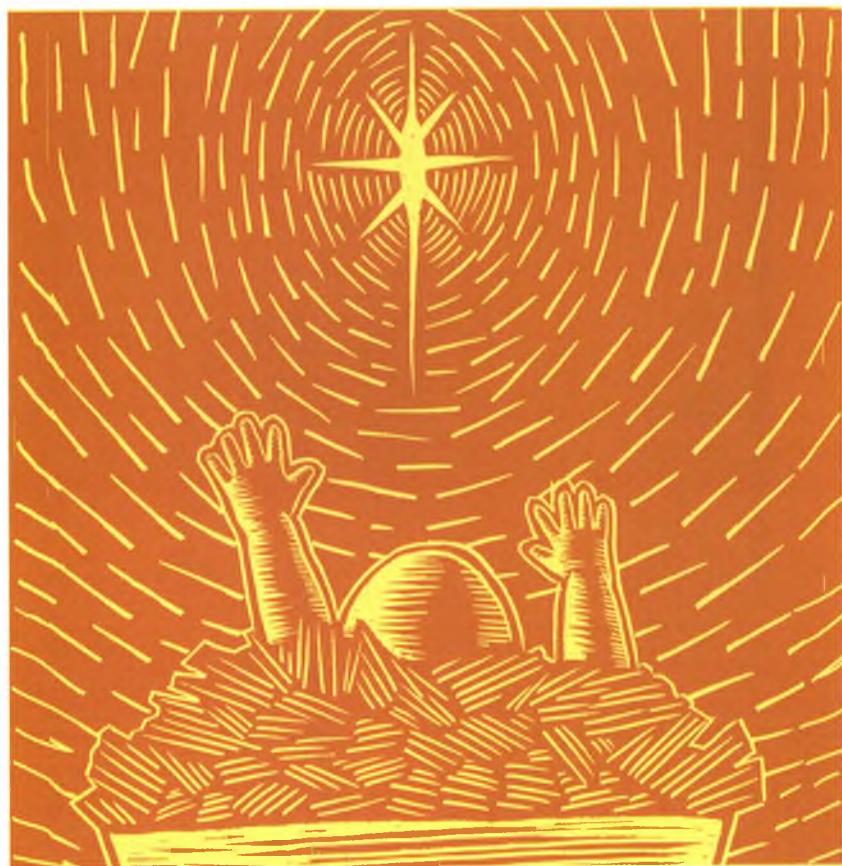


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COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1995

The  
**Incarnation:**  
Grace Personified





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# THE INCARNATION: GRACE PERSONIFIED

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 1995

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# THE INCARNATION: GRACE PERSONIFIED



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## This Quarter's Artist



John C. Williams, this quarter's featured artist for *CQ*, graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California; and a Master of Fine Arts from the Claremont (California) Graduate School. He has been working as an illustrator for the past six years. His interest in teaching has led him and his wife, Lizette Mendoza Williams, a graphic designer, to Washington, D.C., where John has joined the staff at Columbia Union College as coordinator of the graphic arts program. For more information about CUC's arts program, phone (301) 891-4211.

# Getting the Most Out of *CQ*

## Facts You Should Know

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

Adventist young-adult groups work together in producing this quarterly. More than 300 individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 59,000.

## Pointers for Study

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

2. The Bible passage on which each week's lesson is based appears in bold type in the "Logos" pages (Monday's portion of the lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give yourself an overview of the lesson.

3. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the "Logos" pages (Monday's portion of the lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

4. Read remaining sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.

5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

**"Introduction"** (Sunday) is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

**"Logos"** (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

**"Testimony"** (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

**"Evidence"** (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.

**"How-To"** (Thursday) discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

**"Opinion"** (Friday), a personal viewpoint on the lesson, is meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

## *CQ* and the Church

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



# HAVING IT ALL



**“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9, NIV).**



# The Girl Who Had Everything

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Eph. 2:8, 9

Lindsay had everything. Gorgeous looking, great grades, popular with everyone. She was involved in extracurricular activities, and she worked hard at them all.

When Lindsay first met Steve, she didn't take him seriously—he had to ask several times before she'd go out with him. But his persistence flattered her. Lindsay felt she tried hard to look good, dress well, and be a good student. Steve's admiration seemed to assure her that her hard work had paid off. They married shortly after graduation.

Lindsay devoted as much effort to being a good wife as she did to everything else. Although she and Steve both worked full time, she made sure he always came home to a clean house and a home-cooked meal. She made time for them to get away and do things together. She entertained frequently and knew Steve was proud of her.

When their daughter was born, Lindsay quit her job as a commercial artist to freelance at home. She was just the kind of mother you'd expect her to be—

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## **I'm no beauty queen, but I think I still look as good as the day Steve married me.**

---

caring, creative, conscientious. Yet somehow, she still made time for Steve, friends, family, and church activities.

One night Lindsay listened to some women from church discuss a friend whose husband had left her for a younger, prettier woman. Driving home, Lindsay glanced at her reflection in the rearview mirror. *I'm glad I've made the effort to take care of myself*, she thought. *I'm no beauty queen, but I think I still look as good as the day Steve married me. And I don't think he'd ever find anyone more devoted to him or the baby. I can't imagine that he'd ever stop loving me.*

She was so lost in her thoughts that, for once, she didn't come to a full stop at the four-way stop. She didn't even see the truck until it crashed into her, skidding her car across the intersection. After that, she saw nothing at all.

When she slowly became aware of her surroundings, she was alone in a hospital room. Gradually her memory returned. She realized with horror that she couldn't move her legs. Her face was bandaged—probably scarred. She prayed, "Oh, God, please don't let Steve see me like this—ugly, useless, and crippled."

She looked up to see Steve walking through the door. At once, his face lighted up with delight. "Lindsay! Are you awake? Can you hear me?" he cried, then shouted, "Nurse! She's out of the coma!"

Steve wrapped his arms around her, leaving Lindsay overwhelmed by the amazing grace of a love that could never be earned.

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*By Trudy J. Morgan, who teaches English at St. John's Seventh-day Adventist Academy, Mount Pearl, Newfoundland.*

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# Grace, Graced, and Gracing

## LOGOS

### Eph. 2:1-9

When I was younger, I was fascinated with my own name. I remember sitting in front of a mirror, repeating my name to myself. Repetition did not bring familiarity, but rather transformed the familiar into something strange sounding. Sometimes I feel the same way about the word *grace*. I hear myself saying it in class. I look into the faces of my students, and suddenly I am asking them, “What does that word mean? Really mean?”

Take a few minutes to think of pseudonyms for *grace*. Is there really another word that means the same thing? *Love*, maybe—God’s love for us? His love is generous, all-encompassing, nonjudgmental, indiscriminant. But replacing the word *love* for the word *grace* doesn’t help to explain the relief we sinners feel when we receive God’s grace.

Another pseudonym for grace is *mercy*. To me, mercy implies a stay of execution—a moment of grace—but only a moment. Grace adds blessings to that mercy; it suggests a process, not just an incident. Nor is grace the same as *forgiveness*, another much-misunderstood term. Grace enables; we do things “by the grace of God”; it empowers; we live “in grace.” It seems we’ve lost the verb form of this word, but I like the old-fashioned way it was once used.

“A pitcher of flowers graced the table.”

“Thank you, Miss Bennet, for gracing us with your presence.”

The implication was that grace could be passed on, shared. A graceful person would be gracious and could grace us. Every once in a while I love to immerse myself in the novels of Jane Austin or Leo Tolstoy. Nobility needs no definition in those fictional worlds. A truly noble person dignified everyone in the room.

If I were to walk into a drawing room of the period, I would be a bull in a china closet. Not only would I be uncomfortable, I would probably make everyone else in the room ill at ease. A truly gracious hostess, however, would make me feel graceful. I would forget my awkwardness, my clumsy ways, and, like the other guests, know that I too belonged because my hostess chose me.

### Our Gracelessness (Rom. 3:9-18)

That’s the first context of God’s grace: our awkwardness, or more precisely, our sinfulness. Nicodemus asked, “Can an old man crawl back inside his mother’s womb?” Both he and Jesus must have laughed at this clumsy image. But the truth is, when we think we are the most graceful, we fall flat on our faces. The humiliation is essential. Even more than humility, we must feel sinful, undeserving of any invitation to heaven. We have to recognize that at our best we are stained by self-interest. We have to believe that our condemnation to death is just. We have to sit in the electric chair, waiting for the final jolt.

### God’s Gracefulness (Rom. 5:15-21; John 1:14)

And then He comes into the room. A Being who personifies all the nobility, dignity, power, and self-assurance of true graciousness stands in front of us. John writes, “The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only” (John 1:14, NIV).

### **The Gift of Grace (Heb. 4:14-16)**

But He doesn't stop there. He gives us His grace. He frees us from the condemnation of sin. The writer of Hebrews urges us, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

### **Graced! (Eph. 2:1-9)**

He just had to walk into our room, John testified, and we could feel His presence, like the presence of the Almighty Father. He graced us with His presence. Old people forgot their creaking backs, little children were less rowdy at play, sailors stopped swearing, and young men passed up the chance to drink themselves drunk. We knew that Jesus was nearby; His gracious presence ennobled us. His eyes smiled at us, and we knew we were children of the King.

As Paul wrote: "It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah. . . . All we do is trust him

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## **We have to sit in the electric chair, waiting for the final jolt.**

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enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing."<sup>\*</sup>

### **REACT**

1. God's grace is more like: (a) free-falling; (b) landing with a parachute; (c) walking away from a crash; (d) helping the Chief Medic.

2. Explain why you agree or disagree with the following statements: (a) God's grace is available only to people who desire it; (b) God's grace is completed when I first accept Jesus as my Saviour; (c) if God's grace is at work in my life, my family and friends will see positive changes in me.

3. What part, if any, does humiliation play in our acceptance of God's grace?

4. Since God gives us enough grace to attain salvation, can we rely only on Him and do whatever we wish? Explain your answer.

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<sup>\*</sup>Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message; The New Testament in Contemporary English* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress Publishing Group, 1993), p. 403.

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*By Jennifer Morgan, who teaches Bible at St. John's Seventh-day Adventist Academy, Mount Pearl, Newfoundland.*

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# Grace for Zach

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Luke 19:1-10**

Being saved by God's grace. Sounds difficult, right? But that's not the way grace works: "Put away the suspicion that God's promises are not meant for you. They are for every repentant transgressor. Strength and grace have been provided through Christ to be brought by ministering angels to every believing soul. None are so sinful that they cannot find strength, purity, and righteousness in Jesus."<sup>1</sup> So God's grace is available to anyone—any sinner—who wishes to receive it.

Zach wasn't well liked in his community. He cheated everyone with whom he came in contact in his business, and by doing so he became wealthy. But one day Zach realized that his business methods weren't leading him on the path to righteousness, and he repented and was forgiven.

You see, Zacchaeus might not have been a good person before Christ came into his life, but even Zacchaeus was offered God's grace. When Jesus was passing through Jericho, He told Zacchaeus that He must visit with him, and Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus (Luke 19:1-6). Many of the people around did not take

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## **“None are so sinful that they cannot find strength, purity, and righteousness in Jesus.”**

---

the news well that Jesus was going to eat in the home of a tax collector, “but Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount’ ” (verse 8, NIV).

If we are willing to accept God's grace as a gift and as a blessing, the Father is only too pleased to grant it.

Jesus said to Zacchaeus: “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what is lost” (verses 9, 10).

“[Jesus] is waiting to strip [sinners] of their garments stained and polluted with sin, and to put upon them the white robes of righteousness; He bids them live and not die.”<sup>2</sup>

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1. *Steps to Christ*, pp. 52, 53.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

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*By Lori Ennis, a second-year student at Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland.*

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# Is God Biased?

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Titus 2:11-14**

Some electronic measuring devices are able to adjust their actual readings to allow for different operators. Trial measurements are obtained to calculate an individual's "operator bias." The operator uses the device to measure differences in elevation around a practice area. Ideally, when the operator returns to the starting position, adding the readings should yield a value of zero, since the starting position has the same elevation as itself.

But the actual value obtained is rarely zero. Divided by the number of readings taken, this value reflects the individual's operator bias. Before taking test measurements, the operator can enter his or her operator bias into the device to negate operator error. This allows different operators to obtain the same measurements in a particular test area.

The concept of operator bias can also be applied to an individual's walk with God. We are all at various stages or levels in our Christian walk. Some of us are new to the faith, while others have spent many years walking with God. Because of this, God deals with us individually. It is true that God's plan of salvation is available to us all, but it is also true that God treats each person as an individual

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## **Operator bias can also be applied to an individual's walk with God.**

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with different needs and desires.

In a sense, God knows everybody's operator bias when it comes to how we relate to Him. God makes allowances for our shortcomings and failings so that in His eyes we are all candidates for salvation, and everyone who has a relationship with Him is exactly equal. It is God's overwhelming love for us and the precious gift of His grace that allows us salvation and makes us equal in His eyes. God's grace is the operator bias that lets us all achieve the same measurement—salvation.

Operator bias can change as a person becomes more familiar with and better able to use the measuring equipment. This makes it periodically necessary to recalculate the operator bias. Usually it will lessen as the operator becomes better acquainted with the instrument.

The same can be said of our walk with the Lord. The more time we spend with God, the more we become like Him and the less allowance God has to make for our mistakes and failings. As we become better acquainted with the Lord, we obtain a better understanding of His will and deeper insight into the limitless love and unbounded grace that God freely offers to us all.

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*By Jason Cole, a mechanical-engineering student at Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland.*

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# Amazing Grace

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Heb. 4:16**

Grace is difficult for some people to understand, but Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy can help us to know God's wonderful news about grace. In the book of Romans, Paul tells us that "the gift of God [His grace] is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift [of grace] followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:16, 17, NIV). Considering that grace is a gift and that we don't deserve it, we see how amazing God's grace is and how much He loves us.

In *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ellen White writes about two of Christ's disciples, John and Judas. Both had the same opportunity to follow Christ and His teachings. Each had serious character defects, and each had equal access to divine grace that transforms character. It turned out that only one of these men responded to

## There would be no need for grace if it were only a noun.

the powerful transforming grace. John, Ellen White tells us, became humble to Christ's teaching, while Judas became a hearer only.\*

Grace is a fundamental key to understanding God's redemption plan for us. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

Finding grace and understanding it reminds me of a double-decker bus I rode on a tour of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. To get the best view, I had to get to the second level. To be able to get the best view of grace takes two steps:

**1. Recognition.** We need to recognize that grace is a gift from God; it comes to us lovingly—with no strings attached—and is available for everyone. We also should recognize that we as sinners are in desperate need of outside help—God's help—to get us through. God's grace does that for us.

**2. Acceptance.** There would be no need for grace if it were only a noun, but it is more than that. God's grace will actively come into our lives if we allow it to. The gift is available for anyone but will be received only by those who avail themselves of this amazing power source. God promises to knock on the door, but it is up to us to let Him in.

\*Page 558.

# In My Time of Need

## OPINION

**Key Text: Heb. 4:16**

“Do you blame God?” she asked me.

Since that August evening, my mind has sifted through a million questions. For some I’ll never know the answer.

But this one was different.

Some people who go toe to toe with the enemy through a personal crisis often end up questioning God. Why would He let such a thing happen to them? Did He even care?

Well, there I was. In a matter of a few short minutes, my life would completely change. I would discover what it meant to be totally and utterly helpless—to be filled with intense fear, shame, confusion, and anger.

Then amid all these alien emotions, and at a time when I didn’t even trust my own judgment, she asked, “Do you blame God?”

## Some people who go toe to toe with the enemy through a personal crisis often end up questioning God.

Thankfully, I was ready for this question.

How could I possibly accuse my Friend and Saviour of being unfeeling and unloving? The One who gave up His own life that I should live? The One who saved me and continues to save me? If there’s anywhere the blame should be placed for life’s injustice and pain, it’s at the feet of its rightful owner, Satan.

You see, I can’t blame God. It’s not His fault. He’s proven Himself again and again by offering me a limitless supply of love and acceptance. It’s in this grace that my strength lies.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). My Saviour is the answer to pain in life, not the cause of it.

Do I blame God? Certainly not.

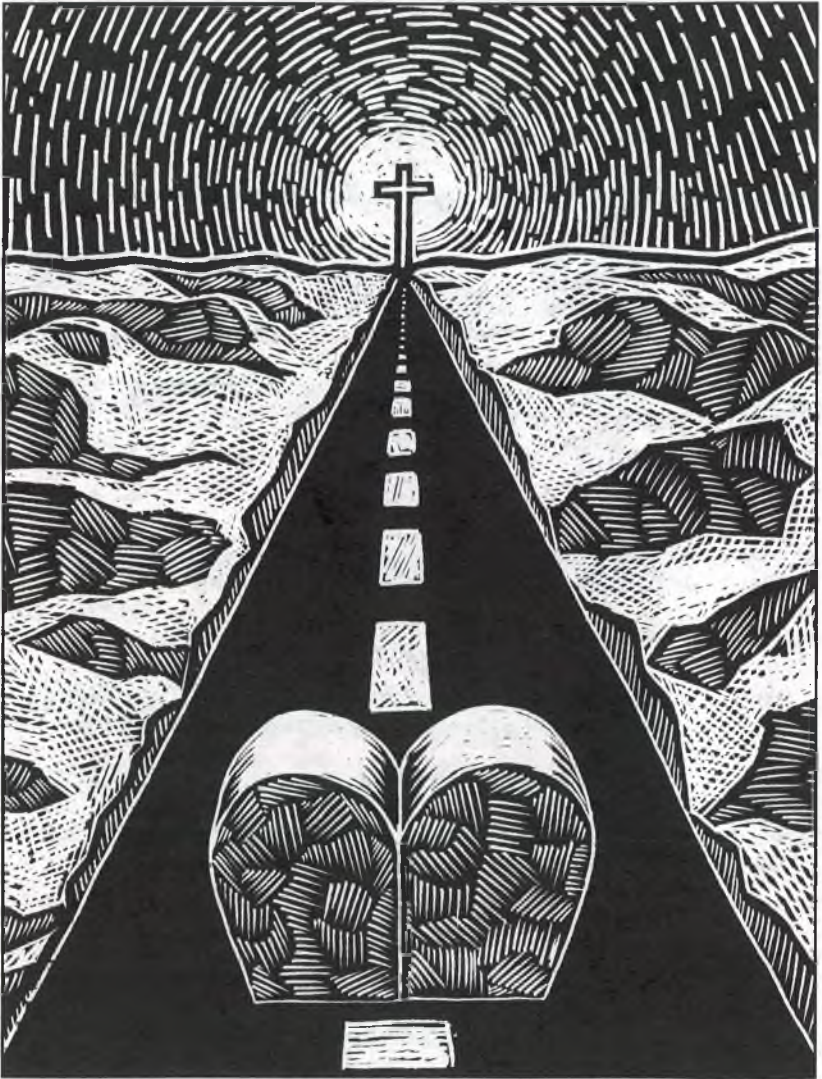
## REACT

1. How has God’s grace affected my struggles?
2. Have I ever doubted God’s promise that He will be there in my time of need?
3. What kind of encouragement can I offer that is an example of God’s continual love and acceptance?

*By Sherry Griffin, who hosts the morning show on radio station VOAR in Mount Pearl, Newfoundland.*



# GOD'S HIGHWAY



**“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care” (1 Pet. 1:10, NIV).**



# Watershed of History

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Luke 1:39-45**

She was a woman well along in years. Her loosely knotted hair, once a fine sable rope, betrayed her age with silver strands. She walked slowly, her hand securely on her husband's arm, her gaze forthright, her eyes clear and honest.

At first glance, they were an older couple, nothing more. A man and his wife, traversing the yard in front of their home. A couple of retirees, secure and content in each other's company.

At first glance.

But a second look revealed an anomaly, a strange addition to the picture, a piece that seemed pasted on by a mocking hand. The woman, past her prime by anyone's guess, was clearly expecting a child.

While prophets searched their scrolls and heaven awaited the divine moment, Elizabeth traversed this earth, unassuming, ordinary, part of the grand plan. The fullness of time had almost come.

"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and

## **Isaiah, sleeping the sleep of the ages, cried forth from tablets of clay.**

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy' (Luke 1:42-44, NIV).

A simple woman. An honest faith. An awesome moment. The watershed of history.

While Elizabeth and Zechariah sat at table, broke bread, and filled their water jugs, an unseen world prepared for the Promise. Scrolls, dusty and long-forgotten, beckoned prophets to contemplate into the night. Isaiah, sleeping the sleep of the ages, cried forth from tablets of clay.

"A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God' (Isa. 40:3).

The highway was about to be paved. Even now, the tar simmered in bituminous readiness. The fulfillment of the time had come.

*By Sandra Doran, a doctoral student in special education, Boston (Massachusetts) University.*

# Escape Plan

## LOGOS

1 Pet. 1:10-12; Isa. 9:2-7; 11:1-5; 40:3-5; 42:1-4

### Isaiah 9:2-7

The plan of salvation reveals not the emergency response to an unexpected problem, but careful planning that reaches all the way back to the time “before the creation of the world” (1 Pet. 1:20, NIV). We are privileged to view the Messianic prophecies of Isaiah from the fulfilled side rather than the unfulfilled side. Our spiritual hindsight is nearly 20/20. But have you ever wondered what the Hebrews of Isaiah’s day thought about his prophecies? Or, more specifically, what he himself thought? Our key text makes it clear that even though they were the messengers of God, the prophets were not always given complete knowledge about the messages they communicated. They were left to study carefully what their prophecies pointed to.

The knowledge that God “became flesh and lived for a while among us” (John 1:14, NIV) is something that we almost take for granted as universally understood by true Christians. But for Isaiah, this may have been a very different matter. Knowing that a Messiah was coming might have been very different from knowing that the Messiah was God in human nature.

It might well be asked whether he could have understood the names given to the Messiah in his own prophecy: “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6, KJV). How these terms could be applied to the “child” who was to be born must have become a major theme of study for the servant of the Lord. Ultimately, it must have led to sheer amazement that God’s method of dealing with the problem of sin meant His becoming one with us in nature.

### Isaiah 11:1-5

Inherent in the prophecies of Isaiah is the revelation of the character of the Messiah. Possessed by the Spirit, He will not judge by external standards. He will not be swayed by what He sees or hears. No outward appeal or splendid bribery will cause Him to bend the truth or distort His judgment. “Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist” (Isa. 11:5, NIV).

### Isaiah 40:3-5; 42:1-4

The prophecies of Isaiah, as they were fulfilled in the life of Christ, reveal not just the passive foreknowledge of God, but His active participation in the events of redemption. It is not as if He merely knows what is going to happen ahead of time and tells us about it. Prophecy makes it clear that He plans what is to happen in the future and carries out His own will.

The plan of salvation, formed in the heart of God from before Creation, has been carried out step by step according to the pattern He has established. “The work of Christ on earth was hastening to a close. Before Him, in vivid outline, lay the scenes whither His feet were tending. Even before He took humanity upon Him, He saw the whole length of the path He must travel in order to save that which was lost. Every pang that rent His heart, every insult that was heaped upon

His head, every privation that He was called to endure, was open to His view before He laid aside His crown and royal robe, and stepped down from the throne, to clothe His divinity with humanity. The path from the manger to Calvary was all before His eyes. He knew the anguish that would come upon Him. He knew it all, and yet He said, 'Lo, I come: in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart.' Ps.40:7, 8."\*

In following His Father's will, Christ has fulfilled many prophecies, but not all of them. "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2, 3, NIV).

Since it is clear that Jesus has perfectly fulfilled all prophecies about His first

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## **We are privileged to view the Messianic prophecies of Isaiah from the fulfilled side.**

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coming, we can have confidence and assurance that He will perfectly fulfill all prophecies about His second coming. We know He is coming back.

### **REACT**

1. How would the "spiritual" Hebrew have understood the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the Messiah?
2. The Gospel writer Matthew frequently referred to the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. Find some of those references. What was he trying to prove in each case?
3. How important is the divinity of Christ to our understanding of the gospel?
4. How does it make you feel when you hear a sermon on the second coming?
5. As members of the family of God, if we fail to accept and acknowledge the eschatological teaching of the Messiah, are we guilty of sin? Explain your answer.

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\**The Desire of Ages*, p. 410.

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*By Eric Doran, pastor of the Lincoln (Rhode Island) and Attleboro (Massachusetts) Seventh-day Adventist churches.*

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# Hope for the Future

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Isa. 40:1-5**

In a few weeks Christmas will be here. One of the highlights of the season is the singing of Handel's *Messiah*. I especially enjoy the tenor solo, "Comfort Ye," which tells of the Saviour's coming to bring deliverance to His people.

The prophets must have trembled as they foretold the coming of the Messiah—the Anointed One. As Jacob gathered his sons to relate the message of the last days, he spoke the powerful words: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come" (Gen. 49:10).

"From the days of Enoch the promise [of the coming Messiah] was repeated through patriarchs and prophets, keeping alive the hope of His appearing."<sup>1</sup> Wherever people gathered—around the dinner table, out in the fields, at family worship—this must have been the main topic of conversation.

In my imagination, I see the prophets stand up to preach on Sabbath mornings, centering their sermons on the coming of the Promised One. How the people's hearts must have been lifted up as they shouted, "Amen!" and "Hallelujah!"

