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Meet the Principal Contributor to This Quarter's Guide

Beatrice S. Neall, Ph.D., received her education from La Sierra College and Andrews University. After marrying Ralph Neall in 1949, she served as a pastor's wife in the New York Conference. Called to mission service in 1957, the couple spent 17 years in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Singapore. During these years, Dr. Neall wrote, for non-Christians, books and Bible courses that have been widely used in Asia and Africa. She taught theology at Southeast Asia Union College and recently retired from 17 years as professor of religion at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska.



Through the years, Dr. Neall has contributed articles to such Adventist publications as *The Adventist Review* and *Ministry*. She also has served on numerous General Conference Committees including the Sanctuary Review Committee ("Glacier View"), the Daniel and Revelation Committee, and the Christian View of Human Life Committee.

Since retirement, the Nealls have returned three times to Cambodia to teach the pastors and lay-workers there. To help that country learn the ways of peace, Dr. Neall has written a book, *Building a Better Cambodia*, which is impacting the thought leaders of the nation.

Check with your local Adventist Book Center for the companion book to the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide.

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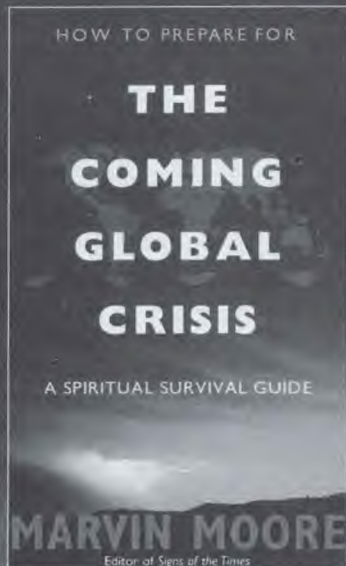
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Great Prayers and Prayers of the Bible

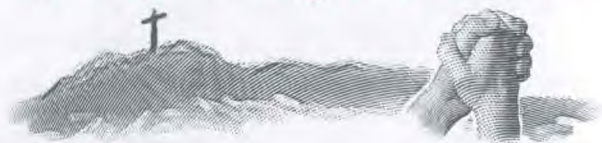
The lessons this quarter lead us into sacred places where Jesus and great saints wrestled with God in prayer. Over half of these prayers sprang out of the dark emotions of discouragement, fear, and remorse; for it is in distress that humans most often seek God. Other prayers are bright with triumph, joy, and praise. All grew out of spiritual conflict with the forces of evil.

The prayers in these lessons represent a variety of people—the God-man Jesus, ordinary men and women, statesmen and kings, prophets and apostles, angels and redeemed. From them we learn of the circumstances that generate prayer—rejection, abuse, guilt, burden for souls, or joy and thanksgiving. From them we learn of the kinds of prayer that move the heart of God—complaints, pleadings, or praise—and how He responds to them. From them we learn of the need for patience and perseverance as we wait for God to work out His purposes.

Jesus is our finest example of how a human being in a world of evil can grasp the mighty power of God through prayer and prevail. Three lessons are devoted to Him. After an introductory lesson based on Jesus' prayers and prayer habits, the lessons continue in chronological order from the oldest book of the Bible (Job) to the triumphant conclusion portrayed in the latest (Revelation).

Prayer can lift you from the depths of darkness to the radiance of the heavenly land, from your dismal circumstances to the throne-room of God. You will benefit most from these lessons if you try to put yourself in the place of the Bible characters. Then try to reach out to God and experience His blessings as they did.

The Model Prayer and the Model Prayer: Christ



Sabbath Afternoon

HAVE YOU EVER EAVESDROPPED ON A PRIVATE CONVERSATION? In our lessons this quarter we will listen to urgent messages from the battle lines to God in His heavenly headquarters as great saints of the Bible struggle with the forces of evil. Jesus, the greatest prayer warrior of all, shows us when to pray, how to pray, and for what to pray. In a hostile world, separated from the glory of heaven and the adoration of angels, He endured loneliness and torture of soul. His source of strength, however, was His communication with Headquarters.

What is prayer? It is “the breath of the soul” (*Gospel Workers*, p. 254), “the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven’s storehouse, where are treasured the boundless resources of Omnipotence,” and “the opening of the heart to God as to a Friend.”—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 93-95. “Our prayers will take the form of a conversation with God as we would talk with a friend. He will speak His mysteries to us personally. Often there will come to us a sweet joyful sense of the presence of Jesus. Often our hearts will burn within us as He draws nigh to commune with us as He did with Enoch.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 129. As you study this week, ask yourself what prayer has done for you.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

- I. Jesus’ Prayer Life (Luke 3:21, 22).
- II. “I Have Prayed For You, Peter” (Luke 22:31, 32, 40-46; 23:34).
- III. “Teach Us to Pray” (Luke 11:1-4).
- IV. “Give Us This Day” (Matt. 6:11-13).
- V. Jesus’ Principles of Prayer (Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-14).

MEMORY TEXT: “ ‘So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened’ ” (Luke 11:9, 10, NIV).

*(Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 6.)

JESUS' PRAYER LIFE (Luke 3:21, 22).

Luke 3:21, 22, says that Jesus prayed at the beginning of His public ministry. What do you think He included in that prayer? What response did He receive?

The Gospels portray Jesus as praying through each stage of His journey to the cross. Today and tomorrow, we will travel with Him through each of these stages to see how prayer encouraged Him and to learn how it can do the same for us.

What do the following texts teach us about Jesus' prayer life and prayer in general?

Text	Jesus' Prayer Life	Prayer in General
Luke 5:15, 16; Mark 1:35		
Luke 9:18		
Luke 9:28-31		
John 17:1-26		

The longest of Jesus' recorded prayers, His prayer in John 17, ends the instruction He gave to His disciples in the upper room and Gethsemane. Some have said it is the most profound chapter in the Bible. (See *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1051:1, "These words spake Jesus.")

"In the opening of his prayer (vs. 1) and three times later (vss. 5, 21, 24) Christ calls God **Father**. . . .

"And that name gives the atmosphere to the whole prayer. Listening, we learn how natural prayer is, how simply we can turn to God, sure of his interest in us and his loving kindness toward us; in the happy assurance that he will certainly do for us all that even God can do, and that gladly and willingly. Christ spoke to God with open face, as a man to his friend, as a child to its father, reverently and humbly."—*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 8, p. 742. (We will study this prayer in depth in lesson 11.)

Listen to Jesus as He arises early to pray. Notice the closeness of His relationship with the Father. How do His prayers encourage you to talk with the Father as to a close friend?

“I HAVE PRAYED FOR YOU, PETER” (Luke 22:31, 32, 40-46; 23:34).

It is now Thursday evening, only hours before Jesus' arrest and trial. Jesus is eating the Passover meal with His disciples. He warns them that one is about to betray Him and all would forsake Him (Luke 22:14-62; see also *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 866:14, “The hour”).

What special message did Jesus have for Peter? Luke 22:31, 32.

“How true was the Saviour's friendship for Peter! how compassionate His warning! But the warning was resented. In self-sufficiency Peter declared confidently that he would never do what Christ had warned him against. . . . His self-confidence proved his ruin. He tempted Satan to tempt him, and he fell under the arts of the wily foe.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1123:31-34, “Peter Tempted the Devil.”

Considering the force of the original Greek, we could say that Satan demands to have every one of us. He lost heaven and eternal life to gain this world, and he struggles to charm each of us and fasten us in his grip. Jesus, however, disputes his claim. He won the right to save every soul (John 1:29; Rom. 5:18). Earnestly He prayed for Peter (Luke 22:31, 32). These prayers gave Peter courage to face the darkest moment of his life.

We travel on to witness Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Read Luke 22:39-44. Once again, despite great anguish, we hear Him calling God His Father, indicating that, even though on the rest of His journey He must travel through great tumult, He still trusts in the divine plan.

Jesus' prayer in Luke 22 points out the risk we sometimes take when we pray. If we really are sincere when we pray, “‘Yet not my will, but yours be done’” (vs. 42, NIV), we must be ready to drink the cup He places in our hands, even if it is bitter. Remember, however, that just as God sent an angel “not to take the cup from Christ's hand, but to strengthen Him to drink it,” so He will empower us. (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 693; for further study, read p. 694.)

Jesus' prayer life followed a pattern we all can follow. He met every crisis in advance through prayer. Before stepping forth to meet His enemies or to meet an unfair trial, humiliation, torture, and death, He fought the battle in prayer. He then was able to stride forth calmly as a Victor to meet His foes.

Why can we say that Jesus' prayer in Luke 23:34 expresses the sum and substance of Christianity?

“TEACH US TO PRAY” (Luke 11:1-4).

Jesus’ disciples were deeply moved as they watched Him intercede with God before ministering to the multitudes each day. They longed to have the same kind of relationship with God as He did. So they requested, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Jesus responded with “the Lord’s Prayer.” Read Luke 11:2-4.

Listed below are phrases from this prayer. What relationship between ourselves and God does each of these phrases illustrate? The first one is done for you. (From John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1-7* [Winona Lake: Indiana, BMH Books, 1985], p. 374).

“Our Father”: the father/child relationship

“Hallowed be thy name”: _____

“Thy kingdom come”: _____

“Thy will be done”: _____

“Give us . . . our daily bread”: _____

“Forgive us our sins”: _____

The Lord’s Prayer has two sections, the first dealing with God’s glory, the second with human needs. Each section has three parts. The first three parts are petitions in behalf of God’s name, His kingdom, and His will. The second three parts are petitions for food, forgiveness, and protection. (See MacArthur, p. 373).

“**Hallowed be thy name.**” Though we can be as familiar with God as a child to a parent, we must also bow in reverence before His awesome majesty. Those closest to the throne in heaven fall down on their faces before Him (Rev. 19:4).

“**Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth.**” We should long to see the reign of evil come to an end when Jesus will be King of kings and Lord of lords and take up His great power to reign (Rev. 11:15-17). “Thy will be done” means first that God’s will becomes ours, and second, that our tortured world will become subject to His will.

Why do you think the first part of the Lord’s Prayer deals with God’s glory? Is affirming His power as we begin to pray a way of strengthening faith in His ability to answer our needs?

“GIVE US THIS DAY” (Matt. 6:11-13).

The second half of Jesus’ model prayer centers on our needs. What does “our daily bread” mean? (Matt. 6:11).

Such a request is fitting for much of the world where the task of providing food for a hungry family is a constant struggle. Our Father hears such cries for help. More prosperous Christians can help to answer those prayers.

“Daily bread” includes all our human needs, especially a daily supply of spiritual bread for the soul (John 6:35).

What is another request we are to make of the Lord while we pray? Matt. 6:12; Luke 11:4.

This request is based on the tradition of forgiving debts during the sabbatical year (Deut. 15:1, 2). The sabbatical year of release is a type of the “acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18, 19, NKJV), when Jesus by His grace releases us from our debts by granting pardon for our sins. Those who have been crushed by overwhelming debt know the joy of release. We should experience the same relief and gratitude when Jesus forgives our sins.

In Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus declared that it is a criminal offense to withhold forgiveness from a fellow human being. Unwillingness to forgive—resentment, hatred, a vengeful attitude—poisons the one who harbors it, embittering the springs of life and producing mental and physical disease. For our own sake, as well as the wrongdoer’s, we should forgive.

Puritan writer, Thomas Manton, said, “There is none so tender to others as they which have received mercy themselves, for they know how gently God hath dealt with them.”—MacArthur, p. 395.

“He who sincerely seeks and entreats forgiveness of sins, longs to be able to sin no more. So he prays, conscious of his own weakness, that God may guide his life away from circumstances in which he is exposed to evil temptations.”—Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 321.

Most of us have heard or repeated the Lord’s Prayer so many times we hardly consider what it means. To help solve this problem, write your own prayer, based on the parts of Jesus’ model prayer that Tuesday’s lesson mentions. After you have written and prayed your prayer, repeat the Lord’s Prayer.

JESUS' PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER (Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-14).

Through His parables, Jesus taught many of the principles of effective prayer. What principles can you gather from the following parables?

The Parables	The Principles
Luke 11:5-13	
Luke 18:1-8	
Luke 18:9-14	

Luke 11:9. The Greek emphasizes persistence in prayer. “Keep on asking,” “keep on seeking,” “keep on knocking,” and your divine Neighbor will open the door and give you what you need.

- How is God pleased when we ask Him to help others?

- Why is persistence necessary in prayer? How would it affect us personally if God gave us everything we asked for, without struggle on our part?

- Do some prayers take time for God to answer because He has to overcome human resistance? Does it ever take time for God to arrange circumstances in our favor?

- Is God really like the reluctant neighbor? Or do we sometimes perceive Him as a reluctant neighbor?

“Men may sometimes think of God as One who would prefer not to have people trouble Him, but His true character as a solicitous, loving, and generous Father is clearly set forth in vs. 9-13. The reluctance of the friend to arise and supply that which was needed in no way represents God. . . . Here, the lesson of the parable is not one of comparison but of contrast.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 789:7, “Trouble me not.”

What do you say to someone who argues this way: “Why does God need to hear us pray over and over? If He knows what we need and intends that we have it—why doesn’t He just give it to us?”

FURTHER STUDY: On a separate sheet of paper, list the principles of prayer that you have learned from this week's lesson. Provide a text for each principle. The following questions can help you organize your list.

- What prayer habits should we develop?
- On what occasions should we pray?
- For what should we pray?
- What attitude should we have toward God when we pray?
- What attitude should we have toward our fellow humans?
- How does prayer help us to have closer fellowship with God?

Read either "Come Rest Awhile" in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 359-363 or "The Privilege of Prayer" in *Steps to Christ*, pp. 93-104.

"Our Saviour identified Himself with our needs and weaknesses, in that He became a suppliant, a petitioner, seeking from His Father fresh supplies of strength, that He might come forth braced for duty and trial. . . . He found comfort and joy in communion with His Father. And if the Saviour of men, the Son of God, felt the need of prayer, how much more should feeble, sinful mortals feel the necessity of fervent, constant prayer."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 93, 94.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. On many occasions, Jesus warned His disciples of His death and prayed that they would not fail in the hour of trial. Should we be as concerned about our readiness to face coming trials, hardships, and tragedies? Explain. What is the best way to prepare?
2. Were Jesus' prayers for His disciples answered, or did they all fail the test? Explain your answer. What about His prayers for Judas? Will our prayers for the salvation of souls always be effective?
3. It is hard to be persistent in prayer when the answers appear delayed. How can one remain persistent?

SUMMARY: Prayer is the power line between earth and heaven, linking us to the mind and might of God and allowing us to converse with Him as with a friend. Through a constant connection with Him, we can face trials, overcome temptation, and share the blessings of heaven with others.



The God Who Sends Rain

J. H. Zachary

INDIA—The Meitei people, who live in the hills of northern India, are still largely unreached with the gospel.

Ranjit Singh and his wife worked for several days to plant 2,500 cabbage plants in their garden. But as they worked, they noticed that some of the cabbage plants were beginning to wither. The ground was dry, and there was no sign of rain. Without rain there would be no harvest, and the family would face a difficult year.

The Singhs had lost faith in the gods they had called upon throughout their lives, but they did not know where to turn for help. Which of Hinduism's 300,000 gods would answer their prayers for rain to make their cabbages grow?

Then Mr. Singh recalled hearing someone say that the God of the Christians was all-powerful. He talked it over with his wife, and they decided to pray to this unseen God for rain. "If the God of the Christians hears our prayer and answers, then we will know that He is the true God," Mr. Singh told his wife. For the first time in their lives the couple poured out their hearts to God for help.

That night it rained. The next day, the couple stood in amazement when they realized that the rain had fallen only on their cabbage patch and nowhere else in the village. Mr. Singh did not hesitate; he set out to learn how he could become a follower of this powerful God who had answered their prayer. But his wife hesitated.

Mr. Singh found a Protestant pastor and asked him how he could become a Christian. The pastor baptized him that day, and Mr. Singh went home happy. But he did not know what it meant to be a Christian. What should a follower of God be doing? How should he worship? What did God expect of him?

Some time later Mr. Singh met an Adventist pastor and asked him, "What does it mean to be a Christian?" Through a series of Bible studies, the pastor showed the couple what it meant to follow Christ. Both Mr. and Mrs. Singh were baptized.

The miraculous rainfall did not go unnoticed by others in their village. Many were deeply impressed and have shown a willingness to learn more about the God who can control the wind and the rain.

Pray for the Meitei people as they seek God.

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Prayers of Despair: Job



Sabbath Afternoon

DARK TIMES CAN SHADOW LIFE with the appearance that God has forsaken us. “Where is God?” C. S. Lewis asked after his wife died of cancer. “Go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? It seemed so once.”—*A Grief Observed* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980), pp. 4, 5.

During Job’s dark night of the soul he cried, “If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out what he would answer me, and consider what he would say” (Job 23:3-5, NIV). No answer came, however.

How does a person pray when circumstances are so bleak that it seems as though no way out exists and God no longer hears? This week’s lesson looks for answers in the story and prayers of Job.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

- I. Crisis! (Job 1; 2).
- II. Job’s Bitter Complaints to God (Job 7:7-21; 10).
- III. Job’s Cry for Justice (Job 9:32-35).
- IV. Glimmers of Hope (Job 13:15, 16; 14:7-17; see also 19:25-27; 23:10).
- V. Breakthrough! (Job 38:1; Heb. 11:6).

MEMORY TEXT: “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold” (Job 23:10, NIV).

*(Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 13.)

CRISIS! (Job 1; 2).

Job was a desert chieftain, and several clues in the book of Job suggest that he probably lived during the time of the patriarchs: (1) his great age (Job 42:16) before average human life span was shortened to “threescore years and ten” (Ps. 90:10), or seventy years; (2) Job served as the head of the family, offering sacrifices instead of deferring this task to temple priests (Job 1:5); (3) there was no written Scripture, only oral transmission; and (4) there was lack of reference to the great events of Israelite history such as the Exodus and the conquest of the Promised Land.

What kind of test was Job subjected to without his knowledge? What was the issue in the contest? Job 1:6-12. What happened to Job’s life when God removed His protective hedge? 1:13-19; 2:7. What common belief did Job’s friends hold about suffering? 4:7, 8.

People suffer for many reasons. Much misery comes from our own poor choices, though the cause of some misery isn’t our own fault. Even God’s forgiveness doesn’t necessarily interrupt the chain of consequences that follow as a result of the poor choices we make. People also suffer indiscriminately from the violence of Satan, the elements, and human nature. “Job and his friends were steeped in a tradition that claimed that suffering was always punishment for specific sin [4:7, 8]. Job was not aware of such sin, and was faced with the predicament of finding an explanation for his misfortune.” —*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 494:4, “Theme.”

Read Job 1:20, 21. These verses record Job’s reaction to his first round of suffering. As Job realized, affliction and loss can deepen our own gratitude to God. Appreciation for the simple blessings may be enriched by the loss of what we often take for granted—ordinary things, such as a cup of water, as British author Somerset Maugham learned. Maugham displayed a cracked clay cup on his mantle, along with far more elaborate objects. When asked about this one misfit, Maugham told how during World War I, on a troop ship crossing the ocean, the crew received one cup of water a day. He drank his ration from that cup and kept it in sight throughout his life to remind himself never to take blessings for granted. After Job’s first test, he worshiped and prayed to God in a similar spirit of gratitude.

Even when we suffer, we all have our own personal “cups” filled with blessings. Whatever you might be suffering now, can you think of things for which you should be thankful? If you know someone who’s hurting, tactfully try to point him or her to the blessings currently enjoyed.

JOB'S BITTER COMPLAINTS TO GOD (Job 7:7-21; 10).

Prolonged suffering profoundly affects the sufferer. How did Job's prayers change after he had been suffering for a long period of time? Job 3:20, 21; 6:8, 9; 7:16.

Preservation of life is one of the strongest human instincts. Job's desire to die shows his desperation. Yet he never thought of taking his own life; instead, he begged God to take it from him.

Job 10 is another of Job's prayers uttered in pain. Use the chart below to study this prayer.

Question	Answer
What was Job's plea to God? Vs. 2.	
How did he feel about what was happening to him? Vs. 1.	
In your own words, what question did Job keep asking God? Vss. 8, 9, 18.	
What was Job's final request in this prayer? Vss. 20, 21.	

"The patriarch continues his argument against God—but why does he? It's as if he cannot give up on the Lord. Do we usually keep on arguing with someone who we expect will never respond to us? Most of us will either retreat into silence or aggressively break the relationship. But Job hangs on—he won't let go of his Creator. . . . The loss of God overwhelms him far more than the destruction of his wealth or even the death of his children and servants."—Gerald Wheeler, *God of the Whirlwind* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1992), p. 69.

Have you ever felt that life was not worth living? At times like this, faith can be so crucial. How were you able to cope? Have you learned things from your experience that you could share with someone going through a crisis?

JOB'S CRY FOR JUSTICE (Job 9:32-35).

As a tribal chief, Job is accustomed to court proceedings. Yet, he who had defended the oppressed (Job 31:21, 22) now longs for a hearing for himself (13:3, 22, 23; 23:3-5). He agrees with his friends that righteousness should be rewarded and evil punished. His complaint is that God has violated the rules (9:22-24). Therefore, he prepares a legal brief with his signature on it, defending the uprightness of his life (chap. 31; see especially vs. 35). However, he fears that he would be defeated in a confrontation with God and that God would not answer his questions but simply overwhelm him with a show of power (chap. 9:14-20; compare 40:1-9).

What kind of legal help did Job long for? Job 9:32-35.

The “daysman” or “umpire.” “In his argument with God, Job feels that there is no one to whom he can look to as an arbiter. On one of two conditions only, he thinks, could the contest be more even between himself and God: (1) If God, divesting Himself of all His divine attributes, became man, and (2) if some umpire, or arbiter, could be found to decide the contest. Neither condition, however, did Job think possible. The gospel provides a fulfillment of both conditions. ‘The I AM is the Daysman between God and humanity, laying His hand upon both’ (DA 25). Not that we need to conceive of Jesus as settling an argument between man and God, but He is the One who represents God to man, the One through whom man can understand and approach God. See Heb. 2:17, 18.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 525:33, “Daysman.”

