

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide
Oct | Nov | Dec 2022

*On Death,
Dying, and the*

FUTURE HOPE



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On Death and Dying: Our Future Hope



God created human beings to enjoy eternity in a loving relationship with Him and His creation. But this relationship was distorted by the mysterious appearance of sin within the heavenly courts (*Isa. 14:12–15, Ezek. 28:12–19, Rev. 12:7–12*) and the subsequent fall of Adam and Eve (*Gen. 3:1–19, Rom. 5:12*). Tragically, death engulfed not only the human race but also all life, as well. Expressions of death can be seen today in the leaves that fall from the trees, the flowers that fade in our vases, our innocent pets who die in agony, and our beloved ones who are taken from us so brutally. Our world is full of suffering and unwiped tears.

Longing for a better world, people have painted for themselves many “paradises” in which they would like to live. For example, in 1933 English novelist James Hilton released his book *Lost Horizon*, which a few years later was turned into a film under the same title. The film captures the plight of an airplane that runs out of fuel, eventually crashing into the snow-covered Himalayan Mountains. The pilot dies in the crash, but the few who survive are pulled from

the wreckage and escorted by a group of Tibetans to the paradisiac valley of Shangri-La. Isolated from the outside world, the inhabitants grow in love and wisdom, living an almost immortal life of enduring harmony and joy.

Of course, it's only fiction.

As mortal human beings, we need assurance in the present and hope for the future. As well stated by the Swiss theologian Emil Brunner, "What oxygen is for the lungs, such is hope for the meaning of human life. Take oxygen away and death occurs through suffocation, take hope away and humanity is constricted through lack of breath; despair supervenes, spelling the paralysis of intellectual and spiritual powers by a feeling of the senselessness and purposelessness of existence. As the fate of the human organism is dependent on the supply of oxygen, so the fate of humanity is dependent on its supply of hope."—*Eternal Hope* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1954), p. 7. Indeed, the biblical hope sustains us during the existential crises we face in our journey toward eternity.

In reality, we should not fear death because Christ died for us and overcame the power of death. Actually, we are assured that He holds " 'the keys to death and to the place of the dead.' " (Rev. 1:18, NCV).

In contrast to the fictional Shangri-La of *Lost Horizon*, our hope of eternal life does "not follow cunningly devised fables" (2 *Pet.* 1:16, *NKJV*). It is based on God's trustworthy promise of a perfect world with no more tears, pain, or death (*Rev.* 21:1–5). This precious promise inspired the apostolic church and was held, and cherished, by many Christians throughout the centuries. Without ever losing its power, this same promise gives meaning and purpose to our present lives. It allows us to look with confidence into the future. It assures us that all our beloved ones who died in Christ will finally be raised from the dead to inherit eternal life.

The present Bible study guide deals with the subject of the great controversy between good and evil from the perspective of two major themes. One is the origin and ongoing existence of sin and death.

The other theme is God's enduring work to solve these problems and bring the world back to its original perfect condition. Special emphasis is given also to the mortal nature of human beings and how the resurrection is what leads to immortality. In reality, we should not fear death because Christ died for us and overcame the power of death. Actually, we are assured that He holds " 'the keys to death and to the place of the dead' " (Rev. 1:18, NCV).

This quarter we will explore the painful subject of death but through the lens of the hope offered us through Jesus.

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LESSON 1

*September 24–30

Rebellion *in* a Perfect Universe



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 John 4:8, 16; 1 John 4:7–16; Ezek. 28:12–19; Isa. 14:12–15; Revelation 12.*

Memory Text: “ ‘How you have fallen from heaven, you star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who defeated the nations!’ ” (*Isa. 14:12, NASB*).

Many thinkers have tried to explain the origin of evil. Some suggest that evil always has existed because, in their view, good can be appreciated only in contrast to evil. Others believe that the world was created perfect but, somehow, evil emerged. For example, in Greek mythology, evil started when the curious Pandora opened a sealed box out of which flew all the evils of the world (this myth, however, does not explain the origin of the evils supposedly hidden in that box).

By contrast, the Bible teaches that our loving God is all-powerful (*1 Chron. 29:10, 11*) and perfect (*Matt. 5:48*). All that He does must likewise be perfect (*Deut. 32:4*), which includes how He created our world. How, then, could evil and sin appear in a perfect world?

According to Genesis 3, the fall of Adam and Eve brought sin, evil, and death here.

But that answer raises another issue. Even before the Fall, evil already had existed, manifested by the “serpent,” who deceived Eve (*Gen. 3:1–5*). Hence, we need to go back, even before the Fall, in order to find the source and origins of the evil that so dominates our present existence and that at times can make it pretty miserable.

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

SUNDAY

September 25

Creation, an Expression of Love

Nature in its present condition carries an ambiguous message that mingles both good and evil. Rosebushes can produce lovely and fragrant roses but also harmful and painful thorns. A toucan can impress us with its beauty and then dismay us by assaulting the nests of other birds and eating their frail chicks. Even human beings, who are capable of kindness one moment, can be vicious, hateful, and even violent in the next. No wonder that in the parable of the wheat and the tares, the servants asked the field owner, “ ‘ “Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?” ’ ” (*Matt. 13:27, NKJV*). And the owner replied, “ ‘ “An enemy has done this” ’ ” (*Matt. 13:28, NKJV*). Likewise, God created the universe perfect, but an enemy defiled it with the mysterious seeds of sin.

Read 1 John 4:8, 16. What can the certainty that “God is love” tell us about the nature of His creative activities?

The fact that “God is love” (*1 John 4:8, 16, NKJV*) conveys at least three basic implications. First, love by its very nature cannot exist closed in itself but must be expressed. (What kind of love is not expressed?) God’s love is shared *internally* among the Three Persons of the Godhead, and *externally* in His relationship with all His creatures. Second, all that God does is an expression of His

unconditional and unchangeable love. This includes His creative works, His redemptive actions, and even the manifestations of His punitive judgments. Actually, “God’s love has been expressed in His justice no less than in His mercy. Justice is the foundation of His throne, and the fruit of His love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 762. And third, since God is love and all that He does expresses His love, He cannot be the originator of sin, which is in direct opposition to His own character.

But did God really need to create the universe? From the perspective of His sovereignty, one could say “No,” because it was a decision of His free will. But from the perspective of His loving nature, He wanted a universe as a means of expressing His love. And how amazing that He created some forms of life, such as humans, not only to be capable of responding to His love but also of sharing and expressing love, not just to Him but to others, as well. (See also Mark 12:30, 31.)

Look around at the created world. In what ways can you see in it reflections of God’s love, despite the ravages of sin? How can we learn to draw lessons of hope from the expression of God’s love revealed in creation?

MONDAY *September 26*

Free Will, the Basis for Love

Read 1 John 4:7–16. What does this passage tell us about free will as a condition to cultivating love?

Artificial flowers can be gorgeous, but they do not grow and bloom as do real ones. Robots are preprogrammed to talk and to perform many tasks, but they have neither life nor emotions. In reality, life and free will are indispensable conditions for someone to receive, cultivate, and share love. So, our loving God created angels (including Lucifer) and human beings with freedom to make their own choices, including the possibility of following a wrong path. In other words, God created the whole universe as a perfect and harmonious environment for His creatures to grow in love and in wisdom.

In 1 John 4:7–16, the apostle John underscores that “God is love,” and that He manifested His love to us by sending His own Son to die for our sins. As a result, we should express our gratitude for His infinite love by loving one another. Such love, divinely originated, would be the most convincing evidence that God abides in us and that we abide in Him. This appeal to reflect God’s love to one another makes sense only if addressed to creatures who can choose to cultivate and express that love or, in contrast, to live a self-centered life. However, freedom of choice can easily be misused, a sad fact demonstrated in the tragic rebellion of Lucifer in heaven.

Even recognizing the importance of free will, some people still wonder, *If God knew that Lucifer would rebel, why did God create him?* Does the creation of Lucifer not make God ultimately responsible for the origin of sin?

That can be a very difficult question to speculate about, because it depends upon many factors, including what exactly is meant by the word “responsible.” The origin and nature of sin are mysteries that no one can fully explain.

Even so, God did not *ordain* sin to exist; He only *allowed* its existence, and then, at the cross, He took upon Himself the ultimate punishment for that sin, thus enabling Him, ultimately, to eradicate it. In all our painful musings about evil, we must never forget that God Himself paid the highest price for the existence of sin and of evil (see *Matt. 5:43–48 and Rom. 5:6–11*), and that He has suffered from them more than any of us ever will.

Free will, a gift from God, is sacred, but comes heavy laden with powerful consequences, not only for yourself but also for others, as well. What important decisions are you, using this gift, about to make, and what will be the consequences of whatever choices you make?

TUESDAY *September 27*

Mysterious Ingratitude

Read Ezekiel 28:12–19. What can we learn from this passage about the mysterious origin of sin?

Much of the book of Ezekiel was written in end-time, symbolic language. In many instances, specific entities (such as persons, animals, and objects) and local events are used to represent and describe broader cosmic and/or historical realities. In Ezekiel 28:1–10, the Lord spoke of the king of Tyre (Tyre itself was a prosperous ancient Phoenician port city) as a rich and proud ruler who was only a “man” but who claimed to be a god and who even sat (he claimed) in the throne of the gods.

Then, in Ezekiel 28:12–19, this historical reality becomes an analogy to describe the original fall of Lucifer in the heavenly courts. So, the king of Tyre, who was a human being living “ ‘ “in the midst of the seas” ’ ” (Ezek. 28:2, 8, NKJV), now represents “ ‘ “the anointed cherub who covers,” ’ ” (Ezek. 28:14, NKJV) living “ ‘ “in Eden, the garden of God,” ’ ” (Ezek. 28:13, NKJV) and “ ‘ “upon the holy mountain of God” ’ ” (Ezek. 28:14).

A crucial statement in the whole account is found in Ezekiel 28:15, which says, “ ‘ “You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you” ’ ” (NKJV). Hence, Lucifer’s perfection included the potential for evil, the potential to do

wrong, and that was because, as a moral being, Lucifer possessed free will, part of what it means to be a perfect being.

In reality, Lucifer was created perfect—which included his ability to choose freely. However, abusing that perfection by the misuse of his free will, he became corrupted by considering himself more important than he actually was.

No longer satisfied with how God had created and honored him, Lucifer lost his thankfulness to God and wished to receive more recognition than he actually deserved. How this could happen with a perfect angelic being living in a perfect universe is, as already mentioned, a mystery.

“Sin is a mysterious, unexplainable thing. There was no reason for its existence; to seek to explain it is to seek to give a reason for it, and that would be to justify it. Sin appeared in a perfect universe, a thing that was shown to be inexcusable.”—Ellen G. White, *The Truth About Angels*, p. 30.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul says that “in everything” (NKJV) we should give thanks. How can these words help us to overcome any feelings of ingratitude and self-pity, especially in trying times?

WEDNESDAY *September 28*

The Price of Pride

Within Scripture, one can see two predominant themes or motifs that are competing with each other. One is the theme of Salem, Mount Zion, Jerusalem, and the New Jerusalem, which represents God's kingdom. The other is the theme of Babel and Babylon, which stands for Satan's counterfeit domain. Several times God called His people out of pagan Babylon to serve Him in the Promised Land.

For example, Abram (later Abraham) was asked to move from Ur of the Chaldees to the land of Canaan (*Gen. 11:31–12:9*). At the end of their long exile, the Jews left Babylon and returned to Jerusalem (*Ezra 2*). And in the book of Revelation, God's people are called out of end-time Babylon (*Rev. 18:4*) to abide with Him eventually on Mount Zion and the New Jerusalem (*Rev. 14:1; Rev. 21:1–3, 10*).

Read Isaiah 14:12–15. What far-reaching consequences did Lucifer's pride while in heaven bring to the universe and to this world?

In the Bible, the city of Babylon stands for a power in direct opposition to God and His kingdom; and the king of Babylon (with special allusion to Nebuchadnezzar) becomes a symbol of pride and arrogance. God had revealed to King Nebuchadnezzar that Babylon was only the gold head of the great image of successive empires (*Dan. 2:37, 38*). Challenging God's revelation, the king made an

image entirely of gold—a symbol that his kingdom would last forever—and even required everyone to worship it (*Daniel* 3). As in the case of the king of Tyre (*Ezek.* 28:12–19), the king of Babylon also became a symbol of Lucifer.

Isaiah 14:3–11 describes the fall of the haughty and oppressive king of Babylon. Then, Isaiah 14:12–15 moves from the historical realm to the heavenly courts and highlights that a similar proud and arrogant spirit generated the original fall of Lucifer. The text explains that Lucifer planned to exalt his throne above all heavenly hosts and make himself “ ‘ “like the Most High” ’ ” (*Isa.* 14:14). This was the beginning of a new and hostile situation in which God’s altruistic love and cooperation would be challenged by Lucifer’s selfishness and competition. The enemy was not afraid of accusing God of what he himself was and of spreading his lies to other angels. Here are the mysterious origins of evil in the universe.

Why is it so easy to become proud and boastful of either our positions or achievements, or both? How does keeping the cross before us prevent us from falling into such a trap?

THURSDAY *September 29*

The Spread of Unbelief

Read Revelation 12. What does this chapter teach about the spread of the rebellion in heaven to the earth?

The fall of Lucifer was not a simple clash of conflicting ideas. Revelation 12 tells us that a major war broke out in heaven between Lucifer and his angels on one side and Christ and His angels on the other. In this passage, Lucifer is called “the great dragon,” the “serpent of old,” “the Devil and Satan,” and “the accuser of our brethren” (*Rev. 12:9, 10, NKJV*). Christ is referred to as “Michael” (*Rev. 12:7*), which means “who is like God.”

Based on the allusion to “Michael the archangel” (*Jude 9*), some interpreters believe that He is only an angelic being. But in the book of Daniel, each major vision culminates with Christ and His everlasting kingdom—as the stone cut out without hands (*Dan. 2:34, 45*), as the Son of man (*Dan. 7:13*), as the Prince of the host and the Prince of princes (*Dan. 8:11, 25*), and as Michael the great prince (*Dan. 12:1*). So, as the Angel of the Lord is the Lord Himself (*Exod. 3:1–6, Acts 7:30–33, etc.*), Michael must be the same Divine Person (i.e., Christ Himself).

Revelation 12 provided a general overview of this ongoing controversy,

which (1) began in heaven with the rebellion of Lucifer and one-third of the heavenly angels, (2) culminated with Christ’s decisive victory

at the cross, and (3) still continues against God's end-time remnant people.

Reflecting on the beginning of this controversy, Ellen G. White explains that "God in His great mercy bore long with Lucifer. He was not immediately degraded from his exalted station when he first indulged the spirit of discontent, nor even when he began to present his false claims before the loyal angels. Long was he retained in heaven. Again and again he was offered pardon on condition of repentance and submission."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 495, 496.

We do not know how long that war lasted in the heavenly realms. Regardless of its intensity and time span, the most important aspect of the whole struggle was that Satan and his angels "were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven" (*Rev. 12:8, NRSV; see also Luke 10:18*). The problem, of course, was that they came here, to the earth.

What are ways in which we can see the reality of this battle being played out on the earth? What is our only hope to overcome our enemy in this battle?

FRIDAY *September 30*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Why Was Sin Permitted?” pp. 33–43, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Origin of Evil,” pp. 492–504, in *The Great Controversy*.

“There was no possible hope for the redemption of those [Satan and his angels] who had witnessed and enjoyed the inexpressible glory of heaven, and had seen the terrible majesty of God, and, in presence of all this glory, had rebelled against Him. There were no new and wonderful exhibitions of God’s exalted power that could impress them so deeply as those they had already experienced. If they could rebel in the very presence of glory inexpressible, they could not be placed in a more favorable condition to be proved. There was no reserve force of power, nor were there any greater heights and depths of infinite glory to overpower their jealous doubts and rebellious murmuring. Their guilt and their punishment must be in proportion to their exalted privileges in the heavenly courts.”—Ellen G. White, *Confrontation*, p. 21.

“From the beginning, God and Christ knew of the apostasy of Satan, and of the fall of man through the deceptive power of the apostate. God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, ‘that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ John 3:16.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, wrestle with the question of whether God is ultimately responsible for the origin and existence of evil in

our world. How might we seek to answer that charge?

2 How does the cross fit in with our understanding of the whole question of evil? Why must the cross and what happened there be central to any understanding of the origin of evil?

3 After so many millennia of sin and suffering in our world, Satan should now be fully aware of the tragic consequences of his rebellion. Why then does he still carry on his rebellion against God?

4 In Matthew 5:43–48, Christ speaks of God’s unconditional love for all human beings as the pattern for all our own interactions. How can you reflect this pattern more closely within your family and church?

5 The apostle Peter warns us that “the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (*1 Pet. 5:8, NKJV*). Read also Ephesians 6:10–20. How can we prevail against the “wiles of the devil” (*Eph. 6:11*)?

Set Free From Chains

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Screams pierced the air in the rural village in Laos.

A Seventh-day Adventist pastor, who was visiting the village with a small team of church workers, headed toward the loud cries to find out what was happening. He was surprised to see a 16-year-old boy chained to the wooden floor of his family home. “What happened to your boy?” he asked the parents. “Why is he chained up?”

The parents looked sad. “Our son Aer has been sick for many years,” his father said. “He becomes normal for several hours, but then he loses his mind again, several times a day,” his mother said.

The parents had spent all their money trying to find a cure. But the situation steadily had gotten worse until they reluctantly decided to leave Aer in chains all the time to prevent him from harming himself and others. He had been bound to the wooden floor for the past six months.

The pastor spoke with Aer and told him and his parents about the saving love of Jesus. “If Jesus is willing, He can heal Aer,” he said.

He asked for permission to pray for the boy. Aer’s parents happily agreed. Hope shone in their faces that their son would be healed.

A few days later, the pastor and his team again visited Aer and prayed for him. The pastor invited the family to worship in the nearest Adventist church in a neighboring village.

The next Sabbath, the parents arrived at church with Aer, his hands bound in chains. Each church member prayed for Aer, and then the pastor also asked the boy’s father to pray for him. All heads bowed as the father prayed to Jesus on behalf of his son. From that day, the boy was healed. He returned to normal and no longer needed to be chained up.

Neighbors were amazed, and they deluged Aer's parents with questions.

"Is this the boy who was ill for many years and was chained up?" one asked.

"Why is he OK now?" asked another. "Who healed him?"

The parents explained that the Christian God had healed their boy.

Not only did Aer's parents accept Jesus as their personal Savior after the healing, but many other families did so as well. Those families are among 122 people who were baptized at the church in April 2021, filling the church building to overflowing.

"We praise God for performing so many miracles in this area, resulting in many people coming to Him to be saved," said the Lao pastor who shared this story with Adventist Mission.



Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that support the spread of the gospel in Laos and around the world.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

LESSON 2

*October 1–7

Death *in* a Sinful World



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 2:16, 17; Gen. 3:1–7; Ps. 115:17; John 5:28, 29; Rom. 5:12; 2 Cor. 5:21.*

Memory Text: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (*Romans 5:12, NKJV*).

Christ was the Divine Agent through whom God brought the universe and the world into existence (*John 1:1–3, 10; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2*). But when God the Father conferred special honor on Christ and announced that They together would create this world, “Lucifer was envious and jealous of Jesus Christ” (Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 14) and plotted against Him.

Having been cast out of heaven, Satan decided “to destroy the happiness of Adam and Eve” on earth and thereby “cause grief in heaven.” He imagined that “if he could in any way beguile them [Adam and Eve] to disobedience, God would make some provision whereby they might be pardoned, and then himself and all the fallen angels would be in a fair way to share with them of God’s mercy.”—

The Story of Redemption, p. 27. Fully aware of Satan's strategy, God warned Adam and Eve not to expose themselves to temptation (*Gen. 2:16, 17*). This means that even when the world was still perfect and blameless, there were already clear restrictions for human beings to follow.

This week we will reflect on the fall of Adam and Eve, on how sin and death took over our world, and on how God planted a seed of hope for humanity even back in Eden.

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

SUNDAY *October 2*

Statements in Tension

The world, as it came from the Lord, was perfect (*Gen. 1:31*). Death was an unknown experience for Adam and Eve. In that context, God came to the Garden of Eden and warned: “ ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die’ ” (*Gen. 2:16, 17, NRSV*).

How does Genesis 2:16, 17 show the reality of free will in the perfection of Eden? That is, why would God have needed to warn Adam and Eve if they couldn't freely choose?

Sometime after this warning from God, Satan assumed the form of a serpent and entered Eden. Eve beheld the serpent joyfully eating the forbidden fruit without dying. “He himself had eaten of the forbidden fruit” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 54), and nothing had happened to him.

Read Genesis 3:1–4. Putting yourself in the position of Eve, why might those words have sounded convincing?

From the perspective of human logic, the argument of the serpent sounded much more convincing than did the word of God. First of all, there was no evidence in the natural world, so far, of the existence of sin and death. Second, the serpent was actually eating the forbidden fruit and enjoying it very much. So why should Eve restrain herself from doing the same? God's command seemed to be too restrictive and senseless.

Unfortunately, in deciding between the two conflicting statements, Eve ignored three basic principles: (1) human reason is not always the safest way to evaluate spiritual matters; (2) the Word of God can appear to be illogical and senseless to us, but it is always right and trustworthy; and (3) there are things that are not evil or wrong in themselves, but God has chosen them as tests of obedience.

We should realize that the experience of Eve in the Garden of Eden is not a single case in time. Every day and every moment we need to decide between the Word of God (which for many can be unpopular) and the seductive appeals of our surrounding culture. Our choice will have eternal consequences.

What are ways that the clear teaching of the Bible conflicts with the ways of the world?

MONDAY October 3

Deceived by the Serpent

Read Genesis 3:1–7. What criteria did Eve use to choose between God’s word and that of the serpent?

Genesis 3 is one of the clearest examples of the psychology of temptation. God had warned Adam and Eve that if they ate the forbidden fruit, they would certainly die (*Gen. 2:16, 17*). Assuming the form of a serpent, Satan used several rhetorical strategies to mislead Eve into sin.

First, he *generalized* God’s specific prohibition. He asked her, “ ‘Has God really said, “You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?” ’ ” (*Gen. 3:1, NASB*). Eve counterargued that the prohibition was in regard *only* to that specific tree, for if they were ever to eat from it or touch it, they would die.

Then, Satan *contradicted* God’s statement. He asserted categorically, “ ‘You certainly will not die!’ ” (*Gen. 3:4, NASB*).

And finally, Satan accused God of deliberately *suppressing* essential knowledge from her and her husband. The deceiver argued, “ ‘For God knows that on the day you eat from it [the forbidden fruit] your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God, knowing good and evil’ ” (*Gen. 3:5, NASB*).

Eve’s curiosity led her onto the enchanted ground of Satan. There she was forced to decide either to remain faithful to God’s restraining command or to embrace Satan’s seductive allurements. Doubting

God's word, she used her own senses—the empirical method, that of personal observation—to decide between the two conflicting statements.

First, she saw that from a *dietary* perspective, “the tree was good for food.” Second, from an *aesthetic* viewpoint, she saw that “it was a delight to the eyes.” Third, from a *logical* analysis, “the tree was desirable to make one wise.” Hence, in her own mind, she certainly had good reasons to heed the words of the serpent and to eat from the forbidden tree. Unfortunately, this is what she did.

Some people argue that all forms of knowledge are valid, as long as we retain “that which is good” (*1 Thess. 5:21, NASB*). But the tragic experiences of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden demonstrate that knowledge, in and of itself, can be very detrimental. There are some things that, indeed, we are better off not knowing.

What does this account teach us about how easy it is to rationalize and justify our sinful choices?

TUESDAY October 4

You Will Not Die

Read Genesis 3:4. What are the many different ways this lie has been repeated through the ages?

One powerful manifestation of this lie is seen in the common belief in the immortality of the soul. This notion was the basis of many ancient religions and philosophies. In ancient Egypt, it motivated the mummification practices and the funerary architecture, such as that seen in the pyramids.

This theory also became one of the main pillars of Greek philosophy. For example, in *The Republic of Plato*, Socrates asks Glaucon: “Are you not aware that our soul is immortal and never perishes?” In Plato’s *Phaedo*, Socrates argued in a similar tone, saying that the “soul is immortal and imperishable, and our souls really will exist in Hades.” These philosophical concepts would shape much of the Western culture and even post-Apostolic Christianity. But they originated much earlier, in the Garden of Eden, with Satan himself.

At the core of the Edenic temptation, Satan assured Eve, “ ‘You certainly will not die!’ ” (*Gen. 3:4, NASB*). With this emphatic assertion, Satan put his own word above the word of God.

In contrast to immortality of the soul, what do these verses teach, and how can they be used to counter this lie? (See *Ps. 115:17; John 5:28, 29; Ps. 146:4; Matt. 10:28; 1 Cor. 15:51–58.*)

The satanic theory of the natural immortality of the soul has persisted, even in our modern world. Books, movies, and TV programs have all continued to promote the idea that when we die, we simply pass into another conscious state. How unfortunate it is that this error is proclaimed in many Christian pulpits, as well. Even science has gotten involved. There is a foundation in the United States trying to create technology that, it claims, will enable us to contact the dead, whom they believe are still alive but exist as PMPs, “postmaterial persons.” With this error so prevalent, it’s no surprise that this deception will play a crucial role in the final events of human history.

In what ways is this lie manifested in your own culture? Why must we rely on the Word of God over what our senses tell us?

WEDNESDAY October 5

Consequences of Sin

Based on Genesis 3:7–19 and Romans 5:12, what were the main consequences of sin?

Captivated by the persuasive speech of the serpent, Eve did not anticipate the far-reaching consequences of the road that she was following. In itself, the act of eating from the forbidden fruit was not as significant as what it actually represented. By such an act of disobedience, Eve broke her loyalty to God and assumed a new allegiance to Satan.

Genesis 3 describes the fall of Adam and Eve and some of its most tragic consequences. From a theological perspective, both were overtaken by *theophobia* (being afraid of God) and hid themselves from Him (*Gen. 3:8*). From a psychosocial assessment, they were ashamed of themselves and began to accuse each other (*Gen. 3:7, 9–13*). From a physical standpoint, they would sweat, feel pain, and eventually die (*Gen. 3:16–19*). And from an ecological perspective, the natural world had degenerated (*Gen. 3:17, 18*).

