

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide
Jan | Feb | Mar 2024

Psalms



Contents

- 1** **How to Read the Psalms**—*December 30–January 5*
- 2** **Teach Us to Pray**—*January 6–12*
- 3** **The Lord Reigns**—*January 13–19*
- 4** **The Lord Hears and Delivers**—*January 20–26*
- 5** **Singing the Lord’s Song in a Strange Land**—*January 27–February 2*
- 6** **I Will Arise**—*February 3–9*
- 7** **Your Mercy Reaches Unto the Heavens**—*February 10–16*
- 8** **Wisdom for Righteous Living**—*February 17–23*
- 9** **Blessed Is He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord**—*February 24–March 1*

10 **Lessons of the Past**—*March 2–8*

11 **Longing for God in Zion**—*March 9–15*

12 **Worship That Never Ends**—*March 16–22*

13 **Wait on the Lord**—*March 23–29*

Editorial Office 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904
Come visit us at our website: <https://www.adultbiblestudyguide.org>

Principal Contributor

Dragoslava Santrac

Editor

Clifford R. Goldstein

Associate Editor

Soraya Homayouni

Publication Manager

Lea Alexander Greve

Editorial Assistant

Sharon Thomas-Crews

Pacific Press[®] Coordinator

Tricia Wegh

Art Director and Illustrator

Lars Justinen

Design

Justinen Creative Group

© 2024 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists[®]. All rights reserved. No part of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* may be edited, altered, modified, adapted, translated, reproduced, or published by any person or entity without prior written authorization from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists[®]. The division offices of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists[®] are authorized to arrange for translation of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, under specific guidelines. Copyright of such translations and their publication

shall remain with the General Conference. “Seventh-day Adventist,” “Adventist,” and the flame logo are registered trademarks of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists[®] and may not be used without prior authorization from the General Conference.

The Psalms: Where God and People Meet Heart to Heart



The Psalms are prayers and hymns of the Bible par excellence. Uttered in praise, joy, sorrow, and despair; spoken or sung in private and in the public by laypeople, kings, poets, and priests; coming from both the righteous and repentant sinners, the Psalms have served as the prayer book and the hymnbook to generations of believers.

The book of Psalms owes its distinct role to the fact that while most of the Bible speaks *to us*, the Psalms speak *for us* and *with us*. The Psalms are a source of blessing, hope, and revival, a guide for both self-reflection and reflection on God's greatness, liberating when one cries out of the depths, and captivating for a renewed surrender to God. It is thus not surprising that many people find the Psalms resonating with their emotions and experiences and adopt them as their own prayers. Luther poignantly speaks of the Psalms: "Where can one find nobler words to express joy than in the Psalms of praise

or gratitude? In them you can see into the hearts of all the saints as if you were looking at a lovely pleasure-garden, or were gazing into heaven. . . . Or where can one find more profound, more penitent, more sorrowful words in which to express grief than in the Psalms of lamentation? In these, you see into the hearts of all the saints as if you were looking at death or gazing into hell, so dark and obscure is the scene rendered by the changing shadows of the wrath of God. . . . It is therefore easy to understand why the book of Psalms is the favourite book of all the saints. For every man on every occasion can find in it Psalms which fit his needs, which he feels to be as appropriate as if they had been set there just for his sake. In no other book can he find words to equal them, nor better words."—Martin Luther, *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), pp. 39, 40.

To experience the life-transforming power of the Psalms, we are called to sing and pray them as did the generations of believers who have used the Psalms to pour out their praises, petitions, confessions, laments, and thanksgiving to the sovereign God of grace and justice.

The Psalms bear witness to a spiritual journey that is common to many of God's children.

Do we need to *study* the Psalms, then? Like the rest of the Scriptures, the Psalms were written in their distinctive historical, theological, and literary contexts. The task of the study of the Psalms is to bring the particular world of the Psalms closer to the modern audience. We must note that while the Psalms are prayers of God's people and even prayers that Jesus prayed as the incarnated Lord, the Psalms are also prayers *about* Jesus. They are God's revelation to humanity. Another task of the study of the Psalms is, thus, to learn from the Psalms about all that God did, does, and will do for the world in and through Jesus Christ.

Although the Psalms are a collection of 150 poems, the collection may not be as random as it appears. The Psalms bear witness to a spiritual journey that is common to many of God's children. The journey begins with a faith that is firmly established and secured by God's sovereign rule and where good gets

rewarded and evil punished. As we progress through our study, we will see what happens when the well-ordered world of faith is challenged and threatened by evil. Does God still reign? How can believers sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

Our desire and prayer are that the Psalms strengthen us on our life journey, and through them we get to meet God daily, heart to heart, until the day when we see Jesus Christ face to face.

Dragoslava Santrac, PhD in Old Testament, is managing editor of the Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists world headquarters. She has authored the volume on Psalms 76–150 for the Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary.

LESSON 1 *December 30—January 5

How to Read *the* Psalms



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Chron. 16:7; Neh. 12:8; Ps. 25:1–5; Ps. 33:1–3; Rom. 8:26, 27; Ps. 82:8; Ps. 121:7.*

Memory Text: “Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (*Luke 24:44, 45, NKJV*).

The Psalms have been a prayer book and hymnbook for both Jews and Christians through the ages. And though the Psalms are predominantly the psalmists’ own words addressed to God, the Psalms did not originate with mortals but with God, who inspired their thoughts.

Indeed, the Lord inspired them to write what they did, which is why, as in all of Scripture (*2 Pet. 1:21*), God in the Psalms speaks to us through His servants and by His Spirit. Jesus, the apostles, and the writers of the New Testament cited the Psalms and referred to them as Scripture (*Mark 12:10; John 10:34, 35; John 13:18*). They are as surely the Word of God as are the

books of Genesis and Romans.

The Psalms have been written in Hebrew poetry by different authors from ancient Israel, and so, the Psalms reflect their particular world, however universal their messages. Accepting the Psalms as God's Word and paying close attention to the Psalms' poetic features, as well as their historical, theological, and liturgical contexts, is fundamental for understanding their messages, which reach across thousands of years to our time today.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 6.*

SUNDAY December 31

The Psalms in Ancient Israel's Worship

Read 1 Chronicles 16:7, Nehemiah 12:8, Psalm 18:1, Psalm 30:1, Psalm 92:1, Psalm 95:2, Psalm 105:2, Colossians 3:16, and James 5:13. What were the occasions that prompted the writing of some psalms? When did God's people use the Psalms?

The Psalms were composed for use in private and in communal worship. They were sung as hymns in temple worship, as suggested by the musical annotations that mention instruments (*Ps. 61:1*), tunes (*Ps. 9:1*), and music leaders (*Ps. 8:1*).

In the Hebrew Bible, the title of the book of Psalms, *tehilim*, “praises,” reflects its main purpose—that is, the praise of God. The English title *Book of Psalms* is derived from the Greek *psalmoi*, found in the Septuagint, an early (second and third century B.C.) Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

The Psalms were an indispensable part of Israel's worship. For example, they were used in temple dedications, religious feasts, and processions, as well as during the setting down of the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem.

“The Songs of Ascents” (*Psalms 120–134*), also known as the pilgrimage songs, were traditionally sung during the pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the three major annual festivals (*Exod. 23:14–17*). The “Egyptian Hallel” (*Psalms 113–118*) and the “Great Hallel” (*Psalm 136*) were sung at the three major annual festivals, including the festivals of the New Moon and the dedication

of the temple. The Egyptian Hallel received a significant place in the Passover ceremony. Psalms 113 and 114 were sung at the beginning of the Passover meal and Psalms 115–118 at the end (*Matt. 26:30*). The “Daily Hallel” (*Psalms 145–150*) was incorporated into the daily prayers in the synagogue morning services.

The Psalms did not only accompany the people’s worship, but they also instructed them on how they should worship God in the sanctuary. Jesus prayed with the words of Psalm 22 (*Matt. 27:46*). The Psalms found a significant place in the life of the early church, as well (*Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:19*).

Though we, of course, do not worship God in an earthly sanctuary like the temple, how can we use the Psalms in our own worship, whether in a private or in a corporate setting?

MONDAY *January 1*

Meet the Psalmists

King David, whose name appears in the titles of most psalms, was active in organizing the liturgy of Israel's worship. He is called "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 *Sam.* 23:1). The New Testament attests to Davidic authorship of various psalms (*Matt.* 22:43–45; *Acts* 2:25–29, 34, 35; *Acts* 4:25; *Rom.* 4:6–8). Numerous psalms were composed by the temple musicians who were also Levites: for example, Psalm 50 and Psalms 73–83 by Asaph; Psalm 42, Psalms 44–47, Psalm 49, Psalm 84, Psalm 85, Psalms 87–88 by the sons of Korah; Psalm 88 also by Heman the Ezrahite; and Psalm 89 by Ethan the Ezrahite. Beyond them, Solomon (*Psalms* 72, 127) and Moses (*Psalm* 90) authored some psalms.

Read Psalm 25:1–5; Psalm 42:1; Psalm 75:1; Psalm 77:1; Psalm 84:1, 2; Psalm 88:1–3; and Psalm 89:1. What do these psalms reveal about the experiences their authors were going through?

The Holy Spirit inspired the psalmists and used their talents in service to God and to their community of faith. The psalmists were people of genuine devotion and profound faith and yet prone to discouragements and temptations, as are the rest of us. Though written a long time ago, the Psalms surely reflect some of what we experience today.

"Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my cry. For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to the grave" (*Ps.* 88:2, 3, *NKJV*).

This is a cry of the twenty-first-century soul as much as it was of someone 3,000 years ago.

Some psalms mention hardships; some focus on joys. The psalmists cried out to God to save them and experienced His undeserved favor. They glorified God for His faithfulness and love, and they pledged their untiring devotion to Him. The Psalms are, thus, testimonies of divine Redemption and signs of God's grace and hope. The Psalms convey a divine promise to all who embrace, by faith, God's gifts of forgiveness and of a new life. Yet, at the same time, they do not try to cover up, hide, or downplay the hardships and suffering prevalent in a fallen world.

How can we draw hope and comfort knowing that even faithful people, such as the psalmists, struggled with some of the same things that we do?

TUESDAY *January 2*

A Song for Every Season

Read Psalm 3, Psalm 33:1–3, and Psalm 109:6–15. What different facets of human experience do these psalms convey?

The Psalms make the believing community aware of the full range of human experience, and they demonstrate that believers can worship God in every season in life. In them we see the following:

(1) Hymns that magnify God for His majesty and power in creation, His kingly rule, judgment, and faithfulness. (2) Thanksgiving psalms that express profound gratitude for God's abundant blessings. (3) Laments that are heartfelt cries to God for deliverance from trouble. (4) Wisdom psalms that provide practical guidelines for righteous living. (5) Royal psalms that point to Christ, who is the sovereign King and Deliverer of God's people. (6) Historical psalms that recall Israel's past and highlight God's faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness to teach the coming generations not to repeat the mistakes of their ancestors but to trust God and remain faithful to His covenant.

