organized in a unique way. Each entry begins with the repetitive use of the phrase “by faith.” The basic pattern is “By faith, So-and-so did such and such” or “By faith, such and such happened to So-and-so.” This repetitive pattern increases the expectation in the reader to hear the climactic assertion that “*by faith, Joshua led the people into the promised land.*”

But that’s not what the text says. Instead, Joshua is passed over, and the prostitute takes his place. After the mention of Rahab, the repetitive pattern ends abruptly with “and what more shall I say?” (*Heb. 11:32, NKJV*). Then, Paul hurriedly lists some names and events that he does not explain in detail.

Rahab’s deed of faith was that she heard, believed, and obeyed, even though she did not see. She did not see the plagues of Egypt or the deliverance in the Red Sea or the water flow from the rock or the bread descend from heaven, yet, she believed. She was a good exemplar for the audience of Hebrews, who did not hear Jesus preach or see Him do a miracle, and for us, as well, who did not see any of these things either.

“Rahab was a harlot who lived on the wall of Jericho. She hid the two Israelite spies sent to check out the defenses of that city. Because of her kindness to them, and her declaration of belief in God, the spies promised that the lives of Rahab and her family would be spared when the attack came on Jericho.”—Introduction to Rahab found in Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God*, p. 35.

Paul then continues (*Heb. 11:35–38*) with a list of the hardships many faced. The phrase “refusing to accept release” (*Heb. 11:35, ESV*) implies that they had the possibility to escape but chose not to, because their sights were set on the reward of God.

Though we have not seen any of these things happen (the six-day Creation, the Exodus, the cross of Christ), why do we have so many good reasons for believing that they did?

Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of Our Faith

Read Hebrews 12:1–3. What do these verses ask us to do?

The climax of the exposition on faith really arrives with Jesus in Hebrews 12. Paul started the letter with Jesus, who is the “coming one” and who “will not delay” (*Heb. 10:37, ESV*), and Paul concludes it with Jesus the “perfecter” of our faith (*Heb. 12:2, ESV*). Jesus is the “author and perfecter of faith” (*NASB*). This means that Jesus is the One who makes faith possible and is the Example who perfectly embodies what a life of faith is all about. With Jesus, faith has reached its perfect expression.

Jesus is the “founder” (*Heb. 12:2, ESV*), or author or pioneer, of our faith in at least three senses.

First, He is the only one who has finished the race in its fullest sense. The others talked about in the previous chapter have not yet reached their goal (*Heb. 11:39, 40*). Jesus, however, has entered God’s rest in heaven and is seated at the Father’s right hand. We, together with these others, will reign with Jesus in heaven (*Rev. 20:4*).

Second, it was actually Jesus’ perfect life that has made it possible for these others to run their race (*Heb. 10:5–14*). If Jesus had not come, the race of everyone else would have been futile.

Finally, Jesus is the reason we have faith. As one with God, He expressed the faithfulness of God toward us. God never gave up in His efforts to save us, and that is why we will reach the reward in the end if we don’t give up. Jesus ran with patience and remained faithful, even when we were faithless (*2 Tim. 2:13*). Our faith is only a response to His faithfulness.

In the end, Jesus is the “perfecter” of faith because He perfectly exemplifies how the race of faith is run. How did He run? He laid aside every weight by giving up everything for us (*Phil. 2:5–8*). He never sinned, ever. Jesus held His sight firmly on the reward, which was the joy set before Him, that of seeing the human race redeemed by His grace. So, He endured misunderstanding and abuse; He stared down the shame of the cross (*Heb. 12:2, 3*).

Now it is our turn to run. Though we can never achieve what Jesus did in our own strength, we have His perfect example before us, and so by faith in Him, and keeping our eyes on Him (as have the others before us), we press on ahead in faith, trusting in His promises of a great reward.

Further Thought: “By faith you became Christ’s, and by faith you are to grow up in Him—by giving and taking. You are to give all,—your heart, your will, your service,—give yourself to Him to obey all His requirements; and you must take all,—Christ, the fullness of all blessing, to abide in your heart, to be your strength, your righteousness, your everlasting helper,—to give you power to obey.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 70.

“God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith.

“It is impossible for finite minds fully to comprehend the character or the works of the Infinite One. To the keenest intellect, the most highly educated mind, that holy Being must ever remain clothed in mystery. ‘Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?’ Job 11:7, 8.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 105.

Discussion Questions:

- ① An early Christian scholar once wrote: “*Credo ut intelligam*,” Latin for “I believe in order that I may understand.” Hebrews 11:3 says that “by faith we understand” (*NKJV*). What is the relationship between faith and understanding? Why does faith often come before understanding? That is, why must we sometimes reach out in faith in what, at least at first, we don’t understand, and then afterward more understanding will come?
- ② The Greek word *pistis* means both “faith” and “faithfulness.” Why are both meanings important in seeking to understand what living “by faith” means? How did the people in Hebrews 11 show, by their faithfulness, the reality of their faith? How can we do the same?
- ③ Though we understand that faith is a gift of God (*Rom. 12:3*), what role do we play, if any, in receiving and maintaining that gift?

Worshipping Like Jesus

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Three years ago, the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped establish a community center to reach people in Cambodia. But the community center, an “urban center of influence,” reached its first person before it even opened.

Koy Sopaon heard that construction work had started on the Essential Life Center and that the wages were fair, so he asked project manager Gary Rogers for a job. Gary, a U.S. missionary who works for Adventist Mission, had no immediate openings at the site in Battambang, Cambodia’s second-largest city, but he took Sopaon’s phone number.

Sopaon returned a few months later, and Gary, learning he had welding and bricklaying experience, told him he could start work the next day.

“Why wait until tomorrow?” Sopaon said. “I can start now.”