The Garden of Eden was no longer the beautiful and pleasant place it used to be. “As they witnessed in drooping flower and falling leaf the first signs of decay, Adam and his companion mourned more deeply than men now mourn over their dead. The death of the frail, delicate flowers was indeed a cause of sorrow; but when the goodly trees cast off their leaves, the scene brought vividly to mind the stern

fact that death is the portion of every living thing.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 62.

Adam and Eve did not die immediately, in the sense of ceasing to live, but on that very same day they received their death sentence. The Lord told Adam, “ ‘In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return’ ” (*Gen. 3:19, NKJV*). The Fall brought tragic consequences indeed to all humanity. The apostle Paul explains that “just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, . . . so death spread to all because all have sinned” (*Rom. 5:12, NRSV*).

The sad and painful fact is that just as humanity has experienced through all ages, we today suffer the consequences of what happened in Eden. How thankful we can be, though, that because of Jesus and the Cross we have the hope of eternal life in a world where sin will never rise again.

As we reflect on Eve’s tragic experience, what lessons can we learn from it about the consequences of our own sinful acts?

THURSDAY *October 6*

The First Gospel Promise

Read Genesis 3:15, 21. What hope can be found in these verses for all of humanity?

Genesis 3 describes the dreadful tragedy that took over the world after the Fall. Everything changed, and Adam and Eve could see the contrast between what the world used to be and what it had become.

But in the midst of their frustration and despair, God gave them assurance for the present and hope for the future. First, He cursed the serpent with a word of Messianic hope. He declared, “ ‘And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel’ ” (*Gen. 3:15, NKJV*).

The word “enmity” (Hebrew *’eybah*) implies not only a long-lasting cosmic controversy between good and evil, but also a personal repulsion to sin, which has been implanted by God’s grace in the human mind. By nature, we are completely fallen (*Eph. 2:1, 5*) and “slaves of sin” (*Rom. 6:20, NKJV*). However, the grace that Christ implants in every human life creates in us enmity against Satan. And it is this “enmity,” a divine gift from Eden, that allows us to accept His saving grace. Without this converting grace and renewing power, humanity would continue to be the captive of Satan, a servant ever ready to do his bidding.

The Lord next used an animal sacrifice to illustrate this Messianic promise (see *Gen. 3:21*). “When Adam, according to God’s special directions, made an offering for sin, it was to him a most painful

ceremony. His hand must be raised to take life, which God alone could give, and make an offering for sin. It was the first time he had witnessed death. As he looked upon the bleeding victim, writhing in the agonies of death, he was to look forward by faith to the Son of God, whom the victim prefigured, who was to die man's sacrifice."—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 50.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Hebrews 9:28. What do these texts teach about what was first revealed in Eden?

Knowing that they would eventually die (*Gen. 3:19, 22–24*), Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden. But they did not leave naked or with their own fig-leaf coverings (*Gen. 3:7*). God Himself “made tunics of skin” for them, and He even clothed them (*Gen. 3:21, NKJV*), a symbol of His covering righteousness (see *Zech. 3:1–5, Luke 15:22*). Hence, even back then, right from the start, in Eden, the gospel had been revealed to humanity.

FRIDAY October 7

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Temptation and Fall,” pp. 52–62 and “The Plan of Redemption,” pp. 63–70, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Knowledge of Good and Evil,” pp. 23–27, in *Education*.

In recent years, studies have been done on what are called near-death experiences (NDEs). What happens is that people “die,” in that their hearts stop beating, and they stop breathing. However, they then come back to life—but with fantastic stories of floating into another realm of existence and meeting a being of light. Some even talk about meeting long-dead relatives. Many people, even Christians who don’t understand the truth about death, believe that these stories are more proof of the immortality of the soul. However (and this should be the clearest warning that something is amiss), most who have these experiences claim that the spiritual beings whom they had met during the NDEs gave them comforting words, nice statements about love, peace, and goodness. But they hear nothing about salvation in Christ, nothing about sin, and nothing about judgment. While getting a taste of the Christian afterlife, shouldn’t they have gotten at least a smidgen of the most basic Christian teachings along with it? Yet, what they’re taught sounds mostly like New Age dogma, which could explain why, in many cases, they come away less inclined toward Christianity than they were before having “died.” Also, why did none of the Christians, convinced that their NDEs were a preview of the Christian heaven, ever get any Christian theology while there, as opposed to a big dose of New Age sentimentalism? The answer is that they were being deceived by the same person who deceived Eve in Eden, and with the same lie too. (See lesson 11.)

Discussion Questions:

- 1** How does the experience of Adam and Eve demonstrate that God's forgiveness does not necessarily reverse all consequences of sin? Why is this such an important truth to remember always?
- 2** The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the "enchanted ground" of the enemy for Adam and Eve. What are some "enchanted grounds" that we might find ourselves tempted to enter?
- 3** Satan is trying to lead God's people to believe that "the requirements of Christ are less strict than they once believed, and that by conformity to the world they would exert a greater influence with worldlings."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 474. What should we do in order not to fall into this subtle trap?

INSIDE *Story*

Signs and Wonders

By DMITRY BAGAL

While studying Isaiah in the adult Bible study guide a few quarters ago, one verse particularly caught my attention: “Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts” (*Isa. 8:18, NKJV*). The verse seemed to be about me. My wife and I already had a child, and we were waiting for the birth of our second. I thought, *Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me! It would be great also to have signs and wonders from God!*

Thinking about the verse, I remembered reading about God’s wonderful intercession in the lives of Adventists who, through faith alone, managed to raise significant funds for mission projects. I prayed, “Lord, I also would like to make a donation. I even have a good occasion: the birth of my second child. Please give me an idea of how much I should donate, with Your help, as a sign of my gratitude for a good pregnancy and smooth birth, and let me know who should get the donation.”

Almost immediately, I felt impressed to raise 1,000 euros (about US\$1,185). The amount seemed unattainable for someone with a limited income like me in Germany. I prayed, “Lord, it’s Your goal, so You have to make sure that the money comes from somewhere. You know that my salary is insufficient to put anything aside. All I can promise is to pray daily and put aside any money that I may receive in addition to my salary.”

Every day I prayed that the Almighty would somehow make it possible to reach the goal of the 1,000 euros. In less than a month, I already had received about half of the amount. An elderly couple unexpectedly gave me 200 euros for helping them move into their new home. Then an Adventist businessman gave 200 euros when

my wife and I, in an effort to be hospitable, put up two of his employees in our home for the night. After that, a married couple transferred 50 euros, unannounced, to our bank account. A month before the baby was born, I already had the 1,000 euros.

The birth of Maranatha Yessenia was smooth and fast on May 4. I parked in front of the hospital at 8:37 A.M., and she was born 20 minutes later. The funds went to a mission project.

The Lord made it possible to reach His donation goal. Blessed with my wife and two children, I can truly say, “Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts!”



Thank you for supporting mission projects through the weekly Sabbath School mission offering, the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, and the Annual Sacrifice Offering.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

LESSON 3

**October 8–14*



Understanding Human Nature

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:24–27; Gen. 2:7, 19; Matt. 10:28; Eccles. 12:1–7; 1 Kings 2:10; 1 Kings 22:40.*

Memory Text: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (*Genesis 2:7*).

The tension between God’s word, “ ‘You shall die’ ” (*Gen. 2:16, 17, NRSV*) and Satan’s counterfeit promise, “ ‘You certainly will not die!’ ” (*Gen. 3:4, NASB*) was not restricted to the Garden of Eden. It has echoed throughout history.

Many people try to harmonize the words of Satan with the words of God. For them, the warning, “ ‘You shall die,’ ” refers only to the perishable physical body, while the promise, “ ‘You certainly will not die!’ ” is an allusion to an immortal soul or spirit.

But this approach doesn’t work. For example, can contradictory words of God and of Satan be harmonized? Is there an immaterial soul or spirit that consciously survives physical death? There are many philosophical and even scientific attempts to answer these questions. But, as Bible-based Christians, we must recognize that only the Almighty God, the One who created us, knows us perfectly (*see Psalm 139*). Thus, only in His Word to us, the Scriptures, can we find answers to these crucial questions.

This week we will consider how the Old Testament defines human nature and the condition of human beings at death.

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

SUNDAY *October 9*

“A Living Being”

Read Genesis 1:24–27 and Genesis 2:7, 19. What similarities and differences can you see between the way God created the animals and the way He created humanity? What does Genesis 2:7 tell us about human nature?

The Genesis account declares that on the sixth day of Creation week the Lord God brought to life land animals and the first human beings, a couple (*Gen. 1:24–27*). We are told that He “formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky” (*Gen. 2:19, NIV*). He also “formed a man from the dust of the ground” (*Gen. 2:7, NIV*).

Although both animals and man alike were made from “the ground,” the formation of the man was distinct from that of animals in two main ways. First, God shaped the man physically, and then “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (*Gen. 2:7, NIV*). He was a physical entity before he became a living one. Second, God created humanity as both male and female in the very image and likeness of the Godhead (*Gen. 1:26, 27*).

Genesis 2:7 explains that the infusion of the “breath of life” into the physical body of Adam transformed him into “a living being” (Heb. *Nephesh chayyah*) or literally “a living soul.” It means that each of us does not *have* a soul that can exist apart from the body.

Rather, each one of us *is* a living being or a living soul. The claim that this “soul” is a conscious entity that can exist separate from the human body is a pagan, not a biblical, idea. Understanding the true nature of humanity prevents us from accepting the popular notion of an immaterial soul and all the dangerous errors built upon that belief.

There is no conscious existence of any isolated part of the human being separated from the person as a whole. God created us in a fearful and wonderful way, and we should not speculate beyond what the Scriptures actually say about this specific matter. In fact, not only is the very nature of life a mystery (scientists still can’t agree on exactly what it means for something to be alive), but even more mysterious is the nature of consciousness. How does the few pounds of material tissue (cells and chemicals) in our heads, the brain, hold and create immaterial things, such as thoughts and emotions? Those who study this idea admit that we really don’t know.

What a miracle life is! Why should we rejoice in the gift of not just life but of *eternal* life, as well, an even greater miracle?

MONDAY *October 10*

“ ‘The Soul Who Sins Shall Die’ ”

Read Ezekiel 18:4, 20 and Matthew 10:28. How can these verses help us understand the nature of the human soul?

Human life in this sinful world is fragile and transitory (*Isa. 40:1–8*). Nothing infected by sin can be eternal by nature. “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (*Rom. 5:12, NKJV*). Death is the natural consequence of sin, which affects all life here.

On this matter, there are two important biblical concepts. One is that human beings and animals both die. As stated by King Solomon, “ ‘Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. . . . All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return’ ” (*Eccles. 3:19, 20, NIV*).

The second concept is that the physical death of a person implies the cessation of his or her existence as a living soul (Hebrew *nephesh*). In Genesis 2:16, 17, God had warned Adam and Eve that if they should ever sin, by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die.

Echoing this warning, the Lord reinforced the point in Ezekiel 18:4, 20: “ ‘The soul who sins shall die’ ” (*NKJV*). This statement has

two main implications. One is that since all human beings are sinners, all of us are under the unavoidable process of aging and dying (*Rom. 3:9–18, 23*). Another implication is that this biblical concept makes void the popular notion of a supposed natural immortality of the soul. If the soul is immortal and exists alive in another realm after death, then we don't *really* die after all, do we?

In contrast, the biblical solution for the dilemma of death is not a bodiless soul migrating either into Paradise or into purgatory, or even into hell. The solution is indeed the final resurrection of those who died in Christ. As Jesus stated in His sermon on the Bread of Life, “ ‘Everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day’ ” (*John 6:40, NKJV*).

Why is the surety of the Second Coming, which is made certain by Christ's first coming (and after all, what good was Christ's first coming without the second?), so crucial to all that we believe? What hope would we have without the promise of His return?

TUESDAY October 11

The Spirit Returns to God

Read Genesis 2:7 and Ecclesiastes 12:1–7. What contrast can you see between these two biblical passages? How can they help us to understand better the human condition in death? (See *also Genesis 7:22.*)

As already seen, the Bible teaches that the human being is a soul (*Gen. 2:7*), and the soul ceases to exist when the body dies (*Ezek. 18:4, 20*).

But what about the “spirit”? Does it not remain conscious even after the death of the body? Many Christians believe so, and they even try to justify their view by quoting Ecclesiastes 12:7, which says, “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (*NKJV*). But this statement does not suggest that the spirit of the dead remains conscious in God’s presence.

Ecclesiastes 12:1–7 in quite dramatic terms describes the aging process, culminating with death. Verse 7 refers to death as the reversal of the creation process mentioned in Genesis 2:7. As already stated, on the sixth day of the Creation week “the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (*Gen. 2:7, NKJV*). But now, Ecclesiastes 12:7 tells us that “the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (*NKJV*).

So, the breath of life that God breathed into the nostrils of Adam, and that He also has provided to all other human beings, returns to God, or, in other words, simply stops flowing into and through them.

We should keep in mind that Ecclesiastes 12:7 describes the dying process of all human beings and does so without distinguishing between the righteous and the wicked. If the alleged spirits of all who die survive as conscious entities in the presence of God, then are the spirits of the wicked with God? This idea is not in harmony with the overall teaching of the Scriptures. Because the same dying process happens both to human beings and to animals (*Eccles. 3:19, 20*), death is nothing else than ceasing to exist as living beings. As stated by the psalmist, “You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust” (*Ps. 104:29, NKJV*).

We often say that death is just part of life. Why is that so wrong? Death is the opposite of life, the enemy of life. What great hope, then, is found in this verse: “The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26, NKJV)?

WEDNESDAY October 12

“The Dead Know Nothing”

Read Job 3:11–13; Psalm 115:17; Psalm 146:4; and Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10. What can we learn from these passages about the condition of human beings at death?

Some Bible commentators argue that these passages (*Job 3:11–13*; *Ps. 115:17*; *Ps. 146:4*; *Eccles. 9:5, 10*), written in poetic language, cannot be used to define the condition of human beings at death. It is true that sometimes poetry can be ambiguous and easily misunderstood, but this is not the case with these verses. Their language is clear, and their concepts are in full harmony with the overall Old Testament teachings on the subject.

First, in Job 3, the patriarch deplores his own birth because of all the suffering. (In our more dire moments, who hasn't wished that he or she had never been born?) He recognizes that if he had died at his birth, he would have remained asleep and at rest (*Job 3:11, 13*).

Psalm 115 defines the location where the dead are kept as a place of silence, because “the dead do not praise the LORD” (*Ps. 115:17, NKJV*). This hardly sounds as if the dead, the faithful (and thankful) dead, are in heaven worshipping God.

According to Psalm 146, the mental activities of the individual cease with death: “His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish” (*Ps. 146:4, NASB*). This is a perfect biblical depiction of what happens at death.

Ecclesiastes 9 adds that “the dead know nothing” and in the grave “there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom” (*Eccles. 9:5, 10, NKJV*). These statements confirm the biblical teaching that the dead are unconscious.

The biblical teaching of unconsciousness in death should not generate any panic in Christians. First of all, there is no everlasting burning hell or temporary purgatory waiting for those who die unsaved. Second, there is an amazing reward waiting for those who die in Christ. No wonder that “to the believer, death is but a small matter. . . . To the Christian, death is but a sleep, a moment of silence and darkness. The life is hid with Christ in God, and ‘when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.’ John 8:51, 52; Col. 3:4.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 787.

Think about the dead in Christ. They close their eyes in death and, whether in the grave 1,500 years or five months, it’s all the same *to them*. The next thing they know is the return of Christ. How, then, might one argue that, in one sense, the dead have it better than we, the living, do?

THURSDAY *October 13*

Resting With the Forefathers

Read Genesis 25:8, 2 Samuel 7:12, 1 Kings 2:10, and 1 Kings 22:40. What do these texts add to your understanding of death?

The Old Testament expresses in different ways the ideas of death and burial. One way is the notion of being gathered to one's own people. For example, about Abraham, we are told that he "breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people" (*Gen. 25:8, NKJV*). Aaron and Moses also were gathered to their respective people (*Deut. 32:50*).

What does the fact that both good and bad kings went to the same place at death teach us about the nature of death? (*2 Kings 24:6, 2 Chron. 32:33*).

Another way of describing death is by stating that someone *rested* with the forebearers. About King David's death, the Bible says that he "rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David"

(*1 Kings 2:10, NKJV*). The same expression also is used in reference to several other Hebrew kings, both faithful kings and unfaithful kings.

We can identify at least three meaningful aspects of resting with the forebearers. One is the idea that sooner or later the time will come when we need to rest from our own tiring labors and sufferings. Another idea is that we are not the first and only ones to follow that undesirable trail, because our forebearers already have gone ahead of us. A third idea is that, by being buried close to them, we are not alone but remain together even during the unconsciousness of death. This might not make much sense to some modern individualist cultures, but it was very meaningful in ancient times.

Those who die in Christ can be buried close to their loved ones, but even so there is no communication between them. They will remain unconscious until that glorious day when they will be awakened from their deep sleep to rejoin their loved ones who died in Christ.

Imagine what it would be like if the dead were actually conscious and could see what life was like down here, especially for their loved ones, who often suffer terribly after their death. Why, then, should the truth that the dead sleep be so comforting to the living?

FRIDAY October 14

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The First Great Deception,” pp. 531–550, in *The Great Controversy*.

If you have ever been in surgery and were put out with general anesthesia, you might have a faint idea of what it must be like for the dead. But even then, when under anesthesia, your brain still functions. Imagine what it would be like for the dead, when all brain function, everything, has totally stopped. Their experience in death, then, is to close their eyes and, as far as each dead person who ever lived is concerned, the next thing they will know is either the second coming of Jesus or His return after the millennium (see *Rev. 20:7–15*). Until then, all the dead, the righteous and the wicked, rest, for what will seem to them to be an instant. For those of us who remain alive, death seems as if it lasts for a long time. For the living it does; but for the dead it seems to last only an instant.

“If it were true that the souls of all men passed directly to heaven at the hour of dissolution, then we might well covet death rather than life. Many have been led by this belief to put an end to their existence. When overwhelmed with trouble, perplexity, and disappointment, it seems an easy thing to break the brittle thread of life and soar away into the bliss of the eternal world.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 539.

“Nowhere in the Sacred Scriptures is found the statement that the righteous go to their reward or the wicked to their punishment at death. The patriarchs and prophets have left no such assurance. Christ and His apostles have given no hint of it. The Bible clearly teaches that the dead do not go immediately to heaven. They are represented as sleeping until the resurrection.”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 549, 550.

Discussion Questions:

- ①** How does the biblical notion of the human being as a whole—who remains conscious only as an undivided person—help us to understand better the nature of death?
- ②** The world has been taken over by the theory of the natural immortality of the soul, with all its uncountable ramifications. Why then is our message about the state of the dead so crucial? Why, also, even among Christians, do we find such strong opposition to what is really a wonderful teaching?
- ③** How should an understanding of the state of the dead protect us from what might “appear” before our eyes? That is, why can’t we always trust what we see, especially if what we see, or think we see, is the spirit of a dead relative, as some have reported seeing?

Every Cent Is Sacred

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Shyamala's eyes widened with surprise as she read the handwritten note tucked in an envelope with two money orders worth US\$110.52. The letter came from the U.S. East Coast, and the money orders were made out to Global Mission, the frontline arm of Adventist Mission whose missionaries start new groups of believers in unreached territories.

"I have enclosed a donation to Global Mission to help people learn about the love of God," the letter read. "I love God and try to help spread the gospel in my neighborhood."

It was the next part of the note that astonished Shyamala, a donor specialist at Global Mission. The writer explained that the \$110.52 donation consisted of pennies that she had found on the street. When her jar of pennies got full, she cashed them in and sent the donation.

"This gift is pennies that I collected for Jesus," she wrote. "I hope it will bring smiles to someone as you share the love of God."

Another surprising letter arrived at Global Mission's office at the General Conference a few weeks earlier. The letter, from the U.S. West Coast, contained no note, but the enclosed \$165 check spoke volumes. It was issued by a prison on behalf of an inmate. With inmates earning up to \$55 a month at the prison, the donor would have had to work at least three months for the gift. "And it wasn't his first donation," Shyamala said.

A third letter was opened by Nimfa, who, with Shyamala, runs the donor relations department at Global Mission. The letter came from a man who had called Global Mission's hotline a few days earlier to inquire whether Global Mission had received a donation submitted through its website. Nimfa found that the caller's bank had rejected

the transaction. When the caller asked for an alternative way to donate, she suggested a check or a wire transfer. A check for \$70,000 arrived a few days later. The donation was the proceeds from the sale of a piece of property. “The man promised God that if the property sold, he would give everything to mission,” Nimfa said.

Stories about the faithfulness of people to God’s mission deeply touch the hearts of Shyamala, Nimfa, and others who work at Global Mission. Whether the donation is \$1—one donor has sent three \$1 bills every month for years—or \$70,000, every penny goes to frontline work. “Every cent that we get is no ordinary cent,” Nimfa said. “When we receive a donation, especially when we learn about how that money got to us or why it was sent to us, we are reminded that every cent is sacred. It is the Lord’s money. Every cent goes only to help finish the work so Jesus can come.”



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LESSON 4

*October 15–21

The Old Testament Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 19:25–27; 1 Tim. 6:16; Psalm 49; Psalm 71; Isa. 26:14, 19; Daniel 12.*

Memory Text: “By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son. . . . He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” (*Hebrews 11:17, 19, NRSV*).

The Old Testament hope is grounded, not on Greek ideas about the natural immortality of the soul, but on the biblical teaching of the final resurrection of the dead.

But how could a no-longer-existent human body, cremated into ashes or destroyed by other means, be brought to life again? How can someone who has been deceased, perhaps for centuries or even millennia, recover again his or her identity?

These questions lead us to reflect on the mystery of life. We are alive and enjoy the life that God graciously grants us every day. Even without beginning to understand the supernatural origin of life, we know that in the beginning God brought life into existence from nonlife through the power of His word (*Genesis 1; Ps. 33:6, 9*). So, if

God was able to create life on earth the first time from nothing (Latin *ex nihilo*), why should we doubt His capacity to re-create human life and to restore its original identity?

This week we will reflect on how the notion of the final resurrection unfolded in Old Testament times, with special focus on the statements of Job, some psalmists, and the prophets Isaiah and Daniel.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 22.*

SUNDAY *October 16*

I Shall See God

Read Job 19:25–27 and compare it with John 1:18 and 1 Timothy 6:16. When and under what circumstances was Job expecting to “see God”?

Life is not fair. We see this especially when we see the “good” suffering and the “unrighteous” prospering (see *Ps. 73:12–17* and *Mal. 3:14–18*). For example, Job was “blameless and upright” and “feared God and shunned evil” (*Job 1:1, NKJV*). Even so, God allowed Satan to afflict him in several disastrous ways. Physically, his body was ravaged by painful disease (*Job 2:1–8*). Materially, he lost large portions of his livestock and properties (*Job 1:13–17*). Within his household, he lost his servants and even his own children (*Job 1:16, 18*). And emotionally, he was surrounded by friends who accused him of being an impenitent sinner who deserved what he was facing (*Job 4:1–5:27, Job 8:1–22, Job 11:1–20, etc.*). Even his own wife stated, “ ‘Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!’ ” (*Job 2:9, NKJV*).

Job did not realize that he had become the epicenter of a deep cosmic struggle between God and Satan. Afflicted by those struggles, Job regretted his own birth and wished that he had never been born (*Job 3:1–26*). Yet, his unconditional faithfulness to God is well expressed in the words “ ‘Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him’ ” (*Job 13:15, NKJV*). Even imagining that soon his life would

end, he kept his assurance that death would not have the final word. With strong conviction he stated that although he would die, his Redeemer would one day stand up and he, Job himself, would see God in his own flesh (*Job 19:25–27*). “This is an unmistakable glimpse of the resurrection.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 549.

What a glorious hope in the midst of such a tragedy! Surrounded by sickness and pain, economic collapse, social reproach, and emotional breakdown, Job could still anticipate the day when he would rise from the dead and behold his beloved Redeemer. Actually, Job’s statement about the resurrection was filled with the same assurance as found centuries later in Martha’s utterance to Jesus: “ ‘I know that he [Lazarus] will rise again in the resurrection at the last day’ ” (*John 11:24, NKJV*). Job, like Martha, had to claim this promise by faith, even though, unlike Job, Martha would soon be given powerful empirical evidence for her belief.

How can we learn to trust God even amid the harsh unfairness of life?

MONDAY *October 17*

From the Power of the Grave

Read Psalm 49. What led the psalmist to be so sure of his final resurrection (*Ps. 49:15*) in contrast to those who perished without that assurance (*Ps. 49:6–14*)?

Psalm 49 speaks about the false confidence of the foolish “who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches” (*Ps. 49:6, NKJV*), who “call their lands after their own names” (*Ps. 49:11, NKJV*), and who live only to bless themselves (*Ps. 49:18*). They act as if their houses and their own glory would last forever (*Ps. 49:11, 17*).

But the foolish forget that their honor vanishes and that they perish just as the beasts do (*Ps. 49:12, NKJV*). “Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; . . . and their beauty shall be consumed in the grave, far from their dwelling” (*Ps. 49:14, NKJV*).

As stated by Job centuries earlier, “ ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart’ ” (*Job 1:21, NIV; 1 Tim. 6:7*). The psalmist points out that both the fool and the wise die, leaving “their wealth to others” (*Ps. 49:10, NKJV*).

But there is a radical contrast between them. On one side are the fools who perish, even though trying to find assurance in their own transient possessions and accomplishments. In contrast, the wise behold, beyond the human saga and the prison of the grave, the glorious reward that God has reserved for them (*1 Pet. 1:4*). With

this perception in mind, the psalmist could say with confidence, “But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me” (*Ps. 49:15, NKJV*).

Consistent with the Old Testament hope, this statement is not suggesting that at the time of his death, the soul of the psalmist would fly immediately into heaven. The psalmist is simply saying that he would not remain forever in the grave. A time would come when God would redeem him from death and take him to the heavenly courts.

Once again, the certainty of the future resurrection is depicted, bringing hope, assurance, and meaning to this present existence. So, the wise will receive a far more glorious and everlasting reward than what the foolish could gather for themselves during this short life.

What are the ways that you have been able to see the folly of those who trust in their own wealth and accomplishments? How can keeping your eyes on the cross protect you from falling into the same error?

TUESDAY October 18

“From the Depths of the Earth”

Read Psalm 71. What did David imply when he asked God to bring him up “again from the depths of the earth” (*Ps. 71:20, NKJV*)?

In Psalm 49 we found a touching expression of hope in the resurrection, in contrast to the false assurance of the fool who trusted in his wealth. In Psalm 71, David seeks security and hope from God, while surrounded by enemies and false accusers who say that God has forsaken him (*Ps. 71:10, 11*).

