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Our Assurance of Salvation



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Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide (ISSN 1096-7400) (Standard Edition). Published quarterly by Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193, U.S.A. One-year subscription in U.S.A., \$8.79; single copy, \$3.99. One-year subscription to countries outside U.S.A., \$11.79; single \$3.99. All prices at U.S.A. exchange. Periodicals postage paid at Nampa, Idaho. When a change of address is desired, please send both old and new addresses.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide (Standard Edition), P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353. Printed in the United States of America.

Editions in Braille available. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506.

Easy Reading Edition available. Contact Pacific Press®, 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687.

Copyright © 2000 by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600, USA.

Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide (ISSN 1096-7400)/No. 419/January-March 2000.

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The adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, the members of which serve as consulting editors. The published guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the authors.

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Dr. LaRondelle and his wife, Barbara, have a son and a daughter (twins).



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

The Assurance of Salvation

As we welcome this new year, we are not only embarking on a new quarter, a new year, or even a new century but on a brand-new millennium! This occurred only once before since the time of Christ. How fitting it is, then, to launch this new millennium with this crucial *message and mission* subject of our assurance of salvation in Christ.

Christians who have experienced the rebirth by the Holy Spirit often wonder whether they can be sure of salvation. This question of assurance arises especially when believers realize that their self-centered nature is still present and their character flaws have not all disappeared. It is then that the joy of salvation seems to evaporate. They ask how it is still possible to be sure of salvation and of acceptance by God. This concern continues as long as we live in this natural body and in this broken world; and it can arise suddenly when adversity strikes or a serious illness crushes our plans for the future or when believers succumb to temptation and fall into sin.

Such a question can seriously affect not only our relationship to God and others but also our Christian witness. Can we be effective in our testimony about Jesus when we are unsure of our own salvation? James Montgomery Boice reminds us: "When Martin Luther was wrestling through these questions, prior to the Reformation, he was a monk shut up in a monastery. Afterward, when he knew that he had been saved by Christ's death and that God had justified him, he left the monastery to launch the Reformation. How can we launch out for God if we are shut up in a monastery of doubts?"—James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1989), pp. 431, 432.

How can believers in Christ regain personal assurance of salvation for the present and for the future? How can they cultivate that blessed assurance in order to be a joyful and effective witness for Christ and His cause? This quarter's Bible Study Guide seeks to answer these questions. We plan to study the correlations of faith and the major revelations of God. We will touch on areas such as faith in: (1) the trustworthiness of the Scriptures; (2) Christ and His work on our behalf; (3) the plan of redemption; (4) the end-time assurances of God's accepting love; (5) His judgments at the end of time; and (6) His last promises in the book of Revelation. In the process we will learn about the saving and sanctifying knowledge and power of Jesus. Some examples from biblical and church history will illuminate our journey of discovery and clarify the issues of a blessed assurance and a false certainty. As our basic motto we adopt the admonition of Peter: "Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. 3:17, 18, NIV).

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where it went;
Tell it where to go!*

— H. K. Singleton



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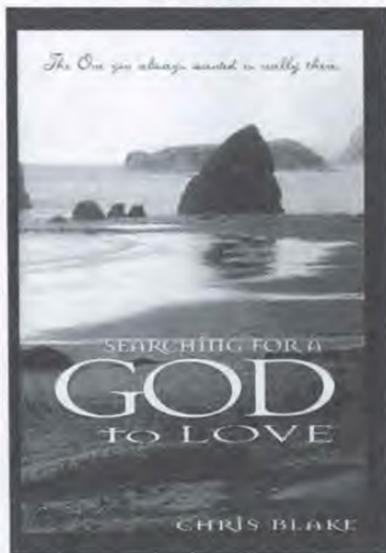
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The Foundation of Our Assurance



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Gen. 2:16, 17; Deut. 30:11-14; Ps. 146:5; Matt. 19:4, 8; Rom. 15:4; Eph. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:15.

MEMORY TEXT: "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: Understanding God's message for us individually and accepting it wholeheartedly brings with it the gift of assurance of salvation.

GOD MEETS OUR NEED. Many would like to have a clearer insight into the Bible, but find much of it difficult to understand. They read Scripture but wonder what it means. God constantly takes the initiative to meet our spiritual need to know His will. When an Ethiopian official was reading the scroll of Isaiah, God sent Philip to him with the question "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone explains it to me?" Philip then explained the passage in relation to Jesus and to the good news of His work of redemption. This brought to the Ethiopian the assurance that God accepted him. Because he was ready to accept the light given to him in Holy Scripture and its fulfillment in Christ Jesus, he experienced the joy of salvation. He requested that he be baptized immediately and then "went on his way rejoicing" (see Acts 8:30-39, emphasis supplied). This example shows that the Bible is a *Christ-centered* book, directed toward the salvation of every individual on earth. The Bible as God's message to each person constitutes the *foundation* of the assurance of our salvation. As you study this lesson, ask the Holy Spirit to establish you in this firm foundation of assurance.

ASSURANCE AND GOD'S WORD, PART 1 (Gen. 2:16, 17; 6:13, 14).

How did Adam and Eve know the will of God? Gen. 2:16, 17; 3:8, 15. How were the patriarchs sure of their calling and acceptance by God? Gen. 6:13, 14; 12:1-3; Exod. 3:2-10.

God began to *speak* to our first parents in the Garden of Eden, giving them a clear command. God spoke again to them after the Fall, calling them to be accountable for their acts and giving them the promise of a Redeemer from their own offspring. Noah was sure of God's command to build an ark, because he had heard God speaking directly to him. Abram left his country, because God gave him a command with a promise. Later he undertook a difficult journey to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, because he was convinced by the direct voice of God (Gen. 22:1, 2). His act of obedience was halted only by God, speaking to him again (Gen. 22:12). Israel's historic liberation from the Egyptian's bondage started because the clear voice of God spoke to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:2-10). Later God even spoke to him "face to face," as to no other prophet (Num. 12:6-8).

Nothing brings more conviction and certainty than the direct voice of God speaking to an individual and confirming it by a supernatural sign.

Why was ancient Israel so sure of the divine inspiration of the Ten Commandments? Mention three dramatic events that convinced the eyewitness.

Exod. 20:1 _____

Exod. 20:18, 19 _____

Exod. 24:12; 31:18 _____

These historical events in the Old Testament indicate that *hearing* the voice of God involved more than a rational acknowledgment of God's message. It motivated the human heart to obey God's revealed will by faith and to hope for His promises (see Heb. 11). Israel's faith and hope were thus based on and motivated by the audible and written Word of God.

"Christ must come to utter words which should be clearly and definitely understood. . . . The principles of God's government and the plan of redemption must be clearly defined. The lessons of the Old Testament must be fully set before men."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 33, 34.

Meditate on Hebrews 1:1-4 and 2 Peter 1:16-19. How are these Bible promises an assurance of salvation to you?

ASSURANCE AND GOD'S WORD, PART 2 (Ps. 65:5; Deut. 4:1, 2, 8; 2 Kings 22:8-13).

Why is God worthy of our complete trust? Ps. 65:5; 146:5, 6. How does this give us confidence and assurance?

We learn from the Old Testament that Israel praised God as their trustworthy Creator and Savior, who blesses everyone who puts his or her trust in Him (Nah. 1:7). He was exalted as "the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas" (Ps. 65:5, RSV). Constantly the emphasis is on God's twofold character as Creator and Redeemer. The faithfulness to God is a faithfulness to His Word, to His covenant promises and exhortations. This God lets "none of his words fall to the ground" (1 Sam. 3:19). To trust Him means to trust in His Word and to believe His promises (see Ps. 119:50, 66). God can never be separated from His Word!

To whom did God entrust His words in a written form for all humankind? Deut. 4:1, 2, 8; Rom. 3:1, 2; 9:4, 5.

The written words of God were not considered to be dead words or laws, but as "living words" that were immediately related to God Himself and to His people (see Deut. 32:45-47; Acts 7:38). They remained the standard of His will for His covenant people and the test of every new prophet in Israel. The writings of Moses were simply called "the Law" (*Torah* in Hebrew), which means teaching or instruction. Together with the writings of the prophets, Israel received from God an expanded Torah, now called "The Law and the Prophets" as the standard of God's will for Israel and humankind. This was not yet the closed canon of Scripture for Israel. The inspired Psalms and Wisdom books became accepted as Holy Scripture, so that we have in the time of Jesus a Hebrew Bible that consisted basically of three parts: the books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings (compare Luke 24:44).

Jesus quoted Moses' own words in Genesis 2:24 about the union of a man and his wife as the words of the Creator Himself. When Jesus spoke of marriage and the Sabbath as being instituted by the Creator "in the beginning," He accepted Moses' Genesis as of unquestionable authority. Also, the apostles accepted the Hebrew Bible as authoritative and trustworthy (2 Tim. 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:19).

What does Jesus' quoting from the Old Testament tell us about its authority and trustworthiness? Matt. 19:4, 8. Why should Christ's trust in the Hebrew Bible build up your confidence in God's Word?

THE CREATIVE POWER OF SCRIPTURE (Eph. 6:17; John 14:16-18).

How does Paul connect the Scripture and the Spirit? Eph. 6:17.

There can be no contradiction between the Holy Scripture and the Holy Spirit. They belong inseparably together. The Spirit not only inspired Scripture but also illuminates the reader's or hearer's understanding as to its deeper spiritual meaning (see 1 Cor. 2:10-13). The Spirit thus reveals to us the Word and convicts us of its message as the Word of God. He also convicts our consciences of God's holiness, of our own sinfulness, and especially of the truth that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of prophecy. The Spirit creates faith in the Word of God when we hear it (Rom. 10:17) and makes God's promises effective in our hearts and lives. The Spirit leads us to obey God's revealed will and gives us the assurance and joy of salvation (Ps. 51:11, 12).

How does Jesus become a living and active reality in our lives? John 14:16-18.

Some religious groups appeal one-sidedly to the Holy Spirit as the authority for their religious morals and practices. The great Reformers in the sixteenth century emphasized the unbroken union of the Word and the Spirit. They compared this to the inseparable union of light and heat from the sun. "Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit speaks to the mind, and impresses truth upon the heart. Thus He exposes error, and expels it from the soul. It is by the Spirit of truth, working through the word of God, that Christ subdues His chosen people to Himself."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

When Martin Luther heard that one of his fellow workers, Karlstadt, had initiated radical reforms, like smashing altars and removing paintings from churches in Wittenberg, he decided to come out of seclusion. He did not agree with the violent manner of such an extremism. In response he preached: "And since I cannot pour faith into their hearts, I cannot, nor should I, force any one to have faith. That is God's work alone, who causes faith to live in the heart. Therefore we should give free course to the Word and not add our works to it."—*Luther's Works*, vol. 51, p. 76; quoted in L. Pinomaa, *Faith Victorious* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 102.

Recall a time when you experienced the transforming power of the Bible in your life. How did it transform your thoughts, your attitudes, or your actions? How do you explain this?

THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE (Deut. 30:11-14; Rom. 10:8-13).

With what clarity does the Scripture communicate the ways of salvation? Deut. 30:11-14; Rom. 10:8-13.

While some assume that the Bible needs a living and authoritative interpreter, Protestantism confesses solemnly that Scripture is plain and simple with regard to salvation and morality. The baptized believer is promised the Spirit, by whom he or she may know God and the truth of salvation (see 1 John 2:20, 27). This is the ground on which Peter counsels all believers: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Pet. 3:15, NIV).

Can the Holy Scripture be compared with a law book that needs a legal court to understand and apply it? Such a concept would bind the human conscience to church authority and a court of theologians! This would mean the loss of personal freedom, responsibility, and the assurance of salvation.

Seventh-day Adventists maintain the Protestant principle that *the Bible is its own interpreter or expositor*. There is no need for an interpretative authority outside itself. Ellen G. White repeatedly called for a return to this "great Protestant principle" (see *The Great Controversy*, pp. 204, 205, 354). "But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines, and the basis of all reforms."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

The Old Testament writings were addressed to the leaders and the common people of Israel (see Deut. 30:11-14; Isa. 1:10; 5:3; 40:1, 2; Jer. 2:4; 4:1). The New Testament was also addressed directly to the members of the Christian churches (see John 20:31; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:3).

How do each of the seven letters of the risen Lord to the seven churches indicate that the individual church member can understand them? Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29, etc.

Consider this comforting counsel: "Those who study the word of God with hearts open to the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, will not remain in darkness as to the meaning of the word."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 36.

Share a time when the Holy Spirit helped make a difficult Bible passage clear to you. How did this affect your thinking and acting?

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE (2 Tim. 3:15-17; Rom. 15:4).

What do 2 Timothy 3:15-17 and Romans 15:4 say about the sufficiency of Scripture?

One famous Protestant creed of the sixteenth century declares effectively that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith: "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. . . . For since it is forbidden *to add unto or to take away any thing from the Word of God*, it doth thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects."—"The Belgic Confession of Faith," 1561, Article VII; in A. C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (Philadelphia, Penn.: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 192.

This fundamental belief does not imply that the Bible contains all the prophetic or apostolic writings that have been written. Many of those writings have been lost (see Num. 21:14; 1 Kings 4:32; 1 Chron. 29:29; 1 Cor. 5:9; Col. 4:16). It means that the Holy Scripture contains a sufficiently clear message of salvation from God and the norm for our moral life, as well as what we need for church order and government.

What do the apostles John and Peter declare about the sufficiency of Scripture for our salvation?

John 20:31 _____

2 Pet. 1:19 _____

God alone decides our salvation and that His promises bring the certainty of divine acceptance to our hearts. Such a certainty can never be grounded on human feelings or logic. It comes, not from within us, but from the reliable and trustworthy Word of God. Consequently, anyone who claims that our salvation depends partly on something else other than Jesus as revealed in the Holy Scripture immediately takes away the assurance of salvation. The Bible constitutes the solid and secure foundation of our salvation. Our hope of life eternal is grounded exclusively in the Word of God and in its central message of Christ Jesus. Thus salvation is in Christ alone, who is the heart and center of the Holy Scripture. This is the primary function of the Bible.

How do you know that your salvation is anchored in the Christ of Scripture and not in the mere words of Scripture?

FURTHER STUDY: Read further on the foundation of our assurance in Heb. 2:1-4; 4:12; Gen. 12:1-3; Exod. 3:2-10; 24:12; 31:18; Ps. 119:52, 81, 105, 111, 130; Jer. 23:29; Eccles. 12:13; Rev. 22:18, 19.

Read the "Introduction" to *The Great Controversy* to explore how the Bible was written. Read also chap. 37, "The Scriptures a Safeguard," to help you study the Bible more faithfully.

In your Bible study, ask first what the text actually says in its own setting, then ask what it meant to those to whom it was addressed; and finally, apply the truth of the message to yourself, for your own spiritual growth.

"In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience."—*The Great Controversy*, p. vii. "It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to follow his example. We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought and comparing scripture with scripture. With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 598.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. For what purpose did God give Israel the Scriptures?
2. How would some basic knowledge of Bible history, the times of Jesus and the apostles, help us to understand better the Bible?
3. What is the fruit of a true understanding and acceptance of the message of the gospel?
4. Why can't we separate Christ and His salvation from the Bible?
5. Knowing that our assurance of salvation is so closely connected to God's Written Word, think of three things you can do to make Bible study a more meaningful part of your daily life.

SUMMARY: The Bible is not primarily a book of laws and regulations, but the Inspired Record of God's words and acts and of human responses throughout history. Divine revelation always bears a historical character. God speaks to us directly through Scripture, so that our conscience is bound by its message. Our personal assurance of salvation is founded on the rock of God's own Word. (See 2 Tim. 2:19.)



Following God's Path, Part 1

J. H. Zachary

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Roberto Azucena hungered for a personal experience with God and a knowledge of the Bible. He joined a charismatic group, where he was told that if the Holy Spirit lived in him, he would show physical proof of it. During worship meetings the air was filled with the sound of strange tongues, but no matter how hard Roberto prayed, he never experienced evidences such as those of other worshipers. He became uncomfortable with his church.

One day two Christian laymen stopped by his home in Leyte, Philippines. They were members of The Quiet Hour evangelistic team that was holding meetings in the city. Roberto told the men that his charismatic church used a large room in his home to hold worship services. Still hungering for that personal relationship with Jesus, Roberto invited the two laymen to hold Bible studies in his home and invited friends from his charismatic church to join them.

As the group studied God's Word together, Roberto realized that these men truly were following the Bible. A wonderful peace filled his heart.

As Bible studies progressed, Roberto was surprised to discover that keeping Sunday holy was not taught in the Bible. Before the week ended, Roberto decided to keep the Bible Sabbath. But his wife was unhappy with his decision. Roberto's bakery had twice gone bankrupt. He had recently borrowed money to start another bakery, and his wife reminded him that Saturday was their most profitable day. How could he pay off the loan if the bakery closed on Saturday? But Roberto was determined to obey God. He closed the bakery on Sabbath. To his wife's surprise, they made more money in six days than they had made when they were open seven days a week.

Roberto began paying tithe. "The Lord has changed my life and given me such joy," he explained to his wife. "I want to do this." But even after seeing the bakery prosper when it closed on Sabbaths, his wife resisted his attempts to tithe.

"I want my share of the business. I will take the children and go live with my parents. I can never follow you in keeping this Jewish Sabbath."

(Continued next week)

J. H. Zachary is international evangelist coordinator for The Quiet Hour, located in Redlands, California.

The Person of Christ: Our Assurance



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Luke 4:16-21; John 3:16; 17:3; Exod. 6:1-3; Mark 8:31-33; Rom. 5:8.

MEMORY TEXT: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:39, 40, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: Christ redeems us from sin, death, and Satan as revealed through the Scriptures.

CHRIST: THE ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE. The person of Christ and His work are so closely connected that we cannot understand the One without the other. One scholar stated: "Not to know who he is means: not to understand what his work is; and not to see his work in the right perspective is not to understand his person."—G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 105.

We receive the benefits of Christ's redemptive work not as blessings that can be separated from His person, or through debates and speculations about His nature, but only through communion with His person. Peter declares that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, NIV).

The lesson for this week gives special attention to the person of Christ. As we study this vital subject, we must always keep in mind the intimate and inseparable connection between who He is and what He does for us.

THE CHRIST OF THE SCRIPTURES (Luke 4:16-21; 24:25-27, 44).

How did Jesus try to convince His listeners that He was sent to fulfill all His covenant promises? Luke 4:16-21.

“While the Jews desired the advent of the Messiah, they had no true conception of His mission. They did not seek redemption from sin, but deliverance from the Romans. They looked for the Messiah to come as a conqueror, to break the oppressor’s power, and exalt Israel to universal dominion. Thus the way was prepared for them to reject the Saviour. . . . They interpreted prophecy in accordance with their selfish desires.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 29, 30.

How did Jesus point out in the Scripture that which had been overlooked regarding the Messiah? Luke 24:25-27, 44.

Jesus’ way of enlightening His disciples through the Holy Scripture teaches us a vital lesson. He does not want us to believe in Him merely on the basis of His wonders and miraculous acts. He wants to establish our faith in Him on the predictive prophecies and types of the Scriptures and on His appeal to the truth they contain. Such a faith can bring the assurance of salvation. When the disciples finally understood how the biblical promises were fulfilled in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, their hearts burned with conviction and joy (Luke 24:32, 45).

When we unite the Old and New Testaments as promise and fulfillment, our hearts can also burn with personal assurance that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of prophecy. Through the Scriptures Christ speaks to us still. Through His testimony we, like the Samaritans, may “know that this man really is the Savior of the world” (John 4:42, NIV).

How did Christ indicate that He was greater than all of Israel’s prophets, kings, and priests? Matt. 12:41, 42.

“He announced Himself greater than the temple, and stood forth proclaiming, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’ He was the one in whom all the Jewish ceremony and typical service was to find its fulfillment. He stood forth in the place of the temple; all the offices of the church centered in Himself alone.”—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 399.

Take a moment to contemplate Paul’s testimony in Philippians 3:7, 8. What does Christ mean to you in relation to the things of this world?

CHRIST'S DEITY: OUR ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE (John 3:16).

Jesus' teaching about Himself leaves no room for doubt concerning His divinity. He clearly declared that He was preexistent with God the Father as His beloved Son. He said in His high-priestly prayer: "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5, NIV). Only One equal with God could claim a direct firsthand knowledge of the Father: "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt. 11:27).

How did Jesus make the point that eternal life is dependent on a living connection with Him? John 3:16; 17:3.

One of the most mysterious yet reassuring declarations of Christ was: "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26). Christ is our assurance from God the Father that every sinner is called to life eternal. Of infinite comfort are these words of Jesus: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and *whoever comes to me I will never drive away*" (John 6:37, emphasis supplied). "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and *I will raise him up at the last day*" (John 6:44, emphasis supplied). Christ expressed His consciousness of deity, stating: "I am the way and the truth and the life. . . . Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:6-9).

However, Jesus did not merely make claims to divinity. He confirmed these claims by His character and deeds. The most convincing miracle of His ministry was the raising of Lazarus from the tomb. Also Jesus experienced His own victory over death. This shows that He can fulfill our hope for eternal life and that He alone is the certainty of our faith and hope. He demonstrated His deity in this supreme act of redeeming love. He alone can therefore say: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25).

How did some disciples of Jesus confess His deity?

Peter: Matt. 16:16 _____

John: John 1:14, 18 _____

Thomas: John 20:28 _____

In what ways does your faith in Christ's divinity boost your confidence and affect the way you live?

JESUS THE GREAT "I AM" (John 8:58; 13:19; Matt. 16:16).

Jesus used the phrase "I AM" [Greek: *ego eimi*] in a variety of settings. In some of these settings it contained a shocking meaning to all whose dogma is a rigid monotheism. Jesus often used the phrase with a clarifying noun (nine times), such as "I am the bread of life", "I am the light of the world", "I am the good shepherd," or "I am the true vine." On some occasions, however, Jesus employed the expression "I am" in an absolute sense, as a distinct, self-contained phrase, without any further clarification.

What did Christ mean by His self-designation as the "I AM" in the texts below?

John 8:58 _____

John 13:19 _____

The last verse implies that this self-testimony of Jesus is part of our faith in Christ. Jesus made this testimony a matter of life and death for His contemporary Jews, when He declared: "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am [the English versions add some explanatory words, like "the one I claim to be," NIV], you will indeed die in your sins" (John 8:24).

Why did the Jews pick up stones to stone Jesus to death? John 8:59; 10:31, 33.

"I AM" was the divine name that Yahweh had revealed of Himself to Moses at the burning bush. "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exod. 3:14, NIV). This divine title Jesus applied to Himself as His own identity. He declared, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). He pointed to His works of salvation to confirm His divine nature: "that you may learn and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (John 10:38). In this exalted claim Jesus expressed the mystery that He and the Father were mutually indwelling. This union implied that Christ is one with God "in nature, in will, and in purpose."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 208.