The poetry of the Psalms demonstrates distinctive power to capture the attention of readers. Though some of these poetic devices are lost in translation, we can still, in our native language, appreciate many of them.

1. *Parallelism* involves the combining of symmetrically constructed words, phrases, or thoughts. Parallelism helps in understanding the meaning

of corresponding parts. For instance: “Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!” (Ps. 103:1, NKJV). In this parallelism, “my soul” is “all that is within me,” namely one’s whole being.

2. *Imagery* uses figurative language to strongly appeal to readers’ physical senses. For example, God’s refuge is depicted as “the shadow of [His] wings” (Ps. 17:8, NKJV).

3. *Merism* expresses totality by a pair of contrasting parts. “I have cried *day and night* before thee” denotes crying without ceasing (Ps. 88:1, *emphasis supplied*).

4. *Wordplays* employ the sound of words to make a pun and highlight a spiritual message. In Psalm 96:4, 5 the Hebrew words *’elohim*, “gods,” and *’elilim*, “idols,” create a wordplay to convey the message that the gods of the nations only appear to be *’elohim*, “gods,” but are merely *’elilim*, “idols.”

Finally, the word “selah” denotes a brief interlude, either for a call to pause and reflect on the message of a particular section of the psalm or a change of musical accompaniment (Ps. 61:4).

WEDNESDAY January 3

Inspired Prayers

Read 2 Samuel 23:1, 2 and Romans 8:26, 27. What do these texts teach us about prayer?

The Psalms are inspired prayers and praises of Israel, and so, in the Psalms the voice is that of God intermingled with that of His people. The Psalms assume the dynamics of vivid interactions with God.

The psalmists address God personally as “my God,” “O LORD,” and “my King” (*Ps. 5:2, Ps. 84:3*). The psalmists often implore God to “give ear” (*Ps. 5:1*), “hear my prayer” (*Ps. 39:12*), “look” (*Ps. 25:18*), “answer me” (*Ps. 102:2*), and “deliver me” (*Ps. 6:4, NKJV*). These are clearly the expressions of someone praying to God.

The remarkable beauty and appeal of the Psalms as prayers and praises lie in the fact that the Psalms are the Word of God in the form of the pious prayers and praises of believers. The Psalms, thus, provide God’s children with moments of intimacy, such as described in Romans 8:26, 27: “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (*NKJV*).

Jesus, too, quoted from the Psalms, such as in Luke 20:42, 43, when He

quoted directly from Psalm 110:1—“ ‘Now David himself said in the Book of Psalms: “The LORD said to my Lord, / ‘Sit at My right hand, / Till I make Your enemies Your footstool’ ” ’ ” (NKJV).

Although some psalms have sprung from, or refer to, specific historical events and the experiences of the psalmists themselves, as well as the experiences of Israel as a nation, the Psalms’ spiritual depth speaks to a variety of life situations and crosses all cultural, religious, ethnic, and gender boundaries. In other words, as you read the Psalms, you will find them expressing hope, praise, fear, anger, sadness, and sorrow—things that people everywhere, in every age, no matter their circumstances, face. They speak to us all, in the language of our own experiences.

What should Jesus’ use of the Psalms tell us about the importance that they could play in our own faith experience?

THURSDAY *January 4*

The World of the Psalms

Read Psalm 16:8; Psalm 44:8; Psalm 46:1; Psalm 47:1, 7; Psalm 57:2; Psalm 62:8; Psalm 82:8; and Psalm 121:7. What place does God occupy in the psalmist's life?

The world of the Psalms is wholly God-centered; it seeks to submit, in prayer and praise, all life experiences to God. God is the Sovereign Creator, the King and Judge of all the earth. He provides all things for His children. Therefore, He is to be trusted at all times. Even the enemies of God's people ask, " 'Where is your God?' " when God's people seem to be failing (*Ps. 42:10, NKJV*). Just as the Lord is the ever-present and never-failing God of His people, so God's people have God always before them. Ultimately, the Psalms envision the time when all peoples and the entire creation will worship God (*Ps. 47:1, Ps. 64:9*).

The centrality of God in life produces the centrality of worship. The worship in which the Psalms lived was fundamentally different from worship as understood by many people today, because worship in the biblical culture was the natural and undisputed center of the entire community's life. Therefore, everything that happened, both the good and the bad, in the life of God's people inevitably was expressed in worship. God hears the psalmist, wherever he may be, and responds to him in His perfect time (*Ps. 3:4, Ps. 18:6, Ps. 20:6*).

The psalmist is aware that God's dwelling place is in heaven, but at the same time, God dwells in Zion, in the sanctuary among His people. God is at the same time far and near, everywhere, and in His temple (*Ps. 11:4*), hidden (*Ps. 10:1*) and disclosed (*Ps. 41:12*). In the Psalms these apparently mutually exclusive characteristics of God are brought together. The psalmists understood that proximity and remoteness were inseparable within the true being of God (*Ps. 24:7–10*). The psalmists understood the dynamics of this spiritual tension. Their awareness of God's goodness and presence, amid whatever they were experiencing, is what strengthens their hope while they wait for God to intervene, however and whenever He chooses to do so.

How can the Psalms help us understand that we cannot limit God to certain aspects of our existence only? What might be parts of your life in which you are seeking to keep the Lord at a distance?

FRIDAY *January 5*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Temple and Its Dedication,” pp. 35–50, in *Prophets and Kings*; “The Benefits of Music,” pp. 291, 292, in *Messages to Young People*.

The book of Psalms consists of 150 psalms, which are grouped into five books: Book I (*Psalms 1–41*), Book II (*Psalms 42–72*), Book III (*Psalms 73–89*), Book IV (*Psalms 90–106*), and Book V (*Psalms 107–150*). The five-book division of the Psalter is an early Jewish tradition that parallels the five-book division of the Pentateuch.

The book of Psalms provides evidence of some already-existing collections of psalms: the Korahite collections (*Psalms 42–49, 84, 85, 87, 88*), the Asaphite collection (*Psalms 73–83*), the Songs of the Ascents (*Psalms 120–134*), and the Hallelujah Psalms (*Psalms 111–118, 146–150*). Psalm 72:20 bears witness to a smaller collection of David’s psalms.

While most psalms are associated with the time of King David and early monarchy (tenth century B.C.), the collection of psalms continued to grow through the following centuries: the divided monarchy, the exile, and the postexilic period. It is conceivable that the Hebrew scribes under the leadership of Ezra combined the existing smaller collections of psalms into one book when they worked on establishing the services of the new temple.

The fact that scribes consolidated the book of Psalms does not take away from their divine inspiration. The scribes, like the psalmists, were devoted servants of God, and their work was directed by God (*Ezra 7:6, 10*). The divine-human nature of the Psalms is comparable to the union of the divine and the human in the incarnated Lord Jesus. “But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that ‘the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 8.

Discussion Questions:

- ①** What does it mean that the Psalms are divine-human prayers and hymns? How does this idea, however difficult to fully grasp, help us see the closeness that God wants with His people? How does it reveal, in its own way, how close to humanity, and to each of us, God is?
- ②** In class, talk about a time in which you found something in the Psalms speaking directly to your own situation. What comfort and hope did you find there?

INSIDE *Story*

Finding Jesus in a Holy Book

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Paul went from home to home to meet people in a European city. With him, he carried a Bible and the holy book of another major world religion.

One day, a man opened the door. His breath smelled of cigarette smoke.

“I would very much like to give you a gift today,” Paul said.

“What kind of gift?” the man asked.

“I have this Bible,” Paul said.

“I don’t want a Bible,” the man said. “I belong to another religion. You are a Christian.”

“I have the holy book of your religion, too,” Paul said.

The man was surprised. He seemed interested. “OK, read something to me but only from my holy book, not from the Bible,” he said.

Paul opened the holy book and read about Jesus. The man’s surprise grew.

“Is this the same Jesus as in the Bible?” he asked.

Over the next few weeks, he studied four lessons about Jesus from his holy book. The man saw that the book does not talk about Jesus being crucified. He saw that the book predicts Jesus will come again. He saw that both people from his religion and Christians were waiting for Jesus to return.

When Paul arrived for the fifth lesson, the man wasn’t home.

A year passed, and one Sabbath the man showed up at Paul’s church.

“I want to come to this church,” he said. “Can I?”

It was Paul’s turn to be surprised.

“I want to follow Christ,” the man said.

After that, the man came every Sabbath. He said his holy book left him feeling empty. It offered no Savior for his sins. He longed to be baptized.

“Jesus says the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit,” Paul said. “Do you

want to be free of cigarettes? Jesus said, ‘If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed’ [John 8:36, NKJV]. You have to choose Jesus or cigarettes. You can throw away your cigarettes today if you choose.”

The man looked scared. “It isn’t possible!” he blurted out. But then he reached into his pocket and threw a cigarette pack into a trash can.

“Jesus, give me victory over cigarettes,” he prayed. “I want to be free.”

Late that night, he called Paul. “This is terrible,” he said. “I feel awful. I cannot live without cigarettes.”

The two men prayed together on the phone. God heard the prayer and gave the man victory. He has not smoked in the four and a half years since then. Today, he is an outreach leader for the church.

“He loves people,” Paul told Adventist Mission. He is waiting eagerly for Jesus to return.

Thank you for your support of Adventist Mission, whose Global Mission Centers help train people to share the good news of salvation with precious people from other world religions. For more information, visit globalmissioncenters.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 2 *January 6–12

Teach us to Pray



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 105:5, Col. 3:16, James 5:13, Psalm 44, Psalm 22, Psalm 13, Ps. 60:1–5.*

Memory Text: “Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples’ ” (*Luke 11:1, NKJV*).

A belief that only spontaneous, unlearned prayer is real prayer appears to be prevalent among some Christians. However, Jesus’ disciples were immensely rewarded when they asked Jesus to teach them to pray. God placed a prayer book, the Psalms, at the heart of the Bible, not simply to show us how God’s people of ancient times prayed but also to teach us how we can pray today.

From the earliest ages, the Psalms have shaped the prayers of God’s people, including Jesus’ prayers (*1 Chron. 16:7, 9; Neh. 12:8; Matt. 27:46; Eph. 5:19*). This week we will look at the role the Psalms played in helping God’s people traverse their life journey and grow in their relationship with

God. We should remember that the Psalms are prayers and, as such, are invaluable, not only for their theological insight but also for the ways they can enrich and transform our individual and communal prayers.

Praying the Psalms has helped many believers establish and maintain regular and fulfilling prayer lives.

This week we will continue to look at the Psalms, especially in the context of times when things are not going great for us.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 13.*

SUNDAY *January 7*

Fostering the Use of the Psalms in Prayer

Read Psalm 105:5, Colossians 3:16, and James 5:13. What is the place of the Psalms in the believer's worship experience?