Amid his trials, David finds comfort and assurance in recalling how God had cared for him in the past. First, he realizes that God had upheld him from birth and even had taken him out of his mother’s womb (*Ps. 71:6*). Then, he acknowledges that God had taught him from his youth (*Ps. 71:17*).

With the certainty that God was his rock and his fortress, David pleads with Him, “Be my strong refuge, to which I may resort continually” (*Ps. 71:3, NKJV*). “Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails” (*Ps. 71:9, NKJV*). “O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!” (*Ps. 71:12, NKJV*). And then David adds, “You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth” (*Ps. 71:20, NKJV*).

The expression “from the depths of the earth” could be understood literally as an allusion to the future physical resurrection of the psalmist. But the context seems to favor a metaphorical description of David’s condition of deep depression, as if the earth were swallowing him (*compare with Ps. 88:6 and Ps. 130:1*). So, we could say that “it is primarily figurative speech, but also hints at a physical resurrection.”—*Andrews Study Bible*, p. 726, note on Psalm 71:20.

In the end, what’s important to grasp is that, whatever our situation, God is there, He cares, and ultimately, our hope isn’t found in this life but in the life to come—the eternal life we have in Jesus after our resurrection at His return.

We all have had some terrible moments of discouragement. How, though, can focusing on the ways that the Lord has been with you in the past help you press on ahead in faith and trust in the moments when He seems far away?

WEDNESDAY October 19

“Your Dead Shall Live”

Read Isaiah 26:14, 19. What is the contrast between those who will perish forever (*Isa. 26:14*; see also *Mal. 4:1*) and those who will receive eternal life (*Isa. 26:19*)?

The book of Isaiah presents a major contrast between the majesty of God and our human fragility (see *Isaiah 40*). Though we are like the grass that withers and the flower that fades, the Word of God remains forever (*Isa. 40:6–8*). Despite our human sinfulness, however, God’s saving grace is available to all human beings and becomes effective even to the Gentiles who embrace His covenant and keep the Sabbath (*Isaiah 56*).

In the book of Isaiah, the hope of the resurrection is broadened significantly. While previous biblical allusions to the resurrection were expressed more from personal perspectives (*Job 19:25–27*, *Ps. 49:15*, *Ps. 71:20*), the prophet Isaiah speaks of it as including both himself and the covenantal community of believers (*Isa. 26:19*).

Isaiah 26 contrasts the distinct destinies of the wicked and the righteous. On one side, the wicked will remain dead, without ever being brought to life again, at least after the “second death” (*Rev. 21:8*). They will be completely destroyed, and all their memory will perish forever (*Isa. 26:14*). This passage underscores the teaching that there are no surviving souls or spirits that remain alive after death. Speaking about the final destruction of the wicked, which

comes later, the Lord stated elsewhere that the wicked will be completely burned up, leaving them “ ‘neither root nor branch’ ” (*Mal. 4:1, NKJV*).

On the other side, the righteous dead will be raised from death to receive their blessed reward. Isaiah 25 highlights that the Lord God “will swallow up death forever” and “will wipe away tears from all faces” (*Isa. 25:8, NKJV*). In Isaiah 26 we find the following words: “Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead” (*Isa. 26:19, NKJV*). All the resurrected righteous will participate in the joyful feast that the Lord will prepare for all people (*Isa. 25:6*). The final resurrection will bring together all the righteous from all ages, including your beloved ones who already died in Christ.

Imagine if we didn't have any hope, any assurance, any reason to think that our death was anything but the end of everything for us. And then, even worse, anyone who ever knew us would be gone, and soon it would be as if we never existed and our lives never meant anything at all. How does this fate contrast with the hope that we have?

THURSDAY *October 20*

Those Who Sleep in the Dust

As we will see, the New Testament talks a great deal about the resurrection of the dead; and, as we have already seen, the idea of the resurrection of the dead appears in the Old Testament, as well. These people, in Old Testament times, had the hope of the final resurrection that we do. Martha, living at the time of Jesus, already had this hope (*John 11:24*). No question, even then, the Jews had some knowledge of the resurrection in the last days, even if not all believed it. (See *Acts 23:8*.)

Read Daniel 12. What resurrection hope is found here, in the writings of this great prophet?

Daniel 12:1 refers to Michael, “ ‘the great prince,’ ” whose identification has been much disputed. Because each of the great visions in the book of Daniel culminates with the manifestation of Christ and His kingdom, the same should be the case in regard to this specific passage. In the book of Daniel we find allusions to the same Divine Being as “the Prince of the host” (*Dan. 8:11, NKJV*), “ ‘the Prince of princes’ ” (*Dan. 8:25, NKJV*), “ ‘Messiah the Prince’ ” (*Dan. 9:25, NKJV*), and finally as “ ‘Michael, the great prince’ ” (*Dan. 12:1, NASB*). So, we should identify Michael also as Christ.

The Old Testament passages considered so far (*Job 19:25–27*, *Ps. 49:15*, *Ps. 71:20*, *Isa. 26:19*) all speak of the resurrection of righteous people. But Daniel 12 speaks of a resurrection of both the righteous and unrighteous. When Michael stands up, “ ‘many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt’ ” (*Dan. 12:2, NKJV*).

Many view this verse to be talking about a special resurrection of certain people, both the faithful and the unfaithful, at Christ's return.

“Graves are opened, and ‘many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth . . . awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.’ Daniel 12:2. All who have died in the faith of the third angel's message come forth from the tomb glorified, to hear God's covenant of peace with those who have kept His law. ‘They also which pierced Him’ (Revelation 1:7), those that mocked and derided Christ's dying agonies, and the most violent opposers of His truth and His people, are raised to behold Him in His glory and to see the honor placed upon the loyal and obedient.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 637.

FRIDAY October 21

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Visions of Future Glory,” pp. 722–733, in *Prophets and Kings*.

Modern science teaches that all matter is composed of atoms, themselves made up of two smaller particles, quarks and leptons, which are believed to be the building blocks of all physical reality. If, then, at the core the physical world is quarks and leptons, couldn't the God who not only created and sustains that world also just reconfigure the quarks and leptons when the time comes to resurrect us? Mocking the resurrection, atheist Bertrand Russell asked what happens to those whom cannibals ate, because their bodies are now part of the cannibals', and so who gets what in the resurrection? But suppose the Lord simply grabs quarks and leptons, the ultimate building blocks of existence, from wherever, and, based on the information that He possesses about each one of us, reconstructs us from those quarks and leptons on up? He doesn't need our original ones; any will do. Or, in fact, He could just speak new quarks and leptons into existence and go from there. However He does it, the God who created the universe can re-create us, which He promises to do at the resurrection of the dead.

“The Life-giver will call up His purchased possession in the first resurrection, and until that triumphant hour, when the last trump shall sound and the vast army shall come forth to eternal victory, every sleeping saint will be kept in safety and will be guarded as a precious jewel, who is known to God by name. By the power of the Saviour that dwelt in them while living and because they were partakers of the divine nature, they are brought forth from the dead.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1143.

Discussion Questions:

1 There are an estimated two trillion galaxies out there, each made of billions and billions of stars. And some of these stars have planets orbiting them, just as the planets in our solar system orbit the sun. Now, think about the incredible power of God, who not only created all these stars, but who also sustains them and knows them by name (*Ps. 147:4*). Though this amazing reality does not *prove* that this same God can or will raise the dead, how does it reveal to us this same awesome power that He does have and why, certainly, something like the resurrection would not be beyond His power?

2 Hebrews 11 highlights the faithfulness and expectations of many of the “heroes of faith” of ancient times. How can this chapter enrich our understanding of the hope that the characters in the Old Testament had, even before the resurrection of Jesus?

INSIDE *Story*

Sharing Living Water

By DAVID MALDONADO

Antonio Maldonado didn't know much English, so he motioned to an interpreter at the reception at the U.S. White House in Washington.

Antonio, a member of a mining delegation visiting from Peru, saw that the guests were being served fine whiskey, but he simply wanted a glass of pure water to raise for the toast with President Lyndon B. Johnson. Speaking through the interpreter, he politely voiced his desire to a waiter.

It was a difficult request to make. Everyone seemed to be holding glasses of whiskey, and Antonio didn't want to make a scene. He didn't want to embarrass fellow delegates as they wrapped up U.S. trade talks. But as a young man, he had made a commitment never to drink after seeing the ruin that alcohol had brought to homes in Peru. Two years earlier, in 1963, he had given his heart to Jesus after hearing *Voice of Prophecy* radio broadcasts.

While Antonio spoke softly with the White House waiter, a pair of eyes watched him. Those eyes followed the waiter as he brought Antonio a glass of water. As Antonio accepted the water, he heard a voice speak.

"Waiter, wait," the voice said. "What did the gentleman ask of you?"

"This guest wanted us to change his whiskey glass for one with pure water, Mr. President," the waiter replied.

Lyndon Johnson extended an arm and handed his own glass of whiskey to the waiter. "Please bring me a glass of water, as well," he said.

After the toast, the president approached Antonio and, almost whispering, asked, "Why don't you drink like the others?"

With the interpreter's help, Antonio replied with a large smile. "When I was young, I promised myself that I would never drink, and many years later I renewed that promise with God," he said. "So far, everything has worked well."

The president extended a hand. "Congratulations for being such a magnificent example," he said. "I, too, am a man of faith. God bless you." A firm handshake ended the conversation.

As Antonio mingled at the reception, he felt curious stares. His habit of abstaining from alcohol, strengthened by his faith, had resulted in an unexpected encounter with one of the most powerful people on earth. His heart rejoiced that he had been able to represent God at the White House.



Today, Antonio seeks to represent God every day in Concepción, Peru, where he lives with his wife, Enma. He is 99, and she is 90—a living witness to their conviction that “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31, NKJV).

This mission story illustrates Spiritual Growth Objective No. 5 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan, “To disciple individuals and families into Spirit-filled lives.” Read more: IWillGo2020.org.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

LESSON 5

*October 22–28

Resurrections Before *the* Cross



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jude 9, Luke 9:28–36, 1 Kings 17:8–24, Luke 7:11–17, Mark 5:35–43, John 11:1–44.*

Memory Text: “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die forever. Do you believe this?’ ” (*John 11:25, 26, LEB*).

The Old Testament references to the resurrection that we have looked at so far were largely based on personal expectations (*Job 19:25–27, Heb. 11:17–19, Ps. 49:15, Ps. 71:20*) and on future promises (*Dan. 12:1, 2, 13*). However, we also have the inspired records of cases in which people actually were raised from the dead.

The first resurrection was of Moses (*Jude 9, Luke 9:28–36*). During Israel's monarchy, the son of the widow of Zarephath (*1 Kings 17:8–24*) and the Shunammite's son (*2 Kings 4:18–37*) also were resurrected. Christ, when here in the flesh, resurrected the son of the widow of Nain (*Luke 7:11–17*), Jairus's daughter (*Luke 8:40–56*), and

then Lazarus (*John 11*). Except for Moses, all these people were raised as mortals who eventually would die again. These cases also confirm the biblical teaching of the unconsciousness of the dead (*Job 3:11–13; Ps. 115:17; Ps. 146:4; Eccles. 9:5, 10*). In none of these accounts, nor in any other biblical resurrection narratives, is there any mention of a supposed afterlife experience.

This week we will reflect more closely on the resurrections that occurred before Christ's own death and resurrection.

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

SUNDAY *October 23*

The Resurrection of Moses

Read Jude 9 and Luke 9:28–36. What evidences do you find in these texts for the bodily resurrection of Moses?

Some Greek Church Fathers from Alexandria argued that, when Moses died, two Moseses were seen: one alive in the spirit, another dead in the body; one Moses ascending to heaven with angels, the other buried in the earth. (See Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 2.1; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.15.) This distinction between the assumption of the soul and the burial of the body might make sense to those who believe in the Greek concept of the immortal soul, but the idea is not in the Bible. Jude 9 confirms the biblical teaching of the resurrection of Moses' body, because the dispute was "about the *body* of Moses" and not about any supposed surviving soul.

Deuteronomy 34:5–7 tells us that Moses died at 120 years of age, and the Lord buried him in a hidden place in a valley in the land of Moab. But Moses did not remain for very long in the grave. "Christ Himself, with the angels who had buried Moses, came down from heaven to call forth the sleeping saint. . . . For the first time Christ was about to give life to the dead. As the Prince of life and the shining ones approached the grave, Satan was alarmed for his supremacy. . . . Christ did not stoop to enter into controversy with Satan. . . . But Christ referred all to His Father, saying, 'The Lord rebuke thee.' Jude 9. . . . The resurrection was forever made certain.

Satan was despoiled of his prey; the righteous dead would live again.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 478, 479.

A clear evidence of Moses’ resurrection is found at the Transfiguration. There Moses appeared with the prophet Elijah, who had been translated without seeing death (*2 Kings 2:1–11*). Moses and Elijah even dialogued with Jesus (see *Luke 9:28–36*). “And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (*Luke 9:30, 31, NKJV*). Moses’ appearance, proof of Christ’s coming victory over sin and death, is depicted here in unmistakable terms. It was Moses and Elijah, not their “spirits” (after all, Elijah hadn’t died), who had appeared to Jesus there.

Moses was not allowed to enter the earthly Canaan (*Deut. 34:1–4*) but was taken into the heavenly Canaan. What does this teach about how God “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (*Eph. 3:20, NKJV*)?

MONDAY *October 24*

Two Old Testament Cases

Read 1 Kings 17:8–24 and 2 Kings 4:18–37. What similarities and differences do you see in these two resurrections?

In Hebrews 11, we read that by faith “women received back their dead by resurrection” (*Heb. 11:35, NASB*). This was the case in the two resurrections depicted in the texts for today.

The first one (see *1 Kings 17:8–24*) occurred during the great apostasy in Israel, which happened under the influence of King Ahab and his pagan wife Jezebel. As a severe drought was ravaging the land, God commanded Elijah to go to Zarephath, a town outside of Israel. There he met a poor Phoenician widow who was about to cook a paltry last meal for herself and her son—and then die. But their lives were spared through the miracle of the flour and the oil, which didn’t run out until the drought was over. Sometime later her son became sick and died. In despair, the mother pled with Elijah, who cried out to the Lord. “The LORD listened to the voice of Elijah, and the life of the boy returned to him and he revived” (*1 Kings 17:22, NASB*).

The second resurrection (see *2 Kings 4:18–37*) took place in Shunem, a small village south of Mount Gilboa. Elisha had helped a

poor widow to pay her debts through the miracle of filling many vessels with oil (*2 Kings 4:1–7*). Later, in Shunem, he met a prominent married woman who had no children. The prophet told her that she would have a son, and it happened as predicted. The child grew and was healthy, but one day got sick and died. The Shunammite woman went to Mount Carmel and asked Elisha to come with her to see her son. Elisha prayed persistently to the Lord, and finally the child was alive again.

These women had different backgrounds but the same saving faith. The Phoenician widow hosted the prophet Elijah in an extremely difficult time when there was no safe place for him in Israel. The Shunammite woman and her husband built a special room where the prophet Elisha could stay while passing through their region. When the two children died, their faithful mothers appealed to those prophets of God and had the joy of seeing their children come to life again.

These are great stories, but for each of these two accounts, how many untold others didn't end with something so miraculous? What should this sad fact teach us about just how central to our faith is the promised resurrection at the end of time?

TUESDAY October 25

The Son of the Widow of Nain

The Bible says that Jesus “ ‘went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him’ ” (*Acts 10:38, NASB*). Indeed, all the Gospels are full of accounts of Jesus ministering to many needy and hurting souls, which is why later many Jews came to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

“There were whole villages where there was not a moan of sickness in any house, for He had passed through them and healed all their sick. His work gave evidence of His divine anointing. Love, mercy, and compassion were revealed in every act of His life; His heart went out in tender sympathy to the children of men. He took man’s nature, that He might reach man’s wants. The poorest and humblest were not afraid to approach Him. Even little children were attracted to Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 11, 12.

Read Luke 7:11–17. What important difference is there between what happened in this resurrection and in the ones we looked at yesterday?

During His ministry in Galilee, Jesus healed the sick and expelled demons. One time, He and His followers were approaching the gates of Nain when a funeral procession was going through those gates. In the open coffin was the only son of a widow, who was weeping inconsolably. Full of compassion for the grieving mother, Jesus said

to her, “ ‘Do not weep.’ ” Then Jesus turned to the dead son in the coffin and ordered him, “ ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ ” The son came to life, and Jesus “presented him to his mother” (*Luke 7:13–15, NKJV*). The presence of Jesus completely changed the whole scenario, and many people who had witnessed the miracle knew not only that something astonishing had happened but also that someone special (they called Him “a great prophet”) was among them.

Both the Phoenician widow (*1 Kings 17:8–24*) and the Shunammite woman (*2 Kings 4:18–37*) had asked for help—from Elijah and Elisha, respectively. But the widow of Nain was helped without even asking for it. This means that God cares for us even when we are unable or feel unworthy to ask Him for help. Jesus saw the problem and dealt with it—so typical of Jesus through all His ministry.

True religion involves caring for orphans and widows around us (*James 1:27*). Though, obviously, we won’t be able to do the kind of miracles Jesus did, what can we do to minister to those who are hurting around us?

WEDNESDAY October 26

Jairus's Daughter

The resurrections prior to Jesus' own death and resurrection were not limited to any specific ethnic group or social class. Moses was perhaps the greatest human leader of God's people ever (*Deut. 34:10–12*). By contrast, the poor Phoenician widow was not even an Israelite (*1 Kings 17:9*). The Shunammite woman was prominent in her community (*2 Kings 4:8*). The widow of Nain had only one son, upon whom she was probably dependent (*Luke 7:12*). In contrast, Jairus was a ruler of the synagogue, probably in Capernaum (*Mark 5:22*). Regardless of their different cultural backgrounds or social status, all of them were blessed by God's life-giving power.

Read Mark 5:21–24, 35–43. What can we learn about death from Christ's words “ ‘The child is not dead, but sleeping’ ”? (*Mark 5:39, NKJV*).

Jairus's 12-year-old daughter was lying deathly sick at home. So, he went to Jesus and begged Him to come to his home and lay His healing hands on her. But before they could get there, someone already brought the sad news “ ‘Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?’ ” (*Mark 5:35, NKJV*).

Then Jesus said to the grieving father, “ ‘Do not fear, only believe’ ” (*Mark 5:36, NRSV*). Indeed, all the father could do was trust totally in God's intervention.

Arriving at the house, Jesus said to those who gathered there, “ ‘Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping’ ” (*Mark 5:39, NRSV*). They ridiculed Him because (1) they knew that she was dead, and (2) they did not grasp the meaning of His words. “The comforting metaphor by which ‘sleep’ stands for ‘death’ seems to have been Christ’s favorite way of referring to this experience ([*Matt. 9:24; Luke 8:52;*] see on John 11:11–15). Death is a sleep, but it is a deep sleep from which only the great Life-giver can awaken one, for He alone has the keys to the tomb (see Rev. 1:18; cf. John 3:16; Rom. 6:23).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 609.

After the resurrection of this girl, those who saw it were “overcome with amazement” (*Mark 5:42, NRSV*). No wonder. For now, death is final, absolute, and seemingly irreversible. To have seen something like this with their own eyes surely must have been an amazing, life-changing experience.

Jesus’ words, “ ‘Do not fear, only believe’ ” (*Mark 5:36, NRSV*), are still meaningful for us today. How can we learn to do that, even amid fearful situations, which are the most important times to keep believing?

THURSDAY October 27

Lazarus

Read John 11:1–44. In what sense was Jesus “glorified” by the sickness and death of Lazarus (*John 11:4*)?

Here, too, Jesus uses the metaphor for sleep in talking about death. “ ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up’ ” (*John 11:11, NIV*). When some thought He was talking about literal sleep (*John 11:11–13*), Jesus clearly stated what He meant: “ ‘Lazarus is dead’ ” (*John 11:12–14, NIV*). Actually, when Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead four days; his corpse already was rotting (*John 11:17, 39*). By the time a body starts decomposing badly enough to smell, there’s no question: *the person is dead*.

In this context, when Jesus told Martha, “ ‘Your brother will rise from the dead’ ” (*John 11:23, NASB*), she reaffirmed her belief in the final resurrection. But Jesus declared, “ ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die forever. Do you believe this?’ ” (*John 11:23–26, LEB*). And Jesus added, “ ‘If you believe, you will see the glory of God’ ” (*John 11:40, NASB*). Martha believed, and she saw the glory of God in the resurrection of her brother.

The Bible says that by God’s word life was created (*Gen, 1:20–30, Ps. 33:6*), and by His word life can be re-created, as in the case

of Lazarus. After a short prayer, Jesus ordered, “ ‘Lazarus, come forth!’ ” (*John 11:43, NKJV*). Right then and there these people saw the life-giving power of God, the same power that spoke our world into existence, and the same power that at the end of the age will call the dead back to life in the resurrection.

By raising Lazarus, Jesus proved that He had the power to defeat death, which, for beings like us, who inevitably die—what greater manifestation of God’s glory could there be?

Read John 11:25, 26. In one line Jesus talks about believers dying, and in the next He talks about believers *never* dying. What is Jesus teaching us here, and why is the understanding that death is an unconscious sleep so crucial in understanding Christ’s words? And why do His words offer us, as beings destined to the grave, so much hope?

FRIDAY October 28

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Death of Moses,” pp. 469–480, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Voice of Stern Rebuke,” pp. 129–142; “A Prophet of Peace,” pp. 237–243, in *Prophets and Kings*; “The Centurion,” pp. 318, 319; “The Touch of Faith,” pp. 342, 343; “ ‘Lazarus, Come Forth,’ ” pp. 524–536, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. ‘He that hath the Son hath life.’ 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life. ‘He that believeth in Me,’ said Jesus, ‘though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?’ Christ here [in John 11:25, 26] looks forward to the time of His second coming. Then the righteous dead shall be raised incorruptible, and the living righteous shall be translated to heaven without seeing death. The miracle which Christ was about to perform, in raising Lazarus from the dead, would represent the resurrection of all the righteous dead. By His word and His works He declared Himself the Author of the resurrection. He who Himself was soon to die upon the cross stood with the keys of death, a conqueror of the grave, and asserted His right and power to give eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Many people died during the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha, as well as during Christ’s own earthly ministry. Only a few were resurrected. (See *Luke 4:24–27*.) Thinking, too, about the experience of all of the dead, whether resurrected in the past or at the Second Coming, what

difference does it make, at least in regard to what it was like to be dead?

2 Many writers over the centuries have written about the futility of a life that ends always in death. Along with other living creatures—chickens, beavers, oysters, et cetera—we all die. However, for humans, in a sense our predicament is worse than for the animals, because we know that we are going to die. (See *Eccles. 9:5*.) Chickens, beavers, and oysters don't. Why, then, is the promise of the resurrection so crucial to us?

3 If you think that the soul is immortal and that the dead, especially the righteous dead, live on in heaven after they die, what need is there for the resurrection at the end of time?

4 If someone called and asked, "Is Sally there?" you might answer, "Yes, but she's sleeping." If, however, someone called and asked, "Is Sally there?" you are not going to answer, "Yes, but she's dead." Why not? What does this teach us about the nature of death?

INSIDE *Story*

Christ's Ambassador

By BENJIE LEACH

One of my goals as chaplain of Forest Lake Academy in Orlando, Florida, was to become acquainted with each student. It was a challenge in a school with 450 students in the mid-1970s.

At the beginning of the school year, a student came up to me and asked, "Have you had a chance to become acquainted with Paul yet?" I had not.

"You need to get acquainted," the student said. "Just ask where he is from."

My curiosity was aroused, so I invited Paul to my office. He turned out to be a rather shy 16-year-old. "So, Paul," I asked, "where are you from?"

"I'm from a little town in Georgia called Plains," he said.

My mouth dropped open. "What?" I said. "That is where the president of the United States—Jimmy Carter—lives!"

I had to ask. "Paul," I said, "do you know the president?"

"Oh, yes," he said.

Early that summer, he had needed a job to pay for his tuition at Forest Lake Academy, and he had gotten a job at a peanut warehouse, the main industry, in Plains. He was excited about finding work and thought that he had made it clear about taking Sabbaths off. But his work supervisor stopped him when he left on Friday with a promise to return on Monday.

"No," the supervisor said. "You come tomorrow. We are open Saturday."

"But, you see, I'm a Seventh-day Adventist," Paul said.

"Come tomorrow, or you won't have a job anymore," the supervisor said.

Paul thought for a moment. "Can I speak to the owner?"

“But that’s the president!” the supervisor exclaimed.

“Is he in town?” Paul asked.

“Yes, but I don’t think that it’s going to make any difference.”

Paul went to the Carter home. He had to go through the Secret Service, but he was able to sit down with the president. Jimmy Carter listened attentively as he explained the situation and his observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. “I respect any young person who has convictions and stands up for what he believes,” the president said. “You can have your Sabbaths off.”

And the soft-spoken, 16-year-old teen became Christ’s ambassador to the U.S. president.

You and I also are ambassadors for Christ. “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us” (2 Corinthians 5:20, NKJV). Let us, with Christ’s help, be faithful ambassadors.



This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 1 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan, “To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life.” Read more: IWillGo2020.org.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

LESSON 6

*October 29–November 4

He Died *for Us*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 13:8; Matt. 17:22, 23; Mark 9:30–32; John 19:1–30; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 1:18–24.*

Memory Text: “ ‘And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life’ ” (*John 3:14, 15, NKJV*).

It has been said that we cannot avoid death and taxes. That's not entirely true. People can avoid taxes—but not death. They might be able to put death off a few years, but sooner or later, death always comes. And because we know that the dead, both the righteous and the wicked, end up in the same place at first, our hope of the resurrection means everything to us. As Paul has said, without this hope, even “those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (*1 Cor. 15:18, NKJV*), which is a rather strange thing to say if those who “have fallen asleep in Christ” are buzzing about heaven in the presence of God.

Thus, Christ's resurrection is central to our faith, because in His resurrection we have the surety of our own. But before Christ was

resurrected from the dead, He, of course, had to die. This is why, amid the agony of Gethsemane, in anticipation of His death, He prayed: “ ‘Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? “Father, save Me from this hour”? But for this purpose I came to this hour’ ” (*John 12:27, NKJV*). And that purpose was to die.

This week we will focus on Christ’s death and what it means for the promise of eternal life.

** Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 5.*

SUNDAY *October 30*

“From the Foundation of the World”

Read Revelation 13:8; Acts 2:23; and 1 Peter 1:19, 20. How could Christ be considered “slain from the foundation of the world” (NKJV)?

“All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8, NKJV). What’s crucial here for us is the idea of Christ’s being “slain from the foundation of the world.” Obviously, we must understand this in a symbolic sense (the book of Revelation is full of symbols), because Christ wasn’t crucified until thousands of years after the earth’s Creation. What this text is saying is that the plan of salvation had been put in place before the Creation of the world. And central to that plan would be the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God, on the cross.

Read Titus 1:2. What does this verse teach us about how long ago the plan of salvation, which centered on Christ’s death, had been in place?

“The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. . . . It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

That plan was revealed first to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 3:15, 21*), and it was typified by every blood sacrifice throughout the Old Testament. For instance, while testing Abraham’s faith, God provided a ram to be sacrificed instead of Isaac (*Gen. 22:11–13*). This replacement typified even more clearly the substitutionary nature of Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross.

Thus, central to the whole plan of salvation is the substitutionary death of Jesus, symbolized for centuries by animal sacrifices, each one a symbol of Jesus’ death on the cross as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (*John 1:29*).

Animal sacrifices are gruesome and bloody—that is true. But why is this gruesomeness and bloodiness precisely the point, teaching us about Christ’s death in our place and what the terrible cost of sin was?

MONDAY *October 31*

A Preface to the Cross

What were the reactions of the disciples to Jesus' predictions of His own sufferings and death, and what should their reactions teach us about the dangers of misunderstanding Scripture?

Matt. 16:21–23 _____

Matt. 17:22, 23; Mark 9:30–32; Luke 9:44, 45 _____

Luke 18:31–34 _____

Jesus was born to die, and He lived to die. Every step that He took brought Him closer to His great atoning sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. Fully conscious of His mission, He did not allow anyone or anything to distract Him from it. In reality, “His whole life was a preface to His death on the cross.”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 382.

In the last year of His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke more and more explicitly to His disciples about His forthcoming death. But they seemed unable and unwilling to accept the reality of His statements. Filled with false notions about the role of the Messiah, the last thing that they had expected was for Him, Jesus, especially as the Messiah, to die. In short, their false theology led them into needless pain and suffering.

Already to Nicodemus, Jesus had declared, “ ‘And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life’ ” (*John 3:14, 15, NKJV*). While in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus told His disciples that He had to “ ‘go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day’ ” (*Matt. 16:21, NKJV*). Passing privately through Galilee (*Mark 9:30–32*) and during His final journey to Jerusalem (*Luke 18:31–34*), Jesus spoke again to His disciples about His death and resurrection. Because it was not what they wanted to hear, they didn’t listen. How easy it is for us to do the same.

People, especially God’s chosen people, had false concepts regarding the first coming of the Messiah. What are some of the false concepts out there today regarding the second coming of Jesus?

TUESDAY November 1

“ ‘It Is Finished!’ ”

Read John 19:1–30. What is the crucial message to us in Jesus’ statement, “ ‘It is finished’ ”?

Finally, the crucial moments for Christ, for humankind, and for the whole universe had arrived. With deep agony, He struggled against the powers of darkness. Slowly He made His way through the Garden of Gethsemane, through His unfair trials, and up the mountain of Calvary. Evil angels were trying to overcome Him. While Jesus was hanging on the cross, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders mocked Him, saying “ ‘He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him’ ” (*Matt. 27:42, NKJV*).

Could Christ have come down from the cross and saved Himself? Yes, He was able but not willing to do so. His unconditional love for all humanity, including those mockers, did not allow Him to give up. Actually, “the mockers were among those whom He was dying to save; and He could not come down from the cross and save Himself, because He was held, not by the nails, but by His will to save them.”—Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (London: Elliot Stock, 1910), p. 397.

Here, in the suffering of Christ, Jesus was defeating the kingdom of Satan, even though it was Satan who had instigated the events that led to the cross, including Judas’s betrayal (*John 6:70; John*

13:2, 27). “Somehow, in a way the Evangelist does not try to describe, the death of Jesus is both an act of Satan and an act in which Jesus wins the victory over Satan.”—George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 1994), p. 192.

Crying from the cross, “ ‘It is finished’ ” (*John 19:30*), Christ implied not only that His agony had come to an end, but also especially that He had won the great cosmic-historic controversy against Satan and his evil forces. “All heaven triumphed in the Saviour’s victory. Satan was defeated, and knew that his kingdom was lost.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 758.

It’s hard to grasp the amazing contrast here: in the utter humiliation of the Son of God He had won, for us and for the universe, the greatest and most glorious victory.

Think about how bad sin must be that it took the death of Christ to atone for it. What should this truth teach us about how useless our works are for attaining merit before God? After all, what can we do to add to what Christ has already done for us? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

WEDNESDAY November 2

He Died for Us

Read John 3:14–18 and Romans 6:23. What do these verses teach that Christ's death has accomplished for us?

When Jesus arrived at the Jordan River to be baptized, John the Baptist exclaimed, “ ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (*John 1:29, NKJV*). This statement acknowledged Christ as the antitypical Lamb of God to whom all true sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed.

But animal sacrifices could not take away sins by themselves (*Heb. 10:4*). They provided only conditional forgiveness dependent on the effectiveness of Christ's future sacrifice on the cross. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (*1 John 1:9, NKJV*).

Read John 3:16, 17. What great hope can we take from these verses, especially when we rightly sense that we deserve to be condemned for something that we have done?

Think about what all this means. Jesus, the One who created the cosmos (*John 1:1–3*), offered Himself for each of us, a sacrifice for sins, all so that we don't have to be condemned for what we could justly be condemned for. This is the great promise of the gospel.

Jesus Christ declared that “ ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son’ ” to die for us (*John 3:16, NRSV*). But we should never forget that Christ offered Himself voluntarily on our behalf (*Heb. 9:14*). Martin Luther referred to the cross as “the altar on which He [Christ], consumed by the fire of the boundless love which burned in His heart, presented the living and holy sacrifice of His body and blood to the Father with fervent intercession, loud cries, and hot, anxious tears (*Heb. 5:7*).”—*Luther’s Works*, vol. 13 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 319. Christ died once for all (*Heb. 10:10*) and once forever (*Heb. 10:12*), for His sacrifice is all-sufficient and never loses its power.

And there’s more: “If but one soul would have accepted the gospel of His grace, Christ would, to save that one, have chosen His life of toil and humiliation and His death of shame.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 135.

Read again John 3:16, replacing the words “the world” and “whoever” with your own name. How can you learn, moment by moment, especially when tempted to sin, to make this wonderful promise yours?

THURSDAY November 3

The Meaning of the Cross

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18–24. What is Paul saying about the Cross, and how does he contrast it with the “wisdom of the world”? Why, even today, when “materialism” (the idea that all reality is only material, which means there is no God or supernatural realm of existence) dominates “the wisdom of the world,” is the message of the Cross so important?

The Cross of Christ is the very center of salvation history. “Eternity can never fathom the depth of love revealed in the cross of Calvary. It was there that the infinite love of Christ and the unbounded selfishness of Satan stood face to face.”—Stephen N. Haskell, *The Cross and Its Shadow* (South Lancaster, MA: Bible Training School, 1914), p. v.

While Christ was humbly offering Himself as a ransom for the human race, Satan was selfishly engulfing Him in suffering and agony. Christ did not die just the natural death that every human being has to face. He died the second death, so that all those who accept Him will never have to experience it for themselves.

In regard to the meaning of the Cross, there are several important aspects that we should remember. First, the Cross is the supreme revelation of God’s justice against sin (*Rom. 3:21–26*). Second, the Cross is the supreme revelation of God’s love for sinners (*Rom. 5:8*). Third, the Cross is the great source of power to break the chains of

sin (*Rom. 6:22, 23; 1 Cor. 1:17–24*). Fourth, the Cross is our only hope of eternal life (*Phil. 3:9–11; John 3:14–16; 1 John 5:11, 12*). And fifth, the Cross is the only antidote against a future rebellion in the universe (*Rev. 7:13–17, Rev. 22:3*).

None of these crucial truths about the Cross can be discovered by the “wisdom of the world.” On the contrary, then, as now, the preaching of the Cross is “foolishness” to worldly wisdom, which often doesn’t even acknowledge the most obvious truth there could be: that a Creator exists (see *Rom. 1:18–20*).

The Greek word for “foolishness” is linked to the English word “moron”; that is, the preaching of the Cross is “moronic” according to the “wisdom of the world.” Worldly wisdom cannot know Jesus or the salvation that He offers us through His substitutionary death on the cross.

Whatever value some “worldly wisdom” can offer, why must we never let it interfere with what we believe about Jesus and the hope we’re offered through “the foolishness of the message preached” (1 Cor. 1:21, NKJV)?

FRIDAY November 4

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Gethsemane,” pp. 685– 697; “Calvary,” pp. 741–758, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Repentance,” p. 27, in *Steps to Christ*.

“I saw that all heaven is interested in our salvation; and shall we be indifferent? Shall we be careless, as though it were a small matter whether we are saved or lost? Shall we slight the sacrifice that has been made for us? Some have done this. They have trifled with offered mercy, and the frown of God is upon them. God’s Spirit will not always be grieved. It will depart if grieved a little longer. After all has been done that God could do to save men, if they show by their lives that they slight Jesus’ offered mercy, death will be their portion, and it will be dearly purchased. It will be a dreadful death; for they will have to feel the agony that Christ felt upon the cross to purchase for them the redemption which they have refused. And they will then realize what they have lost—eternal life and the immortal inheritance. The great sacrifice that has been made to save souls shows us their worth. When the precious soul is once lost, it is lost forever.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 124.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Hebrews 10:4 says, “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (NIV). So, how were people saved in Old Testament times? How can the analogy of a credit card—which you use to make payments but later on have to pay for the credit card bill—help us better understand this subject?

2 Read 2 Corinthians 5:18–21. If Christ died for the sins of the whole world, why won't everyone be saved? Why does personal choice play a crucial role in determining who will be saved by the Cross and who will be lost despite the great sacrifice made in their behalf?

3 What are some things that “worldly wisdom” teaches that are “foolishness” to God? What about the idea that all the incredible design and beauty of the world is purely a chance creation? Or that the universe arose from absolutely nothing? What other examples can you think of?

4 Think about the final question on Tuesday's study. What about the Cross, and what happened there, makes the idea of salvation by works so futile, so erroneous, and so contrary to the plan of salvation?

Turning the Other Cheek

By RICK McEDWARD

Omar, a university student in the Middle East, desperately needed a job, but he wasn't ready to do *anything* to get hired. During a job interview, he openly told the company representative that he could not work on Saturdays because that was his holy day. The company representative did not blink.

"That's fine," he replied. "We don't need you."

It was true. National unemployment was so high that the company really didn't need Omar. Many people were looking for work, and it would be easy to find someone willing to work on Saturdays.

Sadly, Omar left the company's office. Omar was a new believer who, just days earlier, had given his life to Christ. He had mingled with believers for six years and searched the Bible before making his decision. After the job rejection, he bought a three-wheeled cart with a plan to make money by selling *simit*, a circular bread covered with sesame seeds.

Omar's Sabbath-keeping friends were touched by his faithful stand for Jesus and began to pray for him.

A few days later, Omar announced excitedly that the company had called him back and offered him the job with Saturdays off. He was so excited that he decided to find at least one person a day to tell about Christ.

Sipping a drink at a local café a few days later, he and an elderly man began to talk about religion. Omar shared his journey from his family's traditional holy book to the Bible and the incredible peace that he had found.

As Omar left the café, a man who had overheard the conversation from a nearby table followed him. "I can't believe that you could say such things!" the man yelled. "Are you not ashamed? You grew up in

our country and know better!” The man began to beat Omar with his fists.

Later that day, when a Sabbath-keeping friend video-called Omar, he was greeted by a large, swollen eye and an even larger smile of joy. “You could have called the police!” the friend said.

“Yes,” Omar said. “But . . . Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek.”

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” (*Matthew 5:38, 39, NKJV*).



This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . across the 10/40 Window . . . and to non-Christian religions." Read more: IWillGo2020.org. Omar is a pseudonym.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

LESSON 7

*November 5–11

Christ's Victory Over Death



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 27:62–66; John 10:17, 18; Matt. 27:51–53; John 20:11–29; 1 Cor. 15:5–8.*

Memory Text: “When I saw him, I fell down at his feet like a dead man. He put his right hand on me and said, ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the One who lives; I was dead, but look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys to death and to the place of the dead’ ” (*Rev. 1:17, 18, NCV*).

Central to the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus. Paul made this point very powerfully when he wrote: “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (*1 Cor. 15:16–18, NKJV*). We will look at this in more detail next week.

Thus, no matter all the emphasis Paul put on Christ's death, and how important it was—“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (*1 Cor. 2:2, NKJV*)—it really does us no good apart from His resurrection. That's

how crucial the resurrection of Jesus is to the entire Christian faith and the plan of salvation.

However, it's hard to understand why the resurrection of Christ and with it our resurrection are so important if, as many believe, the dead in Christ are already enjoying the bliss of heaven as they have "gone home to be with the Lord."

All that aside, this week we will look at Christ's resurrection and all the convincing evidence He gave us to believe in it.

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

SUNDAY November 6

A Sealed Tomb

Christ's mission seemed to have ended (and even failed) with His death on the cross. Satan succeeded in instigating Judas to betray the Savior (*Luke 22:3, 4; John 13:26, 27*) and the chief priests and elders to demand His death (*Matt. 26:59, Matt. 27:20*). After Jesus was arrested, "all the disciples forsook Him and fled" (*Matt. 26:56, NKJV*), and Peter denied Him three times (*Matt. 26:69–75*). Now Jesus was lying in a tomb hewed out of a rock, closed with a large and sealed stone, protected by Roman guards (*Matt. 27:57–66*), and watched by invisible demonic powers. "If he could, he [Satan] would have held Christ locked in the tomb."—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 12, p. 412.

During His earthly ministry, Christ had foretold not only His death on the cross but also His resurrection. Using the Eastern inclusive language—in which a fraction of a day stands for a whole day—Jesus mentioned that " 'as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth' " (*Matt. 12:39, 40, NKJV*). On other occasions Jesus underscored that He would be killed but on the third day He would rise again (*Matt. 16:21; Matt. 17:22, 23; Matt. 20:17–19*). The chief priests and the Pharisees were aware of those statements and took measures that they hoped would prevent His resurrection.

Read Matthew 27:62–66. How did these actions only help provide the world later with more evidence for the resurrection of Jesus?

All security measures taken to keep Jesus locked in the tomb only made His victory over death and the hosts of evil even more noticeable because of all the precautions and measures that His enemies took to try to make sure it would never happen.

Also, these men surely had heard of the miracles of Jesus; they had seen some of them, too. And yet, they thought that a guard over the tomb could stop Him, the one who was able to do so many miracles, from being resurrected?

Also, they put a guard around the tomb in case of—what? That the disciples might steal the body and then claim that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead? When the people would ask, “Where is the risen Jesus?” They could say: “Just take our word for it.”

If nothing else, their actions revealed just how afraid the chief priests were of Jesus, even after He died. Perhaps, deep down, they did fear that He just might be resurrected after all.

MONDAY *November 7*

“ ‘He Is Risen!’ ”

The victory of Christ over Satan and his evil powers was secured on the cross and confirmed by the empty tomb. “When Jesus was laid in the grave, Satan triumphed. He dared to hope that the Saviour would not take up His life again. He claimed the Lord’s body, and set his guard about the tomb, seeking to hold Christ a prisoner. He was bitterly angry when his angels fled at the approach of the heavenly messenger. When he saw Christ come forth in triumph, he knew that his kingdom would have an end, and that he must finally die.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 782. And though Christ’s humanity died, His divinity did not die. In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death.

Read Matthew 28:1–6; John 10:17, 18; and Romans 8:11.
Who was directly involved in the resurrection of Jesus?

During His ministry in Samaria-Peraea, Jesus stated that He Himself had power to lay down His life and to take it again (*John 10:17, 18*). To Martha He said, “ ‘I am the resurrection, and the life’ ” (*John 11:25*). Other passages speak of His resurrection as an act of God (*Acts 2:24, Rom. 8:11, Gal. 1:1, Heb. 13:20*). Even a mighty angel of the Lord was involved in that glorious event (*Matt. 28:1, 2*).

Meanwhile, Matthew 28:11–15 reveals the futile and foolish efforts of the leaders to continue fighting against Jesus. The Roman guard

told the leaders “all the things that had happened” (*Matt. 28:11, NKJV*). Implicit in this account is the idea that the guards saw the Resurrection. If not, what would their words mean? An angel came down from heaven, moved the stone, sat on it, and the guards fainted? The next thing that they knew the tomb was empty? Maybe, while the Romans were unconscious, the angel took away the body of Jesus? Maybe the disciples did? Or someone else stole it? Whatever happened, the body of Jesus was, obviously, gone.

An angel from heaven coming down, the men fainting from fear, and the tomb being empty would have been disconcerting enough to the religious leaders. But that they “gave a large sum of money to the soldiers” (*Matt. 28:12, NKJV*) to keep these men quiet implied that whatever the soldiers told them disturbed them deeply. And what they told of, of course, was the resurrection of Jesus.

Some scoff at the idea that the first people to see Christ resurrected were Romans. Why? In what ways is this truth symbolic of what was to come: the gospel going to the Gentiles, as well?

TUESDAY November 8

Many Arose With Him

“Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many” (Matt. 27:51–53, NKJV).

What does this incredible account teach us about the resurrection of Jesus and what it accomplished?

An earthquake marked the death of Jesus (*Matt. 27:50, 51*), and another one marked His resurrection (*Matt. 28:2*). At the moment Jesus died, “the earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people” (*Matt. 27:51–53, NIV*). These saints were raised glorified as witnesses of Christ’s own resurrection and as prototypes of those who will be raised at the final resurrection. Thus, right after the resurrection of Jesus, many of the Jewish people were given powerful evidence to believe in His resurrection and thus to accept Him as their Savior, which many did, including many priests (see *Acts 6:7*).

“During His ministry, Jesus had raised the dead to life. He had raised the son of the widow of Nain, and the ruler’s daughter and Lazarus. But these were not clothed with immortality. After they were raised, they were still subject to death. But those who came forth from the grave at Christ’s resurrection were raised to everlasting life. They ascended with Him as trophies of His victory over death and the grave. . . . These went into the city, and appeared unto many, declaring, Christ has risen from the dead, and we be risen with Him. Thus was immortalized the sacred truth of the resurrection.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 786.

Humanly speaking, the chief priests and elders had great advantages. They held the religious power of the nation and were even able to convince the Roman authorities and the crowds to help them with their schemes. But they forgot that “ ‘ “the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes” ’ ” (*Dan. 4:32, NASB*). Their lies were contradicted and invalidated by the existence of those resurrected saints.

No matter how bad things can get now, why can we trust in God’s ultimate victory for us as we still struggle in this fallen world?

WEDNESDAY November 9

Witnesses of the Risen Christ

Read John 20:11–29 and 1 Corinthians 15:5–8. How did the disciples react when they first met the risen Christ?

The two angels at the empty tomb told Mary Magdalene and some other women that Jesus had risen (*Matt. 28:1, 5–7; Mark 16:1–7; Luke 24:1–11*). But soon Jesus Himself appeared to them, and they worshiped Him (*Matt. 28:1, 9, 10; John 20:14–18*). He appeared also to Peter (*Luke 24:34, 1 Cor. 15:5*) and to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, whose hearts were burning while He was speaking to them (*Mark 16:12, Luke 24:13–35*). When Jesus came into the Upper Room, the disciples were initially terrified and frightened, but then they were filled with joy and marveled at what had happened (*Luke 24:33–49, John 20:19–23*). A week later, Jesus came again into the same room without opening the doors, and then even Thomas believed in His resurrection (*John 20:24–29*).

During the 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension, Jesus “was seen by over five hundred brethren at once” (*1 Cor. 15:6, NKJV*) and by James (*1 Cor. 15:7*). Jesus joined some disciples at the shore of the Sea of Galilee and had breakfast with them, followed by a talk with Peter (*John 21:1–23*). There might have been other appearances of Jesus (*Acts 1:3*) before the final one at His ascension (*Luke 24:50–53, Acts 1:1–11*). Paul also considered himself an eyewitness to the risen Christ, who appeared to him on the road to Damascus (*1 Cor. 15:8; compare with Acts 9:1–9*).

When the other disciples first told the absent Thomas they had seen the risen Lord, he reacted by saying, “ ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe’ ” (*John 20:25, NKJV*). A week later, Jesus reappeared to the disciples, now with Thomas present, Jesus said to him, “ ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing’ ” (*John 20:27, NKJV*).

Then Thomas confessed, “ ‘My Lord and my God!’ ”

And Jesus added, “ ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’ ” (*John 20:29, NKJV*).

“ ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’ ” Even if you have not seen for yourself the resurrected Christ, what other reasons do you have for your faith in Jesus?

THURSDAY November 10

“The First Fruits of Those Who Have Died”

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20, in light of Deuteronomy 26:1–11. In what sense did Paul refer to the risen Christ as “the first fruits of those who have died” (NRSV)?

The offering of “the first fruits” was an ancient Israelite agricultural practice with deep religious significance. It was a sacred recognition of God as the gracious Provider, who had entrusted His stewards with the land where the crops grew and were ready to be harvested (see *Exod. 23:19, Exod. 34:26, Lev. 2:11–16, Deut. 26:1–11*). The first fruits indicated that the harvest was not only starting but also revealing the quality of its products.

According to Wayne Grudem, “in calling Christ ‘the first fruits’ (in Greek *aparchē*), Paul uses a metaphor from agriculture to indicate that we will be like Christ. Just as the ‘first fruits’ or the first taste of the ripening crop show what the rest of the harvest will be like for that crop, so Christ as the ‘first fruits’ shows what our resurrection bodies will be like when, in God’s final ‘harvest,’ he raises us from the dead and brings us into his presence.”—*Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), p. 615.

It is worth remembering that Jesus came out of the grave with a glorified human body, but He was still carrying the marks of His

crucifixion (*John 20:20, 27*). Does this mean that the risen children of God will likewise bear the physical marks of their own sufferings? In the case of the apostle Paul, will he still carry in his glorified body the “thorn in the flesh” (*2 Cor. 12:7, NKJV*) and “the marks of the Lord Jesus” (*Gal. 6:17, NKJV*)?

Until his death, Paul “was ever to carry about with him in the body the marks of Christ’s glory, in his eyes, which had been blinded by the heavenly light [see *Acts 9:1–9*].”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 275. But this does not mean that he or any other of the glorified redeemed will be raised with the marks of their own sufferings (*compare with 1 Cor. 15:50–54*). In the case of Christ, “the marks of this cruelty He will ever bear. Every print of the nails will tell the story of man’s wonderful redemption and the dear price by which it was purchased.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 179. His marks are what guarantee us that all of ours will be forever gone.

Christ will forever bear the scars of His crucifixion. What does that reveal about God’s love for us and what it cost to save us? How does it show, too, how much the Godhead has invested in saving us?

FRIDAY November 11

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “In Joseph’s Tomb,” pp. 769–778; “The Lord Is Risen,” pp. 779–787; “Why Weepest Thou?” pp. 788–794; “The Walk to Emmaus,” pp. 795–801; “Peace Be Unto You,” pp. 802–808, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Modern sentiment doesn’t allow for something like the resurrection of Jesus. However, the historical evidence is so strong that even those who can’t accept the reality of the Resurrection are forced to admit that many people *believed* that they had seen the resurrected Jesus. Thus, much of antiresurrection apologetics is the attempt to explain what could have caused all these different people to believe that they had seen the risen Christ.

Some have argued that all the disciples hallucinated the resurrected Jesus; others that Jesus hadn’t really died but only had swooned and then come back to life after He had been brought down from the cross, and when He had reappeared, His followers thought that He had been raised from the dead. And (believe it or not) some have argued that Jesus had a twin brother whom the disciples mistook for the risen Christ. In other words, the historical evidence is so strong for Christ’s resurrection that these are the kinds of arguments people concoct in order to try to dismiss it. With the Resurrection itself so important, we should not be surprised by all the good reasons we have been given to believe it.

“The voice that cried from the cross, ‘It is finished,’ was heard among the dead. It pierced the walls of sepulchers, and summoned the sleepers to arise. Thus will it be when the voice of Christ shall be heard from heaven. That voice will penetrate the graves and unbar the tombs, and the dead in Christ shall arise. At the Saviour’s resurrection a few graves were opened, but at His second coming all the precious dead shall hear His voice, and shall come forth to glorious, immortal life. The same power that raised Christ from the

dead will raise His church, and glorify it with Him, above all principalities, above all powers, above every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in the world to come.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 787.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** “ ‘It is finished’ ” (*John 19:30*) and “ ‘He is risen’ ” (*Matt. 28:6, NKJV*) are two of the most meaningful statements ever made. How do they complement each other within salvation history? What great hope is found in these words for us?
- 2** At first the religious leaders wanted guards at the tomb to keep the disciples from stealing the body of Jesus. Later they paid the guards to say that the disciples did steal the body. How does this account help to reveal the reality of Christ’s empty tomb, and why is that empty tomb so important to us as Christians?

INSIDE *Story*

Accepting the Word: Part 1

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Eulalia Rashid ran out of beer and headed to the store to buy more in the Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. commonwealth in the Pacific Ocean.

It was Christmas Eve. She was lonely and had no one with whom to celebrate the holiday. An alcoholic for 37 years, she had all but abandoned her four children and 13 grandchildren. She also was ill with colon cancer.

As Eulalia walked, a small wooden box caught her eye on the ground on the darkened street. She picked it up and shook it, thinking some money might be inside. Sure enough, a penny was inside, and she placed the box in her pocket. Minutes later, standing in the light of the store, she pulled out the box and saw words written on the top, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (*Psalm 119:105, NKJV*).

The next morning, on Christmas Day, Eulalia read and reread the words on the box. *What is this "word"?* she wondered. *What is this lamp that is to light my path?* Eulalia had always believed in Jesus, but she had never had a relationship with Him. Now she tried to translate Psalm 119:105 into her native Tomoro and Palau languages. She looked up the verse in several Bible translations. Still not understanding the words, she decided to read through the entire Bible. Maybe she would find an explanation somewhere.