The prophets were simply spokespersons for God. Their task was to bring hope

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## **In my imagination, I see the prophets stand up to preach on Sabbath mornings.**

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to the despairing. "Among the Jews there were yet steadfast souls, descendants of that holy line through whom a knowledge of God had been preserved. These still looked for the hope of the promises made unto the fathers. They strengthened their faith by dwelling upon the assurance given through Moses. . . . Again, they read how the Lord would anoint One 'to preach good tidings unto the meek,' 'to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives,' and to declare the 'acceptable year of the Lord.' Isa. 61:1, 2."<sup>2</sup>

Isaiah wrote extensively about the Messiah's coming, penning 61 verses that embody the prophetic message. As he prophesied to the people of his day, he brought messages filled with comfort and hope for the future. Today we have the same promise that ancient Israel had, the promise that Christ is coming. We have the "sure word of prophecy" (2 Pet. 1:19), in which we may find comfort and hope for the future.

## **REACT**

How can we make the promise of Christ's second coming an integral part of our everyday conversation?

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 31.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

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*By Milton Tomlinson, account executive, WJAR-TV, Providence, Rhode Island.*

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# Windows or Wormholes?

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Isa. 2:9**

Outside the confines of hours and minutes, with no beginning and no end, God encompasses all of time. This freedom from temporal boundaries makes Him the only source of eternal value, eternal meaning, and eternal purpose. Sinful humanity, on the other hand, confined within the prison of time, has drifted farther and farther from God.

Made in the image of God, humankind longs for the eternal perspective. A currently popular physics theory, known as Super String Theory, seeks to explain nature's fundamental forces. It predicts that if vast amounts of energy were available, we might be able to warp space and time to create "wormholes," windows into the future or past. But wormholes or no wormholes, it is clear that God found a timely solution to the problem of temporal confinement by giving us great prophets such as Isaiah.

*God has provided a means through which we may regain our bearings in time.*

Isaiah preached between 740 and 690 B.C. During his ministry, the northern kingdom of Israel, consisting of 10 of the 12 Hebrew tribes, was taken into captivity by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom of Judah, consisting of the other

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## Made in the image of God, humankind longs for the eternal perspective.

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two tribes, survived until 586 B.C., when Babylon took it captive. Isaiah not only foretold the downfall of the Hebrew nation but he also opened a window through time on the whole plan of redemption and salvation, which included both the first and second coming of Christ. In chapters 40 through 66, Isaiah exposes, in more detail than any other Old Testament prophet, the plan of salvation, the suffering of Christ, and the glory of Christ's final victory over sin through His second coming. By studying Isaiah in depth, we can be convinced that God indeed opened a window in time, through which Isaiah clearly saw the suffering of Christ on the cross as He poured out His life for our sins—and this a full 700 years before the actual event was to occur! Isaiah's window on salvation would continue to expand until it had encompassed Christ's second coming, as well as the new heaven and the new earth. Thus, Isaiah's verse would be fulfilled: "See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you" (Isa. 42:9, NIV).

## REACT

1. What is the essential value of having windows on the future?
2. How does such knowledge help us in the here and now?

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*By Prestor A. Saillant, graduate student in neuroscience, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island.*

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# A State of Readiness

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: 2 Tim. 3:15**

Many prophets of the Old Testament were guided to reveal information concerning the coming Messiah that would have allowed all who depended on the Spirit of God in their study of the books to be able to identify the Messiah at His first coming. Simeon was able to do so (Luke 2:25-28).

Jesus and the apostles also gave specific prophecies to help us identify His second return. If we are not careful, we may find ourselves like many at His first coming, unprepared and unaware of the momentous events occurring at the time.

If Christ were to return today, would you be able to identify with the body of believers awaiting His return? Here are some practical ways to help us maintain a state of readiness.

**1. Study of God's Word.** Paul encouraged the young leader Timothy to study to show himself "approved unto God" (2 Tim. 2:15) and complemented him that "from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures" (3:15). The process of actively engaging the mind in study and understanding of the Word of God keeps the senses alert and in constant communication with Christ; He is therefore able to reveal Himself to the believer.

**2. Fellowship with believers.** Friends and fellow believers are an important

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## If we are not careful, we may find ourselves like many at His first coming.

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part of our Christian experience. Interaction with friends who share the same beliefs, hopes, and desires provides a strong support system that enables the believer to focus on Christ's return (1 John 1:3).

**3. Sharing of convictions.** Hope in Christ's return invigorates our lives and ignites a flame in the hearts of those with whom we share the message. A Christian who does not share his or her convictions is at a greater risk of being unprepared to receive the Lord at His second coming.

**4. Practicing a lifestyle.** Make the Christian experience a complete way of life. Our choice of friends, food, clothing, and speech; our outlook on life and its situations; our disposition and behavior—should always send the message "I am a Christian living for the return of my Lord and serving other people as I wait."

Christ is ready to help us be fully prepared to meet Him when He comes. As we reach for His hand, He will gladly aid us.

## REACT

1. What are some of the ways I can share my faith in my community?
2. What do you think are some of the signs of the times that are pointing to Christ's soon return?

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*By Lisa Walker, graduate student in psychology, Rhode Island College at Lincoln.*

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# Unity in Christ

## OPINION

**Key Text: Eph. 3:6**

To the Greek, the term *Messiah* means "Jesus Christ." To the Hebrew, it is translated "the Anointed One." The Anointed One philosophy is the central concept of Judaism and Christianity.

The main focus and mission of the Messiah was to bring about reconciliation with God and unification of humanity. The result of Christ's completed mission was the unification of Jew and Gentile. These two previously diverse groups can now approach God in one spirit, no longer as strangers or foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints (Eph. 3:6).

On the cross the Messiah ended the enmity between Jews and Gentiles, as well as that between humanity and God. The reconciled ones now belong to the new order of humankind, the Christian being. Through reconciliation we are placed in one body. This body is the church.

Should there be one universal church? What would be some of the Messianic marks? In accordance with early promises contained in the Old Testament, the Messiah was to deliver Israel from its foes and restore the kingdom of David. This kingdom was to be a universal one, offering peace and prosperity. It is incumbent

## **Paul advised us that without faith it is impossible to please God.**

upon all Christians to become messiahs for truth and unification.

The Messiah is coming again to save those who have been faithful (2 Peter 2). The notion that the Messiah has not yet come can be easily disproved.

Recognizing Jesus' Messianic power when He was on earth passing through the countryside of the Gergesenes, two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, said, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time? . . . If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine" (Matt. 8:29-31).

On another occasion, a man with an unclean spirit cried out, "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him!" (Mark 1:24, 25). The anointed unifying force of deliverance came. He delivered many from oppression, He raised the dead, He restored physical and spiritual sight to the blind, and He cast out devils.

The second advent is soon approaching. Paul advised us that without faith it is impossible to please God. What is your condition of heart today?

## **REACT**

Is it logical to assume, given Paul's words, that everything that does not come from faith is sin? Explain your answer.

*By Dennis Langley, deputy director of the Urban League of Rhode Island, East Greenwich, Rhode Island.*



# A FUTURE BEYOND THE STARS



**“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet” (Matt. 1:22, NIV).**



# A Hope and a Future

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Jer. 29:11**

When I was a teenager, I read my daily horoscope. It was a thrill to get a glimpse into my obscure future. I remember reading a particular issue that told me I would attract men like bees to honey. Well, I was convinced, to say the least. A lot of time and effort have gone into attracting those bees, but my hive hasn't come in yet.

I suppose after many a disappointment I finally realized just how general those predictions were. They could have been for anyone. So many of them were based on flattery and conjecture. Besides this, what did these astrologers know about me anyway? They had never met me or spoken to me. Yet I was willing to take everything they said at face value. So many times we seem to depend more on the limited focus of humanity than on the unlimited focus of God.

God's predictions have always been specific and unquestionable. He leaves us with the truth, not open to personal interpretation but based solely on the re-

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### **Those predictions could have been for anyone.**

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lationship we have with Him. "To Adam was given an assurance of the coming of the Redeemer. . . . To Abraham was given the promise that of his line the Saviour of the world should come. . . . Moses . . . plainly prophesied of the Messiah to come."\* All these prophets could speak with great authority because of the close personal relationship they had with God.

Astrologers reason that the answer to the future is in the stars. God maintains that the answer to the future is in Him who made the stars.

So, you can have a glimpse into the distorted mirror of humanity's perspective of the future, or you can get a good look into God's view of the future for you: " 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' " (Jer. 29:11, NIV).

The choice is yours.

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\* *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 222.

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By Carol D. P. Ferguson, primary teacher at Harper Bell School, Birmingham, England.

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# A Messiah Is Promised

## LOGOS

**Matt. 1:18–2:23; 26:47–27:66**

### **The Start of a Closer Relationship (Matt. 1:18–2:23)**

During the time of Roman occupation, there was a general silence on the subject of Jesus' birth, so much so that people in Matthew's day were inclined to believe that the sonship of Jesus actually began with the divine utterance of His baptism (Mark 1:11). Therefore, Matthew and Luke set the record straight by recording the miraculous events surrounding Jesus' birth (Matt. 1:20).

For Matthew this was a direct fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. A virgin actually conceived and gave birth to a Son, who was called Emmanuel, "God with us." This coming of God to earth marked the beginning of a unique, wonderful, and benevolent relationship between God and humanity. This was not a temporary stay, but the beginning of a permanent relationship (Matt. 28:20), made necessary by humanity's need of a Saviour.

It was not only the Jews who looked for a Saviour. Throughout the whole Roman Empire, there was an air of expectation as far away as the Eastern countries, wherever people gave themselves to a study of prophecy and astronomy. The idea of a star betokening the birth of a king was by no means uncommon for that age. The wise men who followed the star most probably were aware that they were about to fulfill the poetic prophecy of the psalmist (Ps. 45:8).

*What special event in my life marked the beginning of my relationship with Jesus?*

### **God's Protection in Troubled Times (Matt. 1:13, 14)**

There is a parallel between the Matthew narrative and the Exodus story. In both cases we find God's chosen people (or Person) under threat. For the children of Israel, safety meant fleeing from Egypt, but for the Son of God, safety meant fleeing into Egypt, where He stayed. Jesus was "God with us," God with the Egyptians, as well as God with the Jews. Jesus was the greater Moses of Deuteronomy 18:15, who will lead His people out of a deeper captivity of sin into the Promised Land of the kingdom of God (see Matt. 1:20; Exod. 4:19). The massacre of the infants by the jealous and insecure King Herod is typical of the extent to which sin will go if left unchecked. This gravity of human suffering aptly illustrates the tragedy of the human situation and the even more urgent need of a Deliverer.

*Why was Satan unable to locate and destroy the Baby Jesus while He was in Egypt?*

### **He Freely Chose to Suffer (Matt. 26:53, 54)**

Every Messianic prophecy penned by the prophets of old was a promise pointing to the manner in which the Messiah would manifest Himself, and no manner befits that of a true Messiah better than the deportment of Jesus under the intense stress of the trial before Caiaphas (Matt. 26:52-54). Despite His bruised and beaten appearance, His obvious fatigue, and the emotional trauma compounded by the abandonment by His disciples, Jesus remained the master of the situation.

He freely chose to remain under the power of His enemies, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled which described the manner of His suffering (Isaiah 53).

*How did Jesus remain so calm before Caiaphas when He obviously had the power to deliver Himself and prove to all onlookers that He was truly divine?*

### **Coping With Ultimate Failure (Matt. 26:75; 27:5)**

Peter fell into the trap that can be aptly stated in the old saying “one sin leads to another.” Once he started along the steep and slippery road of denial for the purpose of self-preservation, he soon found out that it is not easy to climb back up that slippery slope. Each time we sin makes it easier for the next sin to take place and more difficult to stop altogether. Peter was sliding fast, but his rapid descent into more extreme forms of denial was arrested by the crowing of the cock, which was then followed by the look of compassion on the face of Jesus.

At that moment Peter had a choice. He could go all the way with the trend of denial and pledge to have nothing more to do with Jesus, or he could stop and repent. He chose to repent, and by doing so he experienced—as prophesied in Isaiah 61:1—the power of the Messiah to bind up the brokenhearted. That night Peter received healing.

Unfortunately Judas did not avail himself of that same privilege. Instead, he

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## **It was not only the Jews who looked for a Saviour.**

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chose *not* to receive Jesus Christ into his life (John 1:11; Isa. 53:3) and as a result was crushed by the sheer weight of sin and guilt. Judas died a broken and guilty man.

*During the worst experience of my life, how did I cope emotionally? What can I learn from Peter and Judas?*

### **The Experience of Total Separation From God (Matt. 27:46)**

Jesus lived a life of sinless perfection, obeying all the legal and spiritual requirements of the law, but that was not enough. In order to empathize fully with fallen humanity, Jesus had to experience separation from God, for this is the experience of the sinner. No amount of ridicule, torture, or abuse was enough to wring from the lips of our Saviour an anguished cry, but that moment of separation and dark uncertainty was greater than all the weight of sin. As Jesus cried out to His Father for the first time, He received no reply. It was then that Christ experienced the real gravity of the sin problem. He did it for you and for me.

*At what times in my life do I feel most vulnerable and separated from God?*

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By Paul Liburd, youth pastor in Birmingham, England.

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# The God-Man Saviour

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Matt. 1:21**

“The fullness of the time had come. Humanity, becoming more degraded through ages of transgression, called for the coming of the Redeemer. Satan had been working to make the gulf deep and impassable between earth and heaven. By his falsehoods he had emboldened men in sin. It was his purpose to wear out the forbearance of God, and to extinguish His love for man, so that He would abandon the world to satanic jurisdiction.”<sup>1</sup>

“It was to redeem us that Jesus lived and suffered and died. He became a ‘Man of sorrows,’ that we might be partakers of everlasting joy. God permitted His beloved Son, full of grace and truth, to come from a world of indescribable glory to a world marred and blighted with sin, darkened with the shadow of death and the curse. He permitted Him to leave the bosom of His love, the adoration of the angels, to suffer shame, insult, humiliation, hatred, and death.”<sup>2</sup>

God sent Jesus to us not only to bear our sins and die as our sacrifice. “He gave

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## Every son and daughter of Adam may understand that our Creator is the friend of sinners.

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Him to the fallen race. God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16, KJV). Christ was to identify Himself with the interests and needs of humanity.”<sup>3</sup>

“Since Jesus came to dwell with us, we know that God is acquainted with our trials and sympathizes with our griefs. . . . As the Son of man, He gave us an example of obedience; as the Son of God, He gives us power to obey.”

“To us He says: ‘I AM the Good Shepherd.’ ‘I AM the living Bread.’ ‘I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life.’ ‘All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.’ John 10:11; 6:51; 14:6; Matt. 28:18. I AM the assurance of every promise. I AM; be not afraid. ‘God with us’ is the surety of our deliverance from sin, the assurance of our power to obey the law of heaven.”<sup>4</sup>

“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.”<sup>5</sup>

This is the essence of the good news that was promised by God long ago through His prophets, who recorded it in the Holy Bible.

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 34, 35.

2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 13.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 24, 25.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 25.



## In the Fullness of Time

### EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Gal. 4:4, 5**

What strikes you when you read the book of Matthew? We were impressed by the way Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled in such amazing detail. Matthew records how an Old Testament writer prophesied the exact amount of money paid to Judas for betraying Jesus (Matt. 27:9, 10; Zech. 11:12, 13). An insignificant detail like the soldiers' casting lots for Jesus' clothing was prophesied in Psalm 22:18 (see Matt. 27:35). Why should such detail be important enough to record?

When Jesus was born in a small Judean town, He was fulfilling a divine timetable set out by God. God's timetable is not determined by human events. This would make God into a mere superhuman being, a sort of cosmic Napoleon, who manages to manipulate circumstances to His own best advantage. However, this plan does fit in with human events. When Jesus came, the world had been prepared for this mission to make the fullest impact. At first sight the choice of an insignificant and rather troublesome outpost of the Roman Empire would seem an unpromising place for God to burst in on history. But this particular corner of the world was ideally placed in space and time.

Israel had been prepared by prophets for centuries to recognize the Messiah.

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### **An insignificant detail like the soldiers' casting lots for Jesus' clothing was prophesied.**

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Greek thought had made a profound impact on the world, leaving the legacy of a language capable of expressing profound thoughts in unprecedented detail. The Roman Empire, rising out of the ashes of Greek civilization, had provided the infrastructure (roads, stability, common culture) to facilitate the dissemination of new ideas quickly. The time was ripe for the gospel to spread. "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Gal. 4:4, 5, NIV).

Did Jesus come as the all-conquering King expected by the Jews of the time? No. He came as the suffering servant. If the people had studied the book of Isaiah, they would have known this and welcomed Jesus with open arms. But instead "he was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering" (Isa. 53:3, NIV). Because God so often works in unexpected ways, He gave prophecies to this people. We humans need these pointers so that we can recognize the hand of God in history.

Why then does the New Testament contain such specific fulfillments of prophecy? It is because God functions in remarkable detail. He made sure that all the conditions were right before He sent His Son. He knows the time is right, and He will return when the time is right according to His timetable.

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*By Christopher Rogers and Susanna Matthau, teachers in Birmingham, England.*

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# God With Us!

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Phil. 4:13, 19**

A couple months before I was to leave for England to be a student missionary, many horrible things happened to me and my family. My family holiday was jeopardized because my grandfather passed away, my new car was involved in a very expensive accident, requiring thousands of dollars to repair it, and many other things I don't wish to describe. It seems I'm so prone to trouble, and to make matters worse, I believed God was dropping it upon me like hail. I wasn't even sure anymore whether I still wanted to go to England.

Fortunately, I soon realized that "apart from . . . [God] you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NIV). I could've moaned and complained about life's circumstances, but it wouldn't have given me satisfaction. I was discontented with my university studies and wanted to be independent for a while. But God didn't allow these things to happen earlier. They were to fit into His timetable. All these horrible things had to take place first to prepare me for my missionary work. I should be thankful that I have a little patience and sense left to trust in God. The experience of God's being with us is opposite to Peter's experience when Jesus was being

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## **I was discontented with my university studies and wanted to be independent for a while.**

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tried. Our relationship with Christ is limitless.

First, we must believe that "God [is] with us" (Matt. 1:22). No matter what circumstances befall us, we must "never feel that Christ is far away. He is always near. His loving presence surrounds you."<sup>1</sup> "Christ's presence in the heart is a vitalizing power, strengthening the entire being."<sup>2</sup>

Second, we must trust God's Word. I found that trusting in the Lord is a happy experience (Prov. 16:20). His Words are always the truth, and as we make it a habit to trust Him and make Him our daily companion, "we shall feel that the powers of an unseen world are all around us; and by looking unto Jesus we shall become assimilated to His image."<sup>3</sup>

Third, as we learn to believe in God's constant presence and to trust His Word, we gradually become more like Him. We may encounter many trials and difficulties in life, but God will carry us through (Ps. 46:1; Heb. 13:5, 6). The Lord just wants us to be disciplined so we can be complete.

My difficult experiences were bestowed on me by God, not as hail, but as blessings. They helped me to trust God under any circumstances.

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1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 85.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 71.

3. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 85.

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*By Hazel C. Soliven, student missionary as assistant nursery teacher at Harper Bell School, Birmingham, England.*

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## It's a Question of Trust!

### OPINION

**Key Text: Gen. 15:6**

Do you trust God? Do you really have faith in Him? Do you value the unique influence of the Bible? Abraham believed God's Word, and his faith was counted as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). I believe that many of us as young people don't even know God. So how can we trust Him, let alone His Word? We may have heard about Him, sung about Him, memorized texts about Him, but we haven't spent the time needed to get to know Him by studying the Bible and enjoying truly spiritual fellowship.

I want to show you that God is worthy of your trust. To do this I need to introduce you to a friend of mine. Once you understand about my friend and realize how much he loves you, you'll be convinced that he is worthy of your trust. However, society maintains that there is no such friend. Similarly Satan deludes us with notions of grandeur disguised as humanism—the lie that says, “God is within us; we can be as God.”

When I was 17 years old, I thought I knew God. But God had to introduce Himself to me through other people. One of the strangest introductions happened when a visitor, shabbily dressed, walked into my church. I approached this young

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### **“Oh, but our church has the right doctrines,” I interjected.**

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man at the end of the service, smiled confidently, and shook his hand. Still smiling, I asked, “Did you enjoy the service?”

“Yes,” he replied and explained that he did not belong to a particular church, that instead he visited many. “Oh, but our church has the right doctrines,” I interjected quickly.

The stranger frowned and stared at me. But he was calm and almost sympathetic and pitying in his response. “But do you know Christ? Has He changed your life? Is His love radiating through your life and your church?”

He had a point. I knew of God—things that other people had said about Him, but I had not allowed Him to reveal Himself through my life. I had not been trusting God or His Word.

I know God now because I spend time with Him, through His Word, prayer, and fellowship. I am far from perfect, but I do know that I need not fear for the future.

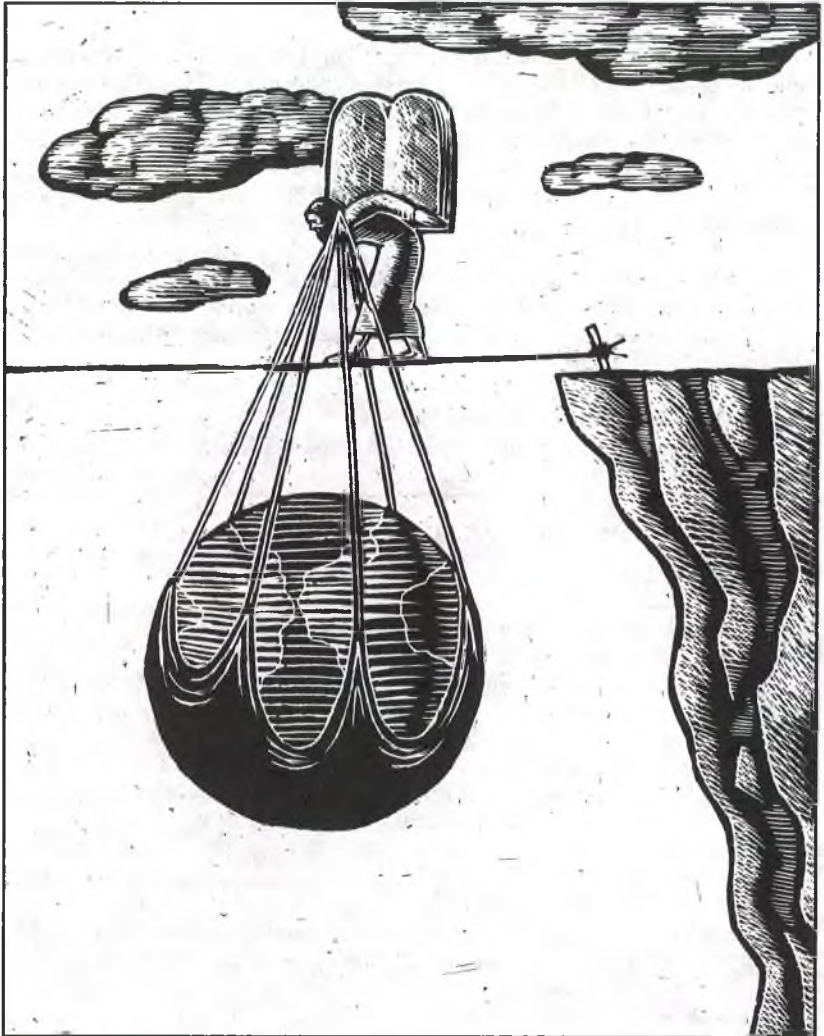
Of course, Jesus is the friend that I am introducing to you. He is worthy of your trust because He loves you so very much that He was born, He lived, died, and was resurrected—all to show you the depth of His love. All He asks is for you to give Him some time. Get to know Him. He will not disappoint you. Trust Him and trust His Word. It is just a question of trust.

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*By Susan Jeffers, an elementary school teacher, Birmingham, England.*

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# THE TIME IS RIGHT



**“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Gal. 4:4, 5, NIV).**



# What We've Been Waiting For

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Gal. 4:4

I sat in the waiting room, eagerly expecting the doctor to come and tell me the good news. My brother and his wife had been in the delivery room for hours. They had been planning this day for years, waiting for the right time. My brother's career was well established, they had moved into a nice home, and they had finally felt they were ready to handle the responsibility. And what a large responsibility it was: bringing a child into the world, a new life. Everything must be in order. Countless doctor's visits, lengthy Lamaze classes—all seemed worthwhile now. This is what they had been waiting for.

After my brother's wife had become pregnant, the good news had spread quickly to friends and relatives. Throughout the pregnancy, our in-laws and companions had shared in the expectant feelings of excitement, as well as the trials, of carrying a baby and the fears of childbirth. During the nine-month period, they had always been supportive. Some had their doubts about whether or not my brother and his wife were ready for such a challenge. They warned about the added time and money, the long nights, the diapers, and the lack of freedom they would have. I think they were genuinely concerned and wanted everything to be perfect. It wouldn't be easy, but this was very important to my brother and his

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### **I sat in the waiting room, eagerly expecting the doctor to come.**

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wife. After all, they had thought about it and planned it for so long. They felt the time was right.

A similar situation can be seen in the life of Jesus. As with the child in the story, Christ's birth had been well planned. Our heavenly Father knew exactly "when the fulness of the time was come" (Gal. 4:4) for Jesus to be sent to this earth, to be born as a child. The conditions were just right. Prophets had foretold them for many years, spreading the good news to all who would listen. Those who heard the prophecies prepared for His coming as they saw the tangible signs of His birth drawing near.