What important meaning did the name "I AM" have for ancient Israel? Exod. 6:1-3, 6, 7; Isa. 41:4; 43:10-13. What does it mean to you personally when Christ assures you that "I AM the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End"? (Rev. 22:13, NIV).

JESUS “THE SON OF MAN” (Mark 8:31-33; John 12:32-34; 1:51).

The phrase “Son of Man” is used only by Jesus in the four Gospels. It was His favorite self-designation. He mentioned it 65 times. Its significance becomes clear if we grasp it as the prophetic description of the heavenly Being who receives from God all authority and power and dominion as evident in the judgment scene of Daniel 7:13, 14. He was described in appearance as “One like the Son of Man.” This understanding of the phrase as a Messianic title, instead of a reference to Jesus’ humanity, has been widely accepted in contemporary biblical scholarship.

George E. Ladd distinguishes three categories in Jesus’ use of “Son of Man”: the Son of Man serving on earth (Mark 2:10; Luke 19:10); the Son of Man in suffering and death (Mark 8:31; 10:45); the Son of Man in eschatological glory (Mark 8:38; 14:62)—See *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), chap. 11.

Considering the background in Daniel 7, what was the reaction of the Jews when they heard that the Son of Man must suffer and die and thus be “glorified”? What was Peter’s reaction? Mark 8:31-33; John 12:32-34. Explain the meaning of Jesus’ promise to Nathanael found in John 1:51; compare Gen. 28:12.

Jesus came to reestablish communication between heaven and earth, for He was with God, at the Father’s side from eternity. He came to reveal God’s true character and will, which was distorted by many religious teachers. But above all, He was sent by the Father to draw all peoples to Himself for their salvation. Humans’ relation to God would be determined, from now on, by their relation to Christ! Jesus encircles us with His human arm, and with His divine arm He reaches divinity. That is why “the humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244.

“There are thousands today who need to learn the same truth that was taught to Nicodemus by the uplifted serpent. They depend on their obedience to the law of God to commend them to His favor. When they are bidden to look to Jesus, and believe that He saves them solely through His grace, they exclaim, ‘How can these things be?’”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 175.

What is the meaning of Jesus’ words to Nicodemus about the Son of Man? John 3:14, 15. Compare Num. 21:8, 9. What do you depend on to commend you to God’s favor?

JESUS CHRIST: THE OBJECT OF FAITH (Rom. 10:9-13, 17).

The Scripture is never an end in itself, but the means to know Christ, of whom the Scriptures testify. Faith and assurance of salvation cannot exist for one moment without their root in the living God and Savior of the Scripture.

What is the nature of faith that connects us with the living God and Christ? Rom. 10:9-13, 17.

“A nominal faith in Christ, which accepts Him merely as the Saviour of the world, can never bring healing to the soul. The faith that is unto salvation is not a mere intellectual assent to the truth. . . . It is not enough to believe *about* Christ; we must believe *in* Him. The only faith that will benefit us is that which embraces Him as a personal Saviour; which appropriates His merits to ourselves. Many hold faith as an opinion. Saving faith is a transaction, by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. Genuine faith is life.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 347.

Where does saving faith in Christ originate? Who takes the initiative in our salvation? John 6:44, 65; 12:32; Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 2:12-14.

“Must the sinner wait until he is filled with remorse for his sin before he can come to Christ? The very first step to Christ is taken through the drawing of the Spirit of God; as man responds to this drawing, he advances toward Christ in order that he may repent. The sinner is represented as a lost sheep, and a lost sheep never returns to the fold unless he is sought after and brought back to the fold by the shepherd.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 390.

The gospel of God about His Son must be proclaimed in all the world, so that all peoples may hear the message from heaven and begin to know God and to trust His Word. Jesus asked His Father: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word” (John 17:20, NKJV). Thus both God the Father and His Son are the object of our faith. Peter confessed: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16, NIV). “The truth which Peter had confessed is the foundation of the believer’s faith. It is that which Christ Himself has declared to be eternal life.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 412.

In what way did you come to know Christ as your personal Savior and Lord? Share your personal testimony with a friend.

FURTHER STUDY: Study the following texts from Acts to see the relationship between the Messianic prophecies and the apostolic gospel. Acts 2:22-36; 9:22; 13:23, 30-39; 17:2, 3; 18:5, 28. Study also Deut. 32:39; Matt. 16:13, 17, 21-23; John 1:3, 4, 45; 5:39; 11:25, 26; 2 Cor. 8:9; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6.

In order to receive a new appreciation of the breathtaking sweep of Messianic promises, from Genesis 3:15 through Malachi 4:2, and their fulfillment in the life, death, resurrection, and royal priesthood of Jesus Christ, read *Prophets and Kings*, chap. 58, "The Coming of a Deliverer."

The story of Nicodemus and his growing conviction that Jesus was the Messiah of prophecy is told with profound insights in *The Desire of Ages*, chap. 17. Here we read: "Through faith we receive the grace of God; but faith is not our Saviour. It earns nothing. It is the hand by which we lay hold upon Christ, and appropriate His merits, the remedy for sin."—Page 175.

"In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. 'He that hath the Son has life' (1 John 5:12). The divinity of Christ is the believer's assurance of eternal life."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why are the Messianic prophecies the essential core of the Old Testament?
2. Why did Christ make His self-testimony as the "I AM" and as the "Son of Man" a test of faith?
3. What did Christ mean when He said: "Blessed is he who takes no offense at me" (Matt. 11:6, RSV)?
4. What, then, is, in essence, the greatest sin? See John 16:9; 3:36; Heb. 10:29-31; Matt. 12:31.

SUMMARY: The divine promise of a Redeemer was made as soon as there was sin. Thus God took the initiative for our salvation. All the Messianic prophecies merely unfold and develop the first promise in Genesis 3:15. The four Gospels are written so "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31, NIV). The Messiah of prophecy is more than a glorified king, priest, or prophet. He is the Son of God, the One and Only. Our salvation is based on His solid promises and on the unassailable facts of history.



Following God's Path, Part 2

J. H. Zachary

Roberto Azucena of Leyte, Philippines, longed for a personal experience with God and a deeper knowledge of the Bible. But the church to which he belonged left him feeling uncomfortable and unfulfilled. Then two Adventist laymen offered to hold Bible studies in Roberto's home. Roberto realized that these two men based their faith on the Bible alone. The more he learned about God, the more excited he became. When he discovered the Sabbath, he closed his bakery on Sabbaths, in spite of his wife's protests. She wanted nothing to do with this new religion. When Roberto decided to be baptized, she threatened to take the children and go to live with her parents.

Roberto needed assurance from God that he was doing the right thing to keep the Sabbath and be baptized. He went off by himself to pray. For years Roberto had struggled with a strong tobacco habit. He knew that smoking was a sin and had tried to quit several times. But each attempt had ended in failure. He asked God for victory over smoking as well as spiritual wisdom to make the right choices. As he ended his prayer, he threw away his tobacco.

The next few days were busy ones as he worked in the bakery and attended the Bible studies. Six days later Roberto realized that he had not smoked once in almost a week. His craving for tobacco was gone. He knew that his victory over tobacco was an answer to prayer. He was convinced that God was guiding him in his spiritual journey as well.

Roberto has found the close walk with God that he craved. He knows that following Christ is the right decision to make, regardless of what others do. As The Quiet Hour evangelistic meetings closed, Roberto invited the group of new believers to worship in the room in his home. He prays that soon his family will join him in worshipping God on the Sabbath day.

Update: Word has just been received that Roberto's wife has changed her mind about his new religion. She and two of their daughters are preparing to be baptized. Continue to pray for this family, who is learning to trust God even when the way is not clear before them.

J. H. Zachary is international evangelism coordinator for The Quiet Hour, located in Redlands, California.

The Work of Christ: Our Assurance

Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: John 4:25, 34; 19:30; 2 Cor. 5:14-21; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 6:19, 20; Acts 17:31.

MEMORY TEXT: "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: Jesus was consumed by one overriding sense of mission: to fulfill and complete the work of seeking and saving the lost.

CHRIST'S LIFE, DEATH, RESURRECTION, AND INTERCESSION: OUR ASSURANCE. Christians believe not only in Jesus Christ as the Son of God but also in His redemptive work for humankind in His life, death, resurrection, and heavenly intercession. This belongs to the essential core of the gospel. The true meaning of the work of Christ is not dependent on any one-sided or speculative theory made about it by theologians. That would leave us in the clutches of doubt and uncertainty. The testimony of the Holy Scripture is clear, sufficient, and authoritative for the humble seeker after divine revelation. The gospel of Christ is the sole, final, and true viewpoint of the unity of Christ's work. Only the illumination of the Holy Spirit imparts the spiritual insight into the redemptive significance of Christ's work (1 Cor. 2:14). "The acceptance of the Saviour brings a glow of perfect peace, perfect love, perfect assurance." —*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 420, emphasis supplied. This week, let us focus on the assurance we have in Christ's work as our King, suffering Servant, Mediator, and Judge.

CHRIST THE VICTORIOUS KING (Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:16-21).

What was Christ's first task on our behalf after His baptism? Mark 1:12, 13. Explain its cosmic importance.

Christ's victory over Satan and his temptations shows that His mission was first to conquer the ruler of this world and to establish Himself as the rightful King of humanity and the earth. "The demonic [aspect] is absolutely essential in understanding Jesus' interpretation of the picture of sin and of man's need for the Kingdom of God. Man is in bondage to a personal power stronger than himself. At the very heart of our Lord's mission is the need of rescuing men from bondage to the satanic kingdom and of bringing them into the sphere of God's Kingdom."—G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 53.

How did Christ, after His victory over Satan, announce and manifest His Messiahship? Luke 4:16-21.

Jesus pointed His fellow Jews to His unique mission, as outlined in the prophecies of Isaiah regarding the "year of the Lord's favor" (Isa. 61:2). He announced its actual fulfillment in His work as the God-sent Messiah: "Today this Scripture [Isa. 61:1, 2; 42:7; 49:8, 9; 58:6] is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21, NIV). Immediately Jesus began to drive out evil spirits from some (Luke 4:31-44), to release others from the power of sin (Luke 5:1-32), and to set all free from bondage to traditions (Luke 5:33-6:11). Significantly, even the demons acknowledged: "You are—the Holy One of God!" (Luke 4:34), and "You are the Son of God!" (Luke 4:41). This means that the demons recognized in Jesus the presence of a supernatural person, of the holy God Himself. Thus Jesus demonstrated His power to redeem all who are oppressed by the power of sin and Satan. Jesus did this in fulfillment of God's promises in Isaiah 61 and 58. "The mercy revealed in every act of His life testified to His divine anointing."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 241. It is important to note that Jesus not only proclaimed the year of release but accompanied His words with acts of release. In a certain sense, the year of Jubilee has begun because the Kingdom of God came in Jesus Christ.

"The works of Christ not only declared Him to be the Messiah, but showed in what manner His kingdom was to be established."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 217.

What caused John the Baptist to doubt the Messiah's mission? Matt. 11:2-6. What causes you to doubt? How can Jesus help you?

CHRIST THE SUFFERING SERVANT (Mark 8:31; 10:45; Rom. 3:25).

How did Christ understand His mission as the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53? Mark 8:31.

Bible scholars point to four specific prophecies or “songs” regarding the “Servant of Yahweh,” which progressively describe the work of the Messiah (Isa. 42:1-6; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). Jesus saw His whole life and death in the light of the Servant prophecies of Isaiah (see Luke 22:37). Shortly after Peter had confessed that Jesus was the God-sent Messiah and Son of God, Jesus began to disclose that He “must” suffer much, be rejected, and be killed. His emphasis on “must” did not mean a surrender to some unavoidable fate, but His willing submission to God’s will for the redemption of humanity (see Matt. 26:39, 42).

What did Jesus mean by saying that He had come to give His life “as a ransom for many”? Mark 10:45, NIV.

“Ransom” is a synonym for “ransom price” (1 Cor. 6:20), or substitutionary redemption. This is emphasized by the expression “for many,” which is literally “instead of many.” Bible scholars widely recognize that this saying of Jesus in Mark 10:45 clearly refers to Isaiah 53:11, 12, which predicts that the Servant of the Lord would bear the sin of “many” and thus will “justify many.” Jesus again indicated that His coming death would be beneficial for many when He said He voluntarily would lay down His life “for the sheep” (John 10:11, 15, 17, 18).

“While as a member of the human family He was mortal, as God He was the fountain of life for the world. He could have withstood the advances of death, and refused to come under its dominion; but voluntarily He laid down His life, that He might bring life and immortality to light. He bore the sin of the world, endured its curse, yielded up His life as a sacrifice, that men might not eternally die.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 484.

How did Paul preach that Christ had paid a complete ransom for all humankind? Rom. 3:25; 1 Tim. 2:3-6.

“Christ took the form of a servant, and offered sacrifice, Himself the priest, Himself the victim.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

In what sense do you feel included in the sufferings and death of Christ? What difference does this make to you?

“COME TO ME . . .” (Matt. 11:28-30; 5:1-12; 7:24-27).

What does Jesus want us to learn from Him? Matt. 11:28-30.

“The ‘yoke’ is Jesus’ yoke, not the yoke of the law; discipleship must be to him. . . . The ‘rest’ he promises is not only for the world to come but also for this one as well.”—D. A. Carson, in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984), vol. 8, p. 278.

Jesus invited every human being to come to Him, because all are “weary and burdened” with the burden of sin. The heavier the burden, the more blessed is the rest He offers to those who place their burdens on Him. The rest of grace comes, however, with: “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me.” This means that we must be willing to enter the school of Christ, to learn how to become “gentle and lowly in heart” as He is. Christ’s words impart a transforming power to those who truly accept them. “Those who take Christ at His word, and surrender their souls to His keeping, their lives to His ordering, will find peace and quietude. Nothing of the world can make them sad when Jesus makes them glad by His presence.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 331.

What was the main thing that Christ taught about the coming of His kingdom in the Beatitudes? Matt. 5:1-12.

Jesus explained: “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21, NIV). What did He mean? The kingdom of God is represented by Christ as the king. Where He is, there is the kingdom or reign of God. His blessings represent the saving power of God. Now that the King has come and stands in their midst, the kingdom of God is within their reach. And it is, if they are willing, within their hearts.

We accept Christ when we accept His words! Christ is and speaks the Word of God. Divine power and love dwell in His words. To receive the words of Christ in faith imparts power to obey. “The word of God is the only steadfast thing our world knows. It is the sure foundation. ‘Heaven and earth shall pass away,’ said Jesus, ‘but my words shall not pass away.’ Matthew 24:35.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 148.

How did Christ illustrate the importance of His words? For what purpose were they spoken? Matt. 7:24-27. What assurance did the words of Christ bring to your heart when you began to trust them?

CHRIST OUR ONLY MEDIATOR (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 4:15, 16).

When was the Son of God appointed as the Mediator between God and humanity? Rev. 13:8; 1 Pet. 1:20, 21.

Satan had misrepresented God as being “severe and unforgiving” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22), as “hard and exacting” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 204), a concept that destroyed all assurance and joy of salvation. As the perfect representative of the Father, Christ offered the world a true picture of God. He could do this because He lived in the closest communion with the Father from eternity (John 1:2; 17:5, 24), “in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18, NKJV). Christ, therefore, could fully explain the will and nature of God (John 1:18, NASB). In the face of Christ, people could see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:6, NIV). He was “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Heb. 1:3). On the other hand, Christ is the perfect Representative of the human race, the “the second Adam” (see 1 Cor. 15:47). He shares in the flesh and blood of humanity (Heb. 2:14), and “learned obedience from what he suffered” (Heb. 5:8).

Why was it necessary for Jesus to become “flesh” and to live in perfect obedience to God? Rom. 8:3, 4; Heb. 2:14-18.

The apostolic gospel places equal emphasis on the Resurrection and on the cross of Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews instructs us that after Jesus had tasted death “for everyone” (2:9), He was “brought back from the dead” as the “great Shepherd of the sheep” (13:20). This reveals the progress of God’s saving activity beyond the cross. The Resurrection was not an end in itself. Christ was appointed by God “to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:10, NIV). Great emphasis is placed on the fact that the risen Christ is now seated “at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (Heb. 1:3; 8:1), so that He might become “a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb. 2:17).

What is Christ’s work in our behalf as our high priest? Heb. 2:18; 4:15, 16; 7:25; 8:1.

The first work of Christ after His enthronement in heaven was to send the Holy Spirit to His disciples. This was the token “that He had, as priest and king, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 39.

CHRIST THE JUDGE OF THE WORLD (John 5:22, 27; 12:48-50).

What did Jesus teach about Himself being appointed as the Judge of all people? Matt. 7:21-23; John 5:22, 27.

The Creator of heaven and earth is a moral God who created us to live in a moral universe. The Scriptures declare that God will exercise His prerogative of judging the world in righteousness. The fact that Jesus solemnly announced that He would be the judge of Israel was a shock to the Jewish leaders. This can be seen in a most dramatic way in Christ's response to the charges that He had violated the Sabbath (John 5:16-30). Before the Sanhedrin, Jesus claimed equal rights with God in doing a work as equally sacred as what God is doing (John 5:17). "The priests and rulers had set themselves up as judges to condemn Christ's work, but He declared Himself their judge, and the judge of all the earth."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 210.

By what standard will Christ judge His people? John 12:48-50; 15:22-24; Matt. 25:40, 45.

These passages disclose that Christ will judge us by our accountability to God and to others. The definitions of sin and righteousness, therefore, become of vital importance. The gospel of Christ teaches us that both definitions have to be oriented to the life and words of Jesus, instead of to the moral law by itself, separated from Christ. Christ is the embodiment of God's law and grace. Those who keep the letter of the law but reject Him stand condemned before God. "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's One and Only Son" (John 3:18).

"Because He has tasted the very dregs of human affliction and temptation, and understands the frailties and sins of men; because in our behalf He has victoriously withstood the temptations of Satan, and will deal justly and tenderly with the souls that His own blood has been poured out to save,—because of this, the Son of Man is appointed to execute the judgment."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 210.

Why is it so reassuring to believe that Christ will be our Judge? Zech. 3:1-7; Rom. 8:1, 30, 33, 34. How do you view the judgment knowing that Jesus is not only your Judge but also your Sacrifice, your mighty Advocate, and your sympathizing Friend?

FURTHER STUDY: Study more about the work of Christ in Isa. 61:1, 2; Matt. 12:29, 30; 25:31-34; John 1:18; 12:48-50; Rev. 1:12-18. Read *The Desire of Ages*, chaps. 12, 21, and 31, for a deeper appreciation of the work of Christ on our behalf. "Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

With apostolic authority Paul summed up the gospel this way: "God our Savior wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-4). What a wonderful assurance of God's redemptive will for us! God has done all He could to restore us into favor with Him. He provided His own Lamb, "who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, NIV).

We need the Old Testament to teach us what the work of the Messiah is all about, even when we know from the New Testament who the Messiah is. From the prophets we learn that He was to be the greatest Prophet (Deut. 18:18, 19), the eternal King (Rev. 19:11-16), and the only Lamb and High Priest of God (Isa. 53; Ps. 110:1, 4). The greatest surprise of all came when Jesus solemnly announced that He was also appointed to be the Judge of all and would decide who would enter the kingdom of God and who would not! (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:31-46; John 5:22, 27).

No wonder that Peter exclaimed, "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain!" (2 Pet. 1:19, NIV).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does Christ mean to you personally?
2. What does it mean to you that Christ calls Himself "the Bread of Life," the "Light of the world," the "Good Shepherd," the "True Vine," the "Resurrection and the Life"?
3. In what sense do you participate in Christ's life and in different aspects of His work?

SUMMARY: We have seen this week a variety of aspects of Christ's work. The different aspects do not contradict but complement each other. We must guard ourselves from choosing a particular work of Christ to the neglect or denial of the others. Together they testify of the unity and wealth of the saving work of Christ to give His assurance of salvation.



The Rest of the Story

Every week we read stories of how God works through the lives of His people. But we seldom learn “the rest of the story.” Recently we received updates on two stories that appeared in “Inside Story.”

Alexander

When Greg and Jodie Bratcher taught English in Magadan, Russia, Alexander, one of their students, expressed his belief in logic rather than in God. One day as he and Jodie walked past the new Adventist church, Jodie said, “The winter snows are late this year. The believers are praying that God would hold back the snows until the roof of the new church is in place.” Alexander said that it was merely chance that the snows were late.

Jodie told Alexander, “I am praying that God will hold back the snow to prove to you that God exists and cares about us.” Every day for two weeks they walked past that church on snowless roads. Then the day after the church roof was snowproof, they walked home through two feet of snow!

Alexander responded, “You won.” But Jodie assured him that it was God who had won.

The Bratchers left Magadan before Alexander made a decision for Christ. But they prayed for him. Recently they received word that Alexander has been baptized—into the church that God had protected from the snows.

Rustico

Rustico grew up in a poor family in the Philippines. He enrolled in Mountain View College to study theology. He worked long hours to pay his school fees. After graduation he worked as a lay pastor, caring for 12 congregations in the mountains. Riding a bicycle, he could meet with three congregations each Sabbath. During the week he met with lay leaders of the congregations. Thus he could visit each of his 12 churches once a month.

Although no appeal was made for help, generous readers sent gifts to help Rustico purchase a motorbike.

Today Rustico is a full-time pastor with 13 churches. He sold the used motorcycle and bought one built for mountain trails. “Without this motorcycle,” he says, “I could not get to some of the villages I serve except to walk.”

In just four years he has baptized more than three hundred new believers and planted two new churches. To the unnamed donors, Rustico says, “Thank you!”

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Christ's Assurance of Justification by Faith



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Mark 2:5-12; Matt. 20:10-16; Luke 18:1-14; 15:11-32; John 8:1-11; 1:29.

MEMORY TEXT: "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: We learn precious lessons from the life and teachings of Jesus about salvation from guilt and the power of sin. To the surprise of His contemporaries, Jesus taught that God justifies a repentant sinner *here and now*.

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF DIVINE FORGIVENESS. The blessed truth of Jesus' teaching is that it brings more than a new idea about God's relationship with humanity. It also imparts God's transforming power, and establishes a personal communication between Him and the believer in Christ. Jesus teaches that justification by faith in Him brings reconciliation with God and the joy of salvation. He taught that divine justification or forgiveness is not simply a legal bookkeeping in heaven, but also a new empowerment to live with God. The merciful Father looks for the reflection of His grace and love in the life of His children. The crucial question of Jesus is, "Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" (Matt. 18:33, NIV).

"God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness *for* sin, but reclaiming *from* sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 114.

ASSURANCE OF DIVINE FORGIVENESS (Luke 18:14; John 8:11).

What does Jesus teach about forgiveness of sins in Luke 18:14 and John 8:11?