Job asked, “How can a mortal be righteous before God?” (9:2, NIV). What is our only claim to acceptance with God? Rom. 3:23, 24.

Job was righteous (chap. 31), and God does reward deeds of mercy like Job’s—if not now, then in the hereafter. (See Matt. 25:34-40 and Job 42:12-17.) Job’s faith in his own good works, however, did not bring him acceptance with God. We all must bow before God as a sinner, claiming the Sacrifice for sin and pleading only the merits of His blood.

How can you help someone who feels too sinful for God to hear his or her prayers? How would an understanding of Christ’s imputed righteousness help such a person grasp the truth that God’s acceptance is because of Christ, not because of anything good in ourselves?

GLIMMERS OF HOPE (Job 13:15, 16; 14:7-17; see also 19:25-27; 23:10).

Silence is one of the cruelest treatments a person can inflict on a friend. It is easily interpreted as hostility. God's silence caused Job's gloom. He kept talking to God, demanding a hearing. God, however, did not answer (13:22, 24; 30:20). Yet, in the darkness of Job's forsaken state, shafts of light, each one more intense, pierced through. These gave rise to sublime expressions of faith.

Through the ages, Job's declarations of hope have brightened the pathway of Christians everywhere. Summarize these declarations of hope below.

Job 13:15, 16 _____

Job 14:7-17 _____

Job 19:25-27 _____

Job 23:10 _____

Job 23:10 "is one of the key verses of the book. Although Job could not seem to find God, he believed that God was aware of his ways and purposeful in His dealings with him. Job was beginning to understand that he was being tried. He still did not know of Satan's challenge regarding him. One of the rungs of the ladder by which Job climbed from despair to faith was the recognition on his part that he was not being punished or unjustly treated, but rather was being tested that he might emerge as pure gold from a furnace."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 561:10, "Come forth." His conversations with God began to show this change.

When we endure suffering and the prospect of death, what an advantage we have knowing that Christ will resurrect us! How can this advantage affect the tone of your prayers when you communicate with God during trials?

BREAKTHROUGH! (Job 38:1; Heb. 11:6).

The greatest sorrow Job expressed was not the loss of his property or family but the loss of a sense of God's presence. Where did Job finally find Him? Job 38:1.

In the midst of Elihu's final speech, a great whirlwind approached (chap. 37) and God spoke to Job out of that storm. "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind" (Job 38:1). Through the storms of life we struggle, and in the storms we find God.

In Job 38 God does not desire "to settle an argument, but to reveal Himself. Neither does He explain the reason for Job's suffering. A clear understanding of God is superior in importance to an unfolding of all the reasons for divine providence. God does not explain why the wicked prosper or why the righteous suffer. He says nothing about the future world, or future compensation for present inequalities. God simply reveals Himself—His goodness, His power, His wisdom—and He intends that this revelation shall answer Job's problems."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 598:1, "Answered Job."

God never explains to Job the cause of his suffering. Why? Perhaps because in this life we often have to trust God without knowing why we suffer. Job, however, seems to be satisfied just to see God (42:5, 6), to make contact with Him again.

Today many "thieves" try to rob us of our intimacy with God. Often we allow guilt, grief, and pain to come between us and Him, but doubt is the cruelest weapon against faith. After studying contemporary science and theology, many Christians cry out, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him"! (John 20:13). Losing sight of God undermines the very basis of life.

What attitude is necessary in order to make contact with God? Heb. 11:6. How does one get this attitude? Rom. 10:17.

Believers today never need to experience the silence of God, because He speaks to us through His Word. We can store in our hearts promises that bring God near, especially in times of crisis. We can also sing our way out of darkness through the great hymns of faith. These hymns become some of the greatest prayers ever uttered.

What promises and hymns have you stockpiled in your arsenal of faith to equip you for the conflicts of life? What do you do when, in certain times, even these promises *feel empty*? How can we learn to move beyond feelings to trust in God?

FURTHER STUDY: We read about the circumstances surrounding Job's last recorded prayer in Job 42:7-10. What does this prayer teach us about grace and forgiveness?

Read *Education*, pp. 154-156, and *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 162-165.

“Let us strive to walk in the light as Christ is in the light. The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed, not only for himself, but for those who were opposing him. When he felt earnestly desirous that the souls that had trespassed against him might be helped, he himself received help. Let us pray, not only for ourselves, but for those who have hurt us, and are continuing to hurt us. Pray, pray, especially in your mind. Give not the Lord rest; for His ears are open to hear sincere, importunate prayers, when the soul is humbled before Him.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1141:10, “Pray for Those Who Hurt Us.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why did God have Job pray for his three friends?
2. Job's friends accused him of being guilty of sin when Job knew he wasn't guilty, at least, of anything worthy of his suffering. If you had been Job, how would you have felt about having to pray for friends such as these?
3. Just because Job's situation remarkably improved after he prayed for his friends, can we always assume that intercessory prayer will guarantee material success? Explain.
4. Consider the principles about prayer that last week's lesson discussed. How do Job's prayers fit these principles? What other principles regarding prayer does this week's lesson teach us?

SUMMARY: Through the long dark night of the soul, God is with us, though we may not be able to sense His presence. During such times, we need to cling to Him in prayer and through faith in the promises of His Word.



Through Sickness and Fire

Charlotte Ishkanian

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GHANA—When Mavis Akomeah's [ah-koh-MEH-ah] father lost his job, the family was forced to return to their village to farm. But Mavis and her younger brother stayed with an uncle in town, so they could continue their studies.

Mavis became sick with a high fever and a serious cough. But there was no money for a doctor or medicine. The cough often kept her awake at night and left her too weak to attend school. As her illness dragged on, Mavis worried that she would not be able to prepare for her upcoming school exams.

Her classmates and pastor came to visit and pray with her. Mavis was surprised at this outpouring of love, for her own family had grown somewhat cold spiritually. The visits showed Mavis that God cared for her, a lonely, sick teenage girl.

Mavis returned to school just before her exams. Though still weak, she forced herself to study long hours to catch up. One night the power went out, and she lighted a candle so she could continue studying. But weak and weary, she fell asleep. Suddenly she awoke and found the table in flames and the room filled with smoke.

Mavis and her brother jumped through the flames to safety. Their shouts brought help, and the fire was soon out, but the room and its contents were destroyed, including Mavis's study notes.

When her friends learned what had happened, they shared their notes with Mavis so she could prepare for her exams. With much prayer and support from her friends, Mavis passed her exams.

The pastor continued to visit Mavis and her brother, and they began Bible studies. Their mother came to visit and joined their study group, then later their father joined them. Mavis asked to be baptized, and her parents, who had not taken their faith seriously before, decided to be rebaptized.



Mavis thanks God for making His love real to her through her uncle, her caring friends, and their concerned pastor, who visited and prayed with her when she needed it most. It made an eternal difference, not just to a sick teenager, but to her entire family.

Mavis (left) is a secondary student in Tamale, Ghana. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.

A Prayer of Supplication: Moses



Sabbath Afternoon

HINDSIGHT IS SO ANNOYINGLY CLEAR! Reviewing one's past can be discouraging, as in the case of a missionary couple who regretted that their years of service had been so unfruitful. The buildings they had built were later destroyed. They wished instead that they had invested more energy into building people. *If only we had been more loving and made more friends!* they thought.

Rearing children also can be a challenge. Wouldn't it be great if children came with an instruction manual? "If only the first child didn't count!" one father remarked.

"If only" is a common lament. "If only I had known his character before I married him!" "If only I had told her I loved her!" "If only I hadn't gone into debt!" "If only I hadn't messed up my life!" "If only I had answered God's call when it came!"

Moses, to whom the authorship of Psalm 90 is widely attributed, seems to be playing the "if only" where he writes, "The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away" (vs. 10, NIV).

Learn how he "wins" the game in this week's lesson.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

- I. Overview of Psalm 90 (Ps. 90:1, 7-10, 12-17).
- II. Headed Home (Ps. 90:1-9).
- III. Living Under God's Wrath (Ps. 90:7-14).
- IV. Midian Remembered (Ps. 90:16).
- V. God's Answer to Moses' Plea (Ps. 90:15, 17; Exod. 3:1-10; 33:12-34:7).

MEMORY TEXT: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Exodus 34:6, NIV).

*(Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 20.)

OVERVIEW OF PSALM 90 (Ps. 90:1, 7-10, 12-17).

Most Bible scholars believe that Moses wrote Psalm 90, and many translations preface it with the superscription: A prayer of Moses, the man of God (compare Deut. 34:10). This would make Psalm 90 the oldest of all the psalms.

Psalm 90 consists of three parts. Read it through and identify the verses that go with each of these parts:

The infinite God: _____

Finite humans: _____

A plea for redemption: _____

“The 90th psalm . . . reflects [Moses’] thoughts, perhaps toward the close of his sojourn in Midian [Exod. 2:11–3:3]. If so, the following interpretation seems appropriate: The opening verses of this psalm seem to mirror the mountain solitudes of Sinai and the majesty of God, in contrast with human frailty in general and the great mistakes of his own life (vss. 7, 8). Knowing the role Providence had marked out for him (Acts 7:25), Moses doubtless reflected that his impetuous act in slaying the Egyptian had frustrated God’s purpose and thwarted the divine plan for his life. He had already passed the mark of ‘threescore years and ten’ and was approaching ‘fourscore years’ (Ps. 90:9, 10), but with his great disappointment in mind he prayed that God would teach him to ‘number’ his days that he might apply his heart unto wisdom (vs. 12). He still had faith in the promises of God to the fathers and hoped for their fulfillment. His thoughts then turned to his suffering brethren in the land of Egypt (vss. 13, 14) and he prayed for their deliverance (vss. 15, 16). Finally, he pleads with God that the work of his own hands may be established, that his life may not have been altogether in vain (vs. 17).”
—*SDA Bible Dictionary* (1979 edition), “Moses,” p. 763.

Considering the tone of this prayer, take some time to examine your priorities (see vs. 12). Have you been expending energy on things that don’t really matter? What are you doing now that in a few years, looking back, you might regret? What can you say to someone who, looking regretfully over his or her past, is in need of encouragement?

HEADED HOME (Ps. 90:1-9).

In his prayer, Moses says that the Lord has been his eternal refuge (vs. 1). Provide specific incidents in Moses' life that illustrate this truth.

As author of the book of Genesis, Moses had done a lot of reflecting on the "generations" of patriarchs since the time of creation (Gen. 5; 10; etc.); he saw that their dwelling place was in God. Like a mansion in which generations of family have been born, lived, and died, so God is home to His people (Ps. 90:1). In Psalm 90, Moses turns his feet toward home. There is nowhere else to go.

The parable of the loving father generously illustrates the welcome we will receive (Luke 15:11-20). " 'But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him' " (vs. 20, NIV).

How does Moses contrast the eternity of God with the shortness of human life in Psalm 90?

God's life span (vss. 2, 4) _____

Human life span (vss. 3, 10) _____

How do such insights enhance our understanding of God's plan for our lives?

As Moses contemplated the "everlasting hills" (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 251) that surrounded him in Midian, he must have been awestruck to realize that God is more ancient still—from eternity in the past to eternity in the future. His awe at the immensity of God's existence was matched likewise by his impression of human life. God, for whom time is nothing, sternly orders humans to return to dust (vss. 3, 4) in fulfillment of the dread sentence upon Adam—"Dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19, NIV).

Though our lives are incomparably short in contrast to the eternity of God, the Lord had, through Christ, "stepped into" human time, when He lived as man. In other words, the Lord, the one who created time, for 33 years became subject to time, just as we are. How does that concept help us understand God's love for us?

LIVING UNDER GOD'S WRATH (Ps. 90:7-14).

Moses experienced drastic changes in his life. Heir to the throne of Egypt, he suddenly found himself a wandering shepherd in the desert. His brilliant education in science and the military arts seemed wasted. His life mission had been thwarted. Moses could think of only one explanation. God was angry with him (vss. 7, 9, 11). Year after year passed with no change in his status or Israel's condition. Prolonged trial has profound effects on the believer. Sometimes we think God does not care. Fortunately, that conclusion is incorrect. God does care.

Where did Moses think God had put his sins? What secret sin oppressed his conscience? Ps. 90:8; Exod. 2:12.

The memory of this sin most likely had haunted his lonely exile in Midian. That one error in judgment, when he thought he was to deliver Israel in his own power, "apparently" had aborted his whole career and shunted him into obscurity.

Next, Moses supplicates God for a number of remarkable things. List two of these below.

Ps. 90:13 _____

Ps. 90:14 _____

Why is it so remarkable that Moses asks God for such blessings?

Moses "prays that after a night of sorrow and suffering, God will give a morning of joy and peace (see Ps. 143:8)."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 842:14, "Early." "Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul" (Ps. 143:8, NIV).

Instead of God's anger, Moses wanted the assurance of His love. In place of terror, he wanted joy. In place of disapproval, he longed for God's favor. Though we all long for these things—how crucial it is to remember to go by faith and not by feelings alone, which sometimes can be influenced by things as simple as diet. What do you say to someone who has repented of his or her sins and yet still feels separated, alienated from God? How can you help this person to look beyond emotions?

MIDIAN REMEMBERED (Ps. 90:16).

Had Moses' life been a failure? Were the 40 years in Midian a waste? Had he been living under God's wrath? (See the *SDA Bible Dictionary*, [1979 edition], p. 763, "Moses.")

The long years of exile were, in fact, an important chapter in Moses' life. "Shut in by the bulwarks of the mountains, Moses was alone with God. . . . In the solemn grandeur of the everlasting hills he beheld the majesty of the Most High, and in contrast realized how powerless and insignificant were the gods of Egypt. . . .

"As the years rolled on, and he wandered with his flocks in the solitary places, pondering upon the oppressed condition of his people, he recounted the dealings of God with his fathers and the promises that were the heritage of the chosen nation, and his prayers for Israel ascended by day and by night. Heavenly angels shed their light around him. Here, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the book of Genesis. The long years spent amid the desert solitudes were rich in blessing, not alone to Moses and his people, but to the world in all succeeding ages."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 248, 251.

The many years Moses spent in the wilderness gave him time to write. His writings—the books of Genesis to Deuteronomy—are among the greatest masterpieces in literature. It is possible that Moses also wrote the book of Job during his stay in Midian. There he became acquainted with worshipers of God in the Edomite and Midianite branches of Abraham's family to which Job and his friends belonged. The ninetyeth psalm has strong ties with the books of Genesis and Job. All three contain perceptions of God's wrath and supplications for His mercy, in addition to echoes of the themes of Creation and the Fall.

Another benefit from the years Moses spent in Midian was the experience of being a shepherd. "The habits of caretaking, of self-forgetfulness and tender solicitude for his flock, . . . would prepare him to become the compassionate, longsuffering shepherd of Israel."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 248.

What other request did Moses make of God? Ps. 90:16.

Moses thought it was time for God to act for His people, but little did he realize what God had in mind. Little did he know the role he himself would play in God's plan!

Can you think about experiences that, at the time, seemed so terrible but, in retrospect, you now are able to see the Lord's providence? How could having experiences like that help someone who is struggling now?

GOD'S ANSWER TO MOSES' PLEA (Ps. 90:15, 17; Exod. 3:1-10; 33:12-34:7).

What final requests did Moses make of God?

Ps. 90:15 _____

Ps. 90:17 _____

In effect, Moses was saying, "Give me 40 years of gladness for these 40 years of affliction in the wilderness." Surely God could make up to him the years of exile and servitude the same as He had done for Jacob and for Joseph. Couldn't God crown his afflictions with joy?

"Finally, he pleads with God that the work of his own hands may be established, that his life may not have been altogether in vain (vs. 17). It was probably about the time of these reflections that God met Moses at the burning bush and commissioned him to return to Egypt to liberate the Hebrews (Ex. 3:1-10)." —*SDA Bible Dictionary*, "Moses," p. 763. Read God's response to Moses in Exodus 3:9-12.

The curtain was opening on the next act of Moses' life. God was going into action, and Moses was the major actor in the drama. At first, Moses was unprepared for his new role. His long years of solitude, his sense of failure and God's anger, had left him with a low self-image. God lifted him up, however, by reassuring him time and again that He would be with him and help him (Exod. 3:12, 14; 4:2-5, 12).

During the next 40 years of his life, Moses experienced a closeness with God never before experienced by another person. Twice he spent 40 days and 40 nights shut in with God on Mount Sinai until his own face glowed with the glory of God (Exod. 24:18; 34:28; 34:30).

Moses saw the glory of God—the beauty of His character. He saw beyond God's anger against sin to His incredible love and compassion for sinners. Though most of us are not privileged with such a revelation of God, the Lord has, in fact, provided us with an even better revelation of Himself. What was the revelation, and how should it change our lives?

FURTHER STUDY: When the children of Israel worshiped the golden calf, Moses again prayed for them. Read this prayer in Exodus 32:11-14 (compare Deut. 9:25-29). Based on Psalm 90, what did he learn about God and prayer that empowered him to be such a great intercessory pray-er?

Read *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 471-480.

“‘Let Me alone, . . . that I may consume them,’ were the words of God. If God had purposed to destroy Israel, who could plead for them? How few but would have left the sinners to their fate! How few but would have gladly exchanged a lot of toil and burden and sacrifice, repaid with ingratitude and murmuring, for a position of ease and honor, when it was God Himself that offered the release.

“But Moses discerned ground for hope where there appeared only discouragement and wrath. The words of God, ‘Let Me alone,’ he understood not to forbid but to encourage intercession, implying that nothing but the prayers of Moses could save Israel, but that if thus entreated, God would spare His people.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 318.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What principles of prayer can we learn from Psalm 90?
2. In essence, Psalm 90 is a prayer of supplication on behalf of Israel. How can this psalm be a prayer for God’s church today? Are we facing some of the same spiritual challenges?
3. Sabbath’s lesson talked about the “if only” game and how we all play it. According to Psalm 90, how do we win this game?
4. Perhaps Moses actually wrote Psalm 90 while sitting on a rock in the Midian desert tending sheep. What merit is there in writing down some of our prayers?

SUMMARY: Reviewing our past and looking forward to the future can be discouraging, especially when life is not going well. Moses’ experience, however, teaches us that we can take our lives to God in prayer so that His favor will rest upon us and He can “establish the work of our hands for us” (Ps. 90:17, NIV).



Single Mother Plants Two Churches in Siberia

J. H. Zachary

RUSSIA—Galina Kazakova's life looked dreary. As a single parent with a daughter to provide for, she found that her work as a nurse's assistant barely paid the bills. Life was hard, but Galina developed a close walk with Jesus. He sustained her through this difficult time.

Galina lives near Irkutsk, on the southern tip of Lake Baikal, in south central Siberia. This huge territory that covers five time zones contains hundreds of towns and cities that have no Sabbath keepers. And some Adventist congregations are 600 miles (1,000 kilometers) from the next nearest Adventist congregation.

A thought began to burn in Galina's heart. The city of Cheremhovo and the region surrounding it were almost empty of believers. Someone should share the gospel with the people in this region.

Galina stepped out in faith and took a year's leave from her work. She packed up her few belongings and went to Cheremhovo. She found a place to live then visited the city manager's office to secure a permit to be a missionary in the city. With her permission document in hand, Galina began visiting schools, orphanages, and factories, offering to give a spiritual message to the students and employees. She sold Christian literature to earn a living as she searched for honest souls who were interested in spiritual matters. She found very few who would agree to study the Bible course she offered.

The work was hard, and her earnings were meager. In a moment of discouragement she felt as if she were a failure, and she considered returning home. In desperation she poured out her heart to God. "Lord, I want to see a church here in Cheremhovo. I have worked hard, but the way seems impossible. Please, please help me."

The next day Galina received a letter from the Bible correspondence school containing a list of persons who had completed the course. She began visiting the people and giving personal Bible studies. Soon a church was organized in Cheremhovo with 53 members.

Galina turned her eyes to the city of Severobaikalsk, another area with no Adventists. So far ten persons have been baptized here, and Galina is giving Bible studies to more than fifty others.

During The Quiet Hour's training program for volunteer missionaries, Galina committed herself to plant a third church in another city in Siberia. She is joining 15 other teams in the East Russian Union Mission to plant 16 new churches in one year.

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

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Prayers of Triumph: Hannah and Mary



Sabbath Afternoon

WHEN GOD WANTS TO PRODUCE A GREAT LEADER, He often starts with a mother whom He molds through deep trials. Susanna Wesley (1669–1742) was such a mother. The wife of a pastor, Susanna was brilliant, strong-minded, and deeply religious. In 21 years, she bore 19 children, 9 of whom died in infancy. Susanna home-schooled her children, teaching them the alphabet as soon as they turned five and using Genesis 1 for reading material. In addition to daily worships, she arranged weekly interviews with each child for personal counsel on their spiritual condition. Once, an angry church member set fire to their home. Six-year-old John almost died. As a result, Susanna felt a special burden for this child. She wrote in her diary, “I do intend to be more particularly careful with the soul of this child . . . that I may instil into his mind the principles of true religion and virtue.”—Ruth Gordon Short, *Affectionately Yours, John Wesley* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Assoc., 1960), p. 37. It was from such dynamic nurture that John and Charles Wesley arose to lead the Methodist movement—John with his lifelong preaching ministry and organizational skills and Charles with over 6,000 hymns that have enriched the Christian world.

Susanna was walking in the steps of her spiritual ancestors, Hannah and Mary, whose prayers of triumph will inspire us this week.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

- I. Briars in the Nest (1 Sam. 1:1-18).
- II. Trouble in the Sanctuary (1 Sam. 1:3-20; 2:12-17).
- III. Gratitude! (1 Sam. 1:21–2:11).
- IV. Victory! (1 Sam. 2:1-10).
- V. Mary’s Triumph (Luke 1:26-56).

MEMORY TEXT: “He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor” (1 Samuel 2:8, NIV).

*(Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 27.)

BRIARS IN THE NEST (1 Sam. 1:1-18).

When God wanted to bless His people with a great prophet, He chose a most interesting family for the prophet-to-be. Elkanah, the father, though descended from the evil Korah of Moses' day (1 Chron. 6:33-38; Num. 16), was a godly Levite and a loving husband (1 Sam. 1:3, 8). His wife Hannah also was a devout person. Why, then, were their lives so miserable? 1 Sam. 1:1-8. List the reasons below.