In the same way, throughout Jesus' life, many Jews were supportive of His ministry and shared in the expectant excitement that He would set up His earthly kingdom. Others, like the disciples, also shared in Christ's trials and fears, being as supportive as possible and helping when they could. Some, like the Pharisees, felt the time was not right and warned of problems that would arise. However, Jesus' birth, ministry, and death came at just the right moments. They had been thought out and planned for a long time. This is what we had been truly waiting for.

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*By Nathan Eric Hoffman, a first-year international-business major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

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# The Time Is at Hand!

## LOGOS

**Daniel 2; Gal. 4:4, 5**

### **Words, the Promise (Gal. 4:4, 5)**

*“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son” (Gal. 4:4, NIV).*

Before evicting Adam and Eve from their Eden home, God promised them a Redeemer, One who would restore all that had been lost. “When Adam and Eve first heard the promise, they looked for its speedy fulfillment. They joyfully welcomed their first-born son, hoping that he might be the Deliverer.”<sup>1</sup> They were the first in a long line of hopeful parents.

Words, nothing more, just words. The promise was just words. “From the days of Enoch the promise was repeated through patriarchs and prophets, keeping alive the hope of His appearing, and yet He came not. . . . Century after century passed away; the voices of the prophets ceased.”<sup>2</sup> “But when the time had *fully* come, God sent his Son” (italics supplied).

“The nations were united under one government. One language was widely spoken, and was everywhere recognized as the language of literature. From all lands the Jews of the dispersion gathered to Jerusalem to the annual feasts. As these returned to the places of their sojourn, they could spread throughout the world the tidings of the Messiah’s coming.”<sup>3</sup> “But when the time had *fully* come, God sent his Son.” What was for centuries just words had now become a reality. A careful study of Daniel 9 reveals that what God promised Adam and Eve centuries before became reality at the best time for that event to occur. The Saviour was born. “God’s purposes know no haste and no delay.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Words, Made More Than Words (John 14:3; Daniel 2)**

Nearly two millennia have passed since Jesus made another similar promise: “I will come back again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3. “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son.” Mere words? Or are they words we can trust? live by? look forward to with anticipation? As surely as the promise of His first advent was fulfilled, so will the promise of His second coming.

In less than 500 words (Dan. 2:31-45), Daniel outlines the history of this planet. He names three kingdoms that would rule the world following Babylon, then currently ruling the world. The other three would follow in the order in which he named them. The last kingdom would be divided into 10 parts, and no other nation would rule the world. Nearly 2,600 years later, Daniel is right on all counts: three events in the order he predicted. Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome—the history books attest to his believability.

If Daniel was correct on three counts, and he was, why not accept his fourth prediction? “In the days of these [final 10] kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed” (Dan. 2:44). Remember the promise? “I will come back again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” The promise made to Adam and Eve did not fail. The promise made to you is based on a spotless record. No failures, no mistakes. The record makes the promise made to you more than words!

## **Knowing the Time Is at Hand! (Luke 21:28; 1 Thess. 5:1-5)**

*“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son” (Gal. 4:4).*

Is it possible to know “the time”? “Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption [deliverance] is drawing near” (Luke 21:28).

Luke gives additional data confirming that the time is at hand. Paul clearly indicates that Jesus’ promise to come the second time need not be an unexpected event (1 Thess. 5:4).

But you are not given up to the power of darkness, fellow believers, for that day to overtake you by surprise like a thief. The promises are more than words. Not one single shred of evidence exists to indicate anything other than that the proper time has come. “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son.” He came on time before, and He will come on time again. We know that time is at hand.

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### **“God’s purposes know no haste and no delay.”**

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“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3, KJV).

## **REACT**

1. Am I ready for God’s coming kingdom? How do I know?
2. Can we be sure we are ready? Why or why not?

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 31.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

4. *Ibid.*

## “Is It Time Yet?”

### TESTIMONY

**Key Text:** Gal. 4:4, 5

Grandma and Grandpa come to visit regularly, and the kids can hardly wait when they know arrival is imminent. They linger at the window, watching the end of the driveway intently, or bounce around the house asking every five minutes or so, “When will they get here?” Sometimes if we ignore them, they will become distracted by some book or toy and stop pestering us about the time. Lately my wife and I have refrained from telling them Grandma and Grandpa are coming, just to avoid having to listen to them ask over and over again, “Is it time yet?”

I can begin to imagine how Adam and Eve must have felt, waiting for Christ to come. “The Saviour’s coming was foretold in Eden. When Adam and Eve first heard the promise, they looked for its speedy fulfillment. They joyfully welcomed their first-born son, hoping that he might be the Deliverer. But the fulfillment of the promise tarried. Those who first received it died without the sight. From the days of Enoch the promise was repeated through patriarchs and prophets, keeping alive the hope of His appearing, and yet He came not. The prophecy of Daniel revealed the time of His advent, but not all rightly interpreted

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### **They linger at the window, watching the end of the driveway intently.**

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the message. Century after century passed away; the voices of the prophets ceased.”<sup>1</sup>

My children hope, by repeatedly asking, that they can speed up the arrival of the grandparents. “Like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God’s purposes know no haste and no delay. . . . Providence had directed the movements of nations, and the tide of human impulse and influence, until the world was ripe for the coming of the Deliverer.”<sup>2</sup> Just as surely as He carefully timed His first appearing, He will return the second time when the time is right.

We must remember today that “Satan . . . [is] seeking to shut out from men a knowledge of God, to turn their attention from the temple of God, and to establish his own kingdom.”<sup>3</sup> As time seems to drag on endlessly, Satan seems increasingly successful in his venture. But “at the very crisis, when Satan . . . [seems] about to triumph, the Son of God . . . [will come] with the embassy of divine grace.”<sup>4</sup>

That’s an event to anticipate with the childlike excitement of the arrival of favored grandparents.

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 31.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

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*By Bruce Closser, who teaches writing at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

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## Just at the Right Time

### EVIDENCE

**Key Text:** Gal. 4:4, 5

Billowing clouds of smoke from firing cannons filled the evening sky. Colorful ranks of warring French and English soldiers dotted the field like battered flowers. Amid the bloody scene and battle noise, a group of men discussed their predicament.

England's eastern infantry, which had just engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the third French division, needed reinforcements, observed one British officer, or the front could be lost. No men could be spared, noted a second officer, or the western front could be lost.

Lost! The word echoed in the ears of the Duke of Wellington, the British army commander. He knew his reserves were heavily depleted from the first French assault, and he realized that it was just a matter of time until he would have to surrender. If only he could hold on for a few more minutes until General Bulow's Prussian Corps arrived, then all would be well and the balance of forces would shift in their favor. It was perhaps the lowest point of the day.

Suddenly, a voice broke the conversation of the officials. General Bulow's

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### **Thanks to the Roman Empire, Christianity was able to spread quickly.**

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corps had just engaged the French army in combat, panted a tired scout. It seemed that the tide had shifted. Immediately the Duke of Wellington commanded that a detachment be sent to aid the general and his forces in a rout of the French infantry. In a few more minutes, the battle would have been lost.

Christ's first coming was equally well timed. At the time of Jesus' birth, the ancient world was experiencing the longest period of peace, order, and prosperity that had ever been known. Thanks to the unifying influence of the Roman Empire, truth was able to spread quickly to the known world. Missionaries were able to travel safely throughout the empire on roads and seas made safe by Roman might. Trade and travel flourished because of improved roads and better ports and harbors. The common Greek dialect, the *koine*, was spoken in most parts of the empire. Missionaries could speak or write to almost anyone and be understood. It was the Roman idea of universal citizenship to all peoples that had prepared the world to accept the universalism of Christianity, which welcomed members of all nationalities.

If Jesus had come earlier, when the Mediterranean world was fractured into separate and competing states, Christianity may well have faced an insurmountable obstacle. Jesus truly did come to this earth when the fullness of time was come. Never before had conditions existed in the world that would have allowed for the rapid spread of Christianity until that time.

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*By Elmer John B. Capina and Heidi Straw, medical-technology and English/communication majors, respectively, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

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## Time to Get Involved

### HOW-TO

**Key Text:** 1 Thess. 5:1, 2

The time is right for us to become involved: "Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:1, 2, NIV).

If you were to sit up all night waiting for a thief to break into your home, you would never get any sleep. You would become so tired that you would get nothing done, and besides, that is ridiculous. You take the proper precautions to secure your home before you sleep, so you can rest in assurance. In the same way we need to prepare day and night for the Lord's second coming, but this does not mean we should become hermits. More than ever, it is time to become involved with our faith and watch it grow. There are several ways we can be involved. Here are a few:

**1. Get personal.** Form a friendship with Christ, a strong bond, and a close trust relationship. Becoming firm friends with someone means investing time and energy with them. Spend time with God, studying the Bible and communicating through prayer. Build a friendship that will last for eternity, starting now.

**2. Get out of the house.** We need to get out of our rooms, dorms, and homes,

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### Contrary to the monastic view, we need to become involved in our communities.

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and into the community. Contrary to the monastic view of separation from the world, we need to become involved in our communities. Meet neighbors you do not know. Volunteer at the local kids' museum or YMCA. Find a summer job that works with children or the elderly, or start in your office or home, slipping anonymous notes of cheer to someone who needs them. The time is right to become involved with others.

**3. Become concerned about the end of the world.** This is the time of the end. All the signs point to the coming of Christ. Our actions need to support that belief. People have been saying it is the end of the world for many years; some of our parents believed they would never become adults, because of the predictions of Christ's soon return. The point is, no one can put a time limit on the end of the world; our focus should be on the Lord and not on our own concerns. People should be able to see our concern for the end in how we live and look for Christ, for by our examples we are witnesses for God. We cannot prepare ourselves; we can only give ourselves to God and store our treasure up in heaven.

So don't give up and shut down work. Open up your life, and become involved for Christ.

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*By Judith Andersen, psychology major, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

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## Waiting for a Last Breath

### OPINION

**Key Text:** Gal. 4:4, 5

I was born such a sickly child that I had to be taken for medical treatment nearly every day. My parents took me to the doctor so often that he even knew which knock on the door was theirs. Eventually I took a turn for the worse. No doctor could provide help; no prescription had any effect.

My mother, being a working parent, sent me to my grandmother for extended care. My grandmother experimented with various home remedies she hoped would speed my recovery. While I lived with her, I experienced many remissions and reversals.

One weekend my parents went shopping and decided to visit me on their way back. My father bought me a very colorful beach ball, which he intended to hang over my cradle. Nearing the house, they saw a small group of relatives standing on the veranda and quickly assumed something had gone wrong with me again.

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### **Everyone gave up all hope and said that I was dead.**

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My condition *had* worsened. For hours I had lain still, showing no sign of life as people looked on.

Everyone gave up all hope and said that I was dead. My great-grandmother said to my mother, “Yuh pay dut Tatlin, yuh pay dat” (a Jamaican phrase used to tell someone that he or she has a dead child to be buried). Then she returned to prepare the strips of white sheets to wrap me for burial. While everyone waited for the last breath to go, Dad stared at me lying there, watching every minute for my departure.

Suddenly he saw my shoulders move up as I gasped for breath. Without thinking, my father grabbed me in his arms, screamed, “She’s alive, she’s alive,” and ran with me to the nearest car to take me to the doctor.

Life was restored to me just at the right time, preventing me from being buried alive. Just at the right time, God sent forth His Son to redeem us. Jesus took on the form of humanity and entered the world and restored it just at the right time, thus preventing us also from dying. We may appear spiritually dead, but Jesus will not permit us to be buried by our own sinfulness. Before it is too late, He will gather us in His arms and save us.

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*By Shana Stewart, mathematics major, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

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# UNDERSTANDING THE SACRIFICE



**“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isa. 53:5, NIV).**



# Sacrifice in Edwardsburg

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isa. 53:3

On December 6, 1993, Cheryl Hicks sat talking in the local post office of Edwardsburg, Michigan. Everyone loved to talk to Cheryl; she had a bubbly personality and an ever-ready helping hand. She was a modern-day Dorcas.

Having just finished her chat with her friends, she scooped her three-year-old son, Tyler, up into her arms, pushed open the post office door, and stepped out into the brisk winter day. She had taken only a few steps when the roar of an engine caught her attention. She glanced to the side in time to see a large pickup truck careening out of control straight in her direction. Without a second's hesitation, she lifted her son in the air as the truck hit her, killing her instantly. Tyler survived with only a few bruises. The whole town went into shock at the loss of their dear friend, who had given her life to save her son.

When I heard this tragic story, I couldn't help thinking of a similar story, in which Someone much loved throughout the universe gave His life for all His earthly children, even though many did not understand His sacrifice. Cheryl Hicks didn't know that morning that she would sacrifice herself to save her son. Her

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## **She had taken only a few steps when the roar of an engine caught her attention.**

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decision took place in a split second. She thought only of saving him and not herself. She also did not have a choice. She could have tried to save herself, but in reality probably would not have succeeded. Could she have gone through with it had she known and had to make the choice?

Conversely, Jesus had a long time to think over His decision to save us. He could have saved Himself, forgetting about the disobedient world below; yet His decision was sure. He would die to save the human race. Not only that, Jesus knew that His death would be long and painful, full of suffering. He knew that He would die without love and support. Cheryl was fortunate to die quickly and without prolonged pain. How much more worth this adds to our Saviour's sacrifice.

Few of us, knowing the consequences, would yield up our lives to save others, even ones we love. The whole town of Edwardsburg, and all who knew Cheryl, mourned her loss with great admiration for her sacrifice. How many mourned Christ's sacrifice with gratitude for what He had done to give life and hope? Imagine the gratitude of Cheryl's son when he is old enough to realize what his mother did for him. Do we fully comprehend, as yet, what Christ has done for us?

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*By Autumn Ellison, a first-year graphic-design major, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

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# Servant Songs

## LOGOS

### Isa. 52:13–53:12

Isaiah enjoys the accolade “Gospel of the Old Testament.” This tribute is largely the result of what are designated as servant songs. Our text for this study is the fourth of such songs: Isa. 42:1-7; 49:1-13; 50:4-9; and now 52:13–53:12.

The incredible reality is that most commentators talk all around these four songs, and the obvious prophetic references to Jesus are either ignored or overlooked. Read for yourself! Can you read Isaiah 42:1-7 without stumbling over the references to providing light for the Gentiles and giving sight to the blind? Why wouldn't you consider this a reference to Jesus' ministry? And it becomes even more obvious. Compare Isaiah 42:1 with Matthew 12:18-21; Isaiah 50:6 with Luke 22:63; Isaiah 53:4 with Matthew 8:17.

Many of the religious leaders of Jesus' day missed out on His ministry and His salvation because they were looking for the wrong Messiah. A careful reading of Isaiah 53 should have opened some eyes. What should we discover in this fourth song that will change or even improve how we think about Jesus?

It is beyond human understanding—why Jesus would leave the perfectly beautiful atmosphere of heaven, where He was revered and had constant interaction with His Father and unceasing adoration from creation. Isaiah's prophecy was written centuries before Jesus was to appear. He came on time—He came as scheduled—He was born and raised in the right towns. He was baptized at the right time and even died at the right time. This all escaped most of those in religious leadership in Jerusalem and in the outlying Jewish enclaves. The message of Isaiah 53 could have given them the clue that would have unlocked the whole Messiah mystery. They were looking for a conquering general instead of a suffering servant.

The song begins by talking about a prosperous servant “high and lifted up,” but that language is very soon replaced by less auspicious references. Jesus certainly left “high and lifted up” circumstances to come to earth, but this reference is more likely referring to His status after fulfilling this earthly mission. And what did He encounter?

### Marred Appearance (Isa. 52:14)

What would a photograph reveal after a 40-day fast climaxed by the tempter of the world in private audience? Or what would just a few hours of separation from His Father caused by God's wrath in Gethsemane do to the visage of this “suffering servant”?

*“He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him” (Isa. 53:2, NASB).*

The nobleman in the miracle recorded in John 4:46-54 was put off by Jesus' plain and dusty appearance.\* Throughout nearly all His tour of ministry, Jesus avoided the level of notice He could have achieved by adding just a bit of flair or “public relations” to His approach.

Much of the rest of this song describes the Messiah in the events leading up

to and including Calvary. It is not a pretty picture when the prophecy—not the history—states “despised and forsaken . . . man of sorrows . . . we did not esteem Him . . .” (Isa. 53:3). What an indictment of humanity! The very Creator of the universe takes on human form and exhibits perfect love, and He still will be despised? And what is the record? The prophecy was borne out too clearly. Maybe He should have come in a little more auspicious package.

*“He was pierced through for our transgressions, . . . and by His scourging we are healed” (Isa. 53:5).*

Now this is personal. This is much more than a physical or even historical report. This is prophecy come home. These “I” and “we” references are much more than literary. This suffering servant—Jesus—took our lacerating beating and the spear that was meant for us. You have to wonder whether Isaiah had any idea what this would come to mean.

Now for the “sheep” analogies. There are some folks in North Dakota who raise sheep, and sheep are not their favorites. “Sheep are the dumbest animals on the earth, and my Lord has nothing in common with that!” Well, maybe the first analogy in Isaiah 53:6, NASB, is OK: “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.” There it is: the willfulness of humanity. There is safety and sustenance with the Good Shepherd, but it is more like our

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## **You were in line at the slaughterhouse, and the number clamped to your ear or painted on your back indicated your time was up.**

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nature to wander outside of His care and into lostness. This is the nature of sheep.

Jesus wasn’t satisfied to take on even average humanity. “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth” (Isa. 53:7). This is meekness personified. He didn’t endure all this just to be our example of how to live. This is a song about salvation—your salvation and my salvation and humanity’s only chance. Humanity must not waste this most valuable of all resources—the lifeblood of this Suffering Servant. “Because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12).

You were in line at the slaughterhouse, and the number clamped to your ear or painted on your back indicated your time was up. The suffering Servant pulled you out and took your place in the line. He could have just shut down the business. He took our place, and we so far haven’t really shown Him our real appreciation. It will take forever!

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\* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 197.

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# He Suffered on Our Behalf

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Isa. 53:7**

When human beings experience suffering, several things may go through their minds. If the suffering is physical, they may think about obtaining pain killers or, sometimes, even sedatives to ease their excruciating pain. If, however, the suffering is emotional, they may harbor thoughts of despair or anger. They may resort to food or alcohol or other drugs to help them forget about the pain. Sometimes they may even seek revenge on those who have inflicted this suffering. Whatever form of suffering they experience, humans who hurt have two things in common: they think about themselves and seek all possible ways to alleviate their pain.

At Calvary, centuries ago, Jesus Christ endured both types of suffering at the same time. His body was racked in physical pain because of the nails pounded through His hands and feet and the crown of thorns embedded in His head. Most of His disciples abandoned any connection with Him. Yet what went through His mind throughout this ordeal?

“His mind passed from His own suffering to the sin of His persecutors, and the terrible retribution that would be theirs. No curses were called down upon the soldiers who were handling him so roughly. No vengeance was invoked upon the

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## **During His suffering, Jesus Christ filled His heart with tender pity.**

priests and rulers, who were gloating over the accomplishment of their purpose.”<sup>1</sup>

During His suffering, Jesus Christ filled His heart with tender pity, love, and forgiveness toward His persecutors. He had no room for anger and hate. As He thought about their sins, His love for them caused Him to abandon any thought of His pain. He longed to reach out to them and draw them nearer to Him. In spite of their wickedness, He showed His love by offering no word of contempt or complaint. Rather, He looked beyond their evil nature and asked His Father to forgive what they were doing.

Jesus suffered the punishment that humanity deserved. But this injustice did not evoke in Him thoughts of revenge. He did not sin. What did He do to avoid Satan’s trap? After all, He was as much a human being as He was divine.

“He would receive nothing that could becloud His mind. His faith must keep a fast hold upon God. This was His only strength. To becloud His senses would give Satan an advantage.”<sup>2</sup> Instead, He drew His strength, both physical and emotional, from His unwavering faith in His Father. Although He could have easily asked His Father to take Him up to heaven, this faith kept Him on that cross.

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 744.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 746.

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*By Hency Labro, a first-year student at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

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## Dying to Live

### EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Isa. 53:6**

A seed won't grow into a healthy plant and bear fruit if it does not first die. A healthy peach or plum must shrivel away into a wrinkled mass, infested with worms, its pit hardened to a stone to lie forgotten until the warmth of a spring day calls it to life again. The promise of the fruit lies not in its life but in its death.

When Jesus walked the earth, He had an abundance of potential. He healed those who were afflicted by disease, and He resurrected the dead. He stirred crowds of people and excited throngs with His speeches and actions. He seemed to have total power over all that took place on the earth, yet He allowed Himself to be killed over some argument with religious leaders.

What a waste! Think of all the money He could have made, or even how much good He could have done if He had not been killed. He could have prevented illness and death. His ability to create food could have helped Israel and the entire world live more comfortably. He could have developed treatments, provided cures, and participated in research. He could have changed the world forever.

He was a suffering servant and willingly died for a greater reason than just

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### **A willing servant of sacrifice is a more important job than any career we are studying for now.**

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making a day-to-day living. All the good He could have done on earth pales in the light of His death. He died to save us from destruction; He provided a way out. Through His suffering, He made life possible. His ultimate sacrifice was performed for people who did not deserve such good treatment. He was vastly superior, yet He was willing to cut short His life here on earth for an eternal outcome.

Jesus asks us each day to place our lives in His hands, even unto death. Why would He do that? We have such potential and possibilities. We can do so much good around us. Why would He want us to lay down our lives so soon? There must be a higher reason.

Even if we were to conduct life-saving research or rescue babies from burning houses, it all pales in the light of salvation. A willing servant of sacrifice is a more important job than any career we are studying for now. To sacrifice one's self takes immeasurable dedication and love. Jesus is asking us to be committed to Him and the salvation of others. Sacrifice changes us into people who appreciate the Lord and who are willing to submit totally to His will. Maybe we should change our perspective and live to die for the Lord.

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*By Dewey Murdick, a first-year secondary-education major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

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## Whose Business Is It?

### HOW-TO

**Key Text: Matt. 25:40**

Poor thing. She looks as if she lost her mother. Maybe I should go over there and . . . I'd better not. It's getting kind of late, and I'm really hungry. Her mother will find her, I'm sure, or the store manager will take care of it. It really isn't any of my business in the first place.

Every day we encounter opportunities to be servants of our King. When we stop and then pass on by, rationalizing our departure, it is as if we were too busy to stop and help Christ. He has told us in the Bible, "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). We should jump at every chance to serve a fellow human being, for we are helping not only them but Christ, as well. Who can claim to be a Christian and not want to take every opportunity to serve God?

You may say you're too busy to notice people in need. God knows the pressures we experience today. He also knows how to ease the pressure and give us peace. The first step is to ask Christ to open our eyes to the need of others. When we walk down the street, we shouldn't just walk by the homeless and turn the

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### **Who can claim to be a Christian and not want to take every opportunity to serve God?**

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other way. We should help in the best way we can. If we can't give them money, we can give them a blanket and some food. If everyone in the world took servanthood to heart, would there be any homeless? The good Samaritan was a true servant who gave of himself to a complete stranger in need. We, too, should give of ourselves to others as Christ gave of Himself to us on the cross.

A second thing we can do to be servants is to think of others before ourselves. As we serve others, a revelation comes over us that our problems are not so big, and we may realize that they don't exist at all.

The final thing necessary for servanthood is a loss of worldly fear. Many are afraid to serve others because of the harm that may come to them. We must trust that God will protect us from all harm.

Christ has called us to be His servants. We must show Christ and His love to others. He will open our eyes and give us strength to do this by serving others in our daily lives.

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*By Roy Allen Hoffman, a first-year biology major, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

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# God's Gamble?

## OPINION

**Key Text: Isa. 53:5**

So what's the big deal if I take Christ's sacrifice for granted? There are many other things I take for granted—life, money, family, friends, education, and even the air I breathe. Adding another item to the list won't be that difficult.

We know that in the beginning there was the Word, and the Word was with God. And the Word was God. Then the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This is when the Word becomes the suffering servant. For Christ, leaving His home in heaven was suffering in itself. Think about what it means to suffer. For me, suffering means studying for exams when I could be on a date, which still isn't too bad, because I will benefit in the end when my grades are returned. Suffering means having to give something up we don't want to give up, but most of us are willing to do so if we perceive possible benefits in the act.

But what did all of heaven have to gain from their God's gamble? God gave all He had; and I gave up only a date. As I think about it, this suggests that the degree of suffering affects the value of the gift. Even though I felt I somehow suffered by missing a date, I can't possibly compare it to the degree of Jesus' suf-

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### **For Christ, leaving His home in heaven was suffering in itself.**

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fering. In my case there was the added benefit of getting a better grade because of a missed date, but Jesus had nothing to gain, only everything to lose. He suffered so we wouldn't have to die.

If the degree of suffering makes such an impact on the value of the sacrifice, then you must return again to the thought of Christ's suffering. It is far too difficult for us to imagine what it would be like if we were in Jesus' sandals. We can't know what it was like for Him to experience emotional separation from God. The entire universe grieved for Him. Now we begin to have some idea of the value of His gift to us.

Jesus knew very well what He was doing. He sweat droplets of blood in Gethsemane, He was betrayed with a kiss, He felt the spikes as they were driven through His flesh. But, even if there weren't any spikes, His love would have kept Him there for us.

It's not as simple as I had thought to add Christ's sacrifice to my list of things to take for granted. I stopped for a minute to think about how much suffering He actually went through for me. Christ became the suffering servant—He died for a dream.

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*By Clarissa A. Saunders, a first-year biology major, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

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# WHO HAS THE TIME?