Sopaon, a leader in his own Christian church, was surprised to learn that Gary began each workday with a 30-minute worship. He had never held a job with worship, and he liked it.

As the group studied, he realized that things he was learning from the Bible were different from what his church taught. One morning, the worship focused on the seventh-day Sabbath. Sopaon read in Luke 23 about Jesus dying on the preparation day, the sixth day of the week, and being buried before the sun set for Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. He saw that the disciples stopped their work for the Sabbath and that Jesus rested in the tomb. It wasn’t until the first day that they brought spices to anoint His body. Surprised, Sopaon told himself, “Then the seventh day truly is the Sabbath!”

Seeing Sopaon’s belief, Gary asked, “Do you want to be like Jesus?”

Sopaon didn’t hesitate. “Yes, I do,” he said.

“If that is your desire, join us as we open the Sabbath together next Friday evening,” Gary said, inviting him to an Adventist gathering.

Sopaon came on Friday and returned the next day for Sabbath worship. He was amazed at how people greeted one another, saying, “Happy Sabbath! Happy Sabbath!” It made him feel that God could make him holy.



As Sopaon learned more about God, he began to return tithe. On Sabbath afternoons, he joined church members in helping the needy. He was baptized 18 months after starting to work on the construction site for the Essential Life Center.

Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering that helped open the Essential Life Center, an “urban center of influence” in Battambang, Cambodia.

Receiving *an* Unshakable Kingdom



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 12:18–29; Exod. 32:32; Dan. 7:9, 10, 13–22; Hag. 2:6–9, 20–22; Ps. 15:5; Ps. 16:8; Heb. 13:15, 16.*

Memory Text: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (*Hebrews 12:28, NKJV*).

Hebrews 12:18–29, the passage for this week, is the climax of the letter, and it sums up its main concern by repeating the idea with which it started: God has spoken to us in the person of His Son, and we need to pay careful attention (*Heb. 1:1, 2; Heb. 12:25*) to Him. The description of Jesus in Hebrews 12:22–24 epitomizes the letter's assertions about Him: Jesus is the Mediator of the new covenant, and His blood provides salvation for believers. His priestly and royal ministry in our behalf is a cause for celebration for the heavenly hosts. And finally, Hebrews 12:25–29 contains the last and climactic exhortation: God's judgment is coming. It will bring destruction to His enemies—but vindication and a kingdom to His people (*Heb. 12:28, 29*).

The ending reaffirms the importance of Jesus' achievements at the cross and directs believers to the consummation of Jesus' victory at the Second Coming. Paul used imagery from Daniel 7 to remind the readers that Jesus has received a kingdom from God, the Judge (*Dan. 7:9–14*), and is going to share His kingdom with believers, “the saints of the Most High,” who will possess it forever and ever (*Dan. 7:18*).

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

“You Have Come to Mount Zion”

Read Hebrews 12:22–24. What does Paul describe here?

Hebrews affirms that we have come to Mount Zion and participate in a great celebration. “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering” (*Heb 12:22, ESV*). We have come through faith in the person of our Representative, Jesus. In this celebration we find an innumerable host of angels, God Himself, and Jesus, who is the center of the celebration. We come as part of the “assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” (*Heb. 12:23, ESV*). Our names are enrolled in the books of heaven, where God’s professed people are listed (*Exod. 32:32, Ps. 56:8, Dan. 12:1, Mal. 3:16, Luke 10:20, Rev. 13:8, Rev. 17:8*).

We are the “firstborn” because we share the inheritance of the Firstborn par excellence, Jesus (*Heb. 1:6*). Thus, we have come not as guests but as citizens (*compare with Phil. 3:20*). We also are described as “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (*Heb. 12:23, ESV*). This expression is a figure of speech in which a dimension of our human nature stands for the whole. It is analogous to the expression “the Father of spirits” in Hebrews 12:9, which refers to God as the Father of us all, human beings who are spiritual in nature.

The festal gathering celebrates the inauguration of Jesus’ kingly rule, priestly ministry, and the inauguration of the new covenant. In Hebrews, Mount Zion is the place where all these events take place. Three of the psalms in Hebrews 1:5–14 describe the enthronement of the Son and have Mount Zion as the place where it occurred (*Ps. 2:6, 7; Ps. 110:1, 2; Ps. 102:21–27*).

Mount Zion also is the place where the Son was appointed “priest forever” (*Heb. 5:6*), a quotation of Psalm 110:4. According to Psalm 110, the appointment of the Son as High Priest occurs at Mount Zion, as well (*Ps. 110:2*). Finally, Hebrews argues that the inauguration of Jesus’ priesthood also marks the inauguration of the new covenant (*Heb. 7:11–22*). Thus, Mount Zion also is the place where the new covenant was ratified. Hebrews 12:22–24 describes, then, the festal gathering that occurred in heaven when Jesus ascended.

In what practical ways can we celebrate the reality of Jesus, His priestly ministry, and the new covenant in our lives and in our worship? Why is rejoicing in this great truth faith-affirming?

You Have Come to God, the Judge of All

Read Hebrews 12:23. If this is a celebration, why is God described as a judge? How can a judge be part of or a reason for a celebration? Read also Daniel 7:9, 10, 13–22.

The celebration described in Hebrews 12:22–24 alludes to a future judgment. God, the Judge, presides, and books are used, and the result of this future judgment from the books is that God’s people receive the kingdom (*Heb. 12:28*).

This scene evokes the great pre-Advent judgment described in Daniel 7, which portrays a judgment scene in which God, the “Ancient of Days” (*Dan. 7:9*), sits on a throne made of fire and is surrounded with “ten thousand times ten thousand” (*Dan. 7:10*) angels. Books are opened (*Dan. 7:10*), and the judgment is decided in favor of “the saints of the most High,” who then “possessed the kingdom” (*Dan. 7:22*).