1 Sam. 1:1, 2 _____

1 Sam. 4, 5 _____

1 Sam. 6, 7 _____

In those days, women achieved self-worth by bearing sons, just as today some women obtain satisfaction from a career. During Hannah's day, people believed that to be barren was a dreadful affliction from God.

It is natural for a wife to demand sole custody of her husband's affections. No woman is content with second place. Second wives like Hagar, Leah, and Peninnah felt threatened by the obvious attraction of their husbands for the preferred wife. Jealous and bitter, Peninnah tried to lift herself up by putting Hannah down. She continued this abusive treatment year after year until Hannah was driven to despair. Furthermore, Peninnah felt superior because of the children she had borne.

"Hannah had good reason to feel discouraged and bitter. She was unable to bear children; she shared her husband with a woman who ridiculed her (1:7); her loving husband could not solve her problem (1:8); and even the high priest misunderstood her motives (1:14). But instead of retaliating or giving up hope, Hannah prayed. She brought her problem honestly before God.

"Each of us may face times of barrenness when nothing 'comes to birth' in our work, service, or relationships. It is difficult to pray in faith when we feel so ineffective. But, as Hannah discovered, prayer opens the way for God to work. . . ."—*Life Application Study Bible* (NIV), p. 434.

What advice can you give to those whose lives, for whatever reason, seems "barren"? Explain to them how prayer can help.

TROUBLE IN THE SANCTUARY (1 Sam. 1:3-20; 2:12-17).

Israelite men were required to attend religious feasts at the sanctuary three times a year (Deut. 16:16). Elkanah and his family expressed their devotion to God by making these pilgrimages (1 Sam. 1:3). Two forces were at work in the sanctuary during this time. Opposing the Lord was a corrupt priesthood, guilty of extortion, gluttony, and molestation of female worshipers. By their scandalous behavior, Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas disgraced the worship of God (1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22). In contrast, there were those like Hannah who prayed to God with every fiber of her being.

What characteristics or qualities marked her conversation with God?

1 Sam. 1:11 _____

1 Sam. 12 _____

1 Sam. 13 _____

1 Sam. 15 _____

Eli, experienced in detecting drunkenness in his sons, was quick to suspect Hannah. Elkanah had just reproved her for not eating and drinking, and now Eli scolded her for eating and drinking too much! Under the sting of such a rebuke Hannah responded calmly without revealing her sorrows (vss. 15, 16). Eli was quick to give her his blessing; and, in faith that God would hear her prayer, Hannah shed her sorrows and took part in the feast (vss. 17-19). Read God's answer in verses 19 and 20.

Sometimes God chooses a barren woman to nurture a special child—a woman like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, or Elizabeth. The agony of craving for a child over a long period of time often creates an intense commitment to that child's welfare when it finally arrives. Yet, only a few women would consent to give such a child back to the Lord as Hannah did. Her sacrifice of her son and Abraham's near sacrifice of his son reflect, in a measure, the sacrifice of God in giving us His Son.

Fortunately, most of those who love the Lord aren't faced with a situation in which they must give up one of their children. Yet, what does Hannah's act say to us about half-hearted commitment to the Lord?

GRATITUDE! (1 Sam. 1:21–2:11).

What does Hannah's care for Samuel reveal about her faithfulness regarding the vow she made to God?

1 Sam. 1:11 _____

1 Sam. 1-23 _____

Hannah decided not to attend the feasts when Samuel was small in order that she might begin educating him from infancy. "As she watched his expanding powers and listened to his childish prattle, her affections entwined about him more closely. He was her only son, the special gift of Heaven; but she had received him as a treasure consecrated to God, and she would not withhold from the Giver His own."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 570, 571.

When Hannah finally did return to Shiloh, she brought Samuel with her. After a sacrifice had been made, she brought her son to Eli and said, " 'As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord' " (1 Sam. 1:26-28). Hannah clearly believed that the God who had given her this child in answer to prayer was able to keep him. Thanks to her nurturing, the little boy already knew how to worship God (vs. 28).

Read Hannah's prayer of praise. 1 Sam. 2:1-10. What is its theme? What was she grateful for? Which verse indicates her attitude toward Peninnah?

"As a result of her full surrender to the Lord [Hannah] is happy for the privilege of giving back to her Creator that which He has given her. In doing so she experiences the highest form of joy, for has she not learned to appreciate His loving-kindness in a new way? . . .

"Hannah's experience may have proved to be the greatest blessing that could come into Peninnah's life. God was as anxious to save Peninnah as He was to save Hannah. How could He accomplish this more effectively than by showing the exaltation of a soul that trusted Him and did not retaliate evil for evil?"—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 461.

How do the prayers of others affect you? Also, stop to think about how your prayers might affect others. What does this tell us about the responsibility we have to pray wisely?

VICTORY! (1 Sam. 2:1-10).

**Why was Hannah so exultant? What was her source of joy?
1 Sam. 1:1-3.**

Peninnah and her children (Hannah's "enemies") had no doubt told her that she was under God's curse, but the birth of Samuel was evidence that God had vindicated her. Hannah saw in this one child the promise of many more (vss. 1, 5; compare vs. 21). She exults in this future blessing of bearing more children when she says, "My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn [strength] is lifted high" (vs. 1). In an agricultural society, horns were symbols of strength; a horn lifted up was powerful (Dan. 8:3). In our human frailty, we often feel weak and insecure. Like Hannah, we need to ground our self-worth on God, our Rock.

In a series of figures (1 Sam. 2:1-10), Hannah notes the reversal of the fortunes of God's people and His enemies.

Figures	God's Enemies	God's People
Warfare	The bows of warriors are broken.	The stumblers are armed with strength.
Hunger	The full are hungry.	The hungry are full.
Barrenness	The mother of many years.	The barren has seven children.
Death	The Lord brings death.	The Lord makes alive.
Poverty	The Lord sends poverty.	The Lord sends wealth.

Hannah certainly had her prayers answered in a miraculous way. Not everyone has had such an experience. How do we console those, or even ourselves, when prayer isn't answered as hoped?

MARY'S TRIUMPH (Luke 1:26-56).

When God designed that Samuel should be His prophet to bring Israel back to God, He first chose a mother to nurture him. When God sent His Son to be the Savior of the world, He again chose a special woman to be His mother.

Ever since God had promised that a “seed” of the woman would crush the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15), many women in Israel hoped to be the mother of the promised Messiah. At the birth of Cain, Eve exclaimed, “‘I have gotten a man, the Lord’ ” (Gen. 4:1, literal translation). She, however, was mistaken. Thousands of years passed, and the hope grew dim. Then an angel came to the town of Nazareth (which may be translated from the root word under *Nazareth* to mean: “watchtower”; “sprout”; “root”; or “branch”), where Jesus, the Branch from Jesse’s roots, would grow up (Isa. 11:1; Matt. 2:23). In that town, the Lord found a young woman to be the mother of the Messiah.

Mary and Hannah both felt exalted by the gift of a son. God performed a miracle for each of them—one conceiving despite barrenness, the other conceiving despite virginity. Both women overflowed with gratitude to God for doing great things for them.

Mary possessed a fine mind and a deep knowledge of Scripture. Her spontaneous prayer of rejoicing is full of references to the Hebrew Scriptures. Her knowledge of these scriptures helped to equip her for her role as the foremost teacher in Jesus’ life.

Read Mary’s prayer of praise in Luke 1:46-55. Which verses of her prayer refer to the following Old Testament scripture?

Ps. 34:2, 3 _____ Ps. 138:6 _____

Ps. 71:19 _____ Ps. 103:17 _____

Ps. 98:1 _____ Ps. 98:3 _____

Luke 1:52. “The reference here is particularly to oppressors. Perhaps Mary had in mind the cruel tyrant Herod, who murdered not only thousands of the Jews but even his closest relatives. . . . Contemporary Jewish literature also reveals the fact that the common people often suffered intensely from economic oppression.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 687:52, “Mighty.”

In her prayer, Mary said, “The Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name” (Luke 1:49, NIV). Though maybe none of us can say that anything so great has been done for us, what great things has God done in your life?

FURTHER STUDY: Review both Hannah's prayer (1 Sam. 2:1-10) and Mary's prayer (Luke 1:46-55). How do they compare with one another?

Read "The Child Samuel," in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 569-574.

Mary and Hannah learned the necessity of and experienced the benefits of praising God. Their experiences teach us how to season our prayers with praise. Ellen White wrote, "To praise God in fullness and sincerity of heart is as much a duty as is prayer. We are to show to the world and to all the heavenly intelligences that we appreciate the wonderful love of God for fallen humanity and that we are expecting larger and yet larger blessings from His infinite fullness. Far more than we do, we need to speak of the precious chapters in our experience. After a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, our joy in the Lord and our efficiency in His service would be greatly increased by recounting His goodness and His wonderful works in behalf of His children."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 299, 300.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Review the principles of prayer discussed in lesson 1. How do the prayers that we studied this week follow these principles? What other principles motivated these prayers?
2. What characteristic of God particularly inspired Hannah to praise God in her prayer? What inspired Mary?
3. What happened to Hannah's mood after she prayed in the temple? 1 Sam. 1:18. What does this tell us about the benefits of prayer?
4. Why is it important not only to take our requests to God in prayer but to praise Him in our prayers, as well?

SUMMARY: The pain Hannah endured as a result of her infertility and the taunts of her rival prepared her for a great role in Israel's history. Mary's lowliness prepared her for the highest responsibility ever entrusted to a human being—rearing the Son of God. The experiences of both women produced mighty prayers that still teach and inspire God's people. Our experiences also can draw us closer to God and to one another through prayer.



The Truth in a Dream

Ismael Serrano

COLOMBIA—Every time Ena Tordecilla came out of a disco, her conscience bothered her. She knew that her mother was praying that the light of God would shine in her life again, as it had during her childhood.

Ena testifies, “Without Christ, I tried to fill the emptiness in my life with activity—going to parties and discos. But one day I came to myself and realized that nothing and no one could fill the God-shaped hole in my heart. Like the prodigal son, I decided to go home to God. I found a church and began attending. Then my thoughts turned to my family. My husband had died without Christ, but I was determined that my children would have the opportunity to know God.

“Thirst for the gospel filled the corners of my soul, and I spent much of my time in prayer and Bible study. As I studied the Bible, I found the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation and wanted to know more about them. But the church that I attended did not seem interested in unraveling these prophecies. I began to search for a way to understand these on my own. Then I had a dream.

“I dreamed that I was visiting a woman in a beautiful city when two young people came to her home. They talked with us and told me many things, then they asked to pray with me, and I agreed.

“I awoke from my dream with a new understanding of the Sabbath. I had never known that the Sabbath began at sundown on Friday.

“I continued to attend the Protestant church while I searched for a church that kept the Sabbath. I did not tell anyone about my dream until the Lord told me in another dream, ‘Share what you have been shown with others.’

“I told the pastor, my mother, and several friends what I had learned about the Bible prophecies and the Sabbath. On the day I was baptized into the Adventist Church, several members of my family and three friends from the Protestant church were baptized with me.

“It is my joy to share with others the truths that God has so graciously shown to me. I challenge every Adventist believer to share this great light with the multitudes who wait for God’s truth.”

Ismael Serrano is a pastor working in Apartadó, Colombia, South America. Ena Tordecilla continues to share her faith in the same city.

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Produced by the Office of Mission
Sabbath School-Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference
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Prayers of Penitence: David



Sabbath Afternoon

HARRY ORCHARD WAS ONE OF THE MOST NOTORIOUS KILLERS OF HIS TIME. He became involved in the bloody wars between miners and mine operators from 1896 to 1905. The early labor organizations considered themselves to be engaged in social revolution against the “unscrupulous capitalist forces.” The labor leaders thought of themselves as the saviors of the downtrodden masses. Under their direction, Orchard blew up trains, mills, and mines to intimidate mine operators, workers, and government agencies and cause a reign of terror. He was especially bitter against Frank Steunenberg, governor of Idaho, for breaking the union’s power in that state. On December 30, 1905, he planted a bomb in the snow by the gate of Steunenberg’s home so when the gate opened it would explode. The huge blast killed Steunenberg and shook the town of Caldwell. Orchard was arrested and jailed. As he lay in his cell, the terrible scenes of his past life tormented him. He considered suicide, but was appalled at the thought of hellfire. One question haunted him: “Can God forgive a murderer?”

This week’s lesson answers that question and tells the rest of Harry Orchard’s story.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

- I. Sin, Coverup, Exposure (2 Sam. 11; 12).
- II. Remorse and Repentance (Ps. 51:1-5).
- III. Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth (Pss. 32:1-5; 51:1-6).
- IV. Clean! (Ps. 51:7-15).
- V. Reflections on Sinning (Rom. 6:1-4).

MEMORY TEXT: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1, NIV).

*(Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 3.)

SIN, COVERUP, EXPOSURE (2 Sam. 11; 12).

King David was Israel's greatest king—a brave shepherd boy who conquered formidable enemies, extended the boundaries of Israel to their farthest extent, and established Jerusalem as the capital. His psalms have influenced the worship of God's people for three thousand years. He became the ancestor and type of Christ, the Messiah. A series of shameful sins, however, marred David's life.

What temptation led to David's downfall? 2 Sam. 11:1-4.

Decisions made in the heat of passion are always bad. Why was David vulnerable to temptation just then? Flattery, the subtle allurements of power and luxury, and association with surrounding nations were not tolerated in subjects but went uncondemned in the king and lessened his sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. "As soon as Satan can separate the soul from God, the only Source of strength, he will seek to arouse the unholy desires of man's carnal nature. The work of the enemy is not abrupt; it is not, at the outset, sudden and startling; it is a secret undermining of the strongholds of principle."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 717, 718. Satan lures us step by step from God until we are separated from Him—then he springs his trap.

Describe at least two of the strategies David used to cover up his sin. 2 Sam. 11:5-27.

1. _____
2. _____

The coverup was worse than the initial wrong. Sin gripped him like an octopus. As he tried to pull off one tentacle, another fastened itself until he was hopelessly entangled. When he thought he had freed himself, he found that his troubles were just beginning (2 Sam. 11:27; 12:10).

How did the Lord bring David to his senses? 2 Sam. 12:1-14.

After David's initial sin (lust in his heart), everything spun quickly out of control. Can you think of other examples in which one sin quickly led to another? What lesson can we learn regarding even "small" sins?

REMORSE AND REPENTANCE (Ps. 51:1-5).

David wrote Psalm 51 in the anguish of remorse and self-abhorrence. It explores not only the depths of David's guilt but the farthest reaches of salvation (see Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973], p. 189). David gave this prayer to the chief musician to be sung in public worship services; therefore, others could learn from the sad history of his fall (Ps. 51, heading), as well as about the power of God to save even the most wretched of sinners. It's a beautiful commentary on salvation by faith in Christ.

What was the basis of David's plea for mercy? Ps. 51:1; Exod. 34:6, 7.

As a lover of the Torah—the books of Moses—David knew the character of his God (Ps. 119:97). Perhaps the very words of Exodus 34:6 and 7, detailing the Lord's revelation of His glory (33:18), brought him comfort in his hour of grief. The heart of God cannot resist the plea—"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13).

"There is in this cry no excuse, no apology, no attempt to vindicate, no complaint against the justice of the law that condemned him. In true humility David blames no one but himself."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 755:1, "Have mercy."

How did David describe the misery of a guilty conscience?

Ps. 51:33 _____

Ps. 2:3, 4 _____

In prison, Harry Orchard endured mental agony as he reviewed his past life—the wife and baby girl he had abandoned, the drinking and gambling that had led him deeper into sin, the string of horrible crimes he had committed. He saw one small ray of hope. Maybe God could forgive him. Dr. David Paulson of Hinsdale Sanitarium sent him a little Bible, which Harry read diligently. There he found the story of David's sin and repentance.

However unique the specifics of David's sin, his experience of repentance and forgiveness is universal, at least among those who know the power of the gospel. How could you use David's story to help someone who feels that he or she is too evil to be forgiven?

TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH, AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH (Pss. 32:1-5; 51:1-6).

According to David's prayers of penitence, how can one find relief from guilt?

Ps. 32:5 _____

Ps. 51:4 _____

After Nathan confronted David with the enormity of his sin, David made a public confession. He did not attempt to neutralize his sin by dwelling on the good he had done. Instead, he approached God as a sinner from birth (vs. 5), pleading for mercy. He even defended the Lord's severe judgment of his sin (2 Sam. 12:10; Ps. 51:4).

What does God require of the sinner? Ps. 51:6, 7.

True confession does not excuse sin or blame others. How rare such a virtue is in our day! How many millions are spent on lawyers to find loopholes in the law. How many innocent people are punished while the guilty remain free. How much injustice exists in this world because people do not tell the truth.

Harry Orchard decided to make no attempt to save himself. He would not plea-bargain for a lighter sentence. Neither would he let the labor union with its huge funds hire lawyers to defend him, even when he knew he could have gone free as many of his fellow criminals had done. "I could find absolutely no way out," he wrote, "except through an open, true confession, regardless of consequences, and with not the slightest deviation from, or modification of, the facts."—*Harry Orchard: The Man God Made Again* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1952), p. 103. This resolution to tell the truth enabled him to be consistent through intense cross-examination by lawyers determined to discredit his story. When the famous lawyer, Clarence Darrow, asked him what his real motive was in telling about his life of crime, he replied, "I wished to make myself right with God and man, as far as lay within my power."—Orchard, p. 105.

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps. 51:17, NIV).

What can you do, if anything, to help a person who refuses to confess his or her sins before God or man? Suppose you find yourself struggling with this problem? How could prayer help?

CLEAN! (Ps. 51:7-15).

What does David's prayer teach us about how to become clean after we sin? What vivid details, or imagery, does David use to describe what he wants God to do?

Ps. 51:1, 2 _____

Ps. 51:7, 9 _____

David didn't say "Lord, preserve my reputation" as Saul had done (1 Sam. 15:30). He wanted God to transform his corrupt nature.

Blotting out means to erase the record of sin from the books God keeps (see Exod. 32:32, 33). David prayed that God would not count his sins against him in the judgment day (Ps. 32:1, 2).

Purging (cleansing) with hyssop refers to the cleansing of a leper by dipping hyssop in blood and sprinkling it upon the person (Lev. 14:6, 7). The writer of Hebrews identified the sprinkled blood with the blood of Jesus (Heb. 12:24). Also, the Israelites used hyssop branches to sprinkle the lamb's blood on the doorposts of their homes. This kept them safe from death (Exod. 12:22), because it symbolized the righteousness of Christ imputed to them through faith.

Washing white as snow suggests laundering clothes (Isa. 1:18). The result of such intense cleansing is a sparkling white garment. " 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow' " (Isa. 1:18, NIV).

What did David want beyond having his guilt removed? What kind of power would it take? Ps. 51:10.

God uses the same power with which He created the world to make a sinner whole. Harry Orchard knew that God had worked a miracle in his life. " 'Before God came into my life . . . I could sit for hours and listen to vulgar, immoral stories, play almost any kind of game, and could scarcely talk without intermingling a string of curses. With the new birth all those old things passed out of my life. . . . They . . . have no attraction for me now.' "—Orchard, pp. 153, 154.

David desired not just forgiveness—but cleansing. Those who know the power of forgiveness will earnestly seek, by faith, for a new heart. Explain why forgiveness will lead to this desire. Why must forgiveness always come first? What happens if the order is reversed?

REFLECTIONS ON SINNING (Rom. 6:1-4).

God delights to uplift fallen human beings. He can save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him (Heb. 7:25). No matter how terrible our sin, God can forgive; no matter how badly our lives are damaged, God can repair.

Some of the greatest saints were once despicable sinners—in fact, even after conversion they still struggled. Christ assured the thief on the cross a place in Paradise. Paul the persecutor became the great apostle. John Newton, a pastor and the composer of the hymn “Amazing Grace,” wrote his epitaph to read:

“John Newton
Once an Infidel and Libertine,
A Servant of Slaves in Africa, . . .
By the Rich Mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
Preserved, Restored, Pardoned
And Appointed to Preach the Faith
He had Long Laboured to Destroy.”

—Grace Irwin, *Servant of Slaves: A Biographical Novel of John Newton* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 433.

George Mueller, a dissolute youth, became a great man of faith and a father to thousands of orphans. Out of his recovery from alcoholism, Bill Wilson founded Alcoholics Anonymous. The salvation that all these people experienced gave them a ministry to the fallen.

Some people might be tempted to think If God’s grace is so abundant, why not sin all the more? Why is this idea wrong? Rom. 6:1-4.

All of the saints mentioned above regretted their past sin. Furthermore, though God forgives sin, He does not prevent its consequences (Exod. 34:7). David’s sin led to the death of four of his sons, caused a civil war, and weakened the moral fiber of the nation. “Though David repented of his sin and was forgiven and accepted by the Lord, he reaped the baleful harvest of the seed he himself had sown.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 723. The pleasures of sin are only “for a season” (Heb. 11:25), while the results are long-lasting and bitter.

A young woman, pregnant out of wedlock, accepts Jesus Christ as her Savior. How do you help her understand that though her sins are forgiven, the consequences can remain? Is not part of our ministry as Christians to help people work through these consequences?

FURTHER STUDY: Read Psalm 130. This psalm is another prayer of penitence. It “is the confession of a sinner who in despair cries unto the Lord for forgiveness. He recognizes that if the Lord should deal with him according to his sin, his case would be hopeless. The Lord reveals Himself to this sinner as a pardoning God.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 915.

Read “Repentance” and “Confession” in the book *Steps to Christ*, pp. 23-41.

“David often triumphed in God, and yet he dwelt much upon his own unworthiness and sinfulness. His conscience was not asleep or dead. ‘My sin,’ he cried, ‘is ever before me.’ He did not flatter himself that sin was a matter with which he had nothing to do, and that should not concern him. As he saw the depths of deceit in his heart, he was deeply disgusted with himself, and prayed that God would keep him back by His power from presumptuous sins, and cleanse him from secret faults.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1147:3, “A Live Conscience Leads to Confession.”