One day, she read John 1:1, which says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (*NKJV*). Her eyes lit up with joy. She read on, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (*John 1:14, NKJV*). *Here is the answer!* she thought. *The Word is Jesus! Jesus is the Lamp that lights my path!*

By now she loved reading the Bible. She kept on reading, and she started to pray regularly. As she read and prayed, her life changed. She read that God had set aside the seventh day as Sabbath in Exodus 20, and she began to keep the Sabbath in her home. She read about clean and unclean foods in Leviticus 11 and modified her diet. When she saw that God gave Adam and Eve a plant-based diet, she cultivated a garden of sweet potatoes, spinach, string beans, eggplant, tomatoes, tapioca, papayas, mangoes, lemons, dragon fruit, soursop, mulberries, and coconuts.

Her family did not understand what was going on. They were astonished to see that she had stopped drinking. She told them that one day she had simply decided not to drink, and Jesus had taken away her desire for alcohol in the twinkling of an eye.

Eulalia didn't know it, but she was already becoming a missionary to her family by her example.



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LESSON 8

*November 12–18

The New Testament Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Cor. 15:12–19, John 14:1–3, John 6:26–51, 1 Thess. 4:13–18, 1 Cor. 15:51–55.*

Memory Text: “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (*1 John 5:11, 12, NKJV*).

Though writing in Greek, all the New Testament writers (except Luke) were Jews, and they of course approached the nature of human beings from the wholistic Hebrew perspective, not from the Greek pagan one.

Thus, for Christ and the apostles, the Christian hope was not a new hope but, rather, the unfolding of the ancient hope already nurtured by the patriarchs and prophets. For example, Christ mentioned that Abraham foresaw and rejoiced to see His day (*John 8:56*). Jude stated that Enoch prophesied about the Second Coming (*Jude 14, 15*). And the book of Hebrews speaks of the heroes of faith as having expected a heavenly reward that they would not receive until we receive ours (*Heb. 11:39, 40*). This statement would be meaningless if their souls were already with the Lord in heaven.

By stressing that only those who are in Christ have eternal life (1 John 5:11, 12), John disproves the theory of the natural immortality of the soul. Truly, there is no eternal life apart from a saving relationship with Christ. The New Testament hope, then, is a Christ-centered hope, and the only hope that this mortal existence will one day become an immortal one.

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

SUNDAY November 13

Hope Beyond This Life

The ancient Greek historian Herodotus (fifth century BC) wrote about a tribe that, at a birth, began a period of mourning because they anticipated the suffering that the infant would face if it lived to adulthood. However alien to us the ritual might seem, there is some logic to it.

Millennia later, an advertisement in America in the early twentieth century read “Why live, if you can be buried for ten dollars?”

Life can be hard enough, we know, even if we believe in God and in the hope of eternity. Imagine, though, how hard it is for those who have no hope of anything beyond the short and often troubled existence here. More than one secular writer has commented on the meaninglessness of human existence, since we all not only die, but we all also live with the realization that we are going to die. And this realization is what makes the whole project of human life, which is often hard and sorrowful in and of itself, seemingly null and void. One thinker referred to humans as nothing but “hunks of spoiling flesh on disintegrating bones.” Rather macabre, but, again, it’s hard to argue with the logic.

Of course, in contrast to all this, we have the biblical promise of eternal life *in Jesus*. And that is the key: we have this hope *in Jesus* and what His death and resurrection offer us. Otherwise, what hope do we have?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–19. What is Paul saying here about how closely related Christ’s resurrection is to the hope of our own resurrection?

Paul is explicit: our resurrection is inseparably tied to Christ's resurrection. And if we don't rise, then it means that Christ has not risen, and if Christ has not risen, then—what? “Your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (*1 Cor. 15:17, NKJV*). In other words, when we die we stay dead, and forever, too, and thus, it all is meaningless. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:32, “If the dead do not rise, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!’ ” (*NKJV*).

If our present existence as carbon-based protoplasm is all there is, and our “threescore and ten years” (if we are fortunate; more if we don't smoke or eat too many hamburgers) are all that we get—ever—we're in pretty tough shape. No wonder Ellen G. White adds, “Heaven is worth everything to us, and if we lose heaven we lose all.”—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 349.

Think about how precious our hope and faith is. Why must we do all that we can, by God's grace, to preserve it?

MONDAY *November 14*

“I Will Come Again”

Read John 14:1–3. It has already been almost 2,000 years since Jesus promised to come again. How can we help others see that, despite the great length of time (which really doesn't matter), this promise is relevant even to our own generation, so long removed from the time when Jesus spoke it?

Four times in the book of Revelation Jesus stated, “ ‘I am coming soon!’ ” (*Rev. 3:11; Rev. 22:7, 12, 20, NIV*). The expectation of His soon coming drove the mission of the apostolic church and filled the lives of uncountable Christians throughout the centuries with hope. But generation after generation has died, and this promised event has not yet occurred. And thus, many are enquiring: How much longer will we have to preach that “Jesus is coming soon”? Have these words generated an unrealistic expectation? (*See 2 Pet. 3:4.*)

Many Christians have complained about the long “delay” (*compare with Matt. 25:5*). But how do we, in fact, know that it is a long “delay”? What would have been the “right” time for Christ to have returned? Would it have been 50 years ago, 150, 500? What really matters is the biblical promise that “the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (*2 Pet. 3:9, NIV*).

Despite the long centuries since Jesus ascended, the promise of His coming remains relevant, even today. Why? Because all that we have is our own short life (*Ps. 90:10*), followed by an unconscious rest in the grave (*Eccles. 9:5, 10*), and then the final resurrection, without any later opportunity to change our destiny (*Heb. 9:27*). As far as each one of the dead is concerned (as stated in lesson 3), because all the dead are asleep and unconscious, the second coming of Christ is never more than a moment or two after they die. For you, in your personal experience (as for all of God's people of every age), Christ's return is no more than a moment after your death. That's very soon, is it not?

Every passing day brings us one day closer to the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven. Though we don't know *when* He will come, we can be certain that He *will*, and that is what really matters.

A pastor preached a sermon, arguing that he didn't care when Christ returned. All he cared about was that Christ *does* return. How does that logic work for you, and how might it help if you are discouraged over Christ's having not yet returned?

TUESDAY November 15

“ ‘I Will Raise Him Up’ ”

In one of His miracles, Jesus fed 5,000 people with just a small amount of bread and fish (*John 6:1–14*). Perceiving that the multitude then intended to proclaim Him king (*John 6:15*), Jesus sailed with His disciples to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. But the next day the multitude followed Him there, where He delivered His powerful sermon on the Bread of Life, with special emphasis on the gift of everlasting life (*John 6:22–59*).

Read John 6:26–51. How did Jesus associate the gift of everlasting life with the final resurrection of the righteous?

In His sermon, Jesus highlighted three basic concepts in regard to eternal life. First, He identified Himself as “ ‘the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world’ ” (*John 6:33, 58, NIV*). By declaring that “ ‘I am [Greek *egō eimi*] the bread of life’ ” (*John 6:35, 48*), Jesus presented Himself as the Great “I AM” of the Old Testament (*Exod. 3:14*). Second, Jesus explained that everlasting life can be secured in Him: “ ‘he who comes to Me’ ” and “ ‘he who believes in Me’ ” will have this blessing (*John 6:35, NKJV*). And finally, Jesus linked the gift of immortality with the final resurrection, assuring His audience three times, “ ‘and I will raise him up at the last day’ ” (*John 6:40, 44, 54, NKJV*).

Jesus also gave this amazing promise: “ ‘Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life’ ” (*John 6:47, NRSV*). So, the gift of eternal life is already a present reality. But this does not mean that the believer will never die, for the very expression “raise him up” (*John 6:40, NKJV*) presupposes coming back to life after one has died.

The picture is clear. Without Christ, one does not have eternal life. But, even after accepting Christ and having the assurance of eternal life, we continue for now being mortal and, therefore, subject to natural death. At the Second Coming, Jesus will resurrect us and, then and there, He will give us the gift of immortality that was ours already. The gift is assured, not because of a supposed natural immortality of the soul but, rather, because of the righteousness of Jesus that comes to us by faith in Him.

Dwell on the words of Jesus that, if you believe in Him, you have (as in *right now*) eternal life! How can this wonderful promise help you deal with the painful reality of our present, though only temporary, mortality?

WEDNESDAY November 16

At the Sound of the Trumpet

The Thessalonians were convinced that eternal life would be granted exclusively to those who would remain alive until the Second Coming. “They had carefully guarded the lives of their friends, lest they should die and lose the blessing which they looked forward to receiving at the coming of their Lord. But one after another their loved ones had been taken from them, and with anguish the Thessalonians had looked for the last time upon the faces of their dead, hardly daring to hope to meet them in a future life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 258.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. How did Paul correct this misconception?

There is a historical tendency to read into the expression “bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus” (*1 Thess. 4:14, NKJV*) more than the text is saying. Many who accept the theory of the natural immortality of the soul suggest that Christ, at His second coming, will bring with Him from heaven the souls of the righteous dead who are already in heaven with God. Those souls thus can be reunited with their respective resurrected bodies. But such an interpretation is not in harmony with the overall teachings of Paul on the subject.

Read the words of this non-Adventist theologian on the real meaning of this verse: “The reason why the Thessalonian Christians

can have hope as they grieve for the dead members of their church is that God ‘will bring’ them, that is, he will resurrect these deceased believers and cause them to be present at Christ’s return, such that they will be ‘with him.’ The implication is that these deceased believers will not be at some kind of disadvantage at the parousia of Christ but will be ‘with him’ in such a way that they share equally with living believers in the glory associated with his return.”—Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 319.

If the souls of the righteous dead were already with the Lord in heaven, Paul would not need to mention the final resurrection as the Christian hope; he could have just mentioned that the righteous were already with the Lord. But, instead, he says that “those who sleep in Jesus” (*1 Thess. 4:14, NKJV*) would be resurrected from the dead at the end of time.

The hope in the final resurrection brought comfort to the grieving Thessalonians. The same hope can help us face with confidence the painful moments when the cold grip of death takes our loved ones from us.

THURSDAY November 17

The Everlasting Encounter

Read 1 Corinthians 15:51–55. What “mystery” (1 Cor. 15:51) is Paul explaining?

Some popular preachers suggest that this “mystery” (1 Cor. 15:51) is the “secret rapture” of the church, which is to occur seven years prior to Christ’s glorious second coming. In this “secret rapture” faithful Christians are suddenly, quietly, and secretly whisked off to heaven while everyone else remains here wondering what happened to them. People might suddenly find themselves in a driverless car, because the driver was raptured to heaven, and all that “remains is their clothes.” The 16-volume best-selling *Left Behind* series, turned into four movies, promoted this false teaching, exposing millions to it.

Of course, no biblical passage endorses such an artificial distinction between the rapture and the Second Coming. The “mystery” Paul is referring to is simply the transformation of the living righteous to join the resurrected righteous at Christ’s second coming. This is the “rapture.” There is no “secret rapture” because the Second Coming will be visible to all living human beings (*Rev. 1:7*), and both the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the living ones will occur at the sound of the trumpet at Christ’s return (1 Cor. 15:51, 52).

Christ’s second coming will bring about the most amazing encounter ever. The living righteous are changed “in a moment, in

the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52). At the voice of God, they are glorified; now they are made immortal and with the risen saints are caught up to meet their Lord in the air. Angels “ ‘gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other’ ” (Matt. 24:31, NKJV).

“Little children are borne by holy angels to their mothers’ arms. Friends long separated by death are united, nevermore to part, and with songs of gladness ascend together to the City of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 645.

This is such an amazing promise, something so different from anything that we have experienced that it’s hard to grasp. But think about the vastness of the cosmos, as well as the incredible complexity of life here. Creation itself testifies to God’s amazing power. What does all this teach us about the power of God to translate the living and raise the dead at Jesus’ second coming?

FRIDAY November 18

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Thessalonian Letters,” pp. 255–268; “Called to Reach a Higher Standard,” pp. 319–321, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“The Romans,” writes Stephen Cave, “were well aware of the Christians’ belief that they would one day rise bodily from the grave and did everything they could to mock and hinder those hopes. A report of a persecution in Gaul in 177 CE records that the martyrs were first executed, then their corpses left to rot unburied for six days before being burned and the ashes thrown into the river Rhône —‘Now let us see whether they will rise again,’ the Romans are reported to have said.”—*Immortality: The Quest to Live Forever and How It Drives Civilization* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), pp. 104, 105.

This little object lesson in theological skepticism, however dramatic, is beside the point; it proved nothing about the biblical promise of the resurrection. The Power who raised Jesus from the dead can do the same for us, as well, regardless of the state of our body. After all, if that same Power created and upholds the entire cosmos, He certainly could translate the living and resurrect the dead.

“‘Even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him’ [1 Thess. 4:14], Paul wrote. Many interpret this passage to mean that the sleeping ones will be brought with Christ from heaven; but Paul meant that as Christ was raised from the dead, so God will call the sleeping saints from their graves and take them with Him to heaven. Precious consolation! glorious hope! not only to the church of Thessalonica, but to all Christians wherever they may be.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 259.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Someone said: “Death wipes you out. . . . To be wiped out completely, traces and all, goes a long way toward destroying the meaning of one’s life.” What hope, then, do we have against such meaninglessness in our lives?
- 2** How can we harmonize the need to grow toward perfection (*Phil. 3:12–16*) with the fact that only at Christ’s second coming will we receive an incorruptible and sinless nature (*1 Cor. 15:50–55*)?
- 3** How might we be able to help someone caught up in the idea of the “secret rapture” to see why this teaching is wrong?
- 4** Read again 1 Corinthians 15:12–19. What in these verses pre-sents such powerful evidence for the teaching that the dead are asleep as opposed to being up in heaven with Jesus? What sense do these verses make if the righteous dead are, indeed, in heaven with Jesus now?

INSIDE *Story*

Accepting the Word: Part 2

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Eulalia Rashid completed her goal of reading the Bible from cover to cover on the Pacific island of Saipan in three years. Based on what she read, she began to keep the Sabbath and eat a plant-based diet. An alcoholic for 37 years, she told her family that Jesus had taken away her desire to drink.

But she had colon cancer, a medical diagnosis that was made before she started reading the Bible. Then she came down with painful shingles. The two illnesses caused terrible suffering. But her attention was elsewhere. She did not understand why she felt as if she did not really know Jesus even though she had read the entire Bible. She earnestly prayed.

Abruptly, an inexplicable desire overcame her to call the Saipan Seventh-day Adventist Clinic. “I’m sorry, but this is not concerning the clinic,” Eulalia told the person who answered the phone. “I need to talk with someone from church. I’ve read the whole Bible, but I’m still hungry and thirsty.”

A short time later, a young pastor showed up at Eulalia’s door. The two hit it off immediately. Eulalia felt as if she had known the pastor her whole life, and they began to study the Bible together. Eulalia asked to get baptized.

About a month before the fall 2019 baptism, Eulalia’s terrible pain suddenly vanished. A doctor had told Eulalia that shingles was untreatable and she would suffer for many months. But now the pain was gone. She touched her stomach and sensed that something else was different. A short time later, the doctor pronounced her cancer-free.

Today, Eulalia is a missionary to her neighbors and family of four children and 13 grandchildren on Saipan. She prays for them as she

tends her luscious green garden, which she calls her prayer garden. She gives the fruit of her labors to neighbors. A room in her house has been set aside as a worship place where Adventists and others gather on Sabbath evenings.

Eulalia, 66, has no doubt that the psalmist was correct when he said, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (*Psalms* 119:105, NKJV).

“My hope and encouragement to other people is: follow the Word,” she said. “Jesus is the Word. He is the way to everlasting life.”



This mission story illustrates the following components of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan: Mission Objective No. 1, “To strengthen Seventh-day Adventist institutions in upholding freedom, wholistic health, and hope through Jesus, and restoring in people the image of God,” and Spiritual Growth Objective No. 5, “To disciple individuals and families into Spirit-filled lives.”

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LESSON 9

*November 19–25

Contrary Passages?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 16:19–31, Luke 23:43, John 20:17, Phil. 1:21–24, 1 Pet. 3:13–20, Rev. 6:9–11.*

Memory Text: “ ‘You search the Scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me’ ” (*John 5:39, NKJV*).

Peter warns us: “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (*1 Pet. 3:15, NKJV*). Paul adds, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine” (*2 Tim. 4:2, 3, NKJV*). This being the case, we should look not only at those passages that easily can be explained to fit our beliefs but also at passages that are commonly used to teach something different from what we believe.

As we do, we should follow the inspiring example of Jesus. “Christ Himself did not suppress one word of truth, but He spoke it always in love. . . . He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word,

never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 353.

This week we will study some intriguing passages that people use to justify the natural immortality of the soul. These reflections should strengthen our own convictions and help us to answer kindly those who question this crucial teaching.

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 26.*

SUNDAY November 20

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Read Luke 16:19–31. Why is this story not a literal description of the afterlife?

Some scholars suggest that Luke 16:19–31 should be interpreted literally, that is, as describing the state of the dead. But this view would lead to several unbiblical conclusions and would contradict many of the passages that we have already looked at.

First, we would have to admit that heaven and hell are close enough to allow a conversation between the dwellers of both places (*Luke 16:23–31*). We also would have to suppose that in the afterlife, while the body lies in the grave, there remains a conscious form of the spiritual soul with “ ‘eyes,’ ” a “ ‘finger,’ ” a “ ‘tongue,’ ” and which even feels thirst (*Luke 16:23, 24*).

If this passage were a description of the human state in death, then heaven would certainly not be a place of joy and happiness because the saved could closely follow the endless sufferings of their lost loved ones, and even dialogue with them (*Luke 16:23–31*). How could a mother be happy in heaven while beholding the incessant agonies of her beloved child in hell? In such a context, it would be virtually impossible for God’s promise of no more sorrow, crying, and pain to be fulfilled (*Rev. 21:4*).

Because of such incoherence, many modern biblical scholars regard the story of the rich man and Lazarus as a parable from

which not every detail can be interpreted literally. George E. Ladd, though a non-Adventist, certainly sounds like one here when he says that this story was probably “a parable which made use of current Jewish thinking and is not intended to teach anything about the state of the dead.”—G. E. Ladd, “Eschatology,” in *The New Bible Dictionary*, edited by J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 388.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus presents a sharp contrast between a well-dressed “ ‘rich man’ ” and “ ‘a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores’ ” (*Luke 16:19, 20, NKJV*). The account teaches that (1) status and social recognition in the present are not the criteria for the future reward, and (2) the eternal destiny of each person is decided in this life and cannot be reversed in the afterlife (*Luke 16:25, 26*).

“ ‘But he said to him, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” ’ ” (*Luke 16:31, NKJV*). What message from Jesus’ powerful words should we take for ourselves regarding the authority of the Bible and how we respond to it?

MONDAY *November 21*

“ ‘Today . . . With Me in Paradise’ ”

One of the Bible passages most widely used to try to prove the immortality of the soul is Luke 23:43—“He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise’ ” (*NRSV*). Almost all Bible versions (with few exceptions) translate this text in a similar way, giving the impression that on the very day Christ died, Christ and the thief would be together in Paradise. This should not surprise us because those translations were made by biblical scholars who believe in the dogma of the natural immortality of the soul. But is this the best translation of the text?

Compare Luke 23:43 with John 20:17 and John 14:1–3. How should the promise to the repentant thief on the cross be understood in light of Jesus’ words to Mary Magdalene and His promise to His disciples?

The assumption that Christ and the thief went on that same day to Paradise (or heaven) contradicts Jesus’ words to Mary Magdalene after His resurrection, which affirm that He had not yet gone to the presence of His Father in heaven (*John 20:17*). This error, that both Jesus and the repentant thief went to heaven that day, also contradicts Jesus’ promise to His disciples that they would be taken to heaven only at His second coming (*John 14:1–3*).

The issue in Luke 23:43 is whether the adverb “today” (Greek *sēmeron*) should be linked to the verb that follows it (“to be”) or to the verb that precedes it (“to tell”). Wilson Paroschi recognizes that “from the grammatical standpoint,” it is virtually impossible to determine the correct alternative. “Luke, however, has a definite tendency of using this adverb with the preceding verb. This happens in 14 of the 20 occurrences of *sēmeron* in Luke and Acts.”—“The Significance of a Comma: An Analysis of Luke 23:43,” *Ministry*, June 2013, p. 7.

So, the most natural reading of Luke 23:43 would be “Truly I tell you today, you will be with Me in Paradise.” In this case, the idiomatic expression “I tell you today” emphasizes the relevance and solemnity of the statement “you will be with Me in Paradise.” In short, Jesus was promising him, right then and there, that he would be saved.

Read the story of the repentant thief (*Luke 23:39–43*), who, despite his sin, despite the fact that he had nothing to offer God, was promised eternal life by Christ. How does this story powerfully reveal the great truth of salvation by faith alone? In what ways are we just like that thief? In what ways do we differ?

TUESDAY *November 22*

“To Depart and Be With Christ”

Read Philippians 1:21–24 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. When did Paul expect to be “with Christ” (*Phil. 1:23*) and “with the Lord” (*1 Thess. 4:17*)?

Paul was driven with the passion to live “in Christ” now (*2 Cor. 5:17*) and “with Christ” after His second coming (see *1 Thess. 4:17*). For the apostle, not even death could break the assurance of belonging to his Savior and Lord. As he said in the epistle to the Romans, “neither death nor life” can “separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Rom. 8:38, 39, NKJV*). “For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (*Rom. 14:8, NKJV*).

With this certainty in mind, Paul spoke of the believers who already had died as “those who sleep in Jesus” (*1 Thess. 4:14, NKJV*) and who will be raised at Christ’s second coming to receive eternal life (*1 Cor. 15:16–18, 1 Thess. 4:13–18*).

When Paul mentioned his “desire to depart and be with Christ” (*Phil. 1:23, NKJV*), did he imply that after death his soul would depart to live consciously with Christ? Not at all. In this text, “Paul verbalizes his desire to leave this present troubled existence and be with Christ, without reference to any lapse of time that may occur between the two events. This verse does not teach that Paul expected to go to heaven at death. He was very clear that he would not receive his reward until the Second Coming (*2 Tim. 4:8*).”—*Andrews Study Bible*, p. 1555, note on Philippians 1:23.

In short, Paul “is saying that the next thing he would know after departing (death) would be Christ coming in the clouds of heaven to raise the dead, when he would ‘be with the Lord’ (*1 Thess. 4:17*). It

also should be noted that the Bible writers at times refer to two events together that may be separated by a long period of time.”—*Andrews Study Bible*, p. 1555, note on Philippians 1:23.

But why would Paul prefer to die than to live? Because then he could finally rest from all his troubles, without needing any longer to suffer pain in his body (*1 Cor. 9:27, NRSV*). And he would do so with the full certainty that he would receive “the crown of righteousness” at the Second Coming (*2 Tim. 4:6–8, NKJV*). Though Paul certainly didn’t want to die, he knew what would follow when he did.

Particularly in hard times, who hasn’t thought about how nice it would be to close your eyes in death and, the next thing you know, “be with Christ”? How does this thought help us understand what Paul was saying in Philippians?

WEDNESDAY November 23

Preaching to the Spirits in Prison

Read 1 Peter 3:13–20. How did Christ preach “to the spirits in prison . . . in the days of Noah”? (See also *Gen. 4:10*.)

Commentators who believe in the natural immortality of the soul usually point out that Christ preached “to the spirits in prison” (*1 Pet. 3:19, NKJV*) while He was still resting in the tomb. For them, His disincarnated spirit went into hell and preached to the disembodied spirits of the antediluvians.

Yet, this fanciful notion is biblically unacceptable because there is no second opportunity of salvation for the dead (*Heb. 9:27, 28*). So, why would Jesus preach to those who had no more chance of salvation?

Meanwhile, and most important, this theory contradicts the biblical teaching that the dead remain unconscious in the grave until the final resurrection (*Job 14:10–12; Ps. 146:4; Eccles. 9:5, 10; 1 Cor. 15:16–18; 1 Thess. 4:13–15*).

Also, if this verse were really saying that Jesus, while bodily in the tomb, went down to hell and preached to the wicked antediluvians, why did only they hear His message? Were no other lost people burning in hell with them? Why did only the antediluvians hear Him preach?

It also is senseless to suggest that Christ preached to the fallen angels who had been disobedient in Noah’s day. While the “spirits in

prison” are described as having been disobedient “formerly” (*1 Pet. 3:19, 20, NKJV*), the Bible speaks of the evil angels as still disobedient today (*Eph. 6:12, 1 Pet. 5:8*). Furthermore, the fallen angels are “kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day” (*Jude 6, NIV*), without any opportunity of salvation.

We should notice that in 1 Peter 3 the “spirits in prison” of verse 19 are identified in verse 20 as the “disobedient” antediluvians in the “days of Noah.” The term *spirit* (Greek *pneuma*) is used in this text, and elsewhere in the New Testament (*1 Cor. 16:18, Gal. 6:18*), in reference to living people who can hear and accept the invitation of salvation. The expression “in prison” obviously refers not to a literal prison, but to the prison of sin in which the unregenerate human nature is found (*Rom. 6:1–23, Rom. 7:7–25*).

Christ’s preaching to the impenitent antediluvians was accomplished through Noah, who was divinely instructed by God (*Heb. 11:7*) and became a “preacher of righteousness” to his contemporaries (*2 Pet. 2:5*). Peter’s verses were written in the context of what it means to be faithful; they are not a commentary on the state of the dead.

THURSDAY November 24

The Souls Under the Altar

Read Revelation 6:9–11. How can the “souls” of the dead martyrs cry “under the altar”?

The opening of the fifth Apocalyptic seal reveals an unusual scene. The souls of the martyrs were seen metaphorically “under the altar” crying to God for vengeance (*Rev. 6:9–11*). Some commentators are inclined to identify this “altar” as the altar of incense mentioned under the seventh seal (*Rev. 8:1–6*). But the reference to “blood” (instead of “incense”) in Revelation 6:9–11 leads us to see here an allusion to the altar of burnt offering, where the blood of the sacrifices was poured (*Lev. 4:18, 30, 34*). As the blood of those sacrifices was sprinkled around the altar, so the blood of the martyrs was symbolically poured at God’s altar when, by remaining faithful to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus (*Rev. 6:9*; see also *Rev. 12:17, Rev. 14:12*), they lost their lives.

The “souls” under the altar also are symbolic. By taking them literally, one would have to conclude that the martyrs are not fully happy in heaven, for they are still crying out for vengeance. This hardly sounds as if they are enjoying the reward of salvation. The desire for vengeance can make your life miserable. But your death, as well?

