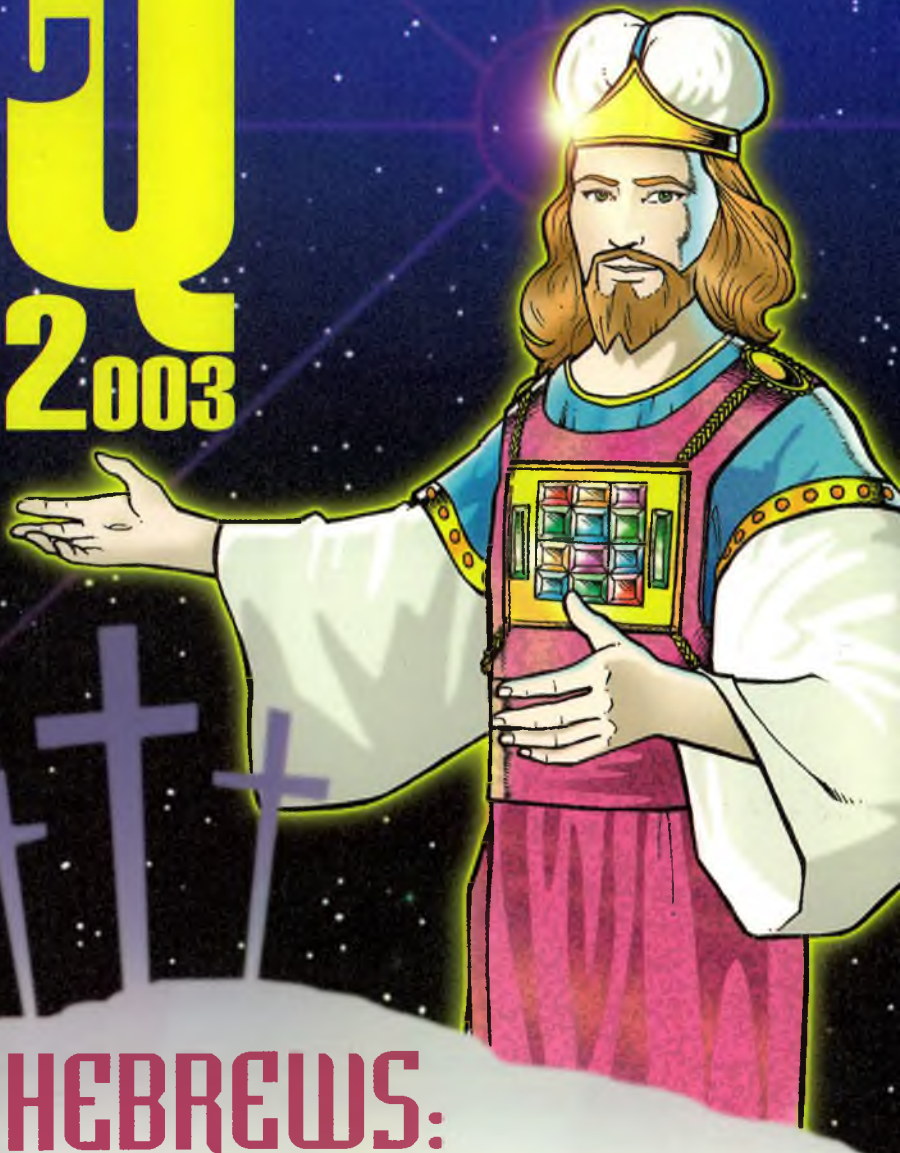


JULY-SEPTEMBER

Q
2003



HEBREWS: It's All About Jesus

A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults



<http://cq.adventist.org>

Hebrews: It's All About Jesus



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Welcome to *CQ's* World



The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in *CQ's* writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School Bible study guide, 400 individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 70,000. It is published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Indonesian, and Finnish.

Get Interactive

Ever think about writing for *CQ*?

Why not! Each year 400 young adults from around the world participate in the *CQ* writing program. It gives Seventh-day Adventist young people aged 18 to 35 a unique opportunity to grow spiritually, to share the benefits of their Bible study, to exchange ideas, and to contribute to the mission of the Church.

You are the most important ingredient in our *CQ* formula because you can be the answer to our greatest need—the need for caring, committed, contributing authors. If you think you'd like to participate in the writing of a lesson, write us today:

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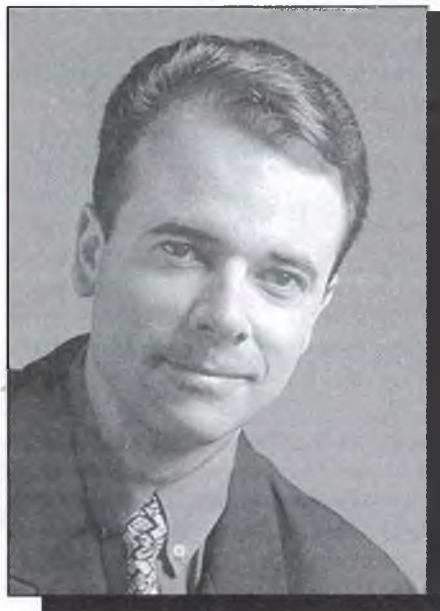


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This Quarter's Illustrator



Michelson Borges was born in Criciúma, State of Santa Catarina, Brazil. He is a journalist who has worked as editor of the *Novo Tempo* radio news program in Florianópolis and hosted a science program. Presently he is editor of the Brazilian edition *CQ* in Portuguese and one of the editors of *Sinais dos Tempos* (*Signs of the Times*) at the Brazil Publishing House. Borges has authored a book on creationism, a history of Adventism in Brazil, and a six-volume series of great empires and civilizations. His hobby is drawing. He is married to Débora Tatiane Martins Borges, who illustrated the first quarter 2002 issue of *CQ*, and they have a daughter named Giovanna.

Getting the Most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the Adult Bible Study Guide find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflect the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of *CQ* is about 70,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
 - "**Introduction**" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
 - "**Logos**" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
 - "**Testimony**" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
 - "**Evidence**" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
 - "**How-To**" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
 - "**Opinion**" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
 - "**Exploration**" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference–approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the Church.*

Jesus and the book of **Hebrews**



“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”
(Heb. 13:8, NRSV).

The Magnificence of Jesus

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 4:15

The book of Hebrews is a full and clear revelation of Jesus and expresses the following magnificent qualities:

The Better Priest (Heb. 2:17; 4:15)

Since the Fall, humanity has needed sufficient representation for restoration. Jesus has become the full means by which God has made restoration available. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be a High Priest for humankind? Hebrews 2:17 says, "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (NIV).

The Better Sacrifice (Heb. 10:10)

In the wilderness sanctuary services, the Israelites used to offer sacrifices every day for their sins, but they were not able to wash away their sins permanently. "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10, NIV).

Our Forerunner (Heb. 6:20)

Christ is our Forerunner in the sense that He was humble, meek, and gentle and He accepted baptism so that we would be baptized after His example. Then He suffered even death on the cross so that all who die in Him would be raised as He was. After resurrection He ascended to be in the presence of God, and He has been glorified so that we who follow after Him will also be with Him in His glory.

Christ is our Forerunner.

The Apostle (Heb. 3:1)

"Christ came to this earth as the 'Apostle' of the Father, 'the Sent of God.' . . . He came to represent God before men . . . and returned to heaven as man's representative, or high priest, before the Father."*

As heaven's envoy on earth, His life was a full expression of God's concern over humanity's state. His suffering and death is a real manifestation of His love for humankind (see John 3:16). His heavenly ministry now is a manifestation that He has completed the work of saving humanity.

*The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 409.

Choosing Christ, the Ultimate

LOGOS

Heb. 1:1, 2; 2:3; 4:15; 10:22, 23

Choosing the Better Revelation (Heb. 1:1, 2)

"Rabbis frequently took statements made about Old Testament personages, changed them into future expectations, and applied them to the Messiah. The author of Hebrews did the same."¹ There is more than a hint in this statement that what Adventists call Old Testament types of Christ and Christianity are nothing more than human inventions.

Some theologians warn against the dangerous relativism of the so-called reader-response criticism, which proposes a variety of interpretations of biblical passages. But, surprisingly, when it comes to the New Testament usage of the Old Testament, such as in the Gospels and in the book of Hebrews, they choose to defend the position that Old Testament

**The Epistle to the Hebrews
applies to Christians at
the end of the ages.**

passages had only one meaning: namely, the original intent of the author. Subsequent Messianic interpretations of these Old Testament passages must rather be seen as personal "applications," "significances," or "creative appropriations" not intended by the Old Testament.²

Richard M. Davidson contrasts this postmodern "neotypology" that recognizes only historical correspondences between the Old Testament and the New Testament retrospectively, with traditional Adventist principles of typology.³ These principles state, among others, our belief in "divinely designed prefigurations that point forward to their antitypical fulfilment in Christ and gospel realities brought about by Christ."⁴

A person may not understand exactly how the Holy Spirit encoded these deeper meanings in Old Testament passages, or how New Testament authors recognized that these Messianic prefigurations applied to Christ. But if one accepts that God knows the end from the beginning, as well as that God is involved in the destiny of His people, then Old Testament promises in the form of types or prefigurations and their New Testament fulfillments become a matter of childlike acceptance.

Choosing a High View of Scripture (Heb. 2:3)

Touching upon a warning against drifting away from Christianity (2:1-3), the author asserts the truthfulness of the gospel proclaimed by Christ Himself and witnessed to by apostolic eyewitnesses (verses 3, 4). Many Bible commentators have concluded on the basis of this statement and obvious differences of language

and style, that the apostle Paul could not have been the author of Hebrews. Many recognize, however, that the “point of view expressed in the epistle is characteristically and uniquely that of the apostle Paul.”⁵

If one accepts the broad authorship of many biblical books (e.g., Paul’s use of secretaries to assist him in the writing of some epistles), then the suggestion of some that Barnabas was the author should be considered a serious option. The authorship of Hebrews by a close, apostolic associate of Paul is a better option than the suggestion that the author was someone under the platonic influence of Philo of Alexandria. Regardless of who the author of Hebrews was, he “understood that all Scripture, even that which he believed had been written by David and Moses, was the Word of God, spoken by either God or the Holy Spirit (3:17).”⁶

Choosing the Heavenly Sanctuary (Heb. 4:15)

Hebrews is addressed to a group of believers in the apostolic age who are apparently falling back into the wilderness experience of the obsolete systems of Judaism. The author of Hebrews counters this futile hankering after the Mosaic era by presenting Jesus as the all-sufficient Sacrifice for sin. Using terms reminiscent of the earthly sanctuary, the author describes how the blood of Jesus brought complete atonement and cleansing at the Cross (2:17; 1:3; 9:11, 12, 23-36), and enters through the inner veil of separation into the very presence of God (6:19, 20; 10:19-21).

Choosing Zion Over Sinai (Heb. 10:23, 24)

The redemption brought about by Jesus’ sacrifice now enables Christians to “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” (10:22, NIV) and “hold unswervingly to the hope” they profess (verse 23, NIV). Instead of going back to some idealized form of Judaism, believers are encouraged rather to look to the heavenly Zion (12:22).

According to some scholars, it is quite possible that the Epistle to the Hebrews was originally addressed mainly to converted priests who were attracted to the lifestyle and beliefs of the Essenes. From the present tenses in those passages referring to the Levitical priesthood in Hebrews, one could infer that the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 was still in the future. In the light of this scenario, the Epistle to the Hebrews applies with particular force to Christians living at the end of the ages, when compromise in both doctrine and lifestyle is a daily threat.

1. G. W. Buchanan, Blomberg, and R. L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), pp. 117-151.

2. Ibid.

3. Richard M. Davidson, “Sanctuary Typology” in *Symposium on Revelation*, Book 1, ed. by Frank D. Holbrook (Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), p. 27.

4. Ibid.

5. Siegfried H. Horn, ed., *SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 470.

6. Buchanan, p. xxii.

Strength for Today and Hope for Tomorrow

TESTIMONY

Heb. 2:18; 4:15

"A true shepherd knows and pities and helps the sheep that most need his help—those that are bruised and lame and feeble. 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd.'

"Far more intimately than the patriarch Jacob knew the weak, the suffering, and the lame among his sheep, does the Chief Shepherd know His flock. He knows what no one else knows. He has Himself weighed every burden. No one knows the weight like Himself, for He has borne all our griefs, and carried all our sorrows. It was this that made Him a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. . . .

"If there is not another soul in the universe that regards you, the Lord God of Israel is looking upon you with thoughts of compassion, tenderness, and sympathy. He sees you with your strong impulses when fainthearted and discouraged. . . . You have the

"He was tempted in all points like as we are."

deepest, the richest, the most refreshing sympathy in the bosom of the great Shepherd. We have not an high priest who cannot sympathize with us, but One who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."¹

"Praise the Lord, that we have a compassionate, tender High Priest that can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities."²

We can take courage from the fact that Christ, who is without sin, now stands in our stead, and so when temptations are strong look up and remember: "Christ is the source of our strength. Let us study His teachings. In giving His only begotten Son to live in our world and to be subject to temptation that He might teach us how to overcome, the Father has made ample provision that we should not be taken captive by the enemy. Meeting the fallen foe, Christ overcame in behalf of humanity. He was tempted in all points like as we are, but He resisted in the strength of divinity, that He might be able to succor us when we are tempted."³

Not only are we to take courage from the life of Christ but also from the testimony and witness of those who have gone before. This is why the author of Hebrews directs our attention to the lives of faithful men and women so that "we have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."⁴

1. *That I May Know Him*, p. 53.

2. *Reflecting Christ*, p. 350.

3. *This Day With God*, p. 151.

4. *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 196.

Does Hebrews Still Speak to Us?

EVIDENCE

Heb. 13:22

For most Christians the book of Hebrews is an enigma, probably because it is saturated with theological talk of Old Testament concepts and ideas. What do high priests, sacrifices, and the sanctuary have to do with us today? Perhaps if we stop to study this book with a sincere desire to understand it, we may discover that it is surprisingly contemporary.

In Hebrews 13:22 the author urges his readers to “bear with [his] word of exhortation” (NIV). To exhort someone is to give them advice; it is not to give them a detailed account of your theological beliefs. Therefore, the writer was trying to communicate something to the recipients of this letter. This becomes apparent when we are able to see the structure of the book of Hebrews.

As the letter unfolds, there is first a discussion about Jesus and His high-priestly ministry, and then the theological argument breaks from time to time for practical applications. These breaks are indicated by words such as *therefore* (2:1; 3:1; 10:10) and by sudden changes from speaking in the third person to the first or second person. The author alternates between theological discussion and practical application.*

We, too, need to be balanced in our approach to the spreading of the gospel. If we are too theological without practical application, then people will view us as out of touch with reality. On the other hand, if we are too practical without good solid theology as a base, then we are breathing hot air to people.

The problems in the congregation become evident.

From the practical applications in this letter, the problems in the congregation become evident. They had been suffering persecution and were growing weary in their Christian walk. They felt like drifting away (2:1), they were beginning to abandon the faith (verse 2), and they even felt tempted to doubt (3:2-14). They were not growing spiritually (5:11-14), and some were not attending church (10:25).

Sound familiar?

The author's solution to their problem was faith (11:1-39). But the only way for their faith to be revived was for them to behold Jesus and what He had done and was doing for them right then in the heavenly sanctuary. The theology of Hebrews revealed Christ anew to His people so that they could be renewed in their walk with Him.

* W. G. Johnsson, *The Abundant Life Amplifier: Hebrews—Full Assurance for Today* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1994), pp. 18, 19.

HOW-TO

Heb. 11:6

What is faith? Faith is not feeling. It “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1, NKJV).

Therefore faith is one of the outstanding qualities that distinguish God’s people from the rest of the world. Hebrews 11 gives us a list of the heroes and heroines of

Faith is not quantitative.

faith, and simply declares to us that faith is not something that we cannot possess; it is possible for us to have faith too. For without faith we are simply fighting a losing

battle; we are attempting the impossible. Trying to achieve our ultimate goal—to spend eternity with Christ—is just a mission impossible without faith. Faith helps us to see the unseen; it turns hope into reality.

“True faith and true prayer—how strong they are! They are as two arms by which the human suppliant lays hold upon the power of Infinite Love. Faith is trusting in God—believing that He loves us, and knows what is for our best good. Thus, instead of our own way, it leads us to choose His way. In place of our ignorance, it accepts His wisdom; in place of our weakness, His strength; in place of our sinfulness, His righteousness. Our lives, ourselves, are already His; faith acknowledges His ownership, and accepts its blessings. Truth, uprightness, purity, are pointed out as secrets of life’s success. It is faith that puts us in possession of these. Every good impulse or aspiration is the gift of God; faith receives from God the life that alone can produce true growth and efficiency.”*

In Matthew 17:20, Christ declares that faith is not quantitative, that all we need is faith no greater than a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds. Our faith in God will help us to be faithful to God. Therefore we can challenge giants. Faith gives us blessings to count. It enables us to see what God has done for us, and what He can still do.

REACT

1. How is faith attained? Be specific.
2. In what way does your faith advance your relation to God?
3. “Faith is not feeling” the author of this article writes. What is the relationship between faith and feelings? Do they connect with each other on some level? How can our feelings help or hurt our faith?
4. What is the relationship between faith and prayer? Is it possible to be strong in one and weak in the other? Explain your answer.

**Gospel Workers*, p. 259.

It's Your Choice

OPINION

Rom. 6:23

Sin cost the death of the only begotten Son of God. Our redemption was bought with the ultimate price, and we cannot afford to take this lightly. The Bible tells us that there is no remission of sins without the shedding of blood. But the same blood that takes away our sin can mean condemnation for its rejecters. When Christ died on Calvary, it was to take away our sin, but when He comes again it will be to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him. At His appearing, the same blood that sets us free will mean for us either salvation or condemnation.

Sinning is a vote of no confidence for the blood of the Lamb. It is not an accident. According to David's definition, it is an act of going against God's will (Ps. 51:4). And surely we cannot as individuals or as a church regard Jesus and His blood lightly. Three striking passages (Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26; 12:15-17) show the calamitous consequences of abandoning Jesus and His saving blood.

I grew up knowing that putting my hand on a hot stove will burn me. This was simply a lesson that says you reap what you sow. If we reject the sacrifice made on our behalf, we must be prepared to live with the results of our actions. God obtained eternal salvation for everyone, and He availed salvation to "whosoever believeth in Him" (John 3:16, KJV). Considering the magnificent work of Jesus and His blood, God cannot excuse sin. The extent to which God went for our salvation displays His intention. Our loss will be a result of our own doing; we will have no one to blame but ourselves.

The Christian's basis for choosing life and not death is rooted in the fact that he or she knows that they are not permanent residents of this world. To choose this world and what it offers would be to reject that better country that Christ is preparing for us yonder. In aligning themselves with Christ and His blood, Christians look beyond the pleasures of this world because they have an eternal destiny. Their daily lives, choices, and tastes indicate that they are merely sojourners in this world. They conduct themselves as citizens of a better country. Theirs is a life of moving away from sin.

**We must be prepared to live
with the results of our actions.**

The Sabbath rest is for the people of God. It affords them a chance to rest from all their labor, worry, and pain. Just as God rested, they also rest from their works of sin. They shun evil and all its appearances. They enjoy the rest found in Christ, and they look expectantly to that time when they shall have their final sabbatical rest with their Lord and Savior.

The Cross and the Crown

EXPLORATION

Exod. 25:8; Isaiah 53; Heb. 7:25-28

CONCLUDE

Hebrews 11 has often been called the Faith Hall of Fame. However, the entire book, if it could be summed up in one word, would be *faith*. The book of Hebrews gives us the foundation for our faith: Jesus, our Savior. He is the Lamb of God, the High Priest, and the only One worthy to save us. He is now making intercession for us, which enables us to have eternal life. To accept Jesus as Savior is to accept the book of Hebrews.

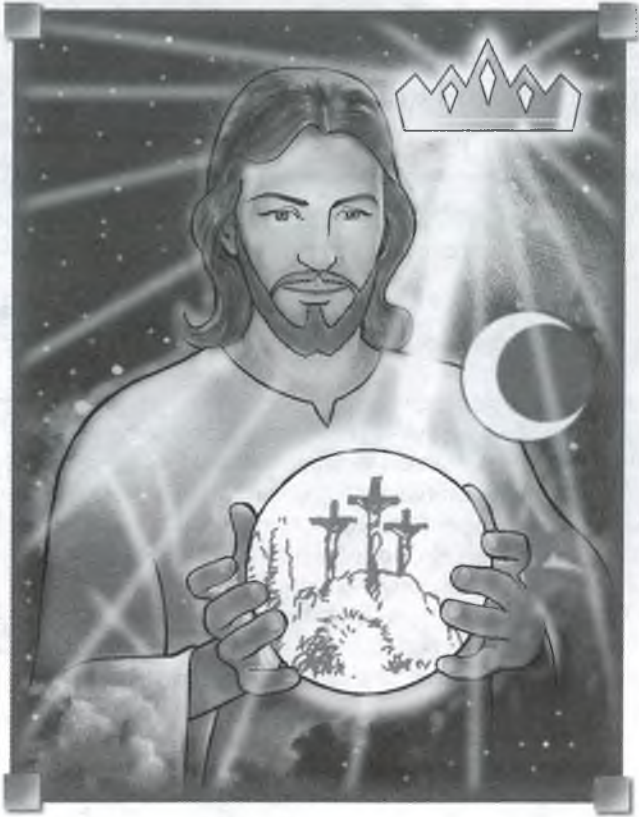
CONSIDER

- Photographing or sketching the inside layout of your church. Compare it to a picture of the sanctuary. What are the similarities and differences?
- Committing to memory one of the texts in Hebrews that speak of Jesus' interceding for us.
- Listening to Crystal Lewis's "The Lion and the Lamb" on CD or downloading it from a gospel Web site.
- Sharing with a friend a specific time when God rewarded your faith.
- Prayerfully reading Isaiah 53 from your favorite Bible version, then reading a commentary on it in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 4, or one of Ellen White's books.
- Studying the characteristics of a lion and of a lamb. Think about why Revelation refers to Jesus as both a lion and a lamb.
- Blindfolding yourself in an unfamiliar environment while trying to get from point A to point B. Try the same route again, this time having a trusted person lead you. Compare how you felt both times. What made the difference?

CONNECT

God's Amazing Grace, p.171.

Our King in our Midst



“He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3, NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 1:3

Queen Victoria was the monarch of England in the nineteenth century. She liked to take time off in the country and go for long walks in ordinary walking clothes. It happened mainly nearby Windsor Castle, not far from London.

One day as she was out in the forest, Queen Victoria got caught in very heavy rain and was forced to stop at a nearby house. She knocked on the door and a woman answered cautiously. Victoria asked if she could borrow an umbrella to use to get home. She promised she would return it the next day.

The woman handed her an umbrella and quickly closed the door.

Reluctantly and suspiciously, the woman handed her an umbrella and quickly closed the door. When the queen opened the umbrella, it had holes all through it and was almost useless.

The next day, as promised, the queen sent a servant—a footman as they were known—to the woman's house to return the umbrella. The holes in it had been repaired.

The woman was apologetic when she saw the footman. She said: "I'm so sorry. If I had known who she was, I would never have acted so badly."

Jesus is our King! Like Queen Victoria, He liked to stay among His subjects. He was on earth, among everyday people, for 33 years. He ate with them, wore clothes like them, touched them (though many were sick), and loved them. Unfortunately, many people among His subjects received Him like the woman who loaned Queen Victoria an umbrella—reluctantly and suspiciously.

Isn't it wonderful that, in spite of it all, King Jesus would also become our Advocate? How much love is necessary for someone to act with such abnegation? What feeling is able to flood someone's heart to the point that He would defend His executioners?

We don't understand this because we are simple and mortal. But we can accept Jesus and His love and, finally, give up on being commoners to be in the heavenly courts.

Who Is Jesus to You?

EVIDENCE

Ps. 24:10

The visit of a king or representative of a monarchy to another country is an event that usually attracts the attention of the media. But with time the fact is forgotten. This happens with any king, however admired he may be. With the King of kings, however, it's another story.

As a student of journalism, I take special interest in researching how the media portrays God. Some time ago, a magazine of great circulation in Brazil was intrigued with the fact that people believe in Jesus so many years after His living on earth and "in an age of technology and consumption."* The following question was raised: Who is Jesus that people should believe in Him?

In order to answer this question, journalists went to an atheist, Ludwig Feuerbach. According to him, "the picture of Jesus is the consummation of the ultimate wish of all religions: To see God. Christ represents real victory over death, over all the violence in the world. . . . [He] is the heart that is free from any distressing limitation . . . [He] is divinity made visible." Although it adopted a skeptical vision, the magazine considered Jesus as a symbol, something it could not deny.

Jesus is the perfect pattern, the hope of restoration, the One who will put an end to suffering and will reestablish justice. Jesus is the consummate Leader. He is the Son of God—the King of Glory. "Being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, [He] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3, NKJV).

**Jesus is much more than a
symbol of majesty.**

Even before Jesus came to earth, the means of communication of that time had already spread word about the event. If newspapers and magazines had been available, I believe their headlines would revolve around the theme: "The King is coming soon." David sang of this promise in his psalms. Isaiah prophesied about it. Many other Bible writers in the Old Testament have done the same. In the New Testament, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John report the story of Jesus. And the Epistle to the Hebrews presents His character and speaks of His human preexistence. The main subject in the Bible is the Son of God.

Jesus is much more than a symbol of majesty. He is the King of the universe and wishes to reign in our hearts (Isa. 57:15).

**Istoé*, December 5, 2000.

Monday
July 7

A Compassionate King

LOGOS

Heb. 1:3; 4:14-16

God always wanted to reign over His people, to protect them from all danger, to make them prosperous and happy. But Israel envied their neighbors, and they preferred to submit themselves to unjust human kings. This choice was the doorway to idolatry and other countless evils, thanks to the infidelity and vanity of human kings. When the ruler gave heed to divine instructions, the entire nation benefited. The opposite also happened—a bad reign brought sad consequences to all the people.