“God intended the history of David’s fall to serve as a warning that even those whom He has greatly blessed and favored are not to feel secure and neglect watchfulness and prayer.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 724.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What ultimately was the foundation of David’s acceptance with God? Was it his sorrow, his confession, his repentance? Or was it the righteousness of Christ credited to Him?
2. Why must our hope of salvation be rooted not in ourselves but in Christ?
3. Why is David’s mention of Jerusalem in Psalm 51:18, 19 an appropriate conclusion to his prayer? Apply your answer to your personal prayers for forgiveness and how you perhaps should conclude them.
4. What role does prayer have in confession and in repentance?

SUMMARY: David’s prayers of penitence teach us that to become right with God we must come to Him as we are, confess our sins, and ask Him to cleanse and recreate us anew. “No one who conceals transgressions will prosper, but one who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (Prov. 28:13, NRSV).



God Gave Her Music

J. H. Zachary

SOLOMON ISLANDS—The happiness of the new parents turned to sorrow when they discovered that their infant daughter was blind. They named her Metol Maki, but people called her Blind Metol Maki.

The little girl did not go to school, but she was a natural leader. When she was a teenager she became the village devil priestess.

Not everyone in the village was a devil worshiper; the village chief had become a Christian. He asked for someone to come and teach his people about God. Beven Stephen, an Adventist lay preacher, answered the call and came to teach the people about Christ. Blind Metol Maki and several others in the village turned from the devil and embraced Christianity.

The new members felt an urgent need for a church in which to worship. They did what they could to make their dream come true. They went into the forest and cut timber and prepared local materials for the walls. But they needed money for the metal roof, for paint and nails, and for the cement floor. How could they raise the funds when they had nothing to sell in the neighboring towns to earn money? Blind Metol Maki wanted to help too, but she wondered what a blind teenager could do to help raise money to build God's house.

Beven Stephen, serving as the lay minister, had listened to Blind Metol Maki sing. He was convinced that God had given her a gift of music, and he encouraged her to learn some Christian songs and make a cassette recording to sell. Her cassette would bless others and raise funds for the church.

She agreed to try and began memorizing some songs. Soon her cassette was ready. The believers each took some to sell, praying that people would buy the recordings that would enable them to build their church. Within a few days the cassettes had all sold. Blind Metol Maki's efforts encouraged other members to work harder for their church. Thrilled by the sales of the cassette, Beven Stephen encouraged Blind Metol Maki to enlarge her repertoire and present a benefit concert in the largest city on the island.

By the time you read this, Blind Metol Maki's mountain village will have a new Adventist church. But even more important, a young woman who was born blind and never attended school is using her talents to encourage others to follow Jesus as their personal Savior.

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

Produced by the Office of Mission
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A Prayer for God's Dwelling: Solomon



Sabbath Afternoon

LIGHT TRAVELS AT 186,000 miles per second. This means it can circle the globe seven times in, literally, the blink of an eye. Yet, even at that speed, light requires 4.3 years to reach Alpha Centuri, a star near to earth. In contrast, some stars are so far away that—even at the speed of light—it would take billions of years to arrive.

The universe is, indeed, big. Yet, the God who created it is even bigger, not in a physical sense but in the sense that an artist is greater than his or her creation. No matter how wondrous the music, the statue, the painting—whatever is created first existed in the mind of the artist, who had not only the notion of what to create but the ability to create it. In this sense, the creator is always greater than the creation.

Yet the Creator of the creation that we exist in—the Creator of the universe itself—had come to dwell with us. The thought is overwhelming. Of course, the closest association came with Jesus, Immanuel, “God with us.” This week’s lesson, however, deals with another way in which the One greater than all that was made chose to tabernacle with those who were made, and that is in the earthly sanctuary.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

- I. A Dwelling Place for God (1 Kings 8:1-21).
- II. “Hear From Heaven, Your Dwelling Place” (1 Kings 8:17-30).
- III. Prayer for a Rebellious Nation (1 Kings 8:31-61).
- IV. “When You Hear, Forgive” (1 Kings 8:23-61).
- V. “If My People . . .” (2 Chron. 7:11-22).

MEMORY TEXT: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

*(Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 10.)

A DWELLING PLACE FOR GOD (1 Kings 8:1-21).

God always wanted to be near His people, but since Israel entered Canaan, He had been dwelling in humble structures, homes, and tents in Shiloh, Gibeon, and Jerusalem. Embarrassed at the contrast with his own palace, King David dreamed of building a home for the Lord. He drew up the plans and collected the materials. His son Solomon had the honor of building it.

Hundreds of years before, Moses had predicted that God would choose a place for His Name to dwell (Deut. 12:5). The very spot where Abraham had offered his son Isaac and where David had offered a sacrifice to end a devastating plague became the site where Israel presented their sacrifices to God in anticipation of the Great Sacrifice God would provide (Gen. 22:2-14; 1 Chron. 21:15-18; 2 Chron. 3:1).

Solomon spent seven years building the temple, a magnificent structure of stone and cedar, lined with gold (1 Kings 6). With great ceremony, the priests brought the ark and sanctuary furnishings into the temple.

How did God respond to this gift from His people? 1 Kings 8:10, 11. How long did Solomon intend that the gift should endure? Verse 13.

“Had Israel remained true to God, this glorious building would have stood forever, a perpetual sign of God’s especial favor to His chosen people.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 46. Human failure thwarted that purpose. Ultimately, this purpose will be fulfilled when the New Jerusalem descends to earth and God lives with His people forever (Rev. 21:1-3).

Solomon built the temple for the name of the Lord to dwell in (1 Kings 8:17-20). Where else does God put His name? Rev. 14:1. What does it mean to bear His name?

A name is not a mere label of identification but an expression of its bearer’s nature. The full expression of God’s character is given in Jesus Christ, who has manifested God’s name (John 17:6, 26, KJV). Whatever is called by Yahweh’s name is His possession and comes under His authority and protection. God wanted His character to be embedded in Jerusalem, in the temple, and in His people.

What does it mean to bear God’s name before people in your part of the world? What kind of solemn responsibility does that entail?

**“HEAR FROM HEAVEN, YOUR DWELLING PLACE”
(1 Kings 8:17-30).**

Though King David had conceived the plan of building a temple for the Lord, God did not want him to. He told David that his job was to unify Israel and lead them in battle against their enemies. God told David, “You are not to build a house for my Name, because you are a warrior and have shed blood’ ” (1 Chron. 28:3, NIV). So He gave the honor of building a permanent place of worship to his son Solomon instead (1 Kings 8:16-20).

Solomon and David did not resist God’s plan (see 2 Sam. 7:27-29; 1 Kings 8:17-21). Sometimes people want to do a great work for God, but because of a lack of experience or capability the Lord directs that others do the work. Instead of resisting, David stepped aside and let the honor fall on Solomon. As a result, both received great satisfaction.

What principle can we learn from David surrendering His ambitions and plans to the Lord?

In his prayer of dedication, Solomon stated that even heaven is not big enough to hold God (1 Kings 8:27). Though God is infinite, eternal, and incomprehensible to us, He is also very near, a friend and personal companion who will enter into a personal relationship with His creatures and who dwells in earthly sanctuaries made for Him (see *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 766:27, “Will God indeed dwell?”). It is only as we recognize the awesome majesty of our God, however, that we can fully appreciate the wonders of intimacy with Him. “I dwell in the high and holy place, with Him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isa. 57:15).

What was Solomon’s earnest longing for himself, for the people, and for the temple?

1 Kings 8:28-30 _____

Five times Solomon asked God to “hear,” also to “give attention,” and to keep His eyes open. It sometimes appears to human beings that God is not there, that He does not hear, that heaven, His dwelling place, is far away. What if a person feels that God neither is near nor hears his or her prayers? What advice can you give to that person?

PRAYER FOR A REBELLIOUS NATION (1 Kings 8:31-61).

Solomon's prayer contains numerous requests. The first was a plea that God would see that justice was done to those who swore under oath before His altar. How much better our justice systems would be today if their object was to determine the truth rather than to secure a favorable verdict for the rich and powerful!

What did Solomon request for foreigners? How far did he expect Israel's influence to extend? 1 Kings 8:41-43.

The temple of Jerusalem was to be a "house of prayer for all people" (Isa. 56:7). What does this tell us about churches that tend to exclude people based on class or ethnic identity?

Other petitions dealt with the covenant curses (Lev. 26:14-39). What types of calamity did Solomon foresee in 1 Kings 8 that would happen as a result of Israel's sins?

1 Kings 8:33 _____

1 Kings 8:35 _____

1 Kings 8:37 _____

Elijah called down a covenant curse when he declared that there would be no dew or rain except according to his word (1 Kings 17:1). Israel's frequent defeats in warfare were a consequence of sin. When a city was besieged, the population inside the walls would experience starvation, disease, and death (8:37). Leviticus 26:27, 28, and 33 state that one of the punishments for persistent rebellion against God would be foreign captivity (see also 1 Kings 8:46). God was patient with His people for hundreds of years. Then the dreaded blow fell. In 722 B.C., Assyria took captive the northern kingdom of Israel, and Babylon overtook the southern kingdom of Judah in 586 B.C.

How would you help a person who believes that a personal calamity in his or her life was a direct result of a judgment from God? Even if that were the case, could you help that person realize that even in such a circumstance God has not abandoned him or her?

“WHEN YOU HEAR, FORGIVE” (1 Kings 8:23-61).

Most of Israel’s history was spent under the shadow of apostasy and the resulting curses. Yet, mingled with the curses were the promises of mercy to those who would repent (Lev. 26:40-45). It was these promises that Solomon drew upon in his prayer of dedication.

What hope was there for God’s people when they were captive in a foreign land? 1 Kings 8:46-51.

Daniel was one of those captives. He used the very words of Solomon’s prayer as he confessed the sins of his people and begged for mercy (Dan. 9:4-19).

Several times in his prayer, Solomon asked God to forgive. He “recognized that every man who sends a prayer heavenward stands in need of forgiveness. . . . Solomon knew that forgiveness of sin would be the earnest desire of those who prayed. He also knew that man’s hope of receiving an answer to his petitions would rest largely on the sin-pardoning grace of God.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 766.

Will God’s people ever get beyond the need for forgiveness? The doctrine of perfection is unprofitable—it leads to pride or despair. The doctrine of imperfection is satanic—it leads to presumptuous sin.

God’s people do not need to commit acts of sin, but the closer they come to Jesus, the more they will recognize the sinfulness of their own natures and their constant need for forgiveness. It’s an interesting process: The more we come to reflect the character of God and the more we obey His commands, the more we realize our own sinfulness and our need for a God who will forgive us, not based on our own righteousness but on His righteousness. “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference” (Rom. 3:21, 22).

Though Christ’s righteousness alone is the foundation of our acceptance with God, explain the importance of prayer in the process of being reinstated with the Lord after we sin. What other things beside prayer are involved?

1 Kings 8:33, 34 _____

“IF MY PEOPLE . . .” (2 Chron. 7:11-22).

How did God respond to Solomon’s petition? 2 Chron. 7:1, 2, 12-16. What does His response teach us about His attitude toward prayer?

It’s a great thrill to make contact with Almighty God—to pray and receive a reply from heaven. The Lord accepted the steps of repentance Solomon had outlined and had promised to respond graciously.

At the conclusion of the dedication services for the temple, the nation celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles, commemorating the years when God and His people had wandered in the wilderness living in tents. Now, God had a substantial place of rest with His people in their own land. They experienced the great joy of being at peace with Him. If only that “rest” had been permanent!

The dedicatory celebrations inspired the people, and they returned to their homes “joyful and glad in heart for the good things the Lord had done for David and Solomon and for his people Israel” (2 Chron. 7:10, NIV).

What special counsel and warnings did God give to Solomon? 2 Chron. 7:17-22.

Solomon’s story presents an astonishing picture of the weakness of human nature. The deceitfulness of riches, fame, and association with the world lured him step by step away from God. Most people can stand adversity. The real test of character comes when they experience prosperity. It is easier to carry an empty cup than a full one.

Solomon committed the very sins he had prayed he would not commit. He lived most of his years away from God. When he looked back on his life, he found it was all “vanity” (the Hebrew word means “vapor” or “breath”). Wealth, pleasure, hard work, and accomplishments brought him no satisfaction (see Eccles. 1; 2). He reached the top of the ladder of success only to discover he had leaned it against the wrong wall! How could this happen to the wisest man on earth?

How can we live our days so that when we are old we will look back with satisfaction? What are the achievements that bring lasting pleasure—wealth, service, friendships, prestige, close family relationships, sacrifice, a walk with God?

Being connected to God’s love and pouring it generously on those around us is a call Christ makes to each one of us. How can prayer help us do this?

FURTHER STUDY: Solomon's temple was only one example of a place where God loved to dwell. Ever since sin separated humanity from God, God has sought ways to dwell or "tent" in human skin with us. Look up the following texts to learn what God's other temples are: Exodus 25:8; John 1:14; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; Revelation 21:1-3.

One more special temple wherein God wants to dwell is your home. You might wish to plan a special dedication service to invite God's presence there.

"From every Christian home a holy light should shine forth. Love should be revealed in action. It should flow out in all home intercourse, showing itself in thoughtful kindness, in gentle, unselfish courtesy. There are homes where this principle is carried out—homes where God is worshiped and truest love reigns. From these homes morning and evening prayer ascends to God as sweet incense, and His mercies and blessings descend upon the suppliants like the morning dew."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 144.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. We have been warned that, in the church, "Many a star that we have admired for its brilliance will then go out in darkness."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 188. When this happens, it can be a very painful experience because of the influence of these people. What can we do to help protect ourselves as a church when something like this occurs?
2. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:11-14). The word for dwelt comes from a Greek word *skenoo*, meaning "to pitch a tent or a tabernacle" and is related directly to the word translated tabernacle numerous times in the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible. What does this mean that Jesus "tabernacled" among us?

SUMMARY: It is our privilege to dedicate ourselves, our churches, and our homes to be God's dwelling place. We can pray with Solomon, "Arise, Lord, and fill your temple!"



Satisfied!

Berhantinsea Masrekasay

ETHIOPIA—I am 19 years old and already have wasted years of my life. I was searching for something, but I did not know what. Some of my friends invited me to become a member of their cult, but I hesitated. Eventually, they convinced me to quit school and join them. They said the Bible did not prohibit smoking, drinking, drugs, adultery, or other activities I had thought of as sinful.

I started taking drugs, and soon I graduated to selling drugs. But when I learned that the police knew about my activities, I became worried. I did not want to spend my life in prison!

I grew restless and could not sleep. I began reading the Bible, although my mind was foggy from drugs and alcohol. I realized that my life was out of control, but I could not help myself. My soul cried out for hope and salvation. The religion that had promised a good life was choking me. Instead of happiness it brought sorrow, and instead of life it brought death. I cried out to God, and He reached down and pulled me out of the pit of sin.

Two Adventist friends invited me to a nature program at their church. I was inspired by the devotional message I heard. I yearned to have what these Christians had—real happiness, true freedom, and purity. As I prayed, I felt God's power pumping new life into me.

However, the devil was not willing to let me go. He tried to convince me that God could not love me. But God assured me that He loves me and I am His child.

I spent much time on my knees begging God to save me from the sins that I had let bind me. Soon I had the assurance that God accepted me and would abide with me. I stopped associating with my former friends and spent all my time with my new Adventist brothers and sisters.

I moved back into my parents' home. They were not sure they wanted me back. But the changes they saw in my life convinced them that I had met Jesus.

Today I am truly happy. I have returned to school; my life has found direction and purpose. But most important, I have the assurance of God's love and salvation. God has cleared my mind of the foul pollution of drugs and the poisons of my bad behavior. I am at peace. I am satisfied. I have real life in Jesus.

Berhantinsea Masrekasay lives in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

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Prayers for Reformation: Elijah



Sabbath Afternoon

THE CULTURE OF OUR WORLD CAN TURN QUICKLY TO EVIL. It usually does. Like tainted air, this evil seeps through the cracks under the doors and the windows of our hearts and minds and homes. Often, because we are part of the culture, we don't see these cultural evils for what they are. They can even invade the church; in fact, they often do.

In the early centuries, paganism invaded Christianity. "Almost imperceptibly the customs of heathenism found their way into the Christian church. The spirit of compromise and conformity was restrained for a time by the fierce persecutions which the church endured under paganism. But as persecution ceased, . . . *the world, cloaked with a form of righteousness, walked into the church.*"—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 49, 50; emphasis supplied.

The marriage of the Israelite King Ahab with the heathen Jezebel illustrates the union of God's people with the world—a union that always results in apostasy. God still needs Elijahs and prayers of reformation to halt the downward course of compromise.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

- I. **Elijah Against Evil** (Exod. 34:15, 16; see also Deut. 18:9-12; 1 Kings 16:29-33).
- II. **The Curse of the Covenant** (Lev. 26:14-20; see also Deut. 28:15-24; 1 Kings 17:1).
- III. **Showdown on Mount Carmel** (1 Kings 18:16-46).
- IV. **Letdown at Horeb** (1 Kings 19).
- V. **Jesus' Example** (Luke 1:32, 33; 19:41-44; see also John 17:6-19).

MEMORY TEXT: " 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty' " (Zechariah 4:6, NIV).

*(Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 17.)

ELIJAH AGAINST EVIL (Exod. 34:15, 16; see also Deut. 18:9-12; 1 Kings 16:29-33).

Describe the evils of Canaanite culture against which God had warned Israel.

Exod. 34:15, 16 _____

Deut. 18:9-12 _____

Because of the degrading practices of its people, Canaan was ripe for conquest. The conquering Israelites themselves, however, were seduced into idolatry. They might have won the military battle, but they lost the war against culture. When Israel split from Judah and formed the northern kingdom, Jeroboam introduced calf worship to keep his people from worshiping in the southern kingdom of Judah. In all of its history, the northern kingdom never had a righteous king, and the majority of its people were idolaters.

How did King Ahab increase the nation's apostasy? 1 Kings 16:30-33.

Jezebel, daughter of a Sidonian priest-king, was a ruthless, domineering person who exercised a powerful influence over Ahab and the nation. She had a temple built for Baal in Samaria and supported a huge college of Baal and Asherah prophets to practice and foster this religion. She also killed large numbers of the Lord's prophets (see 1 Kings 16:32; 18:4, 19).

Baal worship was extremely seductive to Israel. In order to stimulate the gods to make the land fertile, priests, temple prostitutes of both sexes, and worshipers engaged in sexual orgies after working themselves into an ecstatic frenzy by drinking wine and dancing. Israel, as an agricultural society, thought it necessary to follow the practices of the surrounding nations to guarantee abundant harvests.

As bleak as chapter 16 ends, however, chapter 17 begins with a note of hope. "Elijah appears on the scene as a man with an urgent errand for God. The hour is one of crisis. Sin has invaded the land, and if not stopped, will soon engulf all in tragic ruin."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 811:1, "Elijah."

The dangerous thing about culture is that those who are part of it can't often see it for what it is. Trying to step out of it is like trying to take off your shoes while jogging. As a church, we are part of our culture. What is the only guide we have to teach us which part of our culture is acceptable and which part we must reject?

THE CURSE OF THE COVENANT (Lev. 26:14-20; see also Deut. 28:15-24; 1 Kings 17:1).

What would happen to God's people if they refused to obey Him?

Lev. 26:18-20 _____

Deut. 28:23, 24 _____

God loves to bless His people, but when they forsake Him, He speaks to them through blessings removed. We so often tend to forget God in times of prosperity and seek Him in times of adversity.

From his mountain home in Gilead, Elijah viewed with anguish Israel's deepening apostasy. He prayed that God would invoke the covenant curses to bring the nation to its senses. Read James 5:17, 18 and 1 Kings 17:1. According to Baalist theology, rain is simply Baal impregnating the earth in order that it bring forth its crops. God chose to destroy this claim by revealing that He alone is responsible for the earth's treasures—sunshine, rain, and abundant harvests.

In obedience to God's command, Elijah appeared before a startled Ahab, locked up the heavens, and walked away with the key! It took strong faith for Elijah to predict a long-term dry spell. The countryside, lush and green, seemed beyond the bony fingers of drought.

If Ahab, Jezebel, and her prophets were inclined to sneer at Elijah's curse, they soon had cause for alarm. Weeks and months went by with no rain. The prophets of Baal had plenty of opportunity to invoke their god but reasoned that he must have been asleep or on a journey. The brooks dried up, the grass withered, the crops failed, and gaunt herds suffocated under choking clouds of dust.

There was a key to unlock the heavens, but the people didn't know about it because their leaders had neglected to teach them. What was this key? 2 Chron. 7:13, 14.

"The Christian's most powerful resource is communion with God through prayer. The results are often greater than we thought were possible. . . . Because God's power is infinitely greater than ours, it only makes sense to rely on it—especially because God encourages us to do so."—*Life Application Study Bible* (NIV), p. 2252.

When has prayer been a key that unlocked the blessings of heaven for you? How do you respond when the lock seems to remain shut and the blessings stay in heaven?

SHOWDOWN ON MOUNT CARMEL (1 Kings 18:16-46).

After three and a half years of devastating famine, the Lord told Elijah it was time for the showdown. The God who brought drought could also bring rain (2 Kings 18:1). Elijah summoned the nation to Mt. Carmel.

How did he challenge the people? 1 Kings 18:21, 24.

Many Israelites had been serving both Baal and Yahweh. The time had come for them to take a stand one way or the other. As Elijah proposed a test, the prophets of Baal cringed—their god had been powerless for over three years. Before God could send rain, there needed to be a sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people (1 Kings 18:23, 24). Elijah repaired the altar of Yahweh, which had been in disuse for many years.

Study Elijah’s prayer (vss. 36, 37). Note the length and manner of his prayer and its content. How does it contrast with that of the Baal prophets? (vss. 26-29).

Contrast	Elijah’s Prayer	The Baal Prophets’ Prayer
Length of Prayer Offered		
Manner in Which Prayer Was Offered		
Content of Prayer		

When fire streaked from heaven and consumed the drenched sacrifice, wood, and the altar itself, the people fell on their faces, crying “Yahweh”—not Baal—“is God!”