A simple way of introducing the Psalms into daily life is to devote time each day to the reading of a psalm, beginning with Psalm 1, and following the order given in the psalter. Another way is to read the psalms that correspond to your present situation, whatever it happens to be: there are psalms of lament, the psalms of communal lament, the thanksgiving psalms, hymns, penitential psalms, the wisdom psalms (seeking God's wisdom and guidance), historical psalms, psalms containing anger and rage, and pilgrimage psalms. Over the course of this quarter, we will be looking at many of them and studying these psalms in the context in which they appear.

How, then, are we to read the Psalms?

First read the psalm, engaging in simple reflection, and then pray. Ruminating over the psalm involves reflection on the various aspects of the psalm: the way the psalmist addresses God and the reasons for the prayer. Consider how your situation corresponds to the psalmist's experience and how the psalm might be able to help you articulate your experience. You will be amazed at how often you will find yourself being able to resonate and relate to what you read there.

If something in the psalm challenges you, ponder, for example, whether

the psalm corrects your present false hopes about something you are facing. Contemplate the psalm's message in the light of Christ's person and salvific work and the long-term hope Christ's work offers us. As we know, or should know, it always helps to look at everything in the Bible in light of Christ and the Cross.

Also, look for new motives for prayer that the psalm supplies, and think about their importance for you, your church, and the world. Ask God to put His Word on your heart and mind. If the psalm corresponds to the situation of someone you know, intercede in prayer for that person. The point is, the Psalms cover so many aspects of life, and we can be enriched by reading and absorbing into our hearts what they are saying to us.

What does it mean to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16)? Why is reading the Bible the first and most crucial step for that experience?

MONDAY *January 8*

Trust in Times of Trouble

All Christians know, and have experienced, times of despair and suffering, times when they have wondered what the Lord is doing, or why the Lord is allowing these things to happen to them. The psalmists themselves went through similar things. And, through divine inspiration, they recorded what they had experienced.

Read Psalm 44. What is it saying to us, and why is this relevant to believers in all ages?

The selectiveness of Psalms in church worship services often reflects the exclusiveness of moods and words that we express in our communal prayers. Such restrictiveness may be a sign of our inability or uneasiness to engage the dark realities of life. Though we may sometimes feel that God treats us unfairly when suffering hits us, we do not find it appropriate to express our thoughts in public worship or even in private prayer.

This reluctance could cause us to miss the point of worship. The failure to express honestly and openly our feelings and views before God in prayer often leaves us in bondage to our own emotions. This also denies us confidence and trust in approaching God. Praying the Psalms gives an assurance that, when we pray and worship, we are not expected to censure or deny our experience.

Psalm 44, for example, can help worshipers articulate their experience of innocent suffering freely and adequately. Praying the Psalms helps people experience freedom of speech in prayer. The Psalms give us words that we

can neither find nor dare to speak. “Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from Your way; but You have severely broken us in the place of jackals, and covered us with the shadow of death” (*Ps. 44:18, 19, NKJV*).

Notice, however, how Psalm 44 begins. The writer is talking about how, in the past, God had done great things for His people. Hence, the author expresses his trust in God and not “in my bow” (*Ps. 44:6*).

Despite this, trouble has still come to God’s people. The list of woe and lament is long and painful. However, even amid all this, the psalmist cries out for God to deliver, to “redeem us for Your mercies’ sake” (*Ps. 44:26, NKJV*). That is, even amid the trouble, he knows the reality of God and His love.

How can drawing on past times, when God’s presence felt very real, help you deal with the times in which troubles make you think that God is far away?

TUESDAY *January 9*

A Psalm of Despair

Praying the Psalms does more than enable worshipers to articulate their prayers freely. The Psalms supervise their experience according to God's standards and make it bearable by introducing hope and reassurance of God's presence.

Read Psalm 22. What can we learn from this psalm about trust in God amid great suffering?

The lamenting words of Psalm 22:1 may help suffering people express their grief and sense of loneliness: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?" (NKJV).

These words, of course, have become famous among Christians because they were the same words that Jesus Himself, while on the cross, uttered, showing us how central to Christ's experience the Psalms were (*see Matt. 27:46*).

However, even amid the suffering and trials, these words also are expressed: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You" (Ps. 22:22, NKJV).

In other words, though these exact feelings may not coincide with the author's present dilemma, the psalmist was still expressing his faith in God and declaring that, no matter what, he would still praise God.

The point is, by giving us words to pray, the Psalms teach us to look beyond our current situation and, by faith, to see the time when our life will be restored by God's grace.

Praying the Psalms thus takes worshipers to new spiritual horizons. The Psalms let worshipers express their feelings and understandings, but they are not left where they presently are. The worshipers are led to abandon their burdens of pain, disappointment, anger, and despair before God and to trust in Him, whatever their circumstances.

The movement from lament to praise observed in many psalms is suggestive of the spiritual transformation that the believers experience when they receive divine grace and comfort in prayer.

How can we learn to see beyond our immediate trials and, thus, trust in God's goodness, whatever we face now?

WEDNESDAY January 10

From Despair to Hope

We all have probably faced times when the presence of God seemed very far from us. Who, at times, has not thought: *How could this have happened?*

The psalmists, humans like the rest of us, surely faced similar things. Though, yes, at times our sins bring trials upon us, at other times they seem to be so unfair, and we feel as if we did not deserve what we are now faced with. Again, who has not been there?

Read Psalm 13. What two main moods can you distinguish in this psalm? What decision do you think brought the radical change in the psalmist's general outlook?

“How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?” (*Ps. 13:1, NKJV*). Again, who cannot relate to these sentiments, as wrong as they might be? (Does God ever forget any of us?)

Psalm 13, then, points to the way to avoid another common mistake—focusing on ourselves and our problems when praying. This psalm can transform our prayer by leading us to reaffirm the faithful and unchanging nature of God's dealings with His people.

Sure, though the psalm does begin with laments and complaints, it does not end there. And that's the crucial point.

The psalm leads us to deliberately choose to trust God's redemptive power (*Ps. 13:5*), so that our fear and anxiety (*Ps. 13:1–4*) can gradually give way to God's salvation, and we begin experiencing change from lament to praise, from despair to hope (*Ps. 13:5, 6*).

However, a mere repetition of the words of the Psalms with only a slight comprehension of their meaning will not produce the authentic transformation intended by their use. When praying the Psalms, we should seek the Holy Spirit to enable us to act in the way demanded by the psalm. The Psalms are the Word of God by which believers' characters and actions are transformed, not simply informed. By God's grace, the promises of the Psalms are made manifest in the lives of believers. This means that we allow God's Word to shape us according to God's will and to unite us with Christ, who demonstrated God's will perfectly and, as the incarnate Son of God, prayed the Psalms, as well.

How can your trials draw you closer to God? Why, if you're not careful, can they push you away from Him?

THURSDAY *January 11*

Oh, Restore Us Again

Read Psalm 60:1–5. For what occasions do you think this psalm would be a suitable prayer? How can we benefit from the psalms of lament even in joyous seasons of life?

Psalms of lament are generally understood as prayers of people living through trying times, whether physical, psychological, or spiritual. Or all three.

However, this does not mean that we should avoid these psalms, even in good times. Sometimes there may be a total disjunction between the words of the psalm and the worshiper's present experience. That is, psalms of lament can be beneficial to worshipers who are not in distress.

First, they can make us more aware that suffering is part of the general human experience and that it happens to both the righteous and the wicked. The Psalms assure us that God is in control and provides strength and solutions in times of trouble. Even in this psalm, even amid the trouble ("You have made the earth tremble," *Ps. 60:2, NKJV*), the psalmist displays his ultimate hope in God's deliverance.

Second, the lament psalms teach us compassion toward the sufferers. When expressing our happiness and gratitude to God, especially in public, we must be mindful of the less fortunate. Sure, we might have things good right now, but who doesn't know of people, all around us, who are suffering

terribly? Praying such psalms can help us not forget those who are going through tough times. The Psalms should evoke in us compassion and a desire to minister to the suffering as Jesus did.

“This world is a vast lazar house, but Christ came to heal the sick, to proclaim deliverance to the captives of Satan. He was in Himself health and strength. He imparted His life to the sick, the afflicted, those possessed of demons. He turned away none who came to receive His healing power. He knew that those who petitioned Him for help had brought disease upon themselves; yet, He did not refuse to heal them. And when virtue from Christ entered into these poor souls, they were convicted of sin, and many were healed of their spiritual disease, as well as of their physical maladies. The gospel still possesses the same power, and why should we not today witness the same results?”—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, pp. 24, 25.

Whom do you know, right now, who needs not only your prayers but your ministering touch, as well?

FRIDAY *January 12*

Further Thought: Read Psalm 42:8 and Ellen G. White, “Poetry and Song,” pp. 159–168, in *Education*. How are prayer and song related according to these inspired texts?

Ellen G. White describes David’s penitent psalms (*e.g.* *Psalms* 51) as the language of his soul and prayers that illustrate the nature of true sorrow for sin (see *Steps to Christ*, pp. 24, 25). She encourages believers to memorize texts from the Psalms as the means of fostering the sense of God’s presence in their lives and highlights Jesus’ practice of lifting His voice with psalms when met with temptation and oppressive fear. She also remarks: “How often by words of holy song are unsealed in the soul the springs of penitence and faith, of hope and love and joy!

... Indeed, many a song is prayer.”—*Education*, pp. 162–168.

When we pray and sing the Psalms, we assume the persistence, boldness, courage, and hope of the psalmists. They encourage us to continue our spiritual journey and comfort us that we are not alone. Other people, like us, have gone through dark times and yet were triumphant by the grace of God. At the same time, the Psalms reveal to us the glimpses of Christ’s fervent intercession on our behalf, as He always lives to pray for us (*Heb.* 7:25).

Engaging psalms in prayer and worship makes the believing community aware of the full range of human experience and teaches the worshipers to engage in the various facets of that experience in worship. The Psalms are divine-human prayers and songs. For that reason, including psalms consistently in worship brings the believing community to the center of God’s will and powerful healing grace.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is spontaneous, unguided prayer not the only way to pray? How can our prayer life benefit from the Psalms, the biblical prayers?

2 How can the Psalms enrich our communal prayer experience? Discuss some practical ways your local church can foster the use of the Psalms in its worship services.

3 What do the Psalms reveal about the complexity of the human pilgrimage of faith and the power of God's healing grace?

INSIDE *Story*

Cry of Radostin's Heart

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Radostin disliked his life. His friends did not exert a good influence over him. He dabbled in illegal drugs and petty crime. The constant cry of his heart was, "I want to change, I want to change, I want to change."

Growing older, Radostin got married and had two sons. Times were tough, and he left his homeland of Bulgaria in search of work. As he worked in Western Europe, he made new friends. He longed for truth. He wished that his new friends would reveal the truth to him. Now, the constant cry of his heart was, "How can people who know the real truth find me?"

After some time, he moved again in search of a better job. But in six weeks, he hit rock bottom. He found himself living in a small, rented room with no money and no food. He was very, very hungry.

In desperation, his heart cried out to God one night.

"God, help me," he said, praying for the first time in his life. "Send me someone."