Forgiveness of sins by God is more than a declaration of amnesty or canceling our debt to God. It is also God's pronouncement of setting us right with Him, of restoring us in righteousness before Him. This is called by Jesus "justification." This is also a key idea in the covenant of God with Israel. It contains two vital aspects, which are graphically portrayed in Zechariah's vision of the high priest Joshua and the Angel (see Zech. 3:1-7). Here we see that God's forgiveness, or justification, consists first of *taking away* Joshua's filthy clothes (v. 3), and second, of *giving* him "rich garments" and a "clean turban" (vs. 4, 5, NIV). This illustrates the full truth of divine forgiveness, or justification. It contains two divine transactions, which together show that God treats us as if we had never sinned! That is marvelous grace! Stunning mercy! Human logic cannot comprehend this; it only can be accepted by faith. Justification remains forever the gift and glory of God.

How did Jesus confirm that He possessed the divine authority to forgive sins? Mark 2:5-12?

Jesus performed this amazing miracle of healing the paralytic in Capernaum in order to teach the message that He came with the power to forgive sins, especially for those who have lost all hope and were sunk in despair. It took the power of the Creator to restore health to the dying body of this person. "Yet it was not physical restoration he desired so much as relief from the burden of sin. If He could see Jesus, and receive the assurance of forgiveness, and peace with Heaven, he would be content to live or die, according to God's will. The cry of the dying man was, Oh that I might come into His presence!"—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 267.

From this important story we learn that in the eyes of Jesus His Messianic mission was primarily to restore men and women to God through the forgiveness of sins.

Discuss the significance of forgiveness in the way John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the people. John 1:29.

Meditate on the promise of forgiveness in Psalm 103:2, 3. Have you experienced Jesus' taking away your guilt and forgiving your sins? What difference does this make to you?

DIVINE FORGIVENESS IN THE PARABLES (Luke 18:14; 15:21-24).

Which two truths about forgiveness did Jesus teach in His parable recorded in Luke 18:1-8?

1. (*Who* receives forgiveness) _____

2. (*When* one receives forgiveness) _____

From the very start, Jesus emphasized that God's saving grace was offered "today," not just at death or in the last judgment (see Luke 4:21; 19:9)! Christ wanted to emphasize this forgotten or misapplied message in the parable of the forgiven tax collector. To the surprise of the Pharisees and the people, he "went home justified before God."

How did Jesus teach that justification means full reconciliation with and restoration to God? Luke 15:11-32.

In the parable of the "lost son" Jesus dealt with the problem of all who have wandered far away from God, to live for themselves. It shows that the initiative for our redemption comes from the Father's love, which draws His lost children back home. Only when the son realized his father's love, did he find hope and decide to return home. Paul confirmed that "God's kindness leads you toward repentance" (Rom. 2:4, NIV). "So it is the assurance of God's love that constrains the sinner to return to God."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 202.

"In his restless youth the prodigal looked upon his father as stern and severe. How different his conception of him now!"—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 204. Here we find the assurance that God is eager to receive every repentant sinner! God even loves the sinner before he or she repents.

How did Christ teach that forgiveness, truly appreciated, results in grateful love? Luke 7:40-48.

Christ's forgiveness of Mary preceded her grateful love. Her act was the *fruit* of Christ's forgiving grace. Christ was grieved when the forgiven Simon neglected to show his gratitude by words and deeds of love.

Contemplate Luke 7:36-48 again. With whom can you identify, Mary or Simon, in their reactions to Jesus' presence? How can your answer help you in your relationship with Christ?

GOD'S FORGIVENESS AND OURS (Matt. 18:21-35).

To what question of Peter's did Christ reply with the parable of the unmerciful servant? Matt. 18:21.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us" (Luke 11:4, NIV), or as we forgive others (Matt. 6:12). These words can be misinterpreted, as if to say that God's forgiveness depends on ours. However, "we are not forgiven *because* we forgive, but *as* we forgive."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 251. Jesus made this very plain in Matthew 6:14, 15. In other words, if we are unforgiving, we cut off the very channel through which we receive mercy from God. The merciful love of God that we receive must flow through us to others in a spirit of compassion. Jesus taught this lesson in His parable of the unmerciful servant, telling us never to become tired of forgiving those who ask us for forgiveness.

How did the king in the parable hold accountable his unforgiving servant? What specific question expressed the king's expectation? Matt. 18:32-34.

"Nothing can justify an unforgiving spirit. He who is unmerciful toward others shows that he himself is not a partaker of God's pardoning grace. . . . It is true that he may once have received forgiveness; but his unmerciful spirit shows that he now rejects God's pardoning love. He has separated himself from God, and is in the same condition as before he was forgiven. He has denied his repentance, and his sins are upon him as if he had not repented."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 251.

Sometimes we set a limit to our forgiveness of others, like three times or even seven times. But Jesus counsels, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him" (Luke 17:3, 4, NIV). God's forgiving mercy must be the measure of our forgiveness of others. Divine forgiveness is and remains God's prerogative and sovereign possession, even after we have received it. To experience the joy of God's grace propels us to reveal it to others.

"Jesus said to her, 'Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more'" (John 8:11, NIV). What do Jesus' words to the woman caught in adultery tell you about the responsibility of a forgiven person?

JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE IN THE LAST JUDGMENT (Matt. 22:1-14).

What kind of people were invited to the wedding? What does this tell you about the king? Matt. 22:10; Luke 14:21.

“In this parable [Matthew 22], as in that of the great supper [Luke 14], are illustrated the gospel invitation, its rejection by the Jewish people, and the call of mercy to the Gentiles.”—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 307. Jesus predicted that *three* calls would go out from the king to invite guests to the royal banquet (Matt. 22:3, 4, 8-10). The first call came from Christ and His disciples. The second call came from the Spirit-filled apostles after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. The reaction of the Jews was “a great persecution” against the apostolic church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1, NIV). The predicted judgment came in A.D. 70, when the city was destroyed and the nation scattered (see Matt. 22:7). The third call of God went out through the gospel to the Gentiles. The king said, “The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find” (Matt. 22:8, 9).

“The king's servants welcome the people when they enter the palace and tell each guest to put on wedding clothes made for the occasion. The king invites the people, and he expects them to put on the clothes he provides. By wearing the wedding garment furnished by the king, no one reveals poverty or misery. Every guest can hide his social and economic status behind the clothes received from the king.” —S. J. Kistemaker, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 104.

What was the meaning of this royal gift of the wedding garment? Matt. 22:11, 12; compare Rev. 3:18; Isa. 61:10. What kind of people are represented by the guest who refused to wear the provided wedding garment? Why does this guest remain “speechless”? Matt. 22:12, 13.

All depends on the proper interpretation of the “wedding garment.” If we understand this through Revelation 3:4, 5, 18, where Christ provides the necessary white clothes, then it means that He offers us His *own* righteousness by grace. This implies that a rejection of Christ's righteousness is a declaration of self-righteousness, to the effect that one does not sense the need for His sacrificial death and atoning blood.

What impact does the wearing of the “wedding garment” have on your attitude and behavior?

CHRIST'S ILLUSTRATION OF GOD'S GRACE (Matt. 20:1-16).

Why was it so hard for the laborers who labored all day to accept the generosity of the landowner toward the ones who labored little? How did comparing themselves with the others contribute to such attitude? Matt. 20:10-16.

“The truth of God’s free grace had been almost lost sight of by the Jews. The rabbis taught that God’s favor must be earned. The reward of the righteous they hoped to gain by their own works. Thus their worship was prompted by a grasping, mercenary spirit. From this spirit even the disciples of Christ were not wholly free, and the Saviour sought every opportunity of showing them their error.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 390.

The fundamental truth of the gospel of Christ is that salvation is offered to all people by God’s grace alone! This still offends our moral sensibilities. We somehow feel that we must make ourselves worthy to receive eternal life, or at least show some moral goodness as the starting point for our acceptance by God. What would Jesus say to this natural human feeling? He may well reply, “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty’” (Luke 17:10, NIV). Our good works and our obedience to the law do not merit eternal life. Our best works and moral character are not the basis or the title of our salvation.

The reward that God offers is a reward of grace, not of merit. “It is only through the unmerited grace of Christ that any man can find entrance into the city of God.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 394.

Why were the laborers who were hired last, and who worked for one hour only, paid the same wages as those who worked the entire day? What does this tell you about the gracious employer? Matt. 20:12-15.

The traditional Protestant definition of *grace* is: the “undeserved” favor of God. This concept stands in opposition to the idea that we can merit a reward in proportion to our labor before God. It is derived from Paul’s contrast between grace and works in Romans 11:6, “And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.” The biblical concept of “reward” should not be equated with “merit.”

How does accepting that you are justified by grace alone affect your relationships with others?

FURTHER STUDY: Read Matthew 6:1-6, 17, 18; 16:24-27; Acts 4:12; Luke 2:30. Read *The Desire of Ages*, chap. 62, "The Feast at Simon's House"; *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 150-163, "Two Worshipers"; and pp. 390-404, "The Reward of Grace." For a very instructive treatment of Christ's parable of the vineyard laborers, see *Christ's Object Lessons*, "The Reward of Grace," pp. 390-404.

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

"The idea of doing anything to merit the grace of pardon is fallacy from beginning to end. 'Lord, in my hand no price I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.'"—*Faith and Works*, p. 24.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways can you as a church member cultivate the spirit of mercy in your church?
2. Why is the natural person offended by the divine offer of grace for all?
3. What is the meaning of Jesus' statement that "the last will be first, and the first will be last"? (Matt. 20:16, NIV).
4. Why can a person not appear before God without the protective clothes offered by Jesus Christ?
5. Why did Jesus say to the redeemed woman, "Your faith has saved you," and not: "Your love has saved you"? (Luke 7:50).
6. How does "faith" save? Does "faith" contribute anything to receiving and appropriating salvation?
7. How should we understand God's promises of a "reward" for our faithful service?

SUMMARY: To understand the certainty of our salvation, it is best to identify salvation with the person of Christ. That is the way the New Testament does it. Our faith must therefore lay hold of Him, instead of trusting in theories about Him. *He* is the truth, the way, and the life. Christ is our all-sufficient assurance of salvation! His word of justification is the absolute certainty of our salvation.



Cry in the Night

J. H. Zachary

During the night the people of Adavaram village in India were awakened by a terrified scream. Eighteen-year-old Lakshmi had slipped out of her humble home and walked down the familiar path toward the rice paddy to relieve herself.

Suddenly she felt something brush her leg. She stopped, and in an instant a snake wrapped itself tightly around both her legs. Unable to walk, she fell to the ground. She screamed in terror.

Then she thought of Jesus, the God her neighbor had told her about. She called out, "Jesus, save me!" Immediately the snake loosened its grip and slithered away.

Lakshmi and her husband, Ramarao, were Hindus. But recently a friend of Lakshmi's introduced her to some Seventh-day Adventist relatives who live in a nearby village. These Adventist relatives began sharing their faith in the living God with Lakshmi, Ramarao, and other villagers. Lakshmi loved to sing the songs about Jesus. And little by little, the couple had become acquainted with the Creator God.

The day after the snake attack, an Adventist pastor visited the village of Adavaram. He invited people to join a Bible class. During the class Lakshmi told the group about her experience with the snake the night before and how Jesus had saved her from the snake. God had become very real to her.

In gratitude for saving her, Lakshmi and Ramarao gave a piece of land next to their home on which to build a church. When funds are available a church will be built on this land. Ramarao and Lakshmi are continuing their study of the Bible in preparation for baptism.



The pastor is convinced that God answered Lakshmi's cry in order to prepare the way for the people of this village to learn about Jesus. The Quiet Hour has opened a community center in Adavaram, where villagers can come to learn to read, learn about making healthful lifestyle changes, and to receive guidance in family planning. But most of all they can learn about the Savior who loves them and died for them.

Lakshmi (left). J. H. Zachary is international evangelism coordinator for The Quiet Hour, located in Redlands, California.

Paul's Experience and Teaching of Assurance



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Rom. 3:19-28; 4:1-8; 5:1; 8:1, 14-17; Phil. 3:1-11; Gal. 2:15-21; 3:1-14; 1 Thess. 1:5.

MEMORY TEXT: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: The arresting new light for Saul was the discovery that Jesus was the true Messiah of Israel and that righteousness before God comes exclusively by faith in Him; and through Him comes the gift of the Holy Spirit.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER. There is a basic difference between salvation according to Israel's Scriptures and that which had developed in Pharisaic Judaism. Jesus and the apostles did not reject Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets, but their misinterpretation. Christ protested against the merit-seeking piety of the Pharisees in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Paul explained his new insight about salvation and holiness in his letters to the churches in Rome, Galatia, and Philippi. These letters provided the renewing power for the Reformation of the medieval church in its theology and piety during the sixteenth century. These letters still challenge the church today to stay on course in preaching, teaching, and living the simplicity of the apostolic gospel.

The primary motivation of the Protestant Reformers was of a pastoral nature: to restore the believer's assurance of salvation! This remains the central core of the end-time message to prepare a people for the second coming of Christ. The threefold message of Revelation 14 centers in the "everlasting gospel" (v. 6, NKJV).

PAUL AND JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (Phil. 3:1-11; Rom. 4:1-8).

What caused Paul to emphasize the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ? Phil. 3:1-11.

Paul's background was that of a strict Pharisee. He had conscientiously striven to attain a righteousness that fulfilled the law of Moses to the letter. One ancient Jewish tradition says: "Great is the Law, for it gives life to them that practice it both in this world and in the world to come."—Pirke Aboth 6:7, in *The Mishnah* (H. Danby: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 460. As far as legalistic righteousness was concerned, Saul of Tarsus considered himself "faultless" (Phil. 3:6, NIV). But on his way to Damascus a radical change took place in his conviction and zeal for the law of Moses. This occurred when he heard the voice of the risen Lord, asking him, "Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me? . . . I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 22:7, 8, NIV). Soon afterward Paul "baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 9:22). Clearly, Paul's Damascus experience had brought a fundamental change in his theology of the law and salvation. He now saw the law from Christ's perspective and became zealous for Christ as the only way for salvation.

How does Paul explain his new doctrine of justification by faith in Christ? Rom. 3:27, 28; 4:4, 5.

How were Abram and David assured of their salvation? Gen. 15:6; Ps. 32:1, 2 (compare with Rom. 4:1-3, 6-8).

Paul's theological exposition centers on the concept of God "crediting" or reckoning righteousness to the repenting sinner who trusts in Him. This concept is, not just a legal idea, but a covenant requirement in the law of Moses (Lev. 6:1-7). Paul is greatly concerned to show that his message of God's imputation of Christ's righteousness to the repenting sinner is in basic harmony with the way of salvation outlined in the Hebrew Scriptures (see Rom. 3:21).

"Christ's righteousness is accepted in place of man's failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son. This is how faith is accounted righteousness"—E. G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1073.

What does each point of this reassuring statement mean to you personally?

PAUL'S CONCERN (Gal. 1:6-16; 2:20, 21; Phil. 3:8, 9).

How did Paul receive the gospel, and what did he gain through it? Gal. 1:11, 12, 15, 16; Phil. 3:8, 9.

False teachers, who had come from Jerusalem, were confusing the churches in Galatia by urging the Gentile converts to observe the ceremonial laws of Moses. This was a violation of the decision of the general council at Jerusalem. "In the Galatian churches, open, unmasked error was supplanting the gospel message. Christ, the true foundation of the faith, was virtually renounced for the obsolete ceremonies of Judaism."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 385. Paul exposed the error of substituting religious ceremonies for experiencing the free grace of God.

How did Paul agree with Isaiah 64:6, NIV, that "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags"? Phil. 3:8. What did Paul contrast in Galatians 2:21?

"The righteousness that before he had thought worth so much was now worthless in his sight. His own righteousness was unrighteousness. . . ."

"He would know for himself the power of the Saviour's grace. He trusted in His power to save even him, who had persecuted the church of Christ."—E. G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 905.

A closer look at this important verse shows that Paul did not place the law in opposition to the grace of God. Rather, he contrasts law and grace if they are used as *ways of salvation*. He states that "if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing" (NIV). In other words, to *use* the law of God in order to gain salvation is a misuse of the law. There are not two ways of salvation. Christ is the only way (see John 14:6). The law was given to reveal sin and thus the indispensable need for God's grace.

Why did Paul reject "the works of the law," mentioned three times in Galatians 2:16, NKJV? In Paul's theology "works of the law" are by definition works of merit-seeking, and thus works of self-righteousness that are "under a curse" (Gal. 3:10, NIV). Paul included in the word *law*, as used in Galatians, "both the moral law . . . and the ceremonial law."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 949.

Contemplate Galatians 2:20. What is your motivation for a sanctified life?

JUSTIFIED BY FAITH IN CHRIST (Gal. 2:17-20; Rom. 3:21-27).

What does Paul mean by “faith in Christ Jesus”? Rom. 3:21-27.

The common view is that Paul’s expression “by the faith of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16) means “by faith in Jesus Christ.” Many scholars now defend the literal translation “by the faith or faithfulness of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:9; Rom. 3:22; Gal. 3:22; Eph. 3:12). This view recognizes that Paul continues the Hebrew meaning of faith, which includes faithfulness [*‘emunah*], as can be seen in Habakkuk 2:4.

Paul then would point to the basis of the gospel: the faithfulness that Christ rendered to God the Father in His life and death. The faith of the believer is then a response to Christ’s faithfulness (Rom. 3:22; Gal. 3:22; Phil. 3:9) and acceptance of His perfect obedience of faith. The believer in Christ is justified on the basis of the faithfulness of Christ and “not by observing the law” (see Gal. 2:16). Paul contrasts Christ’s obedience with Adam’s disobedience in Romans 5:18, 19, and draws the conclusion that “just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one Man the many will be made righteous” (NIV).

How does Paul indicate that faith in Christ brings also a moral renewal and a sanctified life? Gal. 2:17-20.

The fundamental change of heart and motivation comes by accepting Christ in the heart of the believer. The entire passage of Galatians 2:15-21 shows that justification and sanctification are inextricably united and together form an unbreakable whole in Christ. The center of Paul’s message is, therefore, not the one or the other aspect or doctrine, but being “in Christ.” He uses this unique phrase more than 160 times. Being “in Christ” and “with Him” is much better experienced than explained. It refers to an intimate relationship of the believers, individually and collectively, with the crucified and risen Lord. It stands in a contrasting parallel with being “in Adam” (Rom. 6:3-6; 1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 5:17). Paul even states that “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6, NIV). This points to more than a momentary feeling in the life of Christians. It refers to their objective status that was sealed in baptism (Rom. 6:4).

**How has the life of Christ been manifested in your daily life?
How will you demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit during this week?**

THE SPIRIT AND OUR ASSURANCE (Gal. 3:2-5; Acts 2:38, 39).

How does Paul connect the certainty of being children of God with the work of the Holy Spirit? Rom. 8:14-17.

This inner witness of the Spirit adds a unique confirmation to our faith in Christ. The believer receives a Heaven-born conviction, given by the Spirit's testimony to our spirit. This provides the divine assurance of our acceptance by God. "No less an authority than God Himself in His Spirit has assured us—and continues to assure us—that we are His children."—C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1977), p. 402.

How does John's Gospel connect being children of God to being born of the Spirit? John 1:12, 13; 3:5, 6.

"It is impossible for finite minds to comprehend the work of redemption. Its mystery exceeds human knowledge; yet he who passes from death to life realizes that it is a divine reality. The beginning of redemption we may know here through a personal experience. Its results reach through the eternal ages."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 173.

"While we sorrow on account of sin, we are to rejoice in the precious privilege of being children of God."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 300.

On what condition is the Holy Spirit imparted to the believer? Gal. 3:2, 5; Acts 2:38, 39.

It is the same condition as receiving justification (Rom. 3:28). This indicates that justification and the Spirit of God are given together at the same time to the believer in Christ. "To all who have accepted Christ as a personal Saviour, the Holy Spirit has come as a counselor, sanctifier, guide, and witness. The more closely believers have walked with God, the more clearly and powerfully have they testified of their Redeemer's love and of His saving grace."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 49.

How do you apply this statement in your daily life and witness? "There is no limit to the usefulness of one who, by putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart, and lives a life wholly consecrated to God."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 250.

ASSURANCE AND OUR WITNESS (Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:14-17).

Why do believers need assurance of being adopted by God? How does that affect their witness for Him? Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:6, 7; Acts 1:8.

As the disciples were preparing themselves they “felt their spiritual need, and cried to the Lord for the holy unction that was to fit them for the work of soul-saving. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely. They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls. They realized that the gospel was to be carried to the world, and they claimed the power that Christ had promised.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37.

“The power that accompanied the words of the speaker [Peter] convinced them that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. . . .”

“But the Holy Spirit sent the arguments home to hearts with divine power. The words of the apostles were as sharp arrows of the Almighty, convicting men of their terrible guilt in rejecting and crucifying the Lord of glory.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 43-45.

How do we know that the fullness of the Spirit is available now to God’s children? Eph. 5:18; Gal. 3:2, 5.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is a command of Paul’s for every Christian. The fullness of the Spirit was promised since Pentecost to all who are called by the Lord and who respond by faith to Him (Acts 2:39; 3:19). “It is not because of any restriction on the part of God that the riches of His grace do not flow earthward to men. If the fulfillment of the promise is not seen as it might be, it is because the promise is not appreciated as it should be. If all were willing, all would be filled with the Spirit.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 50.

For what purpose does Christ bestow His Spirit in its fullness on you? Acts 1:8; Luke 24:46-49; John 16:14.

While the Spirit comes as our aid in the battle against sin, He provides added power for our witness to enlighten the earth with the glory of God, as promised in Revelation 18:1.

How has the Holy Spirit enlightened and strengthened you when you spoke about Christ to others?

FURTHER STUDY: Study Acts 2:14-39 to discover the theme of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost when he was filled with the Spirit. In that sermon Peter shared with his fellow Jews hope and assurance of salvation. Also study more about Paul's words on assurance of salvation in 1 Cor. 15:22; Col. 2:2; 3:1; Gal. 4:6, 7; 1 Tim. 1:16.

The background of Paul's zeal for God and his conversion near Damascus is told with captivating power in *The Acts of the Apostles*, chap. 12, "From Persecutor to Disciple."

"The conversion of Saul is a striking evidence of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit to convict men of sin. He had verily believed that Jesus of Nazareth had disregarded the law of God, and had taught His disciples that it was of no effect. But after his conversion, Saul recognized Jesus as the one who had come into the world for the express purpose of vindicating His Father's law."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 120.

"To the repentant sinner, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, the Holy Spirit reveals the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. . . ."

"The Spirit is given as a regenerating agency, to make effectual the salvation wrought by the death of our Redeemer."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 52.