Why did Elijah follow up the demonstration by exterminating the prophets of Baal? What lesson is taught by this act regarding any compromise with the sinful parts of the culture? How could you apply this principle to your own life? Are there any specific issues on which you, personally, need to make a decision one way or another?

LETDOWN AT HOREB (1 Kings 19).

The exciting day was not yet over. As Elijah prayed seven times under a cloudless sky, his faith clung to God's past performances—the drought, the fire, the promise to bring rain (18:1). *Faith feeds upon the memories of God's past leading.* A tiny cloud was enough to convince Elijah that a deluge was coming. In spite of an all-day fast, Elijah ran with superhuman strength to guide Ahab's chariot through the rain. Then he laid on the ground, wet and exhausted, and fell asleep.

What events happened next that caused Elijah to flee? 1 Kings 19:1-5.

How could his mood change so rapidly from triumph to despair?

For years Elijah had invested all his emotional and spiritual energy in the cause of reformation. Yahweh had given convincing proof that He was God. Surely everyone in the whole nation would be converted, but they were not.

After an emotional high, one often experiences a letdown. Elijah felt that the crusade on Mt. Carmel was a failure. He felt useless, and he wanted to die.

Twice Elijah complained to God, " 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too' " (1 Kings 19:10, NIV; compare vs. 14).

A great wind, a powerful earthquake, and a fire immediately followed Elijah's first complaint, but God was not in any of them. Then came a gentle whisper—the unmistakable voice of God (vss. 11, 12). Then Elijah knew that God does not always show Himself in vigorous ways. It is not always the person or event that creates the greatest excitement. A humble heart who hears and obeys God's still, small voice can be just as mighty.

Miracles are often not enough to convince stubborn hearts. They sometimes arouse more bitter opposition (John 11:45-50, 57). God must not only startle the people with signs but persuade them with the still small voice of the Spirit.

Elijah, a man of God, a prophet in fact, became disheartened and discouraged. How should his experience help us through our own periods of discouragement?

JESUS' EXAMPLE (Luke 1:32, 33; 19:41-44; see also John 17:6-19).

What plans did God have for Israel through the coming of Jesus? Luke 1:32, 33, 71, 74; 2:32.

In Luke 19:41-44, we read that these plans were not to be fulfilled. Israel's leaders would not recognize that God was visiting His people in the person of Jesus! (Luke 1:68). If they had, the covenant blessings described in Isaiah 62 and repeated in Luke 1 and 2 would have been poured out. Because of their constant opposition, Christ "seemed to do little of the work He longed to do in uplifting and saving."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 678.

Jesus, however, would not be discouraged. "In the heart of Christ, where reigned perfect harmony with God, there was perfect peace. He was never elated by applause, nor dejected by censure or disappointment. Amid the greatest opposition and the most cruel treatment, He was still of good courage."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 330.

What instructions and encouraging fact about Israel did the Lord give to Elijah? 1 Kings 19:15-18.

"One cure for depression is to get busy. So the first word from God to Elijah after the dramatic demonstration on Mount Horeb is 'Go.' The anointing of Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha would ensure that the campaign against Baal worship would continue, and a faithful remnant of Yahweh worshipers would survive."—Lloyd J. Ogilvie, general editor, Russell H. Dilday, *The Communicator's Commentary: 1, 2 Kings* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), vol. 9, p. 224.

The campaign also would succeed because God had a remnant. Reformers need to remember and be encouraged by the fact that God has always worked through a remnant. "When we give ourselves wholly to God and in our work follow His directions, He makes Himself responsible for its accomplishment. He would not have us conjecture as to the success of our honest endeavors. Not once should we even think of failure. We are to co-operate with One who knows no failure."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 363.

At the end of His ministry, Jesus looked with satisfaction upon His eleven disciples whom God had given Him. He prayed that God would keep them faithful (John 17:6-12). Through this small remnant, the world would be evangelized (vs. 20).

Raphael was a newly baptized member. Early on he saw things in the church that greatly upset him. What can you do to help someone like him? How does "remnant theology" help in a case such as this?

FURTHER STUDY: In review, how does Psalm 51 reassure us that God will honor our prayers for, and sincere efforts on behalf of, spiritual reform?

Read any or all of the following from *Prophets and Kings*: “Carmel,” pp. 143-154; “From Jezreel to Horeb,” pp. 155-166; “‘What Doest Thou Here?’ ” pp. 167-176.

“When upon Mt. Carmel he [Elijah] offered the prayer for rain, his faith was tested, but he persevered in making known his request unto God. . . . Had he given up in discouragement at the sixth time, his prayer would not have been answered, but he persevered till the answer came. . . . God does not always answer our prayers the first time we call upon Him; for should He do this, we might take it for granted that we had a right to all the blessings and favors He bestowed upon us. Instead of searching our hearts to see if any evil was entertained by us, any sin indulged, we should become careless, and fail to realize our dependence upon Him, and our need of His help.

“Elijah humbled himself until he was in a condition where he would not take the glory to himself. This is the condition upon which the Lord hears prayer, for then we shall give the praise to Him.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, pp. 1034, 1035, “Important Lessons From Elijah.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Was Elijah’s request for drought, fire, and rain his idea or God’s? Explain your answer. What scriptural support did Elijah have for his request? How can we know when we are praying and acting according to God’s will?
2. Human cultures greatly vary. People also tend to think that their culture is the best or does things the “right” way. How can we as a church learn to respect cultural difference without being judgmental, simply because the practices are different? Why is it a good idea to leave as much of a culture intact, provided these practices don’t violate biblical principles?
3. Elijah thought he was the only person left in Israel who worshiped the true God. There were others, however (1 Kings 18:13; 19:18, 19). How would working together with these people have helped him?

SUMMARY: In the work of reformation, whether personal or corporate, we are at war with powerful enemies. We need to pray for wisdom, tact,



Natasha's Search for God

J. H. Zachary

RUSSIA—Natasha Dashidordzieva comes from a Buddhist background. But growing up in Russia, she was taught to trust in atheistic communism. She tried to start several businesses, but each time her efforts resulted in failure.

Discouraged, Natasha began searching for God. She read many books, visited religious teachers, and endured many strange practices in an attempt to find God. Finally, she gave up in frustration.

A neighbor gave her some religious books, but Natasha decided to return them unread. She knocked on the neighbor's door and found several women holding a Bible fellowship. The neighbor invited her to stay, and out of courtesy she did. But she was not interested in any new religious ideas.

However, Natasha noticed that the women seemed happy. As the women shared ideas, Natasha suddenly blurted out, "I don't believe there is a living God. If there is, why do I pray but receive no answers?"

Natasha told them of her failed business attempts, and one woman suggested that she should try giving God a tithe of her income and see what happened. It sounded ridiculous to her, but finally Natasha decided to try it. She was amazed when her business efforts began to prosper. Natasha continued attending the fellowship group.

The women planned an outing in the country, and Natasha wanted to go. But she had no money. A friend owed her some money and had not repaid it. Natasha prayed, "Lord, if You really exist, please send my friend to repay the money she owes me—today." As the hours passed and her friend did not come, Natasha wondered if God had heard her prayer. Then at sunset her friend appeared with the money she had borrowed.

Natasha was convinced. She gave her life to God for His service. Recently she attended a training program for missionary volunteers who are preparing to plant churches in unentered cities of eastern Russia. Natasha has been assigned to work in the city of Kiahta, on the border between Russia and Mongolia. This is a strategic area, for the people living in this region can work freely in Mongolia, a country that has fewer than fifty Adventists.

Natasha feels her new life is like a fairy tale, for because of Jesus Christ, her life already has a "happily ever after" ending.

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

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Prayers of Desperation: Hezekiah



Sabbath Afternoon

THOUGH ONLY EARLY SPRING, the farmers were already in fear of another horde of locusts, like the one that had devastated last summer's crops. A similar disaster would ruin many families, which was why April 26 was to be a day of fasting and prayer for every woman, man, and child in the community. That day, a hush fell across the land while prayers ascended to God. The next morning, the sun rose in a cloudless sky. The thermometer soared to mid-summer heat—and everyone watched in horror as the warm earth stirred with the dreaded insects.

During the next three days, the heat hatched a grand army of locusts. What kind of an answer to their prayers was this? But on the fourth day, the temperature dropped and frost enveloped the earth, destroying most of the locusts. That summer, the wheat waved tall and green.

As you study this week's lesson, think about the role of prayer in your life, especially when your prayers were uttered in frantic and fearful desperation.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

- I. Assyria, the Rod of God's Anger (2 Chron. 29; 30; 32:1).
- II. Crisis Without and Within (Isa. 36; 38) .
- III. The Siege of Jerusalem (Isa. 36; 39).
- IV. "Spread It Out Before the Lord" (Isa. 37:1-20).
- V. Deliverance! (Isa. 37:14-38).

MEMORY TEXT: "Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord" (Isaiah 37:14, NIV).

*(Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 24.)

ASSYRIA, THE ROD OF GOD'S ANGER (2 Chron. 29; 30; 32:1).

The Assyrians had been the scourge of Israel and Judah for over 150 years. They attempted to eradicate the national identity of their captives by removing them from their homelands and settling them in foreign lands. In 722 B.C., they conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and took these people captive.

King Hezekiah of Judah inherited the problem of Assyria from his father, Ahaz. Ahaz disobeyed the Lord by asking the Assyrians for aid against his enemies. The Assyrians only made things worse by overpowering Judah. Ahaz also closed the temple and set up idolatrous shrines all over Jerusalem and the nation (2 Chron. 28:19-21, 24, 25).

What reforms did Hezekiah introduce when he became king? 2 Chron. 29:3-5, 10; 30:1. What explanation did Hezekiah give for the troubles Judah had suffered? 2 Chron. 30:6-9.

“A right regard for Him was no abstraction for God’s people, but was grounded in pure and regular worship at the temple. Hezekiah at the beginning of his reign found the temple in a shocking state of neglect and misuse. It was a mirror of the people’s condition before God. So two related tasks were necessary, to put the temple aright and to use it for a service [through] which the people . . . could get right with God again.”—Lloyd J. Ogilvie, general editor, Leslie C. Allen, *The Communicator’s Commentary: 1, 2 Chronicles*, vol. 10, p. 370.

Read the invitation Hezekiah sent to the nation in 2 Chronicles 30:6-9. Underline the parts that appeal to you. Why do you find these sections particularly meaningful?

The huge crowd that came to Jerusalem enjoyed the “camp meeting” so much that they extended the celebration for another week (vs. 23). Serving God brings joy. Under Hezekiah’s rule the nation enjoyed years of peace and prosperity. Eventually, however, the king of Assyria made war on Jerusalem, and the peaceful times quickly stopped (2 Kings 18:17).

Like Hezekiah, have you ever experienced a time when, even though you were working diligently for the Lord, things were going badly? Explain why wholehearted service to God does not always guarantee peace and prosperity.

CRISIS WITHOUT AND WITHIN (Isa. 36; 38).

In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign (701 B.C.), Assyrian King Sennacherib began a western campaign against his rebellious provinces, including Judah. Hezekiah took measures to fortify Jerusalem. In an engineering feat for that time, he had a tunnel built from the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam, channeling water into the city to assure an abundant supply during the siege. He then fortified the city's walls. (For further study, see the *SDA Bible Dictionary*, pp. 484-487, "Hezekiah.")

Meanwhile, the Assyrian forces conquered 46 villages, including the fortress city of Lachish. Hezekiah tried to appease Sennacherib with a massive payment of silver and gold, but to no avail (2 Kings 18:14-16; see also the *SDA Bible Dictionary*, pp. 1003, 1004, "Sennacherib."). Sennacherib gloated in his Annals, "I laid waste the large district of Judah and made the overbearing and proud Hezekiah bow in submission."—*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, George Arthur Buttrick, dictionary editor (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1962), vol 2: E-J, p. 600, "Hezekiah."

While Hezekiah faced the Assyrian invasion from without, his body was struggling with a life-threatening disease from within. Troubles often come in droves.

What message came to him from the prophet Isaiah, and how did he respond? Isa. 38:1-3.

At 39 years of age, Hezekiah was not ready to die. In response to his weeping, Isaiah returned with this message from God: " 'I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city' " (Isa. 38:4-6, NIV).

"Hezekiah did not conclude that it was useless to pray, as though the prophetic message had made death inevitable. If we pray, God may be able to do for us that which He could not do if we did not pray. Requests for healing, however, must be made in the spirit of submission. God alone knows whether the answering of a petition will work for the good of those concerned and redound to [contribute to; advance] His glory."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 966:2, "Prayed."

Why does God sometimes wait to act on our behalf until we pray? Are you presently facing a seemingly hopeless situation? Do you feel that praying about it is useless? Have you ever faced situations where what you specifically asked for in prayer hadn't come, but the mere act of praying itself gave you strength to deal with the situation?

THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM (Isa. 36; 39).

Hezekiah won his battle with death, but the Assyrians still controlled all of Judah except Jerusalem. Why had the Lord permitted such calamity to strike His people, even after the national revival? Apparently, the years of prosperity that followed had undermined the character of the nation. As stated before, often it is easier to find God during adversity than during prosperity.

What character weaknesses did Hezekiah and his people reveal? Isa. 39:1-4; 22:9-11.

Hezekiah's pride was in his possessions rather than in God. The king who had disposed of idol worship in Judah had a few idols of his own! Also, he depended on the arm of flesh by making an alliance with Egypt despite Isaiah's warning recorded in 31:1-3: "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots . . . but do not . . . seek help from the Lord" (NIV).

The people trusted in the city's defenses rather than in God. And when the siege was temporarily lifted, they indulged in feasting and drunkenness, saying " 'Let us eat and drink . . . for tomorrow we die!' " (Isa. 22:12, 13, NIV).

One dreaded day, the Assyrian commander appeared outside Jerusalem and called for a conference with Hezekiah's officers outside the city walls. How did he try to confuse and deceive Hezekiah's men? Isa. 36:4-7; 13-20.

Compare his words to what Satan told Eve at the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:1-5). How does Satan use similar strategies to confuse and deceive us?

The commander's defiance of God was commonplace. Because of Israel's repeated apostasies, the surrounding nations no longer feared God, and the commander thought he could safely mock Him.

German writer Gunther Grass once said that all he knows is what he sees, hears, and feels. Why do we tend to trust most in the things that we ourselves can see, feel, or hear? Is this one reason why, in wealthier nations, it's harder to spread the gospel? Think about these questions in the context of Hebrews 11:1.

“SPREAD IT OUT BEFORE THE LORD” (Isa. 37:1-20).

How did Hezekiah react when his officers relayed to him the message of the Assyrian commander? Isa. 37:1-4.

When we reach out to God, we are saying that we believe He exists and that He will help us as He helped Hezekiah. The message the Lord sent to him through Isaiah was, “ ‘Do not be afraid of what you have heard—those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Listen! I am going to put a spirit in him so that when he hears a certain report, he will return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword’ ” (Isa. 37:6, 7, NIV).

Previously, God promised to protect Jerusalem like mother birds hovering over their nests (Isa. 31:5), and He predicted that Assyria would fall by “a sword, not of mortals” (vs. 8, NIV). When Hezekiah was ill, He promised to deliver Jerusalem from the king of Assyria (Isa. 38:6). Are God’s promises not more powerful than a mighty army?

In answer to Hezekiah’s plea for help, Sennacherib raced from Jerusalem when he heard the news that the Egyptian army was advancing on him. Before he left, however, he sent a letter to Hezekiah proclaiming he would return and that no god would be able to save Judah (Isa. 37:9-13).

What did Hezekiah do with the letter? Isa. 37:14-17.

Jesus encourages us to do what Hezekiah did. “ ‘Come unto me,’ is His invitation. Whatever your anxieties or trials, *spread out your case before the Lord*. Your spirit will be braced for endurance. The way will be opened for you to disentangle yourself from embarrassment and difficulty. The weaker and more helpless you know yourself to be, the stronger will you become in His strength. The heavier your burdens, the more blessed the rest in casting them upon the Burden Bearer.

“Worry is blind, and cannot discern the future; but Jesus sees the end from the beginning. In every difficulty He has His way prepared to bring relief. Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 330.

Take time now to spread your case out before the Lord. Thank Him for His past care and guidance. Why is it so important to remember the Lord’s past leading in your life as you attempt to trust Him with your future?

DELIVERANCE! (Isa. 37:14-38).

Hezekiah's prayer was a model of what a prayer for help should be like. What attributes of God did Hezekiah recall as he prayed? Why were these particular characteristics of God so important at this time? Isa. 37:16.

What other features of this prayer do you notice? Isa. 37:17-20.

Hezekiah's prayer emphasizes the following:

1. *A deep sense of God's presence:* " 'Enthroned between the cherubim' " (vs. 16, NIV). "It is a point of the first importance that we should feel, in prayer, that God is with us in very deed and truth; that we stand in his near presence; that the angels who inhabit the heavenly kingdom are not more truly, though they may be more consciously, before him than are we as we take his Name on our lips and breathe our petitions into his ear."—*The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. X, part II: "The Book of the Prophet Isaiah," chap. XXXVII, p. 29.

2. *An attitude of reverence:* " 'You alone are God' " (vs. 16, NIV). It is true that we can pray to God as to a friend, but we must never forget that we are speaking with the Majesty of heaven, the one true God, infinite and eternal.

3. *Complete confidence in God's power:* " 'You have made heaven and earth' " (vs. 16, NIV). "To doubt God's power to interpose on our behalf . . . must be painful to him, and must invalidate our prayer."—*The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. X, part II, XXXVII, p. 29.

4. *Confidence in His interest in us:* " 'God of Israel' " (vs. 16, NIV). "We place ourselves in accord with God's will concerning us . . . when we assume the fact that we are the objects of his deep solicitude, that we are near to his heart, and that he is disposed to do all that is needful for our present well-being and future blessedness."—*Ibid.*

5. *An unselfish spirit:* " 'Deliver us . . . that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone . . . are God' " (vs. 20, NIV). Hezekiah was concerned about the fate of Judah, but even more so, He was concerned that God be glorified.

In times of difficulty, what is your first reaction? Why do some of us seek God only when we are in trouble? If you are facing a difficult problem, of course you will want to pray, but take time now to thank God and praise Him for the many blessings He has given you.

FURTHER STUDY: Review yesterday's lesson. Then read the answer to Hezekiah's prayer in Isaiah 37:21-35. To learn how the Lord's answer was fulfilled, read verses 36-38.

Is God concerned with the fears and worries of His people today? A comforting answer to that question is found in the chapter, "The Invitation," *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 328-332. You also might want to read the following chapters from *Prophets and Kings* concerning Hezekiah: "Hezekiah," pp. 331-339; "The Ambassadors From Babylon," pp. 340-348; "Deliverance From Assyria," pp. 349-366.

"Hezekiah's pleadings in behalf of Judah and of the honor of their Supreme Ruler were in harmony with the mind of God. Solomon, in his benediction at the dedication of the temple, had prayed the Lord to maintain 'the cause of His people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else.' 1 Kings 8:59, 60. Especially was the Lord to show favor when, in times of war or of oppression by an army, the chief men of Israel should enter the house of prayer and plead for deliverance. Verses 33, 34."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 359.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. **What spiritual warfare is the church presently engaged in? How can individual church members and the church as the body of Christ engage in prayer for deliverance from whatever foes it faces?**
2. **Explain how a crisis such as an accident or a serious illness can change our prayer habits. Look at how much suffering Ellen White went through. How do you think her suffering impacted her ministry? What can we learn from Sister White's experiences?**
3. **What things cause us to forget to thank God and praise Him? Think of ways we can remember to thank and praise Him each day.**
4. **What can people do to help their regular prayer life be more like their emergency prayer life?**

SUMMARY: Our God is still mighty enough to save and to deliver us from crises and from sin. Let us pray always that in the process of such deliverance His name will be glorified, whatever the outcome of our particular trying situation.



Victory at Last

Paul Livingston

AUSTRALIA—Pat Turton had everything—a husband she was proud of and a beautiful home on the coast of eastern Australia. But her life was empty. When John Kingston, a literature evangelist, visited her, Pat sensed his relationship with God and began asking him questions. She expressed her desire to know God, and Kingston arranged for Pat to take Bible studies.

Then Pat's husband died suddenly. Pat was devastated, but she continued her Bible studies. However, Pat had an addiction to tobacco, and following her husband's death, her smoking increased.

Pat moved to a small farm some distance away, but the peace she sought eluded her.

One day an Adventist couple living near Pat received a phone call alerting them to Pat's interest in spiritual matters. They visited Pat, and she resumed Bible studies. Eventually Pat was baptized.

But Pat had not gained complete victory over tobacco. She tried to hide her habit from her friends, but the habit drove a wedge between her and God. Soon she stopped attending church and pretended to be away when church members came to visit.

Months passed; Pat tried everything she knew to win the battle over cigarettes. But the habit was stronger than her will. Her health began failing as her smoking increased to 150 cigarettes a day. Then she heard about the church's stop-smoking program and called to see if any sessions were being held in her area. None were. Pat asked for a "stop-smoking-at-home" kit.

As Pat waited for the kit to arrive, she thought seriously about her relationship with God and her inability to stop smoking. She knew she needed to surrender her life fully to God before she could truly gain victory over cigarettes. When the stop-smoking kit arrived, Pat committed her problem to God and asked Him for the victory over tobacco and her will. With strength she received from reading the Bible and the encouragement of a trusted Adventist friend, Pat started the stop-smoking plan.

With God's help she won her freedom from tobacco. She testifies that once she committed her will to God, He took away her desire to smoke, a desire that had enslaved her for years.

Pat rejoices in her new life. She sings as she works and wants to tell everyone what God has done for her.

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The Prayer of Intercession: Daniel



Sabbath Afternoon

HIGH WALLS SURROUNDED ANCIENT CITIES. Sometimes sections of a wall tumbled down, making the inhabitants vulnerable to attack. Then strong men would stand in the gaps to protect the sleeping citizens. At a time of national apostasy, God told Ezekiel: “ ‘I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none’ ” (Ezek. 22:30, NIV). So He permitted the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem, devastate Judah, and take its people captive.