Similarly, Hebrews 12:22–29 describes a judgment scene at Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, where God, “the Judge of all,” is surrounded with “thousands upon thousands” of angels (*NIV*). The scene also is a fiery one (*Heb. 12:29*). It includes books because the saints are “enrolled” in them (*Heb. 12:23, ESV*), which implies a favorable judgment for the saints.

Jesus is at the center of the scene (*Heb. 12:24*). He was described as the Son of man in Hebrews 2, who was “crowned with glory and honor” after having tasted “death” in our behalf (*Heb. 2:9, ESV*). According to Hebrews 2:10, the “son of man” (*see Heb. 2:6, ESV*) suffered in order that He could bring “many sons to glory” (*ESV*); that is, in order that believers would be able to be “crowned with glory and honor,” as well. The “Son” has now brought believers into Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, through the benefits of the new covenant (*Heb. 12:22–24*), where they are promised to receive a kingdom (*Heb. 12:28*).

This judgment is, then, really good news for believers because it is a judgment that rules in their favor. It vindicates them. It is a judgment that defeats their adversary, the dragon, who is behind the terrible beasts that have persecuted believers in the past (*Daniel 7*) and will do so in the future (*Revelation 13*).

How does what we studied today help us understand that God’s judgment in the three angels’ messages is “good news” for this time (*Rev. 14:6, 7; compare with Deut. 32:36; 1 Chron. 16:33–35*)?

Shake the Heavens and the Earth

After describing the festal gathering occurring in heaven, Paul warns the readers that they need to pay attention to God's voice because God will shake " 'yet once more . . . not only the earth but also the heavens' " (*Heb. 12:26, ESV*). Paul is saying that although Jesus has been enthroned in heaven, our salvation has not been consummated. We need to pay attention because an important event is still to happen.

Compare Haggai 2:6–9, 20–22; Psalm 96:9, 10; Psalm 99:1; and Hebrews 12:26, 27. What is the purpose of God's shaking the heavens and the earth? What does this mean?

In the Old Testament, the shaking of the earth was a common figure for the presence of God, who shows up to deliver His people. When Deborah and Barak fought against Sisera, God fought from heaven on their behalf (*Judg. 5:20*). This is described as a powerful earthquake, a shaking of the earth and mountains because of the presence of God (*Judg. 5:4, 5*). We find this same image appearing throughout the Old Testament when God arises to deliver the oppressed (*Ps. 68:7, 8; Ps. 60:2; Ps. 77:17, 18*). Thus, a shaking signaled God's judgment as He asserts His authority over the peoples of the earth. The prophets predicted this would happen in the day of the Lord (*Isa. 13:13, Isa. 24:18–23*).

For Hebrews, the "shaking" of heaven and earth refers to the destruction of the enemies of God. This is what God promised at the enthronement of Jesus. God said to Him: " 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet' " (*Heb. 1:13, ESV*). Thus, Jesus has defeated the enemy (*Heb. 2:14–16*) and been enthroned (*Heb. 1:5–14*), but the enemies have not yet been destroyed (*Heb. 10:11–14, 1 Cor. 15:23–25*).

But God will destroy these enemies in the future, when He will shake the heavens and the earth. The shaking of the heavens and the earth means, then, the destruction of the earthly powers that persecute God's people and, more important, the destruction of the evil powers (Satan and his angels) who stand behind the earthly powers and control them.

Why is the promise that one day justice will be done, and the evil that has been so prevalent in our world will one day be destroyed, such a hopeful promise for us all, especially those who have suffered directly at the hands of evil?

An Unshakable Kingdom

God has announced that He will “shake” the heavens and the earth, which means that He will destroy enemy nations. There are some things, however, that will not be shaken, that will not be destroyed.

Compare Psalm 15:5, Psalm 16:8, Psalm 21:7, Psalm 62:2, Psalm 112:6, and Hebrews 12:27. What are the things that will not be shaken?

Many modern translations of Hebrews 12:27 suggest that the shaking of the heavens and the earth means that they will be removed and forever gone.

The Bible is clear, however, that God will create new heavens and a new earth (*Isa. 65:17, Rev. 21:1–4*), and we will be resurrected and have new bodies (*1 Thess. 4:13–17, Phil. 3:20*) on this earth. Thus, the “shaking” implies the cleansing and renovation of creation, not its complete removal. What is here will be re-created, and it will be where the redeemed live.

There are some things, however, that will not and cannot be shaken. They include the righteous. They will not be shaken because they trust in God. The Creator sustains them and guarantees their survival.

Note that in Hebrews permanence and stability are associated with Jesus. Hebrews 1:10–12 says about Jesus:

“ ‘You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end’ ” (*ESV*). Hebrews also says that Jesus’ priesthood remains forever (*Heb. 7:3, 24*), as does the inheritance of the redeemed (*Heb. 10:34*). In the final judgment, those who hold fast “in Jesus” will not be shaken (*Ps. 46:5*).

Hebrews 12:28 also says that we will receive “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (*ESV*). This is a reference to Daniel 7:18, which says that the saints will “possess the kingdom forever.” This is the kingdom that “shall never be destroyed” mentioned in Daniel 2:44. This kingdom belongs to the Son, but He will share it with us. Revelation 20:4 says that we will judge with Him the evil powers that persecuted us (*see also 1 Cor. 6:3*).

How well do you do now, in terms of being shaken? If not so well, what choices can you make in order to get help in this important area? (See Eph. 4:14.)

Let Us Be Grateful

Hebrews concludes this section by pointing out that the appropriate response to God for all the wonderful things He has done for us is to show gratitude by offering Him an appropriate type of worship.

Compare Hebrews 12:28 and Hebrews 13:15, 16. How do we offer God acceptable worship?