Also, it’s important to remember that John was not given a view of heaven as it actually is. “There are no white, red, black, or pale

horses there with warlike riders. Jesus does not appear there in the form of a lamb with a bleeding knife wound. The four beasts do not represent actual winged creatures of the animal characteristics noted. . . . Likewise, there are no 'souls' lying at the base of an altar in heaven. The whole scene was a pictorial and symbolic representation."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 778.

George E. Ladd, a non-Adventist, wrote (again sounding like an Adventist): "In the present instance [*Rev. 6:9–11*], the altar is clearly the altar of sacrifice where sacrificial blood was poured. The fact that John saw the souls of the martyrs *under the altar* has nothing to do with the state of the dead or their situation in the intermediate state; it is merely a vivid way of picturing the fact that they had been martyred in the name of their God."—*A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 103.

Who (especially of those who have been victims of injustice) hasn't cried out for justice, which has not yet come? Why must we, by faith, trust that ultimately the justice so lacking in this world will nevertheless come? What comfort can you draw from this wonderful promise?

FRIDAY November 25

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘A Great Gulf Fixed,’ ” pp. 260–271, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Calvary,” pp. 749–752, in *The Desire of Ages*; and “Teachers as Examples of Christian Integrity,” p. 504, in *Fundamentals of Christian Education*.

“In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Christ shows that in this life men decide their eternal destiny. During probationary time the grace of God is offered to every soul. But if men waste their opportunities in self-pleasing, they cut themselves off from everlasting life. No afterprobation will be granted them. By their own choice they have fixed an impassable gulf between them and their God.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 260.

“When those early Christians were exiled to mountains and deserts, when left in dungeons to die with hunger, cold, and torture, when martyrdom seemed the only way out of their distress, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ, who was crucified for them. Their worthy example will be a comfort and encouragement to the people of God who will be brought into the time of trouble such as never was.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 213.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can the overall biblical view of human nature help us better understand some of the passages we studied during this week?
- 2 Reflect on the contrast between the *unnegotiable* religion of the Christian martyrs and the *flexible* religion of our post-

modern generation. In other words, what are things worth dying for? However, if one has a view that all truths are merely relative, or cultural, then why die for any of them? At the same time, what can we learn from those who were willing to die for causes that we believe are false?

3 Dwell more on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. When Jesus had been raised from the dead, many believed on Him. Yet, many, having the same evidence, didn't believe. What does this teach us about how hardened human hearts can be to truth? What can we do to protect ourselves from a similar kind of hardness?

4 Jesus talked about the time when the dead will live: " 'those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation' " (*John 5:29, NKJV*). These two events are a thousand years apart, even though they sound as if they are happening at the same time. How might this help us understand what Paul is saying in *Philippians 1:23*?

INSIDE *Story*

“No. 1: God First!”

By OCRHAIN MATENGU

Modesty Kakula, a businessman in Namibia, has an unusual way of sharing Jesus. Slogans painted on his three cars declare, “No. 1: God First.”

Modesty’s novel approach to mission outreach began when his first employer offered to sell him a car for 50,000 Namibian dollars (US\$4,000) in the town of Katima Mulilo. Modesty, two years out of high school and newly married, worked hard and managed to pay off all but 5,000 Namibian dollars (\$400) in four months. Then his employer changed his mind and priced the car at 60,000 Namibian dollars. “Why are you changing the price just now when I’m about to finish paying for it?” Modesty asked.

A few months later, when Modesty had paid off all but 5,000 Namibian dollars, his employer increased the price to 70,000 Namibian dollars. Modesty tried to pay off the car again and, to his surprise, his employer then accused him of not making any payments. The case ended up in court, and the judge ruled in favor of Modesty. But the employer furiously told the court, “He will only get the car over my dead body.” Modesty’s wife, Rebecca, whispered to her husband and then asked to address the court. Weeping, she said, “Let him keep the car. God will make a way for us.” The employer returned 22,000 Namibian dollars to Modesty and fired him.

At home, Modesty, with no job or income, tearfully poured out his heart to God. As he prayed, he accidentally knocked his Bible to the floor. Picking up the open Bible, Modesty’s eyes fell on Romans 8:28, which says, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (NKJV).

“Wow!” Modesty exclaimed as peace and assurance filled his heart.

The next morning, the phone rang while Modesty was still in bed. An unfamiliar male voice offered to sell him a car for 23,000 Namibian dollars.

Modesty rushed to the man’s house. Sure enough, a car was available for sale. At Modesty’s pleadings, the man lowered the price to 22,500 Namibian dollars, and Modesty borrowed money from his parents to pay the balance.

To testify to everyone about God’s goodness, Modesty immediately painted the slogan “No. 1: God First” above the rear window. Today, Modesty is an elder and business owner with three cars, each of which have the slogan above the rear window. Wherever his cars go, people point and say, “God first!”



This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan: “To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach in large cities.” Read more: IWillGo2020.org.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

LESSON 10 ² *November 26–December

The Fires of Hell



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 9:42–48; Mal. 4:1; Jude 7; 1 Tim. 2:5; Acts 2:29, 34, 35; 1 John 5:3–12.*

Memory Text: “Test all things; hold fast what is good”
(*1 Thessalonians 5:21, NKJV*).

Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) wrote his famous work, *The Divine Comedy*, about a fictional journey of the soul after death. The soul went either to the *inferno* (hell) within the earth; or to purgatory, where the human spirit can purge itself and become worthy of ascending to heaven; or to Paradise, to the presence of God Himself.

Though only a poem, fiction, Dante's words ended up having a great deal of influence on Christian theology, especially Roman Catholic theology. The basic notion of an immortal soul's going either to hell, or to purgatory, or to Paradise is foundational to that church. Many conservative Protestant denominations also believe in an

immortal soul that after death ascends either to Paradise or descends to hell. Indeed, if the human soul never dies, then it has to go somewhere after the body dies. In short, a false understanding of human nature has led to terrible theological errors.

This week we will deal with some of these unbiblical theories, as well as with the biblical view of what happens after death.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 3.*

SUNDAY November 27

Immortal Worms?

Compare Mark 9:42–48 with Isaiah 66:24. How do you understand the expression “their worm does not die” (*Mark 9:48, NKJV*)?

Some interpret the singular noun “worm” (*Mark 9:48*) as an allusion to the supposed disembodied soul or spirit of the wicked that, after death, flies into hell, where it never dies and suffers eternal torment.

But this interpretation does not reflect the biblical notion of unconscious death; it also ignores the Old Testament background of this passage. Actually, “the singular ‘the worm’ is used generically for ‘the worms’—it does not mean a single worm. The reference is to worms which feed upon decaying bodies.”—Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (London: United Bible Societies, 1961), p. 304.

In Mark 9:48, Jesus is quoting Isaiah 66:24, which reads, “ ‘And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind’ ” (*NIV*).

This frightening metaphorical scene portrays a battlefield with God’s enemies dead on the ground and being destroyed. The bodies not consumed by fire are decomposed by worms, or perhaps first by

worms and then by fire. Either way, there is no reference whatsoever to any alleged soul escaping the destruction of the body and flying into hell.

But what about the “worms” that never die? The metaphoric language of Isaiah 66:24 (*quoted in Mark 9:48*) does not imply that those worms are immortal. (*Immortal worms?*) The emphasis is on the fact that the worms do not leave their destructive task incomplete. In other words, they continue to devour the bodies of the wicked until these bodies are destroyed. By contrast, God’s faithful children will joyfully abide in “ ‘the new heavens and the new earth’ ” and worship God in His very presence (*Isa. 66:22, 23, NIV*). With such contrasting destinies in mind, no wonder Jesus stated that it would be far better for someone to enter the kingdom of God without a crucial part of his or her body—without a hand, or foot, or even an eye—than to have a perfect body that will be destroyed by worms and fire (*Mark 9:42–48*).

In the end, we are either totally saved or totally lost. There is no middle ground. We can have either eternal life or will face eternal destruction. What choices do you have to make today? How should this reality—eternal life or eternal destruction—impact those choices?

MONDAY November 28

The Fires of Hell

In his booklet for children titled, *The Sight of Hell* (Dublin: James Duffy, [1874]), English Roman Catholic priest John Furniss (1809–1865) illustrates the eternal torment by means of a great solid-iron ball, larger than the heavens and the earth. “A bird comes once in a hundred millions [*sic*] of years and just touches the great iron ball with a feather of its wing.”—Page 24. Furniss argues that the burning of sinners in hell continues even after that iron ball is worn away by such occasional feather touches!

The sad thing is, many Protestants even today believe in something similar for the lost.

Read Malachi 4:1 and Jude 7. How can these passages help us better understand the notion of “eternal fire” or the idea, as Jesus expressed it, that the lost will be in “ ‘everlasting fire’ ” (*Matt. 18:8*) or in a “ ‘fire that shall never be quenched’ ”? (*Mark 9:43, NKJV*).

The word “eternal” (Hebrew *‘olam*; Greek *aion*, *aionios*) carries different meanings, depending on the immediate context. For example, when associated with God (*Deut. 33:27*, “*everlasting*”), the word expresses His eternity. When related to human beings (*Exod. 21:6*, “*forever*”), the word is limited by their life span. When qualifying

fire (*Matt. 18:8, Matt. 25:41, “everlasting”*), it implies that the fire will not go out until it fully consumes what is being burned. This means that the “eternal fire” will be eternal in the sense that it will consume the wicked completely and irreversibly, leaving them “ ‘neither root nor branch’ ” (*Mal. 4:1, NKJV*).

The theory of an everlasting punishment of the wicked has serious implications. If the wicked are punished forever, then evil will never be eradicated. Also, all human life derives from God (*Deut. 32:39, Ps. 36:9*), who has “ ‘no pleasure in the death of the wicked’ ” (*Ezek. 33:11, NKJV*). Why then would He continue to grant life to the wicked to suffer in endless torment? Would it not be much more reasonable for Him just to end their existence? If the wicked will be punished “according to their works” (*Rev. 20:12, NKJV*), why then should a short human life be punished endlessly?

All Bible references to the “eternal fire” should be seen as allusions to the postmillennium “lake of fire” of Revelation 20 (see lesson 13). Thus, it is unbiblical to speak of an already-present, ever-burning hell.

As unfortunate as the fires of hell are, what does the truth about hell reveal to us about God’s love, especially in contrast to the idea of eternal torment?

TUESDAY November 29

The Saints in Purgatory

The Roman Catholic Church holds that the dead who do not deserve hell but who are not yet ready for Paradise can have their sins purged in purgatory and then ascend from there to Paradise. Their sufferings in purgatory can be reduced by the prayers and penances of loved ones.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is explicit about purgatory: “All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.”—*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p. 291. It states, too, that their suffering can be alleviated by the prayers of their loved ones, as well as by other acts on behalf of the dead. “The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead.”—*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 291.

Read Ecclesiastes 9:10, Ezekiel 18:20–22, and Hebrews 9:27. How do these passages refute the theory of purgatory?

The dogma of purgatory combines the pagan notion of a burning hell with the pagan practice of praying for the dead. This dogma is unacceptable for those who believe in the biblical teachings (1) that the dead remain resting unconsciously in their graves (*Eccles. 9:10*);

(2) that the righteousness of one fallen human being cannot be transferred to another fallen human being (*Ezek. 18:20–22*); (3) that our only Mediator is Jesus Christ (*1 Tim. 2:5*); and (4) that death is followed by the final judgment, without any second chance to repent from the pitfalls of this life (*Heb. 9:27*).

An even more serious implication is how the antibiblical theory of purgatory distorts God's own character. Indeed, "Satan's work since his fall is to misinterpret our heavenly Father. He suggested the dogma of the immortality of the soul. . . . The idea of an eternally burning hell was the production of Satan; purgatory is his invention. These teachings falsify the character of God, that He shall be regarded as severe, revengeful, arbitrary, and not exercising forgiveness."—Ellen G. White, Manuscript 51, 1890. Instead of the dead asleep, awaiting Christ's return, this view says they're in purgatory, suffering there until someone manages to get them out.

What do such errors as purgatory or eternal torment teach us about the importance of doctrine? Why is *what* we believe of importance, and not just *in whom* we believe?

WEDNESDAY *November 30*

A Paradise With Disembodied Souls

Though Protestants don't accept purgatory, many nevertheless believe that the souls of the righteous dead are already enjoying Paradise in the very presence of God. Some argue that those "souls" are just disembodied spirits; others believe they are disembodied spirits but covered by a spiritual body of glory.

Whatever the supposed metaphysical state of the living dead, these theories undermine the biblical doctrine of the final resurrection and judgment of the dead. Why is there a resurrection and a judgment (*Rev. 20:12–14*) if the souls of the righteous are already enjoying Paradise?

Read Acts 2:29, 34, 35 and 1 Corinthians 15:16–18. How do these passages shed light on the state of the dead and those awaiting resurrection?

The Bible teaches that all human beings who are already in heaven were either translated alive, as in the case of Enoch (*Gen. 5:24*) and Elijah (*2 Kings 2:9–11*), or resurrected from the dead, as Moses (*Jude 9*) and those raised with Christ (*Matt. 27:51–53*).

As we have already seen, the allusion to the souls "under the altar" crying to God for vengeance (*Rev. 6:9–11*) is just a metaphor for justice and does not prove the theory of the natural immortality of the soul. Otherwise, these folks hardly sound as if they're enjoying

their eternal reward. In reality, the grave is a place of rest for the dead, who are unconsciously awaiting the final resurrection, when their conscious existence will be restored. The dead, even the righteous dead, are not disembodied souls drifting around heaven, waiting patiently to be reunited with their bodies at the final resurrection.

Also, what could Paul possibly be talking about in 1 Corinthians 15:18 when he says that if there were no resurrection of the dead, then “those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (*NKJV*)? How could they have perished if they are already in the bliss of heaven and have been there for however long since they died? A central and key doctrine of the New Testament, the resurrection of the dead when Christ returns, is made null and void by the false teaching that the righteous dead soar off to their eternal reward right after they die. Nevertheless, we hear it all the time, especially at funerals.

What are ways in which you could help people understand that the idea that the dead are asleep in the ground is really “good news,” in the sense that they truly are at rest and know no pain and suffering?

THURSDAY *December 1*

The Biblical View

Read 1 John 5:3–12. Why does the apostle John limit “eternal life” only to those who are in Christ?

The biblical doctrine of conditional immortality of the human being—in contrast to the nonbiblical theory of the natural immortality of the soul—is made explicit in 1 John 5:11, 12. To grasp the meaning of this significant passage, we have to remember that only the Godhead “has immortality” (1 Tim. 6:15, 16, NKJV) and is the only Source of life (Ps. 36:9, Col. 1:15–17, Heb. 1:2).

When sin entered the world through the fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), they and all their descendants (including us) came under the curse of physical death and lost the gift of eternal life. But our loving God implemented the plan of salvation for human beings to regain eternal life, the life that was to have been theirs from the start. As Paul wrote: “Just as He chose us in Him *before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (Eph. 1:4, NKJV; *emphasis supplied*).

The apostle Paul explains that “just as through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin,” so through “the one Man, Jesus Christ,” the gracious gift of eternal life became available to all human beings (Rom. 5:12–21, NKJV). Paul here is making an unambiguous reference to a literal Adam who brought sin and death into this world. One cannot make sense of anything in the Bible

without a literal Adam who, through transgression, brought sin and death into our world.

Thus, the apostle John adds, “God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (*1 John 5:11, 12, NRSV*).

The whole picture becomes clearer in light of Jesus’ statements: “ ‘Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day’ ” (*John 6:40, NIV*), and “ ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live’ ” (*John 11:25, NRSV*).

This means that eternal life is a gift of God through Christ, which is secured in the present but fully enjoyed only after the final resurrection of the righteous. The conclusion is very simple: if everlasting life is granted only to those who are in Christ, then those who are not in Him do not have everlasting life (*1 John 5:11, 12*). By contrast, the theory of the natural immortality of the soul grants everlasting life—whether in Paradise or in hell—to all human beings, even to those who are not in Christ. However popular this teaching, it is not biblical.

FRIDAY *December 2*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The First Great Deception,” pp. 531–550; “Can Our Dead Speak to Us?” pp. 551–562, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Upon the fundamental error of natural immortality rests the doctrine of consciousness in death—a doctrine, like eternal torment, opposed to the teachings of the Scriptures, to the dictates of reason, and to our feelings of humanity. According to the popular belief, the redeemed in heaven are acquainted with all that takes place on the earth and especially with the lives of the friends whom they have left behind. But how could it be a source of happiness to the dead to know the troubles of the living, to witness the sins committed by their own loved ones, and to see them enduring all the sorrows, disappointments, and anguish of life? How much of heaven’s bliss would be enjoyed by those who were hovering over their friends on earth? And how utterly revolting is the belief that as soon as the breath leaves the body the soul of the impenitent is consigned to the flames of hell! To what depths of anguish must those be plunged who see their friends passing to the grave unprepared, to enter upon an eternity of woe and sin!”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 545.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Those who have talked to other Christians about the state of the dead and the nature of hell have, most likely, discovered just how adamant and firm people are in their belief, not only in the idea that the saved immediately go to heaven but also that the lost are in the eternal torment of hell. Why do you think that is? It’s one thing, understandable

somewhat, for them to want to believe that their deceased loved ones are “with the Lord” (though, as we have seen, there’s still the question of how upsetting it would be for them to see the mess of things down here). But why is there such a strong attachment to the horrific idea that the lost are being eternally tormented in hell? What does this fact teach us about just how powerful tradition can be? Discuss this in class.

② Most Christian denominations are proclaiming the unbiblical theory of the natural immortality of the soul with all its correlated theories. What else should we do as a church (in addition to what we are already doing) to proclaim to the world the biblical view of death and the afterlife?

③ Though Dante’s poem *The Divine Comedy* was mere fiction, it became very influential in helping cement in people’s minds false teachings about what happens to the “soul” after death. What lessons can we learn from how easily Christian theology can be influenced by outside teachings? What other non-Christian ideas influence Christian thought even today, and how can we protect ourselves from them?

INSIDE *Story*

“Modesty! Modesty! Modesty!”

By OCRHAIN MATENGU

People came in a seemingly constant procession to look pityingly on two-year-old Akurious in the hospital in Katima Mulilo, Namibia. The boy had been ill for months, and the people wept as they saw his terrible pain.

“The hospital is failing us,” one told Akurious’s parents. “You should consult with the witch doctor.” “God will understand,” said another. “Just do it.”

After the last visitor left, Father turned to Mother. “What should we do?” he said. “Maybe the people are right. Jesus will understand.”

Mother couldn’t bear to see her only child in pain. She agreed.

The witch doctor declared that witches had cast an evil spell on the boy and that he would recover with traditional medicine. The parents bought the witch doctor’s medicine and gave some to the boy daily. But the more medicine they gave, the worse he got. Father began to pray earnestly. “Lord Jesus, I know I’ve made a mistake,” he said. “I departed from Your saving grace. Speak to me, Lord, for the sake of my child. You healed lepers and made the blind to see and the lame to walk. Do that for my child, too.”

A short time later, Father had a dream. As he slept, he heard a voice call him by his name, Modesty. “Modesty! Modesty! Modesty!” the voice said. “This is My child. Why have you tainted him with evil spirits? I don’t want you to be involved with any witch doctors if you want him to live.”

Shaken, Father got up and threw away the traditional medicine. He remembered hearing a Seventh-day Adventist physician give health presentations at camp meeting, and he took the boy to him.

The physician diagnosed Akurious with pneumonia and tuberculosis and sent him to a hospital where he could treat him. Father continued to pray, and Mother joined him. They placed their full trust in Jesus. Akurious (pictured) now is 22.

Akurious's parents, Modesty and Rebecca Kakula, went on to have four children. But with the birth of each child, they refused to take part in the traditional ceremony that townspeople hold for newborns. Instead, they took their babies to the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be dedicated to Jesus.



Dear reader, pray for people who sincerely accept Jesus but struggle to forsake traditions fully. These people end up with two levels of religion: a theoretical religion based on the Bible and a practical religion grounded in culture. They embrace Bible teachings but, when faced with real-life challenges, revert to tradition. Seventh-day Adventist missionaries seek to contextualize the gospel to facilitate personal Christian growth among these people and to help them realize that traditional practices don't work. Thank you for your mission offerings that help spread a contextualized gospel around the world.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

LESSON 11

*December 3–9

End-Time Deceptions



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 7:21–27, John 11:40–44, 1 Pet. 3:18, 1 Sam. 28:3–25, Eph. 6:10–18.*

Memory Text: “And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their end will match their deeds” (2 Corinthians 11:14, 15, NRSV).

Our contemporary world has become a melting pot of the supernatural and the mystical, helped on by Hollywood, which has no problem making movies with religious and mystical themes in a hodgepodge of error and deception. The old lie “ ‘You surely will not die!’ ” (*Gen. 3:4, NASB*) also has inspired some of the most-read books and most-watched movies of the past few decades, and many popular video games, as well. Undeniably, we are exposed to and tempted by the enchanted ground of Satan, which can appear in myriad forms and even, in some cases, can come hidden under the veneer of science.

One of the most deceptive phenomena has been what have been called “near death” experiences (NDEs), where those who had “died”

have come back to life with stories of an afterlife. Many people have seen these events as proof of an immortal soul!

During this week, we will consider some end-time deceptions, including mysticism, near-death experiences, reincarnation, necromancy and ancestor worship, and others. These are dangerous subjects that we should be aware of but without exposing ourselves to their influences.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 10.*

SUNDAY *December 4*

Mysticism

Our world has been flooded by the strong waves of mysticism. The word “mysticism” is a complex term that encapsulates a huge variety of ideas. From a religious perspective, the word implies the union of the individual with the Divine or Absolute in some kind of spiritual experience or trance. This characterizes the worship experience even of certain churches. The phenomena can vary in form and intensity, but the tendency always is to replace the authority of the Written Word of God with one’s own subjective experiences. In any case, the Bible loses much of its doctrinal function, and the Christian remains vulnerable to his or her own experiences. This kind of subjective religion does not provide a safeguard against any deception, especially end-time ones.

Read Matthew 7:21–27. In light of Jesus’ own words, what does it mean to build our spiritual house “on the rock” or to build it “on the sand”?

There is a strong tendency in the postmodern Christian world to downplay the relevance of biblical doctrines, regarding them as tedious echoes of an obsolete form of religion. In this process, the *teachings* of Christ are artificially replaced by the *person* of Christ—arguing, for instance, that some biblical story or another cannot be true because Jesus, as they perceive Him, would never have

allowed that to happen as it is written. Personal feelings and taste end up being the criteria for interpreting the Scriptures or even for rejecting outright what the Bible clearly teaches, often about obedience to God, which as Jesus said is so essential to building one's house on the rock.

Those who think that it matters not what they believe in doctrine, so long as they believe in Jesus Christ, are on dangerous ground. The Roman inquisitors who condemned to death untold numbers of Protestants believed in Jesus Christ. Those who had "cast out demons" in Christ's name (*Matt. 7:22, NKJV*) had believed in Him. "The position that it is of no consequence what men believe is one of Satan's most successful deceptions. He knows that the truth, received in the love of it, sanctifies the soul of the receiver; therefore he is constantly seeking to substitute false theories, fables, another gospel."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 520.

How can we fight the very human tendency to let our emotions and desires cause us to do things contrary to the Word of God?

MONDAY *December 5*

Near-Death Experiences

Some of the most popular modern arguments to “prove” the theory of the natural immortality of the soul are “near-death experiences.” In his book *Life After Life: The Investigation of a Phenomenon—Survival of Bodily Death* (Atlanta, GA: Mockingbird, 1975), Raymond A. Moody, Jr., presented the results of his five-year study of more than one hundred people who experienced “clinical death” and were revived. These individuals claimed to have seen a loving and warm being of light before coming back to life. This has been regarded as “exciting evidence of the survival of the human spirit beyond death” (back cover). Over the years, many other similar books have been published, promoting the same idea. (See lesson 2.)

Read the resurrection accounts of 1 Kings 17:22–24, 2 Kings 4:34–37, Mark 5:41–43, Luke 7:14–17, and John 11:40–44. How many of them talk about any kind of conscious existence while the resurrected ones were dead, and why is that answer important?

All near-death experiences reported in modern literature are of people considered *clinically* dead, but not *really* dead, in contrast to Lazarus, who was dead for four days and whose corpse was rotting (*John 11:39*). Neither Lazarus nor any of those raised from the dead

in biblical times ever mentioned any afterlife experience, whether in Paradise, in purgatory, or in hell. This is, indeed, an argument from silence, but it is in full agreement with the biblical teachings on the unconscious state of the dead!

But what about the near-death experiences so commonly recounted today? If we accept the biblical teaching of the unconsciousness of the dead (*Job 3:11–13, Ps. 115:17, Ps. 146:4, Eccles. 9:10*), then we are left with two main possibilities: either it is a natural psychochemical hallucination under extreme conditions, or it can be a supernatural, satanic, deceptive experience (*2 Cor. 11:14*). Satanic deception could indeed be the explanation, especially because in some cases, these people claim to have talked to their dead relatives! But it could be a combination of both factors.

With this deception prevalent, and so convincing to many, it is crucial that we stick firmly to the teaching of the Word of God, despite whatever experiences we or others might have that go against what the Bible teaches.

How fascinating that NDEs often now come with the imprimatur of “science.” What does this teach us about how careful we need to be even of things that science supposedly “proves”?

TUESDAY *December 6*

Reincarnation

The pagan notion of an immortal soul provides the foundation for the unbiblical theory of reincarnation or transmigration of the soul. This theory has been adopted by some major world religions. While most Christians believe in the existence of an immortal soul that abides in a permanent heaven or hell after death, those who believe in reincarnation hold that such an immortal soul goes through many cycles of death and rebirth here on earth.

For some, reincarnation is thought to be a process of spiritual evolution that allows the spirit to attain ever greater levels of knowledge and morality in its journey toward perfection. Hindus believe that the eternal soul goes through a progression of consciousness or “*samsara*” in six classes of life: aquatics, plants, reptiles and insects, birds, animals, and human beings, including the residents of heaven.

Read Hebrews 9:25–28 and 1 Peter 3:18. If Jesus died just “once” (Heb. 9:28, 1 Pet. 3:18, NKJV) and likewise all human beings die just “once” (Heb. 9:27, NKJV), why do even some alleged Christians believe in some form of reincarnation?

Many people believe not in what they *should* believe but in what they *want* to believe. If a theory brings them existential peace and comfort, that is enough to settle the discussion for them. But for

those who take the Bible seriously, there is no way to accept the theory of reincarnation.