The history of Israel shows how a king can exercise influence both for good and for evil. Our life is governed by the one who reigns in our hearts. God continues to want to be the King of His people today in a different way from that in the past. We must choose who will have sovereignty in our lives: the King of the universe or the prince of this world.

In His care and affection, God didn't give up helping His people. He always tried to instruct them through the prophets. The greatest news He ever sent to this world

**The King of the universe
wants to talk with you.**

was that of the appearance of the Messiah, who would free the people of Israel and reign over them. Psalm 110 speaks of a strong and powerful king who would subdue all other kings of

the earth. This hope filled people's hearts, but they didn't understand what kind of reign this was to be. It is true that Jesus is the King of the universe, as the book of Hebrews confirms. However, other prophecies point to a reign relative to a rude cross (e.g., Isaiah 53. It was after receiving a crown of thorns that Christ was crowned in glory). In the Crucifixion, once again Israel rejected God as their King and put Christ to death as it had been prophesied.

The book of Hebrews points out that, besides being King, Christ is the High Priest (4:14). Grasping this issue is of the highest importance, for "the correct understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith."*

To explain Jesus' royal descent, an important fact for the Jews, the author of Hebrews mentions Psalm 110 (to which we have already referred), and compares Jesus to priest Melchizedek, king of Salem, to show that He has no beginning or end (Heb. 7:1-3).

The idea of Jesus as King and Priest can cause either positive or negative reactions. It depends on the way you consider the relationship between a king and his subjects. Israel's perception of this was not very good. Human kings were, in their majority, authoritarian, cruel, idolatrous, and a series of other equally

negative characteristics. To gain an audience with them was very difficult, and whoever dared to disturb them without being summoned might even die (as in the time of Esther).

To prevent people from associating Christ with the negative mental image that they had of earthly kings, the author of the book of Hebrews wrote: "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:16, NIV). Without dread. Without fear.

We have to understand what kind of king Jesus is in order to adore Him and to relate to Him appropriately. That is why He made it clear in the Bible that He is more than a king; He is a father. Jesus is the King who invites: " 'Come now, let us reason together,' " (Isa. 1:18, NIV). The King of the universe wants to talk with you. The Creator of countless worlds, of gigantic galaxies, wants to have you very close to His throne. He wants you to be a subject of His coming kingdom of glory. Therefore, " 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts' " (Heb. 4:7, NIV).

REACT

1. How can you improve your mental image of God in order to trust Him more? Be specific.

2. How can you allow Jesus to reign absolute in your heart? What, in your life, has been competing for that supremacy?

3. In the past God advised His people through the prophets. In what specific ways has He been showing you that it pays to be a subject in His kingdom?

4. Other than king and priest, what are some of the other images the Bible uses to describe Jesus' role? Which description is most meaningful for you personally?

5. What does it mean to you personally to have Jesus as King in your life?

6. While on earth, Jesus referred to Satan as "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11, KJV). Who is really ruling this planet? Explain your answer.

**Evangelism*, p. 221.

Tuesday
July 8

Our High Priest and King

TESTIMONY

Heb. 1:3

The book of Hebrews brings us a complete and wonderful description of Christ's work, after the Cross and the Resurrection. It presents Jesus as our High Priest and our Lawyer in the investigative judgment.

It is important that we read the whole book of Hebrews, but I suggest that you read these verses, that are just a few of the many that speak about Jesus as our High Priest, and they bring us wonderful promises: Hebrews 2:17, 18; 4:13-16; 7:25; 9:24.

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do

"Our great High Priest enters the holy of holies."

not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then ap-

proach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (4:14-16, NIV).

Ellen White also speaks regarding this role of Jesus in the unfolding of the plan of redemption: "The people of God today should address their prayers to Christ, their great High Priest who, invisible to human eyes, intercedes on their behalf in the heavenly sanctuary."¹

"Attended by heavenly angels, our great High Priest enters the holy of holies and there appears in the presence of God to engage in the last acts of His ministration in behalf of man—to perform the work of investigative judgment and to make an atonement for all who are shown to be entitled to its benefits."²

But the book of Hebrews also presents Jesus as our King, the King of kings, who in glory and majesty will soon come for us, to take us to heaven (10:37). (Read also Hebrews 1:8; 2:9; 12:2. These are other texts that present Jesus as King.)

"About the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom' " (1:8, NIV). In this verse, specifically, Jesus is presented as God and King, One who has a throne, a scepter (that represents fair judgment), and an eternal kingdom.

REACT

Why is it important to know Christ's work after the Cross?

1. *Christ in His Sanctuary*, p. 33.

2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 480.

An Active Subject

HOW-TO

Heb. 1:8, 9

As Christians we are subjects of a kingdom true and just, and the awareness of this reality should guide our daily conduct. We should reflect upon whether we are really being a positive influence in every circumstance.

Perhaps we might feel like a football fan, cheering for the team when the entire crowd is around. However, when alone among the other team's crowd, we may fear to reveal our true loyalties. To be a good influence among people who profess the same principles is easy. When you are in an atmosphere that is hostile to the faith, things can be different.

What can we do to remain true to the values of Christ's kingdom under any circumstance?

1. Do not lose sight of our mission. We should think about our existence based upon its meaning and purpose. We do not exist to serve ourselves alone. We have a mission to fulfill, and we must keep that in mind in order to conduct ourselves properly in any situation. We are taught to take with us the true principles of Christ's kingdom.

2. Be a positive influence. When I was about to initiate my studies at a secular university, I was told by an atheist professor that I would not stand the pressure of scientific knowledge. I confess that I became concerned. Around that time, I attended a summer course at São Paulo Adventist University, and I expressed my concerns to classmates I met. A young woman handed me a card with these words: "Do not allow the various circumstances of life to mold you, but instead be a positive influence to mold the circumstances." There is a Bible text that expresses this same thought: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21, NIV). Indeed, wherever we might be, we can be an influence for good, spreading joy and hope among people. And better still: We can show them how to be happy by Jesus' side!

Wherever we might be, we
can be an influence for good.

3. Renew our energies constantly. In order for us to be an influence for good, we must feel for ourselves the happiness of being subjects in Christ's kingdom. It is true that sometimes we feel discouraged, but we can be renewed by the conviction that Christ is by our side, willing to strengthen us. We must set aside time to listen to His voice, through the reading of the Bible and of inspiring books, and through prayer. In addition, it is important to cultivate Christian friendships as well as take on responsibilities in the cause of the kingdom.

When we take our role as subjects of a kingdom where "righteousness will be the scepter" (Heb 1:8, NIV), we feel valued, for our cause is of far greater importance.

OPINION

Heb. 1:3, 4

Jesus is a King. That sentence should make a deep difference in our lives, but, as a cliché, it has become something common. However, when we stop to reflect about the depth and the real meaning of it for us, sinful creatures, we cannot have any other reaction except to open our hearts in praise and to recognize the greatness of God's love and care for us, His children.

Let us imagine that you want to be a king. It is necessary first to have a kingdom.

**Our King is still working
to save us.**

For that, your father needs to be a king and to give you his kingdom freely or to leave you an inheritance that includes the kingdom and the reign (and all the headaches resulting from it).

Now that you are a king, it is necessary to work in behalf of your subjects; after all, you have to maintain your kingdom so that nobody takes it from you. You should defend your kingdom from attacks of enemies and take measures so that your subjects grow healthy and happy.

Jesus is a King because He was with the Father when everything was created (John 1:1-4); He participated in the wonderful work of Creation, and when this wonderful work was defiled by sin, He offered Himself to rescue His kingdom by dying for us—a sacrifice that would be accepted only if the blood shed was His blood. As if that were not enough, He revealed to the world the image—disfigured and forgotten—of a God of love and justice. That Father has placed Him at His right hand, where He is up to this day (Heb. 1:3, 4).

And Jesus' work was not finished there. Our King is still working to save us. He is the One who intercedes for us before the Father when we ask forgiveness for our sins. It is on Him that the blame falls. It is through Him that our sins are erased and forgotten and we are presented pure before the Father.

Therefore, be not afraid. Praise God again for the wonderful plan to save us. Give praises because our King went through everything that we go through, and He knows us as nobody does. Thanks to Him we can approach His throne, because it is the only place where we can find mercy and grace and a peace that only He can offer (Heb. 4:15, 16).

REACT

1. Is the image of Jesus as King an effective one for you? Why or why not?
2. What do you think is the hardest part of Jesus' job as Ruler of this earth?
3. Do you feel Jesus is ruling in all areas of your life right now? If not, what territories do you need to give to the King?

Not Just a King— My King!

EXPLORATION

John 14:21

CONCLUDE

It's just a simple question. Who or what is king of your life? It can't be that hard to answer. Is it Jesus Christ? Are you sure? How do you know? Does He captivate your thoughts when you go to church? What about after church? What about the other six days? Jesus wants to be the King of your life. Think about how much more He can do for you if you don't hold anything back and give Him your whole life.

CONSIDER

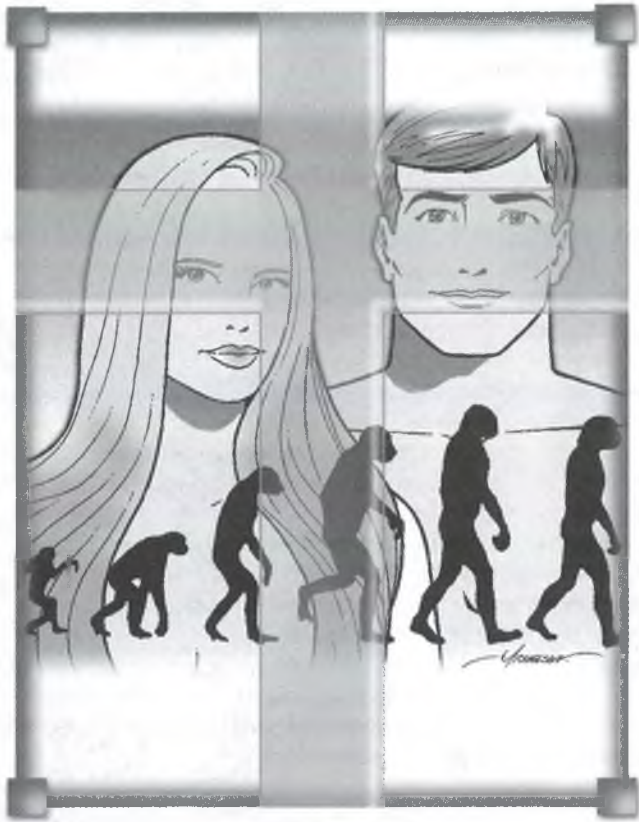
- Using graph paper to plot your spiritual life. Begin with the time you were baptized to your present spiritual condition. Note highs and lows. Set a goal of where you would like to be in a certain time frame and ask the Lord to direct you to that goal and more.
- Reading the poem "Crow's Theology" by Ted Hughes at <<http://www.horak.org/~shand/jjm/crow.html>>. Consider how this poem expresses the kingship of God in our lives.
- Writing a card or e-card to a friend to tell him or her of your love for Jesus and how much of a difference He has made in your life and how you would like that person to experience this same joy.
- Listening to the song "People Need the Lord" while sitting in a busy public place. Read John 14:21; Matthew 28:19, 20.
- Praying for others as you are performing physical exercise, that Jesus will one day become King of their lives too.
- Asking people you meet the "simple" question: "What is king of your life?" Share the love of Jesus with them when the question comes back to you.
- Keeping a journal of your spiritual experiences and how God is revealing more of Himself to you.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, chaps. 5–7.

Henry and Tom Blackaby, *The Man God Uses*; Ronald Knott, *Over and Over Again!*

Who is He, Really?



“For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17, NIV).

Who Was That?

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 16:15, 16

After the Big Bang, over millions of years the various fragments cooled and from one of those fragments came the planet Earth. Over more millions of years, life developed on earth, culminating approximately 50,000 years ago with the evolution of humanity. Because we are constantly evolving, we are only getting better, and maybe in a few more hundred thousand years we will achieve perfection . . .

Many of us grew up listening to this in our classes, from our parents, teachers, and peers. So in this light, who was this Jesus Christ? Obviously He was important enough, since we've begun counting time on earth from His birth and divided history into a period before and after Christ. But could He have been more than just a revolutionary who made a great contribution to the ever-advancing human race?

Could He have been more than just a revolutionary?

People say He was a Savior, the Son of God. But in the ever-evolving world there is no notion of a fall into sin, or of a God of omnipotence, or a Creator. In this case, what exactly would this Jesus save us from? What would make Him different from other famous people who influenced masses over the course of history?

What we will discuss in the lesson this week will be from a completely different paradigm. We will talk about a God who created our world, about the sin that separated God from us (His creations that were made in His image), and about Jesus, the Son of that same God the Creator, who then took on our own warped image and allowed Himself to be mistreated by His own creations, in order to save them from sin.

So just who was this Jesus character, and what was the significance of His life on this planet? This is the question we will answer this week. What is more, I hope that as you study this lesson, you will also discover the reason that He did what He did. As the Almighty God, He wasn't obliged to do anything, much less something that brought Him discomfort. I'm sure you always wanted to have a little glimpse into heaven, or into the mind of God. Well, this is your chance—read on!

LOGOS
Hebrews 2

What an amazing thought! God is born as a man? The One who created the whole universe, the One to whom all the hosts of heaven bow. The Being through whom was created even this rebellious planet of ours has become a man. That morning, the morning of Creation, Jesus Christ formed the man of dust and breathed into him the breath of life, knowing that one day, because of his sin, He, too, would have to become a man; and not only that, but He would have to suffer a shameful death that He did not deserve. God had to become one with the human race to be able to redeem it.

"It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man's nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity."¹ Jesus was humbled to an extent that we cannot comprehend, and it was because of His love for humanity that He had created.

The Human Nature of Jesus Christ

The Bible is full of texts about the human nature of Christ. It tells us that Jesus developed (Luke 2:52), was hungry (Matt. 4:2), was thirsty (John 19:28), and was tired (4:6) just as we are. Jesus was a man not only physically but also emotionally (Matt. 9:36; Mark 3:5; 10:21; John 12:27; 13:23; 15:11). The fact that He was a man does not lessen the fact that He was at the same time

God had to become one with the human race to be able to redeem it.

God. The Father Himself calls Him God (Heb. 1:8, 9), and John 1:1 says that He was with the Father since eternity. This unity of godly and human nature is a mystery for limited human beings (1 Tim. 3:16). He made a conscious decision not to use His godly power in His battle with sin. "He had to be made like his brothers in every way" (Heb. 2:17, NIV). He had to live a life of every descendant of Adam and win over sin in the body using only what was available to Adam's descendants in their battle with sin. He was the Second Adam, who, through obedience, had to gain what the first Adam lost through his disobedience (Rom. 5:19).

The Hard Road to Victory

However, winning in this battle is no easy thing. We can see this through His entire earthly life. Even though He was severely tempted, He never gave place to

sin in His life (1 Pet. 2:22). From the very beginning, Satan pursued Him (as a newborn in Bethlehem, in the desert, etc.). In the Garden of Gethsemane when the deciding battle for the human race was fought, we see Jesus in agony with blood dripping from His body as the angel eases the suffering of His soul (Luke 22:44). This is where the ultimate decision about the sacrifice for the sin of humankind was made.

But His death did not mean defeat, even though He experienced death (Heb. 2:9), but a great victory because by sharing in humanity, He managed to “destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil” (verse 14, NIV) and in that way “free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (verse 15, NIV). The fact that He died for us gives us the possibility of forgiveness. And because of the fact that He was one of us, we can know that we have someone who is representing us before God who knows what temptation is and can help those who are being tempted (verse 18).

“The priestly ministry Jesus began on earth He completes in heaven. His humiliation on earth as God’s suffering servant qualified Him to be our High Priest in heaven.”² Isn’t it a beautiful thing to know that there is Someone representing us before God who was tempted as we are, Someone who has experienced all our earthly pain and suffering?

REACT

1. In His temptations, was Jesus’ godly nature an advantage or a hindrance? Explain your answer.

2. What does it mean that Jesus can sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15)? Does that mean that He takes our sins lightly? Explain your answer.

3. How could Jesus know sin when He never committed it?

4. If it were a sacrifice for Jesus to become human, what was it for Adam?

5. It often seems that we have no trouble accepting the divine nature of Jesus, but we struggle with accepting His human nature. Why?

6. Why does it matter what the condition of humanity was when Jesus became a man? Why did it matter to Him? To us? Why did He wait for four thousand years before He came?

7. How do 6,000 years of hereditary sin affect us?

8. How do you think the Father felt about receiving back a Son who had been perfect and then was marred by sin? How does that affect the way God feels about you?

9. Jesus became human and experienced what we experience. God the Father did not take on human form. Does this mean God the Father can’t understand what we experience? Explain your answer.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.

2. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, p. 53.

Monday
July 14

The Marvel of It All

TESTIMONY

John 3:16

If there were anything wonderful and incomprehensible that has happened in the history of humankind, that is surely the event that happened two thousand years ago, when God incarnate took on a human body and lived on our planet 33 and a half years.

"It was the marvel of all the universe that Christ should humble Himself to save fallen man. That He who had passed from star to star, from world to world, superintending all, by His providence supplying the needs of every order of being in His vast creation—that He should consent to leave His glory and take upon Himself human nature, was a mystery which the sinless intelligences of other worlds desired to understand."¹

God, who is almighty and all-knowing, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, who created the entire universe as well as our planet, which is no more than a speck of dust in the vastness of the universe, who sits on the throne of glory—that same God comes

**"Satan's deceptive power
was to be broken."**

and takes on human nature. He gives His face so we can spit on it. He gives His back so we can flog Him. And in the end gives His hands so we can put nails through them, so we can hang Him on a cross, and all that just so He can save those same people who were doing this to Him and give them eternal life.

"The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan's deceptive power was to be broken. This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Upon the world's dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, 'with healing in His wings.' (Mal. 4:2)."²

When we went away from God, He cried for us; and when we got lost and came to the edge of destruction, Jesus came to find us and save us. The only way He could do that was by laying down His life.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 69.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

The Human Nature of Jesus Christ

EVIDENCE

Luke 2:52

If we were to emphasize exclusively the idea of Jesus' human nature, or exclusively the idea of His divine nature, we would inevitably fall into heresy.

Let's look at Bible verses that tell us about the human nature of Jesus Christ. Luke 2:52 speaks of how He grew like any other man. Matthew 4:2 shows us a human need—hunger. In the conversation with the Samaritan woman, it is emphasized that He was tired from the journey (John 4:6).

John 13:23 speaks of His human emotion. John 11:35 says that Jesus wept; Luke 19:41 also emphasizes that Jesus was crying over Jerusalem, i.e., its wrong choice and the future that awaits it as a consequence. Mark 10:21, where Jesus meets the rich young ruler, says He "loved him." Matthew 9:36 shows us Jesus as the One who "had compassion" for the people. The same sentiment is found also in Matthew 14:14; 15:32. In Mark 3:5 we see human emotions of "anger from distress." Similarly Luke 12:50 talks about worries that weighed Him down.

The term *antropos* (Greek: "man") itself appears in a few places in the New Testament (Matt. 4:4; John 8:40; Acts 2:22; Rom. 5:15; 1 Tim. 2:5).

The Bible presents Jesus' human side in detail. Nowhere in the Bible, however, does it say that Jesus had the same nature as we do, but it says that He was tempted as we are. This brings us to the very essence of temptation as a choice of following God's will when we have two alternatives to choose from. It is easy to go from this issue to the question of Jesus' sinful or unsinful nature, but that is a philosophical, not a biblical, question. After all, Jesus is not only an example but He is also the Savior.

**The Bible presents Jesus'
human side in detail.**

Actually I'm appealing to everyone to be perfect (which really means spiritually mature), and is characterized by the attitude that is pitted against sinning, and in doing so to do justice, which will result in an absolute faith in God's covenant.

Are we prepared to do God's will, to be perfect and do justice, knowing who is representing us and helping us (Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:14-16)?

Sacrifice: Not Just a Nine-Letter Word!

HOW-TO Heb. 2:14, 17

The story goes that one day, while a man was giving blood at Stanford Hospital where he worked as a volunteer, he got to know a little girl named Liza, who was suffering from a disease. Liza needed a blood transfusion from her five-year-old brother, who had miraculously survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies needed to combat the illness. The doctor explained the situation to her little brother and asked the boy if he would be willing to give his blood to his

**His face grew pale and
his smile faded.**

sister. The little boy hesitated for only a moment before taking a deep breath and said, "Yes, I'll do it if it will save Liza."

As the transfusion progressed, he lay in bed next to his sister and smiled, as everyone else did, seeing the color returning to her cheeks. Then his face grew pale and his smile faded. He looked up at the doctor and asked in a trembling voice, "Will I start to die straight away?" Being young, the boy had misunderstood the doctor; he'd thought he was going to have to give her *all* his blood.

You may have heard this story before, but to me personally it has a strong message—someone willing to give up everything he had, even to the point of giving up his own life so that someone else may live. This is the kind of love that Christ has for us—the love that's willing to die to let live. It is the kind of love that Christ wants us to have for one another. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13, NKJV).

REACT

1. When Christ was closest to His victory over Satan, did His humanity comprehend the victory? How does this compare to when we are working to overcome temptation in our own lives?

2. How can you biblically support the fact that Jesus did not use His divine nature to overcome sin?

3. In what ways was Jesus' nature different from our own? Did this make it easier or harder to depend on His humanity to resist sin? Explain your answer.

4. If we become perfect—which is spiritually mature—in what ways will we still be different from Jesus? If being spiritually mature means perfection, why do we have need of a Savior?

Christ Glorified Through Humility

OPINION

Heb. 2:9, 10

Hebrews 2 begins with a warning that is the conclusion of the first chapter, and that indicates the connection between these two chapters. What follows, represents a great paradox that Christianity struggles to understand. God—powerful, mighty, and holy—leaves His throne and comes down to earth, which is washed over with sin, to humble Himself even to the creatures that are lower than the angels.

We should take into account the first chapter, in which the apostle Paul describes how much higher Christ was than the angels, which the Jews of that time put in a very exalted position. The paradox is that however powerful it is to be exalted, it is as powerful to be humbled. This only accents His already perfect character. Having gone through the troubles and suffering, He was glorified. The humility is exalting.

It is impossible not to ask why He was prepared to make such a sacrifice. What was the goal of His willingness to be humbled from the glory of heaven to the pitifulness of humanity?

- To take on flesh and blood (verse 14)
- To destroy the one who has the power of death (verse 14)
- To remove humanity's fear of death (verse 15)
- To provide a mediator for us (verse 17)
- To lead us to glory (verse 10)

While He was in heaven as Lord of lords, He wasn't ashamed to call us—people blemished by sin—brothers and sisters. He wasn't hesitant to suffer such a sacrifice of which no one in the created worlds was worthy (Rev. 5: 4, 9). In every moment He is aware of what we need, what is best for us, and He leaves us an example of real service. We are to serve people in a way that they need it, not in a way that is easiest for us. He was a man in the true meaning of that word, more than any one of us has ever been. And that is the only way to draw us to Him.

**He wasn't hesitant to
suffer such a sacrifice.**

REACT

1. Why was it so important for Christ to take on flesh and blood?
2. To what extent is humility necessary for salvation?
3. Why is it sometimes so difficult to be humble?

EXPLORATION

Heb. 2:17

CONCLUDE

Love was what inspired God, the Creator of the universe, to be born as a man. Taking on human nature was humiliating in itself, but after 33 years of life on earth, Jesus—sinless and pure—died a cruel death on the cross in our stead. The good news is that He rose again and is now working as our High Priest in heaven. We can be assured that He is a merciful and faithful Representative on our behalf. He knows from personal experience what it's like to live on earth.

CONSIDER

- Creating and sending an encouraging card to let someone know that God cares about them and that He understands what they are going through.
- Reading a story or book about foreign missionaries and noting to what degree they became like the people they were ministering to in order to reach them.
- Role-playing conflicts between a mother and a teenage daughter. In the first the mother has previously had similar experiences as her daughter, and in the other the mother and daughter cannot seem to relate at all.
- Viewing a video that depicts the life of Jesus. Analyze how the production explores the relationship between Jesus' humanity and divinity.
- Meditating on the life of Christ and jotting down specific experiences He had on earth that relate to what you are going through.
- Following Jesus' example of service by performing music at a nursing home and sharing with the patients how much God cares for them.
- Writing out Hebrews 2:17 and placing it somewhere in your room where you can see the verse and memorize it as you go about your daily routine.

CONNECT

The Great Controversy, chap. 28.

Frank B. Holbrook, *The Atoning Priesthood of Jesus Christ*, chap. 1; Lawrence M. Nelson, *The Sanctuary Made Simple*, chaps. 3; 5–7.

Jesus, our Anchor



“It was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (Heb. 7:26, NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 7:26

Have you thought how amazing the Bible is—
Sixty-six books written different times, different places?

Over forty authors, yet one basic image
With no contradictions throughout the ages.

If I should converse with those folks of old
And hear them recount the stories we've been told,

I'd be sure to find that there's no mystery
In the Bible having such consistency.

I'd ask Abel about the witness he obtained
When his sacrifice proved more excellent than Cain's.

And Noah, what kept him from going insane
While building the ark though he had never seen rain.

I couldn't talk to Enoch; he wouldn't be around.
When last seen, that godly man was heaven-bound,
But Father Abraham would have much explaining to do,
For he gave up his home and his only son too.

I'd ask Joseph to tell me how could he have known
That his people would leave Egypt and even take his bones.

And Moses, "Why trade fame and fortune that you could see
For some greater reward that was yet to be?"