In the old covenant system, the sacrifice of animals was the way people showed repentance and gratitude, but these sacrifices were to be but a token of the gratitude and repentance in the heart of the worshiper. Thus, God made clear in Psalms and through the prophets that what really pleased Him was not the blood of animals but the gratitude, good deeds, and righteousness of the worshipers (*Ps. 50:7–23, Isa. 1:11–17*).

Thus, Paul invites us to worship God in the heavenly sanctuary by offering sacrifices of praise, confession, thanksgiving, and good works, which is the true worship that delights Him. We offer these sacrifices on earth, but they are accepted as pleasing to God in heaven. This exhortation embraces all the calls that Paul has made throughout the letter for the confession of Jesus' name (*Heb. 3:1, Heb. 4:14, Heb. 10:23*) and his exhortations that we continue to do good works (*Heb. 6:10–12; Heb. 13:1, 2, 16*).

The invitation of Paul to the audience to “offer to God acceptable worship” (*Heb. 12:28, ESV*) implies that believers are truly now a priestly nation that has been perfected and sanctified through the sacrifice of Jesus (*Heb. 10:10–14, 19–23*). This fulfills God's original purpose for Israel, that it would be a priestly nation through which He would be able to announce the good news of salvation to the world (*Exod. 19:4–6; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10; Rev. 1:6; Rev. 5:10*).

Hebrews 13:1–6 describes in practical terms what it means to do good and share what we have. It means to show brotherly love, just as Jesus showed brotherly love to us (*Heb. 2:11, 12*). It means to be hospitable, to visit those who are in prison or have been mistreated (*Heb. 13:3*), and to reject adultery and covetousness.

Why is it important to consider good works and sharing what we have as part of our worship to God? At the same time, what are the very real ways that our spiritual sacrifices to God may be corrupted (*Isa. 1:11–17*)?

Further Thought: “During the thousand years between the first and the second resurrection the judgment of the wicked takes place. The apostle Paul points to this judgment as an event that follows the second advent. ‘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.’ 1 Corinthians 4:5. Daniel declares that when the Ancient of Days came, ‘judgment was given to the saints of the Most High.’ Daniel 7:22. At this time the righteous reign as kings and priests unto God. John in the Revelation says: ‘I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them.’ ‘They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.’ Revelation 20:4, 6. It is at this time that, as foretold by Paul, ‘the saints shall judge the world.’ 1 Corinthians 6:2. In union with Christ they judge the wicked, comparing their acts with the statute book, the Bible, and deciding every case according to the deeds done in the body. Then the portion which the wicked must suffer is meted out, according to their works; and it is recorded against their names in the book of death.

“Satan also and evil angels are judged by Christ and His people. Says Paul: ‘Know ye not that we shall judge angels?’ Verse 3. And Jude declares that ‘the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.’ Jude 6.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 660, 661.

Discussion Questions:

- ① What does the participation of the saints in the judgment of the wicked (*1 Cor. 6:3, Jude 6*) say about God and how transparent He will be with us in showing us His goodness and fairness in how He has dealt with sin and evil?
- ② Read Exodus 32:32, Psalm 56:8, Psalm 69:28, Psalm 139:16, Isaiah 4:3, Daniel 12:1, Malachi 3:16, Luke 10:20, Revelation 13:8, and Revelation 17:8. These are references to God’s books in heaven. What kinds of things are registered in these books? Why is it important that God maintains a record of our tears (*Ps. 56:8*), for example? If God knows everything, what is the purpose of such books or records?
- ③ Why do you think it is important that Hebrews ends the argument of the epistle with a link to the promises of Daniel 7? Why are these links important in the context of Jesus’ ministry in heaven? What does Daniel 7 teach us about the end of all earthly and fallen things?

Perfect Health

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Noy was a wealthy woman who oversaw more than 100 workers at a family-owned coffee plantation in Laos. But then she fell ill with a mystery disease in her village.

Her physician couldn't identify the illness.

Noy went to many medical doctors across southern Laos, but no one could help.

Her health grew worse and worse until she could not even walk and was confined to her bed. More than that, she nearly lost her mind. Many times, she could not remember people in her own family.

All her workers left because she did not pay their salaries. Villagers told her and her husband that she would not survive.

At this low point in Noy's life, a visitor arrived from Laos's capital, Vientiane. The visitor, like Noy, was not a Christian, but her son and daughter-in-law were Seventh-day Adventists. She told Noy about Jesus.

"Maybe Jesus can save your life," she said.

With assistance from her husband, Noy found the telephone number of an Adventist pastor in the south and called him for help.

The pastor traveled to Noy's village and prayed with her.

Noy was encouraged by the prayer, and she decided to move temporarily to Vientiane. She wanted to meet Adventist church members and get to know them.

When she arrived, she could not get out of the bed, and she struggled to think clearly. Church members met and prayed with her regularly. Gradually, her health improved. She started to sit, stand, and walk.

Five months after falling ill, Noy returned to her home village in perfect health.

The villagers were surprised at what they saw. They had expected her to die, but she was alive and fully healed. Astonished, they asked her what had happened.

"Jesus saved me from death," Noy said.

Now many villagers are interested in knowing more about Jesus, the powerful Physician who can heal all who ask Him.

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offering that will help spread the gospel to the people of Laos and other countries of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open an elementary school in Laos.

This mission story illustrates Mission Objective Number 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions." Learn more at IWillGo2020.org.

“Let Brotherly Love Continue”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Hebrews 13, Rom. 12:13, Eph. 5:3–5, 1 Pet. 5:1–4, Heb. 2:9, Heb. 4:16, Gal. 2:20.*

Memory Text: “Let brotherly love continue” (*Hebrews 13:1*).