First, this theory contradicts the biblical teachings of the mortality of the “soul” and the resurrection of the body (*1 Thess. 4:13–18*).

Second, it negates the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (*Eph. 2:8–10*) and replaces it with human works.

Third, the theory contradicts the biblical teaching that one’s eternal destiny is decided forever by one’s decisions in this life (*Matt. 22:1–14, Matt. 25:31–46*).

Fourth, this theory downplays the meaning and relevance of Christ’s second coming (*John 14:1–3*).

And fifth, the theory proposes after-death opportunities for someone still to overcome his or her own life’s pitfalls, which is unbiblical (*Heb. 9:27*).

In short, there is no place for the idea of reincarnation in the Christian faith.

WEDNESDAY *December 7*

Necromancy and Ancestor Worship

The word “necromancy” derives from the Greek terms *nekros* (dead) and *manteia* (divination). Practiced since ancient times, necromancy is a form of summoning the alleged active spirits of the dead in order to obtain knowledge, often about future events. Ancestor worship, meanwhile, is the custom of venerating deceased ancestors because they are still considered family, and these spirits can, it is believed, influence the affairs of the living. These pagan practices can be very attractive to those who believe in an immortal soul and who also miss their deceased loved ones.

Read 1 Samuel 28:3–25. What spiritual lessons against any supposed communication with the dead can be drawn from Saul’s experience with the woman medium at Endor?

The Bible stated very clearly that all spiritists, mediums, sorcerers, and necromancers, in the ancient Israelite theocracy, were abominations to the Lord and should be put to death by stoning (*Lev. 19:31; Lev. 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:9–14*). In accordance with this law, Saul had destroyed all mediums and spiritists from Israel (*1 Sam. 28:3, 9*).

But, then, after being rejected by the Lord, Saul himself went to the Canaanite city of Endor to inquire of a woman medium (*1 Sam. 28:6, 7, 15; compare with Josh. 17:11, Ps. 83:10*). He asked her to

bring up the deceased prophet Samuel, who supposedly came up in a necromancer apparition and spoke with Saul (*1 Sam. 28:13–19*). The deceiving spirit, who pretended to be Samuel, told Saul, “ ‘Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me’ ” (*1 Sam. 28:19, NKJV*). While predicting Saul’s death, that deceiving spirit, merely by assuming the form of Samuel, reaffirmed the unbiblical theory of the natural immortality of the soul. It was a powerful deception, and Saul should have known better than to become involved with what he had previously condemned.

More than two centuries later, the prophet Isaiah wrote, “And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (*Isa. 8:19, 20, NKJV; also Isa. 19:3*).

How often, under stress, do we do things that we know are wrong? Why are faith, prayer, and obedience to the Word of God our only sure defense against ourselves?

THURSDAY *December 8*

Personations and Other Appearances

Similar to necromancy are the demonic personations of the dead and other demonic appearances. The personations can be in the form of a deceased family member, friend, or anyone. Both the physical appearance and the voice are very similar to those of the deceased. All these satanic deceptions will be used to deceive those who are not firmly grounded in God's Word. Ellen G. White warns, "The apostles, as personated by these lying spirits, are made to contradict what they wrote at the dictation of the Holy Spirit when on earth."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 557. And further, "As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 624.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:14, 15 and Ephesians 6:10–18. What should be our safeguards against such demonic deceptions?

The apostle Paul warns us that "our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (*Eph. 6:12, NRSV*). We can be protected against these deceptions only by being clothed with "the whole armor of God" (*Eph. 6:13, NKJV*) described in Ephesians 6:13–18.

The satanic personations and appearances can be very frightening and deceiving, but they cannot mislead those who are sheltered by God and grounded in God's Word. From a doctrinal perspective, those who believe in the biblical doctrine of the conditional immortality of human beings know that any appearance of or communication with the dead is of a satanic origin and needs to be rejected by God's powerful grace. Again, no matter how powerful, convincing, and seemingly real the manifestation is, we must always stand firm on the teaching that the dead are asleep in the grave.

Imagine, though, losing a loved one and then believing that this same loved one appears to you. And expresses love to you. And tells you how much they miss you. And says things that, yes, only they would know. And says that they are now in a better place. If a person is not absolutely grounded in what the Bible teaches about the state of the dead, think of how easily he or she could fall for this deception, especially because they *want* to believe it, as well.

What does it mean to put on the “whole armor of God”? In a day-to-day, practical sense, how do we do this in every area of our lives, not just in dealing with end-time deceptions?

FRIDAY *December 9*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Dealing With False Science, Cults, Isms, and Secret Societies,” pp. 602–609, in *Evangelism*; and “Spiritism,” pp. 86–93, in *Confrontation*.

There exists a foundation which claims that it is creating technology that will allow us to contact the deceased “via texts, phone calls, and video-conferencing.” Calling the dead PMPs (postmaterial persons), its website claims that when humans die they simply pass on “into another phase of forever” but “retain their consciousness, identity, and core aspects of their previous physical form.” But, most important, the folks at the foundation claim to be developing, in three phases, technology that will allow communication between material and postmaterial persons.

The first phase will “allow texting and typing with postmaterial family, friends, and experts in every field of expertise.” Phase two is supposed to “enable talking with your dear ones who are living in another part of forever.” And the third phase, it says, will open the way to “hearing and seeing those who are experiencing the field of all possibilities from a different observation point.”

Especially scary is how they test if the communicating dead are really who they claim to be. “For example,” the site says, “a bereaved parent might ask the following question of a son or a daughter who has changed worlds: ‘Did you have a dog named Snoopy when you were a child? Did we give you a pocketknife for your tenth birthday?’ ” How interesting in light of this warning: “Spiritual beings sometimes appear to persons in the form of their deceased friends, and relate incidents connected with their lives and perform acts which they performed while living.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 684.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Using the excuse of being culturally acceptable, many Christians consume whatever the media promotes. Which biblical principles should guide our relationship with the media, especially when it openly promotes views that we know are wrong and deceptive (see *Ps. 101:1–8*, *Prov. 4:23*, *Phil. 4:8*)?
- 2** How can we help others to overcome Satan’s end-time deceptions without being exposed to the deceiving influence of those very same deceptions ourselves?
- 3** Many Christians have seen the story of having “Samuel” summoned from the grave as biblical proof that the dead live on. What does this account teach us about why we cannot rely only on a single text or story to build a doctrine, but, instead, we must look at all that the Bible says about a topic?

INSIDE *Story*

A Daring Witness

By RICK McEDWARD

At the beginning of the semester, a university classmate asked Sandra if he could take a picture of her class notes with his cell phone. “I saw that you are writing in English,” he said. “I want to improve my English.”

Classes were not taught in English at the university in the Middle East. But English was Sandra’s native language, and she found it easier to take notes in English. “Here you are,” Sandra said, extending her notebook.

The next day, the classmate again asked for permission to take pictures. After the classmate asked to take pictures for several days in a row, Sandra decided to be more intentional with her notes. She resolved to write favorite Bible verses at the bottom of the pages of her notebook.

The next time the classmate asked to take a picture, however, Sandra felt a jolt of fear. She worried that he would notice the verses and stop asking to see her notes. She prayed that God would use the Bible verses for His glory.

The classmate did not seem to notice the Bible verses at first. But after a couple of days, he realized that the notes contained information that the teacher had not mentioned during the class lectures. He went to Sandra and pointed to a verse at the bottom of a page. “Is this a verse from the Bible?” he asked.

“Yes,” Sandra said, her mind racing as she wondered how to explain it.

The classmate paused. “Is this the way you motivate yourself ?” he asked.

Sandra smiled with relief. “Exactly,” she said. “I write my favorite verses in my notebook. They are always really helpful and useful for

my life.”

After that day, the classmate asked Sandra many questions about her religion and beliefs. As they studied together at the university, he also learned about the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At the end of the semester, he asked to make a copy of Sandra’s entire verse-filled notebook. He wanted to share the notes with his siblings.

Although Sandra has not studied with him again, the two have kept in touch, and he regularly asks for advice about life. Sandra is praying for him, his siblings, and the rest of his family. She thanks God for giving her the daring idea to write Bible verses at the bottom of the pages of her notebook.



This mission story illustrates the following components of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan: Mission Objective No. 1, “To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life”; and Mission Objective No. 2, “To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach in large cities, across the 10/40 Window, among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions.” Read more: IWillGo2020.org. Sandra is a pseudonym.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

LESSON 12

*December 10–16

The Biblical Worldview



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 2:52; Matt. 4:23; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; Ps. 24:3, 4; Acts 8:4–24; 1 John 3:1–3.*

Memory Text: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*1 Thessalonians 5:23, NKJV*).

The book of Revelation speaks of two major “globalizations” prior to the second coming of Christ. Revelation 13 describes the globalization of *error*, when “all the world” will marvel and follow the beast from the sea (*Rev. 13:3, 7, 8, 12, 16, NKJV*). Revelation 14 highlights the globalization of *truth*, when the “everlasting gospel” will be preached “to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6, 7, NKJV*). During those “distressing times” (*2 Tim. 3:1, NRSV*), “every wind of doctrine” will be blowing (*Eph. 4:14, NKJV*), and people will “turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths” (*2 Tim. 4:4, NRSV*). “Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former

lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

Until these final events unfold, we must remain firm in our belief in all the truth that we have, which includes the nature of humanity and of death, as we seek to be guided by the Holy Spirit with the purpose of being ready for Christ’s glorious appearing.

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 17.*

SUNDAY *December 11*

The Model of Jesus

Read Luke 2:52. What four dimensions of Jesus' growth are mentioned in this passage?

Jesus was the perfect Human Being, and His growth comprised all basic dimensions of human existence. According to Luke 2:52, "Jesus grew in wisdom [mentally] and stature [physically], and in favor with God [spiritually] and man [socially]" (NIV). "His mind was active and penetrating, with a thoughtfulness and wisdom beyond His years. Yet, His character was beautiful in its symmetry. The powers of mind and body developed gradually, in keeping with the laws of childhood. As a child, Jesus manifested a peculiar loveliness of disposition. His willing hands were ever ready to serve others. He manifested a patience that nothing could disturb, and a truthfulness that would never sacrifice integrity. In principle firm as a rock, His life revealed the grace of unselfish courtesy."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 68, 69.

Read Matthew 4:23. How can the threefold ministry of Jesus—to teach, to preach, and to heal—be carried on by us effectively today?

If we recognize that a human being is an integrated and indivisible person, then we cannot restrict our religion to spiritual matters only. The truth actually embraces our whole being, covers our entire life span, and comprises all dimensions of our life. Our physical and spiritual elements are so powerfully integrated that they really cannot be separated. And though, as fallen beings, we will never be equal to the depiction of Jesus as presented above, we are by God's grace to emulate it because "to restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul" (Ellen G. White, Education, pp. 15, 16) is the work of redemption. This is what God seeks to do in His people as part of the process to prepare them for His return.

In contrasting ourselves to Jesus, we could easily be discouraged by the difference. How, then, does focusing on the Cross and what it means protect us from being disheartened by what we see in ourselves as compared to what we see in Jesus?

MONDAY *December 12*

The Body as a Temple

The dualistic theory of a mortal body with an immortal soul has generated various theories about the human body. For example, for ancient Greek philosophers, the human body was the prison of the soul, which was liberated by death. In an echo of this pagan concept, many Christians today believe that the body is the temporal housing of the immortal soul, which will be reintegrated with the body at the resurrection. By contrast, pantheists make the human body divine; they believe that God and the universe are one and the same. For them, all things are God and the human body is part of the one single, integrated, and universal divine substance. Surrounded by conflicting theories on the subject, we must stand firm on what the Bible teaches regarding the nature of humanity.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; and 1 Corinthians 10:31. How can the understanding that our bodies are “the temple of God” and “the temple of the Holy Spirit” positively influence our lifestyle?

Both Adam and Eve were created in God’s own image and likeness (*Gen. 1:26, 27*), which was reflected not only in their character but also in their physical aspect. Because that image was

marred and even hidden by the presence of sin, the work of redemption is to restore human beings, including their physical health, to their original condition, to the degree possible for beings unable to partake of the tree of life.

This restoration is a lifetime process that will be completed only at Christ's second coming, when the corruptible puts on incorruption and the mortal becomes immortal (*1 Cor. 15:53, 54*).

The apostle John wrote to his friend Gaius, "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul" (*3 John 1:2, NRSV*).

If we recognize that a human being is an indivisible entity, and that religion embraces all aspects of human life, then we should consider the protection of our physical health also to be a religious duty. We should be guided by the inspired principle "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (*1 Cor. 10:31, NKJV*). But remember that we still live in a world where good people can do their best and yet suffer the consequences of a sinful human nature and a sinful environment. So, we should trust in God and do our best, and we leave the results with God.

TUESDAY *December 13*

The Mind of Christ

Some people believe that by changing the environment the individual will be transformed. Definitely, we should avoid places and circumstances that can make us more vulnerable to temptation (*Ps. 1:1, Prov. 5:1–8*). But our problem with temptation and sin can be solved only by the transformation of our own hearts (or minds). Christ touched the core of the issue when He stated, “ ‘For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly’ ” (*Mark 7:21, 22, NIV*). This means that our minds need to be transformed in order for our behavior to be changed.

Read the following texts: **1 Corinthians 2:16; Psalm 24:3, 4; Romans 12:2; Philippians 4:8; and Colossians 3:2.** What does it mean to have the “mind of Christ”?

The Lord had promised that under the “ ‘new covenant’ ” He would put His law in the minds of His people and write it on their hearts (*Jer. 31:31–33, compare with Heb. 8:8–10, Heb. 10:16*). It is no surprise, then, that in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ broadened and deepened the meaning of God’s commandments to the level of thoughts and intentions (*see Matt. 5:17–48*). So, we can gain victory over temptation only by God’s transforming grace and, at the level of

thoughts and intentions, we should claim that promise to stop sinful thoughts.

We will always have sinful natures until Jesus comes. But if we are in Christ, we are fully covered by His righteousness. Although we *are not yet* perfect, we are *considered* already perfect in Him (*Phil. 3:12–15*). “When we are united to Christ, we have the mind of Christ. Purity and love shine forth in the character, meekness and truth control the life. The very expression of the countenance is changed. Christ abiding in the soul exerts a transforming power, and the outward aspect bears witness to the peace and joy that reign within.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 337.

Only by a daily surrender, a daily death to self, a daily determined effort, by faith, to be obedient to Jesus can we have this kind of transformation in our lives.

Imagine what your life would be like if you could stop even sinful thoughts. How different would your life be? What is the only potential way to have this become your experience?

WEDNESDAY *December 14*

The Guidance of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God's powerful Agent who pours out the love of God into our hearts (*Rom. 5:5*), leads us into a true saving experience (*John 16:7–11*), guides us into all the truth (*John 16:13*), and empowers us to fulfill the gospel mission (*Acts 1:8*). Because it is the Holy Spirit who counteracts the degenerating work of Satan, it is no surprise that Satan tries by all means to distort our understanding of the nature and work of the Holy Spirit. While some deny His personality, others emphasize the gifts of the Spirit over His transforming power.

Read **Acts 8:4–24.** Simon the sorcerer of Samaria wanted to **receive** the gifts of the Holy Spirit without *being* regenerated by the Spirit. How is this very same attitude still being manifested in our day?

The children of God are those who are being guided by the Holy Spirit (*Rom. 8:14*) into all the truth of God's Word (*John 16:13, John 17:17*). Jesus warned in clear terms, " 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from

me, you evildoers!" ' ' ' (Matt. 7:21–23, NIV). This means that the Holy Spirit never guides anyone away from God's Word—which He Himself inspired—but rather always leads us into conformity to that Word.

The same Holy Spirit that guides us into all the truth also empowers us in leading others into that wonderful truth (Matt. 28:18–20, Acts 1:8). While fulfilling our sacred mission, we have His special assistance. So, morning by morning, we must kneel before the Lord and renew our vows of consecration to Him. If we do this, He will grant us the presence of His Spirit, with His reviving, sanctifying power.

We must, however, be open to His leading by making conscious choices, every day, to do what we know is right and avoid what we know is wrong. That is, only by seeking, in our God-given strength, to live as we should will we be open to receiving that power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, which God promises us.

Why is it so important, morning after morning, to pray ourselves into an openness to the Holy Spirit's leading in our lives?

THURSDAY *December 15*

Ready for His Appearing

We live in a frenetic world with too many artificial needs and eye-catching distractions. If we are not careful, these can take all our time and pervert our priorities. This is not just another by-product of our globalized cyber world; Christians in every age, to one degree or another, have to be on guard against Satan's attempts to distract them from what really matters in this life.

Who, if not careful, is not in danger of looking away from the Lord and dwelling on worldly, carnal things, things that, in the end, cannot ultimately satisfy us, and that, in the end, can lead to our spiritual ruin?

Read 2 Peter 3:14 and 1 John 3:1–3. What difference do you see between *preparing* ourselves for the Second Coming and *being ready* for that glorious event?

Often the notion of an *ongoing preparation* for the Second Coming becomes an excuse for procrastination. This notion can easily lead one to relax under the evil servant's assumption, “ ‘ “My master is delaying his coming” ’ ” (Matt. 24:48, NKJV).

Read Psalm 95:7, 8; Hebrews 3:7, 8, 15; and Hebrews 4:7. What are these verses saying to us about being ready right

now?

From the biblical perspective, the time of salvation is always “today” and never tomorrow (see *Ps. 95:7, 8; Heb. 3:7, 8, 15; Heb. 4:7*). And further: unless a major conversion experience takes place, we will continue to be what we are right now. Time itself does not convert the unconverted. If anything, unless one is continually growing in grace, and pressing on ahead in faith, the tendency would be to fall away, to become hardened, skeptical, cynical, even disbelieving.

From this perspective we can say that every single day of our life is our life in miniature. So, by God’s grace, we should plan for the future but should live each day ready for the return of Jesus—especially because, given the contingencies of this life, today could be our last day.

How can you, today, be ready for the return of Jesus were He to return today? Discuss your answer in class on Sabbath.

FRIDAY *December 16*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Mind Cure,” pp. 241–259, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “True and False Theories Contrasted,” pp. 7–16, in *The Sanctified Life*.

“The great controversy is nearing its end. Every report of calamity by sea or land is a testimony to the fact that the end of all things is at hand. Wars and rumors of wars declare it. Is there a Christian whose pulse does not beat with quickened action as he anticipates the great events opening before us? The Lord is coming. We hear the footsteps of an approaching God.”—Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p. 220.

“Live the life of faith day by day. Do not become anxious and distressed about the time of trouble, and thus have a time of trouble beforehand. Do not keep thinking, ‘I am afraid I shall not stand in the great testing day.’ You are to live for the present, for this day only. Tomorrow is not yours. Today you are to maintain the victory over self. Today you are to live a life of prayer. Today you are to fight the good fight of faith. Today you are to believe that God blesses you. And as you gain the victory over darkness and unbelief, you will meet the requirements of the Master, and will become a blessing to those around you.”—Ellen G. White, “The Light of the World,” *Signs of the Times*, October 20, 1887.

“The Lord is soon to come, and we must be prepared to meet Him in peace. Let us be determined to do all in our power to impart light to those around us. We are not to be sad, but cheerful, and we are to keep the Lord Jesus ever before us. . . . We must be ready and waiting for His appearing. Oh, how glorious it will be to see Him, and be welcomed as His redeemed ones! Long have we waited, but our faith is not to become weak. If we can but see the King in His beauty, we shall be forever and forever blessed. I feel as if I must cry aloud, ‘Homeward bound.’ We are nearing the time when Christ will come

with power and great glory, to take His ransomed ones to their eternal home.”—Ellen G. White, *Heaven*, pp. 165, 166.

Discussion Questions:

- ① How can the notion of the person—body, soul, and spirit as an indivisible whole—help us better understand the all-encompassing scope of religion and the importance of our personal lifestyle?
- ② All true revivals and reformations are *theocentric* (centered in God) and never *anthropocentric* (centered in human behavior). How does the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (see *Luke 18:9–14*) illustrate this principle?
- ③ In class, discuss your answer to Thursday’s final question. How can you know if you are ready, and can you have assurance without being presumptuous?

Jesus Versus the Dragon

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Something strange happened to Kue in northern Laos in late 2020. Her body, and especially her belly, started to swell. Her worried husband, Cheng, took her to the local shaman, who informed them that a dragon had impregnated Kue and intended to take her away to an underwater world. “You need to give animal sacrifices to appease the dragon and to call back Kue’s spirit,” the shaman said solemnly.

Cheng gave the shaman everything he demanded, but Kue got worse. Cheng turned to traditional healers for treatments over the next two months, but nothing helped. He spent everything on shamans and traditional healers, but Kue’s health continued to deteriorate.

Finally, Cheng thought about asking a Christian pastor to pray for Kue.

Two Seventh-day Adventist leaders happened to be visiting Kue’s village at the time and, after praying for her, decided to send her to a hospital in Laos’s capital, Vientiane. At the hospital, the physician diagnosed Kue with nephrotic syndrome, a kidney disorder whose symptoms include swelling linked to excess fluid retention. But after a week in the hospital, Kue sank into a coma and was placed on life support. She was transferred to the intensive care unit, where the doctor gave her a fifty-fifty chance of survival. He asked who would pay the high medical bills to keep her under his care.

Cheng spoke with his relatives, but they did not have the money. The Adventist leaders, who brought Kue to the capital and paid her initial hospital bills, also lacked funds. Faced with high bills and no assurance Kue would recover, Cheng made the difficult decision to remove her from life support and bring her home. “It was painful to

send her back home to die, but there was nothing we could do for her,” a church leader said later. “The only hope left was that God would show mercy and perform a miracle for her.”

Days after returning home, Cheng called the Adventist district pastor to ask him to pray for Kue in their home. The pastor, who arrived with several Bible workers, lived far away. He decided to stay for a few days so he also could assist with the funeral. As the family waited for Kue to die, the pastor and Bible workers fasted and prayed daily. Instead of dying, Kue improved. She began to breathe easily on her own, and the swelling subsided. By May 2021, she was walking without help. Today, Kue is a living testimony to the people of northern Laos that there is a God in heaven.



Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that support the spread of the gospel in Laos and around the world.

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LESSON 13

*December 17–23

The Judging Process



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 25:31–46; Dan. 7:9–14; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; 2 Pet. 2:4–6; Mal. 4:1; Rev. 21:8.*

Memory Text: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10, NIV).

If Scripture is clear about one thing, it is the reality of judgment. God will judge the world. The texts, both in the Old Testament and the New, are numerous and without ambiguity. The justice so lacking here and now will one day come.

The Bible says that God has “‘perfect knowledge’ ” (*Job 37:16, NIV*) and “knows everything” (*1 John 3:20, NIV*), including our most secret intentions (*Eccles. 12:14, Jer. 17:10*). We can hide from everyone and everything else, but nothing is hidden from God.

What this reality implies is that He does not need a judgment for Himself to know the life of each individual. God’s judgments are, indeed, a divine accommodation, carried on for the sake of His creatures, both in heaven and on earth. This process is of a cosmic-

historical nature because Lucifer began his rebellion in heaven and then spread it to this world (*Rev. 12:7–9*).

During this week we will consider the end-time judgment process with its three main phases: the pre-Advent judgment, the millennial judgment, and the executive judgment. The whole process ends with the vindication of the righteous and the second death of the wicked.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 24.*

SUNDAY *December 18*

The Final Judgment

For many, the idea of judgment means condemnation. And though that's part of the process, we mustn't forget that the idea of judgment has a positive side, in that judgment also involves the vindication of the righteous. Actually, the book of Daniel refers to an end-time judgment " 'in favor of the saints of the Most High' " (*Dan. 7:22, NKJV*). God's judgment includes both—a principle found in this Old Testament text: " 'Then hear in heaven, and act, and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked, bringing his way on his head, and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness' " (*1 Kings 8:32, NKJV*).

Read **Matthew 25:31–46** and **John 5:21–29**. How did Christ point to the concepts of both condemnation and vindication in the final judgment?

Some claim that the expressions " 'is not judged' " (*John 3:18, NASB*) and " 'will not be judged' " (*John 5:24, NIV*) mean that those who are in Christ are not judged at all. But these expressions imply that believers are not *condemned* in the judgment. Hence the texts should be understood as saying " 'is not condemned' " (*John 3:18, NIV*) and " 'shall not come into condemnation' " (*John 5:24*).

In short, our destiny is determined in our present life. Those in Christ have their vindication at the judgment already assured, and those who are not in Christ remain under condemnation. Describing the judgment (*Matt. 25:31–46*), Christ mentioned the presence not only of the goats (wicked) but also of the sheep (righteous). And the

apostle Paul stated explicitly, “For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10, *NRSV*).

While reflecting on the judgment, we should keep in mind that we are saved by grace (*Isa. 55:1, Eph. 2:8–10*), justified by faith (*Gen. 15:6, Rom. 5:1*), and judged by works (*Eccles. 12:14, Matt. 25:31–46, Rev. 20:11–13*). The basis of the judgment process is God’s moral law as summarized in the Ten Commandments (*Eccles. 12:13, 14; James 1:25; James 2:8–17*). Our works are the external evidences of the genuineness of our saving experience and, consequently, the elements to be appraised during judgment.

Remember: there is no arbitrary decree from God electing some to be saved and others to be lost. Each one is morally responsible for his or her own destiny.

In the end, the judgment is not the time when God decides to accept or reject us, but the time when God finalizes our choice as to whether or not we have accepted Him—a choice made manifest by our works.

MONDAY *December 19*

The Pre-Advent Judgment

The concept of judgment before the return of Christ, or what we call a “pre-Advent” judgment, is found in many places in Scripture.

Read Daniel 7:9–14; Matthew 22:1–14; Revelation 11:1, 18, 19; and Revelation 14:6, 7. How do these passages shed light on the notion of a pre-Advent investigative judgment in the heavenly courtroom? What is the significance of such a judgment?

The concept of a pre-Advent investigative judgment of God’s people is grounded in three basic biblical teachings.

One is the notion that all the dead—righteous or unrighteous—remain unconscious in their graves until the final resurrections (*John 5:25–29*).

The second is the existence of a universal judgment of all human beings (*2 Cor. 5:10, Rev. 20:11–13*).

The third is the fact that the first resurrection will be the blessed reward for the righteous, and the second resurrection will be eternal death for the wicked (*John 5:28, 29; Rev. 20:4–6, 12–15*).

What this means is that if all human beings will be judged, they should be judged *prior* to their respective resurrections, because at those resurrections they will receive their final rewards.