In the morning, someone knocked on his door. It was a man in a suit. In his hand was a Bible. Radostin understood that God had sent the man in answer to his prayer.

The man, Paul, brought food for Radostin to eat. He invited him to church. Radostin went and was surprised. He had never been to a house of worship where he sensed God's love. His heart was touched, and he wept.

Returning to Bulgaria, he told his family repeatedly about meeting God and experiencing His love at Paul's church. He longed to return to the church, but he wasn't sure that his wife would agree to even move. Like himself, she had been raised in another world religion.

He prayed, "God, if it is Your will, if You are God, help. If Paul's church is Your true church, send my family and me there. I want to have a complete

change in my life.”

One day, Radostin’s wife abruptly announced, “I don’t want to live in Bulgaria. I want to live in the city of Paul’s church.”

With those words, Radostin realized that it was God’s will for his family to move. He also realized that his wife wanted to know God. The family moved. Today, Radostin is an active member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and goes to Paul’s church every Sabbath.

Times still can be tough, but he is no longer worried. “We don’t pray for God to give us everything, but we pray that He will protect us from evil,” he told Adventist Mission. “We ask that He helps us to live through trials.”

He has no doubt that God hears his prayers. “I was not a good person as a young man,” he said. “But, praise God, He really has changed my heart!”

Thank you for your support of Adventist Mission, whose Global Mission Centers help people better understand how to share the good news of salvation with precious people from other world religions. For more information, visit globalmissioncenters.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 3 *January 13–19

The Lord Reigns



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 8, Psalm 100, Psalm 97, Psalm 75, Ps. 105:7–10, Gal. 3:26–29, Ps. 25:10.*

Memory Text: “The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and armed with strength; indeed, the world is established, firm and secure” (*Psalm 93:1, NIV*).

The Psalms unswervingly uphold the foundational belief in God's sovereign reign. The Lord created and sustains everything that He had created. He is the Sovereign King over the whole world, and He rules the world with justice and righteousness. His laws and statutes are good and bring life to those who keep them. The Lord is a just Judge who ensures that the world remains well ordered, and He does so by rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked, but in His time, not ours.

God's covenant with Israel plays a special role in securing the world because it heralds the Lord's salvation. The Lord adopted Israel as His prized possession, making Israel, of all the nations, His people. The Lord is faithful to His covenant and continues to care for His flock despite their unfaithfulness and, at times, open rebellion.

The Lord's sovereign rule thus renders the world firmly established and secure. The psalmists want the reader to understand this foundational truth. With this worldview as their lighthouse, the psalmists seek to thrive and to serve God with undivided devotion.

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

SUNDAY *January 14*

The Lord Has Made Us

Read Psalm 8 and Psalm 100. How are God and people portrayed in these psalms? What do these psalms reveal about God's character?

Creation plays a crucial role in the Psalms, in upholding God's sovereignty. The heavens, which are "His handiwork," proclaim His glory and power (*Ps. 19:1–4, Ps. 97:6*). God's name is majestic in all the earth (*Ps. 8:1, 9*). The Lord has created everything; He has no beginning (*Ps. 93:2*) and no end (*Ps. 102:25–27*). He is everlasting and superior over the gods of the nations, which are only "the work of men's hands" (*Ps. 115:4*), nothing more. The idols "have hands, but they handle not" (*Ps. 115:7*); as for the Lord, "in his hand are the deep places of the earth . . . and his hands formed the dry land" (*Ps. 95:4, 5*).

Several psalms portray God's power over the forces in nature that other nations believed to be divine (*e.g. Psalm 29, Psalm 93, and Psalm 104*). These psalms reassert the claim that the Lord reigns over all creation and is supreme in power and dignity. Psalm 100:3 strikes one subtle form of idolatry—self-reliance, stressing that God made us, "and not we ourselves."

Creation also testifies to God's love. Everything that exists owes its existence to God, who also sustains life (*Ps. 95:7, Ps. 147:4–9*). Notice that God not only granted people existence but He also made ancient Israel "His people and the sheep of His pasture" (*Ps. 100:3, NKJV*). The notion of "His

people” and “His sheep” reveals God’s desire for a close relationship with His people.

Only the Creator has the power to bless and cause His people to increase, and thus, He is the only One worthy of their worship and trust. Numerous psalms call everything that has breath, all the earth, the sea, and everything in it to shout for joy before the Lord.

The glory of God is seen in the creation, even in the fallen earthly creation, and the Psalms point us to God alone as worthy of worship.

“What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” (Ps. 8:4, NKJV). What is your response to God as your Creator? When God calls the stars by their names (Ps. 147:4), how much more do you think God cares for you?

MONDAY *January 15*

The Lord Reigns

Closely tied—in fact inseparably tied—to the Lord as Creator is the Lord as Sovereign, as Ruler. The declaration “The LORD reigneth” is solemnly proclaimed in Psalm 93:1, Psalm 96:10, Psalm 97:1, and Psalm 99:1, but its echoes are heard throughout the book of Psalms.

The Lord is clothed with honor, majesty, and strength (*Ps. 93:1, Ps. 104:1*). He is surrounded with clouds and darkness (*Ps. 97:2*) but also covers Himself “with light as with a garment” (*Ps. 104:2*). These metaphors exalt the King’s power and splendor and are carefully chosen to express God’s unique greatness, which is beyond human comprehension.

Read Psalm 97. What characterizes the Lord’s reign? (*Ps. 97:2, 10*). What is the domain of His reign? (*Ps. 97:1, 5, 9*).

The Lord’s rule is demonstrated in His works of creation (*Ps. 96:5*), salvation (*Ps. 98:2*), and judgment (*Ps. 96:10*). The Lord establishes His kingship over the whole world (*Ps. 47:6–9*). God’s kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, unparalleled in power and majesty (*Ps. 45:6; Ps. 93:1, 2; Ps. 103:19*). The Lord’s reign is established on mercy, justice, and righteousness, and it brings order and stability to the created world (*Ps. 98:3, Ps. 99:4*). God’s reign unites both heavenly and earthly worshipers in the praise of God (*Ps. 103:20–22, Psalm 148*). Many psalms envision all humanity acknowledging God’s sovereign rule (*Ps. 96:10, Ps. 97:1, Ps. 99:1, Ps.*

145:11–13).

But not all people, or even earthly rulers, do, at least for now. The Lord's reign is constantly defied by the wicked, who deny and mock the Lord and oppress His people (*Ps. 14:1, Ps. 74:3–22*). Though challenged by the prosperity of some wicked people and troubled by God's forbearance, the psalmist trusts in God's sovereign rule and continues to flourish in the assurance of God's righteous judgments (*Ps. 68:21, Ps. 73:17–20*). By faith God's people rejoice in the inauguration of God's kingdom through Christ's redeeming ministry and wait for the consummation of the kingdom at Christ's second coming (*Matt. 12:26–28, 1 Cor. 15:20–28*).

“You who love the LORD, hate evil!” (*Ps. 97:10, NKJV*). Why should our love for God cause us to hate evil? How are these two concepts related?

TUESDAY *January 16*

God Is the Judge

Read Psalm 75. Why is the boasting of the wicked in vain?

As the Sovereign King, the Lord is also a Lawgiver (*Ps. 99:7*) and a Judge (*Ps. 98:9, Ps. 97:2*). The wicked constantly threaten the just order that God established in the world, but the Lord will judge the world and bring the rule of evil to its end (*Ps. 75:8–10, Ps. 96:13*).

In Psalm 75, several images depict the irrevocable destruction of the wicked. The image of a cup with red wine (*Ps. 75:8*) conveys the intensity of God's fury (*Jer. 25:15, Rev. 14:10*). Cutting off the horns of the wicked depicts the end of their power and dominion, while the horns of the righteous shall be exalted (*Ps. 75:10*). God chooses a "proper time" (*Ps. 75:2, NKJV*) or "appointed time" (*NIV*) for His judgment. This executive judgment clearly will take place at the end of time (*Ps. 96:13, 1 Cor. 15:23–26*).

The Lord probes people's hearts as part of His judgment. Read Psalm 14:2. It is reminiscent of Genesis 6:5, 8. Both texts show that the execution of God's judgment of the world is preceded by God's examination of the people's lives and seeking whomever He can save. This judgment is sometimes called "the investigative judgment," when God defends the righteous and decides the fate of the wicked.

How does it work?

First, God delivers His people from the wicked (*Ps. 97:10, Ps. 146:9*) and

crowns the humble with salvation (*Ps. 149:4*). Second, the unrepentant wicked are destroyed forever (*Ps. 97:3*). Some psalms poetically describe the uselessness of human weapons against the Divine Judge (*Ps. 76:3–6*). The Lord is also a forgiving God, although He punishes people's misdeeds (*Ps. 99:8*). God's people, not only the wicked, shall give an account to God (*Ps. 50:4, Ps. 135:14*).

The Psalms convey the same notion that is expressed in other biblical texts, that God's judgment begins with God's people and is extended to the whole earth (*Deut. 32:36, 1 Pet. 4:17*). The psalmist cries to God to judge him but relies on God's righteousness to defend him (*Ps. 7:8–11; Ps. 139:23, 24*).

The Psalms call us to rejoice in anticipation of God's judgments (*Ps. 67:4, Ps. 96:10–13, Ps. 98:4–9*). How is God's judgment good news for those covered by the blood of Christ?

WEDNESDAY January 17

Ever Mindful of His Covenant

The theme of God's judgment prompts a significant question: How can God's people have peace with God and assurance of salvation at the time of judgment? Read *Ps. 94:14, Ps. 105:7–10, Dan. 7:22*.

God's people are secure because the Lord placed His dwelling place in Zion (*Ps. 76:1, 2*) and established His everlasting covenant with them as His treasured possession (*Ps. 94:14, Ps. 105:8–10*). God does not simply promise not to reject His covenantal people—He actively works to keep them secure in Him. He forgives their sins (*Ps. 103:3*); He instructs, blesses, and strengthens His people (*Ps. 25:8–11, Ps. 29:11, Ps. 105:24*). God's judgments are given to turn the people to righteousness and to demonstrate that God cares for them (*Ps. 94:8–15*).

Psalms 105 as a whole shows the Lord's faithfulness to His covenant in Israel's history. In everything that happened, the good and the bad, God was there. He providentially led Joseph to Egypt and through him saved His people and the nations in that area during the severe famine (*Ps. 105:16–24*). The Lord raised Moses to lead His people out of Egyptian slavery, which he did with signs and wonders on their behalf (*Ps. 105:25–38*).

The Lord granted His people the Promised Land (*Ps. 105:11, 44*) and His continual protection (*Ps. 105:12–15*). He multiplied them (*Ps. 105:24*), freed them from their overlords (*Ps. 105:37, 38*), and provided for their daily needs

(*Ps. 105:39–41*). The Lord is undoubtedly in sovereign control of all that involves His people—a truth that the psalmists wanted His people never to forget.