Hebrews 13 presents the apostle's concluding admonition: “Let brotherly love continue” (*Heb. 13:1*). He has affirmed throughout the epistle that we are of the household of the King—High Priest, Jesus, His brothers and sisters. The author does not conceive of the audience only as a group of individuals who work on their salvation in a one-on-one relationship with Jesus, but as a family, or household, saved together. Paul has characterized the work of Jesus for us as “brotherly love”: He was “not ashamed to call them brothers” (*Heb. 2:11, ESV*). Thus, believers should do for one another what Jesus did for them.

Throughout the letter, brotherly love involved “exhorting one another” so that no one would fall short of the grace of God (*Heb. 3:13; Heb. 10:24, 25; Heb. 12:15–17*). In chapter 13 it involves numerous elements: hospitality (*Heb. 13:2*), visiting and supporting prisoners and those who have been mistreated (*Heb. 13:3*), honoring marriage (*Heb. 13:4*), avoiding covetousness (*Heb. 13:5, 6*), remembering and obeying the leaders of the church (*Heb. 13:7–17*), and praying for the author himself (*Heb. 13:18, 19*).

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

Caring for God's People

Read Hebrews 13:1, 2; Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; and 1 Peter 4:9. What was the role of hospitality in the early church?

Christianity was a wandering movement that often depended on the hospitality of both Christians and non-Christians. The instruction to “not forget” to show hospitality probably does not simply refer to the failure to think about taking someone in but about willful neglect.

Paul does not have in mind hospitality only for fellow believers. He reminds his readers that by entertaining strangers some have unwittingly entertained angels (*Heb. 13:2*). He probably had in mind the visit of the three men to Abraham and Sarah (*Gen. 18:2–15*). Offering hospitality implies sharing possessions with other people and suffering with them, which is what Jesus did for us (*Heb. 2:10–18*).

Brotherly love toward those in prison implied not only that believers remembered prisoners in their prayers but also that believers provided relief through material and emotional support. There was a risk of willful neglect of prisoners. Those who provided material and emotional support to those condemned by society identified themselves with them. In some sense, they became “partners” with them and made themselves vulnerable to social abuse (*Heb. 10:32–34*).

Paul’s exhortation uses images and language to encourage the readers in regard to prisoners. First, the author evokes the readers’ own support for their incarcerated brethren in the past. They had become “companions” or “partners” to those who had been “publicly exposed to reproach and affliction” (*Heb. 10:33, ESV*). Second, the language of “mistreatment” echoes the example of Moses, who chose “rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin” (*Heb. 11:25, ESV*). Finally, Paul captures the ideal of brotherly love. He reminds the readers that they “also are in the body” (*Heb. 13:3, ESV*). They share the same human condition and should treat others as they would like to be treated if they were in the same circumstances; that is, in prison. The people should, then, provide material and emotional support to prisoners, showing them that they are not abandoned.

What more can we do for those who are in prison, whether church members or not?

Covetousness and Sexual Immorality

Read Hebrews 13:4, 5; Luke 16:10–18; 1 Corinthians 5:1; Ephesians 5:3–5; and Colossians 3:5. What two evils are related in these passages?

Paul warns the readers against sexual immorality and greed because they are two grave threats to brotherly love. In fact, New Testament authors and ancient moralists noted a connection between them.

Paul's call to honor marriage implied the avoidance of anything that would belittle it. This avoidance included abstaining both from violation of the marriage oath and from unwarranted divorces (*compare with Matt. 19:9*). The exhortation to keep the marriage bed undefiled refers to avoiding the profanation of marriage through sexual relationships outside of marriage. The expression “fornicators” refers in the New Testament to every form of sexual immorality (*1 Cor. 5:9–11; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Eph. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:9, 10; Rev. 21:8; Rev. 22:15*). In addition, Greco-Roman society was lax in regard to sexual ethics. A double standard was common: this allowed men license in their sexual relationships as long as they were discreet. Paul warns, however, that God will judge adulterers. Believers should not let social conventions establish their own ethical standards.

“Love of money” was one of the main categories of vices in the Greco-Roman world. In fact, in another letter, Paul referred to “love of money” as the source of all evils (*1 Tim. 6:10*).

The defense against this vice is an attitude that Paul encourages in several epistles. First, they should “be content” with the things they had (*also 2 Cor. 9:8; Phil. 4:11, 12*). Furthermore, Christians should believe and embrace God's promise that God would “never leave . . . nor forsake” them (*Heb. 13:5*). This promise was given in several places and moments to His people and is available to us today (*Gen. 28:15; Deut. 31:6, 8; Josh. 1:5; 1 Chron. 28:20*). Believers, then, are invited to respond to God's promise with the words of Psalm 118:6: “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (*ESV*). This reference to Psalm 118 is appropriate because the psalmist expressed there his confidence in God, despite the suffering inflicted upon him by unbelievers.

What are the ways that contemporary society undermines sexual purity and, at the same time, feeds the human love of money? In what practical ways can we strengthen our defenses against these two dangerous vices?

Remember Your Leaders

Read Hebrews 13:7–17. What should be our relationship with our leaders?

Hebrews 13:7–17 contains an exhortation to respect and obey the leaders of the congregation. It begins with an invitation to “remember” those leaders of the past who spoke the Word of God to them, and it closes with a call to “obey” the leaders in the present (*Heb. 13:17*). The leaders of the past are most likely those who first preached the Word and founded the congregation. The call to “remember” them does not simply refer to a mental exercise of recollection or to an external tribute honoring them. Paul explains that they are to “remember” them by considering the outcome of their conduct and by imitating their faith.