I'd ask the Israelites about such moments
As the Passover, the Red Sea, and Jericho events.

Rahab's story should be very interesting;
How in the world does a harlot fit in?

I would talk with other great women and men
About stonings and scourgings and lions' dens,
About their courage and steadfastness back then.
I'd try to find out what inspired them.

It wouldn't be surprising that as the answers came,
The experiences differed but the conclusion remained the same.

They all bore witness that since time began
Man anchored his faith in God's Promised Son.

Our Forefathers looked forward to the day Christ would die
While we now look back at that great sacrifice.

Past, present and future by faith we claim Him
As our High Priest in Heaven and soon-coming King!

The Paradox of Providence

EVIDENCE

Heb. 7:7, 24-26; 11:1-26; Phil. 2:5-11

Winning by surrendering. Getting rich by being poor. Living by dying. Peace in the midst of turmoil. Loving the hateful. Believing in what can't be seen. All seem like huge contradictions. Yet Paul tells us this not only is the Christian way, but from God's perspective it makes perfect sense. "Without question, the person who has the power to bless is always greater than the person who is blessed" (Heb. 7:7, NLT).

Jesus the Son of Almighty God, "Holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens" (verse 26, NIV), He was willing to make the greatest sacrifice possible. He "became us" (verse 26, KJV). He was born, He lived, He taught, He suffered, He died, but then, He rose again. Because He paid this price, "He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (verse 25, NIV). (See also Philippians 2:5-11.)

**We have the evidence
of the entire list!**

Though this all sounds good, Satan has made it his business to plant questions in our minds. How can we be sure? Where is the proof? How do we truly know God is so great? Paul answers these questions with what boils down to a one-word answer: faith. "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (11:1, NIV). Paul goes on to confirm that "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (verse 6, NIV).

Since faith is such a crucial ingredient and since faith is evidence to rely on, Paul spends a whole chapter reminding us what evidence we have and introducing us to people—like you and me—who also had to rely on God by faith. The creation of our universe demonstrates intelligent design by Someone superior to the human. The events of history, such as Enoch's translation, Noah and the Flood, Abraham's journeys, Israel's deliverance from slavery, are just some of the evidence that God is truly great enough to trust.

In reality, we have an advantage. Noah had the evidence of Enoch, Abel, and Creation (just to name a few). Moses had the evidence of all these plus Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We have the evidence of the entire list! This is an impressive company of people down through the ages, who chose to place their confidence in God. Never once did God let them down either. Still, one promise remains unfulfilled: heaven. That's why the greatest proof we have of God's faithfulness to keep, even that promise, is our great High Priest, Jesus.

LOGOS

Heb. 7:7-26; 11:1-26

Hebrews 7 focuses on the priority of the priesthood of Christ over everyone else who has carried out that sacred function. Chapter eleven emphasizes what the believer may do to benefit from the ministry of Jesus, the High Priest.

Jesus' Superior Priesthood (Heb. 7:7-26)

The superiority of Jesus' priesthood is established on at least four pillars:

1. His priesthood is superior on the basis of its establishment (Heb. 7:15, 16). Jesus was a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek" (verse 17, NKJV). He was and is a Priest-King. His inauguration to the priesthood was by a divine oath (verse

21). In this capacity, He relates to the vindication of God's character and the salvation of human beings.

2. His priesthood is superior on the basis of its duration (verses 17, 22, 23). By virtue of "the power of an endless life" (verse 16,

NKJV), the priestly ministry of Jesus is endowed with permanence. The transience of the Aaronic priesthood, which was replenished by a line of succession, would not characterize the priesthood of Jesus. He would not be replaced by a successor.

3. His priesthood is superior on the basis of its results (verses 19, 25). Through the priestly ministry of Christ, a "better hope" (verse 19, NKJV) becomes available to those who believe. This hope facilitates the experience of nearness to God. Sin resulted in alienation from God (Isa. 59:1, 2), but reconciliation is effected through Christ and His priestly ministry. The end product of this ministry is that people are saved.

4. His priesthood is superior on the basis of its singularity (verses 23, 24). Though there is a priesthood based on the model of Melchizedek, and of Aaron, there is none based on Jesus. His priesthood is unique, unrivaled, and singular. It will not be reproduced.

- Jesus is a Superior Being (verses 7-26).
- He is superior to Melchizedek, Abraham, and Aaron.
- He is superior in character (verse 26).
- He is superior in ability and achievements (verse 25).
- He is superior in station (verse 26).
- He is superior in the quality of offering that He made for sin (verse 27).
- He is superior in His relationship to God (verse 28).

None of this can in any way benefit the believer in the absence of a faith that works. Faith works because it connects the believer to Deity. When the ascending faith of the believer meets the descending grace of Deity, salvation is experienced.

Faith works because it connects the believer to Deity.

Evidence That Faith Works (Heb. 11:1-26)

● Faith works because it explains the mystery of how words became worlds. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God (Heb. 11:3). Faith has done what intellectual inquiry alone could not do.

● Faith works because it converts sacrifice to surrender. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain (verse 4). There is no righteousness outside of surrender. Faith gives all, not just the best. It recognizes that the giver is of greater value than the gift. Faith lays itself on the altar. Religious people offer sacrifice without surrender. Spiritual people surrender all.

● Faith works because it turns warning into preparation (moving). "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household" (verse 7, NKJV). God did not warn Noah of the impending flood just because He wanted to give him information. God's reason for communicating was to give salvation.

● Faith works because it transforms calling into going. "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going" (verse 8, NKJV). Abraham did not have all the answers he needed. God did not remove the element of doubt. What Abraham knew for sure was that God had called him. His faith allowed him to respond in an appropriate manner. He went. God is calling you now—today.

● Faith works because it changes reproach to riches. Moses esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (verse 26, NKJV). At the time Moses made this choice, he was not aware that he would lead probably the greatest freedom movement ever, and talk directly with God. His choice demonstrates that a seemingly bad decision that is faith based is a good decision.

Putting Together

The believer needs a faith that can follow Christ into "the true tabernacle which the Lord erected" (8:2, NKJV). It is only a faith like this that can draw virtue from Him (Mark 5:30). This is a superior faith that connects us to a superior High Priest who ministers in a superior place and dispenses superior benefits.

"The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven. We must by faith enter within the veil, 'whither the forerunner is for us entered.' [HEB. 6:20.]"*

* *The Great Controversy*, p. 489.

TESTIMONY

Heb. 7:7-26; 11:1-26

The earthly ministry of the priesthood was established to lead humanity back to Christ in a very special way. Ellen White described a vision: "I was carried down to the time when Jesus was to take upon Himself man's nature, humble Himself as a man, and suffer the temptations of Satan."¹

"His birth was without worldly grandeur. He was born in a stable and cradled in a manger; yet His birth was honored far above that of any of the sons of men.

"His birth was without worldly grandeur."

Angels from heaven informed the shepherds of the advent of Jesus, and light and glory from God accompanied their testimony. The heavenly host touched their harps and glorified God. They triumphantly heralded the advent of the Son of God to a fallen world to accomplish the work of redemption, and by His death to bring peace, happiness, and everlasting life to man. God honored the advent of His Son. Angels worshiped Him."²

Does this priestly ministry continue to exist? "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25, NKJV).

Like the earthly priest who would intercede on behalf of the people day-by-day, so it is with Christ our superior High Priest. He intercedes for us in the heavenly sanctuary. "By His work the threshold of heaven is flushed with the glory of God which will shine upon every soul who will open the windows of the soul heavenward. As the prayers of sincere and contrite ones ascend to heaven, Christ says to the Father, 'I will take their sins. Let them stand before you innocent.' As He takes their sins from them, He fills their hearts with the glorious light of truth and love."³

Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (NKJV).

"Faith is not the ground of our salvation, but it is the great blessing . . . the eye that sees, the ear that hears, the feet that run, the hand that grasps. It is the means, not the end. If Christ gave His life to save sinners, why shall I not take that blessing? My faith grasps it, and thus my faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen. Thus resting and believing, I have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ."⁴

1. *The Story of Redemption*, p. 196.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 930.

4. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 1073.

Grace Offered to the Undeserving

HOW-TO

Heb. 7:25, 26; 1 John 3:1

Do you ever look at your life in retrospect and think *Look at what a mess I've made of myself?* In contrast, Jesus is totally perfect and blameless. Yet He left the incredible splendor and beauty of His home in heaven to become a microscopic being inside one of His own creature's bodies.

He came to the world to teach us about the Father. He came to exhibit the most powerful love ever to exist.

That love is what nailed Him to the cross. He could have walked away, but He did not leave. We are undeserving of the grace that Jesus extends to us through His love and His sacrifice. What should we do with this grace we are so undeserving of?

Eternal life cannot be equated with a report card or a job promotion.

1. Realize our inability. Christ died for us to save us from our sins because there is nothing we can do to make ourselves worthy of salvation. Sometimes we forget what grace really means. Eternal life cannot be equated with a report card or a job promotion. No matter how hard we work, we will keep working on in vain until we realize that it is only God's love that will save us.

2. Look to Jesus. Jesus is superior, perfect, pure, blameless. He is what we are not. This might seem like a very obvious statement. But sometimes we have to be reminded of the fact that we are not as great as we like to think we are. Pride and selfishness can easily boost a person's morale and self-image, but when it all comes down to it, our lives are as "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6, KJV). It is Jesus' righteousness that will cover our unrighteousness.

3. Keep the beauty and awe of grace alive. It is easy to forget the beauty of what grace means to you as you get further and further away from the point of your conversion. Because of this, many people get caught up in judging and criticizing other people's faults and struggles. But we have to remember that it is because of our inability that we are saved from our sins by the blood of Jesus. It is only to our disadvantage when we spread "ungrace," as Philip Yancey calls it, in his book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* We need to keep grace alive by sharing the grace we have received with other people.

God's grace is a beautiful thing. We are lowly, struggling sinners. Christ is beautiful in His perfection and purity. He left every wonderful aspect of heaven behind to come to the world and save His creatures He loves so dearly. That is amazing grace!

Thursday
July 24

A Star to Guide the Humble

OPINION

Heb. 7:7-26; 11:1-26

**First we have to bow down
and be humble.**

How do you feel when someone performs better than you? In every field of our life, we find people who do their work better than we do. Many times we are envious of them because we want to prove that we can do better than they. Unfortunately, having success in life often drives us on a path that leads us to self-centeredness, self-aggrandizement, conceit, and snobbishness. These people tend to glorify themselves and want others to do the same. These “stars” don’t realize that their snobbishness covers their pale lights, just as clouds do with the real stars.

We have a choice, but we should try to deal with this problem and demonstrate the real values of life. For this, we have to understand that to look up and behold God’s majesty, first we have to bow down and be humble. Don’t talk about the speck in others’ eyes when we have a beam in ours!

To have an objective point to which we can measure ourselves, let’s examine our real Star, Jesus Christ. There’s nothing wrong with having patterns after which we design ourselves—unless the pattern itself is not perfect. As for me, I always choose the perfect one, for “[Jesus] is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin” (Heb. 7:26, NLT).

This is the best possible choice, for if we decide to be like Him, Jesus will send His Holy Spirit to put Christ’s righteousness on us like a coat. From that time on, it will be not we, but He, who lives in us.

There’s nothing better than the superiority of Jesus Christ, because that’s the only kind of superiority that is not snobbish. Praise His name!

Jesus — He Is the One!

EXPLORATION

John 14:6

CONCLUDE

God communicates with humankind not just to give information but to provide salvation. The earthly priesthood was one of many ways God illustrates His working on our behalf. Paul lists ordinary people who relied upon, or trusted in, the evidence they had about God. When it comes to us, not only do we have the evidence of their lives, we have Jesus to look back to. We can see beyond the frail limitations of the illustration to the One behind, God Himself. God's love will save us. He gives us the evidence on which to base our faith. Jesus—He is the One!

CONSIDER

- Creating a poster that illustrates why Jesus can be trusted.
- Viewing "The Plow," an animation at <http://www.heartlight.org/dynimation/an_theplow.html>. Think about what "The Plow" says about faith.
- Performing a mini-drama on one of the characters in Hebrews 11, demonstrating the point in their story at which God's grace was received by faith.
- Listening to, or singing, Michael Card's song "The Gentle Healer" from *The Life* album. Think about how Jesus revealed God's grace and how you could seek to reveal it to others.
- Taking a "down and out" for a meal. Don't "preach" to them but have a one sentence statement about salvation through grace ready to give them.
- Posting a question on a chat room such as "What does faith mean to you?"
- Studying how an ant or bee colony works. What evidence can you see of working together in accordance with a higher plan?

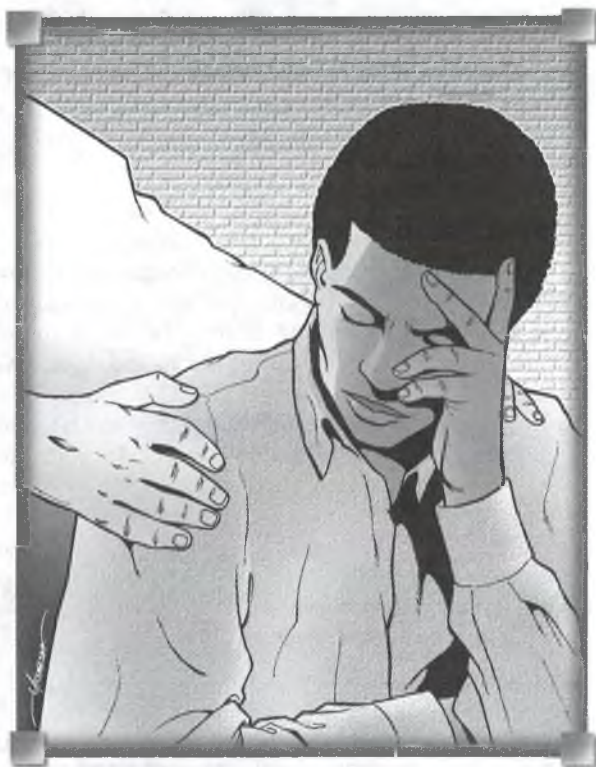
CONNECT

John 14:1-9 (use a different translation from the one you usually use).

"God Made Manifest in Christ," *Signs of the Times*, 01-20-1890.

Chris Blake, *Searching for a God to Love*.

The **Heart** of the Sanctuary



“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:15, 16, NIV).

Who?

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 5:2, 13, 14

Is this my prayer?

Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray my email to keep.

I pray my stocks are on the rise, and that my therapist is wise,
That all the wine I sip is white, and that my hot tub is watertight.

I pray that racquetball won't be tough, and that my sushi is fresh enough.

I pray my cellular phone always works, and that my career won't lose its perks,

That the microwave would radiate, and that my condo won't depreciate.

I pray my health club won't close, and that my money market always grows,

And if I die before I wake, I pray Lord, I really pray . . .

My Lexus they won't take.

When I look at Hebrews (combining it with Exodus 40 and Leviticus 16), two things stick out for me: Whom am I praying to and why?

At the heart of the Israelite camp was the tabernacle. At the heart of the tabernacle was God. In both cases spirituality was at the center. I asked myself, who or what is at my center? I also discovered that in order to reach the center you have to come from the outside to the inside and that there is no barrier to entry except my choice.

When I choose to come in, I no longer stick my prayer on a wall. I am no longer "unskilful in the word of righteousness" (Heb. 5:13, KJV) and just milking it from my Jesus, like a baby. Instead, because I consume "strong meat" (i.e., Bible study), I can "discern both good and evil" (verse 14, KJV). Therefore, I appreciate that in approaching the Center, Jesus Christ, my out-of-my-way (verse 2) lifestyle changes. As our High Priest, Christ offers an eternal open-door policy, and upon entry He acts as change agent in my life and in yours.

It was a goat that took the blame (hence the word *scapegoat* today), and in exchange the Israelite became free from guilt and sin. Presently, from an enriched perspective, Christ powerfully takes the blame and shame of our past and inverts it into lessons learned, victory claimed, and future eternal.

I think my prayer needs a proper end:

And for these things that I have wanted done and now said,
Remind me daily that these things and life will all fade,
I pray Lord, that I will put You first,
Change my heart and provide a new vision of eternal worth.
Amen.

LOGOS

Hebrews 5; 7

Psychologists try to explain your thought processes. Nutritionists try to explain how your eating and fitness influence your thinking. Religion is supposed to keep you in line with your inner self. Counselors are supposed to assign emotions to your actions. Jesus Christ, however, markets and provides a solution for all your physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual experiences.

Unlike some managers who have never done the work of their employees, or a

**Christ says, "Do as I say
and as I do."**

person who offers advice on how to deal with bereavement when he or she hasn't experienced a death of a loved one, Jesus in His divinity became humanity and suffered the realities of

earthly living (Heb. 5:9). While everyone says, "Do as I say and not as I do," Christ says, "Do as I say and as I do." Therefore, His experiences provide three effects:

It gives Him the gift of sympathy (Heb. 4:14, 15).

The word "sympathy" in this passage is translated from the Greek word *sumpatheo*, which means literally "to experience together with."¹ Our great High Priest is not cold and unfeeling. Though great (Heb. 4:14), our High Priest is not above caring for us; being in all points one with us. Look at Him when He washes the feet of His disciples. Look at Him when friends desert Him. Experience the discouragement and rejection, the giving and not getting of Christ. He is, therefore, abundantly qualified and able to come together with us in our circumstances. Though exalted to the highest heavens, Christ has changed His place but not His nature and office toward us; His condition but not His affection.²

It gives Him the quality of mercy (Heb. 4:16).

Mercy is a disposition to forgive and it's something to be thankful for. Mercy is therefore twofold, with Christ's "to know all is to forgive all"³ personality on one hand. In the heavenly sanctuary, Christ intercedes for us and pleads for pardon with His blood of atonement that was shed on Calvary (Heb. 9:7, 8). On the other hand, mercy is our choice. If and when we come boldly with a grateful heart, depending not on our own merits, with assurance God will forgive (and is waiting willingly to do so).

Mercy for a murderer is to acquit him/her of the crime that was committed. Therefore, forgiveness does not make us innocent, but rather identifies the crime, puts it aside, and assists us in moving on. If the crime is repeated, judgment will be dispensed. Your choice is to fall on the rock and be broken or to stand on the rock and view life from a new perspective.

It gives us the assurance that He is able (Jude 24; Rom. 16:25).

An African proverb states: Ask the road from those who are ahead of you. Therefore, you could ask Abraham, Daniel, Deborah, Ruth, the woman at the well, Paul, and Peter. But I submit that Jesus Christ should be the first Person on your enquiry list. "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. . . . But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:4, 5, NKJV). Therefore, ask Him and He will tell you though you "walk through the valley of the shadow of death" to "fear no evil," (Ps. 23:4, NKJV) for He is with you. Christ overcame and you can, too, with His assistance. Then "every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low" (Isa. 40:4, NKJV). Look at His story to see the path He trod, even the darkest experiences of life, and realize that He is able to keep you from falling (Jude 24).

The word translated "falling," *aptaistous*, occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It means properly, "not stumbling" as of a horse; then "without falling into sin, blameless."⁴ Hence the phrase "to keep from falling" emphasizes not yielding to temptation and dishonoring our faith. It is with the support of Christ that we can proclaim that we are "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37, NKJV).

REACT

1. If you view Jesus as One who truly understands where you are, what you go through each day, and how you will overcome, how would this affect your prayer life?
2. How do you think Jesus—who was sinless, now mediating—is able to relate to you when you feel the discouraging effects of sin?
3. How does the meaning of the name *Immanuel* relate to sympathy?
4. How was Jesus able to relate to the feelings of humanity before His nativity?
5. Does mercy come from the Father or Jesus? Or both? Support your answer biblically.
6. How is our relationship with God different from that of people in Old Testament times? Has it benefitted us or handicapped us?
7. Considering the general difference between men and women to ask for directions, for which is it easier to accept the gift of salvation? Explain your answer.
8. How are the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous similar to experiencing the plan of salvation?
9. Can mercy be extended to us if we aren't willing to extend mercy to others? Why/why not? Reflect on a time that someone showed you mercy.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 426.

2. *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, Electronic Database.

3. William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study Guide, Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 43.

4. *Adam Clarke's Commentary*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by BibleSoft.

Monday
July 28

More Than a Lawyer

TESTIMONY

Heb. 4:14-16

A Time to Kill, the Hollywood movie based on a book by John Grisham, depicts the story of a ten-year-old girl named Tonya, who is raped and beaten by two red-necks. Taking the law into his own hands, her father, Carl, guns down the pair in front of dozens of witnesses in a Mississippi courthouse. Carl is arrested for the double murder and faces trial. For his attorney he chooses a local white defense lawyer to oppose the local district attorney.

The most compelling question raised by the film is whether Carl, as a black man, could get a fair trial from a white judge and jury. Carl tells the attorney why he chose him: "You see me as they see me," he said. "If you were on that jury, what would it take for you to set me free?"

Meanwhile, the jury members secretly meet and decide to judge Carl guilty, even before the trial is over. Against all odds, the attorney's ability in his summation to express sympathy and compassion for his client leads to the dramatic release of Carl.

I see Jesus as similar to the defense lawyer in this story, who, despite obstacles, obtains my freedom. "Christ glorified not Himself in being made High Priest. God gave Him His appointment to the priesthood. He was to be an example to all the human family. He qualified Himself to be, not only the representative of the race, but their Advocate [lawyer], so that every soul if he will may say, I have a Friend at

Carl is arrested for the double murder and faces trial.

court. He is a High Priest that can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities."¹

Now, some of us view God with *apathia*, essentially possessing the inability to feel anything at all. Jesus isn't like that as He sympathizes (i.e., "suffers along with"). This provides insight into God's character. "God has declared that those who receive Christ as their Redeemer, accepting Him as the One who takes away all sin, will receive pardon for their transgressions. . . . Man's salvation depends upon his receiving Christ by faith. Those who will not receive Him lose eternal life because they refused to avail themselves of the only means provided by the Father and the Son for the salvation of a perishing world."²

REACT

How is confession of sin affected by knowing that you have a defense lawyer to argue your case?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 930.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 931.

Priest = Power

EVIDENCE

Hebrews 7; 9

Have you read Hebrews yet? It is an essay on the essentials of Christianity. Penned between A.D. 64 and A.D. 70, Hebrews is written for intellectuals. Its Jewish audience was well taught (Heb. 2:1-3; 13:7) and knew God's Word, yet they had failed to grow beyond a faith that exhibited only the basics (5:11-6:3).¹ The author wants to facilitate growth (10:26, 27, 35)² beyond their Jewish ways of regular sacrifices and

The priests had to make sacrifice for their own sins before ministering to the people.

proud tradition of priests and prophets, and to encompass the new covenant expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is therefore not surprising that the writer begins with an emphatic declaration of the core message of Christianity—Jesus is supreme above all things. He is the Creator and the faultless Message of God (1:4; 3:3; 7:23, 24). This discourse demonstrates that a balance is required between the role of religious practices and Jesus' role in the life of a believer.

Changing focus, let's look at the qualities and duties of high priests. "Every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins" (5:1, NKJV). Though people could and did make offerings and sacrifices on their own,³ only the priests were permitted to bring sacrifices before God in His sanctuary, and only the high priest could make the yearly sacrifice for the sins of the people at the Day of Atonement. To fulfill this role, the priests had to make sacrifice for their own sins before ministering to the people; however, Jesus is above this (5:2, 3; 7:27). "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (7:25, NKJV). There is no mention of His ministering for sins, as He was pure and sinless (2:18; 4:15; 5:1-3).

The message in Hebrews is simple: Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us, He ministers for us, and because of this He is the only Priest we need. Because of our human weaknesses, however, we also need to be reminded: "It's crucial that we keep a firm grip on what we've heard so that we don't drift off" (2:1, *The Message*).

1. *The Lion Handbook to the Bible* (Lion: Oxford, England, 1983), pp. 625-632.

2. B. Metzger and M. Coogan M., editors, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford, England), pp. 274-277.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 608-611.

HOW-TO

Heb. 7:26

Many times at home, instead of turning on the light, I have tried to see in the dark, thinking I know where everything is located, only to feel a sharp pain when I hit my toe on the table that has been in the same place for many years! I ask myself, *Why don't I just turn on the light!* Oftentimes my choices have been made in dark circumstances and have led to emotional, physical, and spiritual pain (e.g., loss, rejection, disappointment, disillusionment). All I had to do was turn on the Light—Jesus Christ (John 8:12). But how?

1. Recognize your need for light. Just as you choose to switch on the light to see and eliminate darkness, in the same vein choose to switch to Jesus. As the High Priest, Jesus operates in the sanctuary. Exodus 40:19 tells us that the sanctuary was covered. Therefore, when we choose Christ and enter into His illuminated territory, we become

The writer of Hebrews urges us not to doubt Christ's power.

covered with His grace (e.g., the prodigal son), and our past, like a shadow, is no longer seen. A clear vision and discernment remains.

2. Boldly turn on the light. Confidently switch to Jesus, seek Him even in the darkness through prayer and Bible study. His purpose is to provide a glow to your life, and He understands that when a connection is not made that darkness prevails (Heb. 2:18).

3. Accept that darkness is eradicated. Once the light is on, there is no darkness. It is an observed, accepted fact. The writer of Hebrews urges us not to doubt Christ's power and ability to eradicate our sin (9:14-17). If your sins are forgiven and forgotten (Mic. 7:19) and you are afraid of the dark, readily accept the light found in Jesus.

4. Keep the light on. Now that's a challenge! You may have to pray, fast, and practice resilience to avoid the temptation of self-reliance. Self-reliance leads to fumbling and pain. If the light is on, however, fumbling changes into purposeful decision making, and pain changes into peace of mind (Isa. 26:3).

Is your light on?