When God remembers His covenant, it involves more than cognizance or memory because it always leads to action (*Gen. 8:1, 1 Sam. 1:19, Ps. 98:3, Ps. 105:42–44*). Likewise, when the people are called to remember God's wonders and judgments, it means that the people should live in ways that honor God.

In this covenant, Israel's primary calling is to remain faithful to the covenant by observing God's laws (*Ps. 78:5–7, Ps. 105:45*). God's people also are called to bear witness about God to other nations because the Lord wishes all nations to join His people Israel (*Ps. 105:1, 2*). The world is thus secure in the protective covenant of the almighty and merciful God (*Ps. 89:28–34*).

What do we have in Jesus, which shows why these promises made to ancient Israel can now apply to us? (See *Gal. 3:26–29*.)

THURSDAY January 18

Your Testimonies Are Very Sure

Read Psalm 19:7; Psalm 93:5; Psalm 119:165; Psalm 1:2, 6; Psalm 18:30; and Psalm 25:10. What common thread runs through them all?

The Lord's supremacy in the world as the Sovereign Creator, King, and Judge has theological implications for the reliability of His testimonies. The testimonies (Hebrew *'edut*, "decree," "law") refer to the body of laws and ordinances with which the Lord governs the religious and social life of His people (*Exod.* 32:15). They are "very sure" (*Ps.* 93:5), reflecting the stability and permanence of God's throne and the world that God created and sustains (*Ps.* 93:1, 2). The Hebrew word translated as "sure" (the English word *amen* derives from this word) conveys the notion of reliability, faithfulness, and firmness (*2 Sam.* 7:16, *1 Chron.* 17:23). God's laws are unchangeable and indestructible.

God vouches for the integrity of His promises and commands. God's faithfulness is both wholly reassuring in guaranteeing the unchangeable character of His rule and wholly demanding in asking the people's responses of trust and obedience to God.

At the same time, the lack of justice in the world is poetically described as a shaking of earth's foundation (*Ps.* 18:7, *Isa.* 24:18–21). God's law instructs the people in the way of righteous life that can withstand God's judgment. The righteous, thus, shall not be shaken because they are firmly rooted in

God's law, which provides stability and security, and their hearts are steadfast (Hebrew *kun*, also, means "be firm," "be secure") in the Lord (*Ps. 112:1, 6, 7*). Nothing causes those who keep God's law to stumble (*Ps. 119:165*), which signifies God's protection and guidance in life (*Ps. 1:2, 3, 6*).

God's Word is depicted as the lamp to the psalmist's feet, and so, it protects him from the enemies' hidden snares (*Ps. 119:105, 110*). Great peace, which is enjoyed by those who love God's law (*Ps. 119:165*), obviously does not result from a total absence of trials (*Ps. 119:161*). It rather derives from abiding in God's presence and having a wholesome relationship with Him.

What are practical ways that keeping God's laws and rules and testimonies have helped you in your life? On the other hand, what have you suffered from violating them?

FRIDAY January 19

Further Thought: Read Psalm 86:5, 15; Ellen G. White, “God’s Love for Man,” pp. 9–15, in *Steps to Christ*. How does the truth that God is love help us better understand the various descriptions of God and His deeds in the Psalms?

This week’s study focuses on some key descriptions of God and His activities, which establish the world and render it firm and secure. The psalmists appeal to God, who is the Creator, King, Judge, covenantal Savior, and Lawgiver. The roles in the world that God occupies are further reflected in God’s various other names and titles, including Shepherd (*Ps. 23:1, Ps. 80:1*), Rock of Salvation (*Ps. 95:1*), and Father (*Ps. 68:5, Ps. 89:26*). In the world we can be secure and safe, even amid the turmoil of the great controversy, because God is sovereign and faithful in all He does and says. Although these theological themes are by no means exhaustive, they are suggestive of the various ways in which God reveals Himself in the Psalms.

As we continue to study the Psalms, it is important to remember to read the Psalms in the light of God’s character of love and grace and His plan to save and restore the world. “The more we study the divine character in the light of the cross, the more we see mercy, tenderness, and forgiveness blended with equity and justice, and the more clearly we discern innumerable evidences of a love that is infinite and a tender pity surpassing a mother’s yearning sympathy for her wayward child.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 15. In the Psalms, even when the people face God’s judgment for their rebellion, they continue to call upon God because they know that God’s anger is only for a time, but His mercy is everlasting (*Ps. 103:8*).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is understanding the reality and prevalence of the great controversy crucial in helping us understand that despite God’s

ultimate rulership and sovereignty, there is still much turmoil and suffering in our world? Why is the great controversy motif so helpful to us?

② How should the belief in God as Creator shape our understanding of ourselves and our relationship with the rest of creation? What happens when the people stray from that truth (*Ps. 106:35–42*)?

③ What was wrong with the idols of the nations in biblical times (*Ps. 115:4–8*)? What about modern idols? Why are they just as dangerous to our walk with the Lord?

④ How should God's people live knowing that God's judgment begins with His people? How does God judge His people and to what end?

INSIDE *Story*

“I Fought and Won”

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Pedro was shocked at the greeting that he got when he returned from church services in Mozambique.

“Don’t go back to the Seventh-day Adventist church,” his sister said. “It’s not a good church because it has false prophets. If you go again, you can’t live here anymore.”

Worrisome thoughts filled Pedro’s head. Family problems in his hometown, Beira, had forced him to move 700 miles (1,140 kilometers) to his sister’s house in Mozambique’s capital, Maputo. Because he was new to town, he had missed a few worship services as he searched for an Adventist church. Now he had found a church, worshiped there for the first time, and returned home to find that his sister didn’t want him to go again.

Pedro prayed and kept going to church.

His sister stopped sharing her food with Pedro. She hoped that hunger would cause him to change his mind. But church members gave him food to eat.

Pedro thanked God for His care and kept going to church.

One Sabbath morning, as he was preparing to leave for church, his sister told him not to return.

“Are you still refusing to listen and insisting on going to your church?” she asked. “You don’t want to live here anymore because you don’t want to comply with the house rules.”

Pedro was sad but not discouraged. He realized that he wasn’t caught in a conflict with his sister but in a spiritual struggle between Jesus and Satan. He remembered Paul’s words in Ephesians 6:12, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the

heavenly places” (NKJV).

He went to church and asked the pastor and church members to pray for him. When he returned home later that day, he was kicked out.

A friend allowed Pedro to stay with him for two nights. Then a church member gave Pedro a job as the caretaker of his house in exchange for room and board.

Today, Pedro still works as a house caretaker, he is free to worship God every Sabbath, and he believes that God is working on his sister’s heart. Their friendship has been restored, and she no longer insists that he stop going to church on Sabbath. Pedro hopes that one day she will accept the whole Bible truth and learn to appreciate the inspired writings of Ellen White.

“I put on the armor of God,” he said. “I fought and won, and ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’ ” (*Philippians 4:13*).

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the good news of Jesus’ soon coming in Africa 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 4 *January 20–26

The Lord Hears *and* Delivers



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 139:1–18; Psalm 121; Ps. 17:8; Matt. 23:37; 1 Cor. 10:1–4; Heb. 4:15, 16.*

Memory Text: “The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles” (*Psalm 34:17, NKJV*).

Again and again, the Psalms highlight the truth that the Sovereign Lord, who created and sustains the universe, also reveals Himself as a personal God who initiates and sustains a relationship with His people.

God is close to His people and to His creation, both in heaven and on earth (*Ps. 73:23, 25*). Though He “has established His throne in heaven” (*Ps. 103:19, NKJV*) and “rides on the clouds” (*Ps. 68:4, NKJV*), He also is “near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth” (*Ps. 145:18, NKJV*). The Psalms unswervingly uphold the truth that the Lord is the living God, who acts on behalf of those who call upon Him (*Ps. 55:16–22*). The Psalms are meaningful precisely because they are prompted by, and are addressed to, the living God, who hears and answers prayers.

We should remember that the proper response to the Lord's nearness

consists in a life of faith in Him and of obedience to His commandments. Nothing short of this faith and obedience will be acceptable to Him, as the history of Israel often revealed.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 27.*

SUNDAY *January 21*

My Frame Was Not Hidden From You

Read Psalm 139:1–18. How does this text poetically depict God’s power (*Ps. 139:1–6*), presence (*Ps. 139:7–12*), and goodness (*Ps. 139:13–18*)? What does God’s greatness say about God’s promises?

Did you ever want to help someone but had no means? Likewise, some people tried to help you but did not understand your needs. Unlike even the most loving and best-intentioned people, God has both the perfect knowledge of us and of our circumstances, and also the means to help us. Therefore, His promises of help and deliverance are not shallow platitudes but firm assurances.

God’s knowledge of the psalmist is so great and unique that even his mother’s womb could not hide him from God (*Ps. 139:13, 15*). Divine knowledge pertains to time (*Ps. 139:2*), inner being (*Ps. 139:2, 4*), and space (*Ps. 139:3*)—the psalmist’s entire existence. God’s wonderful knowledge is the result of His creatorship and close acquaintance with people and is manifest in His care for them.

This wonderful truth about God knowing us intimately should not scare us but instead drive us into the arms of Jesus and what He has accomplished for us at the Cross. For by faith in Jesus, we have been given His righteousness, “the righteousness of God” Himself (*Rom. 3:5, 21*).

God’s presence is highlighted by depicting God as reaching as far as

“hell” (*sheol*, “grave”) and “darkness” (*Ps. 139:8, 11, 12*), places not typically depicted as where God dwells (*Ps. 56:13*). His presence also is depicted as taking “the wings of the morning” (east) to reach “the uttermost parts of the sea” (west) (*Ps. 139:9*). What these images convey is the truth that there is no place in the universe where we can be out of God’s reach. Though God is not part of the universe, as some believe, He is close to it all, having not only created it but sustaining it, as well (*see Heb. 1:3*).

As the One who knows all about us, God can help and restore us. The fresh realization of His greatness prompts an outburst of praise and renewed trust in the psalmist. He welcomes divine scrutiny as the means that can remove from his life anything that troubles his relationship with God.

Some might find the fact that God knows so much about them, even their darkest secrets, a rather frightening thought. Why is the gospel, then, our only hope?

MONDAY January 22

Assurance of God's Care

Read Psalm 40:1–3, Psalm 50:15, Psalm 55:22, and Psalm 121. How is God involved in our daily affairs?

The Lord reveals Himself in Scripture as the living God who acts on behalf of those who call upon Him.

For the psalmist, “the LORD [is] always before me” (*Ps. 16:8*). Therefore, he trusts God and calls upon Him (*Ps. 7:1, Ps. 9:10*). The Lord will hear him even when he cries out of the “depths” (*Ps. 130:1, 2*), conveying that no life circumstance escapes God’s sovereign dominion. Thus, the psalmist’s cry, no matter how urgent, is never devoid of hope.