"The presence of the Spirit with God's workers will give the proclamation of truth a power that not all the honor or glory of the world could give."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 51.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Explain why justification, or forgiveness, is more than a legal (forensic) transaction in heaven.
2. What is the role of justification in the assurance of salvation?
3. Why is God's forgiveness based on Christ's life and death?
4. What are some examples of the root and the fruit of our justification by God? What must we do daily to become filled with the Spirit of God?

SUMMARY: Paul's conversion to Jesus Christ near Damascus remains one of the strongest supports of the Christian faith. If Jesus could turn around such a determined opponent as Saul of Tarsus, He must be real. Saul's encounter with Christ and his assurance of salvation are based on the miraculous fact that Jesus had risen from the dead.



A Fitting Wage

J. H. Zachary

"Bernd, can you do the electrical wiring on my new house?" Heiner asked his brother. Heiner was pleased that his brother, an electrician, agreed. When the job was done, Bernd stopped to see his brother on the way to a Sabbath evening evangelistic meeting.

Heiner was surprised to find his brother at the door, especially on the Sabbath. "I have come to collect my wages for wiring your house," Bernd said.

"How much do I owe you?" Heiner asked, apprehensively, for he was short of cash.

"Change your clothes and come with me to the meeting tonight. That will be my fee." Relieved, Heiner agreed and hurried to change his clothes. One meeting in exchange for his brother's work was a good deal.

The meeting awakened in Heiner warm memories of his childhood when he had attended the Adventist Church with his mother and brothers. But he had not been to church for 20 years. Heiner returned the next night and every night of the series. Following the meetings Heiner was baptized. Then the brothers began praying for Heiner's wife, Carola. A year later, in 1982, she was baptized.

Heiner wanted to share his faith with others but was not sure how to start. He placed an ad in the local newspaper, inviting anyone interested in reading the Bible to come to his home. Soon he had a small group meeting each week. After several weeks three persons were baptized. Heiner and Carola prayed for three new persons to take their places.

In the 16 years since they began their home Bible meetings, Heiner and Carola have seen 50 persons join the family of God. They came because they saw the newspaper ad or were invited by friends.

Heiner and Carola have started a new church in a neighboring town. One family who came was from Kenya. They were baptized and eventually returned to Kenya, where they started a new church.

Heiner and Carola are working with four small groups. The work has grown so large that Heiner now trains other church members to lead out in some of the groups. Carola started a very successful women's ministry group in their church. "Our greatest joy comes from seeing what God can do to bring people to a new life," Heiner and Carola say. They should know; they themselves are the fruits of Heiner's brother's witness.

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Peter's Growth in the Grace of Christ



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 16:13-23; 26:31-35, 69-75; Luke 22:31, 32; Acts 2:14-45; 2 Pet. 1:16-19, 3-9.

MEMORY TEXT: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHTS: Peter's life serves as a continuous source of inspiration and encouragement for us. It helps us better understand ourselves and our own prejudices. It shows how Christ can change our hearts and teach us how to grow to be more like Him.

GOD SEEKS PEOPLE LIKE PETER TO SERVE HIM. Many can identify with Peter's character qualities and personality traits. He was sincere, passionate, self-assured, and quick to respond to new impressions of truth. Yet, he showed prejudices and limitations of insight that obstructed the progress of the gospel among the Gentiles. However, he was ever willing to learn and to grow when God showed him the way through humiliation and suffering. The converted Peter grew more and more in the grace and the knowledge of Christ. He became one of the best-loved disciples because of his warmhearted loyalty and devotion to Christ. At the end of his life, Peter was an example of courage, filled with the Spirit of Christ. He was indeed an apostle who laid down his life with the deepest gratitude for the mercy and privilege given to him. His life was a testimony of the power of God's grace. It is evident in his letters that his "entire being had been transformed by grace, and whose hope of eternal life was sure."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 517.

THE MESSIAH OF PROPHECY (John 1:40-42; Matt. 16:13-19).

To what proclamation of John the Baptist did Peter and Andrew respond? Why did they accept Jesus as the Messiah of Israel? John 1:29-34, 40, 41.

“To them the words of Jesus were full of freshness and truth and beauty. A divine illumination was shed upon the teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures. The many-sided themes of truth stood out in new light.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 139.

What qualities did Jesus see in Simon, and why do you think He changed his name to Cephas or Peter (stone)? John 1:41, 42; Matt. 16:18.

“The eye of Christ rested upon him, reading his character and his life history. His impulsive nature, his loving, sympathetic heart, his ambition and self-confidence, the history of his fall, his repentance, his labors, and his martyr death—the Saviour read it all.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 139.

What made Peter so sure that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God? Matt. 16:16, 17. What does this powerful response tell you about Peter?

Peter received a glimpse of the glory of the Son of God in His humiliation. This did not mean that Peter had understood Christ's mission as the Messiah. Nevertheless, the truth that Peter expressed about Jesus is and remains the foundation and assurance of saving faith. Such a faith and assurance in Christ are never the result of human wisdom or reasoning, but a revelation from the Holy Spirit. William Barclay comments: “Christianity never consists in *knowing about* Jesus; it always consists in *knowing Jesus*. Jesus Christ demands a personal verdict. He did not ask only Peter, he asks every man: ‘You—what do you think of me?’”—*The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, Penn.: The Westminster Press, 1975), p. 138.

What is your response to Jesus when He comes to you and asks: “You—what do you think of Me?” How can you witness to what you think of Jesus?

PETER'S FAITH AND RESPONSIBILITY (1 Pet. 2:4-7; Matt. 18:18).

How did Peter state his conviction that all believers are “living stones” built on Christ the chosen Cornerstone? 1 Pet. 2:4-7. (See Isa. 28; Ps. 118.)

Peter and the other apostles were the first stones of the new spiritual temple, the church that Christ was founding. The New Testament recognizes them as the new Israel of God (see Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14), established on Christ the Rock, and held together by Him, the chief Cornerstone. “In the presence of God, and all the heavenly intelligences, in the presence of the unseen army of hell, Christ founded His church upon the living Rock. That Rock is Himself—His own body, for us broken and bruised. Against the church built upon this foundation, the gates of hell shall not prevail.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 413.

What honor did Christ bestow on Peter and on the other apostles? Matt. 16:19; 18:18, 19. What do the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” signify?

Christ referred to “the key to knowledge” which the scribes had taken away from the people so that nobody could enter the kingdom of God (Luke 11:52). Jesus honored Peter along with the apostles and all believers by entrusting them with the keys of the kingdom, to help open the door to life eternal for all who would receive the gospel. Peter did just that when three thousand souls were converted at Pentecost (Acts 2:41). “But it is not only Peter who has the keys of the Kingdom; every Christian has; for it is open to every one of us to open the door of the Kingdom to some other and so to enter into the great promise of Christ.”—William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2, p. 145.

“‘The keys of the kingdom of heaven’ are the words of Christ. All the words of Holy Scripture are His, and are here included. These words have power to open and to shut heaven. They declare the conditions upon which men are received or rejected.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 413, 414.

Christ’s use of the metaphor of sifting the wheat implies separation, suggesting that Satan tried to cause the disciples to fail under severe testing (the “you” in verse 31 is plural). But He assured Peter that He prayed for him that his faith may not fail (Luke 22:32).

List three things that describe how it feels to know that Christ, the mighty Petitioner, is praying for you.

PETER'S GROWTH IN FAITH (Matt. 16:23-28; 1 Pet. 4:12, 13).

What did Peter learn from Jesus' rebuke to him? Matt. 16:23, 24; 1 Pet. 4:12, 13.

To understand this dramatic scene, we must remember that Jesus was confronted by Satan in the wilderness with the same temptation that Peter now suggested to Him: to escape the appointed cross! That is why Peter's idea was, not of divine, but rather of human origin. "The temptation to do His own will by avoiding the cross is *the great temptation* of Jesus' life. It will come to a head in Gethsemane, where Christ will repeatedly pray, 'If this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done' (26:42 RSV)."—G. R. Knight, *Matthew*, Bible Amplifier (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 1994), p. 177. This indicates the crucial importance of the atoning death in the ministry of Christ.

How did Jesus comfort Peter and His disciples with the assurance that He was the Son of God? Matt. 16:28; 17:1-8.

Christ prayed that His disciples might be given a manifestation of the glory He had with the Father before the world was. "He pleads that they may witness a manifestation of His divinity that will comfort them in the hour of His supreme agony with the knowledge that He is of a surety the Son of God, and that His shameful death is a part of the plan of redemption."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 420, 421.

How did Peter explain what he had learned from witnessing Christ's glory? 2 Pet. 1:16-19.

Christ wanted His disciples to know that His suffering and death were not the end goal of God's plan and that eternal glory would follow His cross. The glimpse of His divine glory would assure them that Jesus was indeed the Messiah of prophecy.

Later on, the risen Lord and the outpouring of the Spirit in full measure on the day of Pentecost motivated Peter to proclaim fearlessly that Jesus was the exalted Messiah. (See Acts 2:4, 32-36.)

"With what burning language they clothed their ideas as they bore witness for Him! Their hearts were surcharged with a benevolence so full, . . . that it impelled them to go to the ends of the earth, testifying to the power of Christ."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 46.

How can your daily life and witness include the cross of Calvary, as well as the crown of glory?

PETER'S AND GOD'S PLAN (Acts 10:9-28, 34-36; John 21:15-17).

How did God reveal to Peter the worldwide extent of the gospel? Acts 10:9-28.

Peter “hungered for the salvation of his countrymen. He had an intense desire to point out to them from the Scriptures the prophecies relating to the sufferings and death of Christ. . . . This vision conveyed to Peter both reproof and instruction. It revealed to him the purpose of God—that by the death of Christ the Gentiles should be made fellow-heirs with the Jews to the blessings of salvation. As yet none of the disciples had preached the gospel to the Gentiles.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 135.

What plan of God did Peter discover when he listened to the story of the Roman centurion Cornelius? Acts 10:34-36.

“As Peter pointed those present to Jesus as the sinner’s only hope, he himself understood more fully the meaning of the vision he had seen, and his heart glowed with the spirit of the truth that he was presenting.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 138, 139.

Why did Paul reprove Peter publicly? Gal. 2:11-14.

Peter’s accommodation to the sectarian attitude of the believers from Jerusalem was “not acting in line with the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:14, NIV). It threatened to divide the church and ignored the decision of the general council (see Acts 15:28, 29). “This record of the apostle’s weakness was to remain as a proof of his fallibility, and of the fact that he stood in no way above the level of the other apostles.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 198, 199.

What specific qualification did Christ require of Peter for his discipleship and service? John 21:15-17.

Although Peter’s love had failed the test, Christ’s love for Peter never faltered. “Remembering his own weakness and failure, he [Peter] was to deal with the sheep and lambs committed to his care as tenderly as Christ had dealt with him.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 516.

What helps you to remember that you also, like Peter, need a gracious reinstatement in the service of the Lord?

PERSEVERANCE IN THE FAITH (1 Pet. 5:12; 1:3-9, 23).

For what purpose did Peter write his first letter to Christians living in Asia Minor? 1 Pet. 5:12.

God has given three distinct privileges to His chosen ones. The Father chooses them as His children, the Holy Spirit sanctifies them, and Jesus Christ cleanses them from sin through the sprinkling of His blood. (See 1 Pet. 1:2.)

What does Peter mean by God's gift of a "living hope," and on what historical event is it based? 1 Pet. 1:3, 23.

Without the resurrection of Christ our faith would be in vain and our hope for eternal life meaningless. Peter wrote as an eyewitness, because the risen Lord spoke to him, ate with him, and restored him as an apostle among his brethren (John 21:10-17). He describes the nature of salvation in his First Letter as a "new birth into a living hope." This implies an unassailable assurance based on the resurrection of Christ from the dead. His resurrection guarantees ours. (See also Rom. 6:4, 5; 8:11.)

What "inheritance" does God keep safely in heaven for the future? 1 Pet. 1:4; compare Rom. 8:17. Why does God's power shield us until the Second Coming? 1 Pet. 1:5-7.

"The lowliest disciple of Christ may become an inhabitant of heaven, an heir of God to an inheritance incorruptible, and that fadeth not away. O that every one might make choice of the heavenly gift, become an heir of God to that inheritance whose title is secure from any destroyer, world without end!"—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 235.

God provides His protection from start till finish. He does not abandon the work that He began in the believer. Present salvation is a foretaste and pledge of the coming and ultimate salvation. Peter points to our enjoyment of present salvation, in spite of grief and suffering now "for a little while" (1:6, 8), as the beginning of a more exuberant joy to come at the return of Christ (see 4:13). Trials come to us in order to test and to strengthen our faith (1:7; 5:10).

Why should we have no doubt about our future glory if we trust and serve our Lord?

FURTHER STUDY: Study Acts 4:11; 1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 5:1-4. See *The Acts of the Apostles*, chap. 51, "A Faithful Under-Shepherd" and chap. 52, "Steadfast Unto The End" in order to understand better the purpose and reasons for Peter's two apostolic letters. In his epistles Peter proves to be also a theologian in his own right. "He refers to God's work of electing, regenerating, redeeming, and judging his people. And Peter defines his doctrine of Christ by disclosing the divinity, humanity, and sinlessness of Jesus. Furthermore, his Christology features Christ's resurrection and ascension. Peter also points to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to the early church, and to the end of time."—S. J. Kistemaker, *Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1987), p. 10.

Shortly before his martyrdom Peter called attention to the special privileges offered to every believer in Christ. "In the full assurance of his faith, the aged disciple exhorted his brethren to steadfastness of purpose in the Christian life. 'Give diligence,' he pleaded, 'to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' Precious assurance!"—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 533.

"It was to Peter a bitter lesson, and one which he learned but slowly, that the path of Christ on earth lay through agony and humiliation. The disciple shrank from fellowship with his Lord in suffering. But in the heat of the furnace fire he was to learn its blessing. [Quotes 1 Pet. 4:12, 13]."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 416.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Christ not give up on Peter after he shamefully denied Him?
2. What does Peter's reinstatement as an apostle tell us about Christ?
3. Why was Peter so full of assurance about his present and future salvation?
4. List the differences you can detect in Peter's life between his false security and his blessed assurance of faith?

SUMMARY: Peter's life story gives a telling proof of how an uneducated, narrow-minded, and self-confident fisherman can become a mature thinker and effective leader of God's people. His errors and sins are recorded for our sake, so that we may not despair or become discouraged by our own limitations and shortcomings.



Mary, the Humble Servant

Rajamanickam Daniel

An evangelist was holding meetings in a town in Tamil Nadu. Hundreds came to hear the word of God preached in eloquence and beauty. Among them was a young girl named Mary. She met the Savior during the meetings and was baptized.

While still a teenager, Mary left home and took work as a servant to a wealthy woman in a large city. The woman was kind to the young girl, and Mary served her gratefully for many years.

One day Mary learned that the preacher who had baptized her was coming to the city to hold evangelistic meetings. Mary excitedly told the woman for whom she worked about the evangelist and invited her to attend. The woman thanked Mary and agreed to go.

During the meetings this wealthy, refined woman was touched by the message of God's love and sacrifice. She responded to the evangelist's invitation to accept Jesus as her Savior and walked toward the altar.

When the evangelist approached her, the woman asked for permission to speak to the crowd of people present. "I have accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior tonight, not because of the eloquent words spoken by the preacher but because of the influence of a dear young woman who sits among you. She is not wealthy or well known. Her hands are rough and her back is bent from years of hard work. She has worked for me all these years, and yet not once have I heard her utter an unkind or harsh word, even when I provoked her. Her clothing is simple, but her life is adorned by acts of kindness and unselfishness and love for others.

"When my daughter died, I was left without hope. But Mary brought gladness to my empty life. She read to me from the Bible and gave me hope of life beyond the grave. I began to long for that hope that filled Mary's life and made it beautiful. It was her sweet, Christian life that led me here to the foot of the cross of Christ."

The evangelist invited Mary to the front and introduced her as the true evangelist, for she lived the gospel while he simply preached it.

How many would find Christ at the foot of the cross if we lived more like Mary, the humble servant!

Rajamanickam Daniel is director of Home and Family Ministries in the North Tamil Conference in India.

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no happiness
if the things
we believe in
are different
from the
things
we do."**

—Albert Camus

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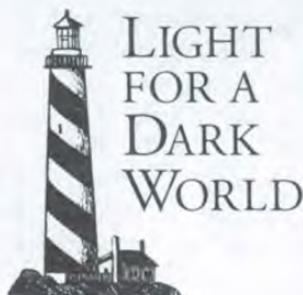
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John's Experience and Assurance of Salvation



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Mark 9:39-41; John 1:1-18, 29, 36; 3:18; 1 John 2:28; 3:23; 4:15-18.

MEMORY TEXT: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHTS: John, the son of Zebedee, was reared as an unlearned Galilean fisherman. He and his brother James were called "sons of thunder," because of their combative and self-seeking nature. But John wanted to be more like Jesus, and through the transforming love of Christ, he became humble and unselfish. Through John, Christ communicated His deepest spiritual teachings of love and assurance.

A LESSON OF UNTOLD VALUE. Although Christ knows our personal character faults, He also discerns beneath our shortcomings the sincerity of our hearts. Christ wants to reveal through each person the transforming power of His love. He teaches that we must not seek to coerce the conscience of others. "He desires only voluntary service, the willing surrender of the heart under the constraint of love."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 541. This week's lesson centers on how John became certain of his salvation, and how he explained the reasons of his faith in Christ as the world's Redeemer and as his personal Savior. John makes a unique contribution in this respect by stressing the redeeming love of God that "draws" all people to Himself. He places his eternal security in the self-giving love of God as manifested in the sending of His Son. The love of God brought his greatest assurance of salvation.

JOHN'S FOCUS ON LOVE AND COMPASSION (1 John 4:7-12).

What caused John to emphasize the love of God as the fundamental attribute of God's character? 1 John 4:7-12.

Although Jesus loved all His twelve apostles, He found in John the most receptive spirit for His teachings. As the youngest of the twelve, he opened his heart to Christ with the complete trust of a child. His soul readily responded to Jesus' teachings about the love and compassion of the Father. He discerned in Christ the glory, the grace, and the truth of God. "The beauty of holiness which had transformed him shone with a Christlike radiance from his countenance. In adoration and love he beheld the Saviour until likeness to Christ and fellowship with Him became his one desire, and in his character was reflected the character of his Master."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 545.

John was so surprised and appreciative of knowing God's forgiving love that at the end of his life he exclaimed: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1, NIV). For him the reality and experience of God's love brought him the certainty of being accepted as a child of God.

How did John initially show a lack of compassion for others? Luke 9:54, 55.

John's character defect became evident when he and his brother James saw how the Samaritans refused to welcome Jesus. While Christ did not urge His presence on the Samaritans, John and James requested to bring down an immediate punishment on them. To their surprise Jesus rebuked them, saying: "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:55, 56, NKJV). "It is no part of Christ's mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, who seek to compel the conscience."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 541.

How did Christ reprove John's judgmental attitude toward a believer who was not one of them? Mark 9:39-41.

John learned that he should not indulge in a narrow and exclusive spirit, but rather must extend his love and compassion to all people.

How can you show this patient, winsome, and loving attitude of Christ in a specific way this week?

JOHN'S ASSURANCE OF GOD'S LOVE (1 John 4:19; 2:6; 3:2, 3).

John became known as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20, NIV). His baptism in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost gave him a fresh zeal and a God-centered motivation to preach Christ effectively to all classes of people. John stressed especially the new commandment of Christ, "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). After he had witnessed the sufferings of Christ, His crucifixion, and resurrection, he had a better understanding of the nature of God's love.

How did John explain the source of his love for God? 1 John 4:19.

It is extremely important to realize that God does not love us merely because we love Him. John explains that it is the other way: we love God because He loved us first! Our love for God can be only our response to His love for us. This means that we can love God only when we come to know Him and His gifts to us, in particular the gift of His Son.

John proved his love for Christ during his time of testing before Emperor Domitian. He courageously witnessed to Christ's goodness and sinlessness when he was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil and his life was preserved (see *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 569, 570).

According to John, what is the condition for being sure of future salvation? 1 John 2:28; How did he link assurance with evidence of a sanctified life? 1 John 3:2, 3; 2:6.

The key thought of John's important declaration of confidence in our future salvation is to "continue in Him." Faith in Christ is, not an occasional exercise, but a daily privilege and duty. "Day by day, in contrast with his own violent spirit, he beheld the tenderness and forbearance of Jesus, and heard His lessons of humility and patience. Day by day his heart was drawn out to Christ, until he lost sight of self in love for his Master."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 557.

John's transformation of character was the result of his daily communion with Christ. He taught that every Christian believer who lives in the blessed hope of Christ's appearance must also purify himself after the pattern of Christ. Love is not a law to itself, but the fulfillment of the law of God and of Christ. Christ is the perfect example of how the law of God should be honored. Christ's life, therefore, pictured the highest standard of a sanctified life. In Him we see the union of assurance and obedience.

Why does a living faith become evident in love?

THE GREATEST EVIDENCE OF DIVINE LOVE (1 John 4:9, 10).

On what historic fact did John base the certainty of God's love for sinful humanity? 1 John 4:9, 10.

While John wrote in his Gospel that God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son (John 3:16), he now explains the nature of God's gift in Christ. God did not give His Son merely to visit planet Earth and to demonstrate that He cares for us. John now states that God gave His Son as an "atoning sacrifice." This means that God sent His Son to suffer not only human insults and rejection but also the divine penalty for the sins of the world. In this sense the final words of Jesus in John's Gospel may be understood, "It is finished!" (John 19:30, NKJV). The infinite price was paid.

What further evidence may we detect in John's Gospel that Christ's death was the fulfillment of the atoning sacrifices in the temple? John 1:29, 36. What, then, is the basis of John's assurance of God's gracious acceptance of sinners? John 1:14, 16.

The repeated pronouncement of John the Baptist that Jesus was "the Lamb" of God lay at the heart of his revelation of Christ to Israel. It is legitimate to hear in this symbolic expression a reference to Genesis 22:8, where Abraham assured Isaac that God Himself would provide the lamb for the burnt offering. John the Gospel writer grasped the fuller significance in the light of Isaiah 53:7, 10, and of the sacrificial lambs, the Passover lamb in particular (see Acts 8:30-35). We may, therefore, consider John's statement in 1 John 4:10 as a clarification of John 3:16. This means that salvation comes not simply from God's gracious self-disclosure in Jesus, or a demonstration of God's love on the cross, but from God's act of reconciliation in the atoning death of His Son.

The Christian faith does not rest on human philosophy or some speculative concept, but on a historical event, together with its inspired interpretation. God Himself came to humanity in Christ. What could God have done more convincing than that? John affirms both the deity and the genuine humanity of Christ. "John unveils the great idea at the heart of Christianity that the very Word of God took flesh for man's salvation."—L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 102.

What does the incarnation of Christ mean to your assurance of salvation?