REACT

1. What darkness would you like Jesus Christ to help you illuminate?
2. What personal steps do you need to take to keep the light on in your life?
3. What kinds of attitudes or activities do we as Christians sometimes continue to carry in our lives that show we reject the mercy Jesus has shown us?
4. When Paul wrote in Hebrews 5 and 7 about the High Priest, the people he was writing to understood the symbolism of this office because they had experienced it. How can we help an unbeliever understand this concept in today's contemporary society?

A Victim Priest?

OPINION

Heb. 9:13, 14

Hebrews is full of allegorical illustrations on the concept of priesthood and sacrifice. The writer engages the Jewish audience with comforting references to their heritage, and urges them to develop their faith further in accepting that Christ mediates on their behalf. Christ as High Priest emulates Melchizedek (Heb. 5:8-10), and this must have captured their attention as it does mine. Melchizedek was a king of righteousness as well as a priest, with an indistinct history. However, as great a high priest as Melchizedek may have been then, none can compare with Christ Jesus, whose history, present, and future are known. It is the divine Melchizedek—Jesus Christ—that is magnified in Hebrews.

You will also find that Christ is shown as both priest and victim. How many high priests were prepared to be the sacrifice as well? “Greater love has no one than this” (John 15:13, NKJV). Think of that! Look at those hands that had flung stars into space, to cruel nails surrendered. In Charles Spurgeon’s words:

See how the patient Jesus stands,
Insulted in His lowest case!
Sinners have bound the Almighty’s hands,
And spit in their Creator’s face.
With thorns His temples gor’d and gash’d
Send streams of blood from every part;
His back with knotted scourges lashed
But sharper sources tear his heart.*

However, note the following:

- Christ’s sacrifice is a voluntary offering. A gift is often measured by the self-sacrifice made, and Christ freely brought all that He was and surrendered it wholly.
- Christ’s sacrifice is a gift to be shared. Despite the mental agony and soul struggling of the human condition, Christ still gave His all. Our lives should be a perpetual repetition of His example, whereby we, too, give our all. Can we do the same?

REACT

What are the “sharper sources” that tear Christ’s heart?

*A Treasury of Wisdom, A Daily Devotional Journal (Barbour & Company, Inc.).

Friday
August 1

There's Only One

EXPLORATION

Heb. 4:15, 16; 9:11-15; 10:19-24

CONCLUDE

In the past the people of God depended on priests to offer sacrifices for their sins and deliver messages from God. But Jesus has taken over the role as our High Priest. He created us. He lived a perfect life as our example. He felt our human experience. He died to pay our debt of sin. He defends us against Satan's charges. He now stands at the heart of the gospel. And because of Him we can confidently talk to God as a loving Father.

CONSIDER

- Looking through your music collection for a song that makes you feel confident. Listen to it carefully, analyzing why it makes you feel that way.
- Writing a letter appealing for the release of a prisoner of conscience whose human rights have been violated. Go to <www.amnesty.org> to obtain details.
- Hosting a party with a twist. As your guests arrive, assign each of them a different physical challenge (deafness, blindness, two broken arms, paralyzed legs, etc.) that they must pretend they have during the party. Serve food and play active games.
- Purchasing an Etch-a-Sketch or borrowing one from a child. Write your worst sins on it, then erase them.
- Visiting a courtroom. Analyze the arguments made by people as they appeal to the judge.
- Viewing a recently produced video with justice as its theme. Consider the similarities and differences between its depiction of justice and that of Scripture.
- Reflecting on a person you have wronged, perhaps in your distant past. Write them a letter, asking for forgiveness.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chap. 1.

Max Lucado, *A Gentle Thunder*, chaps. 5; 20.

Earthly and Heavenly



“Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation” (Heb. 9:11, NKJV).

INTRODUCTION

Ps. 63:2-4

It had been a long week and I was tired. The Sabbath would provide the rest that I needed, and I looked forward to my meditation and sleep. Shortly after making my plans for a quiet evening of rest and private communion with God, the office phone rang. "Hello, my dear, what are you doing tonight?" asked Miss Emmie, my campus mother.

"I am really tired—I am going home to relax."

"Why don't you come over for supper?" This was a familiar invitation, and I was often grateful for those kind words. Although tired, I went over for food and fellowship with Miss Emmie and her family.

"Tonight is the first vespers for the semester. Do you want to go?"

"No, I think I will go home now to relax after having this wonderful meal. I just need the comforts of my bed and a long sleep."

"Do you mind walking with me?"

I think Miss Emmie "forgot" that I was tired, but I agreed to accompany her but told her that I would not stay. Once in the building she said, "Just stay a little while." I protested in silence as I sat down in the seat. I continued to grumble to myself, but my attitude soon changed.

The program started and I began to be transformed as I received blessing after blessing. The singing, blessing number one, lifted my spirits as we praised

God for His goodness. Blessing number two, the testimonies of the students, encouraged me as I heard them speak about God's leading in their lives. Blessing number three, the special music,

"Why don't you come over for supper?"

lifted me to much higher ground. Blessing after blessing poured into the room and my soul was refreshed many times over.

As we walked home, I thanked God for using Miss Emmie to encourage me to attend that vespers. I had stepped into that place of praise weary from a long week of work and walked out transformed and renewed in mind, body (I was no longer tired!), and spirit.

The writer of Hebrews 9 invites us this week to explore the tabernacle and to understand its true meaning. More important, he points us to the High Priest, Jesus Christ, the only Savior of humankind. As we learn this week about the ministry of Christ in the sanctuary, we will be transformed as we truly understand His sacrifice on Calvary and the salvation He freely offers to each of us.

Are you tired, weary, or perhaps discouraged this week? Let God use Hebrews 9 to speak to your soul, and get ready to be *refreshed!*

Imagine That!

EVIDENCE

Hebrews 9

"Excuse me, sir! How much for that little sheep?" asked a young woman.

"Well, Madam, \$500."

"Five hundred dollars!" the woman replied in shock. She had only \$200, and it was all her life savings.

The time had come to prepare for the yearly sacrifice. She pondered what she was going to do. Seeing that the woman was not ready to make her purchase, the merchant continued with his task of selling sheep to other customers who had begun to gather to purchase their sacrifices. Looking over the herd, she searched for the perfect lamb—for it had to be spotless, without blemish, spot, or wrinkle. All her \$200 would buy was a frail, sickly lamb. The others were too costly.

Again the woman approached the merchant. "Sir, do you have any other lambs suitable for sacrifice at a lesser price?"

"No, Madam! What you see is all I have. There are no other lambs."

Overhearing the exchange between the young woman and the merchant, an older gentleman and his family offered to make up the difference for her to purchase her sacrifice.

Grateful and delighted to have her sacrifice, the woman thanked the family and hurried to the temple. Arriving at the sanctuary, she gave the sacrifice to the high priest, who laid it on the altar. Placing one hand on the head of the lamb, she stared into its eyes, confessing her sins as she slashed the lamb's throat, spilling its blood. Taking the blood, the priest sprinkled it upon the horns of the altar, making atonement for the young woman's sins.

Today we do not have to perform the rituals of our forefathers. Our sacrifice was paid at Calvary. Christ became the ultimate sacrificial Lamb. However, we do have a responsibility: a daily act of

confessing our sins. This brings us back to God and His will for our lives. Christ our High Priest is now in the heavenly sanctuary interceding on our behalf. Daily He communes with our Father,

making intercession for us. "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25, NKJV). The actions of the high priest in the earthly sanctuary and the symbolism of the furnishings within typified the heavenly sanctuary and Christ's role on behalf of humankind. The sacrificial lamb represented "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, NKJV).

**The time had come to
prepare for the yearly
sacrifice.**

Monday
August 4

The Earthly Versus the Heavenly

LOGOS
Hebrews 9

Significance of the Earthly Sanctuary

When reading Hebrews 9, the reader realizes that it is a continuation of chapter 8 because it begins, "Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary" (verse 1, NKJV). Paul continues to explain why the old covenant, which also includes the services of the earthly sanctuary, must be done away with. Although the first covenant was said to be waxing old and ready to vanish (8:13), the author identifies the purpose and significance of the earthly sanctuary in relationship to the heavenly sanctuary. If we were to say that the earthly sanctuary had no value, then certainly God wouldn't have instituted it. Its purpose is shown by the author to be a "figure," or, for a better word, "parable," for that time. The "[sanctuary] service had been instituted by Christ Himself. In every part it was a symbol of Him; and it had been full of vitality and spiritual beauty."¹

A Pattern of the Real Services (Exod. 25:1)

An artist can paint a beautiful portrait of the glorious return of Christ with all the host of angels. Nevertheless, the portrait itself is not the real event. It is simply a

**The gifts and sacrifices
offered by the earthly
priesthood could not make
the people perfect.**

weak model to direct the attention of the audience to the actual event. When God commanded Moses to make the earthly sanctuary, it is clear that it was to be built according to the pattern that God would show him. (See Exodus 25.) "Moses made the earthly sanctuary after a

pattern which was shown him. Paul teaches that that pattern was the true sanctuary which is in heaven."² With this knowledge it is important to note that the first half of Hebrews 9:1-7 briefly describes the earthly sanctuary services. The earthly model is then used to direct the attention of the audience to the heavenly sanctuary and gives the reason that the latter is superior to the former.

Perfection as the Goal (Heb. 9:9-14; 10:1-4)

According to Scripture, God's goal for His children is perfection: "That you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12, NKJV), says the apostle Paul. And again, we see that verse 9 mentions that the gifts and sacrifices offered

by the earthly priesthood could not make the people perfect as pertaining to the conscience. The central issue regarding the earthly and the heavenly sanctuary is perfection. Which system is most effective when dealing with sin? The daily gifts and sacrifices offered by the worshipers could not bring perfection. It's impossible that the blood of goats and bulls could atone for sin (Heb. 10:4). "The forgiveness men obtained did not permanently make them any better."³

While the daily services provided forgiveness, the Scriptures state that only once a year was the high priest to make atonement for the cleansing of all the sins of Israel (Lev. 16:30).

Forgiveness and cleansing are two different things. A person can be forgiven and yet continue sinning. To cleanse means to eliminate something. If someone says to you "Go wash your hands," you are expected to wash your hands from dirt or bacteria. It is no wonder that David in his famous chapter of penitence asks not only for forgiveness but also for cleansing. "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Ps. 51:10, NKJV). The veil within the sanctuary restricted the way into the Most Holy Place. Not until another year had elapsed could anyone enter. This demonstrated to the worshipers that the way was not yet open and perfection could not be reached through this service.

The services of the second covenant offer a better solution. Christ, by virtue of His sacrifice, is made Mediator and High Priest of better things to come. He has become the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, NKJV). Christ has entered into the heavenly sanctuary to offer His blood as atonement for our sins. His blood is enough not only to forgive but also to cleanse our sins (1 John 1:9). Therefore, the possibilities of perfection are offered through Him.

When Christ hung on the cross and yielded His spirit, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom (Matt. 27:51). Christ's death represents that veil, thus signifying that through His sacrifice, humanity has access to the presence of God. Ellen White states it nicely: "By the rending of the veil of the temple, God said, I can no longer reveal My presence in the most holy place. A new and living Way, before which there hangs *no veil*, is offered to *all*. No longer need sinful, sorrowing humanity await the coming of the high priest."⁴ Whereas before the way to perfection was not made open to all, now Christ invites us to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16, NKJV).

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 29.

2. *The Faith I Live By*, p. 202.

3. M. L. Andreasen, *The Book of Hebrews*, p. 332.

4. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1109, ephasis supplied.

Tuesday
August 5

The Real Sanctuary

TESTIMONY

Heb. 9:23, 24

“The earthly sanctuary, built by Moses at the command of God according to the pattern shown him in the mount, was ‘a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices’; that its two holy places were ‘patterns of things in the heavens’; that Christ, our great High Priest, is ‘a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man’; that ‘Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.’ Heb. 9:9, 23; 8:2; 9:24.”¹

“The sanctuary in heaven, in which Jesus ministers in our behalf, is the great original, of which the sanctuary built by Moses was a copy. God placed His Spirit upon the builders of the earthly sanctuary. The artistic skill displayed in its construction was a manifestation of divine wisdom. The walls had the appearance of massive gold, reflecting in every direction the light of the seven

**“God Himself gave to
Moses the plan.”**

lamps of the golden candlestick. The table of shewbread and the altar of incense glittered like burnished gold. The gorgeous curtain which formed the ceiling, inwrought with figures of angels in blue and purple and scarlet, added to the beauty of the scene. And beyond the second veil was the holy Shekinah, the visible manifestation of God’s glory, before which none but the high priest could enter and live.”²

“Chosen men were especially endowed by God with skill and wisdom for the construction of the sacred building. God Himself gave to Moses the plan of that structure, with particular directions as to its size and form, the materials to be employed, and every article of furniture which it was to contain. The holy places made with hands were to be ‘figures of the true,’ ‘patterns of things in the heavens’ (Heb. 9:24, 23)—a miniature representation of the heavenly temple where Christ, our great High Priest, after offering His life as a sacrifice, was to minister in the sinner’s behalf. God presented before Moses in the mount a view of the heavenly sanctuary, and commanded him to make all things according to the pattern shown him. All these directions were carefully recorded by Moses, who communicated them to the leaders of the people.”³

1. *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 376, 377.

2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 414.

3. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 343.

In the Temple of Our Hearts

HOW-TO

Rev. 3:20

God's dwelling place is in the heavenly sanctuary. The psalmist declared that "the Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven" (Ps. 11:4, NKJV).

"After His ascension, our Savior was to begin His work as our High Priest.

Says Paul, 'Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.' Hebrews 9:24. As Christ's ministration was to

consist of two great divisions, each occupying a period of time and having a distinctive place in the heavenly sanctuary, so the typical ministration [earthly sanctuary service] consisted of two divisions, the daily and the yearly service, and to each a department of the tabernacle was devoted."*

As Christ is in heaven pleading on our behalf, however, He also desires to be in our hearts. As He is in the heavenly temple, He also wants to be in the temple of the human heart. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20, NKJV).

But being the loving God He is, He will not force His way upon us. We must accept Him, we must open the door for Him, and we must let Him in. The choice is ours. He just stands there and waits. He pleads and He waits but only we can answer. We must listen to His call; we must listen to the still, small voice: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 4:7, NKJV).

Here are some steps in opening our hearts to God:

1. Submission. "Submit yourselves therefore to God" (James 4:7, KJV). We must give up all to our heavenly Father and allow Him to lead, direct, and work in our lives.

2. Staying in Christ. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8, KJV). We must study God's Word, pray daily, and witness to others so that we would always be in connection with God and filled with the Holy Spirit.

3. Being willing. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24, NKJV). We must forget about our plans and selfish desires and follow God in willingness and love. Let His will be done in our life.

He will not force His
way upon us.

*Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 357.

The Sanctuary as a Symbol

OPINION

Heb. 9:11

I have sat through several sermons in which preachers recounted the details of the Old Testament sanctuary, meticulously describing every piece of fabric and refined wood used to furnish the sacred tents. In church school, I was assigned to construct a small model of the sanctuary, including the Holy and Most Holy Places using a large shoe box and tiny, self-invented cardboard cutouts of a lampstand, a gold jar, and the ark of the covenant. Probably not until high school did I seriously begin to wonder about the significance of the sanctuary.

A pastor once told me that if our doctrines and biblical symbols did not, in some way, point to Christ, then such ideas lack meaning and purpose. Hebrews 9

**Jesus is now interceding
for us in the heavenly
sanctuary.**

reminds us that the Old Testament sanctuary points to the work of Christ both on earth and in heaven. On earth, we no longer must sacrifice an innocent lamb because the Lamb of God once gave His life.

His life was enough in exchange for the salvation of humanity. As the priest interceded for others in the earthly sanctuary, Jesus is now interceding for us in the heavenly one.

“Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that great, perfect sanctuary in heaven, not made by human hands and not part of this created world” (Heb. 9:11, NLT).

This verse and the whole of Hebrews 9 remind us how God uses some tangible, easily perceived concepts such as the earthly sanctuary to understand better what is happening in heaven. The roles of the sacrificed animal and the priest in the sanctuary are symbolic. Christ has the same role as the sacrificed lamb: atonement for the sins of the transgressor. Christ is our High Priest in heaven, pleading for the salvation of a fallen race.

REACT

1. Now that we have someone interceding for us in heaven, what is our role?
2. In light of last year's allegations against priests in the Catholic Church in North America, what should be your attitude toward your friends of the Catholic faith?

Once for All!

EXPLORATION

John 1:29; Heb. 9:26

CONCLUDE

The day that Jesus came to the Jordan River, John the Baptist pointed to Him and said to the people, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, NIV). Jesus was—and is—all that human beings need to be saved. He did away with all sacrifices and ceremonies that pointed to Him. He opened the heavens so that we may come to the presence of God with confidence. Through Christ now nothing stands in the way. We have full access to God. We are complete in Him. Not only does He live for us now but we also live for Him.

CONSIDER

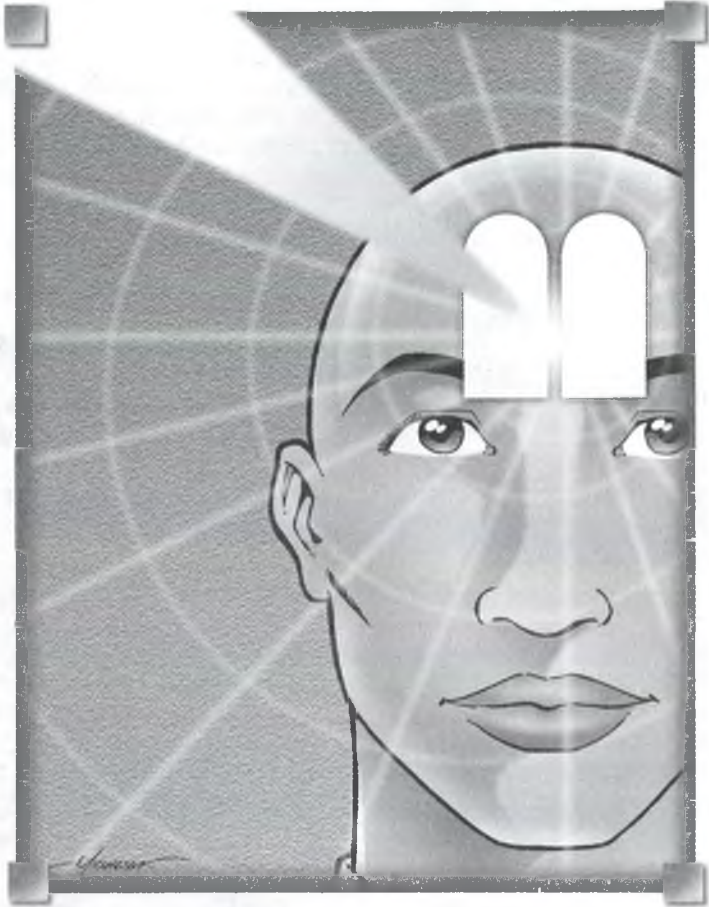
- Reading Hebrews 9 in *The Message* and comparing it with the KJV and NIV versions. Think about what new perspective you may have found.
- Drawing the earthly sanctuary on an 11 x 17 sheet of paper. Imagine yourself walking through the sanctuary. Write your thoughts about how you might have felt.
- Making an appointment with a rabbi of a Jewish synagogue. Ask him about the spiritual meaning of the sanctuary ceremonies to a modern-day Jew.
- Considering animal protection laws today and how ceremonies of the Old Testament sanctuary (i.e., millions of animal sacrifices) would relate to today's culture.
- Writing on a sheet of paper three paragraphs of your personal story of forgiveness. Begin the first paragraph with the words “I see . . .” the second paragraph with the words “I hear . . .” and the third paragraph with the words “I feel . . .”
- Researching the dimensions of the Old Testament sanctuary and pacing them out in a large area to gain a better understanding of the setting.

CONNECT

Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*.

Edward Heppenstall, *Our High Priest*; Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust*.

The **Real** thing



“ ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days,’ says the Lord: ‘I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds,’ he also adds, ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more’ ”
(Heb. 10:16, 17, NRSV).

Experience Reality

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 8:10, 11

“Power set for take-off . . . 80 knots . . . Checked . . . Speed 1 . . . Speed rotate.” As I pull back on the yoke, raising the nose of the aircraft to fly off the runway, something is not right. The plane veers left uncontrollably, I’m pushing my right foot on the rudder pedal to regain control, while at the same time I call for max power to be set. My concentration is so focused on keeping the airplane flying, trying to get control, that I miss the “positive climb” call signal for the gear to be retracted. The aircraft is banking violently left then right, and before I know it the nose of the airplane dips down for just a few seconds . . . CRASH!

All is black. I hear the voice of the sim instructor: “Congratulations, your aircraft has just crashed!”

There’s a good reason that this maneuver involving a failure of the most critical engine at the worst possible time is first encountered by new airline pilots in a simulator. A majority of pilots crash! It’s not as if I didn’t know what I was supposed to do. The procedures had been thoroughly explained and I had reviewed them in my head till I could recite them from a dead sleep. I also was not new to flying airplanes. I had more than 1900 hours of flight time, including a year’s worth of giving flight instruction. The fatal reality was that my hands-on experience of this maneuver, in this particular aircraft, was nonexistent—zip, zero, nada.

**The aircraft is banking
violently left then right.**

Internal, personal, hands-on experience is the key. Listen to what God says in Hebrews 8 about His new plan:

“This new plan I’m making with Israel isn’t going to be written on paper, isn’t going to be chiseled in stone; this time I’m writing out the plan in them, carving it on the lining of their hearts. I’ll be their God, they’ll be my people. They won’t go to school to learn about me, or buy a book called *God in Five Easy Lessons*. They’ll all get to know me firsthand, the little and the big, the small and the great” (Heb. 8:10, 11, *The Message*).

Ask yourself: How is God trying to move me from book-and-head knowledge of salvation to experiential reality? Have I gained “reality living” of Christianity and religion and missed that I have zero hands-on experience of God’s salvation plan? Maybe it’s time to pull back the yoke in God’s simulator.

Sunday
August 10

Prometheus Set Free

LOGOS

Hebrews 8; 9

"Words are the physicians of the mind diseased" (Aeschylus).

"Word" is the English translation for the Greek word *logos*, from which we derive "logic" and "theology." In ancient Greece *logos* carried numerous meanings

In Christ the world
witnessed a masterfully
illustrated self-portrait of
God's unfailing grace.

including "a word," "something spoken," "a speech," "thought," "reason," "rationality." To many Greek philosophers, however, *logos* represented the mind of gods or the ordering principle of all creation, that which set the world in motion and keeps it

operating according to plan. Aeschylus's play *Prometheus Bound* further expanded the view to incorporate the belief that a structured aesthetic world was kept in order through remote apathetic gods. The drama details the story of the titan Prometheus, who is sentenced by Zeus to be chained for eternity to a rock in the middle of the ocean for sympathizing with mortals and providing the knowledge of fire. This view of the "word" is still prevalent today in numerous religious forms and views. Yet, *logos* holds so much more meaning viewed through the new covenant. Let us explore the "Word."

Creation

"The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word. The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. Everything was created through him; nothing—not one thing!—came into being without him" (John 1:1-3, *The Message*). In this passage John connects the Word with God, Creation, salvation, and you! What an incredible way to begin a Gospel. John wants you to know who Jesus is, His relationship to God, and, more important, what He wants to do for you. Many people argue against John's logic by stating a disconnect between the God of the Old Testament and the revelation of Jesus through the New Testament. Citing the fact that even though God states He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, He had to alter His plans by providing a new covenant to replace the failed one with Israel. This argument could be no further from the truth. It was we who broke the old covenant, not God. Instead of punishing us for abandoning Him, He in turn sent "the Word" to provide a new covenant, one based on salvation, not sacrifice.

Revelation

As humans our words sometimes are meaningless and empty. My wife often

implores me to act rather than merely speak. In other words, practice what you preach. It has been my experience that words seldom reveal what a person truly means. Rather, it is a combination of words and actions that reflect character. When one's actions reflect their words, truth is realized, as was the case with General Douglas MacArthur and his famous line, "I shall return."

However, MacArthur's simply stated words were embodied in the Truth, Jesus Christ. When "the Word" became flesh and walked among us, Christ was marrying *logos* and actions to form a God-size mirror. John the Baptist referred to Jesus as "the God-Revealer" (verse 31, *The Message*). The power of Christ's words lie in the revelation that God loved us enough to walk the walk, not out of pity, but out of love. For in Christ the world witnessed a masterfully illustrated self-portrait of God's unfailing grace.

Communication

Hebrews 8:10 sums up *logos'* communicating the new covenant to us. "This time I'm writing out the plan in them, carving it on the lining of their hearts. I'll be their God, they'll be my people." I love this next part! "They won't go to school to learn about me, or buy a book called *God in Five Easy Lessons*." God talking, growing, laughing, learning with us—what a picture. Read the rest of Hebrews 8 to learn about God's communication of the new covenant. It's amazing.

Worship

"Through the Spirit, Christ offered himself as an unblemished sacrifice, freeing us from all those dead-end efforts to make ourselves respectable, so that we can live all out for God" (9:14, *The Message*). When "the Word" died on the cross, we were freed from the mandates of the old covenant. No longer did we need to bring burnt sacrifices to the high priest once a year. Christ's death took care of our sins forever. Under the new covenant, worshiping Christ is the base for salvation. All the old ways were swept away when Christ declared "It is finished," forever defeating sin through the power of "the Word."

The story of Prometheus is not over, however. After being bound to the rock, every day a vulture came to tear out his liver, which always grew back only to be torn out again, the penalty of showing compassion to mortals. What a dramatic contrast to our God! The stoics believed that gods alone held true *logos* and punishment was necessary for Prometheus because he revealed some godly truth to mortals. Conversely, Jesus, "Logos" incarnate, reveals heavenly truth to humans in order to allow them to share in godly compassion. Aren't you glad we serve a God who passionately feels our pain and strives to comfort us? The new covenant, born through Jesus, "the Word," testifies to the passion that God has for us. No universe shall ever separate our love, for God spoke you into existence, became flesh and healed your sins, and will return to fulfill His covenant with you.