**“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isa. 61:10, NKJV).**



# Collegiate Mission

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: 1 John 3:17**

### **Mission 1:**

In August of 1992, Hurricane Andrew ripped through southern Florida. In its path it left total destruction. Thousands of people were left homeless and without food or water. Everything that they owned was gone. Within a week, the Lord led a Campus Advent group from South Florida Community College to drive to Homestead, Florida, to help the people there any way they could. They distributed medicine and clothes and cooked food for the people who needed it.

### **Mission 2:**

In the spring of 1993, an Adventist family in Avon Park, Florida, received word that because of the lack of resources in Cuba, their relatives in Havana didn't have certain necessities such as medicine, shoes, toiletries, and food. It is very difficult to go to Cuba, however, since it is a Communist country. Thankfully, the Lord provided a way in which one family member could go to Cuba. This family immediately began to collect items from generous people throughout the community to send to their relatives in Cuba. In June 1993, a family member flew

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## **When do we possibly have time to do mission work?**

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to Havana, Cuba, to distribute the items.

### **Mission 3:**

In July 1993, the Lord called Campus Advent members throughout Florida on a mission trip to Jamaica. A newly constructed Adventist church in Montego Bay needed to be painted, but the members didn't have the resources. This group bought some paint and brushes and painted the parts of the church that were built.

Life as a college student can be very hectic and full of pressure. Our days are consumed with studying for tests and writing papers. On top of that, most of us have jobs or extracurricular activities that take up a lot of our time. When do we possibly have time to do mission work like the examples discussed above? The Lord says, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" (1 John 3:17, NIV). Although mission trips to other cities and countries are wonderful, we can easily help a "brother in need" right on our own campuses. Just as Jesus had pity and showed kindness to others, we, too, need to follow His example.

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*By Jason Fairchild, graduate special-education major; and Marilyn Hernandez, senior social-work major, Florida State University at Tallahassee.*

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# Healing From Our Hurts

## LOGOS

**Isa. 61:1-3, 6, 10, 11; Luke 4:16-30; Gal. 6:2**

### **The Mission Foretold (Isa. 61:1-3)**

For a man whose name is symbolic of God's *saving* power, it seems unfitting for this man to be warning Israel of its impending doom. *Isaiah* means "the Lord is salvation," or "the Lord is help."<sup>1</sup>

He was preaching to a nation that had enjoyed material prosperity followed by social and moral decline. Economic prosperity and military success "produced an attitude of carnal self-confidence and careless security"<sup>2</sup> in Judah and Israel. Not only had God's people espoused paganism, but they had deteriorated to gross levels of discrimination and insensitivity. The justice system was compromised by the judges' interest in reward. To satisfy their desire for personal gain, rulers made burdensome decrees. The rich were getting richer by preying on the widows and robbing the fatherless. Isaiah emphatically warned that justice via desolation would come with rapid certainty.

Religion had become a mere legalistic formalism divorced from right moral conduct. Some would use a façade of piety while turning others' misfortune to their profit. They had even come to believe that their meticulous attention to empty ceremonialism could atone for their sins.

When God used Assyria to execute judgment upon His people, they prayed for deliverance. Messianic prophecies become their focus. Through Isaiah the Lord takes advantage of this spirit of expectancy to teach Israel that "deliverance from political and spiritual foes" becomes, for those who trust God, a promise of ultimate deliverance from the dominion of sin.<sup>3</sup>

In this context Isaiah proclaims his God-given message. He calls God's people to reform, to fulfill their mission, and he predicts the Messiah's ministry to all nations. The Messiah will incorporate into His very person the virtues and values that God's nation should uphold. The mission to the Gentiles was to be carried out in acts of compassion to the suffering. Thus Israel is challenged to fulfill its Messianic role.

### **The Mission Incarnate (Luke 4:16-30)**

Not too long after Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, He declared Himself the Messiah and announced His mission (Luke 4:18, 19). While on earth, Jesus became the master preacher of the gospel. But His work was not limited to verbal proclamation. His *modus operandi* was first to meet people's physical needs, *then* address their spiritual needs. He spent more time ministering to the sick than He did preaching and teaching.

In His Messianic mission, Jesus employed the following strategy:

1. He met people where they were—at their point of need.
2. He helped only those who recognized their need.
3. He gave people individual attention.
4. He established relationships.

Jesus brought hope to the world because He delivered people from their physical and spiritual sufferings. These powerful acts of deliverance became concrete promises of our ultimate deliverance from sin.

### **The Mission Incarnate, the Sequel (Isa. 61:6; Gal. 6:2)**

Though we can't claim the sacred attributes of the Incarnation that are Christ's, we can consider ourselves a "subsequent incarnation" of God's grace. After the eternal salvation of humankind, the purpose of the Incarnation was to provide a concrete revelation of God's grace. Just as Jesus was a conduit of God's grace to humankind, when completely surrendered to God, we are an extension of Christ's mission of healing and salvation in the world.

Like Israel of old, our messianic role is to relieve people's suffering and direct their attention to the Messiah. God has given us a priestly calling by which we mediate between God and the world and lead people to a new life.<sup>4</sup> In this mission of compassion, *all* have a priestly role to fulfill.

Often it is a natural defense mechanism to become detached and aloof from human experience. But Jesus maintained a constant connection with our infirmities by being what Henri Nouwen calls a *wounded healer*. From His own woundedness, Jesus empathized with people's pain. And from His healing, He imparted hope and strength to the suffering.

The more we become one with Jesus, the better able we are to "comfort those

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### **The joy of a wedding gives us a glimpse of how special that celebration will be to God.**

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who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:4, NASB). By having Christ live in us, we exercise the redemptive qualities of compassion for others and for ourselves.

Today you and I are called to represent God to the world and to lead the world to God. Through intercessory prayer, we plead for the salvation of the world. By giving testimony of our own salvation experience, by our very existence, we are witnesses of God's love and saving power.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Mission Rewarded (Isa. 61:10, 11)**

No mission is accomplished without a goal to look forward to. Isaiah points us to the day of reward and glorious celebration in chapters 60–62. The joy of a wedding gives us a glimpse of how special that celebration will be to God. Why not take as many as we can to that joyous occasion?

### **REACT**

1. In that God's remnant church has a messianic role to fulfill, how would you rate your church's fulfillment of its mission?
2. When, if ever, is it appropriate not to solve someone's problem but only support and encourage? Explain your answer.

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1. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 85.

2. Hobert E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), p. 195.

3. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 84.

4. John L. McKenzie, *The Anchor Bible: Second Isaiah* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1968), vol. 20, p. 182.

5. *Ibid.*, p. LXI.

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*By Gerald S. Fuentes, pastor of the Tallahassee and Crawfordville (Florida) Seventh-day Adventist churches.*

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# Mission to Save

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text:** Isa. 61:1

“When the love of Christ is enshrined in the heart, like sweet fragrance it cannot be hidden. Its holy influence will be felt by all with whom we come in contact. The spirit of Christ in the heart is like a spring in the desert, flowing to refresh all and making those who are ready to perish, eager to drink of the water of life.”<sup>1</sup>

“Christ . . . was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. He wept over Jerusalem, the city He loved, that refused to receive Him, The Way, the Truth, the Life. They rejected Him, the Saviour, but He regarded them with pitying tenderness, and sorrow so deep that it broke His heart. Every soul was precious in His eyes.”<sup>2</sup>

“God is the source of life and light and joy in the universe. Like rays of light from the sun, like the streams of water bursting from a living spring, blessings flow out from Him to all His creatures. And wherever the life of God is in the

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## “God is the source of life and light and joy in the universe.”

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hearts of men, it will flow out to others in love and blessing. . . . This is the spirit that Christ’s followers will possess, the work that they will do.

“Love to Jesus will be manifested in a desire to work as He worked for the blessing and uplifting of humanity. It will lead to love, tenderness, and sympathy toward all the creatures of our heavenly Father’s care.”<sup>3</sup>

As we humbly seek to do the will of Him who sent us, He who raised us from the pit of shame and sin, let us pray that He will keep our natural hearts (which are prone to anger and accusation) under subjection and allow us to be His true representatives. He said, “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16).

## REACT

1. Having Jesus in the heart is compared to a “sweet fragrance.” What other metaphors would you use to describe this experience? Why?

2. If a Christian does not feel “a desire to work,” what can he or she do in practical terms to receive it?

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1. *Happiness Digest*, p. 38.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 353.

3. *Happiness Digest*, pp. 37, 38.

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*By Glenice Debique Richards, a graduate student at Washington State University at Pullman.*



# Conspiracy of the Compassionate... Scholars

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Isa. 61:10**

According to *Webster's Handy-College Dictionary*, a Pharisee is one who follows the letter, not the spirit, of the (religious) law. It has been said that if you look at Christ's ministry on earth, you would see that He spent most of His time healing the sick and comforting the brokenhearted. I would add that if you examine each of Christ's compassionate acts, you would find a Pharisee or someone of that sort who tries to undermine Christ's ministry (see Luke 5:17-22).

This undermining of God's ministry, which started from the time of Lucifer, is very much alive today. Secular biblical scholars have divided the book of Isaiah into three parts: chapters 1-39 are called First-Isaiah; chapters 40-55, Second-Isaiah; and chapters 56-66, Third-Isaiah.<sup>1</sup> The book of Isaiah was divided by a process called "Collecting and Editing the Prophet's Words." Our key text (Isa. 61:10) falls in the realm of Third-Isaiah.

According to scholars, the message of Third-Isaiah is not what they are critiquing. The "fundamental lack of literary and thematic unity suggests that Isaiah 56-66 is the work of several individuals who stood in the shadow of their

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## Creating doubt about the author may also cast a shadow of doubt on the message.

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deceased mentor."<sup>2</sup> Now compare this with Luke 4:16-22 and Matthew 12:1-7, 23. Between the passage quoted and the two previous chapters, what are subtle similarities? What is being questioned? The point here is that creating doubt about the author may also cast a shadow of doubt on the authenticity of the message. After all, if we are not sure who wrote it, how can we be sure that what was written came from God? The work of scholars has to be objective and scientific. Furthermore, scholars are not the tools of the devil. However, the devil uses whomever and whatever is at his disposal. Christ's mission is one of compassion (Matt. 12:7). In comparison, the devil's mission is one of destruction, doubt, and confusion.

## REACT

1. How important is the authorship of the book of Isaiah? Explain your answer.
2. What relationship, if any, is there between pharisaism and compassion?

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1. Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p. 314.

2. J. Kenneth Kuntz, *The People of Ancient Israel* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), p. 420.

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By Wesley Bignall, electrical-engineering major, Florida State University at Tallahassee.

## “Be Ye Doers of the Word”

### HOW-TO

**Key Texts:** Isa. 61:1-3, 9-11; Luke 4:18, 40, 41

Christ had an important reason for coming to earth and becoming a man—to heal and save humankind. Once we become children of God, our lives should reflect His compassionate character. We should turn with love and kindness to those who find no joy in life. Through Christ they can find salvation, hope, and forgiveness.

Christ, our example, shows forgiveness to all who ask for it. We likewise should forgive those who wrong us. If we are as Christ’s children, it also becomes essential for us to watch what we say and how we act toward others. Continually I pray for the Lord’s assistance in this regard because my witness can be seriously hampered by the words that proceed from my mouth.

Our mission on earth should be the same as Christ’s—seeking to comfort the weary, poor, and brokenhearted. There are many people who need our help or maybe just want someone who will spend time talking to them. The elderly

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### **Our mission on earth should be the same as Christ’s.**

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in nursing homes enjoy company, and there are always the young children in orphanages, the homeless in shelters.

Like Isaiah, we can “preach good tidings unto the meek; . . . bind up the brokenhearted, . . . proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; . . . comfort all that mourn” (Isaiah 61:1, 2) because we also are the called of the Lord. Many are out there suffering because of the burden of their sins. We can bring them hope by showing them that there is One who can forgive all their trespasses no matter how bad. By the gladness in our hearts and the mercy and purity that pervade our actions, Christ’s lovingkindness will be revealed to the unsaved; for Christ uses us to draw to Himself those who are oppressed of the devil.

### **REACT**

1. What are some specific ways I can help others in my community or church?
2. In what everyday terms would you define “doers of the word”?
3. How assertive should a “doer of the word” be?

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*By Sonatina Stebbins, sophomore attending Florida State University at Tallahassee.*

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# What Is My Part?

## OPINION

**Key Text: Luke 4:14-20**

The lesson this week has focused on Christ's compassionate mission and our continuation of it. In preparation for what I was going to write, I read the prophecy in Isaiah 61 and Jesus' fulfillment of it in Luke 4. Again and again I studied it. At one point I thought I understood it. Yet the question remained: "What does this have to do with me?"

When Jesus announced Himself as the Messiah, He knew His purpose. It had been written out for Him hundreds of years prior. He was to "preach good news to the poor." He'd been sent to "proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind," as well as "release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18, NIV). This is wonderful news! So wonderful is it that I should have immediately shouted and rejoiced because hope is to be found in this world of sin.

Yet I stopped. As I read this missionary statement, I thought, *Wait a minute. I can't do this! It was easy for Christ. He knew He was the Son of God. He could preach with authority. He could perform miracles.* But wait another minute. If I want to be Christlike, I have to take part in Christ's mission.

Therefore, I began to put things in perspective. We're all human. We have

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## Yet the question remained, "What does this have to do with me?"

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different talents and approaches. Whatever we possess, whether it be our time, voices, musical talents, or listening ears, it's all important. "Our standing before God depends, not upon the amount of light we have received, but upon the use we make of what we have." Thus, we all have something to contribute toward the continuation of the mission that Christ began so long ago.

So, now, I go back to that original question, "What does this have to do with me?" The answer is "everything." Because I love Christ and want to be included in this plan, I know that there is a part of my life that can be used to extend His message to those who desire it. And, finally, I have something to shout about.

## REACT

1. What talent(s)/gift(s)/knowledge do I possess that can be used to continue Christ's mission?
2. What are the human characteristics that prevent someone from being compassionate?
3. What is God's role in helping a person to develop compassion? What is the individual's role?

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\* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 239.

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By Melissa Carlton, master of accounting student, Florida State University at Tallahassee.

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# DOES ANYONE KNOW ME?



**“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me” (John 10:14, NIV).**



# Are You Nameless?

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: John 10:14**

It was a futile attempt at completing the final exam. The three-hour period was reduced to 25 nervous minutes. The failing grade was inevitable. Nameless scanned the auditorium, where 478 hopeful students were intently completing their Chem 1A final exam. A failure here would push his entire program back, blocking him from taking the courses that listed the Chem 1A prerequisite.

Quickly but cautiously he opened his backpack, spilling out his assortment of notes and exams. The professor could not help noticing the unusual activity taking place in the upper-right corner of the auditorium. Immediately, he recognized the fateful act taking place. Incensed by the event, he nevertheless decided to wait until the exam was finished.

The bell rang, and the professor requested that all students bring their exams down to the front. As the bleary-eyed students randomly tossed their exams onto the top of the stack, the professor kept his eyes focused on Nameless and prepared himself for the confrontation and the certain denial to follow. The professor decided that he would stand firm and offer nothing less than the punishment. As

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## **Nameless faced the auditorium and confidently asked, “Does anybody know who I am?”**

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Nameless approached the front table, the professor spoke.

“I saw that you were copying answers from your notes.”

The bustling crowd suddenly turned attentive and silent from the shocking confrontation. Nameless, slightly surprised but undaunted, challenged.

“Do you know who I am?”

The professor was taken off guard. This was not how this confrontation was to occur.

“No.”

Nameless faced the auditorium and confidently asked, “Does anybody know who I am?”

Blank stares and inquisitive looks were the responses. Nameless shoved his exam in the middle of the heap, burying it among the other exams, and ran for the exit.

This bit of folklore has been a battle cry for students demoralized by overwhelming class sizes. But isn't it wonderful that we have a God who recognizes our voices in this earthly classroom? “I know my sheep” (John 10:14) is God's promise to us. As a shepherd knows his sheep, Jesus knows our needs. Do we need wisdom, hope, or determination? He is more than willing to provide. Each of His sheep is far too important to let fall away. We might try to run away from the flock, but why would we when we have the Master Shepherd? Yes, Jesus was a teacher too, and He knows me by name.

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*By Lenson Wong, a mechanical engineer from El Cerrito, California.*

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## Finder's Keepers

### LOGOS

Luke 19:10; Psalm 23

#### **“The Lord is my shepherd.”**

The Lord Himself describes how He is our shepherd: “For thus saith the Lord God; behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. . . . I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick.” “And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God” (Ezek. 34:11-16, 31).

God is seeking every one of us, for “all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). Our sins were laid upon Christ in order that we might be saved from continuing in our wicked, straying course, and that we might be turned to walk in the path of righteousness. Christ came to the world for this purpose. He said, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). The Bible records no stories about a sheep searching for its shepherd. In fact, “As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one: . . . there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:10, 11). Our part, then, is not to search for God as if He is far from us. Our part is to believe the good news that He has found us and will heal our wounds and give us abundant life.

#### **“I shall not want.”**

In Christ all our needs are supplied. He says, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). As Saviour of the world, Christ has given His life for the world. When we appreciate that every blessing flows to us through the sacrifice of Christ, then we cannot help being motivated by the love of Christ to “seek . . . first the kingdom of God.” Then, Jesus promises, “all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).

#### **“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.”**

Here we find the rest that God gives to His people. True rest is found in believing that God’s Word works in us to produce obedience (Heb. 4:3; 1 Thess. 2:13). The Word of God that creates new life in our souls can also be likened to the rain that causes the green grass to spring forth to life. “My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass” (Deut. 32:2).

#### **“He leadeth me beside the still waters.”**

In describing His guidance and care for His sheep, Christ says, “They shall not hunger nor thirst; . . . for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. . . . Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands” (Isa. 49:10-16). The waters represent the cleansing we receive because Christ was crucified, His nail-scarred hands being graven reminders of how He suffered to redeem us. When His side was pierced by a soldier’s spear as He hung upon the cross, “forthwith came there out blood and water” (John 19:34).

Through this cleansing, our souls are restored (Ps. 23:3). “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you” (Ezek. 36:25, 26). By giving to us a new heart and spirit that delights in doing His will, God is fulfilling His new-covenant promise to put His laws into our minds and write them in our hearts. All God’s laws and “commandments are righteousness” (Ps. 119:172). Thus, “he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

### **“I will fear no evil.”**

The Lord has promised He will never leave us or forsake us. Even death cannot “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39).

Just as the twenty-third psalm is a comfort to us, it was also a comfort to Jesus. He told His disciples that in the psalms were words describing His suffering, death, and resurrection (Luke 24:44-46). Jesus is the Lamb of God. He read the twenty-third psalm, looking to His Father as the Shepherd. He was led by His Father daily and trusted in His Father’s care. When Christ walked through the valley of the shadow of death for our sakes, He felt as if His Father had forsaken Him. But His faith held on to the promise that God was with Him. Christ’s victory

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## **True rest is found in believing that God’s Word works in us to produce obedience.**

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over His enemies, as displayed by His triumphant resurrection, is a testimony to the promises of Psalm 23.

Because Jesus walked the path before us, we, as His sheep, may follow Him as we hear His voice calling. “He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. . . . He goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice” (John 10:3, 4).

### **REACT**

1. Read Psalm 23 from Christ’s perspective as being the Lamb of God, trusting in His Father as the shepherd. How does this help you better appreciate the faith of Jesus?

2. How does God seek lost sheep? Read Luke 15:1-10. What is the difference between the lost sheep and the lost coin?

3. In what specific ways am I like a sheep?

4. Jesus identified with the oppressed even though He is the King of kings. What does this say to us about our own identification with the oppressed?

# For One Lost Sheep

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: John 10:15**

Christ was addressing the Pharisees, or false shepherds, when He told the parable of the good shepherd. They felt self-sufficient to enter the fold by their own righteousness and to bypass the true Shepherd, Christ Jesus. "It is the gospel of the grace of God alone that can uplift the soul. . . . Christ came that He might recreate the image of God in man; and whoever turns men away from Christ is turning them away from the source of true development; he is defrauding them of the hope and purpose and glory of life. He is a thief and a robber."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus used the example of the shepherd and the sheep because His listeners were familiar with a shepherd's devotion. "Jesus knows us individually, and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows us all by name. He knows the very house in which we live, the name of each occupant. . . . Every soul is as fully known to Jesus as if he were the only one for whom the Saviour died."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus said, "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15, NIV). The hired person will abandon them in the face of danger; he is not dependable. But the shepherd, like Jesus, owns and loves the sheep and will do anything to save them.

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**"Every soul is as faithfully known to Jesus as if  
he were the only one for whom the Saviour died."**

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"Today the same tender, sympathizing heart is open to all the woes of humanity. . . . The Saviour would have passed through the agony of Calvary that [only] one might be saved in His kingdom."<sup>3</sup>

"His impressive parable of the good shepherd represents the responsibility of every minister and of every Christian who has accepted a position as teacher. . . . The ninety and nine that had not strayed do not call for the sympathy and tender pitying love of the shepherd. But the shepherd follows the sheep and lambs that have caused him the greatest anxiety."<sup>4</sup> The sheep can be gradually scattered without the loving concern of the shepherd. We as Christ's sheep should not run away from Christ to bring His concern but should look upon Jesus as the loving and tender Shepherd and be willing to follow Him.

## REACT

Who would be the hired hands in today's world? Read *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 191; Acts 20:28, 29; 1 Pet. 5:2, 3.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 478.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 479, 480.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 480-483.

4. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 273.

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*By Jennifer Snider, a sophomore electrical-engineering and computer-science major, University of California at Berkeley.*

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# The Good Shepherd

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Ezek. 34:1-23**

During Jesus' time, shepherds were virtual outcasts in Jewish society. Shepherding was on the "list of thieving and cheating occupations."<sup>1</sup> They were not people to whom the Jews looked for spiritual guidance. With this in mind, we may wonder why Jesus used a shepherd as an example of His ministry. I would like to propose two reasons; Jesus was (a) establishing His claim to Messianic authority/deity and (b) restoring personhood to the oppressed shepherd class.

The shepherd theme is prevalent in the Old Testament. Ezekiel 34 tells of God as the owner of the sheep and says He is angry with the shepherds, and He therefore promises to care for the sheep Himself through a future "David." Jesus was telling the people that He was the promised Good Shepherd who would lead them in justice and truth. This Messianic Shepherd was also identified with God Himself. David says, "The Lord is my shepherd" (Ps. 23:1). God is called shepherd in many of the psalms and by other prophets such as Jeremiah (23:1-6), Isaiah (40:11), and Micah (2:12,13). So we can see a direct relationship between the Good Shepherd as both the Messiah and Yahweh the God of Israel. By this, Jesus

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## During Jesus' time, shepherds were virtual outcasts in Jewish society.

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claimed Messianic authority and deity.

Jesus was also identifying with the oppressed. Shepherding was the traditional work of the Hebrews since the days of Abram. Somehow the shepherd had fallen from the state of preparatory position for greatness in Israel, a la Moses and David, to that of a nobody whose testimony was not even allowed in court.<sup>2</sup> Jesus raised the shepherds back to a place in which they became positive figures once more. In His birth Jesus was worshiped by shepherds before the great kings from the East came. As the teacher sent from God, He chose common people for His pupils. On the cross, He hung between two thieves. We find in this theme both Christ the King and Christ the Servant, Son of God and Son of suffering humanity.

## REACT

1. Why did Jesus use stories and word pictures to describe Himself and the kingdom of heaven?

2. In our attempts to share the gospel with others, can we use these same methods? If so, how can we do this?

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1. G. Fredrich, *Theological Dictionary of The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), vol. 6, pp. 488, 489.

2. *Ibid.*

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*By Bill Davis, pastor of the Berkeley (California) Seventh-day Adventist Church and doctoral candidate at San Francisco Theological Seminary.*

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## Walking Closely With Christ

### HOW-TO

**Key Texts: John 10:14-16; Heb. 13:20**

John 10 reminds us of the intimate relationship that Christ desires with us. He says, "I am the Good Shepherd and know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father" (John 10:14, TLB). As students and workers in this fast-paced world, we have neglected to pursue a close relationship with Christ. If we maintain contact with Christ, then our sadness, fears, and worries turn to joy, confidence, and assurance. We need to walk with our fellow sheep and to follow Him to our destination, our heavenly home.

We can take several steps to walk closely with Christ:

**1. Count the daily experiences in which God has shown His love to us.** Sometimes we might not notice the help from our Shepherd, but He promises to be there for us. If we count His blessings, we will be amazed by His goodness. As we completely depend on His leadership in our lives, we will overcome the obstacles in our lives.

**2. Apply God's commandments and focus on Him.** We should not only look at what the commandments tell us not to do, but for the blessings God gives us through following the eternal guidelines. He has made the commandments for us

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### We need to walk with our fellow sheep and follow Him to our destination.

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because He loves His sheep and wants to protect them.

**3. Communicate with Him in morning prayer.** This will help us face each day close to Him. When we talk to our Shepherd before beginning the day, our daily planner will become the tool of the Divine Planner.

**4. Love our fellow human beings.** This will help us concentrate on living a Christ-filled life of service. As Christians, we are one flock led by one Shepherd. We ought to love and encourage our fellow sheep. We also must remember the lost sheep that Christ unsparingly loved.

If we find ourselves heading in a direction different from where our Shepherd is going, we should not be afraid, but be ready to follow Him again. "Like sheep you wandered away from God, but now you have returned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls who keeps you safe from all attacks" (1 Pet. 2:25). He has been waiting with His open arms for a close relationship with us because He loves us and wants to lead us safely through the journey to our heavenly home.