There have been great intercessors in Bible history. Abraham bargained at length with God in behalf of Sodom’s wicked populace (Gen. 18:16–19:29). Moses pleaded for rebellious Israel, willing that his own name be blotted out of the book of life in order that they may live (Exod. 32:31, 32). Paul suffered such agony over his nation’s rejection of Jesus that he was willing to be cursed for its sake (Rom. 9:1-4). In this week’s lesson, we will observe Daniel pleading for his sinful people. In this role, Daniel is similar to Jesus, who always lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25).

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

- I. Daniel, Child of God (Dan. 2:14-23).
- II. Daniel’s Devotional Life (Dan. 6).
- III. Daniel Intercedes (Dan. 9:1-19).
- IV. God’s Answer to Daniel’s Plea (Dan. 9:20-27).
- V. The Ultimate Answer to the Sin Problem (Dan. 9:24-27).

MEMORY TEXT: “ ‘We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy’ ” (Daniel 9:18, NIV).

**(Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 3.)*

DANIEL, CHILD OF GOD (Dan. 2:14-23).

A member of the royal family, Daniel grew up in the court of good King Josiah. As a child, he no doubt read the book of Deuteronomy, newly discovered after being lost during the reign of wicked king Manasseh (2 Chron. 34:14; Deut. 31:24-26). As he heard King Josiah pledge to follow the Lord and obey the words of the covenant written in the book (2 Chron. 34:31), his young heart must have thrilled with the resolve to do the same. From then on, the book of Deuteronomy probably exerted a profound influence on his life.

The boy Daniel must have heard Jeremiah plead with the people of Judah to return to their divine Husband (Jer. 3); and he must have been dismayed by their stubborn resistance. When Daniel was a teenager, a tragic event occurred—King Josiah died in battle. Daniel must have mourned deeply, along with Jeremiah and all the people (2 Chron. 35:23-25). Josiah's successors were weak men who rebelled against the rising power of Babylon, provoking Nebuchadnezzar and his armies to enter Jerusalem, plunder the temple, capture some hostages from the royal family, and take them on approximately a 480-mile trek to Babylon (Dan. 1:3, 4). Daniel was one of these hostages.

Read Daniel 1:17-20 and 2:1-18. What do these events tell us about Daniel's character and his regard for prayer?

Now read Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving in 2:19-23. What concept about God does each of the following verses teach us?

Dan. 2:20 _____

Dan. 2:21 _____

Dan. 2:22 _____

Dan. 2:23 _____

Before going to King Nebuchadnezzar with the interpretation to his strange dream, Daniel thanked God for answering his prayer for the wisdom to understand the dream. How do you respond, however, when what you pray for doesn't come as you ask? Why is it important to praise the Lord, anyway?

DANIEL'S DEVOTIONAL LIFE (Dan. 6).

The year 539 B.C. was a tumultuous time in Daniel's life. Now in his eighties, he witnessed the fall of Babylon, under the midnight attack of the Persians, and the ascent of Darius the Mede to the throne (Dan. 5:30, 31; 9:1). Darius showed extraordinary confidence in Daniel by inducting him into his government with the intention of making him prime minister. The political feuding caused by this plan nearly cost Daniel his life (chap. 6).

In the midst of this turmoil, Daniel's heart grew heavy with a deeper concern: What was to become of his people? From Jeremiah's prophecy, he believed the time had come for the Jews to return to their homeland after 70 years in exile (Jer. 25:11, 12). He may even have hoped that the return would usher in the new-earth state, for Isaiah's prophecies blended the two events (see Isa. 35; 66). However, his own visions over past decades pointed to a succession of oppressive empires, climaxing with an evil power that would trample the saints and the sanctuary before God would set up His kingdom and restore the sanctuary. To the aging Daniel, hoping for the speedy restoration of his people, city, and sanctuary, this was a bitter disappointment. He seems to have thought that the 70-year captivity would be prolonged because of the people's sins.

Imagine we have a camera lens that can look into the past. Notice Daniel's study on the second floor of his home on the palace grounds. It contains an extensive library, for Daniel is a man of letters, familiar with many languages and cultures (1:17). We especially notice the well-worn Hebrew Scriptures—the books of Moses, the chronicles of Israel, and the writings of Jeremiah.

In the afternoon Daniel enters, his figure stooped with age and clothed in sackcloth, as he opens a scroll to the prophecy of Jeremiah and kneels before the west window facing Jerusalem, where He prays daily at the time of the morning and evening sacrifice and also at noon (Dan. 6:10; 9:21; Ps. 55:17).

Why was it necessary for Daniel to pray for something God had already promised? Why should he agonize over the future of his people if it were already determined?

Why did Daniel, in chapter six pray in his usual manner, even with the death threats against him? Was there any specific command he would have been violating if he closed the window or prayed in secret? Why put himself in such danger? Is there some specific lesson the Lord wants to teach us through this incident? If so, what?

DANIEL INTERCEDES (Dan. 9:1-19).

What promise gave Daniel the confidence to pray for his people? Jer. 29:10-14.

“God did not forget his people, even though they were captive in Babylon. He planned to give them a new beginning with a new purpose—to turn them into new people. In times of deep trouble it may appear as though God has forgotten you. But God may be preparing you, as he did the people of Judah, for a new beginning with him at the center. . . .

“According to God’s wise plan, his people were to have hope and a future; consequently they could call upon him in confidence. Although the exiles were in a difficult place and time, they should not despair because they had God’s presence, the privilege of prayer, and God’s grace. God can be sought and found when we seek him wholeheartedly. Neither strange lands, sorrows, frustration, nor physical problems can break that communion.”—*Life Application Study Bible* (NIV), p. 1339.

As you read Daniel’s prayer, summarize the sins that led to captivity. Dan. 9:5-14.

What special sin was Israel guilty of committing? Dan. 9:6.

Israel’s history shows that it is dangerous to despise God’s prophets. Are we guilty of this sin today? God has entrusted us with expressions of His love by revealing to us wonderful truths through the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White. Have we undermined these messages by disputing how they were given rather than what they say? Or have we simply not bothered to read them? Or do we reject them because they condemn sin in our lives?

What verses in Daniel’s prayer show that he trusted in the mercy of a gracious God?

Part of Daniel 9:13 often translated “and understand thy truth” could also be translated “and prosper in thy truth.” Why has God revealed truth to us? How can we prosper in that truth? Have we, either as a church, or even as individuals, prospered in God’s truth as much as we could? Explain your answer.

GOD'S ANSWER TO DANIEL'S PLEA (Dan. 9:20-27).

In his prayer, Daniel requested that the God who brought Israel out of Egypt with a mighty hand would bring His people out of Babylon (Dan. 9: 15, 16) and that He would restore His city and His sanctuary without further delay.

In what ways was God's answer encouraging to Daniel personally? Dan. 9:20-23.

After greeting Daniel with words of personal encouragement, the angel Gabriel told him that after 70 years of captivity, his people could look forward to 70 weeks (490 years) of blessings, mingled with conflict (vs. 24).

The 70-week period would begin with a decree to restore and build Jerusalem, but the rebuilding would be difficult (vs. 25). Though various decrees regarding the city had been issued, the decree specified by Gabriel was issued in 457 B.C. by Artaxerxes (Ezra 7; see also the *SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 80, "Artaxerxes."). For details on this date, see the *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 852-855.

Daniel also had prayed about the desolate sanctuary (Dan. 9:17). What future was there for it? Dan. 9:24, 26, 27.

"Gabriel is sent by God, and Daniel receives new light. We may find, especially in spiritual matters, that there is a real exertion of energy on God's side in response to prayer. He is not a passive hearer of prayer. His answers are not the mere echoes of sympathy. They carry active aid. . . .

"Daniel prays for the restoration of his people. God answers the prayer by revealing the already settled purpose of this restoration. God often answers prayer in a different way from our expectation. Sometimes he opens our eyes to blessings already given, but not recognized. . . . Sometimes he changes our desires, and inclines our hearts to rest in his will by showing us that it is better than our will. The best prayer is that in which we seek to be reconciled to the will of God [see Matt. 26:39]."—H. D. M. Spense and Joseph S. Exell, editors, *The Pulpit Commentary* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers), vol. XIII, part I, p. 278.

Why do you think Daniel received such a quick answer to his prayer? Notice, too, that Daniel was not praying for himself but for others. Are your prayers selfish and self-centered?

THE ULTIMATE ANSWER TO THE SIN PROBLEM (Dan. 9:24-27).

The biggest burden that weighed Daniel down was the sinfulness of his people. Gabriel's message contained a more magnificent answer to the sin problem than Daniel imagined, because it contained the solution for not only his own people's sin but for the sins of the whole world.

Daniel confessed that his people had no righteousness of their own (vs. 18). How would God supply their lack? Dan. 9:24, 25.

God would bring in a supply of everlasting righteousness that would be enough to counteract all the wickedness of the human race (Rom. 5:18). He would do this through the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He alone could atone for sin. He alone could bring in everlasting righteousness, because He alone possessed the "righteousness of God" (Rom. 3:21, 22), the righteousness that He credits to all who truly believe.

Daniel 9 tell us what must happen to the Messiah in order to make the atonement for sin. Jesus emptied Himself of His glory and rank. His unity with the Father was broken up; His human support dried up. His life was "cut off." He gave until nothing more remained to be given.

"Before Gabriel had satisfied Daniel with respect to Israel's earthly fortune, he poured into Daniel's ear what was uppermost in his own mind—the advent of the Son of God. The grandeur, the value, the triumphant issues of Messiah's work,—*these* were the tidings which he delighted to convey. The revelation which, in any age, man most needs is revelation respecting the removal of sin—knowledge how the great redemption can be accomplished. No tidings from heaven can ever be so joyous as *these* . . . that sin shall meet with final destruction, and that reconciliation between God and man is made secure."—*The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. XIII, part I, p. 287.

It was in response to Daniel's prayer that this wonderful prophecy was given, a prophecy that 500 years before the event gave the dates and basic work of Jesus. What can this tell us about the importance of prayer and how God often acts in response to our prayers?

Suppose Daniel had not prayed as he did. Would we not have been given this prophecy?

FURTHER STUDY: As our study this week shows, intercessory prayers can bring powerful results. Even though God is all-powerful and all-knowing, such prayers can change the world and individual lives. Read what else the Bible has to say on intercessory prayer in 1 Timothy 2:1-6. Praying for others reminds us that we are not alone in our joys and sorrows and that others have special needs as well. Praying for others helps us to focus outward, not inward.

Read "Daniel's Prayers" in *The Sanctified Life*, pp. 46-52.

"Prayers of intercession give God permission to work in another person's life. Our prayers for healing, salvation, or protection are unhindered by distance, political borders, or locked doors. We can surround loved ones thousands of miles away with the protection of holy angels through prayer. Our prayers can reach wherever God can reach.

"A spirit of intercession will come among God's people before He comes. About this experience, Ellen White wrote: 'Many were praising God. The sick were healed, and other miracles were wrought. A spirit of intercession was seen, even as was manifested before the great Day of Pentecost' (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 126)." —Dorothy Eaton Watts, *Prayer Country: A Tour Guide to the Wonders of Prayer* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1993), pp. 116, 117.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Daniel's prayer in chapter 9 is not only an intercessory prayer, it is a model prayer for forgiveness. What characteristics mark it as such?
2. The inspiration for all true prayer comes from God's attributes and character. Which of God's attributes motivated Daniel's prayer in chapter 9? Why did he concentrate on these particular characteristics?
3. Daniel prayed for some of Judah's specific needs. What needs in your church and community could you pray for?

SUMMARY: The only solution to the problem of sin is the sacrifice of the Messiah. It is the privilege of each of us to ask forgiveness for our own sins and to intercede for others by claiming the atoning blood of Jesus.



Another Chance for José, Part 1

Mérlinton Pastor de Oliveira

BRAZIL—José was not interested in religion. He was young and had no time for God. When his mother and sister became Adventists, he often made fun of their new religion.

One day the teenager awoke with pain in his joints. Within a few days, his entire body ached. The doctor told him that he had rheumatism, a condition that causes the body's joints to become painfully inflamed. The doctor ordered hospital treatment and bed rest.

José was angry and frustrated. He wanted to work, to spend time with his friends, and to ride his motorcycle. Time hung heavy on his hands. With nothing to do all day, he reluctantly began reading some books that his sister offered him. Later she persuaded him to take Bible studies. But he was still not willing to accept Jesus as his Savior.

After a month in bed, José could not stand it any longer. He began going out with his friends for a drink or some fun.

One Saturday José and his friends were invited to a wedding party. There would be plenty of alcohol, music, and girls. José did not want to miss it! José and a buddy eagerly mounted his motorcycle and sped toward the party. José slowed down for a speed bump in the road, but the car behind him did not see the bump or slow down. José saw the car's headlights approaching and realized that it was going to hit them!

Suddenly José flew through the air and hit the pavement. He lay stunned for several seconds. Then he sat up and looked around. His motorcycle lay in a heap of twisted metal some 250 feet (80 meters) away. He looked for his friend but could not see him.

"Eugenio!" he called out, but he heard no answer. Then he saw his friend, lying under the car that had hit them. José stumbled over to his friend. Neither one of them had been wearing a helmet, and José could see that his friend had suffered serious head injuries. He was bleeding heavily, but he was alive.

A bus driver who had seen the accident offered to take the boys to the hospital, and José accepted, for an ambulance might take too long, and his friend needed help right away.

The doctors examined José and released him, but his friend had suffered massive head injuries. He was in intensive care, and the outlook was not good.

(continued next week)

José das Neves Louro Filho is studying theology at Northeast Brazil College, where Mérlinton Pastor de Oliveira is a pastor.

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Prayer: Listening to Jesus



Sabbath Afternoon

HUDSON TAYLOR, GREAT MISSIONARY TO CHINA, carried staggering burdens—the mission of bringing Christ to all of China, despite personal sickness, persecution, and heavy administrative responsibilities. When in communion with Christ, these burdens seemed light. When separated from Christ, he felt like a diver under water without air, or he felt like a fireman on a burning building with an empty hose. “I continually mourn that I follow at such a distance my precious Master,” he wrote to a trusted friend. “I cannot tell you how I am buffeted sometimes by temptation. I never knew how bad a heart I had.” Nearness to Christ had been so precious that any distance—any clouding of the Master’s face—was unbearable.

The reply he received from his friend changed his life. He gathered his fellow workers around him to tell them what the Lord had done for his soul. “I looked to Jesus,” he said, and “Oh, how joy flowed!” Thus, other hearts were moved and blessed and “rivers of living water” flowed forth that still flow today.

As you study this week’s lesson, learn more about the reply Taylor received and how it can transform your life.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

- I. **Sitting Down With Jesus (John 14:1).**
- II. **The Future Is Now! (John 14:1-3).**
- III. **No Real Separation (John 14:4-6; 15-23).**
- IV. **“I Am the Vine; You Are the Branches” (John 15:1-11, NIV).**
- V. **How to Bear Fruit (John 15:1-16).**

MEMORY TEXT: “Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me” (John 15:4, NKJV).

* (Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 10.)

SITTING DOWN WITH JESUS (John 14:1).

If you wanted to sit down for an intimate conversation with Jesus, you probably would not choose the evening of His arrest and trial. Jesus, though, reserved those last hours for a special season of fellowship with His disciples. This week, let us join Him in our own “upper room” of communion with Him as we learn that prayer is not just talking with Jesus. It also is listening to what He has to say to each of us individually.

On that last evening alone with His disciples, what was Jesus’ concern for them? John 14:1.

Instead of being overwhelmed with His own approaching ordeal, He sought to dispel the gloom that had fallen on them all. His actual words were “Believe into God—believe also into me.” The peculiar expression *believe into* is found only in John’s gospel. Believing *into* Jesus means more than intellectual belief. It means entering into intimate fellowship with Jesus, becoming one with Him (John 17:20, 21). When we have such a relationship, it will be second nature for us to spend time listening to Him.

When our hearts are troubled by our daily cares, it is impossible to trust in Jesus. Without this trust, it is impossible for us to listen to Him.

What comforting promises did Jesus give His disciples to prepare them for the long separation from Him? John 14:2-4.

In Jesus’ day, when a young man was betrothed to a woman, he would go back to his father’s house to prepare a home for her on his father’s property. After the home was ready, he would bring her to the house he had prepared. Jesus applied the language of betrothal, the language of love, to His disciples. He was going to His Father’s house in heaven to prepare a place for His bride, the church. Some day, He will come to claim her, “that where I am there you may be also.”

While the bride-to-be is separated from her fiancé, surely every thought centers upon him in some way. This is how it should be with us while we wait for Jesus to return. If we are so focused on Him, His voice will be the first and only sound we hear in our “upper rooms.”

How do you respond to someone who says “I try to commune with God, but I never hear Him *talk* to me”?

THE FUTURE IS NOW! (John 14:1-3).

Most of us are well acquainted with John 14:1-3. Deeper meanings, however, lie in these verses than we usually see. John, more than the other Gospel writers, caught a magnificent element of Jesus' teaching that scholars sometimes call "present eschatology." *Eschatology* is the study of last-day events, such as the judgment, the resurrection, Jesus' ascension to heaven, the gift of eternal life, and dwelling with Jesus. In Jesus' teaching, all these events occur in the present, as well. He often speaks with double meanings so the spiritual invades the literal, heaven invades earth, and the future invades the present. Following are two examples:

1. We read in John 13:30 that "Judas . . . went out and it was night" (NIV). Literally, it *was* night. However, Judas also entered a spiritual night from which he would not return.

2. In John 12:32, Jesus says " 'I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself' " (NRSV). Jesus was lifted up physically *on* the cross. He also is highly exalted *through* the Cross.

When we are alone with Jesus in our "upper room," listening to what He has to say, these deeper meanings become especially clear and appropriate to us personally.

Explain the spiritual meanings in the following verses.

John 13:10 _____

John 1:51 _____

John 5:25; Eph. 2:1-5 _____

Jesus loved to bring the blessings of eternity into the present. We pass from death to life at the resurrection, but the spiritually dead can come to life and receive eternal life now (John 5:24, 25; 3:36; 6:54). This does not mean unending life on the horizontal level but a vertical connection with God that transforms our earthly existence. We recognize these blessings, receive them, and nurture our connection with God in our "upper rooms," where "we allow inner distractions and frustrations to melt away before him as snow before the sun"; where we "allow him to calm the storms that rage within by saying, 'Peace, be still.'" —Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), p. 162.

Which of these blessings, mentioned above by Foster, have you experienced in a very personal way?

NO REAL SEPARATION (John 14:4-6; 15-23).

The promise of reunion with Jesus at His second advent comforted the disciples. Jesus knew, however, that this was not enough to cheer their sad hearts. Therefore, He also promised to give them, in this life, the blessings of the future He had just listed. After Jesus told the disciples He was going away, He added, “And you know the way where I am going” (John 14:4, RSV). Which way was that? Thomas confessed total ignorance (vs. 5).

Read Jesus’ explanation in verse 6. Explain in your own words how to go to the Father.

Notice how Jesus shifted from a literal journey toward the Father’s house to a spiritual journey. Going to the Father’s house is not just a future experience when Jesus comes the second time. By believing “into” God and Jesus (vs. 1)—by becoming one with Them—we go to the Father.

Jesus said, “I will come again, and receive you unto myself” (vs. 3). How does He come to us now?

John 14:16-18 _____

Here is an amazing fact about the members of the Godhead—when you have One, you have the Others too. Just as the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Jesus (Col. 1:19), so the whole Godhead comes when the Spirit enters in (compare with John 14:23). Jesus comes to each of us when His Spirit comes to our hearts.

Where is God’s special “dwelling place” now? John 14:23.

Jesus’ going away “is not really a departure but the opening of a door into a new age where the presence of the Father, Son, and Spirit is eternally guaranteed to the believer.”—Walter R. L. Scragg, *Adventist Review* (Nov. 27, 1980), p. 5.

In your “upper room,” the Holy Spirit attunes your ears to the special words God desires to say to you only. What can you do to open yourself to this intimate relationship with God? What things can interfere?

“I AM THE VINE; YOU ARE THE BRANCHES” (John 15:1-11, NIV).

Jesus continues His private instruction with the disciples in the upper room by teaching them that He is the vine and they are the branches (John 15:5). Explain what He means.

Jesus did not say He was the *stem* and we are the branches. He is the total vine, and we, as branches, are part of Him! Christ is one with His people like a husband and wife are one, like a temple with its foundation are one, and closer yet, like a person with a body united to its head is one (Eph. 5:31, 32; 2:19, 20; 1:22, 23).

It was this concept of the vine and its branches that transformed Hudson Taylor's life. Shortly after his transformation, he met his friend Mr. Judd, who had replied to his letter. Mr. Judd later recalled Hudson Taylor exclaiming, “ ‘Oh, Mr. Judd, God has made me a new man! God has made me a new man! . . .’ ” Later, Hudson himself rejoiced, “ ‘I have not got to *make* myself a branch. . . . The Lord Jesus tells me I *am* a branch. I am *part of Him*, and have just to believe it and act upon it. If I go to the bank in Shanghai . . . and ask for fifty dollars, the clerk cannot refuse it to my . . . hand and say that it belongs to Mr. Taylor. What belongs to Mr. Taylor my hand may take. It is a member of my body. And I am a member of Christ, and may take all I need of His fulness.’ ” Mr. Judd commented, “ ‘He was a joyous man now, . . . a bright, happy Christian. He had been a toiling, burdened one before, . . . with . . . not much rest of soul. It was resting in Jesus now, and letting Him do the work—which makes all the difference!’ ”—Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission* (London: China Inland Mission, 1955), pp. 172, 173.

Is the vine a symbol of Jesus and the individual or of Jesus and the body of believers? John 15:5-8. Explain your answer.

All the “you” pronouns in the Greek are plural. The closest bonding that human beings can possibly experience occurs when hearts are united through mutual love for Jesus.

The goal of being alone with Jesus in your “upper room” is to be so united with Him that you will be one of the living, vibrant branches growing from the Vine. To be so, a necessary part of prayer is being still and knowing that He is God (Ps. 46:10). Then we are nourished as the vine nourishes the branches.

HOW TO BEAR FRUIT (John 15:1-16).