TESTIMONY

Ps. 40:8

Recently I applied for life insurance. The easy part was calling that 800-number. But after that I had to go through interviews, medical tests, credit checks, and the list went on. The beauty of the new covenant is that, unlike my attempt at buying insurance, it comes with a warm hug and does not require us to attend a boot camp. Ellen White describes how Jesus attended that boot camp for us.

“Under the new covenant, the conditions by which eternal life may be gained are the same as under the old—perfect obedience.... In the new and better covenant, Christ has fulfilled the law for the transgressors of law, if they receive Him by faith as a personal Savior.... In the better covenant we are cleansed from sin by the blood of Christ.”¹ “The

It does not require us to attend a boot camp.

blessings of the new covenant are grounded purely on mercy in forgiving unrighteousness and sins. The Lord specifies, I will do thus and thus unto all who turn to Me, forsaking the evil and choosing the good. ‘I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.’ (Heb. 8:12) All who humble their hearts, confessing their sins, will find mercy and grace and assurance.”²

“The terms of the ‘old covenant’ were, Obey and live: ‘If a man do, he shall even live in them’ (Ezek. 20:11; Lev. 18:5); but ‘cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them’ (Deut. 27:26). The ‘new covenant’ was established upon ‘better promises’—the promise of forgiveness of sins and of the grace of God to renew the heart and bring it into harmony with the principles of God’s law.”³

“The yoke that binds to service is the law of God. The great law of love revealed in Eden, proclaimed upon Sinai, and in the new covenant written in the heart, is that which binds the human worker to the will of God. . . . Love for God, zeal for His glory, and love for fallen humanity, brought Jesus to earth to suffer and to die. This was the controlling power of His life. This principle He bids us adopt.”⁴

What a loving and lovable God we serve. He provides the ultimate life insurance! Not only is the call toll free—the whole package comes with no strings attached. Just as my friend Stephanie says, “Yeah, God!”

1. *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 136.

2. *That I May Know Him*, p. 299.

3. *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 136.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 329.

Dead to the Law!

EVIDENCE

Rom. 3:20; 7:4

Sometimes I wish that God would provide a simple list of behaviors, a law that is “required and doable,” that I could follow and so earn eternal life. A checklist would be so much easier than trying to quantify the value of my love.

Instead, God uses love to determine whether I am safe to save. He asks me to die to the old way of law so I may bear fruit to Him. I, a dead person, have been released from the law so that I may serve God in the new way.

As Eugene Peterson says in *The Message*, “We’re free to live a new life in the freedom of God” (Rom. 7:6).

Does this mean that my Christian behavior, my keeping of the law, does not bear fruit? Are my moral actions more valuable because they come in response to the moving of the Spirit in my life instead of in response to the guilt I feel from my failures?

In his book *Transforming Grace*, Jerry Bridges provides a clear answer to these questions.

“We died to the observance of the law as a requirement for attaining righteousness before God. We died to the curse and condemnation that resulted from our inability to keep the law. . . .

Law implies a broken relationship with God, whereas grace implies a restored relationship with Him. We died to the law so that we might live in the realm of grace, that we might bear fruit in God.

A checklist would be
so much easier.

“The new way of Spirit is not a new and less rigorous ethic than the old way of the written code. The difference does not lie in the content of the moral will of God. Since that is the reflection of the holy character of God, it cannot change. Rather, the difference lies in the reason to obey and the ability to obey.”*

The difference is the way of the Spirit:

The Spirit gives me an internal desire for God's way.

The Spirit causes me to delight in God's way.

The Spirit enables me to live God's way.

The Spirit shows me God's grace so clearly that gratitude overwhelms me.

The Spirit proves that God has accepted me.

The Spirit gives me the strength to rely on God.

The Spirit lives God's way—in me!

The new covenant allows me to live each day, totally reliant upon the Spirit, as I revel in God's moment-by-moment gift of freedom.

*Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1991).

HOW-TO
Ezek. 34:25

As I write this article, the birthplace of Christ is full of terror. Gone is the pastoral stable with its lowing cattle and the soft coos of a newborn child. No angelic choir sings the Hallelujah chorus as sheep mill around the manger. Bethlehem has been under siege by the Israeli military for days. Smoke and flames hang over the city, giving it an ethereal orange glow. Palestinian soldiers and civilians alike are holed up in Christian churches, their wounds tended by monks, nuns, and priests. A boy is shot while attempting to gather weeds to make soup. Hundreds of Israelis have died in suicide bombings. And hundreds of Palestinians have died in the Israeli onslaught of retribution.

Where is the covenant of peace promised by God for His chosen people? Where is the shalom that every Jew is greeted with morning and evening?

We are not living in the time of the Old Testament covenants, when God protected His people from their enemies and gave them the Promised Land. In His ministry Christ was very clear that the old covenants were passed away and

Where is the shalom?

that the new covenant, the covenant of His blood, was for everyone. (See Mark 14:24.) The new covenant is not about a specific people group or code of laws. It is a contract between Christ and anyone willing to enter into agreement with Him. (See Hebrews 10:16, 17.) It promises that no matter what turmoil we suffer through on earth, Christ offers an eternal shalom.

A contract includes the actions expected of both parties. In ancient Israel the people were expected to follow a myriad of laws, including the temple ceremonies. But those rules for atonement and intercession no longer apply. Christ's blood has already covered our sins, and He is now our High Priest in heaven, interceding on our behalf. So what do we have to do to maintain our part of the bargain? Nothing, really—at least not anything that can be measured against a rule book. All that Christ expects is for us to receive His perfect grace and to allow ourselves to be transformed by His righteousness, to write the agreement on our hearts and live it out in our lives. Only then will we be able to “live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety” (Ezek. 34:25, NIV), knowing that Christ has removed all the eternal dangers that may lie in our way.

REACT

Why do we need Christ to intercede for us with God? Why can't we just stand before Him on our own?

Tattoo It to My Heart

OPINION

Heb. 9:11-14

“When the Messiah arrived, high priest of the superior things of this new covenant, he bypassed the old tent and its trappings in this created world and went straight into heaven’s ‘tent’—the true Holy Place—once and for all. He also bypassed the sacrifices consisting of goat and calf blood, instead using his own blood as the price to set us free once and for all. If that animal blood and the other rituals of purification were effective in cleaning up certain matters of our religion and behavior, think how much more the blood of Christ cleans up our whole lives, inside and out. Through the Spirit, Christ offered himself as an unblemished sacrifice, freeing us from all those dead-end efforts to make ourselves respectable, so that we can live all out for God” (Heb. 9:11-14, *The Message*).

Broken promises litter the landscape of human history—of my history. Heaven knows that I have my share of missed deadlines, unfulfilled promises, and absences from piano recitals. Laundry I promised to tend has lain weeks waiting, and I can almost recall New Year’s past by thinking of the grand resolutions proclaimed. If only I could remember a promise kept.

It is a good thing God is doing a new thing. A new covenant is the only one that has a shot in our broken-down world. It’s got to be super-hero size. Able to leap tall denial in a single bound. Faster than a speeding excuse. The only One ever considered for the part is Jesus. That’s a good casting.

The new promise is all about Jesus from start to finish. He’s the One who made the promise; He’s the One who keeps it—in our hearts. No surrogate promisekeeper, no forever friendships sealed in ketchup. Jesus makes His promises and seals them with His blood, the only true and lasting, once-and-for-all solution. Jesus gives us direct access to God, because He is God. So this time, the promise is for keeps.

It doesn’t rely on me. It’s not my efforts that hold the covenant in tact. Given my track record, I am glad to give Jesus the driver’s seat. Let Him do the promise keeping, for me, through me. Tattoo it to my heart; brand it on my brain. Let the new covenant be permanently impressed upon me.

Promise to let Jesus be it all?

He promises and delivers.

**It’s got to be
super-hero size.**

REACT

What are some of the ways you continue to try to make yourself “respectable”?

EXPLORATION

Rom. 6:6, 7; 1 Pet. 2:16

CONCLUDE

There's hardly any point in having something new unless it is superior to the old. God's new covenant is superior. How is this true? No more sacrifices; no more substitutions; a new revelation of how serious He is—His own Son's death—to save people. That's new and that's serious.

It is so new and so serious that He's now free for all time to write His law on our minds of *logos* and our hearts of *pathos*. And the Freedom Man promises: I'll be your God. You be My people. Who wants to be free to be free?

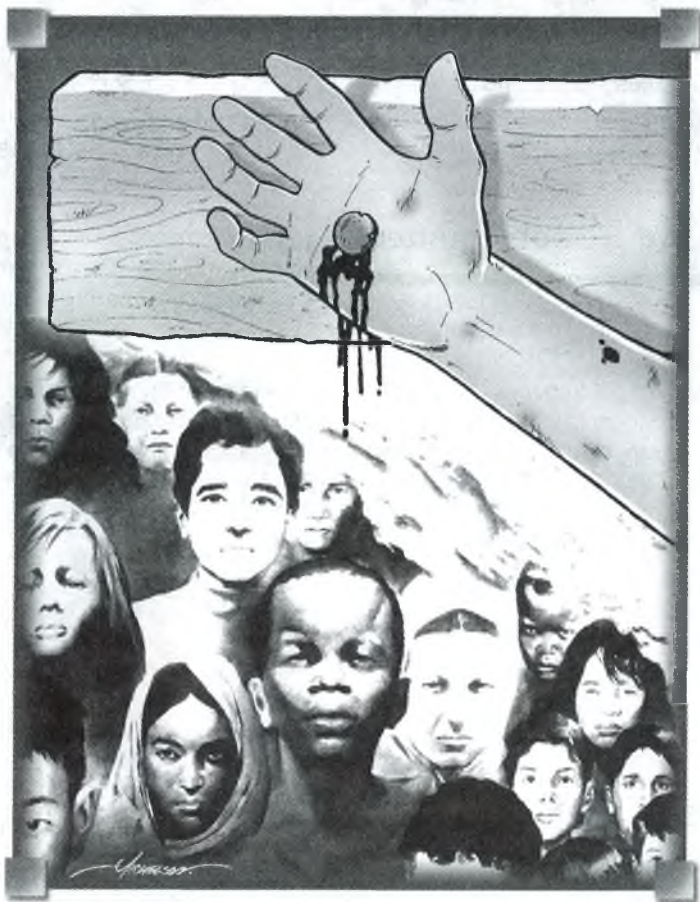
CONSIDER

- Calling a judge, an attorney, a law professor, or a police officer for an informal interview. Ask some probing questions: Could we have order with fewer laws? Would it work to enforce laws on their spirit or intent, not their letter? What better ways are there to have all of us understand not just the *what* but the *why* of laws?
- Discussing with a friend which produces more compliance, coercion or freedom. How much compliance does God want? What is there about a relationship—us with God or us with significant others—that needs or expects compliance?
- Writing a short poem that relates to God's writing His law on our minds of *logos* and our hearts of *pathos*. Consider putting the lyrics of this poem to song.
- Drawing up your own contract of freedom and peace with God in mind. Then draw up a contract with family, colleagues, and casual associates in mind. How will the contract with God read similar to or different from the one you have drawn up for other people?
- Telling a children's story in Sabbath School or church describing how the Freedom Man offers people peace not fear, keeps His promises rather than keeps records of our nastiness.
- Listening and reacting to the song "He Who Began a Good Work in You," by Steve Green.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chap. 51; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, "The Spirituality of the Law."

What's the Big Deal?



“He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 9:14

Growing up as a pastor's kid, for me the sanctuary seemed to be one of the most obscure doctrines. Why was it so important? When I was a teenager, suddenly everyone seemed to be discussing it, adults walking around with troubled frowns, some quoting Ellen G. White, some definitely not.

As a theology student, I had to study about the sanctuary doctrine. And from all the previous muddle and confusion—two things have struck me:

1. The sanctuary is an inextricable part of our history. Its starting point for Adventists was a vision, right after the Disappointment in 1844, followed by much prayer and

We are not forgotten.

Bible study. Ellen White says that it "opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God's hand had directed the great advent move-

ment, and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of his people."*

2. We are not forgotten. Jesus is hard at work on our behalf. There is a place where everything is right, not twisted and rotten to the core as it is here on earth, but where love reigns. Jesus is doing something tangible for us, showing that He has paid once and for all to give us access to God and the possibility of eternal life.

In other words, the sanctuary is significant both to our understanding of Christ and to understanding ourselves as God's people.

**The Great Controversy*, p. 423.

Association of Judgment

EVIDENCE

Heb. 9:12

The *sanctuary*. Just hearing the word easily brings an association of judgment, fear, and some abstract theological concept that is of little relevance today. It certainly has received a lot of misguided attention, with a focus more on judgment than on compassion. It's taken me years to come to an understanding of the sanctuary doctrine that was Christ-centered and in harmony with what Jesus taught. Why is this doctrine so crucial to Seventh-day Adventist belief?

It all goes back to focus: Is it guilt or compassion? The sanctuary doctrine plays a vital part in the rescue plan that God has offered us here on earth. The sanctuary opens for direct access to God through His Son Jesus as our High Priest. If the sanctuary were putting an ad in the business papers, it would say "Open 24/7." The important focus is not to dwell on details of sanctuary design, but to understand the impact of what Jesus as the High Priest does there.

First, it's where Jesus is now. It places Him at the throne, and His access to the tabernacle is because of His love for us manifest on the cross. It is through the Cross that Jesus has "obtained eternal redemption" for us (Heb. 9:12, NIV). The purpose of this ultimate sacrifice is explained through the rituals and understanding of the tabernacle services that existed in Israel. In God's plan of salvation the sanctuary becomes complementary of the Cross.

What is the purpose of Jesus in the sanctuary? What is He doing? He is continuing to throw us a salvation rope by interceding on our behalf. We have direct access to God and have no other go-between than Jesus. And He in turn, because of His love and compassion, spends His time in intercessory prayers for us! It's His sole purpose and function at God's throne, not to judge, but to pray for you and me. His involvement with us and our sufferings didn't finish at the Cross, but continues today.

**Why is this doctrine
so crucial?**

When seeing that it is out of compassion for us that Jesus intercedes, that He shares in our sufferings, it gives us a relevant understanding of the sanctuary doctrine, that its focus is not on judgment but on compassion for us. The sanctuary as a doctrine has received bad press with such dangers as perfectionism, legalism, and guilt-produced forms of theology, and this has robbed us of seeing the beauty and power in its message of compassion and importance of intercessory prayer. Let our prayers be that we may keep our focus on the Cross and rejoice in the sanctuary of our Lord.

Everything Is New With Christ

LOGOS

Matt. 27:52; John 4:21; Heb. 8:1, 2; 9:1-3, 8, 12, 24, 25; 10:19; 13:11

New and Old Realities

Through the book of Hebrews, the main point is (see Hebrews 8:1) that we have a High Priest whose "atonement sealed forever the everlasting covenant of grace."* Jesus is in heaven, functioning as High Priest, and serves in the sanctuary, but this is a picture of a new reality that was not known to the Hebrews. They knew the earthly sanctuary, its function, and the role of the priest, but the reality of Hebrews 8 was much greater. The earthly sanctuary was a picture of the heavenly reality, but it was not the reality itself.

After Golgotha, the meaning of old realities faded because Christ took upon Himself the role of the perfect Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, which is the true tabernacle—built by God Himself, not humanity (Heb. 8:2). This gives freedom of access to God and forgiveness for everyone in spite

The earthly sanctuary was a picture of the heavenly reality.

of location, nationality, gender, or color of skin. This reality is a fulfillment of the words Jesus declared to the Samaritan: "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (John 4:21).

The New Covenant (Hebrews 8; 9:1-5, 8, 17)

The old covenant with the earthly sanctuary and humans performing the functions of the priests (Heb. 9:1-5) was right for the specific time to describe the future hope for sinful humanity. These hopes were personified in Jesus Christ. But the earthly functions had to stop, because the heavenly sanctuary with Jesus Christ as the perfect Representative of human shortcomings came into play. The old, which was only a description of the true reality, had fulfilled its purpose, and this is why the curtain of the temple was torn (Matt. 27:52; Mark 15:38), opening the access to the Most Holy Place through Jesus Christ for anyone, anytime, not just once a year for the high priest. Jesus went into the temple with His blood, not as a priest in the temple with the blood of animals (Heb. 9:12), but He performed the most incredible act of love in the whole universe, giving Himself in order for us to receive eternal redemption.

The Heavenly Sanctuary (Heb. 9:24, 25)

The book of Hebrews emphasizes that Christ didn't depict a model of something greater, as in the case of the earthly sanctuary, but He entered heaven itself. In the heavenly sanctuary, He intercedes for us—you and me—before God (Heb. 9:24). Unfortunately, some still try to bring old realities back, such as in the celebration of the Mass, which is a bloodless sacrifice. Hebrews states very plainly that no multiple sacrifices as it was done under the old covenant in the earthly sanctuary should take place (verses 25, 26). The perfect sacrifice was performed once, when God covered creation with the purple robe of righteousness—giving access to heaven for all.

Freedom in Christ (Heb. 10:19)

So now we all have access to the temple in heaven, where Jesus purifies us. He is our loving High Priest, whose love was manifest in His death so we can live. Let Him be our inspiration for life (Heb. 13:11), our hope in struggle, our way to love.

REACT

1. Name some Adventist doctrines or ways of thinking that could potentially "bring old realities back." How can we avoid this happening?
2. If God loves us fully and unconditionally, why does His Son need to intercede for us?
3. Did Jesus really cover all creation with His righteousness, or only those who choose to let Him cover them? Explain your answer.

**The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 933.

Clear or Clouded Answers?

TESTIMONY

Zech. 6:12; Heb. 9:15

In the Bible can be found "a full explanation of the subject of the sanctuary, its nature, location, and services; the testimony of the sacred writers being so clear and ample as to place the matter beyond all question."¹

First, it must be understood that Christ is our advocate. " 'Behold the Man whose name is The Branch . . . He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne.' Zech. 6:12, 13."²

"A new and living way is prepared for all."³ "The sanctuary of the first covenant

**"Henceforth the Savior was
to officiate as priest
and advocate."**

was pitched by man, built by Moses; this is pitched by the Lord, not by man. In that sanctuary the earthly priests performed their service; in this, Christ, our great high priest, ministers at God's right hand.

One sanctuary was on earth, the other is in Heaven."⁴

Here is revealed the sanctuary of the new covenant. "No longer need sinful, sorrowing humanity await the coming of the high priest. Henceforth the Savior was to officiate as priest and advocate in the heaven of heavens."⁵

Do not fear. "While Jesus ministers in the sanctuary above, He is still by His Spirit the minister of the church on earth. He is withdrawn from the eye of sense, but His parting promise is fulfilled, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' Matt. 28:20."⁶

Though it is important to know that Jesus has entered into the Most Holy Place on our behalf, it is equally important to understand that Christ is our High Priest. The "heavenly temple [is] where Christ, our great High Priest, after offering His life as a sacrifice, [is] to minister in the sinner's behalf."⁷

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 411.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 166.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 757.

4. *The Great Controversy*, p. 413.

5. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 757.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

7. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 343.

Avoiding the Consequences

HOW-TO

Exod. 25:8, 40; 29:42, 43; Heb. 8:5

The consequences of sin are many and varied. Romans 6:23 says the ultimate wages of sin is death, but before death sin creates alienation. This has never been clearer than in the contemporary world in which we live. Humanity is alienated from his neighbors, his environment, but worst of all from God, who created him and who gave Jesus to recover him.

After his sin, Adam was afraid of God (Gen. 3:10). In His work of redeeming and recovering humanity from sin and its consequences, God needs to get close to us and take away the fear that separates us from him. The sanctuary in the Old Testament and in the high-priestly ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary demonstrates how God gets close to humanity to remove fear.

After his sin, Adam was
afraid of God.

In Exodus 25:8 we discover the ideology behind the sanctuary services. "Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (NKJV).

From God's instructions we can conclude:

- God takes the initiative to build the sanctuary.
- Its purpose is to bring a holy God and sinful humanity together.
- The sanctuary was constructed after a plan shown to Moses. (See Hebrews 8:5; Acts 7:44.)

The two most important aspects of the sanctuary are:

1. The sacrifice. All the services of the sanctuary depend on the sacrifice on the altar of burnt offering at its entrance. It was here that God met the penitent sinner with salvation. (See Exodus 29:42, 43.) This sacrifice teaches two vital lessons: (a) the wages of sin is death; (b) the death of the substitute meant that the sinner went free.

2. The priest. The virtue derived from the sacrifice informed the work of the priest in the first and second room.

The earthly sanctuary, the sacrifice, and the priest are illustrations of how Jesus, through His sacrifice and high priestly ministry, brings a holy God and sinful humanity into a saving relationship.

REACT

How can a confidence in Jesus display itself in daily life? Be specific.

The Real Sanctuary Is on the Earth!

OPINION

Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:5-10

Amidst the discussion on how the old sanctuary on earth corresponds with the heavenly sanctuary, I'd like to challenge you by stating that the *real* sanctuary is on the earth, not in heaven!

The New Testament speaks of the community of believers as *the* temple. "You yourselves [plural] are God's temple [singular]" (1 Cor. 3:16; see also Hebrews 3:6; 2

The *real* sanctuary is on the earth, not in heaven!

Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:5). In other words: You and I are *the* temple, *the* sanctuary. And this sanctuary is on earth, visible for people. In that sense the church (the people, not the building,

mind you) is the temple people can see, hear, touch, smell, experience.

The New Testament also teaches that all Christians are priests in this temple (1 Pet. 2:9). Let's spend a moment reflecting on the symbols of the sanctuary in this context, and see ourselves serving as priests there.

- **The temple was a place of God's presence.** God Himself was present in the temple (Exod. 29:42, 43; 40:34, 35; Num. 12:4, 5; 1 Kings 8:10). At times God's presence was so overwhelming that nobody could be in there! How about your church: Is it a place where God is (at times, overwhelmingly) present? Are we as priests serving the One who is present there, or are we running around with our own agendas? (See Leviticus 10:1-3.)

- **The temple was a place where broken people were reconciled with God.** It was a place where sins were confessed and forgiven. It was the place to go if you had disobeyed God. The priests' primary task was to receive these people, day in and day out. Entering the sanctuary to take care of the lamps, etc., was merely side business. How about your church? Is it the place to go to confess sins? When people approach it, will they receive condemnation or forgiveness? And are you as a priest engaged primarily in "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18-21)?

- **The temple was in the midst of the people.** The original temple designed by God was a tent, not a building. The sanctuary and every item in it were mobile. The larger items had rings in them, into which poles could be inserted so they could be transported (see Exodus 25:12, 26, 27). The tabernacle itself could be dismantled into pieces that could be carried because the sanctuary was supposed to move where the people moved! How about my church? Is it where the people are? Have I as a priest been faithfully moving the sanctuary and putting it up where people are living today?

Then and Now

EXPLORATION

Hebrews 9

The doctrine of the sanctuary is not only an important part of our Seventh-day Adventist history, it contains the essence of our salvation. It reveals Christ as the only One capable of being both our High Priest and Sacrifice. The earthly sanctuary and its rituals were just symbols of the real thing. Jesus came and sacrificed His life once and for all so that daily sacrifices are no longer necessary. In the sanctuary in heaven, He intercedes on our behalf as High Priest, so we need no other. The sacrifices were necessary then. Jesus is all we need now.

CONSIDER

- Sketching a picture of a high priest dressed in his priestly garments such as can be found on Arthur Maxwell's *Bible Story*, volume 3. Why do you suppose God used such bright and vibrant colors instead of only white?
- Baking some unleavened bread from a recipe obtained from a Jewish friend or the person who bakes the Communion bread at your church. Eat it prayerfully, thanking God that Jesus lived without sin, allowing Him to be our Savior.
- Researching texts relating to Jesus as our Sacrifice for sin or the Lamb of God. Commit one to memory, post one on a bathroom mirror, or use one as a screen saver.
- Writing a special Thank-You letter to Jesus for being our Sacrifice and Atonement. Tell Him of the weaknesses that you struggle with. Include your desire to meet Him in heaven.
- Checking the topical index under the heading "Jesus Christ" in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* for hymns relating to Jesus' priesthood, and/or search the index called "Scriptural Allusions in Hymns." Look under Hebrews to find songs relating to that book. Record yourself singing one of these songs.
- Organizing an agape feast with a group of friends. Have each person relate what Jesus as our heavenly High Priest means to them.
- Reading a book on Adventist history, such as *Tell It to the World* by Mervyn Maxwell. Consider what it tells you about the history of the sanctuary in Adventism.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 30.

What is Jesus doing?



“Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself” (Heb. 7:27, NRSV).

Once for All

INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 10

"We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (Heb. 10:10, 11, NIV).

God's love for humanity is so amazing that His only begotten Son was willing to be the Sacrifice that paid for humanity's sins. Even in the form of a man, Jesus alone being perfect could do for us what we cannot begin to do for ourselves, let alone the priest who "stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (verse 11, NIV).

It was not possible that the blood of animals should take away sins.

Though the daily and annual sacrificing of animals for the sins of the people were a shadow of things to come (i.e., Jesus' death on the cross), it was not possible that the blood of animals should take away sins. For had this been the case then there would have been a need for continual sacrifices.

In offering Himself once, however, Jesus' sacrifice sanctifies us through faith in Him. Thanks be to God that we have a risen Savior by whom we are sanctified (by the offering of His body and the shedding of His blood) through the Holy Spirit that purges us from sin to serve the living God (9:14; 10:10).

As a result, we are cleansed and accounted worthy of the gift of God (i.e., eternal life). Therefore, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" (10:23, NIV).