LOVE: THE RULING PRINCIPLE OF ACTION (John 14:15).

Divine love urges the heart to express the same compassion that Jesus manifested. Christ lived only to bless others. He explained, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35, NKJV). This implies that, to be able to love others, the Christian must first know the Lord personally and experience His forgiving and keeping grace. "The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 551.

How and to what extent is fear driven out when the spirit of love is experienced? 1 John 4:17, 18.

In the acceptance of God's forgiveness of our sins we are set free from their punishment! This means that we no longer need to fear the last judgment. As long as we maintain our union with Christ by faith we cannot be lost. Our salvation is not based on our good works, but on the faithful Promiser who has paid the all-sufficient price for our redemption. "Centuries, ages, can never lessen the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 552, 553. The only fear is, not of being lost, but of losing our communion with Christ now. John states that we may have "confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like Him" (1 John 4:17, NIV). This "confidence" or "boldness" is the outcome of abiding in Him.

How does John unite faith, love, and obedience as the basis for Christian "confidence on the day of judgment"? John 3:18; 5:24; 1 John 3:23; 4:15, 16.

For John, love reaches its goal in Christian conduct *now* (see 1 John 2:29) and also through confidence in God's presence *at the Second Coming* (1 John 2:28; 3:21). The one leads to the other. What does it mean that the confident believers are in this world "like Him"? Consider the words of S. S. Smalley: "It should be characteristic for every believer to reflect the abiding fellowship and love which exist between the Son and the Father; and, insofar as this is achieved, a complete likeness to Christ in the future is foreshadowed [represented] (cf. 3:2)."—*1, 2, 3 John* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1984), p. 259.

How does obedience to Christ, born out of love to Him and trust in Him, help us deal with the problem of fretting over trying to feel sinlessly perfect in our present situation?

GOD'S TESTIMONY OF ASSURANCE (1 John 5:6-12; John 1:32-34).

What is the divine foundation of our assurance of salvation? 1 John 5:6-12. What are the three witnesses, and what is the meaning of their symbolic testimony?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The testimony of God marks the difference between the believer and the nonbeliever (1 John 5:10). It has the power to give life, the same eternal life that Jesus as the Son of God possessed (v. 11). For "he who has the Son has life" (v. 12). Here is the *certainty of life* in believing in the Son of God. Notice John's emphasis that believers *know* that they have a present certainty. The goal of John's Gospel had been to lead doubters to become believers in Christ (see John 20:31). The goal of his first letter was to assure believers that they had eternal life.

What does John mean by stating that Jesus Christ came by water and blood? 1 John 5:6.

If we understand the "water" as meaning the baptism of Jesus and the "blood" as signifying His atoning death on the cross, John speaks here of the beginning and close of Christ's earthly ministry. He thereby affirms the truly human nature of Christ, as well as His divine nature, which gives eternal life (1 John 5:20; 1:1, 2).

The testimony of these three stands or falls together in confirming that Jesus is Messiah and Son of God: "the three are in agreement" (1 John 5:8). 1 John 5:9 stamps God's own authority on the truth of the gospel. It is superior to all human testimony.

How did the Spirit attest to the divine Sonship of Christ at His baptism? John 1:32-34. How does the Spirit still testify to us about Christ? John 7:38, 39; 15:26, 27.

Why was it important for John to have *three* witnesses to produce reliable evidence? Deut. 19:15; John 8:17, 18.

Does your daily life show that you trust in God's testimony of assurance rather than in people's words? If not, how can you overcome this lack of trust?

FURTHER STUDY: Study John 1:14, 16; 21:20-25; 1 John 3:14-16; 4:11-13; 5:18; Galatians 5:6, 22. Read 1 John in one sitting. Chapters 53-56 of *The Acts of the Apostles* are devoted to John the beloved, describing his character transformation till he "could talk of the Father's love as no other of the disciples could."

"Evil temper, the desire for revenge, the spirit of criticism, were all in the beloved disciple."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 540.

"James and John had thought that in checking this man they had in view the Lord's honor; but they began to see that they were jealous for their own. They acknowledged their error, and accepted the reproof."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 544.

It is instructive to consult not only the *SDA Bible Commentary* but also other reliable commentaries, such as those of R.E. Brown in the Anchor Bible, S.S. Smalley in the Word Biblical Commentary, and of J. R. W. Stott in the Tyndale NT Commentaries, on 1 John. Their exegetical scholarship brings to light that John's first letter teaches that Jesus did not come just to enlighten sinners about the love of God, but specifically to redeem humankind through His sacrificial death. This is the most fundamental truth of the gospel for John.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can you experience God's blessed assurance that Jesus is the Messiah and Redeemer of all?
2. Could the "blood" of Christ have the power to reconcile humankind with God if Christ was no more than a perfect man? Explain.
3. Against what three deceptive claims did John warn the believers in 1 John 1:6, 8, 10? How can you overcome such false claims? Some early Christians were being deceived by so-called Gnostic philosophers, who taught that Christian faith should be divorced from all moral standard and conduct.

SUMMARY: John the Beloved was the most receptive disciple of Christ, and he appreciated the divine attributes of the Lord to such an extent that he increasingly reflected Christ's character. His certainty of faith was based on a correct understanding of Christ's person and mission and was anchored in God's truthful testimony about His Son.



Kill the Old Man!

J. H. Zachary

Jardslaw Wajik, a popular rock band musician in Poland had everything he wanted. Everything but peace. He had grown up attending church, but his life had become a tangled nightmare of tobacco, drugs, alcohol, and sinful living. He knew that his lifestyle was killing him. Depression set in, and one night he sat on a street curb and cried.

He was admitted to a mental hospital, and slowly his life began to change. Following his release, he married a former Adventist woman who helped him recover his health. His music career soared, and his records reached the top of the charts. In spite of success and financial security, Wajik still felt lonely.

When one of his band members announced that he intended to stop smoking, Wajik, who smoked 70 cigarettes a day, replied, "If you are still clean in two weeks, I will stop smoking too." Two weeks later Wajik knew he must keep that promise. He asked God to take away his hunger for liquor and tobacco. God came close to him and answered his prayer.

Then one day Wajik's wife announced that she had been rebaptized. She wanted a new life for herself and their daughter. Wajik did not object. One day he picked up a Bible and, in his words, "The Lord opened it to Exodus 20." He read the Sabbath commandment and realized that the church of his childhood was not following all the commandments. He stopped performing in rock concerts on Sabbath.

He attended Adventist evangelistic meetings but did not take a stand for God. Several months later at a youth camp meeting Wajik felt the Holy Spirit touch his heart. He gave his heart totally to God. At his baptism Wajik testified that "My old life was buried in the water, and Jesus has given me a new life. I am still a sinner, but I have a wonderful Friend, Jesus Christ."

God impressed him that he needed to use his influence and popularity to help others. He dropped out of his band and set his heart on three objectives. He wanted to have a relationship with God, a God-honoring family, and to be involved in some exemplary type of work. He had no idea how hard that would be.

Wajik began writing songs for a new musical group. He wants to show people the way out of sin, the way to joy and hope. He prays that the thousands who purchased his earlier albums will purchase the new one and find in it the joy that Wajik has found in his new life in Christ.

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Assurance and Christ's High-Priestly Ministry



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Heb. 1:2, 5; 4:15, 16; 5:5, 6; 6:13-19; 8:2, 6-12; 9:11-28; 10:19.

MEMORY TEXT: "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: The book of Hebrews gives assurance that faith in the risen and interceding Lord brings salvation as a present reality.

EXHORTATIONS TO TASTE THE POWERS OF THE AGE TO COME. As a pastoral letter, Hebrews shows how Messianic Jews can learn from the mistakes of their forefathers who heard the gospel but did not believe it. He urges them to persevere in their faith in Christ until the end in order to enter the promised inheritance. Christian faith brings even more privileges and responsibilities to cherish such a great salvation. A rejection of the gospel is an apostasy from the living God, who has revealed Himself through Jesus. In Christ we are tasting now the powers of the age to come. For our study this week, we will refer to William G. Johnsson's book, *Hebrews: Full Assurance for Christians Today* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994).

We believe that Paul was the author of this important Epistle even though it is anonymous. Ellen White accepts the position that the apostle Paul himself was the author (see *The Great Controversy*, pp. 347, 411-413, 415, 420, 512). It is beyond question that this book is indeed inspired by the Holy Spirit. May it speak to our hearts this week as we focus on the assurance we have in Jesus our High Priest.

THE FOUNDATION OF ALL ADMONITIONS (Heb. 2:1; 3:1; 10:19-22).

How does Hebrews connect its theological statements with its practical applications? Heb. 2:1; 3:1; 10:19.

The transition from theological discussion to practical application becomes evident in the use of the word *therefore*. This is also typical in Paul's other writings (see Rom. 5:1; 6:12; 8:1). It indicates that the Christian life is based on and motivated by God's acts in Jesus Christ. The apostolic exhortations are not just good advice, but the necessary fruits of the believer's faith in Christ.

Jesus is the dominant figure throughout the book of Hebrews (see Heb. 1:2, 5; 4:14; 5:5; 8:1; 10:19-22). The book presents several portraits of Him. Describe these portraits in:

2:10 _____

3:1 _____

6:20 _____

12:2 _____

“So in Jesus Christians have full assurance. They have access to the heavenly Most Holy Place and a conscience cleansed of sin.”—Johnsson, p. 22.

What does it mean that Jesus “by the grace of God” has tasted death “for everyone”? Heb. 2:9, 10; 10:12.

Paul sees Jesus' death not merely as that of a great martyr but as that of the Son of God, whose death was the critical moment of God's gracious act of reconciling humankind to Himself. “He tasted death—not just physical death, but the horror of separation from God, which the Bible calls ‘the second death’ (Rev. 20:6).”—Johnsson, *Hebrews*, p. 69. In this God-appointed way Christ became “the author of our salvation”(Heb. 2:10).

Contemplate the assuring promise in Hebrews 2:14, 15. Have you by faith in Jesus overcome the fear of death? But what about the fear of dying the trauma, the pain, the temporary separation from loved ones?

THE BENEFIT OF JESUS' WORK IN HEAVEN (Heb. 4:14-16; 7:25).

What benefit is there for us now that Christ has become our High Priest? Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:14-16; 6:19.

Jesus alone is qualified as our High Priest before God. By experiencing human frailties, temptations, and pain He became qualified to be our Mediator. Hebrews 4:14-16 is one of the most comforting passages in the New Testament. It assures us that our faith is effective because it connects us with the living person of Christ. We do have a powerful and merciful High Priest in heaven. That is the main point of Hebrews (see 8:1). The risen Christ is the guarantor of all His promises (7:22). William Johnsson comments: "At the heart of our religion stands a Man, and His name is Jesus—a Man, but much more, for He is God's Son!"—p. 103.

Compare how Paul in Romans 8:34 describes Christ's work in heaven with how John portrays His work in Revelation 1:12, 13 and 5:6-10.

What is Paul's basic exhortation in Hebrews 4:16?

Christ's aim is not to punish sinners, but to save them by drawing them to Himself through His sacrifice for them (see John 12:32). He can sympathize with human weaknesses, because He "has been tempted in every way, just as we are yet without sin" (4:15). In Christ every believer has received *access* to the throne of God. "Because we have such a high priest, the doors of heaven's temple swing open wide to welcome us. The command center of the universe no longer holds fear and uncertainty for us—we *belong* there. We come confidently (King James Version: 'boldly') into the divine presence."—Johnsson, p. 105.

Discuss the significance of the total salvation Christ gives us through His continuous intercession. Heb. 7:25.

The Lord offers us both His forgiving and His keeping grace. He knows we need more than mere amnesty. We need the victorious power of His Spirit in order to overcome our character defects and the many threats to our faith.

How does coming confidently before God's throne affect your daily relationship with Him?

OUR CONSTANT NEED FOR ASSURANCE (Heb. 5:1-11; 6:1, 4-6).

How is Jesus' priesthood in heaven of a higher order than Aaron's or that of the Levitical priests? Heb. 5:1-10.

Here is a lesson of great consequence for all who still seek the forgiveness of sins from earthly priests or give glory to human mediators. The first and most fundamental difference between Christ and all others is that God the Father has appointed His one and only Son as equal with God as our Mediator (7:28). This divine ordination is claimed as the fulfillment of two Messianic predictions, in Psalms 2 and 110 (see 5:5, 6). Look up these psalms and read those major promises about the Messiah's work of redemption. No other being in heaven or on earth can share in this high honor and work. In Christ alone are deity and humanity united. The Levitical priests were faint representations of the sinless, divine Mediator. Paul wrote to Timothy that God wants to save "all men" and therefore has appointed "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men" (1 Tim. 2:5, 6, NIV).

How does Paul deal with the common problem of being "slow to learn" spiritual truth? Heb. 5:11; 6:1.

He stimulates sluggish Christian believers to move forward to a mature spiritual understanding, and to "enjoy the full experience of salvation" (6:9, J. B. Phillips).

What is the purpose of his severe warning against an irrevocable apostasy? Heb. 6:4-6.

This difficult passage can be understood best if read with the parallel sections of 10:26-31 and 12:15-17, where the same elements occur as in 6:4-6. The "if" in 6:6 indicates that Paul places before the Jewish Christians a *possibility* of apostasy rather than an actual situation. He warns them against a deliberate, public rejection of Christ. "Here, we find the strongest words of Christian assurance coupled with the strongest warnings to Christians. But the two go together."—Johnsson, p. 117. The threefold message of Revelation 14 also contains the same strong words of warning after the proclamation of the everlasting gospel.

As you reflect on Hebrews 6:11, 12, how is your hope made "sure"?

CHRIST: THE ANCHOR OF OUR LIFE (Heb. 6:13-20; Ps. 110:4).

What twofold assurance has God provided for us, and how is Abraham an example in this respect? Heb. 6:13-15.

Complete: God made a _____ to Abraham and then confirmed it by an _____. Thus God made His word doubly sure! For Christians, God's Word is made even more sure because of its fulfillment of the Messianic promises in Jesus. Our hope rests on the reality of Messiah Jesus. "Jesus anchors our hopes. His person and His work make our salvation absolutely sure."—Johnsson, p. 119.

What special significance do you find in Hebrews 6:19?

We need to consider the phrase "behind the curtain," or "within the veil" (NASB), in the theological context of chapter 6 and not as a mere item of technical information. The intended message is clear: through the risen Son of God we have now full and free access to the very presence of God, and through Christ's ministry we now enjoy a person-to-person relationship with God. Adventist Bible scholars, therefore, consider this particular phrase as a metaphor for the heavenly sanctuary, from which the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant are dispensed. (See *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 4, F. B. Holbrook, ed. [Biblical Research Institute, 1989]).

Why is Psalm 110:4 so important in the entire letter to the Hebrews? Heb. 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:17, 21-24.

Write out Psalm 110:4 and consider each word. It contains the surprising announcement that the Levitical priesthood would be replaced by a more perfect priesthood. Paul claims that Psalm 110 is being fulfilled in the permanent priesthood of Christ in heaven.

This psalm refers to the ancient priest-king in the time of Abraham (see Gen. 14:18-20) in order to announce that a son of the royal house of David would one day become a priest-king forever! Melchizedek becomes a historical prototype of Christ in his double office of priest and king. In this respect he was "like the Son of God" (Heb. 7:3). Paul's main point is to announce that Jesus is a *better* priest, because He became one in "the power of an indestructible life" (7:16).

Why is Christ's present priesthood so important to you?

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD (Heb. 7:19-28; 8:1).

Why is the "better hope" introduced? Heb. 7:19, 25.

The key point of Jesus' new priestly order is that in Christ "we draw near to God." This is the perfection of Jesus' ministry, which the weak Levitical order did not have (7:18, 19).

Mention four distinctive characteristics that express the superiority of Christ's priesthood in Hebrews 7:20-28.

1. _____ 2. _____
 3. _____ 4. _____

"Too often in our times, the fizz has gone out of Christian living. We wander about, groping for a light, when the Light has already come. We debate and argue, when the Truth already has spoken. We seek to please God, when He already has opened the Way."—Johnsson, p. 137.

What does Paul point out as the sum total of the previous chapters? Heb. 8:1, 2.

Notice the ring of certainty: "We do have such a high priest"! This good news should excite us every day. It is an essential part of the gospel just as is the cross of Christ. Our faith must center in a crucified, risen, and interceding Lord. Such a comprehensive faith brings assurance of everlasting salvation!

How does Paul explain the special benefit of Jesus' superior ministry? Heb. 8:6, NIV. What are the "better promises"? Heb. 8:7-12.

The main benefit of the new covenant lies in providing a solution to the sin problem. No longer is there any need for sacrifices for sins (see 8:13; 10:18). The progression of God's plan of salvation from the old to the new covenant is expressed in a change of worship rituals. So we no longer need to enter God's temple through the blood of animals, but by the shed blood of Christ (9:1, 8, 11-14).

What is the abiding benefit of Christ's shed blood for you today? (See Heb. 9:14, 22.)

FURTHER STUDY: Study Luke 5:20, 21; Heb. 3:1; 12:2; 13:20, 21; Rom. 8:34; Rev. 1:12, 13; 5:6-10. Read the two chapters in *The Great Controversy*, entitled "What Is the Sanctuary?" and "In the Holy of Holies."

"The ministration of the priest throughout the year in the first apartment of the sanctuary, 'within the veil' which formed the door and separated the holy place from the outer court, represents the work of ministration upon which Christ entered at His ascension. . . . So did Christ plead His blood before the Father in behalf of sinners, and present before Him also, with the precious fragrance of His own righteousness, the prayers of penitent believers."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 420, 421.

Another helpful study book by W. G. Johnsson is *In Absolute Confidence: The Book of Hebrews Speaks to Our Day* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Pub. Assn., 1979). The more in-depth treatment of some basic texts, such as Hebrews 6:19 and 9:23, is found in *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, referred to earlier.

The book of Hebrews still speaks today to all believers in Christ. The religious profile of the early Jewish Christians and the threats to their faith resemble those of believers in our own time. Hebrews, therefore, is an effective exhortation to us to persevere in the faith we have in Christ. Meditating its great themes of salvation, we breathe the atmosphere of heaven and prepare for our eternal home.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what way is Jesus more real to you after studying Hebrews? How has your assurance of salvation been renewed?
2. What is the difference between the priesthood of believers in 1 Peter 2:9 and Christ's priesthood as described in Hebrews 5:1-10; 6:19, 20?
3. Do you approach the "throne of grace" with confidence or with fear? What difference does this make in your personal devotions and your public worship?
4. What assurance do you receive from the good news that Christ has entered "behind the curtain" as our forerunner?

SUMMARY: The book of Hebrews is an inspired and authoritative affirmation of Christian faith. It leads us from the foundation truths to a deeper understanding of God's plan of complete salvation through the work of His Son after His ascension to the heavenly sanctuary.



A Searching Heart

Barbara Huff

Roman Ebragemov comes from Kazakhstan, part of the Euro-Asia Division and a former republic of the Soviet Union. He is a member of the Dungan race, an ethnic group that dates back to the seventh century, when Arabs intermarried with Chinese. The children of these marriages took their father's religion, Islam, and their mother's language, a dialect of Chinese. Most Dungans remain in China, but five generations ago, Roman's ancestors moved to Kazakhstan.

Roman grew up in a strong Muslim family. Members of his family are priests, and he, too, studied in the Muslim seminary. He has studied the Qu'ran for years and knows it well. But in spite of this, he knew no peace. His spiritual hunger and inquiring mind drove him to search for answers. He decided to compare his religion with Christianity and learn about this God-Man, Jesus.

He met a Protestant pastor, and for two years he attended worship services in both the Christian church and the mosque. During this time he says he felt like a spy. He compared the Bible with the Qu'ran. He found a peace and comfort from studying the Bible that he had not found in following the traditions of Islam.

During this time an Adventist evangelist announced meetings in town. Roman read the brochure and decided to attend. Cautiously he studied the Adventist doctrines. To his joy, he found that Adventist health teachings were very similar to his Muslim beliefs and practices. And he found similarities in teachings about end-time events as well.

Roman surrendered his life to Christ and was baptized. In doing so, he became the first ethnic Dungan to become a Seventh-day Adventist.

He did not make this decision lightly, for he knew that such a decision would mean total separation from his family, who would consider him a traitor to his faith.

Roman changed more than his faith; he changed careers. He had prepared to be a cook and was a talented masseur, but he recently completed studies at Zaoksky Theological Seminary in Russia. His one desire now is to share the gospel with other Muslims.



Barbara Huff is an administrative secretary in the Euro-Asia Division office in Moscow, Russia.

Such a Great Cloud of Witnesses



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Heb. 11:1-40; Job 19:25-27; Pss. 16; 23; 73; Gen. 5:21-24; 6:22; 12:1, 4.

MEMORY TEXT: "I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: The witness of God's faithful followers in the past encourages those who are new in the faith and establishes those who may have doubts and need assurance in their relationship with God.

THE VALUE OF PERSONAL TESTIMONIES. The saints' witness in the past about their encounters with God: their calling, their answered prayers, their transformed lives, and their supernatural rescues, all build up our faith and bring praises to the living God. Their encouraging testimonies are an essential part of worship. This week we will briefly look at the witness of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Job. Finally we will consider Psalms 16, 23, 73, which demonstrate how believers experienced God's establishing their assurance in Him and renewing their hope for the future. The Psalms have proved to be an unceasing fountain of spiritual comfort and revival. All these testimonies are inspired examples of how we may reach our God and cultivate a living communion with Him. They are written for our sake, as Paul explains: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4, NIV). This week let us regain courage and assurance as we remember God's saving acts. God *can* be trusted; He is the same faithful covenant God at all times.

TESTIMONIES OF GOD'S CARE, PART 1 (Heb. 11:1-6).

Describe the essence of a living faith. Heb. 11:1.

Having assured us that God cares for His people in previous chapters, Hebrews 11 makes practical applications for believers today. At the end of Hebrews 10 the author appeals to Habakkuk's famous assurance (Hab. 2:3, 4) that those who live by "faith" will survive the impending judgment. His principal citation from Habakkuk is: "But my righteous one will live by faith" (see Heb. 10:38). His first conclusion was "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved" (Heb. 10:39, NIV). What is the meaning of "faith" here? The Hebrew term for faith [*'emunah*] refers not to a one-time acceptance of a creed of beliefs, but to an attitude of *faithfulness*, to a persevering faith that holds on till the end. To continue this rich meaning of "faith," Hebrews 11 begins to define *faith* for Christian believers in an even deeper sense.

Why did God approve of Abel and his offering? Heb. 11:4; Gen. 4:4.

Notice that God looked first at the offerer himself and then at his offering. This indicates that both faith and obedience are essential in true worship.

How is Enoch's life a telling example for the end-time people? What is the prerequisite to pleasing God? Describe its twofold content. Heb. 11:5, 6; Gen. 5:21-24.