Psalm 121, meanwhile, celebrates the power of the Creator in the faithful individual’s life. This power includes:

1. “He will not allow your foot to be moved” (*Ps. 121:3, NKJV*). The image of “foot” is often descriptive of one’s life journey (*Ps. 66:9, Ps. 119:105, Prov. 3:23*). The Hebrew word for “move” describes the security that God gives to the world (*Ps. 93:1*) and to Zion (*Ps. 125:1*).

2. The image of the Lord as Israel’s Keeper who does not slumber nor sleep highlights the Lord’s constant alertness and readiness to act on behalf of His children (*Ps. 121:3, 4*).

3. The Lord is “your shade” (*Ps. 121:5, 6, NKJV*) calls to mind the pillar of cloud in the time of the Exodus (*Exod. 13:21, 22*). Similarly, the Lord

provides physical and spiritual shelter to His people.

4. God is at their right hand (*Ps. 121:5*). The right hand typically designates a person's stronger hand, the hand of action (*Ps. 74:11, Ps. 89:13*). Here it conveys God's nearness and favor (*Ps. 16:8, Ps. 109:31, Ps. 110:5*).

5. God's protection of His people is clearly confirmed in Psalm 121:6–8. God shall preserve His children from all evil. Neither “the sun” nor “the moon” shall strike them. God shall preserve their “going out” and “coming in.” These poetic figures underscore God's comprehensive, unceasing care.

The bottom line? The psalmist trusted in God's loving care. We, of course, should do the same.

What are some practical ways that you can better experience the reality of God's care? How can you better cooperate with God in order to enable Him to work within you and for you?

TUESDAY *January 23*

The Lord Is a Refuge in Adversity

Read Psalm 17:7–9, Psalm 31:1–3, and Psalm 91:2–7. What does the psalmist do in times of trouble?

The psalmist encounters various sorts of troubles and, in them, turns to the Lord, who is a refuge in every adversity. Trust is a deliberate choice to acknowledge God's lordship over one's life in all circumstances. If trust does not work in adversity, then it will not work anywhere.

The psalmist's testimony, "I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust' " (*Ps. 91:2, NKJV*), springs from his past experience with God and now serves to strengthen his faith for the future. The psalmist calls God the Most High and the Almighty (*Ps. 91:1, 2*), remembering the surpassing greatness of his God.

The psalmist also tells of the security that one can find in God: the "secret place" ("shelter" or "hiding place"), "shadow" (*Ps. 91:1*), "refuge," "fortress" (*Ps. 91:2*), "wings," "shield," "buckler" (*Ps. 91:4*), and "dwelling place" (*Ps. 91:9, NKJV*). These images represent safe havens in the psalmist's culture. One needs only to think of the unbearable heat of the sun in that part of the world in order to appreciate the shadow (or shade) or to recall the times of wars in Israel's history in order to value the security provided by the shield or the fortress.

Read Psalm 17:8 and Matthew 23:37. What image is used here, and what does it reveal?

One of the most intimate metaphors is the one that refers to being “under the shadow of Your wings” (*Ps. 17:8, Ps. 57:1, Ps. 63:7, NKJV*). This metaphor elicits comfort and assurance by implying the protection of a mother bird. The Lord is compared to an eagle who guards its young with its wings (*Exod. 19:4, Deut. 32:11*) and to a hen who gathers her chicks under her wings (*Matt. 23:37*).

How, though, do we deal with the times when calamity strikes, and we can't seem to see the Lord's protection? Why do these traumas not mean that the Lord is not there with us?

WEDNESDAY January 24

Defender and Deliverer

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–4. How does Paul describe the Exodus story? What spiritual lesson does he seek to teach with it?

Read Psalm 114. How is the divine deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt poetically described here?

What a poetic depiction of God's marvelous deliverance of His children from the bondage of Egypt is given in Psalm 114. All through the Old Testament, and even in the New, the deliverance from Egypt was seen as a symbol of God's power to save His people. Paul in these verses in 1 Corinthians does just that, seeing the whole true story as a metaphor, a symbol of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Psalm 114 also depicts divine deliverance through God's sovereignty as the Creator over the powers of nature, which was how He saved His people in the Exodus. The sea, the river Jordan, and the mountains and hills poetically represent the natural and human powers opposing the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land (*Deut. 1:44, Josh. 3:14–17*). God, though, is sovereign over all of them.

In fact, for many of God's children in all times and in all places, the way

to the heavenly Jerusalem is fraught with danger. The Psalms encourage them to look beyond the hills and toward the Creator of heaven and earth (*Ps. 121:1*).

The spirit of Psalm 114 is captured by Jesus' calming of the sea storm and His proclamation that the church has nothing to fear because He has overcome the world (*Matt. 8:23–27, John 16:33*).

The Lord's great deeds on behalf of His people should inspire the whole earth to tremble at His presence (*Ps. 114:7*). The trembling should be understood as acknowledging and worshiping rather than as being terrified (*Ps. 96:9, Ps. 99:1*). With God on their side, believers have nothing to fear.

What are some of the spiritual dangers we face as believers, and how can we learn to lean on the Lord's power to protect us from succumbing to these dangers that are as real for us now as they were for the psalmist?

THURSDAY *January 25*

Help From the Sanctuary

Read Psalm 3:4; Psalm 14:7; Psalm 20:1–3; Psalm 27:5; Psalm 36:8; Psalm 61:4; and Psalm 68:5, 35. Where does help come from in these texts?

The motif of spiritual and physical refuge and help notably appears in the context of the sanctuary. The sanctuary is a place of help, of safety, and of salvation. The sanctuary provides a shelter to the troubled. God defends the orphans and widows and gives strength to His people from His sanctuary. When “out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth” (*Ps. 50:2, NKJV*), God’s righteous judgments are proclaimed, and the Lord’s blessing goes forth (*Ps. 84:4, Ps. 128:5, Ps. 134:3*).

The refuge in the sanctuary surpasses the security provided by any other place in the world because God personally dwells in the sanctuary. The presence of God, not merely the temple as a firm building, provides safety. Likewise, being the mountain where the Lord dwells, Mount Zion surpasses other mountains though in itself it is a modest hill (*Ps. 68:15, 16; Isa. 2:2*).

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (*Heb. 4:15, 16, NKJV*).

In what ways do these verses parallel what the psalmist says about the

sanctuary?

The holiness of God's sanctuary prompts the psalmist to acknowledge that all people are sinful and completely undeserving of God's favor, and he claims that deliverance is based on God's faithfulness and grace alone (*Ps. 143:2, 9–12*). Nothing in us gives us any merit before God. It is only when people stand in a right relationship with God through repentance and acceptance of God's grace and forgiveness that they can plead for God's assurance of deliverance. The sanctuary service represented the salvation found in Jesus.

FRIDAY January 26

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Night of Wrestling,” pp. 195–203, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*. What can we learn from Jacob’s experience about the power of importunate prayer and unreserved trust in God?

The Psalms strengthen our faith in God, who is the never-failing Refuge for those who entrust their lives into His mighty hands. “God will do great things for those who trust in Him. The reason why His professed people have no greater strength is that they trust so much to their own wisdom, and do not give the Lord an opportunity to reveal His power in their behalf. He will help His believing children in every emergency if they will place their entire confidence in Him and faithfully obey Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 493.

Yet, some psalms can pose a serious challenge when what they promise, and our current situation, do not match. At times such as this, we just have to learn to trust in the goodness of God, most powerfully revealed at the Cross.

Also, at times some psalms can be used to foster false hopes. Jesus’ response to Satan’s corrupted use of Psalm 91:11, 12 shows that trusting God must not be confused with tempting God (*Matt. 4:5–7*) or presumptuously asking God to do something that is contrary to His will.

“The greatest victories to the church of Christ or to the individual Christian are not those that are gained by talent or education, by wealth or the favor of men. They are those victories that are gained in the audience chamber with God, when earnest, agonizing faith lays hold upon the mighty arm of power.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 203.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, discuss the answer to the last question in Tuesday’s study about trusting in God amid adversity and when things go terribly

wrong. How does one understand these things and how they could happen to people, even with all the wonderful promises in the Psalms about God's protection? Think about this too: Did not the psalmist, who wrote about those wonderful promises, suffer adversity or know of faithful people who did, as well?

2 How can we develop unreserved trust in God in all circumstances (e.g. Ps. 91:14; Ps. 143:8, 10; and Ps. 145:18–20)? What can cause us to lose this confidence? Why is trust in God in good times crucial for learning to trust Him in bad times, as well?

Prayer Answered in Perth

By JOE PEOLA

Margaret and her husband, Levana, were sitting one morning in their living room in Perth, Australia, after returning the previous night from a trip to Papua New Guinea, located some 2,000 miles (4,500 kilometers) away.

Margaret was reflecting quietly on her father's parting words at the airport. After praying with her, he had said, "Margaret, Jesus is coming back very soon. When you arrive at your home in Perth, my God will be at your door the next day."

Not far from Margaret and Levana's home, literature evangelist Jo Laing and several friends were praying at a Seventh-day Adventist church. They were praying for divine appointments as they prepared to head out for a day of canvassing.

A couple hours later, Jo knocked on the door of Margaret and Levana's home. The home looked no different from the other houses on the street.

Levana opened the door and politely looked through the cookbook that Jo showed him. But he didn't express any real interest in the book. Then Jo gave him a copy of Ellen White's *The Great Controversy* and began telling him about it.

Levana flipped through several pages and called to his wife.

"Do we have this book?" he asked.

Margaret came to the door and confirmed that they did have the book. She turned to Jo and explained that she was a former Seventh-day Adventist. The words tumbled from her mouth.

"We just came home from Papua New Guinea last night," she said. "The last thing that my dad said to me was that he would be praying for God to show up at my house."

It was a hot day in Perth—109.5 degrees Fahrenheit (43 degrees Celsius).

But Jo felt goosebumps on her arms. She and Margaret looked at each other with big smiles and marveled at how God had answered the prayer of Margaret's father.

"Wouldn't it be great if I could come to your church and share this story?" Margaret said.

"It would," Jo agreed, and the two exchanged phone numbers.

A few weeks later, Margaret stood with tears in her eyes at Bickley Seventh-day Adventist Church and told her story of how God had found a lost, straying lamb.

God used a woman with a copy of *The Great Controversy* in Australia to answer a father's passionate prayer in Papua New Guinea.

Join the Seventh-day Adventist world church in the mass promotion and distribution of The Great Controversy in 2023 and 2024. Visit greatcontroversyproject.org for more information or ask your pastor.

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 *January 27–February 2

Singing *the* Lord's Song in a Strange Land



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Ps. 79:5–13, Ps. 88:3–12, Ps. 69:1–3, Ps. 22:1, Psalm 77, Ps. 73:1–20, 1 Pet. 1:17.

Memory Text: “How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a strange land?” (Psalm 137:4).

We do not need to get deep into the book of Psalms in order to discover that the Psalms are uttered in an imperfect world, one of sin, evil, suffering, and death. The stable creation run by the Sovereign Lord and His righteous laws is constantly threatened by evil. As sin corrupts the world more and more, the earth has increasingly become “a strange land” to God’s people. This reality creates a problem for the psalmist: How does one live a life of faith in a strange land?