### REACT

1. How are we drawn closer to Jesus when first communicating with Him before engaging in other daily activities?

2. Have you noticed that some church members are "on the fringe" of the church because nobody seems to care? If so, how can you reach out to them?

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*By Grace Heun, senior business major, University of California at Berkeley.*

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## A Note on “Notation”

### OPINION

**Key Text: John 10:1-5, 11-15**

Being a mechanical-engineering major, I constantly deal with equations that describe physical phenomena. Such equations are always stated generally and contain symbols that have defined meanings. If I do not understand how these symbols are defined or what they represent (that is, if I do not understand the notation), then it is impossible for me to realize the significance of these equations or understand how they relate to real-world situations. Therefore, understanding the underlying meaning of the notation used in equations is an important aspect of my education and future career.

In this week’s lesson, the focus has been on Jesus as “the good shepherd” (John 10:11). This phrase in itself constitutes a sort of notation that signifies the loving care and personal guidance that Christ extends to every individual. It refers to the image of Christ as an all-powerful protector and guide to His followers. Ultimately, the image of Christ as the Good Shepherd symbolizes His tremendous love for us.

At this point, it might be a good idea to pause and reread John 10:1-5, 11-15,

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### The image of Christ as the Good Shepherd symbolizes His tremendous love for us.

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focusing on the sheer magnitude of Christ’s love. Christ *knows each of us*. He loves us, “calls . . . [us] by name” (John 10:3, NIV), and even lays down His life to protect us. Clearly, as with equations, it is important to understand the meaning of the notation (or symbolism) used in these passages; otherwise, the notation is just words, and its significance is lost. But I question whether it is adequate to interpret the phrase “the good shepherd” (the notation) only in terms of how it is presented in John 10:1-5, 11-15. To me, this symbol is an important *first* step to understanding this aspect of Christ’s character, but the *real* significance of this symbol reveals itself only when I consider the evidence of Christ’s presence in my life. That is, the notation of John 10:11 is given true meaning, not when it is explained to me, but when I observe the manifestation of Christ’s shepherdly nature in *my* life.

The topic of this week’s lesson is definitely a case in which it is important to understand the notation involved, but it appears to me that *understanding* the notation requires recognizing the presence of the Good Shepherd in our lives. When we see Christ working with us, for us, and through us in a daily context, the words of John 10:1-5, 11-15 are no longer a beautiful image but a powerful reality.

### REACT

How has Christ influenced my life recently? Don’t overlook something because it seems insignificant; remember, Christ doesn’t (see Matt. 6:26, 30).

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*By Paul S. Krueger, freshman mechanical-engineering major, University of California at Berkeley.*

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# WHO'S ALLOWED IN GOD'S FAMILY?



**“These I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa. 56:7, NIV).**



## Exclusive to Be Inclusive?

### INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isa. 56:3-9; Matt. 21:12-16

**Scene 1:** In a Jewish synagogue in midwestern USA, everyone is singing and dancing in circles as they hold a scrolled Torah. A little boy shouts, “*Goy! Goy! Goy!* [non-Jew]!” I am not invited in. An elderly man breaks away from the dance and joins me. “You can’t enter without a *yamaka* on your head,” he says. Quickly he pulls one out of a drawer and helps me pin it to my hair. Once inside, he sits with me and offers to explain the ceremony but doesn’t let me join in. “Because *goyim* aren’t allowed,” he explains.

**Scene 2:** My father once preached in an African-American tabernacle. Everyone in the pews was black except my mother and me. I’ll never forget the stained-glass window behind the pulpit. It pictured Christ’s return in the clouds: Jesus and the angels were African. A member commented, “It’s easier to relate to a black Christ than a Semitic one.”

**Scene 3:** Women sit in council, paraphrasing the Bible, so Jesus is referred to as “she” because “portraying Christ as a man excludes half the population.” The women’s committee think women need a God who is female.

Which of these churches was “a house of prayer for all” (Isa. 56:7, NIV)?

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## In cleansing the temple, Jesus revealed that His grace is extended to all.

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Division based on race, gender, social status, or culture isn’t unique to our times. Jesus encountered divisiveness in Jerusalem and overturned the money-changers’ tables, scattering their fortunes and causing the temple gatekeepers to flee.

Kicking out the authorities may seem an exclusive act, yet it distinguished Jesus as the inclusive Christ. When the religious leaders with their entrance requirements were gone, our Example allowed everyone to enter His temple without qualification—men, women, and children. Later, as the money-changers returned, the Saviour didn’t even refuse their entry. Christ excluded their behavior—not them. It’s probably the only time everyone came into the temple on equal terms.

In cleansing the temple, Jesus revealed that His grace is extended to all. He disapproves of religious cliques that bar others from participating in worship. The money-changers’ racket detracted from the temple’s sacred experience. He must deal with anything that inhibits inclusive worship.

When Earth inherits its celestial throne, humans will be worshipping in the heavenly sanctuary alongside many strange-looking creatures, like seraphs, elders, angels, and nondescript beasts, who will joyfully include us redeemed renegades. These intelligent beings will be decidedly different in appearance from us. God loves variety. Earthly races, cultures, classes, and genders are but a small taste of the Christian’s future.

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*By Stanley Maxwell, a graduate history student, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

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# From Robbers' Den to House of Prayer for All

## LOGOS

**Matt. 21:12-16; Isa. 56:7; Jer. 7:11**

A temple market, penned animals, an indignant Man, a whip, overturned tables, scattered coins—the parable in action in Matthew 21 is well known. Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe the cleansing as part of the week preceding the arrest, trial, and crucifixion. John 2:12-16 places it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry to stress its inclusiveness. John also adds several details, most notably the whip. The account in Matthew is the fullest, involving the exclusion of the buyers and sellers and the subsequent healing of the lame and the blind and the praise by children.

Although the event is obviously dramatic, what is its significance? Is it merely the act of an irate prophet upset by the buying and selling in the outer courtyard of the temple? Is it primarily a condemnation of worship profaned by market practices?

We may often consider the criticism of holding a bazaar in a place of worship as the central concern, particularly when we note Jesus' strong words of condemnation: "My house will be called a house of prayer," but you are making it a 'den of robbers'" (Matt. 21:13, NIV). The reference to robbers is important, but Jesus is doing more than condemning a temple market. There is little evidence of corruption. There is no reference to high prices or cheating practices, although the requirement that purchases be in a temple-approved currency may have led to abuses by the money lenders. The location of the market within the temple may have been inappropriate. Yet the money-changers and the sellers were providing a needed service. Worship in the temple had to involve animal sacrifices. These animals had to be available locally, since those traveling for several days for the Passover festival in Jerusalem could hardly be expected to bring cattle or sheep with them.

By invoking two Old Testament phrases, "house of prayer" (Isa. 56:7) and "den of robbers" (Jer. 7:11), however, Jesus is commenting on God's inclusiveness and on the need for right attitudes toward worship.

Worship is inclusive. Although there were a number of apparent exclusions, particularly in the initial establishment of worship in Sinai, later developments moved toward greater and greater inclusion. Isaiah 56:3-8 specifically addresses two groups who had been traditionally excluded from worship in the temple: foreigners and eunuchs. Perhaps as a result of Isaiah's words, the temple had been expanded to include a large outer court of the Gentiles. The temple was meant to be "a house of prayer for all nations" (Isa. 56:7).

Yet it is in this court that we find the money lenders, buyers, and sellers. Although Gentiles were not excluded from worship, the intrusion of a market in the court of the Gentiles was corrupting the worship. The inner courts for Jewish men and women did not have such activity. The Gentiles were being robbed of purity of worship.

Worship is attitude. In fact, the phrase "den of robbers" refers primarily to a right attitude toward worship. Jeremiah 7:11 is a condemnation of those who presumptuously expect God's protection and safety in the temple despite false beliefs

and worship. Their daily secular behavior contradicts their professed temple worship.

The cleansing of the temple, then, was not so much the removal of a market as it was the removal of barriers to worship. Those barriers were wrong attitudes toward worship, particularly presumption that worship in the temple was sufficient to cover up the sins outside the temple and an attitude of exclusion.

Although the cleansing of the temple excluded a group of buyers and sellers, it led to further inclusions. Immediately afterward, Jesus performs His only recorded healing within the temple. In direct conflict with Old Testament prohibitions, Jesus now includes the lame and the blind, making the temple more fully a house of prayer for all. The praise of the children highlights the inclusiveness of a house of prayer for all people: foreigners, handicapped, lame, blind, children. All are welcome. The only requirement is a desire to worship.

The cleansing of the temple was a performed parable. Temple officials probably did not change anything as a result of Jesus' actions. The next week (if not

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## **There is no reference to high prices or cheating practices.**

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the next day) the buying and selling of animals probably continued, but Jesus had acted out a parable that applies to us today. True worship of God requires the right attitude. True worship of God is inclusive. The church should be open to anyone who truly desires to worship. It is a house of prayer for all.

### **REACT**

1. How can an act of exclusion (chasing out both sellers and buyers) be considered as an act of inclusion?
2. What prerequisites, if any, should be required for worship?
3. Who, if anyone, should be excluded from worship in church? How do the following conditions relate to this question: age, gender, nationality, race, dress, finances, health (including communicable disease), or openly sinful behavior?
4. Should goods ever be bought and sold in church? Why or why not?
5. How do our feelings about tragedy reflect Christ's inclusive love?
6. How do we reconcile the caution of the Israelite not to associate with Gentiles and the commission to the Christian to share God's love with everyone?

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*By Charles H. Tidwell, Jr., academic dean and professor of English, Hong Kong Adventist College, Kowloon, Hong Kong.*

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# Who Are My Kinfolk?

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Mark 3:35**

Rwanda, April 1994. Armed pursuers on a massacre mission shattered the Friday-night calm. Through Internet the shocking news reached us in Hong Kong within hours. Thousands of Adventists had been lost. We personally knew none of them, but in Hong Kong, thousands of miles away, we were deeply moved. We interrupted an assembly to devote a silent period to the memory of those who died. Why this concern? Our kinfolk!

For the Hebrews, patrimonial rights were protected (Lev. 25:25, 47-49). When circumstances demanded that a Hebrew give up these rights, the nearest kinsman was obligated to redeem the distraught relative. Worship abuses that Christ saw at the temple the week before His death forced the worshiper to bargain for the love of God with pieces of gold and burnt offerings. God Himself stepped in to claim kinship, exercise patrimonial rights, and renew the covenant relationship between Himself and us.

He did not die just to become our Kinsman but also to form a kinship with "all who receive Christ by faith."<sup>1</sup> He made Himself "closer than father, mother,

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## Through Internet the shocking news reached us in Hong Kong within hours.

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brother, friend, or lover."<sup>2</sup> Hear His soothing words: "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine" (Isa. 43:1). His compassion urges Him to add, "I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life" (verse 4).

Jesus defined blood relationships in a new way. Once, when informed His mother and brothers were waiting for Him, Jesus asked, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" (Mark 3:33, NIV). In reply to His own question, He answered, looking around, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (verses 34, 35).

"How then shall we treat the purchased inheritance of Christ?"<sup>3</sup> We have become the nearest of kin to everyone seeking Christ, kin even to the hounded Christians in Rwanda, when we accept God through the companionship of Christ as our brother. When we have the joy of this acceptance, "we have more than human brotherhood. We have the exalted companionship of heavenly angels. They cooperate with us in the work of enlightening high and low."<sup>4</sup>

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 324.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 229.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

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By "Sunny" Kim Sun-Hee, senior English-as-a-second-language major, Hong Kong Adventist College, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

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## Christ's Open House of Worship

### EVIDENCE

**Key Text:** Isa. 56:3-8; Matt. 21:12-14

"His followers love and adore Him as the offspring of the immortal God. He calls the dead from their graves, and heals all sorts of diseases with a word or a touch," wrote a non-Jew, Publius Lentulus, the president of Judea, to the Roman Senate about A.D. 33.<sup>1</sup> The extraordinary beauty and divine appeal of Christ's life and ministry attracted all. He made no caste, no color, no race, no gender distinctions. He belonged to the people; He had compassion.

Originally, the temple was a place of worship, cleansing, and healing for all. But now the temple had become a marketplace, with the authorities demanding a generous portion of the profits. The abuse of the services turned people away from worship and from the study of first-advent prophecies. Not only did the priestly hierarchy disapprove of the ministry of Jesus, but they also spied on and otherwise harassed the Messiah Himself.

The two acts of cleansing (John 2:12-22; Matt. 21:12-16) were dramatic manifestations of Jesus' divinity. The second, just before His death, was the more significant, being weighted with literal and symbolic meaning. One moment in the

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### Here is his answer paraphrased, "Christ, yes; Christian, no!"

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presence of infinite Authority revealed to all the filth in and around the temple precincts. Second, convenient interpretations supporting dubious practices clouded reason and logic and had to be swept away. Third, sentinels at the gates hindered the free flow of people into the temple courts (Matt. 23:13, 14; Luke 11:52). The Messiah was made exclusive. Jesus was not accessible to all. Fourth, the Redeemer and real High Priest of the universe saw the felt need of the people and moved, however temporarily, to provide them a place of genuine worship. The Saviour's mission needed a clear presentation.

Jesus is as attractive to us today as He was to them two thousand years ago. One survey describes Christianity as the largest world religion.<sup>2</sup> But we have not lived His life to its fullest. Debate, dispute, discrimination, division have deterred a great multitude from following the Saviour. These echo the sentiment of the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi when he was asked his opinion of Christianity. Here is his answer paraphrased, "Christ, yes; Christian, no!"<sup>3</sup>

Let us open wide the doors to God's house.

1. H. M. S. Richards, "Special Bible Subject Helps" bound with *The Holy Bible* (London: Collin's Clear-Type Press, 1959), p. 9.

2. "Faiths in the World," *Asiaweek*, March 23, 1990, p. 6.

3. Joseph Francis Backianadan, *Love in the Life and Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Patna, India: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1991), pp. 87, 133, 157, 186, 258.

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*By Francis R. Roy, professor of chemistry, Hong Kong Adventist College, Kowloon, Hong Kong.*

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## “Renew a Right Spirit Within Me”

### HOW-TO

**Key Text:** Ps. 51:10

“Divinity flashed through humanity” two times, once at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and again at its end. See Jesus enter His Father’s house and observe the clutter, the clatter, and the chatter. “Take these things hence!” demands instant action—and it is done. Dwellers and dealers flee—with their “things.” But all present are not moved to flee. The multitude with the Saviour feel no urge to follow. The difference: these each have experienced the healing touch of His look, word, or act.

A hint. All the sin-burdened find a warm welcome; all the otherwise-burdened find no admission. Our purpose in approaching God and in His worship determines the way His arms fold, exclusively or inclusively.

Consider practicing the inclusiveness of Christ.

**1. Meditate.** Set priorities—with the Spirit’s help. Shun every idol—wealth, honor, authority, scholarship, church office, personal goodness, or humility itself—that comes before the Saviour. Personally choose that which strengthens physically and enhances spiritually—of food, drink, reading, TV programs, atti-

### See Jesus enter His Father’s house and observe the clutter, the clatter, and the chatter.

tudes, clothes, recreation, etc. There will be no fences in heaven; your next-door neighbor may be the “beast” you could not get along with here.

**2. Dedicate.** Set the temperature control. Quit reacting to unexpected turns; rather, act. Be the loving and lovable Christian whom spouse, child, or colleague longs for. Wake up earlier or give up a pet routine to begin the day with your Sustainer. Sing at worship. A song in your heart easily lifts beyond the irritating and the trifling.

**3. Cultivate.** Foster a warm corporate worship style. Reassess worship routines. Consider the visitor’s feelings when no seat is offered, or Bible or hymnal shared. Would the Christian, the non-Christian, the wealthy, the poorly clad, the minority ethnic, the dispossessed, the foreign-tongued or any of the “menial” vocations, the AIDS-infected—or the cough-racked—be comfortable next to you? Would you be?

**4. Reactivate.** Sit in a place in church other than your usual. Introduce yourself to believers you have not noticed before. Share an experience—a meal, a hike, a Bible discussion. Disband church cliques. Grow small-group fellowships.

Let all see the graciousness of a Christ who includes them.

*By Emil Fernando, associate professor of English, Hong Kong Adventist College, Kowloon, Hong Kong.*

# For All People

## OPINION

**Key Text: Mark 11:15-17**

Israel had become so focused on the rituals of worship that they had lost sight of the real reasons for coming to God's house. Monetary contributions had to be made in the official temple currency. Even animals for sacrifices had to be approved. These conditions were an obstacle for people who wanted to worship God.

What about our church today? We tend to feel more comfortable worshipping with people similar to ourselves. Whether we share a common ancestry or favor a particular worship format, we find security in being with people who share our views. Is it possible that through our actions or behavior we create an environment that excludes individuals who may worship God in a different way?

We have to set limits, right? After all, we need a special room for parents with infants so their children's crying won't disturb members who come to worship. We can't allow ourselves to be distracted by people who come to church in ripped blue jeans or who wear jewelry or too much makeup. We can't have people disrupting our services by shouting, "Amen!" every time our minister says something

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## We have to set limits, right?

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they agree with. We can't just allow anyone off the street to walk in the front doors and sit with us. What are we to do if a stranger walks into our church on Sabbath morning and decides to light a cigarette? What about people in our church who are in favor of changing the format of our service?

Christ demonstrated that the church is to be a place that is open to all who are sincere in their desire to worship God. It is to be a sanctuary free of merely human restrictions, free of prejudice. "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV). In God's house, everyone is welcome.

## REACT

1. In my local congregation, which forms of worship are culturally based?
2. In what sense, if any, is salvation conditional?
3. What does Jesus teach us about appropriate behavior toward those who differ from us?
4. In what specific ways can my church develop a more inclusive attitude?
5. How can my church administration and institutions cultivate more inclusiveness?

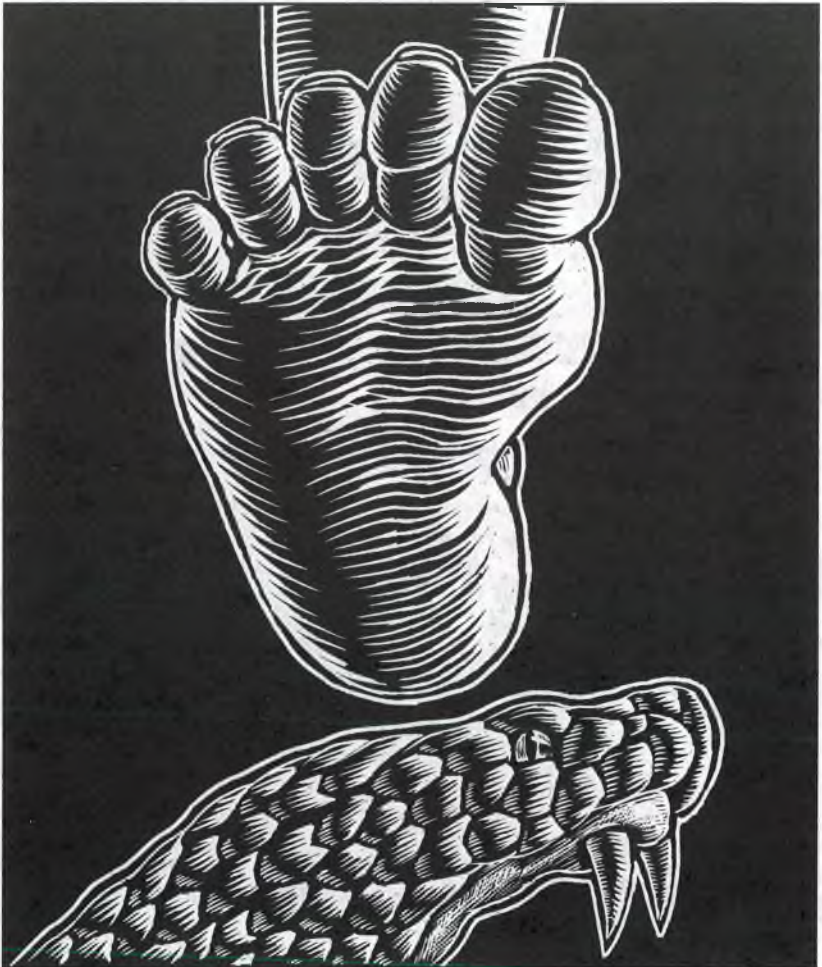
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*By Sydney Wong, instructor in the department of business and computers, Hong Kong Adventist College, Kowloon, Hong Kong.*

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# GENEALOGY OF GRACE



**“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21, NIV).**



# The Black Spot

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 1:21

I stood in the foyer, surrounded by people, most of whom were three times my age. My mother said they were all relatives, but I had never seen most of them.

Once in a while I caught glimpses of my immediate family—my father standing tall, arm around my eldest brother; or my mother, sitting with the women, talking about people as they walked by. Most of my brothers and sisters had found people to talk to. Being the youngest in my family by nine years, I shared no common friends with my siblings, so I searched for something to fill my afternoon.

A small, introspective group stood in one corner, looking at a mural on the floor. It was covered mostly with names and embellished with decorative drawings. It was a large, elaborate family lineage chart.

I soon found my great-grandparents, my grandparents, and then my family. “I found my name!” I said aloud.

A man standing nearby glanced at me, then to where I pointed on the mural. He smiled slightly. “That’s nice,” he said.

I had heard that our line had royalty in it, that King David might have been one

## Every name held a story, and I wished that I could know each.

of our ancestors, hundreds of years ago. As I looked back, generation after generation, I recognized names that I’d heard Grandma and Grandpa talk about. After a few generations, I no longer recognized any names but read on. Every name held a story, and I wished that I could know each.

Then I reached a place on the chart where a portion had been blacked out. I tried to read underneath the black but could make out no words. I asked a woman standing near me, “Why is this blacked out? Who was this?”

The woman glanced at the spot I pointed to and said, “Don’t worry about that part. The woman got pregnant before she was married; we aren’t sure who the father was. The son turned out to be a criminal who brought disgrace on our family.”

“But what was his name?” I asked. “What did he do?”

“I’m sure you’ll hear the story someday,” she said. She walked away quickly, leaving me staring. I wondered what could be so horrible.

I stared at the black on the mural and then slowly turned to leave. As I turned, I almost ran into a boy about my size. He looked at me and smiled; I smiled back. He said, “I heard you talking about the black mark on the mural.”

I answered, “Yes, do you know anything about it?”

The boy looked both ways, then motioned for me to sit down. We sat next to the mural on the floor, and then the boy said, “His name was Jesus. Have you ever heard of Him?”

*By W. Kent Rogers, graduate student in English, La Sierra University, Riverside, California.*

# Joseph, Jesus, and the Old Testament

## LOGOS

### Gen. 6:4

Although the story of Jesus' birth is relatively straightforward, it does contain a number of passages that deserve further consideration. Four important sections appear in the passage.

#### **With Child From the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18)**

Though Mary's pregnancy is unique, its uniqueness does not lie in its source—coming from a divine being. The idea of god-human sexual interaction is common to many traditions. The Babylonian goddess Inanna was attracted to a number of human males. Zeus, of Greek mythology, even fathered a number of children with human women. And our own scriptural tradition presents us with this enigmatic situation: "The sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them" (Gen. 6:4, NIV).

The difference between Mary's pregnancy and these other cases is that it was not the result of sexual contact. Rather, the Child is attributed to the working of the Holy Spirit, the least physical member of the Trinity. Traditionally, the Spirit has been understood as God at work, arranging matters to His own purposes. So although Mary's pregnancy is the result of God's action, it differs significantly from similar stories in other traditions.

#### **A Righteous Man (Matt. 1:19)**

We know Joseph was a righteous man. But the nature of that righteousness can be interpreted two ways, depending on what emphasis is read into the text. One can read the text to mean that Joseph was a righteous man and therefore unwilling to expose Mary to public disgrace. This emphasizes compassion, implying that Joseph was a caring man. The other possible reading is that Joseph was a righteous man yet unwilling to expose Mary to public disgrace. Given the strong emphasis on law at the time, it is reasonable to conclude that this is a more likely interpretation. Joseph's personal feelings—which caused him to be compassionate toward Mary—conflicted with his intellect—which told him that, according to the law, he was to report her, after which she would have been killed. In deciding to divorce Mary quietly, Joseph made a wise choice, selecting a middle-of-the-road approach in which he neither ignored what he saw as Mary's unfaithfulness nor turned her over to public death as an adulteress.

#### **Name Him Jesus (Matt. 1:21)**

The giving of names, and names themselves, were more important in Joseph's culture and time than in our own. To name something was to have power over it. (This notation has in isolated instances carried into more recent times, appearing significantly in the fairy tale of Rumpelstiltskin.) To the Israelites, names represented character and destiny. Thus the act of giving a name was important.

Instructing Joseph to name Jesus was a delegation of power on God's part. God did not say, "His name will be Jesus" or "Call Him Jesus." He instructed Joseph to give the name.

The name itself is also significant. *Yeshua* (Jesus' name in Hebrew) was a form of the name *Yehosua* (Joshua) and bore the meaning "Yahweh is salvation." This meaning of the name and its significance are reflected in the remainder of the verse as Matthew writes: "He will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21, NIV).

Another name for Jesus appears in this passage: *Emmanuel*. Unlike the name *Jesus*, the name *Emmanuel* is not meant to be a name of personal identification. Rather, its purpose is to describe Jesus. *Emmanuel* is not who Jesus is but what He is: "God with us."

### **Jesus, Moses, and Prophecy (Matt. 1:22, 23; 2:15, 17, 18, 23)**

One of Matthew's major concerns in this passage is to show that Jesus is the Messiah. He uses two methods to establish this—explicit reference to Old Testament passages and prophecies and implicit references to parallels between the stories of Jesus and Moses, whom God had also sent to deliver His people from bondage.