Explain our function as branches of the Vine. What effort does a branch make to bear fruit? John 15:4, 5.

Jesus made us the loveliest part of the vine—the part that bears flowers and fruit. A branch does not bear fruit by struggling but by its connection with the vine.

In John's Gospel, what is meant by fruit? Look at the following verses in their setting: John 4:35; 12:24; 17:20.

How does one abide in Jesus? What role does the Word have in this process? John 15:7. What role does love have? Verse 9.

“The scion is engrafted into the living vine, and fiber by fiber, vein by vein, it grows into the vine stock. The life of the vine becomes the life of the branch. . . . The sinner unites his weakness to Christ's strength, his emptiness to Christ's fullness, his frailty to Christ's enduring might. Then he has the mind of Christ. The humanity of Christ has touched our humanity, and our humanity has touched divinity.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 675.

What privileges come with abiding in Christ? John 15:7, 16. See also John 14:12-14; 16:23, 24.

When our mind is one with the mind of God and our will is in harmony with His, we can approach the Lord with faith and assurance. “He is well pleased when [His people] make the very highest demands upon Him, that they may glorify His name. They may expect large things if they have faith in His promises.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

Our highest wish and the Father's greatest pleasure will be that we bear fruit that will remain through all eternity (John 15:16). To stand by the throne of God and see souls that we have won and whom they, in turn, have won will be pure joy!

What is it about prayer that makes us more open to the Lord? What does prayer do to us that enables the Lord to work in our lives? What happens to a Christian who neglects prayer?

FURTHER STUDY: This week's lesson has only sunk a few test holes into the riches we can mine from John 14 and 15. For deeper insights, read both chapters in their entirety. As you do, constantly ask yourself how you can apply Jesus' promises in these chapters to your life.

Also read "Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled" in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 662-680.

"In all who are under the training of God is to be revealed a life that is not in harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices; and everyone needs to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' Ps. 46:10. Here alone can true rest be found."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 363.

"Be still. Literally, 'let be,' 'desist,' 'give up.' God Himself speaks these sublime words. The first clause of this verse [Ps. 46:10] has been paraphrased: 'Hush! Cease your tumult and realize that I am God.' We talk too much and listen too little."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 745:10, "Be still."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What causes us to "talk too much" in many of our prayer sessions?
2. List and discuss ways we can prevent our prayer sessions from being one-sided—where we do all the talking and God does all the listening.
3. In many ways, prayer is a means of dying to self. What does this mean, and why is that so important for our spiritual life?

SUMMARY: Though Jesus has departed from this world, He has not left us alone. He has promised that the entire Godhead will come and make Their home with us in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Our greatest responsibility and privilege is to abide continually in Jesus. One way of doing so is to meet with Him in our "upper room," where we can shut the door against the clamor of life and listen to what He has to say.



Another Chance for José, Part 2

Mérlinton Pastor de Oliveira

BRAZIL—José and his friend were riding their motorcycle to a party when they were struck by a car. José was not seriously injured, but his friend suffered massive head injuries and lay unconscious in the intensive care unit of the nearest hospital.

After being released from the hospital, José went to the police station to file an accident report. It was after midnight when he finally started for home. He had not called his mother to tell her of the accident, because he knew she would worry.

As he made his way home along the quiet city streets, José thought about the accident, thought about his friend's life, which hung on a thread because of another driver's inattention. José realized that his own life could have ended that same instant. He knew that if he had died his life would have been without purpose and without God.

He remembered the times he had made fun of God and of his mother's faith. But now he was ready to turn his life over to God.

Arriving home, he opened the door and found his mother waiting up for him. She stared at him, dirty and torn and bruised, while he told her what had happened. When he finished he looked at her and said, "Mother, I want to give my life to Jesus." Mother and son knelt together, while José asked Jesus to take over his life.

José's friend died a few hours later. And in a sense, José also died that day. His former life of pleasure and carelessness in regard to sin died, and in its place was born a new life in Christ, a life that had purpose and meaning.

José had quit school, but after the accident he resumed his education with a new zeal and purpose. Today, three years after the accident that took the life of his friend and forever changed his own life, José is studying at the Adventist college in northeastern Brazil, where he is preparing for the ministry. He wants others to know what can happen to them if they choose to live a life of self-seeking and carelessness. But José also wants them to know that with Christ living in their hearts their lives can become a wonderful adventure with God.

José das Neves Louro Filho is studying theology at Northeast Brazil College, where Mérlinton Pastor de Oliveira is a pastor.

The High Priestly Prayer: Jesus



Sabbath Afternoon

HEAVEN AND EARTH ONCE WERE AT ONE WITH EACH OTHER. Then sin came and drove them apart. It is Satan's mission to break up all godly unions—whether it be marriage, the family, the church, or tribes and nations. John's Gospel paints the contrast between heaven and earth as follows:

The World Above	God	Light	Life	Truth
The World Below	Satan	Darkness	Death	Lies

Jesus came to bring life to a world of death, light to a world in darkness, truth to a place of lies. He descended from the world above to be the ladder uniting the two realms. In Jesus, divinity and humanity are united so that He becomes our High Priest, representing God to us and us to God. He brought heaven down to earth, and at His ascension, lifted humanity up to God.

As you study this week's prayer, examine your heart to see what Jesus' conversation with God means to you personally.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

- I. "The Hour Has Come" (John 17:1-5, RSV).
- II. Mutual Ownership (John 17:6-10).
- III. "Father, Keep Them" (John 17:11-19, RSV).
- IV. In the World but Not of the World (John 17:13-19).
- V. "That They May All Be One" (John 17:20-26, RSV).

MEMORY TEXT: "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who are to believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:20, 21, RSV).

*(Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 17.)

“THE HOUR HAS COME” (John 17:1-5, RSV).

Concluding their time in the upper room, Jesus gathered His eleven disciples around Him and lifted them up in prayer. First, He prayed for Himself (vss. 1-5), then for His disciples (vss. 6-19), and finally for all believers. Thus, Jesus has prayed for you (vss. 20-26).

Christ’s “hour” had come. “The hour” had been planned since the foundation of the world. He had anticipated His “hour” throughout His life on earth. To Him, the hour of His death was His hour of glory: He would glorify His Father, and His Father would glorify Him (John 17:1).

What glory was there in being lifted up on the cross? What would He accomplish through it?

John 12:23, 24 _____

John 12:31 _____

John 12:32 _____

The crucifixion appeared to be anything but glorious. At the crossroads of the world, Jesus would be stripped of all human dignity and degraded by the very people He came to save. Incredibly, though, to Him it was an hour of supreme glory. He was about to illumine the world and the onlooking universe with a glory never before witnessed, though He and the Father had shared this glory before They created the world (17:5)—the glory of self-sacrificing love. Jesus was anticipating the grand results of His suffering on the cross (Isa. 53:10, 11).

What was Jesus’ secret of being jubilant in the face of a cruel death? John 17:13; Heb. 12:2.

Through faith, Jesus transcended time and space. He could see the glory of the future and bring it into the present darkness. He could rise above earthly gloom to the presence of His Father (John 17). He invites us also to “come to the Father” through Him (14:6). We may “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Look again at Hebrews 4:16. What do the promises in there mean? What does it mean to approach God “boldly”? How could you, right now, or in any “time of need,” apply the promises in this text to your life?

MUTUAL OWNERSHIP (John 17:6-10).

Jesus rejoiced because He had completed the work God gave Him to do (John 17:4). What work was that? Verses 6, 8, 12.

Jesus considered that His mission on earth was to reveal the Father to His disciples so they could share this revelation with the world. He had sown the seed. They were to sow more seeds and reap the harvest (4:35-38), making their work greater in extent than His (14:12). All subsequent generations would believe in Jesus through their efforts (17:20).

In verse 8, Jesus tells His Father two things about the eleven men listening to His prayer:

1. They had accepted Jesus' teachings, unlike the Pharisees and others who had heard Him.
2. They knew beyond a doubt where Jesus had come from, and acceptance of this led them into further truth.

List the possessions the Father and the Son hold jointly. John 17:5-10.

Jesus and His Father do not own separate bank accounts. They share everything jointly, and we are one of Their most precious possessions.

How do we become God's "possession"?

John 3:16-18 _____

John 12:32 _____

John 14:6 _____

John 15:16 _____

Both the Father and the Son work for our salvation. The Father draws us to Jesus (6:44), and Jesus draws us to Him by His Cross (12:32). In this sense, we are Their property, obtained at great cost to Them, and They derive great joy from us. We have a role to play, too, however. We must respond to God's drawing power.

How does knowing that we have been "bought" at such a great price change our views about ourselves? What does it tell us about our worth?

“FATHER, KEEP THEM” (John 17:11-19, RSV).

What was Jesus’ great concern as He faced separation from His disciples? John 17:11.

“Jesus is about to leave; hence He commits the disciples to His Father’s care. . . . They would be left in an evil world and would need special grace in their battle against sin. This keeping power every Christian may claim. God will not suffer him to be tempted above what he is able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). He is impregnable to the assaults of Satan so long as he battles in the strength and light of Heaven. However, God keeps only those who choose to be kept. When against divine counsel men willfully place themselves upon the enemy’s ground they cannot expect to be preserved by the power of God.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1052:11, “Keep.”

Though it’s so easy to forget, we do live in a world where supernatural forces are always at work. In our humanity, with our own carnal and worldly weapons, we are incapable of fighting against those powers that are hostile to us. We can no more fight Satan on our own than we could shoot down a military jet with a slingshot. That’s why we have to rely on Divine power, the power of God. More than anything else, prayer is the method by which we grasp hold of that power—as did Christ.

“As a man He supplicated the throne of God till His humanity was charged with a heavenly current that should connect humanity with divinity. Through continual communion He received life from God, that He might impart life to the world.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 363. Through our prayer life, we may be so charged with the power of self-sacrificing love that our faces radiate the glory of God—His name on our foreheads.

Jesus saw in His disciples the seed of His church that would spread over continents and ages to become a great multitude that could not be numbered, standing before the throne, praising Him for His salvation (Rev. 7:9, 10). This was Jesus’ joy, and in John 17:13 He prays that we will experience this same joy in full measure. In order for us to do so, we must learn to abide in Him as branches abide in the vine (lesson 10). Then we will experience the power of God’s name and the joy of serving Him.

There’s a phrase that supposedly someone once used in the heat of a military battle: “Praise the Lord, but pass the ammunition!” What do you think this means? How could you apply that principle to your own life? Or should you even apply it?

IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD (John 17:13-19).

Why does the world hate Jesus and His people? John 17:14; 15:18, 19.

“Because Christ’s followers don’t cooperate with the world by joining in their sin, they are living accusations against the world’s immorality. The world follows Satan’s agenda, and Satan is the avowed enemy of Jesus and his people.”—*Life Application Study Bible* (NIV), p. 1916. Jesus told Peter that Satan wanted to “have” him. The adversary of souls claims every sinner as his own (Zech. 3:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:10). For this reason, Jesus guards us. He does not want to lose a single soul.

“ ‘I [Jesus] give them eternal life, and they shall never perish and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one’ ” (John 10:28-30, RSV).

Grasp a coin in your left hand. You are just as secure in the hand of Jesus, even more so. Then wrap your right hand around your left hand. You are secure in the Father’s hand as well. When tempted to doubt your own salvation, claim the promise that both Jesus and the Father will hold you firmly in Their hands.

List and explain the things Jesus and His people have in common.

John 17:13, 16 _____

John 17:18, 19 _____

In Jesus’ high priestly prayer, He “put his whole soul into an adoration of thanksgiving to the Father for allowing him to suffer for the world. . . . [A]ll through the prayer he keeps speaking of his disciples as a gift of God to him. . . . Lovingly and trustfully he commits them to the Father’s watchfulness and care. . . . that they may hold together, and be one in heart and mind and purpose.” —George Arthur Buttrick, editor, *The Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1952), vol. VIII, p. 742.

Why would Jesus, the Son of God, need to consecrate Himself? What does this say about the importance of consecrating ourselves to God?

“THAT THEY MAY ALL BE ONE” (John 17:20-26, RSV).

After Jesus prayed specifically for His eleven disciples, He broadened His prayer to include “those who will believe . . . through their [the disciples’] message” (John 17:20, NIV).

What was Jesus’ supreme wish for those of us who followed His disciples? John 17:21-23.

Why is it so important that this wish be fulfilled?

The Father and the Son are closely bonded together. They never act independently but always are united in everything They do (John 5:20-23). They share a common love for fallen humanity to the extent that the Father sacrificed His Son, and the Son sacrificed His life (3:16; 10:15). Neither one seeks His own glory, but each brings glory to the Other (17:1). To know One is to know the Other (14:7, 9). This type of relationship is what Christ desires for us, the members of His church.

The unity Jesus is speaking of is “an expression of the creative diversity within the Godhead. As there is only one ‘true God’ who manifests Himself through differing functions of Father, Son, and Spirit, so the loving unity of the body of believers is expressed through a rich variety of gifts and ministry. The whole family of God is a beautiful montage [picture] of differing cultures and temperaments, colors and gifts, offered to God in worship and ministry that He may be glorified.”—Lloyd J. Ogilvie, general editor, and Royce L. Fredrickson, *The Communicator’s Commentary: John*, vol. 4, p. 258.

Love is the “glue” that will hold us together in Christian unity (17:26). *Love, oneness, and glory* are closely related. Love holds the universe together. Selfishness tears it apart. We find the Christian definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Sometime during the remainder of this week, read and meditate upon this definition.

How do you deal with a church member who is upset by things happening in the church and is thus causing disunity? At the same time, is unity at any cost a biblical principle? For example, if a group of church members, or even a pastor, were teaching that the Sabbath was no longer binding and that violating it was not a sin, would dealing with them be appropriate, even at the cost of unity? Who decides over which factors, if any, are worth splitting a church?

FURTHER STUDY: To reflect further on the theme of love and oneness as expressed in Jesus' prayer in John 17, read the following: Psalm 133; Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 John 3:1, 11-24; 4:7-21.

Also read *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 680.

Jesus' prayer in John 17 "is a lesson regarding the intercession that the Saviour would carry on within the veil, when His great sacrifice in behalf of men, the offering of Himself, should have been completed. Our Mediator gave His disciples this illustration of His ministration in the heavenly sanctuary in behalf of all who will come to Him in meekness and humility, emptied of all selfishness, and believing in His power to save (MS 29, 1906)." —Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1145, "Illustration of Jesus' Intercession in Heavenly Sanctuary."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does Jesus' high priestly prayer teach you personally about His present work in your behalf? With such a prayer as this, how should we view the work He is presently doing for us?
2. When we read Jesus' prayer in John 17, we are struck by how easily He talked with His Father. What can we learn from this example about conversational prayer?
3. When Jesus prayed this prayer, it was a very special moment in His life. List and discuss special moments in the lives of people and the church when prayer is essential.
4. In what specific ways does Jesus' prayer apply to His followers and the church today? How might the church be changed if we made Jesus' prayer our prayer?

SUMMARY: Just before Jesus went forth to die, He consecrated His disciples and all succeeding believers to His Father through prayer. The bonds of God's love are the power we need to draw the unbelieving world to Christ. Pray daily for an outpouring of that love upon yourself and the church.



The One-Day River

Joe Dugucagi

FIJI—When Joe Dugucagi (doon-goo-KAHN-gee) joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church, he was the only Adventist in his village. He met strong opposition from others when he tried to share his faith, but eventually a few others were baptized.

The believers held evangelistic meetings, and seven people prepared for baptism. But an eight-month drought had left the nearby river dry. Some skeptical villagers jeered at the Adventists, who insisted on baptizing by immersion, even when there was no water. The only alternative was to baptize the new believers in an oil drum. The day before the baptism, the believers carried water to fill the barrel. That evening they gathered for vespers and once more asked God for rain, though the skies were clear.

The next morning Joe saw puddles of water outside his door. He realized that it must have rained during the night, although he had not heard rain, even on his house's metal roof. Excited, he hurried to the river and found the water level was up to his chest! He ran to tell the pastor the good news.

The believers gathered under the clear sky to worship and praise God and then moved to the river for the baptism. It was a glorious day for the little Adventist congregation!

The following morning when Joe went down to the river to bathe, he found only a few puddles where yesterday there had been a full river. He walked some distance to another channel of the same river and found water there. Apparently, Friday night's rain had caused the river to change course and fill the river channel nearest the village. When the water receded, the river returned to its normal channel.

The villagers were amazed that the rain had filled the river channel in answer to the prayers of the believers and then left it dry the next day. Many who had jeered the Adventists responded with interest.

The church in Joe's village now has about forty members, thanks to God's blessings and to answered prayers.



Joe Dugucagi (left) works in Suva, Fiji, but he spends his weekends in his rural village, where he continues to share his faith.

Prayers for the Church: Paul



Sabbath Afternoon

ROME, A.D. 62. THE TYRANT NERO IS ON THE THRONE.

The palace seethes with vice, intrigue, and murder. Not far away is a house where a prisoner sits chained to a palace guard. Friends and visitors come and go, encouraging him, listening to his instructions, and bearing letters from him to believers in other parts of the empire.

If we were to visit, we might expect to see a man sitting in the gloom, pondering his fate, agonizing over whether he will be executed or released. Instead, he is writing to other Christians about being alive and joyful in Christ. He also is praying for them that they will apply Christ's salvation—His immeasurable grace—to their lives. What kind of experience is this? How can we learn more about it? Paul's prayers for the church in Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:14-20 will explain.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

- I. The Church—Real and Ideal (Eph. 1:1-14).
- II. A Vision of the Church (Eph. 1:15-23).
- III. God's Power in Christ (Eph. 1:19-23).
- IV. God's Power in Us (Eph. 2:1-10).
- V. Filled With All the Fullness of God (Eph. 3:14-21).

MEMORY TEXT: "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6, 7, NIV).

*(Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 24).

THE CHURCH—REAL AND IDEAL (Eph. 1:1-14).

Some people think the Christian church in the days of the apostles was ideal. Actually, it was not all that different from our churches today. The church at Ephesus, for example, had its problems. Paul's letters to Timothy indicate that the church contained false teachers, apostates, idlers, and busybodies (1 Tim. 1:6, 7, 20; 5:13). He warned the elders of Ephesus that "grievous wolves" would infiltrate the church, drawing away disciples after themselves (Acts 20:29, 30). The church of Ephesus then rooted out heresy so vigorously that it became a loveless congregation (Rev. 2:1, 2, 4, 6). Such experiences are typical of the *real* church. In his letter to the Ephesians, however, Paul shows a view of the *ideal* church that astonishes us.

What were Paul's circumstances when he wrote the book of Ephesians? See the *SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 333, "Ephesians, Epistle to the."

Acts 28:16, 30, 31 _____

Eph. 3:1; 6:19, 20 _____

After being arrested and kept in custody for two years, Paul appealed to Caesar for justice and was sent to Rome as a prisoner. For two more years, he was under house arrest, chained to a soldier—a trying time for the aged apostle (Philem. 9, 10). He was tried before Nero and acquitted but later re-arrested, confined to a dungeon, and then beheaded. (See the article "Paul" in the *SDA Bible Dictionary*.)

What is Paul's mood as he writes this letter? List the blessings he specifies. Eph. 1:3-10.

In the midst of persecution with the prospect of execution, Paul still looks beyond his earthly circumstances to the heavenly realms in Christ. Instead of worrying over his fate, he is reveling in blessings he describes in exceptional terms—*riches* that God *lavishes* on those who accept Him.

God predestines that all should accept Him. He "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4, NRSV; see also 2 Pet. 3:9; Ezek. 33:11; Matt. 11:28; Rev. 22:17; John 3:16).

Paul's circumstances teach us that no matter where we are, God blesses us immeasurably. The lesson is obvious. The question is, How do we apply that lesson to our own lives?

A VISION OF THE CHURCH (Eph. 1:15-23).

Paul has caught a vision not only of the rich blessings God has lavished on His people (vss. 3-10) but also of how richly blessed God's people themselves are. He tries to explain this in verses 15-23.

Upon hearing of their faith in Christ and their love for one another, Paul expresses exuberant thanks for the saints in Ephesus (vss. 15, 16). He remembers them daily in prayer, no doubt asking God to help them continue their spiritual growth. For only as any person in any age draws closer and closer to the Savior can that person become more and more like Him.

Paul's concept of the church is so magnificent we need special help to comprehend it. What does he pray God will do for us to help us understand?

Eph. 1:17, 18 _____

Look at the three things that Paul prays we will especially understand. Eph. 1:18, 19.

1. *"The hope to which he has called you"* (v. 18, NIV). Colossians 1:27, written about the same time, sheds light on his thought. "The hope of glory" is "Christ in you." Having Christ in our lives now is a foretaste of the glory of the future.

2. *"The riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints"* is the literal translation. Paul mentions two inheritances in Ephesians, ours and God's (1:14). Our inheritance is all the blessings Paul lists in 1:3-14. Conversely, we are God's possession (1:14) and Jesus' inheritance (vs. 18). Jesus looks at us and recognizes that we are "the riches of His glorious inheritance." Are we, though, all that glorious? Paul's next point explains.

3. *"His incomparably great power for us who believe"* (NIV). "God's mighty power is displayed in the transformation of a sinner into a saint. This remarkable change is not accomplished by psychology, education, or good works; it is an act of divine grace and power." —*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1004:19, "Power."

How does one explain the gap between the great promises given the church and the reality of the church as it exists? How does one explain the gap between the great promises given individuals and the reality that often exists? We know where the fault lies. The question is, How do we remedy it?

GOD'S POWER IN CHRIST (Eph. 1:19-23).

God's power to work in our lives is tremendous and immeasurable (vs. 19). To demonstrate how great that power is, Paul shows what it accomplished in the life of Christ. (Eph. 1:19, 20).

1. God raised Him from the dead.
2. God seated Him at His right hand in heavenly places.

Christ's resurrection proves that no matter what humans may do, they cannot prevent God's purpose from being fulfilled. In our frantic and frenzied world, we can remain calm knowing that God is in control.

How high did God raise Jesus? Eph. 1:20, 22.