As we already have seen, the psalmists acknowledge God’s sovereign rule and power, as well as His righteous judgments. They know that God is the everlasting and never-failing refuge and help in times of trouble. For this reason, the psalmists are at times perplexed (who isn’t?) by the apparent

absence of God and the flourishing of evil in the face of the good and Sovereign Lord. The paradoxical nature of the Psalms as prayers is demonstrated in the psalmists' responses to God's seeming silence. In other words, the psalmists respond to God's perceived absence, as well as to God's presence.

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

SUNDAY *January 28*

The Days of Evil

Read Psalm 74:18–22 and Psalm 79:5–13. What is at stake here?

The psalmist seeks to grasp the great controversy between God and the powers of evil, and he points to God's unfathomable forbearance, as well as to His infinite wisdom and power.

The problem of evil in the Psalms is primarily theological; it inevitably concerns questions about God. Thus, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple is seen principally as a divine scandal because it provided an opportunity for the heathen to blaspheme God. God's inheritance (the people of Israel) is the sign of His divine election and covenant (*Deut. 4:32–38; Deut. 32:8, 9*) that will never fail. The concept of God's inheritance also contains an end-time dimension, as one day all nations will become God's inheritance and will serve Him. The notion that the nations invaded God's inheritance threatens these divine promises.

No question, the psalmist acknowledges that the sins of the people corrupted the people's covenantal relationship with God and brought upon the people all the consequences (*Ps. 79:8, 9*). The people's survival depends solely upon God's gracious intervention and the restoration of the covenantal bond through the atonement of sin. The Lord is "God of our salvation," which conveys God's faithfulness to His covenantal promises (*Ps. 79:9*).

However, more important than the restoration of Israel's fortunes is the

defense of God's character in the world (*Ps. 79:9*). If the evil actions of the nations go unpunished, it will appear that God has lost His power (*Ps. 74:18–23, Ps. 83:16–18, Ps. 106:47*). Only when God saves His people will His name be justified and uplifted.

As today, the same principle existed back then. Our sins, our backsliding, our evils, can bring disrepute not only on ourselves but, worse, on the God whose name we profess. Our wrong actions can have detrimental spiritual effects on our witness and mission, as well. How many people have been turned off to our faith by the actions of those professing the name of Christ?

“The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671. How do you understand this important truth and what it should mean in your own Christian life?

MONDAY *January 29*

At Death's Door

Read Psalm 41:1–4; Psalm 88:3–12; and Psalm 102:3–5, 11, 23, 24. What experiences do these texts describe? In what can you relate to what is said here?

These prayers for salvation from illness and death demonstrate that God's children are not exempt from the sufferings of this world. The Psalms reveal the psalmist's terrible afflictions. He is without strength, withering like grass, unable to eat, set apart with the dead, lying like the slain in the grave, repulsive to his friends, suffering and in despair. His bones cling to his skin.

Many psalms assume the Lord has permitted the trouble because of Israel's disobedience. The psalmist recognizes that sin can bring sickness; therefore, he refers to the forgiveness that comes before healing (*Ps. 41:3, 4*). However, some psalms, such as Psalm 88 and Psalm 102, acknowledge that the innocent suffering of God's people is a fact of life, no matter how hard to understand.

In Psalm 88, God is charged with bringing the psalmist to the verge of death (*Ps. 88:6–8*). Notice, however, that even when the most daring complaints are uttered, the lament is clearly an act of faith, for if the Lord in His sovereignty allowed trouble, He could restore the well-being of His child.

At the grave's threshold, the psalmist remembers God's wonders, loving-kindness, faithfulness, and righteousness (*Ps. 88:10–12*). Despite his sense of

being stricken by God, the psalmist clings to God. Although he suffers, he does not deny God's love and knows that God is his only salvation. These appeals show that the psalmist knows not only suffering but also has an intimate knowledge of God's grace and that the two do not necessarily exclude each other.

In short, both God's permitting of suffering and His deliverance are demonstrations of His ultimate sovereignty. Knowing that God is in control inspires hope. When we read Psalm 88 in the light of Christ's suffering, we are awed by the depths of His love, in which He was willing to pass through death's door for the sake of humanity.

Think about Jesus on the cross and what He suffered because of sin. How should that reality, that God in Christ suffered even worse than any of us, help us keep faith even amid times of suffering and trial?

TUESDAY *January 30*

Where Is God?

Read Psalm 42:1–3, Psalm 63:1, Psalm 69:1–3, and Psalm 102:1–7. What causes great pain to the psalmist?

Not only does personal and communal sufferings trouble the psalmist but also, if not more, God’s seeming lack of attention to His servants’ hardships. God’s absence is felt like intense thirst in a dry land (*Ps. 42:1–3, Ps. 63:1*) and mortal anguish (*Ps. 102:2–4*). The psalmist feels removed from God and compares himself to lonely birds. “I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert. I lie awake, and am like a sparrow alone on the housetop” (*Ps. 102:6, 7, NKJV*).

The mention of wilderness highlights the sense of isolation from God. A bird “alone on a housetop” is outside of its nest, its resting place. The psalmist cries to God “out of the depths,” as if being engulfed by mighty waters and sinking into a “deep mire” (*Ps. 69:1–3, Ps. 130:1*). These images depict an oppressive situation from which there is no escape, except by divine intervention.

Read Psalm 10:12, Psalm 22:1, Psalm 27:9, and Psalm 39:12. How does the psalmist respond to God’s apparent absence?

It is remarkable that the psalmists resolve not to keep silent in the face of God's silence. The psalmists unswervingly believe in prayer because prayer is directed to the living and gracious God. God is still there, even when He is apparently absent. He is still the same God who heard them in the past, and so, they are confident that He hears them now.

The occasions of God's silence cause the psalmists to examine themselves and to seek God, but with confession and humble petitions. They know that God will not remain silent forever. The Psalms demonstrate that communication with God must go on, regardless of life's circumstances.

What can we learn from the psalmists' responses to God's apparent absence? How do you respond to times when God does seem silent? What sustains your faith?

WEDNESDAY January 31

Has His Promise Failed Forevermore?

Read Psalm 77. What experience is the author going through?

Psalm 77 begins with a plea to God for help that is filled with lament and painful remembering of the past (*Ps. 77:1–6*). The psalmist’s whole being is mournfully turned to God. He refuses to be comforted by any relief except the one coming from God.

However, remembering God appears to intensify his anguish. “When I remember God, I moan” (*Ps. 77:3, ESV*). Hebrew *hamah*, “moan,” often depicts the roar of raging waters (*Ps. 46:3*). Similarly, the psalmist’s whole being is in a state of intense unrest.

How can remembering God produce such strong feelings of distress? A series of troubling questions betray the cause of his anguish (*Ps. 77:7–9*): *Has God changed? Can God possibly betray His covenant?*

The stark contrast between God’s saving acts in the past and God’s apparent absence in the present causes the psalmist to feel abandoned by God. If God has changed, then the psalmist has no hope, a conclusion that he struggles to reject.

Meanwhile, the psalmist cannot sleep because the Lord keeps him awake (*Ps. 77:4*). This recalls other biblical characters whose insomnia was providentially used by God to advance His purposes (*Gen. 41:1–8, Esther 6:1, Dan. 2:1–3*). The long sleepless night causes the psalmist to consider the

Lord's past acts of deliverance but with new resolve (*Ps. 77:5, 10*).

The assurance that the psalmist receives from God does not consist of explanations about his personal situation but rather a confirmation of God's faithfulness and trustworthiness (like Job). The psalmist is encouraged to wait on the Lord in faith, knowing that He is the same God who performed miracles in Israel's past (*Ps. 77:11–18*). The psalmist also realizes that "Your footsteps were not known" (*Ps. 77:19, NKJV*), recognizing God's guidance, even in situations in which His presence is not obvious to human eyes. The psalmist acknowledges that God is simultaneously revealed and hidden, and so, he offers praise to the Lord's mysterious and sovereign ways.

Think about past times when the Lord worked in your life. How can that truth help you deal with whatever you are facing now?

THURSDAY *February 1*

Lest the Righteous Be Tempted

Read Psalm 37:1, 8; Psalm 49:5–7; Psalm 94:3–7; and Psalm 125:3.
What struggle does the psalmist face?

These psalms lament the current prosperity of the wicked and the challenge that this fact poses to the righteous. The wicked not only prosper but at times also openly despise God and oppress others. The perplexing issue is that while “the scepter of wickedness” (*Ps. 125:3, NKJV*) dominates the world, the “scepter of righteousness” (*Ps. 45:6, NKJV*) seems to be failing. Why not, then, give up and embrace evil as others do?

Read Psalm 73:1–20, 27. What brings the psalmist through the crisis? What is the end of those who trust in futile things? *See also 1 Pet. 1:17.*

While the psalmist in Psalm 73 remained focused on the current iniquity in the world, he was unable to see the big picture from God’s point of view.

The problem that the prosperity of evil posed to his faith was overwhelming; he believed, also, that his argument about the uselessness of faith was based on reality.

However, Psalm 73 shows that “these things mock those who ignore the first verse of this psalm, which is the summary of the whole psalm: ‘How good the God of Israel is to those who are upright in heart!’ ”—Johannes Bugenhagen, *Reformation Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), p. 11.

The psalmist is led to the sanctuary, the place of God’s sovereign rule, and was reminded there that “today” is only one piece of the mosaic, and he should consider the “end,” when the wicked will face God’s judgment. The fact that the psalmist understood this truth in the sanctuary and confessed his previous folly shows that reality can be grasped only by spiritual insight and not by human logic.

How does the promise of God’s judgment upon the world, and upon all its evil, give you comfort when so much evil now goes unpunished?

FRIDAY February 2

Further Thought: Read Psalm 56; Ellen G. White, “Rejoicing in the Lord,” pp. 115–126, in *Steps to Christ*.

Like the psalmists, God’s people of all times wonder every so often how to sing the Lord’s songs in “a strange land.” Our faith in the sovereign rule of the Lord is challenged, at times severely, and we may ponder whether God is in control or truly as powerful and good as the Scriptures say.

Biblical faith often implies uncertainty and suspense as much as confidence and assertion. Sometimes uncertainty and suspense, especially in the face of evil and God’s seeming absence, can be almost unbearable. Yet, uncertainty must never be about God or His loving and righteous character and trustworthiness. The psalmists may be uncertain about the future, but they often appeal to God’s unfailing love and faithfulness (*Ps. 36:5–10; Ps. 89:2, 8*).

Likewise, we are to follow the same example. “Summon all your powers to look up, not down at your difficulties; then you will never faint by the way. You will soon see Jesus behind the cloud, reaching out His hand to help you; and all you have to do is to give Him your hand in simple faith and let Him lead you. As you become trustful you will, through faith in Jesus, become hopeful.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 578, 579.