Sunday
August 24

Radiating With Light

LOGOS

Hebrews 9; 10

"The book of Hebrews radiates with light, truth, and details regarding salvation history, regarding what Jesus has done for us, what He is doing for us now, and what He will do for us throughout eternity. It reveals not only what Christ accomplished by His life and death (Heb. 1:3; 2:9; 7:27; 9:12, 28), but it presents the most explicit explanation of Christ as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary (2:17, 18; 4:15, 16; 7:25; 9:24) found anywhere else in scripture."*

The book of Hebrews also portrays Christ as the Logos. *Logos* is a Greek word meaning "word" or "reason." John's gospel uses this term to describe Jesus as the Revelation of God. Therefore, the Logos was present with God from the beginning.

I'm reminded of a story in which one Sabbath for divine praise and worship service, as the young minister was about to deliver a word from God, he noticed an older minister in the audience. So he asked the older minister to come up and say a "few words."

As the older minister took his position on the platform, he began to tell a story that went like this: I remember one Sunday morning, a man, his only son, and his

**The raft hit a rock, tossing
the two boys into the
violent waters.**

son's friend all went rafting. They all were having the time of their lives until a storm came and the waters began to get violent. These waters became so violent that the raft began to toss to and fro. Then all of a sudden, without

notice, the raft hit a rock, tossing the two boys into the violent waters. The man had a decision to make because he knew he could save only one. So he quickly took the rope and tossed it to his son's friend and called, "Grab on to it!"

His son's friend was now safe, yet his son died. So when they made it back home everyone asked this man, including his wife, why he didn't save his own son instead. The man replied, "I knew my son knew God and that if he died, he would be saved when Jesus comes back; but my son's friend had no knowledge of God, and I wanted to give him the opportunity to get to know God for himself!"

The older minister then returned to his seat, and after church was over, some of the young members went to the older minister and said, "That was a very good story, but it just doesn't seem realistic. Who would let their *only* son die?" The older minister then responded by saying, "That man in the story was me, and the boy I saved is your pastor."

That's how our heavenly Father is. "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). The only difference is that God can save us all, as the old folks would say, “From the gutter most to the uttermost!” All you have to do is let Him! Just as the boy in the story had life because of the man who saved him, we have life only in Jesus Christ—our Savior. “This is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son” (1 John 5:11, NKJV).

This is why we are to be thankful for Jesus Christ—the true Logos, who has come that we may have eternal life. This is why His death was so important. If Jesus had not died, there could be no will or covenant (Heb. 9:16), nor could Jesus have become our Mediator, acting between a Holy God and guilty sinners to the end that they might be reconciled (verse 15; 1 Tim. 2:5).

As a result of Jesus' redemptive death, those whose sins were simply covered under the old covenant (Rom. 3:24, 25) have now received “the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15, NKJV). Even among humanity, a covenant/testament or will is invalid until the testator dies and it becomes operative. Jesus' death sealed the new covenant and set it in force or made it valid (verse 17). Jesus truly paid it all. So keep the faith, “For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry” (10:37, NKJV).

REACT

1. We often hear the expression “Jesus paid it all.” What did He pay and to whom? Are there any weaknesses in this metaphor? Explain your answer.
2. What does the Bible mean when it says that Jesus was slain “from the foundation of the world”? (Rev. 13:8, KJV).
3. For the Greeks, the logos was a life force that kept the universe together. How does this affect our understanding of Jesus as the Logos, especially in John 1:1?
4. Were animal sacrifices really necessary because of sin or were they merely a helpful object lesson? Explain your answer.
5. Did Jesus really take back dominion of the earth at His death? If God is all powerful, how could He have lost dominion of the earth?
6. Why is Christ the perfect High Priest?
7. Discuss the similarities of the perfect Sacrifice and the perfect High Priest.
8. What does it mean to get ready for Jesus' coming? How do you know if you are ready?
9. If the purpose of the signs of the times is to tell us Jesus' coming is near, what does “near” mean?

**Adult Bible Study Guide, July-September 2003, p. 2.*

TESTIMONY

Prov. 28:13

"The sanctuary in heaven is the very center of Christ's work in behalf of men. It concerns every soul living upon the earth. It opens to view the plan of redemption, bringing us down to the very close of time and revealing the triumphant issue of the contest between righteousness and sin. It is of the utmost importance that all should thoroughly investigate these subjects and be able to give an answer to everyone that asketh them a reason of the hope that is in them.

"The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven. We must by faith enter within the veil, 'whither the forerunner is for us entered.' Hebrews 6:20. There the light from the cross of Calvary is reflected. There we may gain a clearer insight into the mysteries of redemption. The salvation of man is accomplished at an infinite expense to heaven; the sacrifice made is equal to the broadest demands of

With a sound knowledge of the sanctuary doctrine, we can better understand the merciful longsuffering of God toward us.

the broken law of God. Jesus has opened the way to the Father's throne, and through His mediation the sincere desire of all who come to Him in faith may be presented before God.

" 'He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and

forsaketh them shall have mercy.' (Prov. 28:13). If those who hide and excuse their faults could see how Satan exults over them, how he taunts Christ and holy angels with their course, they would make haste to confess their sins and to put them away. Through defects in the character, Satan works to gain control of the whole mind, and he knows that if these defects are cherished, he will succeed. Therefore he is constantly seeking to deceive the followers of Christ with his fatal sophistry that it is impossible for them to overcome. But Jesus pleads in their behalf His wounded hands, His bruised body; and He declares to all who would follow Him: 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' 'Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.' Matt. 11:29, 30. Let none, then, regard their defects as incurable. God will give faith and grace to overcome them."*

**The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, pp. 313, 314.

Into the Palm of His Hand

EVIDENCE

Genesis 1; 2; Heb. 9:22

Through Adam's disobedience, sin entered the world and animal sacrifices became necessary. The slain lamb offered upon the altar in repentance pointed forward to when the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world, would come and die and make atonement for all our sins once and for all.

In the beginning, the earth was made perfect and good in God's eyes. (Gen. 1:31, NKJV). Through Christ, paradise was established upon the earth. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-3, NKJV).

Adam and Eve were the first and only people in this magnificent paradise. Placed in the Garden of Eden, they lived happily and would have always continued

to do so except for the fateful day when the counsel of God was unheeded. Eve separated from her husband, Adam, which she was cautioned not to do, and found herself talking to Satan in the form

**Adam and Eve were the first
and only people in this
magnificent paradise.**

of a serpent. The serpent spun tales of doubt concerning God's authority and their right to every tree in the Garden (Gen. 3:1, 4, 5, NKJV).

Eve allowed herself to be deceived by the devil, and Adam followed suit. They were to live happily together in open fellowship with Christ their Creator forever with face-to-face communion. But after their Fall the initial state of glorious living didn't last long. Paradise was suddenly snatched away because of their disobedience to God, and they were cast out of the Garden.

Through Adam, sin brought corruption and death to the whole world, giving Satan full reign to conquer and destroy for a time and only a time. Every time a lamb was slain by Adam, Eve, and their descendants it represented the day when Christ would lay down His life for the sinner and take back dominion of the earth. The regulation of time would be in God's hand, and Satan's time would be shortened. Through God's love, Christ has taken death into the palm of His hand and sacrificed His own blood to give life to all who believe in Him. Christ as our High Priest today pleads to His Father for our souls so that one day we can reclaim the paradise that was taken away by sin.

How to Accept the Perfect High Priest

HOW-TO

John 3:16; 14:6; Heb. 5:5, 6

To accept Christ as the perfect High Priest is also to accept Him as the perfect Sacrifice. To accept Christ as the perfect Sacrifice is to understand God's love for us. Unconditional love compels a loving God to sacrifice His only Son to save us. To accept Christ as the perfect Sacrifice is to accept God's love for us.

When we accept God's love and His Son's perfect Sacrifice, then we can accept Jesus Christ as our perfect High Priest. It was God Himself who appointed Christ

**"He is our High Priest that
can be touched with the
feelings of our infirmities."**

to the priesthood. "Christ glorified not Himself in being made High Priest. God gave Him His appointment to the priesthood. He was to be an example to all the human family. He qualified Himself to be, not

only the representation of the race, but their Advocate, so that every soul if he will may say, I have a friend at court. He is our High Priest that can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities."¹

There are three ways to accept Jesus Christ as our High Priest:

1. We must have faith. We must have the kind of faith that can look beyond the veil, seeing things that are invisible. We must see and accept what Christ is presently doing for us as our Advocate and High Priest.

2. We must have exact obedience. We must not overlook Christ's obedience as something achieved by His particular Divine nature. He was tempted on all points and stood before God as a man. If Christ would have enjoyed special privileges on earth, Satan would have really made a big deal of this matter. Jesus' life on earth alone makes Him the perfect High Priest and Advocate.

3. We must accept Christ as truth. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6, NKJV). To accept Christ as High Priest is to accept Him as truth. To accept Him is to know Him as truth. How do we know Him as truth? By studying His Word and allowing Him to communicate to us through His Word that He is indeed truth. Only a High Priest who is truth can rightfully stand before God as our Advocate. "It is truth . . . we all need, the truth that works by love and purifies the soul."²

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 930.

2. *The Upward Look*, p. 293.

Judge Jesus Christ Presiding

OPINION

Heb. 12:23, 24, 28

What is the underlying message in the sanctuary doctrine? A call to holier living? Moment by moment preparedness for Christ's soon return? God is judging us? According to Ellen White, "Those who would share the benefits of the Saviour's mediation should permit nothing to interfere with their duty to perfect holiness in the fear of God. The precious hours, instead of being given to pleasure, to display, or to gain seeking, should be devoted to an earnest, prayerful study of the word of truth."¹

The answer is clear. The underlying message is not just a call to holier living, but a call to knowing Jesus more through His Word. Getting to know Jesus is a matter of life and death, and the more we get to know Him, the more our lives will reflect Christ.

"The subject of the sanctuary and the investigative Judgment should be clearly understood by the people of God. All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest."² Understanding the heavenly sanctuary doctrine and the role it plays in our salvation points us to one ever-present fact: We are in the last days and we should be getting ready for Christ's soon return, getting our lives in order.

**The underlying message is
a call to knowing Jesus.**

However, since we've known for centuries that we are living in the last days, through the signs of the times, we should already be reading, studying, watching, and proclaiming the Word of God.

The great High Priest is judging His people. "Each has a case pending at the bar of God. Each must meet the great Judge face to face. How important, then, that every mind contemplate often the solemn scene when the judgment shall sit and the books shall be opened, when, with Daniel, every individual must stand in his lot, at the end of the days."³ Enough time has been wasted doing our own thing. We have been instructed through prophecy and the Holy Scriptures to get our lives in order, now, while we still have breath in our lungs. God is waiting on His people to behave as though they are aware that His coming is near, even at the doors. Let us do all in our power to cooperate with God and hasten His soon return.

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 488.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

He Died to Give Us Life

EXPLORATION

John 3:16, 17

CONCLUDE

It's very difficult, if not impossible, for us to fathom anyone giving their life for another human soul, let alone the fact that He is the Son of God who came and lived among us and ultimately sacrificed His life for you and me. Did He have to do this? Absolutely not! The love of God for His created beings is so immense that He even sent His one and only Son to bear the sins of everyone before Him and after Him on the cross. Praise God for His Love.

CONSIDER

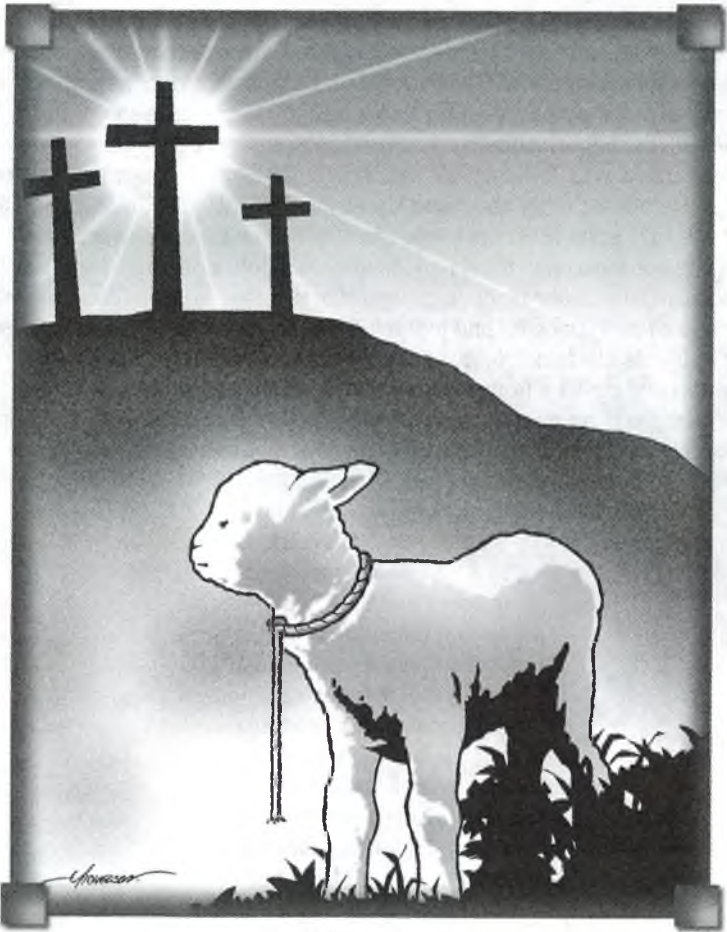
- Creating an image that would give you a sense of the meaning of John 3:16 through the visual medium (drawing, painting, photography, etc.). Write this text at the bottom of your work and place this in an area of your home or work that would give you an opportunity to share it with someone.
- Contemplating the meaning of John 3:16, then share these thoughts by using them to uplift someone through a note in the mail or by email.
- Listening to George F. Handel's *Messiah*. Visualize the words to the music or look up the passages of Scripture and follow along.
- Baking cookies or repackaging store-bought ones with a copy of John 3:16 in the bag to pass along to coworkers, neighbors, or unchurched friends.
- Visiting the hospital and offering to pray with patients or families in waiting rooms.
- Reading John 3:16, meditating on the text, and then journaling the thoughts God will inspire you to write.
- Leaving copies of *Steps to Christ* on seats at airport terminal gates.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, chaps. 1; 2.

Max Lucado, *No Wonder They Call Him Savior*; Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way of Spiritual Growth*; *Christ's Way of Making Disciples*; *Christ's Way of Reaching People*.

Mission Accomplished!



“By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14, NRSV).

No More Need for Sacrifices

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 10:14

"By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified"
(Heb. 10:14, NRSV).

The payment for sin is death. The shedding of blood is necessary for the forgiveness of sin. Annually, by law, the Israelites were mandated to confess their sins on the heads of sacrificial animals, and innocent blood was spilled in the stead of the guilty person. Jesus volunteered to be our scapegoat and willingly shouldered our sins. He became the Sacrifice and suffered for us.

His sacrifice was the ultimate sacrifice in that, unlike the sacrificial animal offerings, He offered to be sacrificed knowingly and willingly. Unlike the sacrificial animal, He truly suffered in the tainted form of a human and saw the world in the eyes of one burdened with the darkness of sin and torn away from the love of God. We who have fallen, we who have caused Him to suffer, we who have mocked Him and turned away in unbelief and ingratitude, we who are unworthy were deemed worthy by Jesus. His fathomless, unconditional love compelled Him to come to our sinful world and save us from the depths of hopeless despair.

Today there is no need for annual animal sacrifices; Jesus was the supreme Sacrifice. His death paid for all our sins, and His resurrection is proof that we, too, can triumph over sin and death.

Let me know
The sacrifice that You made for me.
Let me see
The scars that You bore for me.
Let me hear
The words You speak to God for me.
Let me touch
The tears that You shed for me.
Let me feel
The love that You have for me.
Let me want
The gift that You offer me.
Let me cry and feel shame
For what I have done to You.
Let me smile and feel hope
For what You have done for me.
Let us together
Enter the world You have prepared just for You and me.

The Rest of the Story

EVIDENCE

Heb. 10:22

Hebrews 10 is likened to a mirror reflecting the character of Christ. He is at once a God of love and a God of justice. He is a God of love by virtue of His atoning sacrifice on the Cross, and a God of justice by exacting judgment on the disobedient. Love brings good news and judgment bad news.

First, the good news (Heb. 10:1-18). The good news is that God has solved the sin problem. He has provided a way of escape. "Take away sins" (verse 4, KJV) means a complete removal of sin so that it becomes nonexistent.

A way out has been provided.

It was impossible for animal sacrifices to accomplish such removal of sin from the people. But it was God's will to solve the problem of sin. Christ's sacrifice was effectual. It accomplished what animal sacrifices had failed to do. Because Christ has entered the heavenly sanctuary, we have an advocate in the presence of the Father.

This good news of having an all-sufficient Mediator should result in "full assurance of faith" in Christ (verse 22, NKJV). Believers are not to question the right of access or the certainty of Christ's ministry. They are to "hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" (verse 23, NIV).

Second, the bad news (verses 26-31). The bad news is that God's plan for us may falter if we "deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth" (verse 26, NIV). A believer who sins deliberately is tantamount to spurning the Cross. There is no more sacrifice for such sins, no other Christ to save such sinners. When mercy is rejected, judgment follows.

A story is told of a minister who was forced by a traffic police officer to pull over for speeding. As the officer was about to write the ticket, the minister said to him, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." The officer handed the minister the ticket and said, "Go and sin no more!"

God has shown mercy through His Son, Jesus. A way out has been provided. We must hold on to the assurance of our faith and not allow willful sin to separate us from God.

REACT

1. Time and again, the author of Hebrews emphasizes the importance of assurance of salvation through Christ (Heb. 10:22, 35). Yet, some tend to live in fear of not being saved. Why?

2. How is the sin of commission different from the sin of omission?

LOGOS

Hebrews 9; 10

Earthly Tabernacle Not Enough (Heb. 9:1-10)

For hundreds of years before Christ, Jewish priests offered regular sacrifices to God in an act of repentance. Sinners performing ceremonies to forgive sinners—this was not a real saving system, but a shadow of what was to come. These rituals could not effect real forgiveness; they were pointing forward to a far greater sacrifice that would accomplish forgiveness once and for all (Heb. 9:9, 10). They were to prepare human minds to accept the perfect Sacrifice that was to come.

The tabernacle had two rooms: the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, which were separated by a heavy veil. The ceremonies and the furnishings both represented that God Himself was in the Most Holy Place. Unfortunately, sin has separated humanity from God, as represented by the veil shielding the Most Holy Place. Only once a

The law is only a shadow of the good that is coming.

year, in a special ceremony, was the high priest allowed to enter the presence of God (verse 7). The Holy Spirit used the tabernacle and its rituals to show that the way into the Most Holy Place, to God, had not yet been revealed (verse 8). The veil was between God and humankind.

Christ as High Priest (Heb. 9:11-24)

Jesus came to take the place of that veil. Christ, being both human and God, could stand between the Father and us. The blood sprinkled about so freely in the temple was only that of animals; how much more effective would be the blood of the Son of God! Christ went through the real sanctuary system, not just the model on earth. He entered with His own blood, innocent God/man blood, and gave His life for His human family. At His crucifixion, the veil in the temple was torn in two, signifying that we could now approach God (Matt. 27:51). Christ's death has made it possible for humanity to communicate, through Him, with God. He who was sinless came, paid our price, and eliminated our debts. This ultimate sacrifice can cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so we can serve our living God (Heb. 9:14). Our living God has broken the power of death, so we can live eternally with Him.

Christ as Sacrifice (Heb. 9:25–10:18)

Ever hear of debtor's prisons? Long ago, if a man had debts he could not pay, he and his family could be thrown in a debtor's prison. He was basically a slave of the

system. Without any method of earning money while incarcerated, he and his family had little hope of freedom. Imagine a man in this predicament—he and his wife and children hopelessly cut off from life. Then enters a benevolent father, who comes to his aid. His father satisfies the debts, and therefore gives freedom to his whole family.

Just as this family had been sentenced by the acts of one person and had been redeemed by one, Christ has come to pay the tremendous price to get us out of Satan's grip—paying a debt that we could never hope to pay.

Satan seduced our first parents into his system of sin, trusting themselves over God. Satan has therefore claimed all humankind with the power of death. Through one man, all men and women were born into sin; through the Son of man, all humanity can be born again into a saving relationship with Him. Jesus broke the hold Satan had on us. Christ sacrificed once, for all.

We can have assurance and hope from His sacrifice.

A Confident Approach to God (Heb. 10:19-25)

The law is only a shadow of the good that is coming (Heb. 10:1). The good news is not about the blood of animals. The exciting news is that Christ has opened up a new and living way to the Most Holy Place, through the curtain of His body. God with us! God desperately wants to be reunited with His children. The high priests were afraid for their lives when they entered the Most Holy Place. We are now invited to draw near to God, with full assurance. We have been washed clean, and our consciences freed from guilt. We can now live in God's incredible freedom, encouraging one another on toward love and good deeds.

Throwing Away This Hope? (Heb. 10:26-39)

However, if we reject this grace, what option is left? (Heb. 10:26). We can never hope to pay our way out of our current position; we can only forfeit our life, eternally. This is all we would have to look forward to if Christ had not paid for us already with His life. The choice is ours, so why would we throw away the confidence that Christ's sacrifice gives us? We will be richly rewarded if we persevere. For He is coming back to get us, and soon!

Belief and Salvation (Heb.10:39)

It comes to this: We have been given the privilege of choosing our own destiny. Will we insist on trying to pay our own way out of Satan's death trap? Or will we accept the payment that Christ offers us? As the apostle says, we are not the type to shrink back and be lost; we choose to believe and be saved! (Heb. 10:39).

REACT

If the sacrificial system pointed forward for hundreds of years to Christ, why were so few ready? How are we vulnerable to the same mistakes?

Tuesday
September 2

He Thinks Upon Me

TESTIMONY

Ps. 40:17; John 5:27

Through his death Christ attained for us what no other sacrifice would have. He rescued humankind from the penalty of the law of death. Thus both the Old and New Testaments have one theme in common, i.e., the story of redemption, which points to Him as the central figure, the perfect Sacrifice, High Priest, Mediator, Advocate, and, eventually, Judge on behalf of His people. The birth and death of Christ on planet Earth brought a new hope to the penitent sinners. The type sacrifices all pointed to Him.

While on the mount of God, Moses was shown the heavenly sanctuary and was commanded to follow the directions, plan, size, and form to build God a dwelling place on earth—the earthly sanctuary. This was a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary. The apostle Paul refers to this type sacrifice as the sacrifice of the law (Heb. 10:1). It pointed to the good things that were to come.

What we ought to remember is that it won't be long.

The earthly sanctuary was really a miniature representation of the heavenly temple (9:23, 24) where Christ our High Priest—after offering His life as a sacrifice—was to minister on behalf of the sinners. This gave us the opportunity to be called sons and daughters of the heavenly Father. It also gave us the right to enter into the Most Holy Place with the blood of Christ.

We can imagine how real and vital is this ministry of our Savior to His people. It is very exciting to focus our attention on the ephod, the most sacred priestly vestment on Christ's breast. (Exod. 28:29, NIV).

So Christ the High Priest pleading for His blood before the Father in the sinner's behalf bears upon His heart the name of every repentant believing soul. What a comforting promise, when God's Son has our names before the Lord of lords! (Ps. 40:17).

What we ought to remember is that it won't be long. This heavenly ministry will come to an end, and our High Priest will leave the Most Holy Place. From then on no one will be there to intercede on our behalf, but we are lucky to have this alarm when there is still time and we can do something about our freely given salvation. The ball is in our court, and the choice remains ours. He who bears in His heart our names and now is sitting in the presence of His Father and the mercy seat still waits for us to surrender our will to Him. God needs no less than what we can offer; He requires us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice unto Him. Hebrews 9; 10 continue to show the plan of salvation through this divine sacrifice of Him who understands us better, for He was once tempted like we are, and soon He will become our Judge (John 5:27).

We're No Experiment Gone Awry

HOW-TO

Heb. 7:20-22; 9:11-14

Adventists have always focused on the relationship between the things of earth and the things of heaven, especially the connection of the earthly sanctuary with the heavenly one. Often heavenly truths are revealed through earthly glimpses, but nowhere else in the Bible is this relationship of heaven and earth explained as clearly as it is in Hebrews.

When God dies for something, it's important.

Hebrews presents us with the opportunity to deepen our understanding of heaven and salvation through our earthly experiences. Though we no longer practice animal sacrifice, we still experience the results of our sins: guilt and the need for forgiveness.

When the Israelites found themselves in this situation, they trusted in a ritual. Though the ritual was one instituted by God, animal blood alone has no power to forgive sin or ensure salvation. The power behind the sacrifices was the death that they foretold.

Just as God's truth has both immediate and eternal significance, so the truths found in Hebrews affect us today and in the future.

1. Right now we are given the gift of a clear conscience. Instead of being cleansed with the blood and ashes of goats and cows, we are made holy by the perfect blood of Jesus Christ, which He willingly gave to remove our guilt. We are no longer slaves to our own sins—we have been set free, and in the truest meaning of freedom, we are free to serve God in a way we never could while being under the mastery of sin.

2. We have value. Because we believe that there is meaning in Christ's sacrifice, we can no longer believe that we are merely God's cosmic science experiment gone awry. When God dies for something, it's important. Despite the fact that we deserve nothing but punishment, God said (and still says), "I love you. You mean everything to Me."

3. We have clear, undeniable assurance of God's gift of salvation. The promise of salvation, which was made long before Jesus' life on earth, was unalterably guaranteed by His death. There is no need—or reason—to wonder whether we will be saved. It is no longer a question; it is a matter of God's honor. He will keep the promises that He has given to us.

Blood That Never Fails to Save

OPINION

Heb. 7:24, 25; 10:4

What is blood? In a definition by Webster, it is called "the essence of life." Blood is a life-giving, life-sustaining substance that no animal can live without. Sometimes our dependence on blood is forgotten, and only remembered when a disease attacks the body or a large amount of blood is lost. Then the need is urgent, and a life-threatening situation arises.