1. _____

2. _____

Enoch's life was a daily "walk with God" for three centuries. Can you describe what this involved? How do you walk with God? Is there any significance in the statement that Enoch began his walk with God after the birth of his first son, Methuselah? How did Enoch demonstrate a living faith? "The closer the connection with God, the deeper was the sense of his [Enoch's] own weakness and imperfection. . . . To him prayer was as the breath of the soul; he lived in the very atmosphere of heaven."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 85.

Do you sense living in "the very atmosphere of heaven"? If you do not, what can you do this week to begin to do this?

TESTIMONIES OF GOD'S CARE, PART 2 (Heb. 11:7-16, 39, 40).

How did God regard Noah's faith and life? Heb. 11:7; Gen. 6:22; 7:1. What motivated his obedience to God?

Noah trusted in the Word of God. His faith was living and obedient. He was sure of the coming fulfillment of God's promise. This shows that faith and hope are inseparable. In fact, the forward-looking aspect of faith is hope.

How did Abraham first demonstrate his faith in God's Word? What does this say about his relationship with God? Heb. 11:8-11; Gen. 12:1, 4.

Again we see how faith includes the forward-looking aspect. It motivated Abraham to start his pilgrimage of faith in obedience to God's command. He then showed his faith by living in tents as a stranger in the Promised Land, because he was looking for the heavenly city. Abraham believed God!

How is Abraham's faith an inspiring example for those waiting for the Second Coming? Heb. 11:13-16, 39, 40. What does God's immediate response to Abraham's faith tell you about His character? Gen. 15:6.

Can we accept Abraham's justification by faith alone as a guarantee for our own justification by faith alone? See Romans 4:24, 25. Is this good news for you? "When the sinner believes that Christ is his personal Saviour, then according to His unfulfilling promises, God pardons his sin and justifies him freely. The repentant soul realizes that his justification comes because Christ, as his substitute and surety, has died for him, is his atonement and righteousness."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1073.

What does it mean that "none of them received what had been promised"? God had a "better plan" that includes all Christian believers and will be consummated in the "better resurrection" (11:35, NIV) of all the saints together. Charles Wesley wrote: "E'en now by faith we join our hands with those that went before, And greet the blood-besprinkled bands on the eternal shore."—Quoted in F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The New London Commentary on the New Testament* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971), p. 344.

THE TESTIMONY OF JOB (Job 13:3-12, 15-18; 19:23-27).

How did Job's friends misrepresent both him and God? Job 13:3-12.

"Job is willing to confess to any sins that may be proved against him (13:23), but so far neither his memory nor his friends have done this. His own vindication and God's will go hand in hand, but what he needs more is understanding of the ways of God through rational discussion. So far the friends have failed to supply the needed explanation (4-12). It must come from God."—F. I. Andersen, *Job. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 164.

How did Job respond to God's justice? What does this tell us about his relationship with God? Job 13:15-18.

Job is certain of his vindication. He sees his sufferings, not as a punishment, but as a test by God. He now accepts this divine testing. "I will come forth as gold." This implies his belief that he is precious in the sight of God. Job's faith in God is stronger than death (13:15).

In what famous words did Job's faith reach its height in his darkest hour? Job 19:25.

The great sufferer expects to die soon and wants his testimony to be recorded as a permanent witness for the day of judgment (19:23, 24). As Job looks to the future he calls God "my Redeemer," and expects to be vindicated by Him after his death.

What is the significance of Job's emphasis on "seeing God" with his own eyes? Job. 19:26, 27.

Job firmly believed that God would "remember" him after his temporary stay in the grave (see 14:13, 14) and would never abandon him. What great trust in God!

"From the depths of discouragement and despondency Job rose to the heights of implicit trust in the mercy and the saving power of God."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 163.

Is your relationship with God leading you to trust Him no matter what? How is this trust being strengthened daily?

DAVID'S SONGS OF CONFIDENCE (Pss. 16; 23).

The communion with nature and with God, the care of his flocks, the persecutions and rescues experienced, all were set in songs of praise and thanksgiving by David, Israel's sweet singer. "They were, in all coming ages, to kindle love and faith in the hearts of God's people, bringing them nearer to the ever-loving heart of Him in whom all His creatures live."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 642.

How did David find security in his God when he faced death? Ps. 16:1, 2, 8.

David expressed his confidence in God and His blessed assurance of salvation (see also Ps. 62:2, 6). In Psalm 16:8 he mentions what he did in order not to be shaken: (1) setting the Lord always before him; (2) experiencing the Lord on his right hand. The Lord became his guide and his support to give him assurance and security.

What were David's three great spiritual blessings when he trusted in God? Ps. 16:11.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How did David sing of God's keeping grace during the crises of his life? On what basis could David have no fear of death or evil? Ps. 23:1-4.

Verses 1-4 contain an extended metaphor, in which God is the shepherd and David is a sheep belonging to His flock. So long as the Lord was his Shepherd, he would suffer no lack. That is trust in God's providence and confidence in His guidance. Look up Deuteronomy 2:7 and describe how all who were delivered from Egypt and had arrived safely in the Promised Land could have identified with the promises of Psalm 23. Explain what David meant by the metaphors of "your rod and your staff" as his comfort. What would those instruments of a shepherd do for a sheep?

How did David anticipate the future with full assurance of God's provision and protection? Ps. 23:5, 6.

FROM DOUBT TO TRIUMPHANT FAITH (Ps. 73).

Psalm 73 is the personal testimony of Asaph, a Levitical priest and founder of one of the temple choirs (1 Chron. 25:1). He has a story to tell that describes his spiritual journey from doubt about God to an assurance of His presence. This psalm belongs to one of the highest expressions of communion with God in the entire Bible. *Heart* is a key word in this testimony (six times). It indicates that the state of the heart, not external circumstances, determines our relation to God. "Psalm 73 takes us beyond the present life into an eternity of glory, where man will find the ultimate solution and his ultimate satisfaction in the presence of God."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 802.

Compare Asaph's introduction of this psalm with its conclusion. Ps. 73:1, 28. What two things does he refer to in verse 28 that move him to witness about God?

1. _____
2. _____

What led Asaph to doubt God's care for him? Ps. 73:2, 3, 14. How did he find the assurance and new hope for which he searched? Ps. 73:16, 17, 24.

The immediate occasion may have been a serious illness (vs. 14, 26). Asaph's constant question became, "Why must a righteous man suffer while the wicked prosper and have it so good?" He began to doubt God's faithfulness to His covenant with Israel. He can be called "the doubting Thomas of the Old Testament."

He finally went into the sanctuary of God, not just to perform his official duties, but to commune with Him. "Asaph went into the sanctuary plagued by doubts. He came out singing for joy, because he had seen the Invisible One. He went in insecure; he came out transformed and utterly convinced. Israel's God had kept him from finally slipping away, because Asaph had come to Him. . . ."

"Asaph found not so much an intellectual solution to his questions as a settling reassurance of God's care for him and of God's sovereign control of history."—Hans K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms: Messages of Hope for Today* (Sarasota, Fla.: First Impressions, 1991), p. 170.

How can you in the midst of doubt and discouragement experience hope and assurance? Recall an experience when this was the case.

FURTHER STUDY: Read Hebrews 11:1 in different translations to experience its rich meaning. For example: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (RSV).

In what respect did Enoch “please God”? Are there “Enochs” today? (See *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 332).

Consider Job 19:26 and 14:13-15. These passages strongly indicate that the hope of the resurrection belonged to the very heart of Job’s faith. “Job indicates that in the resurrection he will retain his personal identity.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 550.

“It is the privilege and duty of every man to take God at His word.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 928.

Am I committing myself to His guidance as Asaph did? “By prayer, by the study of His word, by faith in His abiding presence, the weakest of human beings may live in contact with the living Christ, and He will hold them by a hand that will never let go.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 182.

The following commentaries offer helpful instruction about the historical background and the literary context of the Psalms: *Psalms*, 2 volumes, by D. Kidner, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; *Psalms 1-50*, by P. C. Craigie, and *Psalms 51-100*, by M. E. Tate, Word Biblical Commentary; *Deliverance in the Psalms*, by Hans K. LaRondelle.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why does the Bible contain so many personal testimonies of experiences with God? How would you write your own testimony? How would you share it?
2. How may we apply the doubts and insecurities, the expressions of repentance, the protestations of innocence against false accusations of the saints of old to ourselves today? How do we receive assurance and hope as they did?
3. Where did Abraham, Job, David, and Asaph find their ultimate spiritual security and satisfaction?

SUMMARY: The purpose of the accounts of tragedies and triumphs of believers in the Bible is to teach us valuable lessons of trusting our God. We have the privilege not only to take the Bible saints as our examples but also to identify with their sinful impulses and with their victories through faith in the promises of God. Their hopes must become ours.



No Adventists Allowed

J. H. Zachary

Everet Kamuh, Global Mission director for the Irian Jaya Mission, wanted to place Global Mission pioneers in Aurim, a village in the steamy jungles of eastern Indonesia. But the villagers threatened to kill any Adventist who entered. How could Kamuh ask two pioneers to risk their lives on such a dangerous assignment? Then he realized that while the villagers might kill a man, they would not harm a woman! He asked Yinina and Sarah to go.

Trembling, the women finally agreed to go. They took a bus to the village. But heavy storms made the road impassible, and the women had to walk the last few miles, carrying their heavy luggage.

As they approached the village, a crowd gathered. Frangky, the leader of the village youth, blocked the path and loudly told the women, "If you were men, you would have one minute to leave."

The women bowed their heads and prayed, then started singing a song of praise to God. The villagers were charmed by the music. Scowls turned to smiles. Even Frangky hummed along.

The villagers let the women stay in a large house in the center of the village. They offered to teach the villagers to sing their songs. Even Frangky joined the singers. But the daughter of the region's king demanded that her father force the women to leave the large house. The women found themselves living in a tiny crowded hut.

About a week later this woman's son died in an accident. She was crushed and convinced that God was punishing her for driving the women from the large house. She begged their forgiveness and urged the villagers to listen to them.

Often when the villagers sang, Tarsan, a village dog, howled along. The villagers said that the dog was praising God.

Frangky joined the women's Bible study group and eventually decided to be baptized. His decision angered his friends, who threatened him. "If you join them, we will kill you and burn your house down."

Frangky answered, "My life is hidden in God. Everything I have is laid up in heaven. You cannot take it away."

Today a jungle chapel stands in Aurim. And Frangky, the man who had led the threats against the missionaries, recently graduated from the Global Mission training center. He has gone to an unentered village in Irian Jaya, where he will share the love of God that changed his life.

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Assurance and the Final Judgment



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: John 3:16-19; 12:31-33; 1 John 4:16-18; Rom. 2:6-13; James 2:14-17; Dan. 12:1; Rev. 20:12.

MEMORY TEXT: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHTS: Assurance of salvation is considered by many to be incompatible with a last judgment of the saints according to works. However, the Scriptures teach their essential harmony and unity in the history of salvation.

IMPORTANCE OF JUSTIFICATION AND JUDGMENT. There can be no doubt that Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament present the reality of both justification by faith and judgment according to works. It is a faith that works. A living faith in Christ produces good works that glorify God. We are saved *by* Christ *for* good works. Our assurance of salvation does have a bearing on our conduct.

This week's lesson will explore both topics to help us understand their mutual relationship. Why does God's last judgment not threaten the present assurance of the saints? How does the judgment confirm and guarantee that salvation is by grace alone?

"We owe everything to grace. . . . Grace in the covenant ordained our adoption. Grace in the Saviour effected our redemption, our regeneration, and our adoption to heirship with Christ. Let this grace be revealed to others."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 268.

JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO WORKS (Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6-11; Rev. 20:12; 22:12).

What role will our works play in the final judgment? Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6-11; 2 Cor. 5:10.

Both Christ and Paul teach emphatically that everyone, including every Christian believer, will be held accountable for his or her life in the last judgment. Such a teaching is evident in the Old Testament in such passages as Psalm 62:12, Proverbs 24:12, and Ecclesiastes 12:14. The crucial question arises as to *how* the New Testament affirmation of judgment according to works is compatible with the gospel message that we are justified by faith “apart from works of law” (Rom. 3:28 RSV)? How can faith and works be seen as a spiritual unity and not as a contradiction?

What is the fundamental difference between “works of faith” and “works of law” in Paul’s theology? 1 Thess. 1:3; Rom. 12:1, 12-21; 3:28.

We must clearly distinguish in Paul’s theology between “works of law,” that are by his definition self-righteous works and therefore under the curse of God (see Gal. 3:10), and works that are the fruits of faith and love through the Holy Spirit (see Gal. 5:22-25).

How does the indwelling Spirit empower the believer to remain anchored and fruitful in Christ? Rom. 8:9-14.

Saving faith connects the believer with Christ Himself as Savior and Lord. Such a faith expresses itself in a new attitude of forgiving love to others (see Gal. 5:6) and of obedience to God’s will (see 1 Cor. 7:19). The works of faith and love must not be seen as isolated acts that deserve merit before God, but as the demonstration of a transformed character.

“Those whom God justified through Jesus Christ He called to witness to Jesus Christ in word and deed until the consummation of all things. When the end comes, the judgment assesses and testifies to the reality of justification evidenced by the faithful witness of God’s people. In this flow, justification and judgment do not stand in the relation of tension or contradiction, but in that of inauguration and consummation.”—Ivan T. Blazen, “Justification and Judgment,” in *Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy* (Biblical Research Institute, 1986), vol. 3, p. 344.

What in my conduct reveals my living faith in Christ?

JUDGMENT AND ASSURANCE (Rom. 8:1, 33-39; 3:21-31).

What is the standard of judgment according to Paul's gospel? Rom. 2:6-13, 16.

Romans 2:13 is often misunderstood, as if Paul intended to present an impossible standard. He states: "It is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous." Paul did not have in mind, of course, a mere external or legalistic law-righteousness (see Phil. 3:6, 9), but a grateful obedience "as the expression of humble trust in God, well-pleasing in His sight."—C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC, (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1975), vol. 1, p. 155.

How can a believer reach God's standard in the judgment? Rom. 3:21-31.

The justified believer is saved. Those who are saved do not need to work for their salvation. They are accepted by God on the basis of Christ's perfect life and death. What believers need is to accept Christ by faith and to exercise that faith daily by walking with Christ. But the merits of Christ remain the only basis on which believers will be acquitted in the last judgment.

Who is our substitute and surety in the final judgment? Why do we not need to fear the outcome of our verdict? Rom. 8:1, 33, 34, 38, 39; 1 John 2:1, 28; 4:16-18.

In the last judgment Christ will *still* be our Advocate and our merciful Judge when He pronounces the final verdict. He will never withdraw His Spirit from His people. As the indwelling Christ, He will remain with us until probation closes and beyond (compare Gal. 2:20). Then every believer will have been judged and the destiny of everyone will have been fixed forever (see Rev. 22:11). There can be no question, therefore, about the certainty of salvation for God's people when Christ terminates His mediation in heaven. When the time of trouble breaks He will shelter them by His grace, as promised in Psalm 91. When Christ closes His priestly ministry in heaven, each believer will have been sealed for all eternity (see Rev. 7:1-10; 22:11).

What does Christ's promise "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20, NKJV) mean to you?

JUSTIFYING AND SANCTIFYING FAITH (James 2:14-17, 21-24).

What does James say about the dynamics of a genuine faith in Abraham's experience? James 2:14-17, 21-24.

James faced a different problem in his church community from the problem Paul had to deal with in the Gentile churches. James had to reprove some who "claimed" to have faith but had no deeds to match it. He tells them that "such faith" cannot save them. It is not worthy of the name, because it is merely theoretical, leaving the heart cold and unconverted. The Epistle of James is not primarily focusing on the Pauline theme of *how* a person becomes saved by faith in Christ, but on practical Christianity and the sanctified life. He wants to show that genuine, living faith in Christ produces works of love and compassion in the life of His disciples (see 1:1, 27). "James is not comparing faith with works, but a genuine faith with a dead faith."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 521. He may well have had to deal with those who were distorting Paul's teaching of salvation "by faith without works of law." Like Paul, James uses the example of Abraham as his crown witness to show that Abraham's faith in Genesis 15:6 was "fulfilled" in an act of obedience in Genesis 22 (James 2:23). Abraham's work testified to the character of his faith. James does not deny that a person is declared righteous by faith (2:23). He only denies the separation of faith from its corresponding works. He sees Abraham's life in its totality, not just in the moment of his justification by faith in Genesis 15:6. He states that Abraham's faith was "made complete by what he did" [lit. "was perfected"] (2:22), referring to his act of obedience in offering his son Isaac.

How did Jesus relate faith and works? Matt. 7:16-20.

If faith embraces Christ, it is living and active in works of love and mercy. Faith is purely instrumental, never meritorious. According to Jesus the righteous do not even remember their works of compassion in the judgment day (Matt. 25:37-39), because they did it all for His sake. For them there was no separation between faith and works, because faith expressed itself through love. That is what counts in the judgment of God! His judgment, therefore, distinguishes between faith and unbelief, between a genuine faith and a dead faith. God alone knows the quality of our faith in any work and will acknowledge it (Matt. 26:10). He will bring all hidden motives to light.

How does James 5:7 and 8 help you in view of the Second Coming?

**ASSURANCE AND THE INVESTIGATIVE JUDGMENT
(1 John 4:17, 18).**

Does belief in an investigative judgment threaten our assurance of salvation? Upon what does such assurance rest? 1 John 2:28; 4:17, 18; Rom. 8:1, 33, 34; Phil. 3:9.

Daniel's vision of the judgment reveals two phases: (1) an investigative judgment; (2) an executive judgment. The faithful saints will be vindicated and then receive the kingdom of God (Dan. 7:22, 27). The persecutors will be condemned and then receive their punitive judgment (7:9-11, 26). The comforting assurance of Daniel's judgment portrayal is that the "Ancient of Days" will pronounce "judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High" (7:22, NIV)! This is the ultimate assurance of salvation. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). God's people should not doubt or fear, but rejoice for such infinite mercy in His judgment (see Ps. 96:10-13; 98:8, 9).

What is the decisive issue for deliverance in the judgment? Dan. 12:1; Rev. 20:12.

God's assurance to us is more secure than the feelings of our own hearts. Even when our hearts condemn us, we are safe in the care of our covenant God because "God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything" (1 John 3:20, NIV). The decisive point is not how we feel about ourselves, but whether our names are found in the book of life of the Lamb! Christ told His disciples that their names were written in heaven (Luke 10:20). Paul wrote that the names of his fellow workers were "in the book of life" (Phil. 4:3). The names of all believing Christians are "written in heaven" (Heb. 12:23) and they have therefore "citizenship . . . in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). Believers in Jesus are *already* "written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27).

What basic question will God's judgment answer regarding the professed believer? Matt. 7:21-23; 25:12.

The ultimate question will be Has Christ been both your Savior and your Lord? Have you accepted both His gift for you and His claim on you? Have you been a disciple of Jesus in your life, a blessing to others? Christ cannot be divided or accepted partially. We cannot accept His forgiveness and not forgive others (Matt. 6:15).

JUDGMENT IN THE WRITINGS OF JOHN (John 12:31-33; 16:8, 11).

How does John view the cross of Christ as a judgment by God? John 12:31-33; 16:11; 1 John 4:10.

John's Gospel places God's judgment on sinful humanity in the atoning death of Christ. This truth belongs to the very core of the gospel. For this purpose Christ gave His life. He completed His ministry with the shout of triumph, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). With that, salvation and eternal life were assured to all true believers (see John 12:24). The Cross is the foundation of God's last judgment. Faith in the substitutionary death of Christ is essential for the last judgment. Rejection of Christ and His words brings condemnation in the judgment (John 12:48).

How does our abiding in Christ affect our assurance of salvation in the judgment? 1 John 2:6, 24, 25, 28; 4:17.

Our assurance lasts as long as we abide in Christ. Faith in Him is not a one-day occurrence, but a daily exercise and commitment. It is our privilege and duty to walk daily with Him, to abide in Him, to persevere in our faith. "It is by continually hearing and believing that one continually has eternal life and avoids the judgment of condemnation. . . . Deny the one reality (hearing and believing), and one necessarily denies the other (having eternal life and avoiding condemnation)."—Ivan T. Blazen, "Justification and Judgment," p. 385.

How do you interpret what Jesus said about "judgment" or "condemnation" in John 5:24?

The Greek word *krisis* can mean "judgment" (John 5:30) or "condemnation" and punishment (John 5:24, 29; 3:17-19, where the verb *krinein* means a condemning judgment). Notice the contrast of outcomes in 5:24. Compare 5:28, 29. "All who are united with Christ are assured of salvation. In the pre-Advent phase of the last judgment genuine believers, those who have a saving relationship with Christ, are affirmed before the unfallen universe."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (Washington, D.C.: Ministerial Association, 1988), p. 326.

Considering that professed believers can be adversely judged and lost (John 15:2, 6), in what ways can you choose daily to abide in Christ?

FURTHER STUDY: Look up Matt. 12:33; John 15:5, 8; Rom. 2:16; Gal. 5:6; Phil. 1:9-11; 2:12, 13.

Paul points to the believer's final justification in Galatians 5:5, which reads in the RSV: "For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness." This confident hope is nothing else but "the final verdict of acquittal in the divine judgment."—H. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 189.

It is the believer's personal responsibility to choose between separation from Christ and abiding in Him. Christ assures us: "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37). He even declares that no one could snatch anyone out of His hand (John 10:28). But apostasy is a serious threat, as becomes clear in Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:29-31.

For a better appreciation of faith in Christ, see Ellen G. White's *Faith and Works*, pp. 63-79.

"We want that living faith which grasps the arm of infinite power, and we want to rely with all our being upon Jesus Christ, our righteousness. And we may do it. Yes, we do it profitably to our own soul's interest."—*Faith and Works*, p. 66.

An excellent guide for this week's study is the chapter "Justification and Judgment," in *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3 (Biblical Research Institute, 1986).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How would you refute the error of "Once saved, always saved"? What Bible passages can you use?
2. How would you deal with the error of "cheap grace," that God gives His grace without claiming our obedience?
3. How do you confront the error of sinless perfectionism before probation closes? What Scripture passages can you use?
4. In what ways has the study of this week's lesson helped you to be more thankful for God's judgment? How has it given you new confidence?

SUMMARY: It is important to discover the biblical connection between the Cross and the judgment of God in the entire history of salvation, and not as isolated doctrines of truth. In this larger scope God's judgment does not threaten the believers' assurance of eternal salvation. Rather it acknowledges publicly their living faith in Christ, ratifies their justification by faith, and rewards them for their witness for Him.



The Power of Forgiveness, Part 1

Lynn Rose

Ruthie Papay had as bad a childhood as one could imagine. Her single mother often left her alone in an unheated trailer house while she went out looking for a good time. Sometimes she took Ruthie with her to bars in order to attract men whom she could invite home.