The first connection Matthew makes is in verse 23, wherein he quotes from Isaiah 7:14. Though this Old Testament verse was probably not intended as a long-term prophecy by the original writer, the Jews had come to understand it as a prediction of the Messiah. Matthew observes and makes clear the connections between the prophecy and its fulfillment in Jesus.

The second connection appears in Matthew 2:15, wherein he quotes from

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## **The idea of god-human sexual interaction is common to many traditions.**

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Hosea 11:1. In this case, the Old Testament verse was not intended as a prophecy at all. Yet Matthew can speak of its fulfillment, because he is emphasizing a typological relationship. He is demonstrating the significant parallels in history between an earlier event and a later one. The exodus of Israel from Egypt foreshadows the calling of Jesus out of Egypt.

Verses 17 and 18 make another connection. In Jeremiah 1:15, Rachel is portrayed as showing inconsolable grief over the Israelites' captivity. Again, Matthew finds a fulfillment, not of prophecy, but of typology. Once again there is a cause for great sadness, for grief of the magnitude realized in the Israelite captivity.

The last connection comes in Matthew 2:23, but the reference is not as clear. One suggestion is that "Nazarene" refers to the Hebrew word *netser* for "branch," found in Isaiah 11:1. The other possibility is that it is meant to connect with the setting apart that the Nazarite vows of Numbers 6:2-21 outline and that Samson was intended to follow. Other references to this special case may be found in Judges 13:5, 7; 16:17. Amos 2:11, 12 speaks also of this vow.

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*By Craig Kinzer, an English and communication faculty member, La Sierra University, and Sylvia Nelson Clarke, a freelance writer living in Riverside, California.*

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# He *Still* Comes in Swaddling Clothes

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text:** Isa. 53:2, 3

Our family collects Nativity scenes. They all share one thing in common—they are neat and clean. The manger is spotless, the infant's blanket looks freshly washed. Even the people and animals look well groomed and refreshed—to say nothing of Jesus, who looks like one of the cutest babies you'll ever see.

So much for reality. The Incarnation *wasn't* pretty. It involved two dead-tired travelers who were frustrated from their failure to find lodging. Stables were stench-filled caves in ancient Israel, covered with manure and filth. The manger was uncomfortable and degrading. The whole scene was one of revulsion and humiliation for any newborn, much less the Son of God.

On top of it all, Jesus wasn't a Gerber baby. "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Isa. 53:2, NIV). He was "like one from whom men hide their faces" (verse 3). Does that sound like *ugly* to you?

"It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man's nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like

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## The whole scene was one of revulsion and humiliation for any newborn.

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every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great laws of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life."\*

By His genealogy, by His birth, by His childhood, by His youth, by His life, and by His death, He was despised and rejected. We esteemed Him—NOT. And the point of the story is that the same is true today. He still comes in swaddling clothes. He is still born in a manger. He is still rejected by many of the wise and the strong and the powerful—today. And He still rejoices that He is embraced by the weak, the dependent, the foolish, the hurting, and the helpless (Luke 10:21). Freud said that religion is a crutch for the emotionally weak. I agree with him; the problem is with those of us who don't realize how weak we are.

## REACT

1. How does the Incarnation give us the potential of greater intimacy with God than that which Adam and Eve had before the Fall?

2. Would Jesus be rejected as a nerd if He were born into the Adventist sub-culture today? Explain your answer.

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\* *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 48, 49.



## “Psychic” Christians

### EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Rom. 8:28**

One cannot spend much time in Christian circles without encountering “psychic” Christians. These persons agonize over every decision—whether between two potential life partners or between chocolate and vanilla ice cream—not because they don’t know how to decide but because they can’t read God’s mind, and they quail at the thought of taking responsibility for the consequences of their decisions. These Christians often cite Joseph’s story as evidence that God is waiting to step into one’s life and set everything in line with His will, but this did not actually happen in Joseph’s case.

Joseph had made the decision to divorce Mary *before* God persuaded him to continue with the marriage. In recommending that Joseph take his family to Egypt and suggesting their return, God advised *before* Joseph had made a decision. In choosing a place to live, however, Joseph again made the decision that Judea was unsafe, and only *after* this did God advise him to settle in Galilee. We see God *intervening* in four key decision processes but not assuming unilateral control of a completely passive man. We can also be sure that Joseph made many other sig-

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### The capacity to make our own choices is part of our inheritance.

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nificant decisions—his profession, for instance—without such intervention.

The capacity to make our own choices is part of our inheritance as creatures made in the image of God. Such freedom of choice is not a curse. It does not offer us the possibility of making the one wrong decision, when otherwise we would have been capable of making only the one right decision. Often it provides us with the chance to make one of many right decisions. Although God provided Joseph with extra information, thus influencing his decision, He still expected Joseph to make the necessary choices and accept the consequences of those choices.

Psychic Christians should recognize that for God to reveal His will to us before every minute decision in our lives would be redundant, since His will is already revealed in the Bible. God can rightly expect us to use the faculties for reasoned choice, which He has given us to make decisions confidently for ourselves. God assures us that He is capable of bringing good from our decisions, even if they sometimes fall short of perfection: “In all things God works for the good for those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28, NIV).

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*By Craig R. Kinzer, an English and communication faculty member, La Sierra University, Riverside, California.*

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# God's Only Commandment

## HOW-TO

**Key Texts:** Matt. 22:36-40; 1 Cor. 13:4-7

"Do you love Me?" He asked his friend as they sat on the beach. He asked again and received the same response. Finally, when He asked the third time, his friend felt the pains of the past, for the questions echoed what he had done. Peter had broken the bonds of love between himself and Jesus, and there on the beach they mended them.

In this event, recorded in John 21:15-19, Jesus reemphasizes the key to being a Christian. Jesus said that all the law hangs on two commandments—love God and love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:40). Essentially the single most important key to being a Christian resides in having love. We use the word *love* so freely in the English language that it often loses its meaning as Christ emphasized it and as Paul defines it.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude" (1 Cor. 13:4, 5, NIV). Love is the foundation of all God's commandments. If we have a heart full of love, all the commandments will be fulfilled as a natural consequence.

Jesus pointed out to His disciples that the world will know they are His disciples

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## **We use the word *love* so freely in the English language that it often loses its meaning.**

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if they love one another (John 13:35). This is precisely what Jesus calls us to do. Jesus wants us to love one another so we will be known by that love we share—not only as Christians but also as fellow humans.

This week we have learned how God included names in Jesus' genealogy that may not seem to deserve to be there. By doing this, God reminds us that He looks at people's hearts, their true essence. God is also showing us that He is a God of inclusivity, not exclusivity. Jesus serves as our example in welcoming everyone to His fold. He calls us to love—as Paul explains it—God and each other as fulfillment of the law.

## **REACT**

1. Is the Adventist Church a welcoming, inclusive church? If not, why?
2. How can the church grow in inclusivity and warmth to others?
3. How can we obtain the love that Paul is talking about?
4. As individuals, how should we treat someone who claims to be a Christian yet does not appear to act like one?

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*By Reuben Sutter, a junior engineering student at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.*

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# Stuck in the Family Trees

## OPINION

**Key Text: Matt. 1:1-16, 20, 21**

Everybody has ancestors. We may not choose to associate ourselves with them very much; their past exploits may embarrass us at times, but they do not go away. Every one of us is firmly stuck somewhere on a family tree. There is nothing any of us can do about it. We can change many things about ourselves, but not our ancestry.

Glancing back over our own genealogies can help us to situate ourselves. Our family trees, mediocre and uninspiring as they may be, can give us a sense of time and place. We are not solitary, isolated individuals; rather, we are only the most recently added links to ancestral chains that stretch back into untraceability. This is true even for Jesus, though Matthew seems certain that Jesus' lineage can be traced unbroken all the way back to Eden.

Jesus has a family tree full of famous people, borderline famous people, and downright forgettable people. Everyone would be proud to have a David or a Solomon as distant contributors to their family's genetic makeup. But what about some of the others? Why does Matthew list them? Why not just leave off the unseemly

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## **Every one of us is firmly stuck somewhere on a family tree.**

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characters and concentrate on the great historical figures in Jesus' lineage?

The answer lies in what it means to be human—what it means for Jesus to be human. Living as part of a family is a fundamental and inescapable part of existing as a human being. The fact that Jesus' family is of very mixed quality—though the high points are much higher than for most of us—makes His humanity all the more authentic. Matthew doesn't gloss over the low points in Jesus' genealogy, because that would make Him appear unreal, like a purely mythological figure descended only from an unbelievable mix of biblical celebrities.

Matthew is telling us that Jesus has a history, that the historical Jesus lives and acts in a particular time and place as part of a human family. When God becomes human, He makes the choice to be stuck on a very human, very imperfect family tree. It is this Jesus, the Jewish carpenter from Nazareth, son of Joseph and Mary and the member of a family of forgettable and unforgettable characters, who is uniquely accessible to us. He is the Saviour who shares our lot, who has experiences similar to our own—who is born, lives, and dies as a member of a flesh-and-blood human family.

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*By Joel Sandefur, recently graduated with a B.A. in French, from La Sierra University, Riverside, California.*

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# JOSEPH'S MARRIAGE TO MARY



**“Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:20, NIV).**



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# Doing God's Will in the World

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: 1 Cor. 6:19, 20**

*I'm getting married!* In just a few weeks I will share the moment of a lifetime with someone I love very deeply. I wasn't always sure I would be getting married at all. Growing up Adventist, I used to wonder when God would come. Would He come before I learned to drive a car? Or maybe before I was married? Would I have children before the time of trouble? Sometimes I hoped He *wouldn't* come until I had the chance to grow up. I'm still growing up, but now I hope He comes in the next three minutes!

Our emphasis on the second advent affects the way we live. We always have one hand on the doorknob, ready to run outside to meet Christ in the clouds of glory. Does Christ's soon second coming also affect our perception of God's will for our lives? I used to cry with guilt because I didn't want to become a missionary. I knew I would be miserable as a missionary, yet I felt it was the only way I could serve God. I've learned since that God needs lawyers, plumbers, scientists, and teachers as much as overseas missionaries. But how can we really know what God wills for us?

During the first advent, Joseph planned to divorce Mary for infidelity. But God's

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## **I used to cry with guilt because I didn't want to become a missionary.**

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plan was for Joseph to be married, contrary to Joseph's analysis of the situation. As we wait for the second advent, what is God's will for us?

Through prayer and careful study of the Scriptures, we can know what God plans for each of us. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20, RSV). As we go through life, will our decisions and actions (our body) glorify God? Will what we say and do make it easier for others to know Him? Are we as Christians projecting an accurate picture of Him whom we represent?

After listening to God in His Word and through prayer, it's time to get out there and act! God gave us reflective minds and courageous hearts, and He calls us to action for Him. We can't hole up in caves awaiting the time of trouble. We can't stop our lives, unsure whether God wants us to marry. We have to keep on living, witnessing to others as we grow and learn, and always listening to Him who will keep us from falling.

Lord, what can I do for You today?

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By Nathan Sutter, senior biology major at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

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# Who Are These People?

## LOGOS

Matt. 1:18-25; 2:13-23

### Jesus and the Founders of Israel

Note the way in which Matthew's genealogy is introduced (1:1). Jesus is said to be the "son of David, the son of Abraham" (NIV). This heading stresses what the Gospel's readers are to remember: Jesus stands in direct continuity with Israel's divinely appointed leaders, with those who have made the nation what it is. As Messiah, Jesus is the successor of David, Israel's model king, and of Abraham, Israel's founding father.

The evangelist seeks to demonstrate the legitimacy of Jesus' claim to Messiahship by highlighting His pedigree, by showing that He is the descendant of a long line of leaders in Israel. Not only Abraham and David but also Solomon and his various royal descendants are identified as Jesus' ancestors (though only David, interestingly, is explicitly identified as king). Even though Jesus' immediate ancestors had little social prestige, His roots linked Him with Israel's greatest leaders.

### Jesus' Female Ancestors

Although Matthew 1 is clearly intended to stress the power and social position of Jesus' ancestors to underscore His credibility, the four women (other than Mary) are mentioned in the chapter to make a complementary, perhaps contrasting, point. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba (referred to here simply as "the wife of Uriah" [RSV]) were, in various ways, outsiders and real or potential victims. It is remarkable that, in a patriarchal society, women would be included in Jesus' genealogy at all. It is doubly impressive that these women, social outcasts as they all—in one way or another—were, should have been the ones selected for inclusion.

While married to Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba was seduced or raped by the king of Israel (2 Samuel 11, 12)—the very king whose remembered greatness makes it important for the evangelist to link him with Jesus. Rahab was a prostitute (Joshua 2)—quite possibly another victim of male power. Similarly, Tamar was reduced to feigning prostitution because the male members of her deceased husband's family refused to take responsibility for her—thus leaving her a dependent and relatively impoverished widow (Genesis 38). And like the other women listed here among Jesus' ancestors, as a Moabite, Ruth would undoubtedly have been ostracized by exclusivistic Jewish nationalists (Nehemiah 13). Further, as a widow, she was forced to glean the fields of others for food (Ruth 2). Though, on first reading, Matthew's genealogy paints Jesus as the ultimate insider, a subversive countertradition within the genealogy emphasizes His identification with socially and/or religiously unacceptable people struggling to find acceptance from others—and perhaps also doubtful of God's acceptance.

We cannot be sure, of course, but it seems likely that these women are also included as a way of responding to anti-Christian slurs on the character of Mary. It was widely believed by Christianity's opponents that His birth was not miraculous, but illegitimate. And in a society that was horrified by pregnancy out of wed-

lock and ostracized unmarried women who bore children, this charge certainly called Jesus' credibility into question. The genealogy likely refers to these women in part to suggest that God can work in and through births that occur under irregular circumstances. While the story of Jesus' virginal conception is clearly included in Matthew as an additional reply to these charges, the genealogy provides an initial response by suggesting that the occasion of someone's birth is no bar to God's activity in her or his life.

### **Salvation in History**

Matthew's Gospel tells us that it is *this* Jesus, the One caught between power and marginality, the One whose heritage includes outsiders like Ruth and insiders like David, who is God's self-gift to us, God's offer of salvation (Matt. 1:21). Jesus saves us, the people who—like Him—are affected by the tension between insiders and outsiders. The result of His saving action—as we discern in, for instance, 1 Corinthians 3, Galatians 5, and Ephesians 1–3—is, in fact, the abolition of the distance between the prestigious and the powerless, Jews and Gentiles,

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## **It was widely believed by Christianity's opponents that His birth was not miraculous, but illegitimate.**

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women and men. The tensions to which Jesus' genealogy calls our attention are precisely those addressed in and as a result of His ministry.

### **REACT**

1. How does Jesus' ancestry as outlined in Matthew 1 affect your evaluation of Him?
2. How do you think it affected the perception of the Gospel's initial readers?
3. How are the stories of the four women in Jesus' genealogy alike and how different?
4. How do you think we would relate to people with stories like theirs today?
5. What significance, if any, do you think the circumstances of a person's birth should have on how we view her or him?

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*By Gary Chartier, managing editor, Adventist Heritage, La Sierra University, Riverside, California.*

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# The Advantage of Insignificance

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Luke 1:35-35**

“God has . . . promised to give visions in the ‘last days’; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth.” Whether it was a dream, a vision, or some other form of communication, Joseph’s message from the Lord saved the course of his life. What had been his life dream would now become God’s dream for his life. This is that to which God is calling His people today, to give up our dreams for His dreams. Such a decision involves at least three steps:

**1. We must realize that living out God’s dream always involves risk.** When we become pregnant with God’s dream for us, we are all virgins. We are called to do something we have never done before. It seems scary and risky. We feel unprepared and inadequate. But God comforts us with His grace. He affirms us in our anxiety. As He did for Mary and Joseph, He assures us of His presence and favor. He calls us to trust in His ability rather than our own.

**2. We must recognize our dependence on the Holy Spirit.** If we could accomplish the dream ourselves, it is not God’s dream. When Mary and Joseph questioned the possibility of God’s dream because of Mary’s virginity, the angel

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## When we become pregnant with God’s dream for us, we are all virgins.

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assured them that the Holy Spirit and God’s power would make the impossible a reality (Luke 1:35-37).

So many of our churches are dying today because they have become self-dependent and afraid of taking risks. We make decisions by committee and human wisdom, rather than by seeking God’s will through visions, dreams, or Holy Spirit directives. God’s people do the impossible in direct proportion to their willingness to move in the Spirit rather than in human wisdom and strength.

**3. We must recognize that God chooses the most unlikely places to plant His seed.** First He chooses an old couple beyond the years of parenthood. Then He selects a teenage virgin with no worldly credentials. So it will be in our churches: God will impregnate the aged and the innocent with His Spirit, and they will dream, prophesy, and see visions (Joel 2:28).

In Christ’s day Nazareth was a city of the poorest reputation. So look for God to choose the smallest cities, the smallest churches, the universities of no worldly reputation, in which to plant His seed in the days ahead. Insignificance is an advantage in the kingdom of God.

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*\*Early Writings, p. 78.*



# Jesus Had a History

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text:** Matt. 1:19, 24

Jesus didn't simply appear one day full-grown, a direct divine creation. He had a normal human body, ushered into the world in the usual way. And He developed in the fashion of ordinary human beings; He had a history.

Not only did He *have* a history—He was *part of a history*. The genealogies stress that Jesus took His place within a particular culture, heritage, and tradition. When God chose to become incarnate, “God’s humanity,” if we can use that expression, was conditioned, shaped, structured by years of history.

Though Joseph did not help to constitute Jesus’ DNA, he clearly helped to constitute Jesus’ character and awareness of His own heritage. Mary and Joseph both contributed to Jesus’ identity by acculturating Him, by helping Him to make the history of the Jewish people His own. Both biblical genealogies are important because the history of Jesus’ community helped to make Him who He was, and both genealogies point to that history.

If God chose to become incarnate as a first-century Jew, that must be, at least in part, because Israel’s heritage was especially appropriate for God’s self-disclosure, prepared through the sometimes tortuous operation of divine provi-

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## **Not only did He *have* a history—He was *part of a history*.**

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dence. Because God came among us as Jesus of Nazareth, we can infer that we ought to take the history and convictions of Israel seriously indeed.

That’s why the Old Testament matters to us. If we didn’t believe in Jesus, and we weren’t Jews ourselves, we would have no particular reason to read the Old Testament and thus seek to discern God’s identity and purposes there. We wouldn’t have as much reason to take the Sabbath seriously. We wouldn’t give as much thought to the Ten Commandments or the socially transforming message of the biblical jubilee or the comforting and accusing words of the prophets.

Not only should we take our Jewish heritage seriously; Jesus’ genealogies suggest that we need to take contemporary Judaism seriously. That the history of Israel was chosen as the vehicle for God’s self-revelation suggests that it provided the best available context for the Incarnation. Jesus differed with the religious leaders of first-century Judaism. But this disagreement needs to be understood against the backdrop of the Incarnation’s implicit affirmation of Israel’s heritage.

An appreciation for Judaism as important to God’s self-revelation should make it difficult for Christians to write it off as easily as they have done in the past. Christians believe that they have something distinctive to contribute that Judaism does not. But they must be willing to take a new look at Judaism as the context within which God laid the groundwork for the Incarnation.

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*By Gary Chartier, managing editor, Adventist Heritage, La Sierra University, Riverside, California.*

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# Guidance and Response

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Ps. 32:8**

"I know we are to return to the States permanently," my husband said. But I still had my doubts. Not only did I feel we were where God had sent us; I couldn't face all the decisions such a move would demand. After explaining how he had reviewed God's leading in our past and saw His guidance now, my husband waited patiently for me to accept the fact that this move was God's will.

The peace I experienced when I finally acknowledged God's leading and the ease with which the sorting, selling, and packing proceeded made me ask myself why I had waited so long to respond. Was I waiting for a dream, a tap on the shoulder, an audible voice? I already had enough information to make the necessary decision.

First, inflation and other factors had made our financial situation difficult. The new job would take care of that problem. Second, God promised to be with us always, so our children would still be safe in His care in a less rural setting, despite my fears to the contrary. And last, my husband already saw God's leading in this direction through the unexpected call from an old friend offering another posi-

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## Was I waiting for a dream, a tap on the shoulder, an audible voice?

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tion. I could trust my spouse's judgment because of his dedication to God and His service.

In some ways, I was slow to believe God when He promised to instruct me in the way I should go. My attitude, I'm sure, was not unique. Humanly speaking, we think God has perhaps overlooked something when He seems to indicate a particular choice. We ask, "How can we know what God wants us to do?"

Sometimes we turn to Scripture for a specific answer to choices we face. This is not wrong. We can find guidance in the Bible, but in it God gives examples of His relationship to us and how He expects us to respond. And we can, by prayer and meditation, open our minds to hear the "still, small voice" by which He communicates.

These are not, however, the only ways God instructs us. We can also find His guidance in our circumstances—doors that open or close to us—in the advice of friends and associates, in ideas that may come from books or music. When we face important decisions, God has also provided a supportive Christian community to which we can turn for help in making wise choices. Because His Spirit dwells in this community, God often leads through the counsel of fellow Christians. No matter where we find God's guidance, the important thing is to respond—to act—as Joseph did, on the direction we receive.

*"God can't steer a parked car!"*

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*By Sylvia Nelson Clarke, a freelance writer from Riverside, California.*

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# Restoring the Image of God

## OPINION

**Key Text: Gen. 1:27**

The female image of God was defaced by the harsh patriarchal culture of the Old Testament. The law of that culture permitted Joseph to divorce his pregnant fiancée without regard to the consequences to her (Deut. 24:1, 2). His only intended concession to tenderness was the quietness of the divorce he planned (Matt. 1:19).

The Holy Spirit moves through soft hearts, not stone tablets (Ezek. 11:19; 2 Cor. 3:3). The grace and truth that came to the world with Jesus began with Joseph's acceptance of the pregnant Mary. The Holy Spirit opened Joseph's eyes to Mary as a woman of God and not as an object of social convention.

The Hope of the World lived and developed in the holy and mutual vulnerability of a spirit-filled, spirit-led man and woman. The Christian psychologist Henri Nouwen says, "The highest safeguard for the physical, mental, and spiritual health of the child is not primarily the attention paid to the child, but the unrestricted love of the parents for each other."<sup>\*</sup>

"If you know me, you will know my Father also," said the man Jesus (John 14:7). So the world learned God's heart for women through His Son. That heart

## **The Holy Spirit moves through soft hearts, not stone tablets.**

was revealed in His honest, affirming encounters with the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, the woman at the house of Simon the leper, Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, and the woman who touched Him in the crowd. He replaced shame with grace, hypocrisy with truth, and forced submission with the freedom of communication.

The apostle Paul recognized the radical revision of the status of women through Jesus. "There is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

God will eventually destroy the evil social systems that exploit men and women and even corrupt marriage relations (see Revelation 18). The climactic wedding supper of the Lamb makes no distinction between "small and great" in His invitation to its celebrants (Rev. 19:5-9). " 'In that day,' declares the Lord, 'you will call me "my husband"; you will no longer call me "my master"'" (Hos. 2:16, NIV).

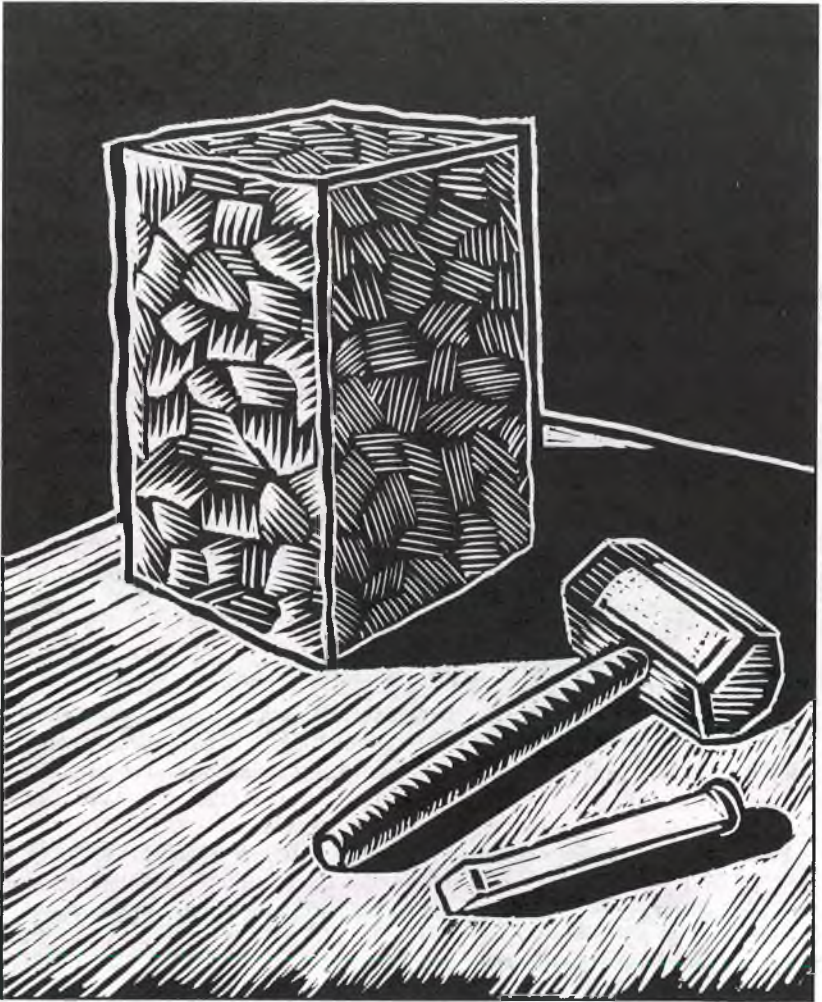
The true believer need not wait to obtain full and equal citizenship in the kingdom of God. The Spirit of God that bore grace and truth in the relationship of Joseph and Mary lives wherever hearts are open to Mary's Son. Our vulnerability to the power of the Spirit to restore the image of God is still the best hope of the world (2 Cor. 3:18; 1 John 4:12).