For Paul, the greatest act of remembrance and praise is emulation. In this way, Paul has added the founding leaders of the congregation to the list of faithful heroes whom believers should carefully consider. This list includes the heroes of faith of Hebrews 11, and Jesus, the consummate Example of faith, in Hebrews 12. The author further notes that Jesus is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (*Heb. 13:8, ESV*). He stands in stark contrast to false teachers who change with time and whose teachings become “various” and “strange” (*Heb. 13:9, NKJV*).

The call to remember the leaders in Hebrews 13:7 is restated in more forceful terms at the end of the section. Believers are exhorted to obey the leaders, because they watch out for their souls. The leaders are described here as pastors who are in charge of the spiritual well-being of the congregation, their flock, and who will give an account to God for their spiritual state (*see also 1 Pet. 5:1–4, 1 Cor. 3:10–15*). Certainly, too, the idea should apply to all our church leaders, as well as at all levels of the denomination today.

The context also suggests that these leaders are undershepherds who serve under Jesus, “the great Shepherd of the sheep” (*Heb. 13:20*). The combination of care and faithfulness from the leaders and obedience or trust from the members will result in joy. This may mean that the leaders will be able to serve the congregation with “joy,” or that they will give an account of the congregation to God with joy and not with grief.

What can you do to strengthen or improve the leader-member relationship in your congregation, as well as around the world?

Beware of Diverse and Strange Teachings

Compare Hebrews 13:9; Hebrews 2:9; Hebrews 4:16; and Hebrews 6:19, 20. Where is grace obtained? How are our hearts strengthened?

The relationship between false teachings and foods, touched on in Hebrews 13:9, probably does not refer to the distinction between clean and unclean foods.

Why?

First, Paul does not seem concerned in the epistle with the distinction between clean and unclean foods. We know from Acts 15 that the early Christian church affirmed both that believers are saved by grace (*Acts 15:7–11*) and that they should continue to observe some food regulations (*Acts 15:19, 20*). The distinction between clean and unclean foods and other biblical regulations are not opposed to grace. In fact, Paul argues that the new covenant has put the law in the heart (*Heb. 8:10–12*). What the author makes very clear, however, is that animal sacrifices and the Levitical priestly mediation in the sanctuary have been superseded by the superior sacrifice and priestly mediation of Jesus (*Heb. 8:4, 5; Heb. 10:1–18*).

Second, the context suggests that Paul is criticizing the audience not for abstaining from certain foods but for partaking of them with the hope of somehow obtaining grace or merit (*Heb. 13:9*). He is probably warning against participating in Jewish ritual or cultic meals that were celebrated as an extension of the animal sacrifices in the temple and which were supposed to provide spiritual benefits, or grace. But grace is not mediated through these meals; grace comes only through the sacrifice and priestly mediation of Jesus Christ. Believers “have an altar” (*Heb. 13:10*), the cross of Christ, from which they can eat (*John 6:47–58*).

In Hebrews, “grace” comes from the throne of God (*Heb. 4:16*). This grace, mediated through Christ, is an “anchor,” “sure and steadfast,” that is fastened to God’s throne itself (*Heb. 6:19, 20; compare with Heb. 4:16*). It is this grace, which we receive through the sacrifice of Christ, that provides stability and assurance to our hearts. When the heart has been “established” in this way, it will not be “carried about” by new doctrines (*Heb. 13:9*), nor will it “drift away” from God (*Heb. 2:1, NKJV*).

Dwell on Christ’s complete sacrifice. Why, then, is the idea of anything that we do “adding” to this sacrifice contrary to the gospel and the grace that is found in Jesus?

Go to Jesus Outside the Camp

Compare Hebrews 13:10–14, Mark 8:34, Matthew 10:38, Luke 14:27, and Galatians 2:20. What does it mean to go to Jesus outside the camp?

The place outside the gate was the most impure of the whole camp. The carcasses of the sacrificial animals were burned there (*Lev. 4:12*). Lepers also were excluded from the camp (*Lev. 13:46*), and blasphemers and other criminals were executed there (*Lev. 24:10–16, 23; 1 Kings 21:13; Acts 7:58*). These regulations presupposed that the presence of God was within the camp. Anything that was impure was cast outside because God was unwilling to see any “unclean” or “indecent” thing in it (*Num. 5:3, Deut. 23:14*).

Jesus suffered on the cross outside Jerusalem (*John 19:17–20*). This emphasizes the shame that was cast upon Him (*Heb. 12:2*). He was officially condemned as one who had “blasphemed the name” and, therefore, was repudiated by Israel and executed outside the wall (*Mark 14:63, 64; see Lev. 24:11, 16*). Jesus was cast outside the camp as a “shameful,” “unclean,” or “indecent” thing (*Heb. 12:2*). Paul, however, exhorts believers to follow Jesus outside the gate, enduring the shame that He endured (*Heb. 12:2; see Heb. 13:13*). This also was the path Moses followed, who chose to bear “the reproach of Christ” instead of the treasures of Egypt (*Heb. 11:26*).

Paradoxically, however, Hebrews suggests that God’s presence is now outside the camp. The action of following Jesus outside the camp means not only “bearing His reproach,” or shame, but also going “forth to Him” (*Heb. 13:13, NKJV*) just as those Israelites who “sought the Lord” went “outside the camp” in the desert when Moses removed God’s tent from the camp after the golden-calf controversy (*Exod. 33:7, NKJV*). This account suggests that the rejection of Jesus by unbelievers also implied the rejection of God, as Israel did in the golden-calf apostasy (*Exodus 32, Exodus 33*). Thus, the path of suffering and shame also is the path to God.

Paul invites readers to follow Jesus as “the author and finisher” of their faith (*Heb. 12:2*), implicitly inviting them also to consider their present sufferings a momentary discipline that will yield “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (*Heb. 12:11*). They are leaving behind a corrupted city, or camp, in search of “the city that is to come,” whose architect is God (*Heb. 13:14, ESV; Heb. 11:10, 16*).