In spite of this upbringing, Ruthie did well in school. And when she was 17, she gave her heart to God. Two years later, she met a man who asked her to marry him. Finally, she thought, she would have a real home and family.

But to her horror her husband was even more abusive to her. Frustrated and confused and in a fit of rage, she killed someone. She never denied her crime and was sentenced to life in prison.

I met Ruthie in 1993, when she sent a tithe check to the General Conference. But the letter that accompanied the check was full of anger toward those who had hurt her. Much of her anger, I learned, was directed at her mother, whom she loved but blamed for the way her life had gone. I realized that unless Ruthie forgave those who had wronged her, she could never experience the joy of salvation in Christ.

I wrote to Ruthie and encouraged her to look to Jesus, not to other humans and their frailties. In trying to show Ruthie how to forgive others, I learned some important truths that changed my life as well. But her letters remained so full of anger and unforgiveness that they depressed me. Finally I had to stop corresponding with her. But I told her that I would continue to send her Christian literature and I would never stop praying for her. I asked my prayer partners to put Ruthie at the top of their list.



For months I did not hear from Ruthie, but we continued praying for her. Then one day a letter from her arrived. As I read it, I could hardly believe that it was from the same woman. Instead of anger and bitterness, her letter was filled with praise for God for what He was doing in her life!

(continued next week)

Ruthie Papay (left) is an inmate in an Ohio prison. Lynn Rose works at the General Conference.

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God's Assurance in Baptism and Communion



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Mark 1:4; 1 Pet. 3:20, 21; John 13:1-20; Rom. 6:3, 4; Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-26.

MEMORY TEXT: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHTS: Baptism, foot washing, and the Lord's Supper—more than being mere church functions—are holy ordinances, because God Himself has established them and confirmed them by His command and promise. Through these sacred ordinances God's Spirit seals His assuring promises on the believer's heart.

THE DIVINE ORDINANCES ARE ESTABLISHED IN GOD'S WORD. They assure the believers of the Lord's faithfulness to His covenant promises and build up their faith in Him. But they have no redemptive meaning or effect in themselves. They function redemptively only when the believers exercise faith in the Word of God.

We do not accept that an ordinance is a ritual that in and of itself imparts grace and effects salvation. This is contrary to biblical teachings. The proper administration of the holy ordinances, as appointed by Christ in Scripture, constitute a genuine mark of the true church.

This week we will study how the holy ordinances serve as symbolic acts to express a covenant relationship with our risen Lord. We will learn about the assurances He provides for us in these ordinances. May this study help us to experience His cleansing and sanctifying power.

THE UNIQUE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM (Matt. 3:11; 28:18-20).

Compare the baptism of John the Baptist with Christian baptism. Mark 1:4, 8; Matt. 3:11.

While there is a substantial continuity between the baptism of John and that of Christ's apostles regarding repentance and forgiveness of sins, the new aspect of Christian baptism was the impartation of the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit was promised by Israel's prophets as a sign of the Messiah's presence (Isa. 11:1, 2) and of the arrival of the Messianic age (Isa. 44:3; Joel 2:28, 29). John the Baptist presented the long-expected King and His gift of the Spirit to Israel (John 1:31).

How did Peter introduce baptism to his listeners on the day of Pentecost? Acts 2:38-41. (Compare Matt. 28:18-20.)

Peter announced that the "outpouring" of the Spirit of God would from then on be *united* with water-baptism "in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." This "outpouring" of the Spirit is synonymous with the "baptism" of the Spirit (Acts 1:5). Peter's message is that baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit come simultaneously for the believer.

How did Jesus indicate that water baptism and spiritual baptism are inseparable? John 3:5. (Compare Titus 3:4-7.)

This union was promised to a repentant Israel in Babylon (Ezek. 36:24-27). It was the core of the new covenant promise for a cleansed people. Only after Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead could forgiveness be united with the fullness of the Spirit. Christ alone can offer these two great gifts: the removal of our guilt and the bestowal of His Spirit. The gospel offers both gifts together when we place our trust in Christ as the Son of God (see Gal. 3:2, 5; Titus 3:4-7). Christ Himself is the one who baptizes us with His Holy Spirit (John 1:33) after cleansing us by His blood (1 John 1:7).

How can one experience the simultaneous baptism of water and the Spirit today?

How can you have the assurance that you have the Holy Spirit in your heart?

DIVINE ASSURANCE IN BAPTISM (Mark 16:16).

How did Peter compare baptism with the deliverance of Noah's family? How was baptism a "saving" event? 1 Pet. 3:20, 21.

Peter refers to the waters of the ancient Flood as a "type" (NKJV) or "figure" of baptism. He recognizes a correspondence between the Flood and Christian baptism in that both effected a cleansing from sin and evil. The New Testament calls baptism a "washing away" of the believer's sins (Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5). The baptismal water *represents* the shed blood of Christ that saves a sinner (see 1 Pet. 1:18, 19; 1 John 1:7). To this salvation believers respond with the "answer" or pledge of a good conscience (1 Pet. 3:21), and they receive from God in baptism a "clear conscience" (1 Pet. 3:16).

What reference to assurance in baptism do you see in Mark 16:16 with regard to the last judgment? (Compare Heb. 10:22, 23).

Baptism is presented in the New Testament as an anticipation of the last judgment. In baptism the believer *dies* with Christ and then rises with Him to life eternal: "If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him" (Rom. 6:5, 6, NIV). "Death" accounts in Scripture for the ultimate verdict on sin. Christ's death on the cross is the point of orientation in each baptism! By faith and baptism the believer accepts Jesus' death as his or her own death before God. In baptism the believer "has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24) and is now "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17). If you believe this wonderful assurance for future glory as a child of God (Rom. 8:17), there can be no fear for the last judgment. "Fear" belongs to those who are still in the state of a "slave" (Rom. 8:15).

What is God's redemptive part in baptism? Rom. 6:3-6.

Paul affirms that God acts in a redemptive way in the baptism of a genuine believer. The believer is baptized "into Christ Jesus," meaning "into His death." He or she is now "united with Christ" in His death. Paul testifies: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20, NIV). He further affirms God's act: "He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and *transferred us* to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13, 14, RSV).

ASSURANCE IN THE ORDINANCE OF FOOT WASHING (John 13:3-17).

It is fitting that today's subject follows yesterday's study on baptism and precedes tomorrow's study on the Lord's Supper. This ordinance of humility looks back at baptism and looks forward to the Lord's Supper. We have accepted Christ as our Savior and Lord and have experienced the cleansing of His blood at baptism, but in our Christian walk we stumble. This ordinance of humility allows us to come to Christ in a special way to experience His cleansing grace to wash away our sins. It serves as a continuous reminder after baptism that we always stand in need of Christ's assurance of cleansing and renewal.

Our participation in this ordinance not only hearkens back to our baptism but prepares us also to meet our Lord in the celebration of His Supper. "This ordinance, preceding the Lord's Supper, fulfills the injunction that all should examine themselves so as not to participate in that meal 'in an unworthy manner' (1 Cor. 11:27-29)."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, p. 196.

How did Jesus affirm that He indeed wanted His disciples to wash each other's feet as He washed their feet?

John 13:14 _____

John 13:15 _____

John 13:17 _____

The vast majority of Christians today ignore Christ's definite command to participate in this ordinance of humility which He Himself established. It is often dismissed as an ancient practice that has no relevance to us. Thus many miss out on its deep spiritual significance and rich spiritual blessing. This ordinance of foot washing reminds us of Christ's condescension as He took the form of a servant, giving Himself in loving service to others. It points to Calvary as the culmination of His ultimate act of condescension. It represents a cleansing of the heart, resulting in a true fellowship of forgiven believers with their Lord and with one another.

How can we ever be puffed up with pride when we contemplate our humble Savior! The Creator of the universe bending low to wash even Judas' feet! "In My kingdom the principle of preference and supremacy has no place. The only greatness is the greatness of humility. The only distinction is found in devotion to the service of others."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 650.

How does Christ's example teach us true humility? John 13:12-14. How does participating in the ordinance of foot washing give you assurance of God's forgiveness and restoration?

ASSURANCE IN THE LORD'S SUPPER (Matt. 26:26-29).

What is the significance of Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper in place of the Passover Feast? Matt. 26:26.

The Passover commemorated Israel's miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Exod. 12:27-30, 43-46). "The ordinance of the Lord's supper was given to commemorate the great deliverance wrought out as the result of the death of Christ. Till He shall come the second time in power and glory, this ordinance is to be celebrated. It is the means by which His great work for us is to be kept fresh in our minds."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 652, 653.

What do Christ's words "this is My body" and "this is My blood" signify? Matt. 26:28; Isa. 53:10; Jer. 31:34.

Jesus understood His mission on earth in the light of the prophecy of Isaiah 53. He therefore viewed His self-sacrifice as an atoning death for the forgiveness of sins for many. He also fulfilled the predicted "new covenant" of Jeremiah 31:31-34, which was a covenant of forgiveness in the shedding of His blood. Christ's significant words do not point to His flesh or His blood as isolated substances, but point to His atoning death (see 1 Cor. 11:26).

What is the meaning of "eating" the body of Christ and "drinking" His blood during the Lord's Supper? 1 Cor. 11:26.

The significance of these words is found in sharing in the blessings that flow from the sacrificial death of Christ. Partaking of the emblems means to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." It means to abide in Him now and to live eternally with Him (see John 6:53-56). Taking Jesus' words literally would misinterpret His meaning (see John 6:60). He gave His disciples a clue in verse 63. The Holy Spirit helps us to grasp their redemptive significance.

How does the presence of your Host at His Supper make you feel welcome and give you assurance? Matt. 26:26, 27.

"The holy Watcher from heaven is present at this season to make it one of soul searching, of conviction of sin, and of the blessed assurance of sins forgiven." And "Christ is there to minister to His children. All who come with their faith fixed upon Him will be greatly blessed." —*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 650, 656.

CONFIRMATION OF FAITH AND HOPE (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23-26).

How did Christ indicate that the symbolic acts of the Lord's Supper are connected with present and future salvation? Matt. 26:29; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23-26.

By partaking of the meal, the believer not only exercises faith in Christ's substitutionary death but also receives its sanctifying power and hope through the Holy Spirit. "In partaking with His disciples of the bread and wine, Christ pledged Himself to them as their Redeemer. He committed to them the new covenant, by which all who receive Him become children of God, and joint heirs with Christ. By this covenant every blessing that heaven could bestow for this life and the life to come, was theirs."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 656, 659.

For how long does the risen Lord guarantee His promise of future glory? Matt. 26:29; Luke 22:16.

The Lord's Supper connects the past with the future, the Cross with the Second Advent. The certainty of a glorious future for the saints is based on the redemptive validity of the death of Christ. "It is only because of His death that we can look with joy to His second coming. His sacrifice is the center of our hope. Upon this we must fix our faith."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 660.

What should be your present concern in preparing for Communion? 1 Cor. 10:14; 11:27-32.

Many of the Corinthians had perverted the spiritual significance of the sacramental meal by a disregard for Christ as the Host, and by humiliating the poor (1 Cor. 11:20-22). Paul rebuked them by reminding them that whoever partakes of the Lord's Supper "without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Cor. 11:29, NIV). We may see in the phrase "the body of the Lord" two levels of meaning: (1) Christ's self-sacrifice; (2) the church community. Paul is primarily recognizing the infinite sacrifice of Christ as the Host of the Communion table, and he considers a disregard of its holiness an "unworthy manner" that makes such a partaker "guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27). Paul indicates that the Host is, at the same time, also the Judge of each partaker (1 Cor. 11:31, 32). To receive the blessing from the cup of the Lord, "a man ought to examine himself" (11:28).

FURTHER STUDY: Read these texts to see what light they shed on our topic of the sacred ordinances: Ps. 51:2; Rom. 6:4, 5, 11, 17; 1 Cor. 10:1-12; 2 Cor. 5:14; Col. 3:12; Heb. 6:2, 6; 10:29. Read about the indwelling Holy Spirit in the believer in Rom. 5:5; 2 Cor. 5:5.

Read chaps. 71, "A Servant of Servants," and 72, "In Remembrance of Me" in *The Desire of Ages*. Read chaps. 14 and 15 about the divine ordinances in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*. . . .

Martin Luther said: "We must draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and we must retort, 'But I am baptized! And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body.'" The Large Catechism, in *The Book of Concord*. T. G. Tappert, ed. (Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 442. Compare this with Ellen White's assurance to baptized believers: "These candidates have entered into the family of God, and their names are inscribed in the Lamb's book of life."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1075.

"The salvation of men depends upon a continual application to their hearts of the cleansing blood of Christ."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1090.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Is baptism necessary for salvation? Explain.
2. Why is baptism more than an initiation rite into the church?
3. Does Christ baptize with the Holy Spirit only some selected believers or all genuine believers? Consider Romans 5:5; 8:9; 1 John 2:20, 27.
4. Is rebaptism ever necessary? If yes, under what circumstances? Explain.
5. What can you do to make the next celebration of the divine ordinances more meaningful to you, to the children, and to visitors?
6. How do the divine ordinances impart God's assurance of salvation to us in our daily lives?

SUMMARY: The sacred ordinances are sanctioned by Christ's example and authority. They serve to initiate and renew the assurance of eternal life. More than mere symbolic rituals, they are the appointed means of grace through which God gives His effective testimony of faithfulness.



The Power of Forgiveness, Part 2

Lynn Rose

Ruthie Papay has spent the past 18 years in prison. Although she had become a Christian, she had never let go of her anger and bitterness toward those who wronged her. Her relationship with God and with others was rooted in legalism rather than love.

In letters to her I encouraged her to look to Jesus for the power to forgive others and love them. And I asked my prayer partners to pray for her.

Six months later I received a letter from Ruthie. She was a different woman. Instead of bitterness and hatred, her letter was filled with praise to God. She was living in the same bleak cell, surrounded by the same angry people, yet she had found love and forgiveness in her Friend Jesus.

"I wish I could get out of [prison]," she said, "so I could become a missionary!"

Rejoicing over the change in Ruthie's life, I wrote back to her. "Do you realize that you are in a . . . larger mission field than many of our missionaries?" I shared with her my philosophy that most of us are already in the mission field where God wants us to work.

Ruthie's letters sparkle with hope and joy in Jesus. Other prisoners and staff members notice the change in her life. Some come to her for counsel with their problems, and many have taken an interest in studying the Bible with her. But Ruthie's greatest joy came the day her mother accepted Jesus as her Savior and was baptized.

The prison's policy makes it difficult to place religious books in the prison library. But whenever Ruthie's "book box" becomes too full, she places her books in the library for others to read. And in this way she gets books into the prison that otherwise would have been refused.

Ruthie has had as many as 20 women studying the Bible with her at a time. She gladly helps anyone who wants to find answers to their spiritual questions.

No one knows if or when Ruthie will be released from prison. But now that she understands that her mission field is a prison in Ohio, it's easier to wait for God's next call.

Pray that God will use Ruthie to touch the lives of many prisoners and staff members with whom she has contact and that through her they will find forgiveness and acceptance in Jesus.

Ruthie Papay is an inmate in an Ohio prison. Lynn Rose works at the General Conference.

Witnessing With Assurance



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Josh. 24:1-21; Isa. 42:6; 52:7-10; Mal. 3:13-18; Rom. 10:14, 15; 1 Pet. 2:9; 3:15; Rev. 6:9.

MEMORY TEXT: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHTS: Assurance of salvation is not something to keep for ourselves, but to share joyously with others. Gratitude for deliverance from danger, illness, or death was always a matter of shared joy in Bible times. It was a matter of public witness to the honor and glory of God and for the encouragement of others. So it must be to us today.

THE CHRISTIAN'S CALLING TO WITNESS FOR CHRIST. Christ emphasized the basic continuity of His own mission and that of His followers with the high calling to them to be a saving light to the world (compare John 8:12; Matt. 5:14 with Isa. 42:6). We can be such a light to others only if we have accepted Christ as our personal Savior and Lord. To be a blessing, one must first receive a blessing. Effectiveness in witnessing for Christ is, therefore, largely dependent on our personal assurance and joy of salvation. Our words resonate our inner experience with Christ. Our calling from God thus resembles our breathing in and breathing out. This week as we study the witness of God's saving acts in the Bible, may the Holy Spirit empower us always to share the good news with love and assurance.

RECOUNTING GOD'S SAVING ACTS—PRAISING GOD (Ps. 136).

Why did Joshua renew Israel's covenant with God at Shechem? Josh. 24:1-15. How did Israel respond to Joshua's example? Josh. 24:16-21.

In his farewell address to the leaders of Israel, Joshua first recounted God's saving acts on behalf of His people, in order to show God's faithfulness to all His promises. He then said: "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:22, NIV). The people responded: "Yes, we are witnesses." "Joshua desired to lead them to serve God, not by compulsion, but willingly. Love to God is the very foundation of religion. To engage in His service merely from hope of reward or fear of punishment, would avail nothing. Open apostasy would not be more offensive to God than hypocrisy and mere formal worship."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 523.

What did Deborah, Samuel, and Micah find necessary to do in order to revive the faith of Israel?

Judg. 5:10, 11 _____

1 Sam. 12:7 _____

Mic. 6:5 _____

Before we can truly worship God, we must know Him from His redemptive works in history. Knowing God this way leads us to love and praise Him and declare Him with assurance.

How did David praise God? Ps. 103:1-8.

Israel's God is exalted as the one who "alone does great wonders" (Ps. 136:4, NIV). These refer to God's acts in both Creation and redemption. The only proper response of Israel to such a Creator-Redeemer is: "Give thanks to the LORD" (Ps. 136:1-3, 26). Bible scholars believe that the congregation had a part in this liturgy by alternate responsive singing. This kind of thanksgiving is a necessary part of our witnessing to the glory of God.

What valuable lessons can we learn from the two classes of witnesses in Israel according to Malachi 3:13-18?

ISRAEL'S MISSION TO THE GENTILES (Gen. 12:2, 3; Exod. 19:6).

What was God's redemptive purpose for the Gentiles, and what role was Israel to play? Gen. 12:2, 3; Exod. 19:6.

Israel as a whole was elected to fulfill the role of priesthood to all nations. For that larger purpose Israel received a saving knowledge of God—His “blessing” in order to be a blessing to all the families on earth.

Why would God's plan with Israel not fail even when His people failed? Isa. 9:6, 7; 11:1-9; 53:10.

How did a girl from Israel witness for her God while serving a Gentile master? 2 Kings 5:2, 3.

“In every land there are those who are as earnest and sincere as Naaman, and who are waiting only for the faithful testimony and the holy lives of the people of God before giving their hearts to Him.”—Ellen G. White *Comments, SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 878. Mahatma Gandhi is reported to have said, “I will become a Christian when I see one!” He clearly meant that a true witness of Christ includes a harmony of faith and works!

What impact did the witness of Daniel and his three companions have in Babylon? Dan. 3:16-18, 28-30; 6:25-27.

“The light of heaven had been shining forth from Daniel and his companions, until all their associates understood the faith which ennobled their lives and beautified their characters.”—Ellen G. White *Comments, SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1170.

How did the king of Nineveh and his nobles react to Jonah's message from God? Jon. 3:5-9. How did God honor their response of faith? Jon. 3:10.

Because of Jonah's compelling testimony, a city of more than 120,000 people believed God, repented (Jon. 3:5), and were spared.

How would you have responded to God's call if you were Jonah?

THE CALL FOR CHRISTIAN WITNESSING (John 8:12-14; Acts 1:8).

How did Christ consider His life and work as a witness for God? John 3:13-18; 8:12-14; 17:8, 14-18.

“From His earliest years He was possessed of one purpose; He lived to bless others.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 70. “Light” was the well-known symbol of God’s presence. David sang with full assurance: “The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” (Ps. 27:1, NIV). In the words “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12, KJV). Jesus announced that He was the promised Messiah for all peoples. He wanted His disciples to be “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14) and His witnesses “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The indwelling Holy Spirit makes our witness powerful and effective. We witness about Christ and His work *for* us before we witness to His transforming power *in* us. The Jews who listened to Peter on the day of Pentecost were not converted by his personal emotions and feelings, which they ascribed to drunkenness, but by the earnest preaching of “the wonders of God” (Acts 2:11, *megala*, NIV; “the mighty deeds of God,” NASB) in Christ Jesus! We need to become aware of the priority of the message above the medium of the message.

How did those listening to Peter respond to his proclamation of the gospel? Acts 2:41, 46, 47.

How did Paul and Barnabas explain their mission and mandate to the Jews? Acts 13:47. How did the Gentiles respond? Acts 13:48, 49.

The apostolic church believed that “its mission was that of witnessing to Israel and to the world of the redemption God had wrought in Christ. . . . It is this witness and life and this sense of mission that make her the Church. The secularizing of the Church does not consist of her institutional forms, but in the loss of her convictions, in the dilution of her message, in the surrender of her witness to the world. Then she becomes like the world and only a part of the world and no longer the Church of the living God.”—G. E. Ladd, *The Young Church, Acts of the Apostles* (New York, N.Y.: Abingdon Press, 1964), pp. 94-96.

In what way does your witness reflect the light of Christ?

EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN A MISSIONARY (John 4:39-42; 12:23-25).

How did many Samaritans come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah of prophecy? John 4:39-42.

Being weary from His work in Judea, Jesus nevertheless grasped the opportunity to speak with a woman, though she was a stranger, an alien from Israel, and living in open sin. Although Samaria did not look inviting to the disciples, Jesus observed that it was a field ripe for the harvest. "As soon as she had found the Saviour, the Samaritan woman brought others to Him."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 195.

To the Samaritan woman He had explained: "Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14, NIV). This "living water" is the gift of Christ, and it flows out from the believer to refresh the lives of others. He asks the church, as His "bride," to add her voice to that of His Spirit: "'Come!' . . . Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Rev. 22:17, NIV).

Why did Christ send a healed Gentile demoniac back to his family and friends? Mark 5:19, 20; Luke 8:38, 39.

"In doing this work they could receive a greater blessing than if, merely for benefit to themselves, they had remained in His presence. It is in working to spread the good news of salvation that we are brought near to the Saviour."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 339, 340.

What did Christ say to some Greeks who requested to see Him? John 12:23-25, 32. How do you explain Christ's seemingly paradoxical statement in verse 25?

Jesus knew that only after His death and resurrection could He reach out to the Gentiles and "draw all men" to Himself. This He does through His witnessing disciples and through the preaching of the gospel.

Reflect on 1 Peter 3:1-4, 7-9. In what ways can you witness effectively "without words" to nonbelieving spouses and others?

Reflect on Revelation 12:17; 14:6-12. How have you been involved in the calling and witness of the remnant church?