I gave my blood one time a couple of years ago when the Red Cross was asking for donations. I remember lying in a stiff recliner with my feet propped up and my neck

Maybe my blood would
give life to a newborn baby.

resting on a strange headrest while the medical assistant tied a piece of rubber around my upper arm. Then in two quick movements the nurse had a thick needle in my vein

with the blood flowing into a clear sack below me while I squeezed a rubbery ball.

As I lay there, I began to think about where my blood might go and whose life it could save. It might go to California to save a famous movie star such as Tom Cruise or Julia Roberts. It could be used to save the life of my great-aunt in New Jersey. Or maybe my blood would give life to a newborn baby suffering from a blood disease.

Whatever the case, without my donation that day, a life could have potentially been lost. I gave someone the "essence of life." I have given some person a "drink" of life-giving "water" that possibly healed or saved their life.

Jesus gave us each the ultimate life-giving, life-sustaining blood donation when He died on the cross. But unlike the medical uses of blood transfusions, which sometimes fail to save the patient, Jesus' blood always saves. I can have perfect faith in the power of Jesus' blood, because it never fails to save.

REACT

1. Why were the sacrifices of the Israelites not enough to save them eternally?
2. How would you explain the symbolism of Jesus' blood covering our sins to make us as white as snow?
3. What are some of the negative associations that books and movies have with blood?
4. Is Jesus' blood a figurative or literal component in our salvation? Defend your answer scripturally.
5. How can you explain Jesus' blood to an unbelieving friend or family member?
6. Why did God choose blood to represent His power to save?

Debbie Battin, Manchester, Kentucky

Our Death Sentence Reversed

EXPLORATION

Heb. 9:23-38

CONCLUDE

During Old Testament times, the sanctuary and its sacrificial services pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice—Jesus. Later, when He died on the cross, the veil in the sanctuary tore in two, illustrating that He had bridged the separation between God and humanity. Jesus lived a perfect life without sin, yet He chose to die in order to pay the penalty of our sins. Because of God's amazing act of love and mercy, we can now live forever with Him.

CONSIDER

- Making a sketch of the earthly sanctuary and exploring the meanings of the different symbols and ceremonies.
- Writing a Thank-You note to God for His ultimate sacrifice and gift.
- Taking a walk in nature and seeing how many things you can find that illustrate the natural cycle of life and death that results from sin.
- Reflecting on Jesus' death on the cross, what that means to you personally, and how that has impacted or should impact your life.
- Composing a song about the gift of God's Son and teaching it to the members of your church or Bible study group.
- Calculating how many burnt offerings would have been offered in your lifetime. For the Israelites, under the sanctuary system, a lamb for burnt offering was offered every morning and evening every day of the year.
- Surfing the Internet for materials on the sanctuary to see what people think about it.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chaps. 1; 78.

Doug Batchelor, *At Jesus' Feet*, chaps. 5–7; Frank B. Holbrook, *The Atoning Priesthood of Jesus Christ*, chap. 5 and Appendix A.

How can I be Sure?



“Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:22, 23, NRSV).

How Do I Know?

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 10:19-25

Dear Lord,

Assurance. Such a distinct and solid-sounding word. Yet, I write it with worry in my heart and trembling in my hands. What does assurance mean to me? Do I have any? How do I know, especially in this day and age? How am I ever really sure of anything?

Oh, wait, there are things that I am sure of: that bus fare will rise, as well as the price of postage stamps. But, Lord, what about the good things? Do I have assurance that I'll be awake for the resurrection—the first one?

I guess that's a question I need to ask myself. Am I sure? Hold up. In order to be sure, or at least to begin to be sure, I need to believe. Do I believe? That's quite the loaded question. Lord, You promised eternal life to all who believe in You. So then, what's my problem? What's holding me back? Do I believe?

Yeah, well, I think so. OK, so I'm not as confident as I let people think I am. All I need to do is believe. That's simple, right?

Jesus came down to earth and was tempted like crazy. Yet He never once stumbled. As if that wasn't example enough, He was killed. Why? Because some unbelieving people just wanted Him gone. He wasn't even guilty of pulling a strand of hair. Instead, He spoke truth and made beautiful promises. He fulfilled His promise by rising from the grave three days after He was killed. He even made sure the Sabbath was honored while dead. I think I'm slowly beginning to get the big picture. If I do believe, is there anything to lose? I would have lived a good life, helped lead others to Christ, and would have had hope. I would die happy, knowing that I'll see Jesus when I awake—if He didn't come in my lifetime. That sounds like a good deal to me.

Once again, I ask myself this: Do I believe? Yes! With strong confidence, I believe. And my belief gives me the assurance of a life in heaven. I now have a personal definition for *assurance*. It means that there's hope for my life, that Jesus has paved a way for me because I have decided to follow Him. Blessed assurance, I know that Jesus is mine! I know—not I think or dream—I *know* that Jesus is mine. I know that His promises apply to me because I believe. I know that I have assurance in Jesus.

Thanks, Lord!

There are things that
I am sure of.

LOGOS

Heb. 6:11, 18-20; 10:19-23, 35; 11:1-6

In the courtroom He sits, high and imposing, the first thing that strikes you about this awesome scene. High above the rest He pays close attention to the debate taking place in front of Him, pausing momentarily to take an overview of the audience in His courtroom. And what an audience it is! People from various stations in life, with different goals, different motives for being present in court, but all with one common purpose—to hear the judge's decision.

In the dock sits another witness, evidently intimidated by the whole process. Sitting next to his attorney is the accused, visibly shaken, seeing yet not perceiving, hearing but not quite understanding.

In court language, when a judge orders an officer of the court to “approach” (the bench), it is usually to have the judge settle some immediate dispute between opposing counsel. In television renditions I've seen, the judge might issue some stern disapproval to the cantankerous counsel, often threatening sanctions should they continue

His very demeanor would drive fear into anyone.

their unruly course. The command to approach may be unsettling to lawyers, as now they must feel they have to work harder to regain the judge's approval.

But not so with our Judge. Not so in this court. There is no anxious waiting. No sitting at the edge of one's seat, pondering one's fate. No working hard to make up for misdeeds. Not so with Jesus, for in this court He stands as both our Lawyer and Judge.

That is the essence of the book of Hebrews. Written to confirm for the Jewish Christians the efficacy of the blood of Jesus to purge their sins, this powerful book touches on the scenes of the past but pauses to ponder the power of the present. Then, with clear vision, it focuses way beyond the horizons into our glorious future.

We have evidence of the system of sacrifices as far back as Eden (Genesis 3). It pointed forward to the victory Jesus would win at the Cross—and to the time when the new and better covenant would be put in effect (Heb. 8:6). It looks for the time when the ultimate Sacrifice would be offered, once and for all time (7:27). It also typified Jesus' continuous work as High Priest in heaven (4:14).

But what of the present?

Here was a group of believers, who were, no doubt, the fruits of the writer's labors, still struggling with the question of their forgiveness. The ultimate Sacrifice—Jesus—had already been offered for their sins. But they were uncertain, many struggling with the temptation of looking back to the shadow of the laws of ceremonies. Having eyes yet not seeing, and ears but no hearing, they wrestled

with basic principles while losing out on the blessings of assurance. Trusting in their own merits they are left standing on the brink of a bleak tomorrow. Could it be that I sometimes fall into the same predicament? How can I be sure of my salvation?

Jesus' sacrifice is worthy—perfect (Heb. 7:26, 28).

The ceremonial system required strict conformity in order to maintain the purity of both sacrifice and symbol. The animals offered had to be spotless (not speckled) and without any physical defect (no lame, deformed, blind, or bruised animals were accepted). Likewise Jesus—fully human, but sinless in every sense—met the criteria of the perfect Sacrifice.

His blood atones for me (Heb. 8:25).

The blood of bulls and goats was not able to forgive sins (Heb. 10:4). But God in the person of Jesus became the ultimate Sacrifice. If His blood could redeem all those who came before Him, i.e., those under the ceremonial system, I am assured that it can take care of mine. After willingly laying down His life, He burst forth from the tomb and lives to make intercession for me. Hallelujah!

The high priest and the sacrifice are one and the same (Heb. 7:27; 2:17; 5:7-9).

There is no doubting this Sacrifice. When Jesus went to the Cross He took the role of both High Priest and Sacrifice. He laid down His life and ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). Today I am assured that since He needs not plead on the merits of another, Jesus will stand up for me when my name is called in the heavenly court.

Jesus gives me the grace to walk in faith (Heb. 2:18; 8:10, 11).

As God fulfills His promise to me to write His laws in my heart, I can let go of working to gain His favor. Because I am already the object of His favor, I can cease from wrestling and begin resting.

So that's it. I don't have to worry about meeting the requirements of ceremonies. In faith I can look to the price paid—the blood of God Himself—and be sure that it has covered my sin. Not only that, the redemption act brings me into a new relationship. I am now Jesus' own kin. Yes, I belong to His family (Heb. 2:11).

Unlike the accused in the courtroom scene described above, I can stand without fear of the judgment because our Attorney and our Judge are one! I don't have to worry about the outcome. I don't have to be intimidated by the Judge's decision. He rendered it a while back at Calvary. Saved! What sweet assurance!

So I will approach. Not with fear of censorship, but "with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22, NIV). Won't you approach?

Making a Decision for Faith

TESTIMONY

Heb. 6:11; 11

Jesus once said that if we have faith the size of a mustard seed we would be able to move mountains. But how do we get such faith? Hebrews 6:11 shows us that we need assurance, and Hebrews 11:1 tells us that it is faith that gives us that assurance. What, then, is faith? This is what Hebrews is telling us.

Faith is a decision, not an emotion. Once we decide to follow Christ, we are making a decision to believe in Him—to have faith in His promises and in His

**It is He who sets the pace
and path for each of us
to follow.**

Word. It is Jesus who is our Forerunner; it is He who sets the pace and path for each of us to follow. Faith is what produces the evidence of our desire to follow Christ. Each of the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 is

known for their faith because of their actions! By faith: Noah prepared an ark, the parents of Moses hid him, Moses kept the Passover, Israel passed through the Red Sea, etc. "Those who talk and cultivate faith will have faith, but those who cherish and express doubts will have doubts."¹

If you do not plant a mustard seed and water it regularly, it will never grow but will stagnate and die. Similarly, we must daily feed and water our faith by being in communication with Jesus through His Word. "I have to fight the good fight of faith every day. I have to exercise my faith and not rely upon feeling. . . . Faith is not a happy flight of feeling; it is simply taking God at His Word—believing that He will fulfill His promises because He said He would."²

We must understand that faith does not fade or grow with our emotional state, but rather is a conscious decision that remains constant and grows with exercise. "If we would give more expression to our faith, rejoice more in the blessings that we know we have—the great mercy, forbearance, and love of God—we would daily have greater strength."³

We must cling to our faith with the same tenacity that Jesus clung to the cross—even amid trials and hardships beyond imagination. "Do not dishonour Jesus by doubting His precious promises. He wants us to believe in Him with unwavering faith."⁴ I will decide to keep my faith in all circumstances.

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 302.

2. *Mind, Personality, and Character*, vol. 2, p. 539.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 536.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 537.

Pilgrimage

EVIDENCE

Heb. 2:17, 18; 10:22, 23; 11:6

Saints embarking on pilgrimages are an element of every major religion. From Buddhism to Judaism, from Christianity (Catholicism) to Islam, each year on their significant holy days, members of these faiths embark on these journeys. Many of them physically transport themselves to villages, cities, and even foreign countries. Most, if not all, are driven by the desire to find God, Allah, or Yahweh in these places. Their faith urges them on these pilgrimages, which are the ultimate sign of devotion, in order to seal their assurance of salvation.

The passage with which the world is most familiar is the Muslims' journey to Mecca. This journey is called the *hajj*. It is one of the central pillars of their faith and is a duty owed to Allah by his followers. The *hajj* is carried out between the eighth and thirteenth days of the 12-month Muslim year. Upon arrival at Mecca, Muslims partake in a series of rituals. This journey is necessary only once in a lifetime. There you will find all worshipers from almost every nation and race, partaking in this breathtaking display of faith.*

As a student, balancing tuition, rent, and credit card payments, as much as I would love to embark physically on a voyage of faith, my modest budget simply won't allow it. However, I praise God that our salvation is sure and that it costs us only faith. How did we get the opportunity to receive assurance at such an inexpensive price? The answer is simple: through a Father and Son's unconditional love and unselfish sacrifice (Heb. 2:17, 18). Christ's sacrifice provides for us indisputable evidence of

**My modest budget simply
won't allow it.**

our assurance—pilgrimage free! Unlike the saints who seek their assurance in faraway places, however, we will want to approach God's throne of grace daily. And we have a loving high priest who is familiar with the issues and situations that compel our trip (4:15, 16).

We do not need to go on a long, arduous journey to seek God or earn His favor. By seeking Christ in prayer, we have the assurance of our salvation, and the key to receiving this assurance is faith (11:6).

REACT

What are the benefits of pilgrimages? What sorts of journeys do Seventh-day Adventists take? How are they different from the pilgrimage mentioned above?

*Simon Coleman and John Elsner, *Pilgrimage* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1995), pp. 53, 58.

How to Have Assurance in Christ

HOW-TO

Heb. 11:1, 6

Olympians believe that they can win the gold.

The Olympics occur every four years. The Olympic athlete has put in countless hours of hard work and training in hopes of achieving the gold medal. With practice and hard work, Olympians believe that they can win the gold for their sport. Without faith, or believing they can achieve an Olympic medal, the athletes wouldn't reach their goal. They

would fail to train and eventually give up.

This is similar to our faith in Christ (Heb. 12:1-3). Faith is defined as allegiance to duty or a person; loyalty; belief and trust in God. If we fail to have faith in Christ, we will not have any assurance that Christ is Lord and we will not achieve the goal of heaven.

These are the ways to have assurance in Christ:

1. Exercise your faith. Faith is believing in things unseen. "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (11:1, NIV). "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (verse 6, NIV).

2. Pray earnestly. Allow God to take control of your life. Submit yourself completely to Him and allow Him to take hold of your life (Eph. 6:18).

3. Listen to what God is telling you to do. Do not just hear what He says, but go out and do it. Put your faith into action (James 2).

4. Learn about Jesus for yourself. Study the Bible to know truly our Creator and Savior. Through studying God's Word, you'll understand God's grace. "By grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8, NIV).

REACT

1. In the spiritual realm, are there any bronze or silver medals? Explain your answer.

2. For you, what unseen thing is it hardest to believe in?

3. Why does God require faith from us?

4. In what ways and in what areas does God take hold of your life? Can you keep certain areas away from Him?

5. What would you recommend to a new Christian who asks you what to read in the Bible about Jesus' teachings? Why?

The Desires of My Heart

OPINION

Heb. 11:1

I needed a change in my life because I felt as if I were at a standstill. I was active in Adventist Youth and on the music committee at church. But even with these kinds of activities in my life, something was missing. Daily I would pray and petition before God the desires of my heart. I desired to live in a new place to be able to meet new people, to sing in a big choir, and to be involved in a traveling music-ministry group. I never imagined that all these desires would come true at the same time, but I believed that God would work things out in His time.

It was on a Sabbath afternoon, and I was running out the door to Adventist Youth, when the phone rang. On the other end of the line was my former pastor's wife. She said, "Marlene, the Lord has been telling me to call you and encourage you to come to Canadian University College." She explained that for the previous few months, I would come to her mind. She told me that she prayed and asked God what it was she had to tell me. She believed God had something for me to do. At the end of our conversation, she prayed with me, and I felt at peace.

**She believed God had
something for me to do.**

Did God want me to go to Canadian University College? I had to know. Through a lot of prayer and discussion with my parents and sister, I made the decision to go in faith. God is so amazing! The things He has done for me, I will never forget. I did not have much money, but I knew that because I put my trust in Him, He would work everything out. I did not worry. Although it was the Christmas season, my plane ticket was miraculously inexpensive, I had no trouble receiving admittance into the school, I secured a job on campus three days after my arrival, and I got to sing in the choir!

All the things I had hoped for came to pass. I moved to a new town, I met a lot of new people and made new friends, but best of all, I became a member of a music-ministry group. I was blessed to visit many places across Canada and the United States, singing of God's love for us all, and telling of the wonderful things He has done for me. But most remarkably, we were privileged to sing at the General Conference session in Toronto during the youth portion of the closing ceremonies. It was just like a dream. The Bible tells us that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1, NKJV). I knew that as long as my trust was in God, the desires of my heart would come to pass. I continue to put my faith in Him.

Marlene George, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Why Wouldn't I Be Sure?

EXPLORATION

Heb. 10:37, 38

CONCLUDE

How can we have assurance? In ordinary things it is not hard to be sure, but when it comes to spiritual things we struggle. Why? It is a matter of what, or rather whom, we believe in. Hebrews gives us the evidence about the God whom we can be sure of. There is the evidence of Bible heroes, but the most important evidence that helps us to be sure is Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. We can be sure of Someone we trust. If we trust God, then the question is no longer "How can I be sure?" but "Why wouldn't I be sure?"

CONSIDER

- Looking back at your life and writing down specific instances in which you can see God's provision/intervention. Remind yourself that these form a basis for future assurance.
- Calculating the tenth line of Pascal's triangle without writing out the other nine. Are you sure of the answer? On what can you base your assurance in God?
- Writing out your own personal definition of assurance. Try sharing it with friends and getting them to do the same.
- Looking up your local weather forecast on the Internet. How certain are you that it will be accurate? Share this with a friend and draw a parallel with your assurance in Christ.
- Listening to Geof Bullock's song "I Will Rest in Christ" from the *Unfailing Love* album. Think about what you tend to rely on instead of resting in Jesus.
- Sending out invitations to friends to come to a meal at your place. (Make something simple or order something delivered.) As you eat together, ask them how they knew they wouldn't go home hungry. Talk together about assurance in Jesus.

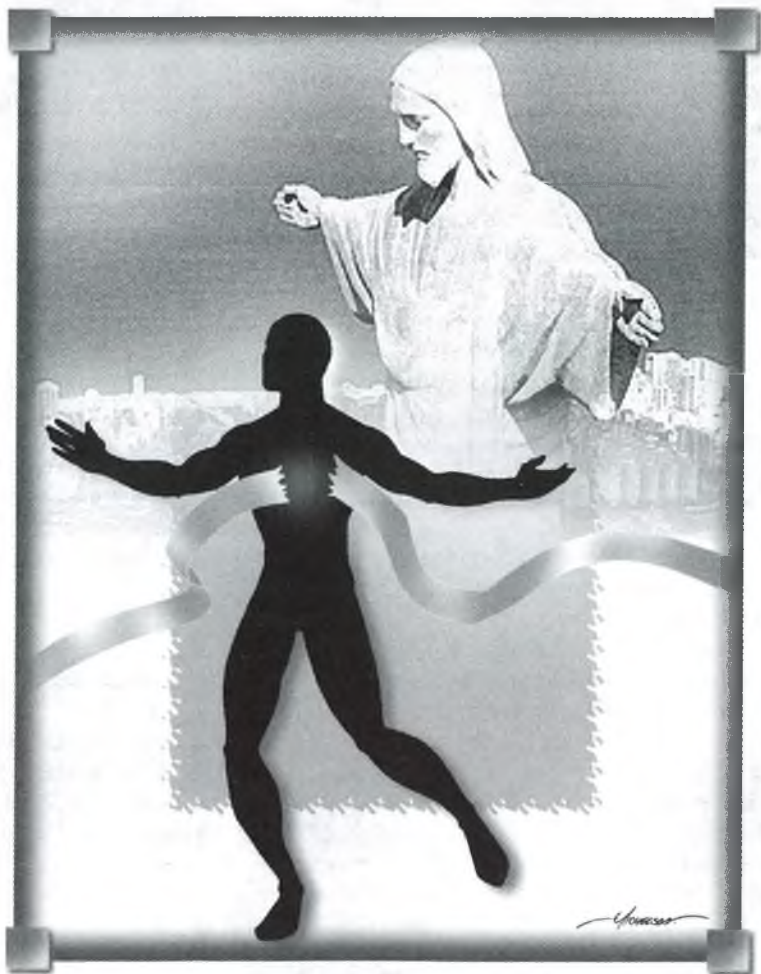
CONNECT

Romans 1:16, 17; Hebrews 10:37–11:1 in a modern translation.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 420.

Philip Yancey, *Soul Survivor*.

You can Do It!



“Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1, NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 12:1, 2

I'd give almost anything to erase yesterday from the collective memory of my church board. It was the culmination of a fortnight from . . . well, I'd rather not go into detail. But recent days remind me of a time when as a 12-year-old I came in last in a 1,600-meter race.

I was a sprinter not a middle-distance runner, so the race was over by the time I reached halfway. I "ran" the last half alone as the place getters waited for their ribbons and the officials waited for me!

With every step of my leaden feet, I wanted to quit, but my parents' admonition that "quitters never win and winners never quit" kept me going. So I continued to run, despite my embarrassment at being last. I was far from competitive, but I finished the race.

**The race in Hebrews 12
has less to do with winning
and more to do with
continuing.**

In the first two verses of Hebrews 12, we are reminded to "run with endurance the race

that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish" (12:2, NLT).

Each time I ran past my parents, their cheers grew louder, not because I was winning but because I wasn't quitting. Their encouragement and enthusiasm led to my final lap being more like a victory lap, for by now everyone cheered with them. I, the loser, became the crowd favorite.

The race in Hebrews 12 has less to do with winning and more to do with continuing. It's not about speed but endurance. It doesn't emphasize starting but finishing. In this race success is achieved only by a life in concert with Christ.

If it weren't for my parents' encouragement to finish the race, I would have quit halfway through. It's like that with the Christian race too. Our success is not determined by agility or ability, but on the availability of God's grace. It is through "keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish" (verse 2, NLT) that we are able to finish the race.

If your life is anything like mine, there will be times when you face seemingly insurmountable challenges. In His grace God sometimes uses these events to correct me, but in every case these experiences help me to become what I can be in Him.

Not far to go now—keep going—you can do it!

The Scariest Questions You Will Ever Ask

EVIDENCE

Heb. 9:11

This quarterly has brought many questions to my mind. The Epistle of Hebrews is a letter with a beautiful message. However, over the years, many people have given up trying to understand its symbolism and message, and in the end have quit altogether on Christ and His heavenly ministry.

Hebrews 9:11 says that Jesus is our High Priest, ministering in our behalf. But what does that mean to you? To me, that sounds almost superficial.

We as Christians have the source of all answers in Jesus Christ. We should not be afraid to ask "Why?" When we were children, we asked "Why?" all the time. And we got used to a "Just because" answer. As adults, we tend to expect that from God too. When we ask God "Why?" does He tell us "Just because"?

So what does it mean that Jesus is our High Priest?

First, why do we need a high priest, when in Exodus 19:6 God calls us all to be a kingdom of priests? What is a priest supposed to do? Why the need for priests? I found an answer in Exodus 20:18-21. The people wanted Moses to speak to God

for them because they were afraid that Moses' "Friend" would kill them. So they asked Moses to talk to God, in other words, to be a mediator. The priestly, highly

**When we were children, we
asked "Why?" all the time.**

symbolic system was set up by God so the people wouldn't be afraid and could get to know Him, to know what He is doing, and to get the bigger picture of the great controversy. Yet we come to the New Testament and find that Caiaphas, instead of representing God's character to the people, actually killed the Son of God.

It's important to understand the answers to such questions as why Jesus had to die, what His death really means, and why we say Jesus is pleading His blood. What does His blood represent? We need to question our understanding of the words so that we may see a bigger picture. What is a mediator? Is Jesus standing between us and the Father because the Father doesn't like us? Maybe instead of saying that Christ is the One who spares us from the Father's justice, we should be able to see Christ as the One who brings us the truth about who God is.

In no way let these questions make you question whether God exists or if He is a God of love, but use these questions to help you understand the God in whom you put your faith. God is real and He does love you; He is waiting though to let you understand and experience the height and depth of that love as written about in Hebrews.

Monday
September 15

An Olympian Struggle

LOGOS

Heb. 12:1-13:19

It's said that Paul was a little man. And when he himself writes of suffering from "a thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7, KJV), many commentators quickly deduce this as a physical impediment, possibly poor eyesight. It seems obvious that anyone who had been beaten with rods, stoned, left for dead, and five times suffered the punishment of 39 lashes would be a very debilitated individual indeed (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-25). All of which makes even more remarkable the Olympian imagery that dominates the verses for this week.

Some years ago there was a sweet-sounding pop song with words that went like this: "Heaven is watching us . . . at a distance." That is not the reality that Paul appeals

The Greeks believed gross errors regarding truth and the nature of God.

to in these verses. Immediately he has drawn an analogy between our Christian struggle and the heroic attainments of the faithful through the ages (Heb. 11:32-39). Though they belong to past ages, he sees us as

"surrounded" by this great "cloud of witnesses" (12:1, NIV). They expect us to continue the struggle. And implicit in these words of Paul is the biblical model of heavenly beings, God, Himself, intimately interested in our plight. But more than interested—actually involved.

The Greek world of Paul's time honored the gods who they believed lived on the heights of Mount Olympus. In their view Zeus and a whole panoply of demigods watched in distant isolation, while descending on occasion to meddle in human affairs. It was at once a fatalistic and capricious vision. It was against a backdrop of these assumptions that Paul explained the purposes of heaven and the role of Jesus in securing our salvation.

When Paul calls on believers to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (verse 1, NIV), He is clearly tapping into what today we have re-created as the Olympic games. In his day these were athletic events with a decidedly spiritual twist. Participants ran for glory and to draw near to God and the demigods; in fact, they held that some humans were actually the offspring of gods.