What does it mean for you to follow Jesus “outside the camp”? What are those aspects of the life of faith in Jesus that may bring “reproach” or “shame” from those around you?

Further Thought: “After the descent of the Holy Spirit, . . . [believers] rejoiced in the sweetness of communion with saints. They were tender, thoughtful, self-denying, willing to make any sacrifice for the truth’s sake. In their daily association with one another, they revealed the love that Christ had enjoined upon them. By unselfish words and deeds they strove to kindle this love in other hearts. . . .

“But gradually a change came. The believers began to look for defects in others. Dwelling upon mistakes, giving place to unkind criticism, they lost sight of the Saviour and His love. They became more strict in regard to outward ceremonies, more particular about the theory than the practice of the faith. In their zeal to condemn others, they overlooked their own errors. They lost the brotherly love that Christ had enjoined, and, saddest of all, they were unconscious of their loss. They did not realize that happiness and joy were going out of their lives and that, having shut the love of God out of their hearts, they would soon walk in darkness.

“John, realizing that brotherly love was waning in the church, urged upon believers the constant need of this love. His letters to the church are full of this thought. ‘Beloved, let us love one another,’ he writes; ‘for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 547, 548.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Christian life often is considered the personal, individual relationship between Jesus and the believer. This is, however, only one aspect of the Christian life. Why is it important to remember that God is leading us as a group? What are my responsibilities to the group? What can I expect from the group?
- 2 What are the best indicators that brotherly love is strong in a congregation? Be prepared to create a list in your Sabbath School class.
- 3 What is *true* brotherly love? What are its characteristics, causes, and results? How would you differentiate it from *false* brotherly love?

Narrow Escape!

By SAENGSRIN PHONGCHAN

God loves me a lot.

When a friend moved away to Australia, I agreed to visit her parents every once in a while back here in Thailand. It wasn't easy to find the parents' house. I had to look up directions, and I learned that the house was quite some distance from my own. For my first visit, I filled my backpack and several bags with groceries. Carrying the food, I hailed a three-wheeled *tuk-tuk* taxi to take me to the bus station.

Partway through our trip, the *tuk-tuk* driver suddenly said, "I can't take you. Can I call you another *tuk-tuk*?" He didn't give any reason for his change of heart. What could I do? A second *tuk-tuk* picked me up, but the driver took me to the wrong place. I got into a third *tuk-tuk*.

It took nearly two hours to reach the bus station. I was fuming in frustration when I arrived. Why had it taken two hours and three *tuk-tuks* for the usual short and simple trip to the bus station?

"Where are you going?" the ticket seller asked me.

I was so upset that I couldn't talk to anyone, not even to the ticket seller.

"I'll talk to you later," I said, turning away.

After calming down, I bought a ticket and boarded a minivan.

During the trip to the house of my friend's parents, we passed a wrecked minivan on the side of the road. Our driver stopped to see if he could help. Returning to the minivan, he somberly told us that several passengers had died in the crash.

"This is the minivan that left right before us on this route," he said.

At that moment, I realized that I should have been on that minivan. I only missed the minivan because of the many delays in reaching the bus station.

My friend's parents were relieved to see me. They had heard about the crash. "We were so worried because we thought you were on that minivan," the mother said.

"God is so good," I said. Then I told my story about the delays to the parents, who were not Christians.

"The God or angel who protects you is really great!" the father exclaimed.

Yes, God loves me a lot.



Saengsurin Phongchan was principal at the Seventh-day Adventist school in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand, that received part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering three years ago. Thank you for your offering that helped the school, Adventist International Mission School-Korat, expand into a high school at a new site.

28 FUNDAMENTAL Beliefs

OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH



Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Below is an abbreviated version for your reference. A complete version can be found at www.Adventist.org/beliefs.

1. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)

2. THE TRINITY

There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. God, who is love, is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Gen. 1:26; Deut. 6:4; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 28:19; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 1:21, 22; 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2.)

3. THE FATHER

God the eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. (Gen. 1:1; Deut. 4:35; Ps. 110:1, 4; John 3:16; 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:28; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 John 4:8; Rev. 4:11.)

4. THE SON

God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly human, Jesus the Christ. (Isa. 53:4-6; Dan. 9:25-27; Luke 1:35; John 1:1-3, 14; 5:22; 10:30; 14:1-3, 9, 13; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; 2 Cor. 3:18; 5:17-19; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 2:9-18; 8:1, 2.)

5. THE HOLY SPIRIT

God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He is as much a person as are the Father and the Son. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God. (Gen. 1:1, 2; 2 Sam. 23:2; Ps. 51:11; Isa. 61:1; Luke 1:35; 4:18; John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:7-13; Acts 1:8; 5:3; 10:38; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 12:7-11; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Peter 1:21.)

6. CREATION

God has revealed in Scripture the authentic and historical account of His creative activity. He created the universe, and in a recent and literal six-day creation the Lord made “the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them” and rested on the seventh day. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of the work He performed. (Gen. 1:2-5; 11; Exod. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Isa. 45:12, 18; Acts 17:24; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; 11:3; Rev. 10:6; 14:7.)

7. THE NATURE OF HUMANITY

Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7, 15; 3; Ps. 8:4-8; 51:5, 10; 58:3; Jer. 17:9; Acts 17:24-28; Rom. 5:12-17; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 John 3:4; 4:7, 8, 11, 20.)

8. THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God’s adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. (Gen. 3; 6-8; Job 1:6-12; Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-18; Rom. 1:19-32; 3:4; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 1:14; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Peter 3:6; Rev. 12:4-9.)