WITNESSING IN JOHN'S REVELATION (Rev. 1:5; 3:14; 2:10, 13).

How does the book of Revelation refer to the faithful work of the risen Lord? Rev. 1:5; 3:14. Why does Christ mention Antipas as an example for all who are called to give the ultimate witness for Him? Rev. 2:10, 13.

The Greek word *martus* ("witness") soon after New Testament times came to mean "martyr." But in Revelation it still denotes one who witnesses for Christ. Antipas receives from the Lord the title of "my faithful witness." "From Pliny's letter to Trajan (*Ep.* x. 96) and from the story of the martyrdom of Polycarp we know that in the second century it was part of lawcourt procedure that those accused of being Christians should be invited to exculpate [exonerate] themselves by cursing Christ."—G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on The Revelation of St. John* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 38.

Why were Christ's faithful witnesses persecuted and martyred? Rev. 1:9; 6:9; 12:11; 17:6; 20:4.

"John has said of his own exile that it was 'because of the word spoken by God and attested by Jesus' (i:9), and the martyrs have lost their lives in the same cause, not merely because they bore their own testimony to the word of God, but because in so doing they were giving new expression to **the testimony** which had brought Jesus to his death."—G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 84.

What is the meaning of the two symbolic witnesses of God during the 1,260 days in Revelation 11:3-6?

We may understand the meaning of the two witnesses of God on two levels: (1) as the twofold testimony of "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus," which equals that of the two Testaments, the message of the Hebrew prophets and the witness of the apostles; (2) as the *living* witnesses of Christ who proclaim this twofold message. "Century after century the blood of the saints had been shed. While the Waldenses laid down their lives upon the mountains of Piedmont 'for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus,' similar witness to the truth had been borne by their brethren, the Albigenses of France. In the days of the Reformation its disciples had been put to death with horrible tortures."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 271.

FURTHER STUDY: Study about God's great intervention in behalf of His people in 1 Sam. 12:6-11; Pss. 22:22; 40:1-3; 136. Study about the disgraceful impression Gehazi gave to Naaman in 2 Kings 5:20-27.

The theme of witnessing to the trustworthiness of God's acts and words is of central importance in both Testaments. Such a witness receives the status of a legal validity before God. Fundamental to its reliability is the requirement that "a matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Deut. 19:15, NIV). Jesus recognized this and claimed that His Father in heaven was His other witness (John 8:15-18; 12:47-49). John explains that God gave His testimony about His Son conclusively through His Spirit at Jesus' baptism, at the cross and Pentecost, and further through the anointing in the hearts of true believers (1 John 5:6-10).

Read about Christ's witness in Matt. 10:32; John 3:11; 7:37-39; Isa. 42:5-7; 55:1.

Read *The Desire of Ages*, chaps. 37, 70, 73; the chap. entitled "The Work and the Life" in *Steps to Christ*. "Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 195.

"The only way to grow in grace is to be disinterestedly doing the very work which Christ has enjoined upon us. . . . Strength comes by exercise. . . . Thus the Christian who will not exercise his God-given powers, not only fails to grow up into Christ, but he loses the strength that he already had."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 80, 81.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are God's people to witness about?
2. Why is it both a privilege and a duty to witness?
3. How do you relate your assurance of salvation to witnessing? How do you plan to improve your witness next week as a result of this lesson?
4. How is our witness for or against Christ related to the last judgment?

SUMMARY: The Scriptures teach that God's initiatives and interventions in history need to be recognized in human witnesses. This takes the forms of worship and missionary outreach. Witnessing is not about some human philosophy or personal emotion about God, but God's own acts in salvation history, in His Son Jesus Christ in particular, as recorded in the Bible.



Sofyan's Search

J. H. Zachary

"I will never permit a son of mine to become a Christian!" the angry man said as he tied his son's hands and locked him in his room. For six days young Sofyan remained a prisoner in his father's house.

Sofyan is a Muslim teenager living on the island of Java in Indonesia. When a friend invited him to attend a Christian church service, Sofyan refused. But his friend was persistent, and finally Sofyan agreed to attend, partly to please his friend and partly out of curiosity.

As he neared the church building, he glanced nervously in all directions. No one must see him enter. The pastor read John 3:16. Sofyan had never heard such a wonderful message. *Allah loves me!* He turned this thought over and over in his mind as he contemplated the greatness of God's love. His heart was touched; he had to know more.

Sofyan secretly returned to the church each week until his father found out and locked him in his room for six days. Then his father released him after he promised to never enter a Christian church again. To keep Sofyan away from his Christian friends, he was sent to a far corner of the island.

Sofyan had studied the Qu'ran, the Muslim holy book, for many years. He had won a prize for reciting from the Qu'ran. Now far from home, he read the Qu'ran for comfort. One day he was amazed to read in the Qu'ran that the seventh day is the holy day of Allah. Excited, Sofyan knocking on doors, asking people if they knew of any Christians who kept the seventh day holy. Finally he found someone.

"Yes," the man said. "I keep holy the Sabbath day of God. There is a congregation of Sabbath keepers here in the city."

Sofyan asked the man about other beliefs. Satisfied that he had found people who worshiped Allah and kept holy His Sabbath day, Sofyan started studying the Bible with them. He recognized God's truth and asked for baptism. Sofyan rejoiced in his new walk with God.

Then Sofyan's uncle died. The family told Sofyan to come home. During this visit home Sofyan's father learned of his conversion. Angry, the man grabbed a large knife to kill his son. But neighbors who heard the scuffle intervened. They held the angry father so Sofyan could escape.

Today 18-year-old Sofyan is preparing to become a pastor. He wants to teach his own people more about Allah and His Son, Jesus.

J. H. Zachary is international evangelism coordinator for The Quiet Hour, located in Redlands, California.

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Blessed Assurances in Revelation



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Rev. 1:1-3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14.

MEMORY TEXT: "Behold, I am coming as a thief, blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame" (Revelation 16:15, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHTS: The book of Revelation presents us with seven beatitudes or pronouncements of blessing for those who persevere to follow Christ until the end. These beatitudes serve also as assurances that Christ will never abandon His faithful disciples.

THE BLESSINGS OF GOD IN THEIR TOTALITY. The last book of the Bible brings seven beatitudes which begin with the first chapter (Rev. 1:1-3) and conclude with the last (Rev. 22:14). Christ will reward His faithful followers with His abiding presence all the way, even in death, and will vindicate and honor them at last.

The seven blessings reveal a progression from John's time to the time of the end and the second advent of Christ. Consequently, these beatitudes may be seen as a summary of Revelation's message. Together they represent the complete blessings of God for all His faithful and persevering children. Death has no power over such, for they love their Lord, keep His words, receive and live His righteousness. The marriage supper of the Lamb awaits them to celebrate this grand victory with Him. As we study these assurances of God this week, may the Holy Spirit help us to apply their saving and sanctifying power in our lives. May the promised glorious future with Christ renew our love to Him.

A BLESSING FOR ALL WHO KEEP HIS WORDS (Rev. 1:3; 22:7).

Why does God promise His blessing on all who hear, study, and keep His words in Revelation? Rev. 1:3; 22:7.

“When the books of Daniel and Revelation are better understood, believers will have an entirely different religious experience. They will be given such glimpses of the open gates of heaven that heart and mind will be impressed with the character that all must develop in order to realize the blessedness which is to be the reward of the pure in heart. . . . One thing will certainly be understood from the study of Revelation—that the connection between God and His people is close and decided.” “If our people were half awake, if they realized the nearness of the events portrayed in the Revelation, a reformation would be wrought in our churches, and many more would believe the message.”—*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 114, 118.

In order to understand the book of Revelation better than we do now, we must approach its symbols correctly. This means that we must use correct *principles of prophetic interpretation* before we apply a symbolic prophecy to history. The General Conference has provided some important guidelines in this respect through the seven volumes of the “Daniel and Revelation Committee” (from 1982-1992). These enlightening studies by our qualified Bible scholars are quite helpful in understanding these two books. Regarding our subject at hand we have *Symposium on Revelation* (F. B. Holbrook, editor; Biblical Research Institute).

How are we to regard the book of Revelation? Rev. 1:3; 22:18, 19.

To understand this symbolic book, we need to realize first that its symbols continue the traditional Hebrew images and terms. This connects Revelation closely with the Old Testament. These connections have to be established so that we can study each apocalyptic symbol in its original setting and meaning. There is a spiritual unity in God’s revelations and works of redemption and judgment found in God’s two witnesses of the Old and the New Testament. This brings with it a deeper insight and conviction of truth.

The other important principle of prophetic interpretation is the application of the gospel of Christ to all Hebrew symbols and images for the Christian age, because Christ is the center of all hope.

How does experiencing Christ as the center of your hope lead you to take to heart His words and submit to His will?

THE BLESSING OF WASHING OUR ROBES (Rev. 22:14; 7:14).

What did Christ accomplish for us by His shed blood? Rev. 1:5; 5:9.

Notice the imagery Isaiah used to express his own saving experience: "I delight greatly in the LORD. . . . For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness" (61:10, NIV).

Explain why Christ counsels the church in Laodicea to "buy" from Him "white clothes to wear"? Rev. 3:18, NIV.

Do you see a connection between these symbolic "white clothes" and "wearing" them? Do you discern a close connection between justification and sanctification here?

What is a believer to do *after* he has accepted from Christ His "white clothes"?

7:14 _____

12:11 _____

22:14 _____

We may consider Revelation 7:14 as the key text to understand the meaning of the seventh beatitude in Revelation 22:14. It explains to some extent *how* we can wash our character robes to be white again. It keeps the attention riveted on the present privilege and duty of Christ's followers: they need to *keep washing* their robes of character.

Most modern versions of the Bible accept the reading, "those who wash their robes" (Rev. 22:14) as preferable; however, the King James Version renders it, "they that do his commandments." The *SDA Bible Commentary* harmonizes the two: "In actual fact both readings suit the context and are in harmony with John's teaching elsewhere. . . . Our title to heaven is the righteousness of Christ imputed: our fitness for heaven, the righteousness of Christ imparted, represented by the washed robes."—Vol. 7, p. 897. It is also represented by the outward evidence of doing His commandments. "Hence the two ideas of washed robes and obedience to commandments are closely related."—Page 897.

In this way the believer keeps a living connection between participating in the atoning cross of Christ and preparing for future salvation in Paradise restored.

How do you apply the shed blood of Christ daily to your conscience?

THE WEDDING SUPPER OF THE LAMB (Rev. 19:8, 9; 1 Cor. 11:26).

What kinds of people in Jesus' parables were invited to the wedding banquet? Matt. 22:9, 10; Luke 14:23.

It is important to know that the king in Jesus' parable invited not only the good people to the wedding feast, but also the bad ones (Matt. 22:10). They represent all nations in the Christian church (Matt. 28:19). "It points to the mixture of true and false—i.e., obedient and disobedient—disciples in the church and sets the stage for the further addition of vv 11-14 (cf. 13:24-30)."—R. H. Gundry, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 438.

Why was at least one man who was invited not allowed to take part in the wedding feast? Matt. 22:11-14.

The king came in to see the guests before the actual wedding occurs. An interesting application is presented by Dr. S. Kistemaker: "The guest who did not have wedding clothes at the royal banquet unmistakably represents the self-righteous sinner. He wants to make it known that he does not need the sacrificial death and atoning blood of Jesus to enter heaven. . . . It is an utter impossibility to appear before God without the protective clothing offered by Jesus Christ."—*The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980), p.105.

What clarifying note does John add regarding the meaning of "fine linen"? Rev. 19:8. Why do you think he does that?

The larger setting of the unit of Revelation 17–19 shows the contrast between the "harlot" and the "bride." Their different dresses indicate different behaviors. In opposition to the evil deeds of the harlot (see Rev. 17:4-6), John points to the "righteous acts" of the bride of the Lamb. This indicates a Christlike character!

When will the wedding supper of the Lamb take place? Matt. 26:29; 1 Cor. 11:26. Do you see a relationship of this to the Lord's Supper? 1 Cor. 11:28, 29.

In what ways are you preparing yourself for the wedding supper of the Lamb?

SPECIAL BLESSINGS FOR THE END TIME (Rev. 14:13; 16:15).**What is the time-setting of the beatitude in Rev. 14:13?**

If we recognize the specific context of the pronouncement of blessing, we have moved forward in time to the preaching of the last warning message of God to all nations (Rev. 14:6-12). This means that the blessed dead of 14:13 are those who kept “the faith of Jesus” (14:12, NKJV) during the testing time. The phrase “from now on” does not point to the moment of death, as some commentators say, but refers to those who die in the Lord while witnessing with the restored faith and obedience to God’s commandments (14:12). They do this in the face of the threats of the beast and his allies (Rev. 13:15-17). This special blessing is assured by the resurrection of Christ, who holds “the keys of death and Hades” (Rev. 1:18, NIV). Notice the remarkable confirmation by the Holy Spirit: “Yes, . . . they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them” (14:13, NIV). These “deeds” are not independent entities but the expression of a living faith in those whose lives correspond to their profession.

What is the time frame of the beatitude of Revelation 16:15? (See Rev. 16:1.)

Again we are moved forward in history, now to the time of the seven last plagues. Although these plagues will fall only after probation has ended (Rev. 15:1, 8), Christ inserts here a special alert signal to His end-time people: “Behold, I come like a thief!” (Rev. 16:15, NIV). This must be understood in the light of Christ’s earlier warnings (Rev. 3:3; Matt. 24:43, 44; Luke 21:34-36). Their purpose is to arouse God’s people to be ready *before* probation ends. “It is precisely because the followers of the Antichrist are not awake to God and his gospel that the day of God for them is a day of doom instead of a day of redemption.”—G. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 245.

What do you think is the meaning of the blessing of staying awake and keeping one’s clothes found in Revelation 16:15? (See Matt. 22:11.)

“Are my sins forgiven? Has Christ, the Burden-bearer, taken away my guilt? Have I a clean heart, purified by the righteousness of Jesus Christ?”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Nov. 27, 1900.

OUR GREATEST BLESSING IN THE FUTURE (Rev. 20:4-6; 1:6).

What is the most comforting assurance for the future of the saints? Rev. 20:4-6.

This blessed assurance goes beyond that of 14:13. Its fulfillment must come before the saints can enter the wedding supper of the Lamb in 19:9. Here we find also the reassuring answer to the question What will happen in the judgment to those who have died in the Lord? How and when will they enter heaven and enjoy its glory? By a new act of creation! The faithful ones will be resurrected along with those who will be translated to take part in a new responsibility, to judge the world (see also 1 Cor. 6:2, 3).

This is a fulfillment of what the prophets had already promised in the resurrection for the saints (see Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2).

Who are the “holy” ones that are blessed with the first resurrection? Rev. 20:6.

We need to realize that the term *saints* [*hoi hagioi*, in Greek] is the regular title of all believers in Christ (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2). This title does not denote primarily a moral qualification, but a calling to belong to God as His chosen people (see Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12). But then the Spirit of God leads them into a life of holiness (Rom. 8:14; 1 Cor. 6:11) to make them fit for heaven (Col. 1:12), to make their “calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10, 11). Peter explains the moral implications in this regard (1 Pet. 1:13-16).

For our purpose, we need to consider also the larger context in Exodus 19:6 and Daniel 7:9, 21, 22, 25. The background of Daniel 7:22 is illuminating for understanding Revelation 20:4-6. The saints in Daniel 7 are those who remain faithful in persecution and witness faithfully about the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

How did Jesus describe death? How did He correct Martha’s belief in the resurrection? John 11:11, 23-26.

“In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. ‘He that hath the Son hath life.’ The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

Discuss Paul’s certainty of faith in 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

FURTHER STUDY: Study about the divine act of forgiveness portrayed in Zechariah 3:3-5. Discover what the risen Lord knows about the deeds of His people (Rev. 2:2, 9, 19, 23; 3:1, 8, 15). Can you detect a relation between Revelation 14:13 and Isaiah 57:1, 2, 10? For the expression "shamefully exposed," see Revelation 17:16 and Ezekiel 23:24-29.

Ellen G. White strongly urged all members of the church to restudy the prophetic portions of Scripture, especially Daniel and Revelation (see *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 112-119).

Read *The Desire of Ages*, the chap. entitled "Lazarus, Come Forth," and *Christ's Object Lessons*, the chap. entitled "Without a Wedding Garment."

"When the king came in to view the guests, the real character of all was revealed. For every guest at the feast there had been provided a wedding garment. This garment was a gift from the king. By wearing it the guests showed their respect for the giver of the feast. But one man was clothed in his common citizen dress."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 309.

A helpful comment on Revelation 22:14 is found in *Problems in Bible Translation* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954), p. 261: "In the last analysis, it makes little difference which of the two renderings we accept, as far as doctrinal teaching is concerned. It is evident that those whose robes have been washed from sin will naturally, through the indwelling Christ, be obedient to God, and hence will keep the commandments of God. Furthermore, those of whom it is said that they keep the commandments of God, do so only because their robes have been washed by the precious blood of Christ."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why should we always strive to know more about the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation?
2. Why should we not simply trust others to do the study for us and accept their conclusions?
3. How many times can a believer "wash his clothes" in the blood of the Lamb? Is it continuous?
4. If we keep our robes "unsoiled" from apostasy, do we then no longer need God's forgiving grace?

SUMMARY: The book of Revelation gives the church seven promises of blessing, a complete assurance of salvation. The marriage motif becomes the dominant emphasis, together with a strong witness to all peoples to come to the wedding supper of the Lamb.



Goat-Milk Evangelism

Mathurin Dellev

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Mathurin Dellev is a farmer on the beautiful island of Martinique in the Caribbean. But for him farming is simply a means to earn a living. His real love is evangelism.

Although he grew up in a religious home, as a teenager religion never stopped him from doing the things he considered fun, such as going to movies, dances, and cockfights. "Life was good," he said. "And I planned to get the most out of it!"

But when he was 19 years old, he met Jesus Christ, and everything changed.

When his family was invited to attend evangelistic meetings, Mathurin decided to go. He was deeply moved as the speaker revealed Jesus Christ from the Bible. But he had no intention of becoming an Adventist and having to give up cockfights and dancing.

Then he learned about the Sabbath. He asked his priest why some Christians keep the Sabbath and others don't. The priest responded honestly. "The Sabbath day is Saturday; we observe Sunday to honor Jesus' resurrection."

Mathurin was troubled. He wanted to be saved, spared from the eternal fire reserved for Satan and his angels. But how could he be saved if he did not obey God's law? He tried to ignore these new truths, but his conscience would not let him. Finally he surrendered his life to Christ and was baptized. The rest of his family soon joined him.

Today Mathurin's family finds their greatest joy in seeing others come to know Jesus Christ as the Lord of their life. They sell farm products, including goat milk, to their neighbors. Often they include a book, a magazine, or literature with their milk deliveries.

One customer has a sign on his house that says, "No Jehovah's Witnesses or Adventists allowed." Mathurin had given the family magazines before, but they had seemed unreceptive. Then last year the family was not getting milk deliveries and did not receive the gift books Mathurin gave to customers. When the family resumed milk deliveries, they asked if they could get the gift books as well! Mathurin says that the family is more open to receiving other literature. He looks forward to the day when their milk deliveries will include Bible studies.

Mathurin Dellev is a lay leader in the Verrier Church in Bellefontaine, Martinique.

Bible Study Guide for Second Quarter, 2000

The second quarter adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, entitled *The Certainty of the Second Coming*, is a message and mission theme that studies our assurance of salvation in Christ and in His second coming in the context of the everlasting gospel.

Lesson 1: What Makes Christianity Christian?

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Gen. 1:26; Eph. 2:8; 3:9; Isa. 59:2.

MEMORY TEXT: John 17:3, NKJV.

KEY THOUGHT: The goal of Christianity is to restore us to God.

OUTLINE:

- Created for Fellowship (Gen. 1:26; 5:1; Jer. 3:14; 1 Cor. 1:9; Eph. 3:9).
- Separated Through Sin (Isa. 59:2; Ezek. 14:7).
- Fellowship With God Through Salvation (Isa. 62:5; Hos. 2:19, 20).
- Salvation Is the Gift of God (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 2 Cor. 5:19; 9:15).
- The Interrelatedness of Doctrine (John 5:39, 40; Luke 24:27).

Lesson 2: The Authority of the Bible and the Second Coming

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Deut. 29:29; Ps. 111:10; Isa. 66:2.

MEMORY TEXT: Romans 15:4, NKJV.

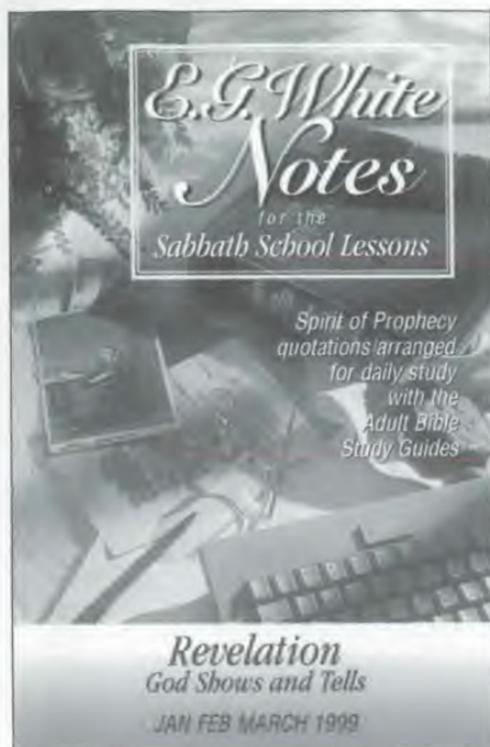
KEY THOUGHT: The Second Coming is revealed in God's Holy Word.

OUTLINE:

- The Authority of the Bible (2 Tim. 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; 3:2-16).
- God Is Known in His Self-Revelation (Deut. 29:29; 1 Cor. 1:21).
- The Bible Alone—the Battle Cry of the Reformation (Isa. 8:20).
- The Bible and Human Studies (Jer. 8:9; 1 Tim. 6:20; Matt. 2:24-29).
- The Authority of the Bible and Its Interpretation (2 Cor. 4:2-6).

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The regular adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in Braille and on 16 2/3 rpm records to blind and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact the Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506.



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SOUTH PACIFIC DIVISION



Unions	Churches	Companies	Membership	Population
Central Pacific	221	130	29,833	1,611,366
Papua New Guinea	727	1,991	180,456	4,300,000
Trans Australian	188	37	20,151	9,509,415
Trans Tasman	306	38	39,853	12,851,631
Western Pacific	220	299	40,634	873,564
Totals	1,662	2,495	310,927	29,145,976

as of 9/30/98

- Mission Projects:**
1. Enlarge the library at Fulton College in Fiji.
 2. Relocate Pic Vert High School in Tahiti.
 3. Construct a manual arts and home economics building at Lalovaca College in Apia, Samoa.