The Greeks believed gross errors regarding truth and the nature of God. But Paul picks up their own imagery to accentuate Christ, "pioneer and perfecter of our faith . . . at the right hand of the throne of God" (verse 2, NRSV). We, too, are to run the race that He ran. And we, too, are regarded as children of God (verse 5). This was powerful imagery for the Hellenistic mind.

But Paul is hinting at far more than just a parallel to the conventions of Greek mythology and Olympian endeavor. The Greek athletes cast off everything in striving

to win the physical contest—armor and clothes. It was literally a naked race. Paul takes it a step further and includes sin as the weight we must cast off to win—just as Jesus won. And by analogy he puts the rigors of the race as a mechanism in this divestiture from sin—the discipline—that you have to endure (verse 7). In fact he says that we are to strive for holiness, “without which no one will see the Lord” (verse 14, NRSV). Naturally this holiness is consistent with the Olympian image. Holiness, a dedication to God that sets us apart from earthly attachments, is actually the symbolic parallel to the godlike status athletic victory bestowed on the Olympians. In case his readers became too taken up with the parallels to Greek thinking, Paul then takes it to a level far beyond the petty confines of a Mount Olympus. He alludes to the grandeur of God at Mount Sinai, at the occasion of the giving of the law. Here God had come close, and terrifyingly so. Not the petty or peevish Zeus of mythology, but a blazing reality that scorched the mountain with His presence. “You have not come to something that can be touched” (verse 18, NRSV), reminds Paul as he takes us to an even more exalted view of God. “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” (verse 22, NRSV).

I think Paul is bringing us back to the “cloud of witnesses.” It’s a reminder of the everyday reality we too easily forget. Surrounded by the armies of Syria, Elisha saw only the horses and chariots of fire that filled the mountain—God’s army (2 Kings 6:15-17). We do not run alone or unaided.

Paul is reminding us of the transcendent reality of heaven, of Jesus and the efficacy of His sacrifice for us. Paul exhorts us to persevere to the point of physical pain in our struggle against sin. But in reminding us that we “have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (verse 4, NRSV), he brings us to the absolute guarantee that our efforts will be both successful and acceptable—Jesus’ blood.

The Greek dramatists had a rather cute way of resolving plot difficulties. A deity would intervene—actually an actor in a machine—let down on the stage or swung into the action—a *deus ex machina*. In the concluding verses of chapter 11 and into chapter 12, Paul reminds us that God is not to be confused with these mechanical representations. His is a real city, His is real power, and ours is a real obligation. As so often elsewhere Paul puts narrative to the symbols of the temple sacrifices. Jesus’ blood is in the context of His forging a way for us to follow. And the sacrifice that is “pleasing to God” is “to do good and to share what you have” (13:16, NRSV).

REACT

1. The Greek concept of sin revolved around excess or imbalance. How does this contrast with the view we see in this article?

2. If Paul could use the erroneous thinking of Hellenistic gods and their games, what might be a current cultural phenomenon that we could use to illustrate a message we want to share? Are you comfortable using such illustrations? Why or why not?

TESTIMONY

Heb. 7:25

"The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was his death upon the cross. By his death he began that work which after his resurrection he ascended to complete in Heaven. We must by faith enter within the veil, 'whither the forerunner is for us entered.' [Heb. 6:20.] There the light from the cross of Calvary is reflected. There we may gain a clearer insight into the mysteries of redemption. The salvation of man is accomplished at an infinite expense to Heaven; the sacrifice made is equal to the broadest demands of the broken law of God. Jesus has opened the way to the Father's throne, and through his mediation the sincere desire of all who come to him in faith may be presented before God."¹

Christ's superiority is recognized in His role as the ultimate Mediator on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary. Affirmation of this role is proclaimed in Scripture when Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6, NKJV). Ellen White further

Christ's superiority is recognized in His role as the ultimate Mediator.

admonishes how we are to respond to what Christ has accomplished for us: "All who have received the light upon these subjects are to bear testimony of the great truths which God has committed to them. The sanctuary in heaven is the very center of Christ's work in behalf of men. It concerns every soul living upon the earth. . . . It is of the utmost importance that all should thoroughly investigate these subjects, and be able to give an answer to everyone that asketh a reason for the hope that is in them."²

"The subject of the sanctuary and the investigative Judgment should be clearly understood by the people of God. All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time, or to occupy the position which God designs them to fill."³

REACT

What illustrations and approach would you use to explain the beauty of the heavenly sanctuary to a six-year-old child? How would it differ for a teenager or young adult? How about an unbeliever?

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 489.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 488, 489.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 488.

How to Live Love

HOW-TO

Rom. 15:2, 3

Jesus lived love. If you don't understand what I mean, look at every act in His life, culminating with His death on that cruel cross. The cost of redemption was great, and we are called to pay an awesome cost in order to run this Christian race—we must surrender our will. Once the will is surrendered, we have the promise that He will “make you complete in every good work to do His will” (Heb. 13:21, NKJV).

What is God's will for us? That we love one another as He loved us (John 15:12). Sounds easy? Not so. While we have trouble loving our own flesh and blood, Jesus loved even His enemies. What wondrous love! And yet—mission possible. We are encouraged that we can do all things through Christ who will give us the strength (Phil. 4:13). His will is in essence substituted for ours.

Jesus was moved with
compassion even for
guilty humans.

Below are some practical steps outlined in Hebrews 13:1-6:

1. Entertain strangers (verse 2). Isn't it interesting that God judges the sheep and the goats according to what they had done (or not done) unto “the least of these [His] brethren”? (Matt. 25:40, NKJV). The follower of Christ must be proactive and seek out opportunities to “entertain” strangers, such as saying a kind word to the person sitting beside you on the public bus.

2. Suffer with the suffering (verse 3). Does it make you cry, or at least saddened, when you see images of suffering children on television? Do you feel kinship with that missionary who is being persecuted in that religiously intolerant nation? Jesus was moved with compassion even for guilty humans. We must likewise be moved.

3. Honor the sacred bonds of marriage (verse 4). Although this text is clear and needs no explanation, the statistics on family life and the apparent popularity of a lewd Hollywood industry lay claim that we just don't get the message.

4. Show total dependence upon God (verses 5, 6). The actual verse speaks of not being covetous. Do you think Bill Gates's children covet their classmates' stuff? No way. Neither should we as children of the King. We must thank and praise God openly for His goodness and His mercy.

Remember, we are preparing for heaven. These principles will be the rule in heaven, not the exception, as it is here and now. Let us be practical in our Christianity so that the world may know Jesus as a caring Friend.

OPINION

Heb. 13:25

Our church pastor once related a story of when he and his wife took Christmas gifts around to all their neighbors. One woman, who lived across the street from them, expressed how she had always wanted to get to know the pastor and his wife better, "But, I didn't want to bother you," she said, "you all seem so busy."

The world is well aware of how little time you have; even business communications are outlined by an "executive summary" to save you time. Written in concise and direct language, short and manageable in length, the executive summary presents an overall picture of the major points. It should not be too lengthy in case you become impatient and lose interest, but rather it should encourage you to read on for further details.

Just like an executive summary, the book of Hebrews gives you an overall picture of the Bible. It discusses several biblical matters including Christ's divinity,

**He's replying to a message
from an old school friend.**

why God sent Jesus, the Sabbath, the sanctuary and the new covenant, faith, apostasy, Christian living, and the importance of prayer. Hebrews could be described as the

Bible's executive summary for the Christian walk, for the writer himself declares: "Bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words" (Heb. 13:22). Even though his letter was short, the message was great.

I can imagine the writer of Hebrews being a well-known, caring evangelist on itinerary in a foreign country, and he's checking his email late one night. He's replying to a message from an old school friend who doesn't know very much about the Bible and is in need of comfort. It's late, he's tired, and he has to catch a plane in a few hours, but his main concern is to get the message of truth to his friend as quickly as possible. Speaking frankly and honestly, he writes about salvation through faith, from the sanctuary to living the Christian life. Finally, his eyes heavy with sleep, he concludes with what he knows to be the only important thing that matters and offers this simple prayer, "Grace be with you. Amen" (verse 25, NKJV).

REACT

1. The book of Hebrews seems to capture the essence of the Bible, but are there any biblical or Christian issues that Hebrews does not discuss? Explain your answer.

2. If you were asked to give your personal testimony in 30 seconds, what would you say and/or do?

You're Being Watched

EXPLORATION

Heb. 12:1, 2

CONCLUDE

The book of Hebrews summarizes the essential points of the gospel. It compares the Christian journey to running an important race, such as an Olympic competition. It assures us that we don't have to run alone, for we have Jesus to help and inspire us and to mediate on our behalf. This book emphasizes the importance of endurance and perseverance rather than speed or winning. It also refers to the "cloud of witnesses" (12:1, KJV) watching our performance. We will finish the race by keeping our eyes on Jesus and submitting our will to His leading.

CONSIDER

- Looking for someone who appears lonely. Use banners, balloons, or other festive materials to decorate their desk, locker, door, or car. Let them know that they're a loved child of God.
- Imagining you're going to conduct a television interview with one of the Bible characters mentioned for their faith in Hebrews 11. Prepare your interview questions.
- Training for a 5K or 10K race. As you run, think about how physical endurance is similar to spiritual endurance. How is it different?
- Reflecting on the day, especially your words and actions. Chart which ones make you feel as if you're running a good race and which ones indicate that you need more training on God's team.
- Purchasing a seedling, planting it, watering it, and watching it grow. How does a seedling run a "good race"?
- Going online and researching the job of a mediator. How do they make judgments? How do they know they're being fair?
- Attending an athletic event, such as a Little League game. Loudly cheer for the losing team. Notice if your encouragement affects their playing, and think about the heavenly "cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1, KJV) cheering you on.

CONNECT

The Great Controversy, chap. 28.

Frank B. Holbrook, *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*.

Looking into the Future



“Here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Heb. 13:14, NRSV).

Delayed Gratification?

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 2:1-6

"I'm not spoiled. I'm not! I'm not! I'm not!"

"Life is uncertain. Eat dessert first."

Delayed gratification? Be serious. My house is on payments. My car is on payments. My clothes are on payments. My groceries are on payments. My credit cards are maxed out. Now I'm about to be laid off, and I'm just a bit frazzled.

But I just have to have it now. Who needs faith when I can have the actual at financing of 20 APR?

"You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world. . . . All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. . . . But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:1-6, NIV).

My groceries are on payments.

"Let us throw off everything that hinders . . . and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus" (Heb. 12:1, 2, NIV).

Christians, those who are daily becoming better friends with Jesus, are in the business of delayed gratification—the business of faith. (Why would we want this life of pain, rejection, and loss anyway?) "We are looking for the city that is to come" (Heb. 13:14).

Hebrews: The Means to an End?

LOGOS
Heb.13:14

**What hope do we have
without the soon return
of Jesus Christ?**

We have come to the end of a quarter in which we have discussed several aspects of the book of Hebrews, including Jesus as our High Priest and the sanctuary service. While these have been interesting, important, and necessary, it is now imperative both to reflect and focus on the book's ultimate emerging goal: the reality of and preparation for the second coming of Jesus

Christ. It is important to recognize and reinforce the fact that Hebrews does not just cover past issues, but is a book that devotes much time, direct and indirect, to the future. What hope do we have without the soon return of Jesus Christ? What good is faith without His return?

In a nutshell, the last three chapters of Hebrews encourage, warn, and prepare us to receive the kingdom of God. Working backward, let's look at some key verses in each of these chapters:

Chapter 13

In Hebrews 13:14 we find that the Jews apparently looked to Jerusalem as a "continuing" city, that is to say, they believed the city of Jerusalem to be instrumental in—if not bound to—God's divine plan for our salvation. The verse continues by pointing out that as Christians we have no such city (or religious system for that matter) on earth; rather our hope lies in a "New" Jerusalem.

It is well documented that the Jewish people often allowed ceremony, tradition, and systems to dwarf the principle, doctrine, or belief that they respectively pointed to. In Hebrews 13, the author exhorts us not to fall into the same trap. The sacrificial system, the earthly sanctuary, and the pillars of faith so eloquently described throughout Hebrews need not and should not supplant what they point to and prepare us for—the Second Coming.

Chapter 12

Hebrews 12:28, 29 presents us with several significant points to consider. First, as believers we are immensely blessed to receive a kingdom that is eternal. Second, this blessing demands an adequate response: serve God in purity and with devotion. Third, be warned! There is no escape from the wrath of God for those who refuse Him. It should also be noted that because we have already received a kingdom of

“grace” through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we now look to His coming to receive a literal kingdom.

These verses emphasize the superiority of Christianity over Judaism in a not-so-subtle fashion. This is understandable though, considering the historical setting for the book. It also shows that the kingdom Christ is establishing drastically differs from all earthly kingdoms.

Chapter 11

In the United States to declare Chapter 11, you are admitting you are financially bankrupt. For the Christian, declaring Chapter 11 is another matter. In its entirety the chapter presents us with examples of individuals who prepared themselves to receive the kingdom of God. Using these verses as a springboard to study each of the individuals who are mentioned here, we can find an ample amount of tools and methods for our personal preparation. The last verses of Hebrews 10 imply that salvation is obtained by believing. Chapter 11 opens with the words, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (verse 1, NKJV), providing additional confirmation of this fact. Faith gives the strength to stand through all trials and to persevere.

Comments by Ellen White

“We are homeward bound. He who loved us so much as to die for us hath builded for us a city. The New Jerusalem is our place of rest. . . . Soon we shall witness the coronation of our King. Those whose lives have been hidden with Christ, those who on this earth have fought the good fight of faith, will shine forth with the Redeemer’s glory in the kingdom of God. It will not be long till we shall see Him in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered. . . . Look up, look up, and let your faith continually increase. Let this faith guide you along the narrow path that leads through the gates of the city of God into the great beyond, the wide, unbounded future of glory that is for the redeemed.”*

The concluding chapters of Hebrews help us understand the sometimes confusing synergy of salvation as a present reality and at the same time a future hope. Like those who have gone before, let us press toward our goal in faith.

REACT

1. If, as a Christian, I am truly to be a “stranger” or “pilgrim” in this world, what steps can I take today to eliminate the “baggage” that I am traveling with?
2. How do you respond to the Christian who refuses to enjoy life on this earth?
3. Explain how you tie the heavenly sanctuary to the Second Coming. How is each incomplete without the other?

**Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 287, 288.

Thinking of That Beautiful Land

TESTIMONY Heb. 11:10

A book by Edwin Abbott entitled *Flatland: A Romance of Dimensions* talks of a resident of Flatland, A. Square, who is given an opportunity to visit Spaceland. After seeing and experiencing the wonders of Spaceland, he made a request to his friend, a sphere, if he could remain there. The sphere declined his request and told him that he must return to his world so he could convey to his fellow inhabitants the world of three dimensions.

Upon returning, he had difficulty reconstructing the images that he had witnessed in Spaceland. He tried to tell his friends about the wonderful world of three dimensions, but it was all in vain since Flatlanders did not have a notion of height, only length and width.

In some way or another, we are like A. Square. God has given us a tiny glimpse of a glorious world that He has prepared for us described through metaphors in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen White. Like the Flatlanders, only by faith can we see that "city which has foundations, whose builder and

**He tried to tell his friends
about the wonderful world
of three dimensions.**

maker is God" (Heb. 11:10, NKJV) until Jesus Himself takes us there when He comes.

If we would constantly think of the indescribable splendors heaven has to offer, "we will habitually cultivate thoughts of the presence of God. This will be a shield against the incoming of the enemy; it will give strength and assurance, and lift the soul above fear."¹

"Jesus has brought heaven to view, and presents its glory to our eyes in order that eternity may not be dropped out of our reckoning."²

As we go on with our daily lives, we will have that extra bounce in our step and that extra song in our hearts for we know by faith of that beautiful land that is to come.

REACT

1. If it is not possible to experience the reality of the next dimension described in the story, is it really healthful for us to try? Explain your answer.
2. How would you describe your spiritual view of heaven to someone who is not living with a spiritual perspective on life? How do we help "flatland" discover "space"?

1. *Last Day Events*, p. 284.

2. *Ibid.*

"A Natural Response"?

EVIDENCE

Heb. 10:35-37

A Holy week in suburban Manila, a neighborhood quieter than usual, more fish entrees, and the Seventh Heaven marathon. It was March 2002, and, for the ninth time, the movie *Dear God* was aired. One of the characters says, "Faith is a natural response."

The scriptwriter for the movie was right that faith is a response. Faith is defined as a supreme trust in the ability and integrity of God. To put it another way, faith is my response to God's ability. Faith relates to the word *hope*. Just as when you have peace, you will have joy.

The book of Hebrews gives us an understanding of the past, which looks toward the future. We hope and we have faith that Jesus will come back to take us home, which is the climax in the story of the plan of salvation. We believe that God is preparing a home where everything will be fine: no more heartaches and disappointments; only love and joy.

We are hoping that we will live with Him through eternity. We claim His promise of salvation, a promise that Jesus completed by hanging on the cross. "Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 'For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry'" (Heb. 10:35-37, NKJV).

**Faith is a supreme trust in
the ability and integrity
of God.**

Let's all look to Jesus and let our faith grow deeper every day, which will guide us along the narrow path away from this sinful world to our ever-waiting eternal home. That is the great promise of God. I'm longing to be home.

REACT

1. Is faith a natural response or something we have to develop? Can you really explain faith to someone else, or is it something to be experienced? Or some combination?

2. If you were to describe heaven to someone else, is your illustration centered more on what you won't have, what you will have, or whom you will be with? How can it change if it needs to?

*The SDA Bible Commentary, p. 360.

Be Patient and Persevering!

HOW-TO

James 5:7, 8; 2 Pet. 1:19

Some individuals give up
their hope to witness
Christ's coming.

Have you ever questioned yourself about when Christ will truly appear? Although countless people around the world are stoically waiting for Him, some are still doubtful that the Second Coming will ever transpire. Sad to say, some individuals give up their hope to witness Christ's coming.

The fact is, Christians are longing for this great event to take place. They do not lose

hope in God because they know He loves them so much that He will not disappoint them. But for us to move toward our goal, the heavenly city, we must have faith in Jesus and believe in His Word.

1. Let the Bible be your guiding light. The purpose of reading Scripture is that "we can experience the change [the Bible] can accomplish in our lives, as well as see the Bible prophecy being fulfilled before our eyes every day."¹ But just reading the Bible won't assure you that it can save you; it is only the medium of God that guides you to seek Him to the end.

2. Persevere to the end. "Persevere" comes from the Latin word *perseverare*, which means to persist in or remain constant to a purpose, idea, or task in spite of obstacles.² From the meaning itself, we can already understand what it conveys. Regardless of all the trials that we've had and will overcome, we will never give up our faith in our Savior, even if others may persecute us for it.

3. Be ready at all times. Have you ever experienced having a visitor come to your house for lunch when you least expect it? If you have, you can understand the feeling of being taken unprepared. Notice these words: "Silently, unnoticed as the midnight thief, will come the decisive hour which marks the fixing of every man's destiny, the final withdrawal of mercy's offer to guilty men."³ No one Christian should be caught unprepared by Christ's second coming. Like a thief in the night, Christ's second coming will be unexpected; therefore, we should "be alert and self-controlled" (1 Thess. 5:6, NIV) to await this great event. I pray that this will inspire us to be prepared for that day when Christ will take us all in His arms to our heavenly home.

1. Donald Ernest Mansell and Vesta West Mansell, *Sure as the Dawn* (Australia: Signs Publishing Company, 1993), p. 118.

2. *American Heritage Dictionary* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1983).

3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 491.

Pathways of Heaven

OPINION

John 14:1-3

We stood at the foot of the mountain, asking ourselves: Can we make it? As first-time hikers, we were a bit anxious of our ability to reach the top. We'd never tried it before, and there was no question of backing out now.

As Christians we can compare our lives to first-time hikers. We set goals and try to stand by them—and hope and pray to stay on the right path, never getting lost in the wilderness of sin. Although we don't know what lies ahead of the path we are on, "faith and love for our Savior" makes worthwhile the travel on the path toward the heavenly home.

We never regretted that hike. The enchanting beauty of the mountain alone was a masterpiece of God's magnificent creation. Even though there were thorns, slippery rocks, and other distractions that we encountered along the way, it never stopped us in achieving our goal of reaching the top.

The path toward the heavenly home is not easy. But with Christ by our side, burdens will be lighter, and together we can enjoy the heavenly home that God has prepared for us. "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13, NIV).

How wonderful it will be to be in heaven, a place called home where we can view wonderful things beyond imagination. One of the most famous and wonderful promises of God is found in John 14:1-3: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (NIV).

Let us keep our eyes looking up to Jesus because He is the way, the truth, and the life (verse 6).

**There was no question
of backing out now.**

REACT

If we are sinners, how can we assure ourselves that we are indeed prepared for Christ's soon return?

Friday
September 26

Heart in Heaven; Feet on the Ground

EXPLORATION

John 17:15-18; Rev. 21:1-8

CONCLUDE

Christians can be so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good. The earthly and the heavenly, as the now and the future, are always in conflict. Focusing on the earth made new and the sinful earth is always a struggle. Anticipating the return of Christ while we make a living here on earth always carries a degree of disappointment. The waiting to be home while living in this strange land requires that we be connected to Christ through a daily relationship with Him. While we wait to be with Jesus, we need to be actively involved in the lives of those who don't know Him.

CONSIDER

- Writing three ideas of how you can help a person who is not a Christian be prepared to meet Jesus.
- Planting a seed in the ground or flower pot and taking care of it until it produces fruit. Keep a diary of your experience of taking care of it.
- Taking a walk through a botanical garden or park and taking pictures of nature. With the photographs make a collage and imagine how different or alike the new earth will be.
- Listening to the song "I Can Only Imagine" by the group Mercy Me. Write your feelings about the song.
- Sharing with a friend what you will say to Jesus when you meet Him face to face.
- Finding a need in your community/neighborhood and doing something about it.
- Studying the sculpture by Bertel Thorvaldsen at <http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/art/19th/thorvaldsen/thorvaldsen_christ.jpg>. Consider what this piece of art conveys about Jesus' love for you and His imminent return.

CONNECT

Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*.

Bob Briner, *Roaring Lambs, A Gentle Plan to Radically Change Your World*;

Roy C. Naden, *The Lamb Among the Beasts*.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Jonah

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for fourth quarter 2003, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: Biblical Prophets, Modern Critics

Logos: Jonah 1; 3:4; Amos 3:7; Matt. 12:39-41; Luke 11:29-32

KEY THOUGHT: How is the book of Jonah introduced? Why were Jonah's personal experiences central to the book? Why do some scholars dismiss the authenticity of Jonah? In what ways has the modern worldview impacted our Christian faith? Should supernatural occurrences included with a prophet's life surprise us?

Lesson 2: People and Places

Logos: 1 Sam. 16:1-3; Psalm 104; Jonah 1; Matt. 10:30

KEY THOUGHT: How does God reveal His concern for people? In what ways does the Bible show us God's intimate knowledge of us? How did Jesus reveal the fact that God knows so much about us? How does the book of Jonah instruct us about this aspect of God's amazing grace? Why did God send Jonah to Nineveh? What sins were in that city that spurned on Jonah's prophetic call?

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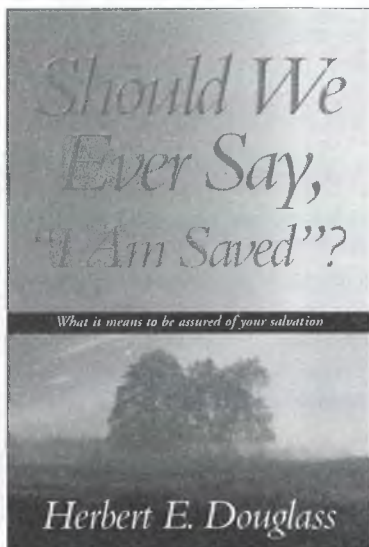
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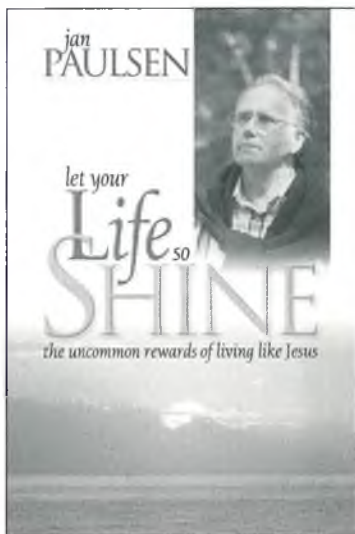


A GUIDE FOR ABOVE- THE-ORDINARY CHRISTIAN LIVING

FROM THE GENERAL CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

In *Let Your Life So Shine*, Dr. Jan Paulsen, head pastor and president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, lays aside the administrator's mantle and speaks from his heart about a successful spiritual walk with God. Dr. Paulsen defines the journey toward our heavenly home, and addresses our real-life concerns here and now. He challenges us to go beyond a "steady-as-you-go church life" and risk becoming a "wave-walker"—someone who will step out in an adventure with God, and make a difference for His kingdom.

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East-Central Africa
Division

Even as a child, John Mavesere knew that God had called him to be a minister. When time came to enroll in university, John chose Solusi, the Adventist University in Zimbabwe, his home country. His mother paid his fees for his first year. Without any job possibility, John spent his vacation working in ministry and outreach. He loved seeing people give their lives to God. But as time neared to return for his second year, the money his mother expected to pay his tuition did not come.

“Don’t worry,” John told his mother. “God called me to the ministry; He will take care of my school fees.” With that John packed his bag, kissed his mother goodbye, and took the bus to college. He arrived at Solusi with just a few dollars in his pocket, less than the cost of a ticket back home.

Did God provide John’s tuition? Read his testimony in “Nothing But Faith” in this quarter’s Mission.

Part of this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath offering will help build a men’s dormitory at Solusi University in Zimbabwe.



ECQ030701