9. THE LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

In Christ’s life of perfect obedience to God’s will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life, and the whole creation may better understand the infinite and holy love of the Creator. (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22:1; Isa. 53; John 3:16; 14:30; Rom. 1:4; 3:25; 4:25; 8:3, 4; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4, 20-22; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 19-21; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 2:15; 1 Peter 2:21, 22; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.)

10. THE EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION

In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, Substitute and Example. (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 33:11; 36:25-27; Hab. 2:4; Mark 9:23, 24; John 3:3-8, 16; 16:8; Rom. 3:21-26; 8:1-4, 14-17; 5:6-10; 10:17; 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13, 14, 26; 4:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10; Col. 1:13, 14; Titus 3:3-7; Heb. 8:7-12; 1 Peter 1:23; 2:21, 22; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rev. 13:8.)

11. GROWING IN CHRIST

By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus’ victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. (1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Matt. 20:25-28; 25:31-46; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Rom. 8:38, 39; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; Phil. 3:7-14; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thess. 5:16-18, 23; Heb. 10:25; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 1 John 4:4.)

12. THE CHURCH

The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to humanity, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. (Gen. 12:1-3; Exod. 19:3-7; Matt. 16:13-20; 18:18; 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38-42; 7:38; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:22, 23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11; 5:23-27; Col. 1:17, 18; 1 Peter 2:9)

13. THE REMNANT AND ITS MISSION

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. (Dan. 7:9-14; Isa. 1:9; 11:11; Jer. 23:3; Mic. 2:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3, 14; Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4.)

14. UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. (Ps. 133:1; Matt. 28:19, 20; John 17:20-23; Acts 17:26, 27; Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; 2 Cor. 5:16, 17; Gal. 3:27-29; Eph. 2:13-16; 4:3-6, 11-16; Col. 3:10-15.)

15. BAPTISM

By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Saviour, become His people, and are received as members by His church. (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38; 16:30-33; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12, 13.)

16. THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper is a participation in the emblems of the body and blood of Jesus as an expression of faith in Him, our Lord and Saviour. The communion service is open to all believing Christians. (Matt. 26:17-30; John 6:48-63; 13:1-17; 1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:23-30; Rev. 3:20.)

17. SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND MINISTRIES

God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts that each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people. (Acts 6:1-7; Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 27, 28; Eph. 4:8, 11-16; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.)

18. THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church, and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Her writings speak with prophetic authority and . . . make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Num. 12:6; 2 Chron. 20:20; Amos 3:7; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 22:8, 9.)

19. THE LAW OF GOD

The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 28:1-14; Ps. 19:7-14; 40:7, 8; Matt. 5:17-20; 22:36-40; John 14:15; 15:7-10; Rom. 8:3, 4; Eph. 2:8-10; Heb. 8:8-10; 1 John 2:3; 5:3; Rev. 12:17; 14:12.)

20. THE SABBATH

The gracious Creator, after the six days of Creation, rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. (Gen. 2:1-3; Exod. 20:8-11; 31:13-17; Lev. 23:32; Deut. 5:12-15; Isa. 56:5, 6; 58:13, 14; Ezek. 20:12, 20; Matt. 12:1-12; Mark 1:32; Luke 4:16; Heb. 4:1-11.)

21. STEWARDSHIP

We are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow human beings, and by returning tithe and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15; 1 Chron. 29:14; Haggai 1:3-11; Mal. 3:8-12; Matt. 23:23; Rom. 15:26, 27; 1 Cor. 9:9-14; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; 9:7.)

22. CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR

We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life. For the Spirit to re-create in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things that will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. (Gen. 7:2; Exod. 20:15; Lev. 11:1-47; Ps. 106:3; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 10:5; Eph. 5:1-21; Phil. 2:4; 4:8; 1 Tim. 2:9, 10; Titus 2:11, 12; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 John 2:6; 3 John 2.)

23. MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between a man and a woman who share a common faith. (Gen. 2:18-25; Exod. 20:12; Deut. 6:5-9; Prov. 22:6; Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:3-9, 12; Mark 10:11, 12; John 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 7:7, 10, 11; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:21-33; 6:1-4.)

24. CHRIST'S MINISTRY IN THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY

There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle that the Lord set up and not humans. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. At His ascension, He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the holy place of the earthly sanctuary. (Lev. 16; Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Heb. 1:3; 2:16, 17; 4:14-16; 8:1-5; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; Rev. 8:3-5; 11:19; 14:6, 7; 20:12; 14:12; 22:11, 12.)

25. THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Saviour's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-6; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:8; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 1:7; 14:14-20; 19:11-21.)

26. DEATH AND RESURRECTION

The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later. (Job 19:25-27; Ps. 146:3, 4; Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10; Dan. 12:2, 13; Isa. 25:8; John 5:28, 29; 11:11-14; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 20:1-10.)

27. THE MILLENNIUM AND THE END OF SIN

The millennium is the thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints in heaven between the first and second resurrections. During this time the wicked dead will be judged; the earth will be utterly desolate, without living human inhabitants, but occupied by Satan and his angels. At its close, Christ with His saints and the Holy City will descend from heaven to earth. The unrighteous dead will then be resurrected, and with Satan and his angels will surround the city; but fire from God will consume them and cleanse the earth. The universe will thus be freed of sin and sinners forever. (Jer. 4:23-26; Ezek. 28:18, 19; Mal. 4:1; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Rev. 20; 21:1-5.)

28. THE NEW EARTH

On the new earth, in which righteousness dwells, God will provide an eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy, and learning in His presence. For here God Himself will dwell with His people, and suffering and death will have passed away. The great controversy will be ended, and sin will be no more. All things, animate and inanimate, will declare that God is love; and He shall reign forever. Amen. (Isa. 35; 65:17-25; Matt. 5:5; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 11:15; 21:1-7; 22:1-5.)