\* Henri J. Nouwen, *Seeds of Hope* (New York: Bantam, 1990).

By Kent A. Hansen, an attorney from Riverside, California.



# GOD'S VIEWS ON PARENTHOOD



“ ‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May it be to me as you have said’ ” (Luke 1:38, NIV).



# Everlasting Love

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Luke 1:38**

“Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world” is a song that many children in the Christian world grow up singing, and indeed it is a true song—for Jesus loved us even before we were born.

A child brought by parents to be dedicated and prayed for shows the parents’ realization that the child has been entrusted to them. It is for parents and all who will have to do with the child’s upbringing to realize that child rearing is a special task, a special responsibility that should not be taken lightly.

Mothers especially should realize that the influence wielded over their children has a profound effect on their present and future lives because the truism “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world” is true.

“To fashion a character after the heavenly Model requires much faithful, earnest, persevering labor; but it will pay, for God is a rewarder of all well-directed labor in securing the salvation of souls.”<sup>1</sup>

A mother begins her molding long before the child is born. Not only does she bring physical nourishment, but she also formulates “mental and spiritual influ-

## **Child rearing is a special task, a special responsibility that should not be taken lightly.**

ences that tend to the shaping of mind and character.”<sup>2</sup>

It takes great faith to consider accepting the responsibility of child rearing. Child upbringing requires great patience and careful, painstaking commitment to the task God has assigned. Sometimes it is frustrating. Always there is only one way to turn—up!

I would just like to share a poem my youngest son wrote me on Mother’s Day, 1994.

We truly love “U”  
 “U” gave us life and love  
 and we thank you for feelings from above.  
 Mom you are great and we truly love “U”  
 a pain we sometimes be  
 but that’s the way it is you see  
 we truly love “U” and know that  
 you love us too  
 for this we thank you.

Could similar sentiments be directed toward our heavenly parent?

1. *The Adventist Home*, p. 240.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

*By Beverly Henry, public-relations director of West Indies College, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies.*

# Mary and Elizabeth: Called of God

## LOGOS

Luke 1:5-7, 24-55

### Unmerited Favor (Luke 1:5-7, 26-33)

*“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God” (Luke 1:30, NIV).*

Caught in the throes of subjugation and oppression at the hands of the Romans, Israel looked eagerly, though with some misconceptions, for the Messiah’s coming. The privilege of mothering the Redeemer was a cherished dream among Hebrew women. A mother hoped that the bundle of joy to which she gave birth would be the promised Deliverer. Yet they must have known that there was nothing they could do to merit this privilege.

Gabriel’s address to Mary as one “highly favored” (1:28) and the further affirmation that she had found “favor with God” (verse 30) underscore the fact that her being called by God to bring His Son into the world was unmerited favor. The same is true of Elizabeth (verse 25), who was chosen to be the mother of John the Baptist, forerunner of the Messiah (verses 15-17). Yet it is evident that their relationships with God were significant factors in their being called. Both Elizabeth and Zacharias are described as “righteous before God” and “walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (verse 6, KJV); Mary’s submissive response (verse 38) reflects an implicit faith in God. Mary’s and Elizabeth’s relationships with God did not earn them the right to be chosen for their respective maternal privilege and responsibility, but it did make them suitable candidates for the task of nurturing the Messiah and His forerunner under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The magnitude of the gracious favor extended to Mary is evidenced by Gabriel’s description of the One she would carry in her womb for nine months and deliver as God’s greatest gift to the world. He would be called Jesus, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name “Joshua,” which is from the root meaning “Yahweh is salvation.” His appellations would include “Son of the Most High” and “Son of God” (verses 32, 35, NIV). He would reign forever over a never-ending kingdom (verses 32, 33). To be the mother of the Son of God, the Saviour, the Everlasting King, is both the greatest privilege ever afforded and the most awesome responsibility ever placed upon a woman.

As members of the remnant community of faith, we are called to shoulder responsibilities relating to the spread of the good news of salvation. Our task is not as stupendous as giving birth to the Messiah, but its significance must not be underestimated. Mary was called to bring Christ *into* the world; we are called to take Him *to* the world. Like Mary’s call, ours is not based on personal merit but on God’s grace in calling us to proclaim the good news of salvation through Christ.

### Submissive Faith (Luke 1:34-38)

*“‘Nothing is impossible with God.’ . . . Mary answered, ‘May it be to me as you have said’ ” (Luke 1:37, 38).*

Mary’s initial reaction to Gabriel’s greeting was one of apprehension and perplexity (verses 28, 29). The celestial messenger allayed her fears by announcing that she was the one favored by God with the unique privilege of mothering the

Son of God (verses 30-33). Apparently interpreting Gabriel's words to mean an immediate conception, Mary expressed doubt because she was a virgin (verse 34). Gabriel assured her that the Holy Spirit would surmount this human limitation and enable her to carry out the task to which she had been called (verse 35). Citing what God had done for the aged, barren Elizabeth, he affirmed that "nothing is impossible with God" (verses 36, 37). Mary, her apprehension, fear, and doubt now dispelled, responded submissively in implicit faith: "May it be to me as you have said" (verse 38).

When faced with the immensity of the task to which we have been called, we may be daunted by a consciousness of our human inadequacies at the personal and organizational levels. The God who called and enabled Mary is the God who summons and empowers us through the Holy Spirit to perform effectively the work we have been assigned—to preach to the world the One whom Mary delivered to the world. Like Mary, we must look beyond our human limitations and surrender in faith to God's supreme will and enabling power.

### **Grateful Praise (Luke 1:46-55)**

*"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (verses 46, 47, RSV).*

Mary's visit to Elizabeth provided through a human agent confirmation of Gabriel's announcement. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth declared that Mary

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## **Mary was called to bring Christ into the world; we are called to take Him to the world.**

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was specially favored and would be the mother of the Messiah (verses 42, 43). This dramatic reaffirmation elicited from her a tremendous emotional response, and she burst forth in the joyful exuberance of grateful praise. In a manner reminiscent of Hannah's Song (1 Sam. 2:1-10), Mary gratefully praised God for the great things He had done for her, for those who fear Him (Luke 1:50), for the downtrodden (verses 51-53), and for His people Israel (verses 54, 55).

We, too, have reason to praise God. He has graciously favored us by calling us and empowering us through the Holy Spirit to perform the greatest task given to humanity since the birth of Christ—the proclamation of His miraculous birth, perfect life, vicarious death, glorious resurrection, salvific ministration, and imminent return. When we acknowledge our unmerited privilege, submit ourselves to the will of God, and experience the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, we cannot but express grateful praise to God for what He has done for us as individuals and for His remnant people.

### **REACT**

1. Since a major purpose of the Incarnation is for God to identify with the human family, how does the uniqueness of the virgin birth impact upon its significance?

2. God chose to send the second Adam as a child, not an adult like the first Adam. What might this be saying about God's concern for the family?

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*By Orlando Moncrieffe, chairman of the religion department, West Indies College, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies.*

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# Our Faithful Response

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Luke 1:38**

At times we might become discouraged when circumstances surrounding a call do not seem to match its prestige. We begin to make suggestions for God's plan to be more "reasonable," but instead, we run into trouble. Through God's love and mercy, He stirs a faithful response within us with a method that at the time might be perceived as an uncomfortable experience.

Zacharias had to be silenced in order for him to discern God's plan. "The birth of a son to Zacharias, like the birth of the child of Abraham, and that of Mary, was to teach a great spiritual truth, a truth that we are slow to learn and ready to forget. In ourselves we are incapable of doing any good thing; but that which we cannot do will be wrought by the power of God in every submissive and believing soul. It was through faith that the child of promise was given. It is through faith that spiritual life is begotten, and we are enabled to do the works of righteousness."<sup>1</sup>

Prior to our Lord's coming as a babe, "while the light of truth seemed to have departed among men, there were souls who were looking for light and . . . with ongoing eyes they looked for the coming of the Deliverer, when the darkness

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### **Zacharias had to be silenced in order for him to discern God's plan.**

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should be dispelled and the mystery of the future should be made plain."<sup>2</sup> "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). This was the answer of the "sweet, childlike faith of Mary, the maiden of Nazareth," to Gabriel's "wonderful announcement."<sup>3</sup>

It will take from each of us a certain amount of knowledge about the One whom we love to emulate Mary's response to God's calling. We are never called to a purpose for which we have not the requisite character or for which God would not provide that which we might lack. When God calls, our best move is to respond faithfully, for it is our privilege to be a part of the unfolding scenes of the plan of salvation.

Like the instructions about the character of John the Baptist, we must give a new direction to our thoughts. We must impress them with the holiness of God's requirements and their need of His perfect righteousness. We must be holy. We must be a temple for the indwelling Spirit of God. To fulfill our mission, we must have a sound physical constitution and mental and spiritual strength.

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 95.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 33.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

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*By Evelia Cargill, a sophomore in business administration, West Indies College, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies.*

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# All or Nothing

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Luke 1:37**

Congratulations! You've been chosen for the special task. All your energy and focus are required for its accomplishment. Why you? God has favored you. So you don't feel qualified or worthy? The only qualification is dedication to God, complete devotion and openness to His plan.

We are all called by God to fulfill a unique task. So were Elizabeth and Mary. It was a man's world, more so then than now. The social status of men greatly overshadowed that of women. Even if a woman accomplished something significant, her husband or father was acknowledged instead of her. A child was the man's child as exemplified in the Bible genealogies. In focusing on maternal parents, Elizabeth and Mary, God chose a method that ran counter to the social/sexual thinking and practices of the day. A widely cherished desire of the women of the day was to be the mother of the Messiah. Barren Elizabeth and virgin Mary, however, were among the least likely to be chosen for such an awesome responsibility. God employed parthenogenesis in Mary's case; she conceived without any contribution from a man. How on earth could this be possible!

Society now is so bombarded with subtle and conflicting signals that God

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## Accepting the call from God does not make the way easy.

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often has to use drastic methods to get our attention. It could be reasoned, if Elizabeth lived in our time, that large doses of fertility pills made her pregnancy possible. Mary could have been impregnated by artificial insemination. But at that time, such possibilities could not even be conceived of. What manner of faith these women had!

Elizabeth and Mary risked much. Elizabeth's pregnancy could have been perceived as a freak event. Mary's becoming pregnant away from her home and fiancé for three months could be viewed as promiscuity; her declaration that this was the work of the Holy Spirit might have been considered evidence of demon possession.

What are you willing to risk? Social status? The possibility of acquiring wealth? Career development and self-actualization? Being called stupid even by relatives and close friends? Is there a cost too high to pay?

We are taught to make partial and conditional commitments: get as much as you can for as little as you can possibly give. Accepting the call from God does not make the way easy. Life once fertile with possibilities may become barren. Inexplicable events may increase. God requires complete commitment—all or nothing. He had made available all the resources we need to accomplish the task. Remember, "with God nothing shall be impossible."

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*By Paul Pryce, science teacher, West Indies College, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies.*

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# Blessed Gift

## HOW-TO

**Key Text:** Prov. 31:38

I'm writing this article during the Mother's Day season, and the word *mother* bombards me from every angle of the printed and electronic media. The large front-page newspaper picture of a mother carefully tending two children on Mother's Day is captioned "A Mother's Love." Stores, florists, gift shops, and long-distance telephone companies everywhere are doing brisk business as the world ensures that mothers are duly honored. And I keep getting in the way as my own family tries to take over "Mother's chores" and fete me today.

Much time, energy, and money are spent preparing for motherhood, especially the first time around. Baby's layette is carefully selected. The nursery is fabulously furnished and decorated, and the mother-to-be faithfully keeps her doctor's appointments. But is emphasis placed on the most important preparation for this high calling? How can today's mother be as well prepared as Hannah, Elizabeth, and Mary? Here are some suggestions:

**1. Realize that motherhood is a special gift**, a call to a God-given responsibility. " 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have

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## How can today's mother be as well prepared as Hannah, Elizabeth, and Mary?

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said' " (Luke 1:38, NIV).

**2. Accept this call with faith in God's promise** to teach us what to do and accomplish His will in us. Remember that "nothing is impossible with God." "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished" (verses 37, 45).

**3. Pray earnestly and work diligently in cooperation with Christ** to set the right example. Don't be swayed by a materialistic, "modern-mom" syndrome. Rather, focus on the sacred biblical principles, remembering that values are better caught than taught. Obey Proverbs 3:5. Of Elizabeth and her husband it could be said, "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (verse 6, KJV).

"What a world we would have if all mothers would consecrate themselves on the altar of God, and would consecrate their offspring to God, both before and after its birth."

## REACT

How important are the physical and emotional aspects of preparation for motherhood?

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\* *The Adventist Home*, p. 255.

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By *Leonarda McKenzie*, chairperson for the department of nursing, West Indies College, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies.

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# From Humble to Awesome

## OPINION

**Key Text: Hos. 11:4**

When Mary accepted the call to be the mother of the Son of God, she also accepted the possibility of ridicule and shame that could have been brought upon her by being pregnant and unmarried—yet engaged.

Each wife since Eve hoped to be the mother of the Messiah, yet who would have thought that the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, would have been born in Nazareth, an obscure Galilean town (“Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” [John 1:46]). According to the world’s standards, being born into a poor tradesman’s family did not give Jesus equal opportunity at birth. However, guided by the Holy Spirit, Mary fulfilled her unique role and brought up God’s Son, the Saviour of the world.

Acceptance of parenthood and its concomitant tasks is an awesome responsi-

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### **Being born into a poor tradesman’s family did not give Jesus equal opportunity.**

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bility. It is with a constant and earnest prayer life that one can respond with submissiveness to God’s given mission.

## **REACT**

1. In what respects could Mary be regarded as a surrogate mother?
2. Had Jesus somehow come as an adult, what would have been the implications?
3. If Mary had not responded in faith to God’s call, would she still have been the mother of Jesus? Explain your answer.
4. In what specific ways can the experience of Zacharias and Elizabeth help us in matters of faith and sexuality?
5. Discuss the implications of the following statement: Christians should consider every pregnancy a call, regardless of the circumstances.
6. How can you strike a balance between temporal and spiritual preparation for motherhood?

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*By Beverly Henry, public-relations director of West Indies College, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies.*

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# ONE NIGHT ONLY!



**“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11, KJV).**



# The Show

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Luke 2:11

The theater was a hillside covered in grass, scrub brush, boulders, and a few trees. The lights of town shone dimly in the distance. The curtain was the black night sky. The performers themselves provided the lights. There were no provisions for acoustics. No tickets or souvenirs were sold. There is no sheet music to let us know what the song actually sounded like. None of the usual trappings of a hit show were available that night, and yet the performance will be talked about throughout eternity.

The audience didn't contain any notables. No presidents or celebrities were on hand to applaud this most thrilling of shows. There were only a group of common shepherds and a herd of peacefully grazing sheep. There were no glittering gowns or jewels. The shepherds had been working hard all day in the hot sun. Their meager clothing was sweat-stained and dusty.

Others had received advance notice and could have benefited from this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see a truly star-studded show. Messengers had first visited highly placed people. They had met with indifference, scorn, and suspicion. These people were too wrapped up in their own concerns truly to appreciate

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## **No presidents or celebrities were on hand to applaud this most thrilling of shows.**

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what was about to happen, so their names had been stricken from the guest list. A group of shepherds, one of the lowest ranks in society, were the only ones invited to witness the performance. They were selected because they had demonstrated that they were willing to receive the blessing about to be given.

So, on that memorable evening, as they sat around their campfire, they were astonished when the black night parted enough to allow one shining individual to pass through. In a melodious voice he announced: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). Joy and wonder crept across their faces as the impact of the message hit home. Prophecy was being fulfilled! Before they could fully comprehend what was happening, the glow around the messenger expanded, and then the entire sky was ablaze with light. Thousands of shining beings appeared, and the music started. "Glory to God in the highest . . ." was the refrain. The hairs on their arms stood on end as they listened to the beautiful music. Enraptured, they stared heavenward as the show continued. The final notes rang across the hillside, and the shepherds turned toward Bethlehem, eager to pay their own homage to the Baby whose birth was heralded by the most thrilling show earth had ever seen.

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*By Janalee Shaw, an administrative secretary at the University of North Carolina at Durham.*

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# The Call of the Shepherds

## LOGOS

### Luke 2:8-20

#### The Announcement to the Shepherds (Luke 2:8-13)

*"To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (2:11, RSV).*

After centuries, during which her faithfulness to Yahweh's covenant wavered, Israel was under the hegemony of Rome's appointed ruler of Palestine, Herod the Great. Now the time had finally arrived for the eschatological fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (Gen. 12:1-3; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Luke 1:32, 33, 55, 69, 72, 73).

Surely a formal announcement of God's extraordinary visit (*epeskepsato* [verse 68]) would go out to leaders of the day—to Augustus Caesar in Rome, to Herod and the high priest in Palestine. Instead, the first public announcement of the good news of the Messiah's birth goes to unassuming shepherds. This not only echoes the pastoral setting of David's origins in Bethlehem (1 Sam. 16:17; 17:15) but also underscores God's predilection for the lowly of human society.<sup>1</sup>

"To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:11). This verse appears to be the birth announcement of the child who would be the heir of the throne of David in Isaiah 9:6, 7. Old Testament titles have been substituted with three new ones: Saviour, Messiah, and Lord.<sup>2</sup> These titles disclose the person and work of Jesus: He is Israel's royal Messiah, who has come to reestablish the throne of David and proffer salvation for humankind.

Another interesting aspect of this verse involves the Greek word *soter* (Saviour). *Soter* was a frequently used title in the Greco-Roman world; Julius Caesar was called "god manifest and common saviour of human life."<sup>3</sup> Having already referred to Augustus Caesar (2:1), Luke may well be contrasting Jesus with the emperor in this verse. The salvation and abundant life that first-century humans longed for was not to be found in the reign of Augustus, but in Jesus.

God's extraordinary irruption of human history as a "babe in a manger"—the *semeion* (sign) given to the shepherds—reveals the humility of divine condescension. Our human obsession with power, wealth, and status is manifestly exposed as contrary to God's ways. Who would have thought that the Creator of the heavens and the earth would arrive on the human scene in such a lowly state? The birth of God's Son without outward splendor certainly echoes Isaiah: "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (53:2).

#### The Song of the Heavenly Host (Luke 2:13, 14)

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" (Luke 2:14, NIV).*

The angels' annunciation of the birth of Jesus occasions a canticle of praise from the heavenly host. Their song suggests that God's achievement in the birth of Jesus further discloses His awesome majesty. The supreme achievement of this event is *eirene* (peace) to "those whom he favors" (verse 14). Much more than a cessation of strife is meant by the word *peace* here. "The word is used to indicate

the full sum of the blessings associated with the coming of the Messiah (Isa. 9:5f; Mic. 5:4). He brings a new situation of peace between God and men in which His blessings can be communicated to them; 'peace' is thus tantamount to 'salvation.'<sup>24</sup>

### **The Reaction to the Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:15-20)**

"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them" (Luke 2:20).

Luke records three reactions to Jesus' birth in this passage, those of: (a) shepherds, (b) hearers, (c) Mary. The angel's announcement does not generate any hint of skepticism, ambivalence, or tentativeness from the shepherds. Their spontaneous trust in the heavenly message and haste to see the Baby Jesus is an example of the spontaneous faith God delivers in all believers. This faith quickly leads to proclamation: "When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child" (verse 17). The hearers' reaction to the shepherds' report is one of astonishment—the common human reaction to God's mighty acts (*thaumazo* [1:21, 63; 2:18, 33; 4:22, etc.]). What God does is truly impressive.

Unlike others present who heard the shepherds' report, Mary "treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (verse 19). From Gabriel and Elizabeth, she learned that her Son would be the Davidic Messiah, Son of God, and Lord (1:32-35, 43). From the shepherds, she learned that He would be the Saviour (2:11).

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## **Mary was truly the first Christian believer.**

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Though Mary did not completely discern the divine revelations (her astonishment and lack of understanding [verses 33, 48, 50] preclude this), more than anyone else, she was able to begin to penetrate the significance of her Son's birth. It is noteworthy that Luke presents Mary's willingness to obey God as the pattern for Christian faith (1:38, 45). She is truly the first Christian believer.

The passage concludes with the shepherds' departure, glorifying and praising God, thus echoing the previous song of the angels (2:13, 14). It comprehensively gathers the appropriate responses to God's mighty eschatological act in the virgin birth of Jesus: proclamation, glorification, and praise.

### **REACT**

1. What is the significance of the fact that the first public announcement of Jesus' birth did not go to leaders of the day?

2. What can we learn from the shepherds' response to the angels' announcement?

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1. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday & Company, 1981), p. 396.

2. Raymond E. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday & Company, 1977), pp. 424, 425.

3. Fitzmyer, p. 204.

4. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), p. 112.

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*By Leo S. Ranzolin, Jr., graduate student, Duke University Divinity School and Boston University.*

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# Signature Song

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Matthew 22:36-40**

“The angels could not rejoice as Christ opened before them the plan of redemption, for they saw that man’s salvation must cost their loved Commander unutterable woe. In grief and wonder they listened to His words as He told them how He must descend from heaven’s purity and peace . . . and come in contact with the degradation of earth.”<sup>1</sup> “Christ assured the angels that by His death He would ransom many, and would destroy him who had the power of death. . . . Then joy, inexpressible joy, filled heaven. The glory and blessedness of a world redeemed outmeasured even the anguish and sacrifice of the Prince of life. Through the celestial courts echoed the first strains of that song which was to ring out above the hills of Bethlehem—‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.’”<sup>2</sup>

There in the two clauses of the song reside the two tablets of the Decalogue—love to God and love to humanity. Christ “came to explain the relation of the law to man, and to illustrate its precepts by His own life of obedience. . . . The law is an expression of the thought of God; when received in Christ, it becomes our

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## “The angels could not rejoice as Christ opened before them the plan of redemption.”

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thought. . . . When at Jesus’ birth the angels sang, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men’ they were declaring the principles of the law which He had come to magnify and make honorable.”<sup>3</sup>

“Oh that today the human family could recognize that song! The declaration then made, the note then struck, will swell to the close of time, and resound to the ends of the earth. When the Sun of Righteousness shall arise, with healing in His wings, that song will be re-echoed by the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, saying, ‘Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.’ Rev. 19:6.”<sup>4</sup>

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

## REACT

Compare the mission of the Christ Child with the purpose of the tablets of the law. How are they the same? How are they different?

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1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 64.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 308.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

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*By J. David Taylor, who studies gene regulation as a molecular biologist, employed in the pharmaceutical industry.*



# No One Willing

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Luke 2:8, 9**

A sudden light, a rush of panic, followed by a calm voice from within the light that speaks: "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people" (Luke 2:10, RSV). This was it! This was the good news that humanity had been waiting for since the Garden of Eden. That night the Son of David, the Messiah, had been born!

But there was no fanfare, no nationwide holiday to celebrate it. No king, no farmer knew of this event. The only people in the area who knew were some shepherds tending their sheep near Bethlehem.

Amid the groves of olive trees and the vineyards surrounding the city of David, shepherds grazed their flock in a small green field. This was probably the same place where David had tended his father's sheep. Of the several flocks that may pass that area, one flock would remain: the temple flock. Tended by temple-appointed shepherds, it would be solely used in sacrifices, so the shepherds taking care would give the flock special care.

Shepherds were often uneducated and poor, sometimes causing trouble in cities

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## **This was probably the same place where David had tended his father's sheep.**

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near their flocks. As such, they did not have a good reputation. They were often shunned and enjoyed few of life's amenities. Yet the angels chose to share the good news with this particular group. Was there no one else to whom the angels could announce this wonderful news? Given that these shepherds may have been the exception to the rule, who would possibly believe in them? Could there not have been some virtuous, respected member of society to whom the angels could have announced this wonderful news instead?

Alas, no one of any consequence wished to hear this news. The respected people of society were too busy with their personal lives to listen. Only the shepherds were ready and willing to hear this great news. God bypassed the king and scholars to announce the greatest news for humankind to the uneducated, shunned shepherds, the lowest among the population. God looked past the exterior, the bias carried by society, and looked into the heart, and found what He was looking for. Thus, with joy in their hearts, the angels could sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (verse 14, KJV), while the shepherds listened.

## **REACT**

What parallels can be drawn between David the shepherd, the shepherds near Bethlehem, and the Good Shepherd, Jesus?

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*By Fabio Alexander Yeon, a biomedical and electrical engineering double major at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.*

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# How to Be Joyful

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Luke 2:13-15**

George Frederick Handel's musical setting for Luke 2:8-14 in his oratorio *Messiah* expresses the joy felt by the angels at Heaven's gift to humankind. When we listen to this great masterwork, we catch a small glimpse of what the shepherds must have felt when they heard the angelic choir singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (verse 14, NIV). Despite Handel's excellent setting (no other work in the history of music has been as popular as *The Messiah*), there is no doubt that the music sung by the heavenly choir far exceeded Handel's or any other composer's imagination.