The book of Daniel helps us to understand both the time and the nature of that pre-Advent judgment. At the end of the 2,300 symbolic days—in 1844—the heavenly sanctuary would be cleansed (*Dan. 8:14, compare with Heb. 9:23*) and the pre-Advent investigative judgment would begin (*Dan. 7:9–14*), two different ways of expressing the same event. And the judgment is “ ‘in favor of the saints of the Most High’ ” (*Dan. 7:22, NKJV*). That is, it’s good news for God’s people.

In Matthew 22:1–14, Jesus spoke of an investigation of the wedding guests before the wedding feast actually started.

And in the book of Revelation, the pre-Advent investigative judgment is referred to in the task of measuring “ ‘those who worship’ ” in the temple of God (*Rev. 11:1, NKJV*) and in the announcement that “ ‘the hour of His judgment has come’ ” (*Rev. 14:6, 7, NKJV; compare with Rev. 14:14–16*).

How should our knowledge of a judgment in heaven impact how we live here on earth?

TUESDAY *December 20*

The Millennial Judgment

The Bible tells us that at the Second Coming (1) both the living saints and the resurrected saints will “meet the Lord in the air” (*1 Thess. 4:16, 17*); (2) all the saints will be taken to heaven to abide in the heavenly “dwelling places” that He Himself has prepared for them (*John 14:1–3, NRSV*); and (3) only at the end of the millennium will the New Jerusalem come down to this earth and become the everlasting home of the saints (*Rev. 21:1–3, 9–11*). So, during the millennium, while this earth remains desolate, the saints will reign with Christ in heaven (*Jer. 4:23, Rev. 20:4*).

Read 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3 and Revelation 20:4–6, 11–13. Why should the saints participate in the millennial judgment?

The whole judgment process is intended (1) to vindicate God’s character against the accusations of Satan that God is unfair in the way He treats His creatures; (2) to confirm the impartiality of the rewards of the righteous; (3) to demonstrate the justice of the punishments of the wicked; and (4) to dissipate all doubts that could lead toward another rebellion in the universe. In the pre-Advent investigative judgment of the righteous, only the heavenly hosts are involved (*Dan. 7:9, 10*). But during the millennial judgment of the wicked and the fallen angels, the saints themselves also will participate (*1 Cor. 6:3, Jude 6, Rev. 20:4–6*).

The pre-Advent investigative judgment began in 1844 when “ ‘thrones were put in place. . . . The court was seated, and the books were opened’ ” (*Dan. 7:9, 10, NKJV*). The millennial judgment, however, will start after the saints are taken to heaven and sit on thrones, and the judgment is committed to them. Then, once more, the heavenly books are opened, and the dead are “judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (*Rev. 20:4, 12, NKJV*). This process provides an opportunity for the saints to evaluate the heavenly records and to see God’s fair treatment in all cases. He not only rewards all human beings according to what they deserve based on their own decisions but also explains to them why He does so.

What does it teach us about the character of God that before any of the sleeping lost are resurrected to face the second death, the saved will be involved in the judging process, and no one will be punished until we, too, see the justice and fairness of God? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

WEDNESDAY *December 21*

The Executive Judgment

During the Middle Ages there was a strong tendency to portray God as a severe, punitive Judge. Today the tendency is to describe Him as a loving, permissive Father who never punishes His children. Yet, love without justice will turn into chaos and lawlessness, and justice without love will become oppression and subjugation. God's judging process is a perfect blend of justice and mercy, both of which derive from His unconditional love.

The executive judgment is God's final and irreversible punitive intervention in human history. Limited punitive judgments occurred, for example, in the casting out of Satan and his rebellious angels from heaven (*Rev. 12:7–12*), the driving out of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (*Genesis 3*), the great Flood (*Genesis 6–8*), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (*Genesis 19, Jude 7*), the death of the firstborn in Egypt (*Exodus 11, Exodus 12*), and the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (*Acts 5:1–11*). So, it is no surprise that there also will be an executive judgment of the wicked at the end of human history.

Read 2 Peter 2:4–6 and 2 Peter 3:10–13. How do these texts help us understand the nature of the final executive judgment? How do they imply the idea of the completion of judgment as opposed to its going on forever, which would be a perversion of justice and not an expression of it?

“God’s goodness and long forbearance, His patience and mercy exercised to His subjects, will not hinder Him from punishing the sinner who refused to be obedient to His requirements. It is not for a man—a criminal against God’s holy law, pardoned only through the great sacrifice He made in giving His Son to die for the guilty because His law was changeless—to dictate to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 12, p. 208.

All that God could have done to save humanity from being eternally lost He did, even at a great cost to Himself. Those who are lost ultimately made choices that led them to this unfortunate end. The idea that God’s judgment on the lost, even the annihilation of the lost (as opposed to eternal torment), goes against the character of a loving God is simply wrong. It’s God’s love, and God’s love alone, that demands justice, as well.

What does the Cross itself teach us about what God was willing to do in order to save everyone who would be saved?

THURSDAY *December 22*

The Second Death

God is leading human history toward its end-time climax. At the end of the millennium all the wicked dead are raised from their graves to receive their final punitive sentences (*Rev. 20:5, 11–15*). Then, when the whole judging process is completed and nothing else can be added to it, the wicked will acknowledge God's justice. "With all the facts of the great controversy in view, the whole universe, both loyal and rebellious, with one accord declare: 'Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints.' " And Satan himself "bows down and confesses the justice of his sentence."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 670, 671.

Read Malachi 4:1; Revelation 20:14, 15; and Revelation 21:8. How effective are the "lake of fire" and the "second death"?

The final destruction of Satan and his angels and all the wicked will cleanse the universe from sin and its consequences. And yet, even the final destruction of the wicked is an act of God's love, not only for the saints but also for the wicked themselves. They would rather die than live in the presence of God who is a "consuming fire" for sin (*Heb. 12:29*).

"They [the lost] would long to flee from that holy place. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them. The destiny of the wicked is fixed

by their own choice. Their exclusion from heaven is voluntary with themselves, and just and merciful on the part of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 543.

Thus, the final annihilation of sin and sinners—in contrast to the unbiblical theory of their everlasting sufferings in hell—provides a just and proportional punishment for whatever evil people had committed. It also confirms that sin had a beginning and will have an end. Then the whole universe will return to its original perfection, before sin, evil, and disobedience arose mysteriously and without any justification.

Praise the Lord that He, as our “righteous Judge” (*2 Tim. 4:8, NKJV*), will make the fair decision of granting immortality to the righteous and eternal destruction to the wicked.

What would be wrong with the idea that God saves everyone in the end? Why is that such a bad idea?

FRIDAY December 23

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Without a Wedding Garment,” pp. 307–319, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Desolation of the Earth,” pp. 653–661; “The Controversy Ended,” pp. 662–673, in *The Great Controversy*.

“In the day of final judgment, every lost soul will understand the nature of his own rejection of truth. The cross will be presented, and its real bearing will be seen by every mind that has been blinded by transgression. Before the vision of Calvary with its mysterious Victim, sinners will stand condemned. Every lying excuse will be swept away. Human apostasy will appear in its heinous character. Men will see what their choice has been. Every question of truth and error in the long-standing controversy will then have been made plain. In the judgment of the universe, God will stand clear of blame for the existence or continuance of evil. It will be demonstrated that the divine decrees are not accessory to sin. There was no defect in God’s government, no cause for disaffection. When the thoughts of all hearts shall be revealed, both the loyal and the rebellious will unite in declaring, ‘Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? . . . for Thy judgments are made manifest.’ Rev. 15:3, 4.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 58.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 “If you cling to self, refusing to yield your will to God, you are choosing death. To sin, wherever found, God is a consuming fire. If you choose sin, and refuse to separate from it, the presence of God, which consumes sin, must consume you.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*,

p. 62. How does this quote help us understand the nature of the executive judgment?

② Dwell on the idea (presented at the end of Tuesday's study) that not one of the lost will face final judgment until after the redeemed have been part of the judging process. Again, what does this teach us about the openness and transparency of God? For a universe in which love reigns, why is this transparency so important?

③ How will the participation of the saints in the millennial judgment comfort them in regard to their loved ones who will be lost?

Two Dreams in Angola

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Every time he went to church, little William Frederico João Lumbo seemed to hear the preacher say the same phrase. The big preacher stood behind the pulpit in the church in Angola. He raised a hand into the air, and thundered, “Those who do not live to serve God are not fit to live!”

The preacher’s words made a big impression on his young mind. But the world outside the church also made a big impression, and he decided that he would rather dance than go to church. At age 14, he formed a dance group and performed at parties and school events in Angola’s capital, Luanda.

Even though William enjoyed dancing, something didn’t seem right. He felt an emptiness inside, and he remembered the words of the preacher, “Those who do not live to serve God are not fit to live.”

The joy from dancing faded, and William began to smoke and drink. But he felt increasingly empty. One day, he prayed desperately, “I am not living to serve You, and I am not fit to live. Help!”

Shortly after the prayer, a friend gave William a flash drive with a sermon on it. William wanted the flash drive because, on it, the friend also had saved a video of him dancing.

The sermon touched William’s heart. He fell to his knees and asked for forgiveness. He decided to go to church. All churches were closed in Angola because of COVID-19, and William ended up in an Adventist house church.

A big surprise awaited William. The leader of the house church, Filipe, had had two dreams about William over the past two nights. In the first dream, Filipe was standing beside a big tree, and, in his hand, he held a small branch. He needed to somehow connect the

branch to the tree so it could grow again. In the second dream, Filipe was standing beside a big river. A small river flowed beside the big river, and Felipe somehow needed to connect the small river to the big river.

“You are the small branch that needs to be connected to the big tree,” Filipe told William. “The big tree is Jesus, who is the Tree of Life. You are the small river, and the big river is Jesus. You need to be connected to Jesus, who is the River of Life.”

William could scarcely believe his ears. “Jesus wants me to be connected to Him?” he asked.

As William worshiped at the house church, peace and joy began to fill the emptiness in his heart. He decided to be connected only to Jesus. Today, William couldn’t be happier. He lives only to serve God.



This mission story illustrates Spiritual Growth Objective No. 5 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan, “To disciple individuals and families into Spirit-filled lives.” Read more: IWillGo2020.org.

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LESSON 14 *December 24–30

All Things New



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:3, 22; 1 John 3:2, 3; 1 Pet. 1:22; Isa. 25:8; Rev. 22:3–5.

Memory Text: “Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And He said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful’ ” (Revelation 21:5, NKJV).

Scripture gives us this hope: “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13, NASB).

For some, however, the promise of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1) seems like a fantasy, stories told by those in power who used the hope of an afterlife to help keep the masses in line. The idea being: *Though you have it hard at present, one day you will have your reward in heaven, or the like.*

And though some people have used the future hope presented in the Bible that way, their abuse doesn't change the truth of the promises that we have regarding the new heavens and the new earth.

In the last days, scoffers will ridicule our blessed hope (2 *Pet.* 3:3–7). But their scoffing, just as predicted, could be seen as more evidence that what the Bible says is true, for they are scoffing as the Bible predicted they would.

During this week we will reflect on the glorious promise of a new heaven and a new earth, including the heavenly temple, the presence of God, the end of death and tears—and, finally, the ultimate triumph of God's love.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 31.*

SUNDAY *December 25*

A New Heaven and a New Earth

For some followers of Greek philosophy, the idea that something is physical means that it is bad. That's why for them it is unconceivable to think of a real heaven with real people in the future. In this thinking, for it to be heaven and to be good, it must be a purely spiritual state, free from the blemishes found in the physical world here. If something is material, they assert, it cannot be spiritual; and if something is spiritual, it cannot be material. By contrast, the Bible speaks of heaven in concrete terms but without the limitations imposed by the presence of sin.

Read Isaiah 65:17–25; Isaiah 66:22, 23; 2 Peter 3:13; and Revelation 21:1–5. What is the ultimate message of these passages?

The book of Isaiah provides interesting glimpses of how the earth would have been if Israel as a nation had remained faithful to their covenant with God (*Isa. 65:17–25; Isa. 66:22, 23; compare with Deuteronomy 28*). The whole environment with its various expressions of life would have grown more and more toward God's original plan; that is, before the entrance of sin.

However, that plan did not materialize as expected. Then a new plan was established, but now with the church, composed of Jews and Gentiles from all nations (*Matt. 28:18–20, 1 Pet. 2:9*). The

prophecies of Isaiah, therefore, have to be reread from the perspective of the church (*2 Pet.* 3:13, *Rev.* 21:1–5).

“In the Bible the inheritance of the saved is called ‘a country.’ Hebrews 11:14–16. There the heavenly Shepherd leads His flock to fountains of living waters. The tree of life yields its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the service of the nations. There are ever-flowing streams, clear as crystal, and beside them waving trees cast their shadows upon the paths prepared for the ransomed of the Lord. There the wide-spreading plains swell into hills of beauty, and the mountains of God rear their lofty summits. On those peaceful plains, beside those living streams, God’s people, so long pilgrims and wanderers, shall find a home.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 675.

Many secular writers, without the hope of eternity as presented in Scripture, have lamented the meaninglessness of human existence. Though they are wrong about the future, why is it hard to argue with their point about the meaninglessness of life without a future hope? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

MONDAY *December 26*

In the Temple of God

Some people speak of heaven itself as being God's sanctuary. But the book of Revelation refers to a specific sanctuary/temple within the New Jerusalem, where God's throne and the sea of glass are located (*Rev. 4:2–6, Rev. 7:9–15, Rev. 15:5–8*). There the great multitude of saints from all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues will worship God forever (*Rev. 7:9–17*).

Compare Revelation 7:9–15 with Revelation 21:3, 22. How can we harmonize the description of the great multitude of the redeemed serving God “‘day and night in His temple’ ” (*Rev. 7:15, NKJV*) with the statement that John “saw no temple” in the New Jerusalem (*Rev. 21:22, NKJV*)?

The heavenly sanctuary/temple has always been the place where the heavenly hosts worship God. But with the appearance of sin, that sanctuary also became the place from which salvation is offered to humanity. “When the sin problem is over, the heavenly sanctuary will once again revert to its original function. In Revelation 21:22, John the revelator reports that he no longer saw a temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. But does that mean there is no longer a house of the Lord where His creatures can come and have special fellowship with Him? By no means!”—Richard M. Davidson, “The Sanctuary: ‘To Behold the Beauty of the

Lord,' ” in Artur Steele, ed., *The Word: Searching, Living, Teaching*, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015), p. 31.

The book of Revelation gives special attention to the One who is being worshiped and to those who are worshiping Him. This heavenly worship is centered on God and the Lamb (*Rev. 5:13, Rev. 7:10*). As always, and as it should be, Christ is the focus of the worship.

The worshipers are those “ ‘who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’ ” (*Rev. 7:14, NIV*). They are living witnesses of God’s redeeming and transforming power. They sing praises to God for who He is and for what He did for them.

Revelation 21:3 reads: “ ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God’ ” (NKJV). This verse reflects numerous other passages (*Jer. 32:38, Ezek. 37:27, Zech. 8:8, Heb. 8:10*). What does it mean for us now, still here on earth, that God will be our God, and we will be His people? How do we live out this amazing truth now?

TUESDAY *December 27*

In the Presence of God

The Bible says that God “dwells in unapproachable light” (*1 Tim. 6:16, NRSV*), and that “no one has ever seen God” (*John 1:18, 1 John 4:12, NRSV*). Does it mean that the saints in heaven will never see God the Father? Not at all. It is quite evident that not seeing God refers to the human beings after the Fall, because there are several indications in Scripture that the saints will actually see Him in heaven.

Read Matthew 5:8; 1 John 3:2, 3; and Revelation 22:3, 4. What do these passages tell us about the supreme privilege of seeing God?

The same apostle John who states that “no one has ever seen God” (*John 1:18, 1 John 4:12, NRSV*) also declares that “we shall see Him as He is” (*1 John 3:2, 3, NKJV*) and “see His face” (*Rev. 22:3, 4, NKJV*). It can be debatable whether these passages refer to God the Father or to Christ. But all doubts are gone in light of Christ’s own statement, “‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ ” (*Matt. 5:8, NKJV*). What a privilege it will be for the redeemed to worship God in His temple! But the supreme privilege of all will be to see His face.

“The people of God are privileged to hold open communion with the Father and the Son. ‘Now we see through a glass, darkly.’

1 Corinthians 13:12. We behold the image of God reflected, as in a mirror, in the works of nature and in His dealings with men; but then we shall see Him face to face, without a dimming veil between. We shall stand in His presence and behold the glory of His countenance.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 676, 677.

Notice in some of the verses for today the link between purity and seeing God. The “ ‘pure in heart’ ” will see God; he who will see God “purifies himself, just as He is pure” (*1 John 3:3, NKJV*). What these verses reveal is that God must do a work in us now to help prepare us for heaven.

Though, in the end, our title to heaven has been made certain through the death of Jesus, we will go through a purifying process here and now that will help prepare us for our eternal home. And central to the purification process is obedience to His Word.

Read 1 Peter 1:22. How does this text reveal to us the link between obedience and purification? What is it about obedience that purifies us? How, specifically, does Peter say our obedience will be made manifest?

WEDNESDAY *December 28*

No More Death and Tears

The theory of an immortal soul, suffering forever in an ever-burning hell, contradicts the biblical teaching that in the new heaven and the new earth there will be “ ‘no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying’ ” (*Rev. 21:4, NKJV*). If the theory of an eternal burning hell were true, then the “second death” would not eradicate sin and sinners from the universe but only confine them in an everlasting hell of sorrow and crying. And further: in this case the universe would never be fully restored to its original perfection. But praise the Lord that the Bible paints a completely different picture!

Read Isaiah 25:8, Revelation 7:17, and Revelation 21:4. What comfort and hope can these passages bring us amid the trials and suffering of this present world?

Life can be very hard, unfair, cruel. Some people, so dear to us, are brutally taken away by the cold embrace of death. Or some people come subtly into our lives, steal our feelings, and then walk away as if nothing ever happened. How terrible it is to be betrayed by someone whom we loved and trusted.

There are moments when, with a broken heart, we may even wonder if life is worth living. Regardless of our sorrows, however, God is always eager to wipe away from our cheeks as many tears as possible. But some of our heaviest tears will continue streaming

down until that glorious day when death, sorrow, and crying will cease to exist (*Rev. 21:1–5*).

We can trust that in the final judgment God will treat every single human being with fairness and love. All our loved ones who died in Christ will be raised from the dead to be with us throughout eternity. Those unworthy of eternal life will finally cease to exist, without having to live in an “unpleasant” heaven or in an ever-burning hell. Our greatest comfort derives from the fair way God treats everyone. When death definitively ceases to exist, the redeemed will shout joyfully, “ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ ” (*1 Cor. 15:54, 55, NRSV*).

The Lord promised that in the new heaven and the new earth He would create, “ ‘the former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind’ ” (*Isa. 65:17, NIV*). This does not mean that heaven will be a place of amnesia, but, rather, that the past will not undermine the enduring joy of heaven.

Who hasn't felt the unfair ravages of human existence here? Especially in those bad times, how can we learn to trust and, to the degree possible, rejoice in God's goodness and love?

THURSDAY *December 29*

His Name on Their Foreheads

Read Revelation 22:3–5. How can we be assured that we will be among those who will have the name of God written on our foreheads? Or can we be assured?

After the rebellion of Lucifer and the fall of Adam and Eve, God could have destroyed the two sinners. Yet, as an expression of unconditional love for His creatures, God established a merciful plan to save all those who accept what He offers. This is what is known as the “plan of salvation,” which, though existing even before the Creation of the earth (*Eph. 1:3, 4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2; Rev. 13:8*), was first presented to humanity in Eden, right after the Fall. It was then further revealed in the types and shadows of the Hebrew sanctuary service (*Exodus 25*). And then it was given its fullest expression in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (*see Romans 5*).

At the center of the plan of salvation is the promise of eternal life, based on the merits of Jesus, to all who accept, by faith, the great provision supplied at the cross. Before the cross, after the cross—salvation has always been by faith and never by works, however much works are an expression of our salvation.

Paul wrote about Abraham, who existed long before the coming of Christ, as an example of salvation by faith: “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’ ” (*Rom. 4:2, 3, NKJV*). How do these verses help us understand what salvation by faith is all about?

Thus, we can have the assurance of salvation if we have accepted Jesus, have surrendered to Him, and have claimed His promises, including those of a new life now in Him, and if we lean totally on His merits and nothing else. Abraham believed, and it was accounted to him as righteousness; it works the same with us.

This, then, is what it means to have His name written on our foreheads. If we have it written there now and don’t turn away from Him, then it will be written there in the new heavens and the new earth, as well.

FRIDAY December 30

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Controversy Ended,” pp. 674–678, in *The Great Controversy*; “The Earth Made New,” pp. 133–145; “Heaven Is a School,” pp. 146–158; “It Will Not Be Long,” pp. 159–166; “Heaven Can Begin Now,” pp. 167–176; “The Music of Heaven,” pp. 177–184; “A Call for Us to Be There,” pp. 185–192, in *Heaven*.

“The cross of Christ will be the science and the song of the redeemed through all eternity. In Christ glorified they will behold Christ crucified. Never will it be forgotten that He whose power created and upheld the unnumbered worlds through the vast realms of space, the Beloved of God, the Majesty of heaven, He whom cherub and shining seraph delighted to adore—humbled Himself to uplift fallen man; that He bore the guilt and shame of sin, and the hiding of His Father’s face, till the woes of a lost world broke His heart and crushed out His life on Calvary’s cross. That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 651.

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Many secularized Christians live their lives as if this world will last forever (*Luke 12:16–21*). How can we balance our earthly ideals with our heavenly priorities? How can we guard against what Jesus has warned us about in Luke 12?**
- ② If heaven begins here, what should we do to transform our homes and our personal lives into little expressions of heavenly principles?**
- ③ Dwell on the question asked at the end of Sunday's study. What is the logic behind the pessimism of those who don't believe in eternal life? At the same time, too, some of these people nevertheless seem to live fairly "happy" lives, even without expressing any future hope. How do you think they do that? That is, how might they rationalize living, even contentedly, without the promise of something beyond this life?**

Influential Juice Bar in Fiji

By GEORGE KWONG

Wailoaloa Beach is a popular tourist destination known for affordable lodging, restaurants, and especially bars and night spots in Nadi, Fiji. But when COVID-19 struck, many small cafés, fast-food outlets, and restaurants lost business along the beach. One such place was the Bamboo Resort.

Sensing an opportunity, three local Seventh-day Adventist churches teamed up with Bamboo Resort to open Bitu Wellness Bar, a juice bar offering health and wellness programs, such as free biometric screenings, exercise programs, fat-loss challenges, and personalized meal plans. The bar, whose name *bitu* means “bamboo” in the local language, quickly gained popularity among the locals, who streamed in for healthy fresh juices daily.

Church members prayed that the bar would serve as a center of influence to encourage Fijians to take a more wholistic approach toward health in a region where people struggle with lifestyle diseases, particularly diabetes. The bar—supported by the South Pacific Division’s 10,000 Toes campaign, a recipient of a 2019 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering—also sought to raise awareness about healthy alternatives to alcohol.

But then a second wave of COVID-19 struck Fiji, and the authorities ordered that the Bamboo Resort shut down along with the juice bar. For two weeks, customers called daily to find out when and where the juice bar would reopen. What happened next surprised everyone.

A married couple who managed the neighboring Beach Escape Resort had watched crowds pouring in and out of the Bamboo Resort daily and had noticed that more people visited the juice bar

than the liquor bar. They also noted with satisfaction a decrease in alcohol-related incidents on their street.

The couple contacted church members and offered the use of their liquor bar and other premises as a wellness hub. Church members initially declined the offer, not wanting to offer fruit juice in the same place as alcohol, but the managers explained that they wanted to stop selling alcohol altogether.

Alcohol was cleared out, and bar equipment was replaced with juicing machines; blenders; and fruits, vegetables, and herbs. The Bitu Wellness Bar was up and running again.

Church members expressed amazement at the marvelous way that God leads. The juice bar has not only influenced the patrons of the Bamboo Resort, but it also has transformed the Beach Escape Resort into a center of influence that is bringing hope and healing to the community.



Thank you for your 2019 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering that supported the South Pacific Division's 10,000 Toes campaign in Fiji and other South Pacific countries. Thank you for planning a generous Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter to support new projects to spread the gospel in the South Pacific Division and beyond.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at [AdventistMission.org](https://www.adventistmission.org).

2023 Bible Study Guide *for the First*

Quarter

In the more than 2,000 verses in the Scriptures that deal with money and possessions and our attitude toward them, God gives practical instruction on how to live above the stresses of life and to manage in financially faithful ways what we have been given.

In this quarter's lessons, entitled Managing for the Master—Till He Comes by G. Edward Reid, we will study God's ideal for our relationship with Him and see how we can develop a deep trust so that we will remain faithful to Him, even when we can't buy or sell. (See Rev. 13:17.) This kind of faith does not come overnight; we can, even now, by faithfully managing what God has given us, be prepared for whatever comes our way. Although we live in challenging times, our Christian worldview gives us hope as we see the signs Jesus gave to let us know that His second coming is very near. We pray that these practical lessons will deepen your faith and trust in God and encourage you to be a faithful manager for Him.

Lesson 1—Part of God's Family

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **We Are Part of God's Family** (*Eph. 1:14*)

MONDAY: **God Is the Owner of Everything** (*Ps. 50:10–12*)

TUESDAY: **Resources Available for God's Family** (*Phil. 4:19*)

WEDNESDAY: **Responsibilities of God's Family Members** (*Deut. 6:5*)

THURSDAY: **Treasure in Heaven** (*Matt. 6:19–21*)

Memory Text— *1 John 3:1*

Sabbath Gem: God trusts us to manage His affairs on earth. He encourages us to spend the resources He has given to us for our

needs, others' needs, and the advancement of His work. There are privileges and responsibilities in being a part of God's family.

Lesson 2—God's Covenants With Us

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Salvation Covenant** (*1 John 5:13*)

MONDAY: **To Hearken Diligently** (Deut. 28:1–14)

TUESDAY: **Honor the Lord** (Prov. 3:1–10)

WEDNESDAY: **The Tithe Contract** (Mal. 3:7–11)

THURSDAY: **Seek Ye First** (Matt. 6:25–33)

Memory Text— *Deut. 28:1, 2*

Sabbath Gem: God has made contracts (or covenants) with us. Most are bilateral, meaning that both parties (God and man) have a part to perform. As we look at some significant bilateral covenants between God and His children in this lesson, let's pray that we "uphold our end of the bargain."

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