Psalm 110:1 foretold this event: " 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet' " (NIV). Compare 1 Corinthians 15:24, 25; Hebrews 1:3. The principalities, powers, dominions, and names that Paul mentions include His enemies, the forces of evil, both earthly and satanic (Eph. 6:12). Paul was suffering from the tyranny of Rome, but Jesus was above Rome. The name of Nero that made armies tremble was a "paper tiger" compared to the name of Jesus.

What significance does Jesus' exaltation have for the church? Eph. 1:21-23.

God gave Jesus, as head over all things, to the church, which is His body (literal translation). When Christ is exalted, His body, the church, is exalted, too. When Christ is seated in heavenly places, His body, the church, is seated in heavenly places with Him. Paul adds the staggering statement that the church is the fullness of Christ! (Eph. 1:23). No wonder we need a special revelation to comprehend the glory of the church! (vss. 17-19).

How can you use these wonderful promises to help those struggling with sin or with addictions?

How can you help a person make these promises real and personal? What is the key to latching hold of these promises and making them work changes in your life?

GOD'S POWER IN US (Eph. 2:1-10).

Compare God's power in Christ with God's power in you, using the following chart:

Text	God's Power in Christ	God's Power in You
Eph. 2:1-3	Christ was dead.	
Eph. 2:4, 5	God raised Christ.	
Eph. 2:6	God seated Christ in heavenly places.	

The life lived apart from Christ is ugly indeed. It took the same resurrection power to raise us from death in sin as it did to raise Christ from death on account of our sins. Raised from death, we become "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

What does it mean to be seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus? Is this not a future privilege reserved for eternity when we will sit with Him on His throne? (Rev. 3:21). Here is another example of "present eschatology," when the blessings of the future invade the present in spiritual form. (Review lesson 10.) Bodily, Paul was in prison awaiting trial by a cruel tyrant. Mentally, he was praising God for every spiritual blessing in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3).

Paul is amazed that God would raise fallen sinners and exalt them so high. How does he describe God's grace in verses 4-9?

When a friend gives you a gift, you do not ask that person how much you owe him or her. Yet many Christians, when they receive the gift of Christ's salvation, feel or believe that there is still something they must do to earn that gift. Paul talks about "the incomparable riches" (2:7, NIV) of God's grace. Nothing we could ever do would equal such a gift. We are to do with it what we would do with any gift—accept it gracefully, enjoy it to the fullest, and share it with others through traditional witnessing activities and acts of service.

How do you explain to someone just what "grace" is? What analogies can you use to show how futile salvation by works is and that salvation must be a gift, unmerited and unearned?

FILLED WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD (Eph. 3:14-21).

Paul concludes his vision of the ideal church with one of the most sublime prayers in the Bible. After describing God's family (Eph. 2:11-22), he pours out his soul, asking Him to do stupendous things for them—His church.

"For this reason I kneel before the Father" (3:14, NIV). Normally, the Jewish attitude of prayer was standing with hands outstretched and palms upward (Mark 11:25). However, Paul's prayer is not the ordinary, incidental prayer inspired by a passing feeling or thought. His desire for the church is so deliberate and passionate that He kneels before God in solemn humility and pleads with Him to grant his request.

Paul proceeds to pray for the Ephesians to receive power through Christ's Holy Spirit. For what reasons does Paul desire the Ephesians to have this power?

Eph. 3:17 _____

Eph. 3:17, 18 _____

Eph. 3:19 _____

Paul speaks of the Spirit and of Jesus coming to make their home with us as Jesus promised in John 14:16-18 and 23. Though the power of God is constantly at work in every breath and heartbeat of our lives, Paul wants the Spirit to penetrate further into the "inner being" of our minds. Then we will be "strengthened with power."

To receive this power, we must first have deep roots (like a tree) and a firm foundation (like a building) based on love (Eph. 3:17). Second, we must experience this power "with all the saints." We cannot fully grasp it on our own. It comes to the church as a body.

Once we have the Holy Spirit's power, we can begin to know something that surpasses knowledge—the width, length, height, and depth of Christ's love.

"God so loved the world" is the breadth of His love. "That He gave His only begotten Son" is the length of it. "That whosoever [the lowest sinner] believeth in Him" is the depth of it. "Should . . . have everlasting life" is the height of it (John 3:16).

What does prayer do to us that allows these promises to become real in our lives?

FURTHER STUDY: Read the closing to Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:20, 21.

Paul's prayer staggers the imagination. It is a field for deep and prolonged meditation. Notice all that God wants us to take into our inner beings: His power, His Spirit, Jesus, the four dimensions of Jesus' love, and the fullness of God.

The conclusion is no less astounding. After making such boundless requests, he says that God is able to do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine"! (NIV). There is no limit to what His power can do for us. This is Paul's vision of "glory in the church and in Christ Jesus" forever and ever! (vs. 21).

After Paul's trip into the heights of the glory of the *ideal* church (Eph. 1-3), Paul descends to the *real* church in the world below. Read chapters 4 through 6 to see how living in heavenly places translates into life in this world. Jot down the counsels that are relevant to your life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How is the closing of Paul's prayer an appropriate conclusion to chapters 1, 2, and 3?
2. If Paul were your prayer partner, how might his prayer for the Ephesians influence your prayer life?
3. Paul included prayers in his letters to the churches. Can you include prayers in your correspondence and contact with others? In what other ways can you approach your prayer life more creatively?

SUMMARY: Paul's great prayers, as recorded in the letter to the Ephesians, teach us that the church is the body of Christ, a part of His being, infused with His blood and breath and life. To be a part of it is the greatest privilege and honor given to human beings.



The Stranger Who Came to Town, Part 1

J. H. Zachary

INDIA—Pastor Jesurathnam Baka was assigned to work in a remote area of India north of Madras (Chennai). As he walked from village to village, young people crowded around him, curious about a stranger who had come to visit them.

But when Pastor Baka told them that he had come to bring them Jesus Christ, the villagers answered, "We already have three village gods. There is no place for your God in our village." Still the people were curious about this stranger. "Please tell us a story," they begged.

The stories Pastor Baka told them about Jesus touched their hearts, and they asked him to stay. Pastor Baka stayed in the village for 20 days and taught the people about Jesus. The stories led to Bible studies and seasons of prayer.

Pastor Baka walked to the next village, where he found a group of children playing marbles under a tamarind tree. He bent over and joined them in their game until a village man saw him. "What are you doing here?" the man asked.

"I have come to bring Jesus Christ to your village," he answered.

The village man told Pastor Baka, "If Jesus is a God, we have no place for Him here. You should leave at once." As Pastor Baka silently prayed for wisdom, one boy said, "Wait! Samuel worships your God. I will go call him!" The boy ran off to find Samuel.

Soon Samuel arrived. "Sir, this is a wonderful day!" Samuel said. "I have prayed for five years that God would send someone to teach us about Jesus. The people here worship a man-god. How can we tell them about the living God?"

Pastor Baka asked Samuel to invite the villagers to a worship service that evening. At sunset a crowd of curious villagers gathered to see the stranger and learn how Christians worship their God. Children scooted close for a better view. Pastor Baka talked about God and His love for them. Then he announced that he would hold public meetings.

Nearly two hundred people came night after night to study and learn about God. When the pastor invited those who wanted to follow Jesus to prepare for baptism, several came forward.

However, Satan was determined that these people who had lived in darkness for so long would not escape to Christ without a struggle.

(continued next week)

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Prayers of Praise: Revelation



Sabbath Afternoon

ON THE VIVID SCREEN OF JOHN'S REVELATION we gaze into heaven to observe worship there. At the heart of heavenly worship is a glorious King on the throne with the Lamb standing before Him. Many choral groups surround Him. From the throne a lone voice frequently cries out. In the inner circle is a quartet of living creatures. Surrounding them is a chorus of twenty-four elders. Beyond is a vast choir of angels. Before our delighted gaze, another group presses its way to the throne—a great multitude that no one can number, from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev. 7:9). Then the focus expands to encompass “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea,” all uniting in praise to God and the Lamb. Even the satanic forces from the abyss “under the earth” will eventually bow down to worship God (Phil. 2:10, 11).

What do these various orders of creation have to say about their God? Their exultant songs express many reasons for exalting the Creator. Learn about these reasons this week and how your prayers can become hymns of praise.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

- I. He Exists (Rev. 4:1-8).
- II. He Created All Things (Rev. 4:9-11).
- III. He Was Slain (Rev. 5:1-12).
- IV. He Judges and Makes War (Rev. 11:15-19).
- V. His Wedding Day Has Come (Rev. 19:1-8).

MEMORY TEXT: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Revelation 5:12, NIV).

*(Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 31).

HE EXISTS (Rev. 4:1-8).

How do the four living creatures around the throne continually praise God?

Rev. 4:8 _____

These creatures are the cherubim who guard the throne (Ezek. 1:5; 10:1). Their threefold repetition of the word *holy* suggests the Trinity, whom John introduces in Revelation 1:4, 5. The One “who is and who was, and who is to come” is God. The second Member is the Holy Spirit, and the third Member is Jesus Christ.

Holiness has the meanings of majesty, brightness, purity, and goodness. God’s holiness separates Him from sin but brings Him close to the repentant sinner. This truth was manifested in Jesus, who though He is the Holy God, nevertheless *tabernacled* among sinners.

God is also the Source of “ultimate reality.” Go back before, after, above, below, and in everything—and the evidence of God is seen. Everything came from Him and depends on Him (Col. 1:17; Rev. 22:13). The welfare of the universe depends on God’s character. How fortunate we are that God is good. How miserable our existence would be if God were a selfish tyrant or if His law were unjust and unfair, as Satan has accused.

Almost all the early Christian writers indicate that John wrote the book of Revelation during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian. Under his rule, emperor worship became a pressing concern for Christians. Many met with persecution for refusing to worship this false god. This was especially the case in the province of Asia, where John first sent the letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2; 3). These second-generation Christians must have rejoiced at his reassurance that the God they worshiped was, indeed, the Lord God Almighty. (See *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 720-723.)

The four creatures sing their praises day and night without stopping. What does this teach us about developing an attitude of reverence and worship toward God?

What is the immediate spiritual benefit to ourselves when we have an attitude of praise?

HE CREATED ALL THINGS (Rev. 4:9-11).

How do the twenty-four elders worship God? What is the meaning of casting their crowns before the throne? Rev. 4:10.

In John's day, a king would signal his surrender by casting his crown at the feet of the conqueror. Occasionally, the Roman army carried with them an image of the emperor so that, when they conquered another ruler, that ruler would throw his crown before the image in a gesture of defeat. As our Redeemer and Lord, God conquers our souls with His grace. We cast our crowns before Him in total submission. We cannot be His disciples without doing so.

How do the twenty-four elders enlarge upon the praise of the four living creatures? Rev. 4:11.

God's creation is awesome—from the vastness of the heavens with billions of systems of stars to the microscopic molecular world with its intricate systems of subatomic particles. He is the God of breathtaking sunsets and delicate flowers. His children recognize in nature the tokens of their Father's love.

However, many human beings want to exalt self in place of God. They want to make humanity the center of worship. Ironically, when they remove God, their lives lose all significance. Life then becomes a product of chance, an accidental collection of atoms thrown into the world with no purpose for existence, no future but extinction. As social scientist Peter Berger once wrote: "There is really nothing very funny about finding oneself stranded, alone, in a remote corner of the universe bereft of meaning. . . ."—Peter Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Publishing Group, Inc.; Anchor Book Division, 1969), p. 33.

By contrast, how satisfying it is to know we are not orphans but God's special creation, made in His image for never-ending fellowship with Him.

If you know people who do not believe in God, ask them to explain (if they can) what they believe the purpose of their life is. Press them to take their premises to their logical conclusion. How can you, as a Christian, show them the utter futility of their beliefs, in contrast to the wonderful hope that our faith has given us?

HE WAS SLAIN (Rev. 5:1-12).

In a tense drama over who can open the scroll of human destiny (see Rev. 5:1-10), a new Figure enters the throne room. How does one of the elders describe Him?

When John looks, what does he see instead? Verses 5, 6.

What a contradiction—a powerful conquering Lion and a gentle dying Lamb. Yet, they are the same Person. The Lion conquers by His overwhelming power. What, then, is the greatest power in the universe? Not missiles or atomic bombs. It is the self-sacrificing love of the Lamb giving up His life for fallen, created beings. God's love has such power that it conquers kingdoms, empires, and stubborn hearts. The Lion is strong, the Lion conquers, *because* He is a dying Lamb. The most powerful force in the universe is God's love.

Read the new song of the living creatures and the elders. How does the Lamb's sacrifice exalt the redeemed? Rev. 5:9, 10.

Jesus' goal was to gather representatives from all peoples, tribes, and nations (Matt. 24:14; 28:19, 20) and unite them into a kingdom whose citizens will be "priests to serve our God" (Rev. 5:10, NIV).

In addition, their new song praises Christ's work in two other areas:

1. He purchased them with His blood.
2. He appointed them to reign on the new earth.

Next, a multitude of angels bursts into song with these words, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (vs. 12, NIV).

Jesus renounced all power, wealth, strength, honor, and praise in His long journey from the throne of heaven to the stable in Bethlehem and the cross on Calvary. In their place, He accepted weakness, poverty, mockery, scorn, and abuse. He never, though, gave up His glory—the glory of self-sacrificing love.

Why should Christ's death in our stead be the foundation of our worship, praise, and prayer?

Discuss this: What would have happened to the human race had Christ not died? Would you even be here to discuss this topic if He had not redeemed us?

HE JUDGES AND MAKES WAR (Rev. 11:15-19).

What great announcement is made in heaven at the climax of earth's history? Rev. 11:15.

Why do the twenty-four elders rejoice? Verses 16, 17.

God's kingdom has been an "underground" power in the midst of enemy territory ever since Satan seized dominion from Adam and became "the prince of this world." Now God takes full control and begins to reign.

How does the last part of verse 17 and the first part of verse 18 describe the transfer of power from Satan's kingdom to God's kingdom? Compare Psalm 2:1.

It is a time of wrath—the wrath of the nations suddenly cut short by the wrath of God. God's wrath is a necessary part of His love. Sin causes suffering; therefore, a loving God must hate sin. Those who choose sin will feel the wrath of God. Salvation is such a tremendous gift that rejecting it is a terrible offense.

What need is there for the judgment as depicted in Revelation 11:18?

To bring an end to the great controversy, there must be a final judgment that reveals God's justice (Rev. 15:2-4; 16:5-7). Though we reap what we sow, neither sinners nor saints receives the full consequences of his or her deeds in this life. There is a moral necessity for judgment, and a future life, in order that justice may be done.

It is God's purpose that every sin should be justly punished. Indeed, every sin has been punished in the Person of Jesus Christ at the cross! No human being ever needs to endure the wrath of God against sin. The greatest sin against God is to reject His gift of forgiveness.

German philosopher Immanuel Kant developed an argument for an afterlife, based on the assumption that if God is just, there must be some sort of final reckoning, because justice certainly doesn't appear in this life. Does the notion of a final reckoning strengthen your faith? What would it say about God if, in the end, there were no final reckoning?

HIS WEDDING DAY HAS COME (Rev. 19:1-8).

What new group takes its place before the throne? What is the significance of their cry, “Salvation belongs to our God” (Rev. 7:10, NIV)? Rev. 7:9, 10.

What further reasons do they have for rejoicing?

Text	Reasons for Rejoicing
Rev. 19:2	
Rev. 19:6	
Rev. 19:7	

There is joy when the great harlot Babylon (a persecuting religious system—(see Rev. 17:1-6) is destroyed, because she is the rival to the Lamb’s bride. As long as God’s people are part of the harlot, the marriage of the Lamb cannot take place. So they are called to come out of her (Rev. 18:4).

The saints are jubilant because the time has at last come for the wedding of the Lamb. At last His bride is ready.

What makes the wedding dress “bright and clean”? Rev. 7:14. Where does the wedding dress come from? Isa. 61:10.

In some cultures—including the heavenly one—the groom gives the wedding dress to his bride. Jesus gives the saints the perfect robe of His righteousness—a perfect standing with God. The wedding dress in this passage also includes her character, her “righteous deeds,” given her by God. The bride must wash her robe in the blood of the Lamb. Revelation 7:14 is a picture of how we are saved through faith (see also Isa. 1:18; Rom. 3:21-26).

Though the great wedding day has not yet come, why can we rejoice in it now? Where is our assurance that we can be part of the wedding? Is that assurance found in ourselves or in someone else?

FURTHER STUDY: What do the following texts teach us about praise, and how can they help us develop a more invigorating prayer life? Psalms 34:1; 113:3; Ephesians 5:19, 20.

Read about the praises of the redeemed when Jesus brings them into His heavenly kingdom, in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 645-652. Notice how many times the praises of Revelation are repeated.

Read also about the time and circumstances when Satan will bow down and confess the justice of his sentence, in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 669-672.

“To praise God in fullness and sincerity of heart is as much a duty as is prayer.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 299.

“Human help is feeble. But we may unite in seeking help and favor from Him who has said, ‘Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.’ Divine power is infallible. Then let us come to God, pleading for the guidance of His Holy Spirit. Let our united prayers ascend to the throne of grace. Let our requests be mingled with praise and thanksgiving.”—*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 485.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Though it is sometimes difficult to understand how prayer works, why is it so important for Christians to pray anyway? How many other things do we do in our life that we don’t fully understand yet know that they work?
2. Why would God, the Creator of the universe, be so interested in our worship? Is there something beneficial to ourselves in worship? If so, what?
3. List and discuss ways we can develop an attitude of praise and thanksgiving as we go throughout our day.
4. The prayers we studied this week were hymns of praise. What are some creative ways we can use the words and music of hymns to enhance our prayer life?

SUMMARY: The book of Revelation shows why all creation will praise God and the Lamb—He always lives, He is our Creator, He redeemed us by His blood, He will claim us as His bride. Before we join the heavenly choirs in singing praises to God, let us practice here on earth. Then the heavenly praises, whose words already are written for us in Revelation, will become our everlasting prayers that will be answered continually and spontaneously by the very presence of Christ Himself.



The Stranger Who Came to Town, Part 2

J. H. Zachary

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INDIA—As Pastor Baka visited the villages in his new district in a remote area of southeastern India, he was met with curiosity, but little interest in religion. “We have no place for your God here,” one man told him. But one villager, Samuel, was a Christian who had prayed for five years that God would send a pastor. Together the men held meetings, and 200 people attended. When the pastor asked for those who wanted to follow Christ in baptism, 35 villagers stepped forward.

On the day of the baptism, the entire village gathered at a lake to watch the baptism. Samuel and his family were baptized first, then a woman stepped into the water. When the pastor raised her out of the water, she suddenly cried out in alarm. “My wedding ring is gone! If I go home without it, my husband will beat me!” she wailed.

“Our God can do anything,” Pastor Baka assured her. “If it is His will, He will show us where your ring is.” When he finished baptizing the new believers, he joined them on the shore and asked them to form a circle for prayer. He prayed that God would reveal His power and glory and show them where the woman’s wedding ring was.

The pastor told two young boys to go into the water and stand on the spot where he had baptized the new believers. “Reach into the water and bring up a fistful of sand,” he said. The youth did as they were told, but they found no ring. “Reach in again and bring up more sand,” he said.

The villagers watched as the boys searched the lake bottom handful by handful. Could the God of the Christians find a small ring in the sandy bottom of the lake? The crowd pressed closer. Suddenly one of the boys shouted, “I found it!” He held up the woman’s ring.

The happy woman cried, “My God Jesus Christ! You are great!” The new believers praised and thanked God for showing the villagers that God is truly the one all-powerful God.

The amazed villagers returned to their homes talking about the miracle of the missing ring. Following this dramatic answer to prayer, the entire village wanted to know more about this new God who had come to live in their village.



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Bible Study Guide for Second Quarter, 2001

Martyrs and murderers, saints and sinners, Judas and Peter—what do these characters have in common? They're just a few of the Bible lives to be studied in next quarters's Bible Study Guide. Join us as the guide takes you on a personal tour through a "portrait gallery" of Bible personalities, featured in *Bible Biographies: Actors in the Drama Called Planet Earth*, by Dr. Wilma McClarty. Be sure to get your copy!

Lesson 1: Christ and Satan—Contenders for Control

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: When Perfection Failed (Ezek. 28:12-15).

Monday: Father of Truth, Father of Lies (John 8:44; John 14:6).

Tuesday: The Savior, the Adversary (1 John 2:1; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:7-13).

Wednesday: Descriptive Names (Isa. 9:6; Rev. 12:9).

Thursday: The King of Kings, the False God of This World (Matt. 4:8, 9).

MEMORY TEXT: John 1:14, RSV.

SABBATH GEM: Satan's jealousy over Christ's authority started a controversy involving every member of the human race. Bible biographies are a holy record of the choices some people made in conflict.

Lesson 2: The Betrayers—Peter and Judas

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: Some Positive Characteristics (Luke 5:5-11).

Monday: The Two Betrayals (Matt. 27:3, 4; Luke 22:54-62).

Tuesday: The Two Betrayals Continued (Mark 14:10; Luke 22:60).

Wednesday: The Aftermath (Matt. 27:5; 1 Pet. 1:1).

Thursday: The Opportunity to Be Saved (Luke 22:21; 22:31).

MEMORY TEXT: Luke 22:61, RSV.

SABBATH GEM: First the good news: Both Peter and Judas were capable, aggressive members of Jesus' elite twelve. Now the bad news: Both betrayed (or denied) Jesus within hours of each other.

Lessons in Braille

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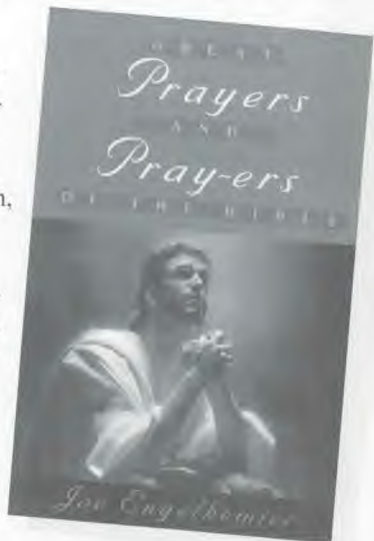
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