The shepherds could not sit still after hearing such wonderful news. The long-awaited Messiah had been born! They had to respond. Their response is recorded in verses 15-17.

When we compare the message to the shepherds with the message to Joseph in Matthew 1:20-23, we see that the angels told the shepherds that a Saviour was born. In Matthew we are told what we are to be saved from. They were not to be freed from Roman domination, and we are not to be saved from anything that is

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## The music sung by the heavenly choir far exceeded Handel's imagination.

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insignificant. We are to be saved from our sins, and when we are saved from our sins, we are also saved from the results of sin. Can you think of anything else from which you would rather be saved?

One summer as I worked as a lifeguard, a young boy who could not swim jumped off the diving board. He did not realize that the water he was jumping into was deep. After I rescued him, he told everyone what I had done for him, and he gladly obeyed when I asked him to stay out of the deep end of the pool.

We realize that Jesus came to rescue us from the deep waters of sin. Should we not respond with joyful thankfulness and obedience, wanting to tell others what He has done for us by jumping into this world of sin and pulling us out?

## REACT

1. Listen to the section of Handel's *Messiah* described above. While you are listening, imagine you are one of the shepherds on that wonderful night when the angels sang of our Saviour's birth. Notice how Handel is able to set up the expectation in the narrative and the recitative of the opening angel's message and finally with the chorus representing the heavenly choir.

2. Decide what your response will be after hearing such good news.

3. How can you respond in a way that will best help to maintain your level of joy?

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*By Boyd E. Gibson, doctoral student in musicology, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.*

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# God's Way

## OPINION

Key Text: Isa. 55:8

One summer I biked to work. The research building wasn't too far from where I lived, but I left myself very little time to get from the apartment to Research Drive and was always in a rush. One day a car stopped abruptly in front of me. I braked immediately and waited behind its driver as he proceeded slowly. I would be late to work, and my boss would be angry. How was I going to explain this? I had a schedule, but this nobody was preventing me from carrying it through. Finally, I made my turn and continued on my way to work. Then I realized that that person had every right to be on the road. My thoughts had been only on myself.

That morning I understood the text in Isaiah 55:8, 9: " 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts'" (NIV). Our narrow-minded human minds focus on ourselves. It's difficult to see another's needs, not to mention God's will. But through God's eyes we can see puzzle pieces of our lives fitting together. God is in control, and in faith we follow.

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## I would be late to work, and my boss would be angry.

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The following verse hangs on my wall: "Each day at dawning, / I lift my heart high / And raise up my eyes / To the infinite sky. / And then I give thanks / as my heart kneels to pray, / 'God, keep me and guide me, / go with me today'" (Helen Steiner Rice).

I pray for God's leading with confidence in His promises. "As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth" (Hos. 6:3, NIV). He has left us with a precious promise: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). His still, small voice speaks, and in the holiness of quietude we hear Him: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10).

For the shepherds, the night of Jesus' birth could have passed as another ordinary night. But an angel appeared to them. Imagine the reaction when "a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel" (Luke 2:13). Regardless, God chose them to hear the good news first, and they were prepared, for they hurried to see the Baby Jesus. Afterward, in their amazement, they spread the good news. Excitement, holiness, and splendor are waiting to be poured on us. Let's be willing to receive and hear God in repose and tranquility.

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*By Jenny Kim, religion-and-biology (pre-med) major, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.*

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# JUST ANOTHER BABY?



**“The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, NIV).**



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# The Birth and Childhood of Jesus

## INTRODUCTION

**Key Text: Luke 2:52**

What was so special about Jesus' birth? Was He just a boy who was born two thousand years ago? I would say yes—and no. He was a real and human boy—the birth confirms that.

Could He become hungry? Did He need rest? Was He always happy—or was He also sad sometimes? Did He have to learn? Or did He know everything from the beginning? Did He have feelings like a normal boy? The Bible tells us that He needed food and rest; He had feelings like any human being. It also says that He grew mentally and physically.

The Bible tells us that His mother was a virgin. This is very special. He was the only child in the world born by a virgin! He is not a result of ordinary human love, and there has never been a person like Him! Who else has been so important that we count the years before and after that person? Why is this year called A.D. 1995? Do you think that in the future a person could come who would be so special that we would base our time measurements on him or her?

How is Jesus unique? Why is He unique? Both the place and the time of His birth

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## **He was the only child in the world born by a virgin!**

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were prophesied many years before—and even His attitude and characteristics. Is there any other person who has been described in advance in such detail? Why shouldn't we relate to Him?

A birth confirms a real life. Since this is true for Jesus, we can relate to Him as a real person. But don't miss the difference between an ordinary person and a real person. From the very beginning, some people looked upon Him as a real, ordinary person, but for others He was unique and special. What does He mean to you?

Isn't it a privilege to be able to relate to a real person who is given all the power on earth and in heaven?

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*By Monette Ailin Indahl, a senior at Tyrifford Junior College, Royse, Norway.*

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# God Enters History

## LOGOS

**John 1:14-18; Luke 2:1-7, 22-38**

“In the beginning . . . the Word was God.” “The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us” (John 1:1, 14, NIV). Jesus was God and became human. This is the most obvious statement for the Christian, yet the most disgusting and blasphemous statement in the philosophical world of John’s time.

In the introduction of his Gospel, John talks about the mystery of the Incarnation (see Paul’s statement in 1 Tim. 3:16). Jesus was truly God, and He became a human being. In Greek thought, which was predominant at that time, God and physical things were worlds apart. To mention God as being physical was blasphemy. God was ideas. God was spirit. He was definitely not physical.

On top of this, John says that God became “flesh” (*sarx*), a Greek word that in the Bible often denotes the human race in its degenerate condition. “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41, RSV). God the Father did what was unthinkable to human wisdom: He sent “his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3). No wonder John received opposition to this. In one of his letters, he says: “Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist” (1 John 4:2, 3).

Many children (and adult children) feel a great loss because they do not know their biological parents. And even more people feel a loss because they do not know their heavenly origin. In their search for God, they look for ancestry to their spiritual life. This was one purpose for Jesus’ coming to us: “No one has ever seen God” (John 1:18). Yet Jesus “has made him known” (verse 18). Through Jesus we can know our spiritual Father. Jesus also said: “He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (14:9).

Jesus not only came to a sinful world, but He chose to be born under the most adverse circumstances: in a nation occupied by foreign troops (Luke 3:1); to a mother who became pregnant before her wedding (Matt. 1:18), which was even less acceptable at that time than today; in a manger (Luke 2:7); to poor parents. Mary and Joseph offered only a couple of birds (verses 22-24) as a sacrifice for Jesus’ birth. This shows that they must have been very poor. Normally, they should have sacrificed a lamb about six weeks after the birth, but “if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons” (Lev. 12:8).

Of course, the difference between heaven and earth is greater than between a rich and a poor human. The greatest humiliation for Jesus was to become human, but He didn’t take the easy way by being born under more favorable circumstances. Jesus deserves our thanks for being willing to identify with those under not-so-ideal conditions.

“Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” Pilate asked (Matt. 27:22). He crucified Him. What shall *we* do with Jesus? What would you have done with a newborn Messiah? When Jesus was born, people reacted in many different ways. King Herod reacted in one way. He felt threatened, so he killed all newborn babies in Bethlehem. Most people couldn’t care less about what happened to the little child. Why is it always the older generation that responds to Jesus?

When Mary and Joseph came to the temple to sacrifice, they met two of the very few people who understood the significance of what had happened a few weeks earlier. Simeon, a “righteous and devout” man (Luke 2:25), was led to the temple that day. The Holy Spirit had told him that he would not die before he had seen the long-awaited Messiah. Now the Lord revealed to him that the Child he held in his hands was the Saviour, and he blessed Jesus and Mary and Joseph. The coming of the Messiah was the most important event in his life. Why were the young people so indifferent?

The prophetess Anna also, who “was of a great age,” 84 years old (verse 36), met Jesus, Mary, and Joseph that day. And she continued to talk about Jesus to all

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## **Why is it always the older generation that responds to Jesus?**

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who wanted to listen. Why are there not mentioned any *young* men or women who received Jesus in the temple when He came? Didn't anybody care?

### **REACT**

1. How can we present the birth of Jesus in a way that appeals not only to the old generation, but to young, unchurched, modern people?
2. How do you think Jesus must have felt? Being the eternal, unlimited God, He became a human being, restricted by time, space, strength, etc.
3. When Jesus comes to enter your life and mine, how do we receive Him?

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*By Bjorn Eivind Holm, pastor and Bible teacher, Tyrifjord Junior College, Royse, Norway.*

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# We Have Come to Worship Him

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Matt. 2:2**

The story about the wise men who traveled such a long way to see such a little boy has always fascinated me. The Holy Bible itself doesn't tell us very much about them, except that they were wise and that they believed the star was a sign of the birth of a new king. Ellen G. White, however, gives us special information about them, and she mentions many events and happenings from their journey.

The wise men left their country and arrived in Jerusalem after a long journey. Naturally, they expected the birth of the new King to be "the joyful burden of every tongue."<sup>1</sup> However, they were disappointed by how careless people were. "Their questions called forth no expressions of joy, but rather of surprise and fear, not unmingled with contempt."<sup>2</sup> Even among the priests, there seemed to be no expectation or knowledge about this event.

Their errand excited the people, and many gathered around the palace of King Herod. The people hated Herod, and he suspected that the priests had planned this. When he asked them where this new King was going to be born, according to the Scriptures, they answered very indifferently. He thought that they were trying to

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## The rejection of Christ by the priests and rabbis started here.

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conceal their knowledge about the birthplace of the new King. Finally, when the priests no longer dared to disregard his authority, they identified the appropriate prophecy: Bethlehem in the land of Judah.

In fact, the rejection of Christ by the priests and rabbis started here. Their pride was stung when pagans came and asked where the newborn Messiah was. "It could not be, they said, that God had passed them by, to communicate with ignorant shepherds or uncircumcised Gentiles."<sup>3</sup> To protect their pride, they decided not even to go to see whether there really should be a king. In contrast to the Pharisees, the wise men were humble and open-minded. They did not prejudge the birthplace, family, appearance, or rank of the new King, but they sought Him with their hearts.

I hope that the following does not fit us: "They [the priests and rulers] had not studied the Scriptures with a desire to conform to the will of God. They had searched for prophecies which could be interpreted to exalt themselves."<sup>4</sup> We should pray that God will give us some of the wisdom that the wise men possessed.

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 60.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 63.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 65.



## A Real Birth

### EVIDENCE

#### Key Text: Luke 3

Did Jesus actually exist, or is He only a fictitious person? Historical sources confirm that Jesus really is a historical man. The Roman historian Tacitus, almost contemporary to Jesus, refers to Jesus and the Christians. In order to bring an end to the talk that Nero himself had set fire to Rome, he “put the blame on others and in the most select ways punished some people who were detested for their disgracefulness and were commonly called Christians. Their name was from Christ who during the reign of Tiberius was executed by the attorney Pontius Pilate.”<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the biblical information, we obviously have no historical information about the birth of Jesus. When was Jesus born? Luke 3:1 says that John was commissioned to introduce Jesus in the fifteenth year of Tiberius. Historical sources say this was in A.D. 27 or 28. According to the Bible, Jesus was then about 30 years old, which means He was born about 4 B.C. Matthew 2 says that Herod was king when Jesus was born and that Joseph and Mary fled with Jesus to Egypt in order to escape him. Herod died in 4 B.C., which fits well with the time we calculated from Luke.

“Jesus was born, lived and died in that Palestine which in his time was a part of

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### Did Jesus actually exist, or is He only a fictitious person?

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the Roman world empire. The Romans had conquered the Jewish state in 63 B.C., with Caesar’s future opponent Pompeius as commander, and was later under uninterrupted Roman rule until the fall of the empire.”<sup>2</sup> “The Jews, however, did not suffer under the Roman dominion, as they had often done under other conquerors earlier, and as they would experience later. The Romans did not practice war of extermination. They did not move people by force. They almost never interfered with Jewish worship. And the local self-government continued. Within limits, the Jews conducted their own judicial system both in Palestine and other parts of the empire, and they were exempt from military service.”<sup>3</sup> However, the Jews had to pay tax to the Roman government, and the Romans punished rebellion severely.

Although the Jews did not suffer too much under the Roman yoke, there was an increasing expectation that the Messiah would come and free them. The Romans were well aware of this and were therefore ready to crush any attempt at unrest. This was probably the reason that Herod reacted as he did over the rumors that the Messiah was born in Bethlehem.

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1. Arne Ording and Thorleif Dahl, editors, *Aschehougs Verdenshistorie* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co., 1958), vol. 1, p. 631.

2. Svend Holm-Nielsen, Bent Noack, and Sven Tito Achen, editors, *Bibelen i kulturhistorisk lys* (Denmark: Politikens Forlag, 1970), vol. 7, p. 31.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

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By Kai Sunde, senior at Tyrifjord Junior College, Royse, Norway.

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## Why Is More Important Than *How*

### HOW-TO

**Key Text: John 3:16**

Because it is difficult to understand how God could take on the form of a tiny fetus in the womb of Mary, many people today deny that this ever happened. In their denial based upon *how* it happened, they overlook an even more important issue—*why* it happened. Why did Jesus take our human nature upon Himself? Why did He come to live on earth among us? The answer is both simple and complex. He came to reveal God's character and to restore the broken relationship between humanity and God.

In his book *When Jesus Prayed*, Wayne Judd tries to imagine how God must have felt after Jesus was born. He writes:

"You cannot hear me now, Jesus, but you are a beautiful baby and the whole universe sings with hope as you begin the rescue of man. Somehow it is hard to think of you now as a tiny infant sleeping quietly in the manger. It is lonely here without you, Son. How shall I watch you endure the affliction of man? How can I bear to see my beloved Son suffer? Your hands are so tiny and soft. Those hands that will grow strong and callused over the carpenter's bench, hands that will reach

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### Why did Jesus take our human nature upon Himself?

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out in matchless love to heal the sick, give hope to the lost, to make blind eyes see, to raise from the dead those claimed by the enemy. It pains, Son, to see those chubby little baby hands and to know that one day, cruel man will drive spikes through them. But sleep on, dear Son. Mary and Joseph will be good parents and angels will watch over you."

Jesus came to do for us what we are unable to do for ourselves and to restore for us the true picture of a heavenly Father who "so loved the world (you and me) that . . ."

### REACT

1. What kind of picture of God's character do you think the Jews had at the time when Jesus was born?
2. What/who had given them that picture?
3. After studying this lesson, how do I see God's character?
4. Is my understanding of God's character different from that of the Jews' some 2,000 years ago, and if so, how?
5. What in this week's lesson touched me the most and helped me understand God's character better?

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\* Wayne Judd, *When Jesus Prayed* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Assn., 1979).

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By Faye Kendel, a senior at Tyrifford Junior College in Norway.

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# He Knows All

## OPINION

**Key Text: Hebrews 4:14-16**

What does it mean to you that Jesus was born, that He became a human being? I believe we sometimes make Jesus less real than He was. Icons made by Christian artists through the centuries have often portrayed Jesus as a distant, holy guru, looking very different from the rest of humanity. Christian movies portraying the life of Jesus have shown a man with no life or vigor, moving slowly around, with dull eyes, very few smiles or laughter, just being very holy.

Of course, Jesus was holy. But Jesus was also alive. He was real. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4, RSV). Jesus was full of life—not cheap fun and entertainment, but real life: happiness, smiles, goodness.

Jesus also knew what problems were. Sometimes we picture Jesus as if nothing could move Him—nothing make an impact on Him. I do believe that Jesus always was in control when there was turmoil around Him. But Jesus was human. He was upset at hypocrisy, He was sad at the loss of a friend, He was afraid in the face of death. Jesus was one of us. "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isa. 53:4).

Jesus also knows what it is like to be tempted and haunted by the devil. He is

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## Icons through the centuries have often portrayed Jesus as a distant, holy guru.

---

"one who in every respect has been tempted as we are" (Heb. 4:15). Sometimes we look at Jesus as if He were tested only those three times in the wilderness. Not so: Satan left Jesus, but only until the time was right for him again (Luke 4:13). Do you think Jesus wasn't tempted again until Gethsemane? Oh no! He had to be constantly on guard.

Do you think it was always easy for Jesus to resist temptation? Sometimes we portray Jesus as if right were the only thing He could do. But listen to what He says: "I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 5:30). "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). Jesus was human. He had to deny His own will and follow the (sometimes) unpleasant will of God.

Do you feel that Jesus knows what you are going through? He does! He knows what it is like to be you and me. He knows the battles you have to fight every day. And He wants to help you. Does it mean something to you that Jesus was born? Tell me what it does *not* mean!

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*By Bjorn Eivind Holm, pastor and Bible teacher, Tyrifjord Junior College, Roysse, Norway.*

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## Next Quarter's Lessons

### How to Study the Bible

If you have not yet received a copy of *CQ* for first quarter 1996, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

#### **Lesson 1: The Centrality of the Bible**

*Scripture:* 2 Tim. 3:14-17; John 8:31, 32; Prov. 2:1-15

*Theme:* "The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history" ("Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1994*, p. 5).

#### **Lesson 2: The Purpose of Bible Study**

*Scripture:* Ps. 119:1-18; Matt. 4:1-11; 7:24-27; 28:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 8

*Theme:* Among other things, the Bible challenges us to discover three great truths: (1) What God is like; (2) how God acted in the history of the world; and (3) how we can grow in grace in preparation for His soon-coming kingdom.

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Please take the time to answer the following questions for us. In this way we hope to get better acquainted with the interests of CQ's readers. Thank you.

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**If you have any children living at home, from which of the following age groups are they?**

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 Ages 2-4    Ages 5-7    Ages 8-10    Ages 11-12  
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**What three magazines do you read most regularly:**

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**To help us understand our readers' lifestyles, please indicate the interests and activities in which you enjoy participating on a *regular or frequent* basis:**

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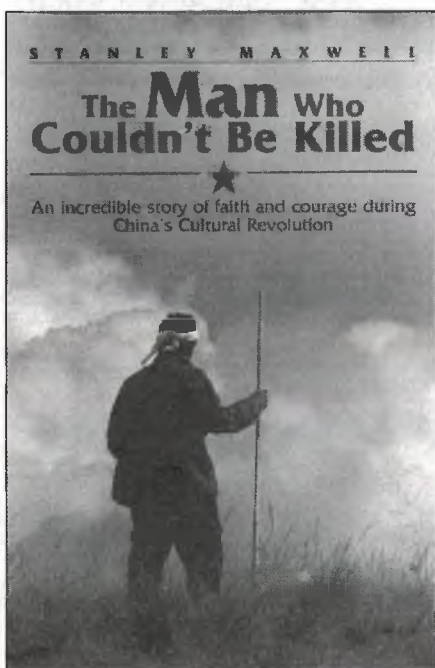
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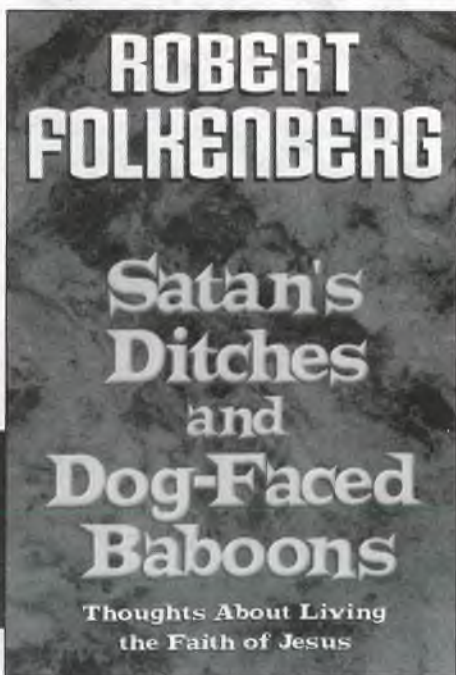
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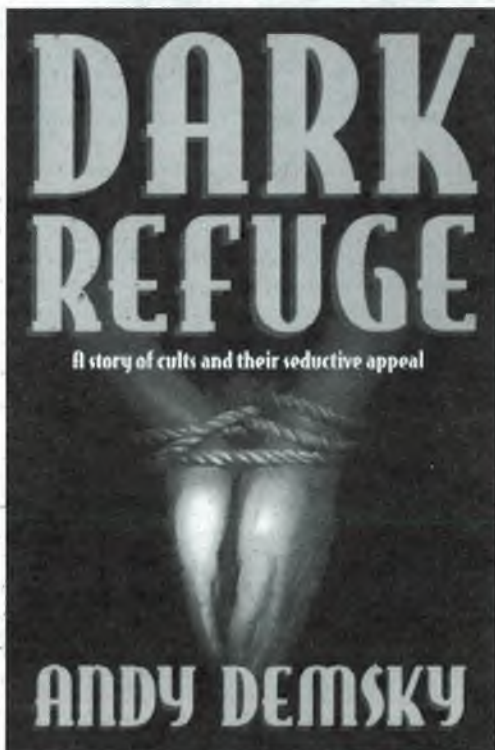
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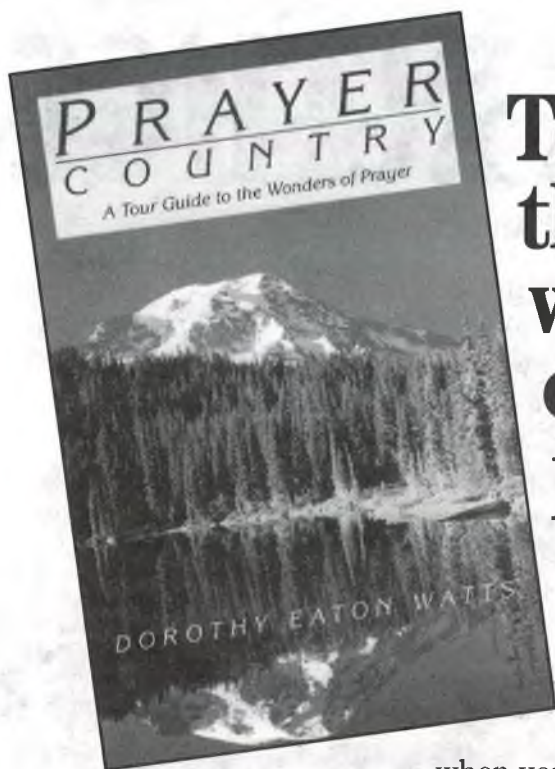
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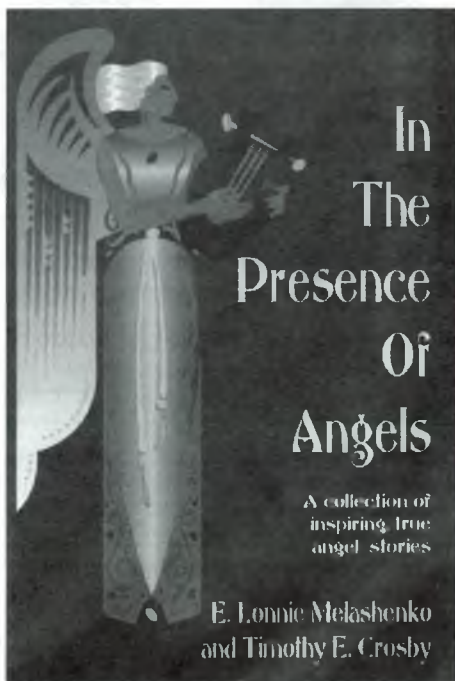
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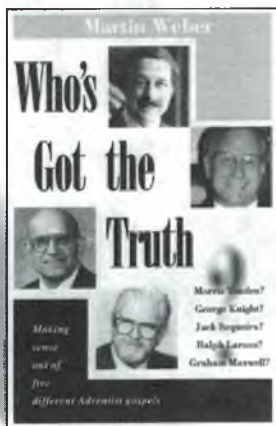
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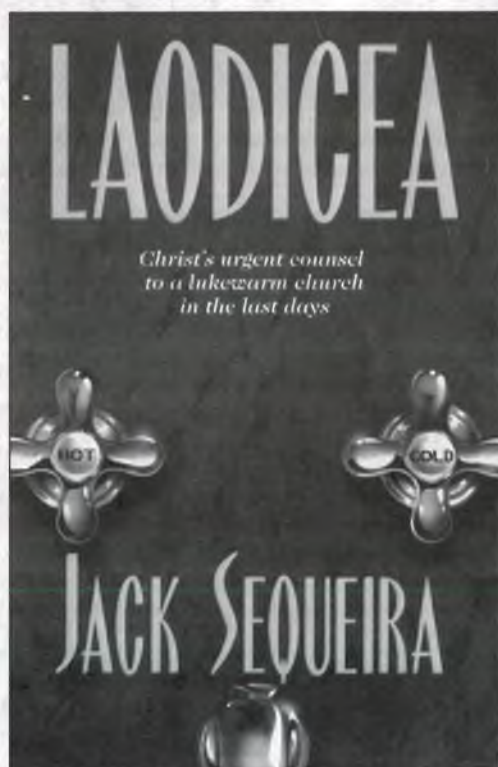
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Unions	Churches	Membership	Population
Atlantic	398	75,788	32,098,135
Canada	332	43,377	28,106,000
Columbia	574	95,352	45,730,425
Lake	469	67,521	31,882,120
Mid-America	481	52,715	22,141,790
North Pacific	384	75,452	10,670,430
Pacific	613	188,026	39,968,910
Southern	875	156,478	46,453,850
Southwestern	505	58,416	29,479,330
Totals June 30, 1994	4,631	813,125	286,530,990