The times when God “hides His face” do not undermine the efficacy of prayer. On the contrary, these occasions cause the psalmists to examine themselves, recall God’s past saving acts, and seek God with confession and humble petitions (*Ps. 77:10–12, Ps. 89:46–52*). “Faith grows strong by coming in conflict with doubts and opposing influences. The experience gained in these trials is of more value than the most costly jewels.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 555.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** What tensions did the psalmists experience in the face of evil? What similar tensions have you faced, and how have you dealt with them? How do you maintain your faith during these times?
- 2** Where should we look for answers when our faith in God is tested by trials or by people whose own sufferings cause them to question the goodness and power of God?
- 3** How do you answer the common question about evil in a world created and sustained by an all-powerful God of love? How does the great controversy motif help answer, at least somewhat, this challenge?

INSIDE *Story*

Giving Up on God: Part 1

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Five-year-old Sekule was frightened by Grandmother's warnings about hell. "You must be good," Grandmother said. "If you aren't good, you'll end up in hell."

"What do you mean 'end up in hell'?" the boy asked.

"You will end up in eternal flames if you lie or steal," she said. "You will feel the flames for all eternity."

Grandmother's words ignited great fear in the young boy's heart. He was confused. On the one hand, she said God is love. On the other, she said that if Sekule lied, he would end up in hell. Sekule was afraid because he couldn't help but lie sometimes.

The boy didn't know what to do. He couldn't turn to his parents. They were not Christian in then-communist Montenegro. Grandmother was the only Christian whom he knew in his village.

One day, when no one was looking, he hid behind a bush and scolded God. "I don't know why people say You are love," he said. "You aren't love but a monster. Why did You create me to end up in flames? Am I supposed to be faithful and not lie and do bad things? I can't believe in You, and I won't believe in You. You are a monster."

Sekule was finished with God. He was only 5 and had no interest in God.

Nine years later, at the age of 14, Sekule was sent away to a boarding high school in Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Among the 700 boys at the school, he was the only one from Montenegro. Sensing that he faced an uphill battle as an outsider, he resorted to fighting to gain acceptance with his classmates. He fought nearly every day. If someone even touched one of his ears—and they were a temptation to touch because they stuck out like teacup handles—he attacked viciously. One fight left him with a knife scar on a

hand. Sekule also was a bully. When a younger boy received a food package from home, Sekule dangled him outside a dorm window by the ankles until he handed over the package.

After three years of fighting, a desire grew in Sekule to know truth. He wondered whether Grandmother had told him the truth about God. But what was truth? Sarajevo had several main religions: Islam, Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Judaism. Sekule wondered, *If God is One, why are there so many religions?* He decided to become familiar with all religions to find the truth.

SEKULE SEKULIĆ is an affluent entrepreneur and faithful Seventh-day Adventist in Montenegro. Read more of his story next week. Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the good news of Jesus' soon coming in Montenegro 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 6 *February 3–9

I Will Arise



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 18:3–18, Ps. 41:1–3, Deut. 15:7–11, Psalm 82, Ps. 96:6–10, Ps. 99:1–4, Rom. 8:34.*

Memory Text: “ ‘For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now I will arise,’ says the LORD; ‘I will set him in the safety for which he yearns’ ” (*Psalm 12:5, NKJV*).

Our age is not the only age in which evil, injustice, and oppression rage. The psalmists lived in such a time, as well. And so, whatever else they are, the Psalms are also God's protests against the violence and oppression in the world, in our world, and that of the psalmists, as well.

Yes, the Lord is long-suffering and holds His wrath in His great forbearance, not wanting anyone to perish but to repent and change their ways (*2 Pet. 3:9–15*). And though God's proper time for His intervention does not always coincide with human expectations, the day of God's judgment is coming (*Ps. 96:13, Ps. 98:9*). We just need to trust in Him, and in His promises, until that day comes.

Only the Creator, whose throne is founded on righteousness and justice (*Ps. 89:14, Ps. 97:2*), can provide, with His sovereign judgment, stability and

prosperity to the world. The twofold aspect of divine judgment includes deliverance of the oppressed and destruction of the wicked (*Ps. 7:6–17*).

This is what we have been promised, and this is what will, indeed, one day come—but in God’s time, not ours, a point that the psalmist emphasizes.

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

SUNDAY *February 4*

The Majestic Warrior

Read Psalm 18:3–18; Psalm 76:3–9, 12; and Psalm 144:5–7. How is the Lord portrayed in these texts? What do these images convey about God’s readiness to deliver His people?

These hymns praise the Lord for His awesome power over the evil forces that threaten His people. They portray God in His majesty as Warrior and Judge. The image of God as Warrior is frequent in the Psalms and highlights the severity and urgency of God’s response to His people’s cries and suffering.

“The LORD thundered from heaven, / And the Most High uttered His voice, / Hailstones and coals of fire. / He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, / Lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them. / Then the channels of the sea were seen, / The foundations of the world were uncovered / At Your rebuke, O LORD, / At the blast of the breath of Your nostrils” (*Ps. 18:13–15, NKJV*).

The sheer determination and magnitude of God’s action should disperse any doubt about God’s great care and compassion for the sufferers or about His ability to defeat evil. We just need to wait for Him to do it.

In the end, even when God’s people, such as David, were involved in war, deliverance did not come from human means. In his many battles against the enemies of God’s people, King David praised God as the only One who

achieved all the victories. It would have been easy for David to take credit for what happened, for his many successes and triumphs, but that was not his frame of mind. He knew where the Source of his power came from.

Although David states that the Lord trains his hands for war (*Ps. 18:34*), nowhere in the Psalms does he rely on his battle skills. Instead, the Lord fights for David and delivers him (*Ps. 18:47, 48*).

In the Psalms, King David, who was known as a successful warrior, assumes his role as a skilled musician and praises the Lord as the only Deliverer and Sustainer of His people (*Ps. 144:10–15*). Praise and prayer to the Lord are David's sources of strength, which are more powerful than any weapon of war. God alone is to be trusted and worshiped.

Whatever gifts and skills and success you have had in life, why must you always remember the Source of them all? What danger do you face if you forget that Source?

MONDAY February 5

Justice for the Oppressed

Read Psalm 9:18, Psalm 12:5, Psalm 40:17, Psalm 113:7, Psalm 146:6–10, and Psalm 41:1–3. What is the message here to us, even today?

God exhibits special care and concern for justice regarding the various vulnerable groups of people, including the poor, needy, oppressed, fatherless, widows, widowers, and strangers. The Psalms, like the Law and the prophets, are clear on that point (*Exod. 22:21–27, Isa. 3:13–15*).

Many psalms use the expression “poor and needy” and avoid representing the oppressed in exclusively national and religious terms. This is done in order to highlight God’s universal care for all humanity.

The expression “poor and needy” is not limited to material poverty but also signifies vulnerability and helplessness. The expression appeals to God’s compassion, and it conveys the idea that the sufferer is alone and has no other help but God. The depiction “poor and needy” also pertains to one’s sincerity, truthfulness, and love for God in confessing one’s total dependence on God and renouncing any trace of self-reliance and self-assertion.

Meanwhile, caring for the deprived (*Ps. 41:1–3*) demonstrates the people’s faithfulness to God. Evil done against the vulnerable were particularly heinous sins in biblical culture (*Deut. 15:7–11*). The Psalms inspire faithful people to raise their voices against every oppression.

The Psalms also underline the futility of grounding one’s confidence on

perishable human means as the ultimate source of wisdom and security. God's people must resist the temptation to put ultimate faith for salvation in human leaders and institutions, especially when they differ from God's ways.

In His grace, our Lord identified Himself with the poor by becoming poor Himself that through His poverty many might become rich (*2 Cor. 8:9*). Christ's riches include deliverance from every oppression brought by sin, and He promises us eternal life in God's kingdom (*Rev. 21:4*). Jesus Christ fulfills the Psalms' promises as the divine Judge, who will judge every mistreatment of the deprived, as well as neglect of duty toward them (*Matt. 25:31–46*).

How much do we think of the “poor and needy” among us, and how much do we do for them?

TUESDAY *February 6*

How Long Will You Judge Unjustly?

The Lord has endowed Israel's leaders with authority to maintain justice in Israel (*Ps. 72:1–7, 12–14*). Israel's kings were to exercise their authority in accordance with God's will. The leaders' central concern should be ensuring peace and justice in the land and caring for the socially disadvantaged. Only then shall the land and the entire people prosper. The king's throne is strengthened by faithfulness to God, not by human power.

Read Psalm 82. What happens when the leaders pervert justice and oppress the people they are tasked to protect?

In Psalm 82, God declares His judgments upon Israel's corrupt judges. The "gods" (*Ps. 82:1, 6*) are clearly neither pagan gods nor angels because they were never tasked with delivering justice to God's people and so could not be judged for not fulfilling it. The charges listed in Psalm 82:2–4 echo the laws of the Torah, identifying the "gods" as Israel's leaders (*Deut. 1:16–18, Deut. 16:18–20, John 10:33–35*). God questions the "sons of men" whether they judge justly, and their punishment is announced because they have been found unrighteous. The leaders totter in darkness without knowledge (*Ps. 82:5*) because they have abandoned God's law, the light (*Ps. 119:105*).

The Scripture unswervingly upholds the view that the Lord is the only God. God shares His governance of the world with appointed human leaders as His representatives (*Rom. 13:1*). How often, however, have these human representatives, both in history and even now, perverted the responsibility that they have been given?

Psalm 82 mockingly exposes the apostasy of some leaders who believed themselves to be “gods” above other people. Although God gave the authority and the privilege to the Israelite leaders to be called the “children of the Most High” and to represent Him, God renounces the wicked leaders. God reminds them that they are mortal and subject to the same moral laws as all people. No one is above God’s law (*Ps. 82:6–8*).

God will judge the entire world; God’s people, too, shall give an account to God. Both the leaders and the people should emulate the example of the divine Judge and place their ultimate hope in Him.

What kind of authority do you hold over others? How justly and fairly are you exercising that authority? Take heed.

WEDNESDAY February 7

Pour Out Your Indignation

Read Psalm 58:6–8; Psalm 69:22–28; Psalm 83:9–17; Psalm 94:1, 2; and Psalm 137:7–9. What sentiments do these psalms convey? Who is the agent of judgment in these psalms?

Some psalms beseech God to take vengeance on individuals and nations who intend to harm, or who have already harmed, the psalmists or their people. These psalms can sound perplexing because of their harsh language and apparent discord with the biblical principle of love for enemies (*Matt. 5:44*).

Yet, the psalmist's indignation in the face of oppression is a good one. It means that the psalmists took right and wrong more seriously than did many people. He cares, even greatly, about the evil that is done in the world, not just to himself but to others, as well.

However, nowhere does the psalmist suggest himself to be the agent of vengeance. Instead, he leaves retribution solely in God's hands. The Psalms evoke the divine covenant curses (*Deut. 27:9–16*) and implore God to act as He has promised.

The Psalms are prophetic proclamations about God's impending judgment; they are not solely the psalmist's prayers. Psalm 137 reflects the announcements of divine judgment on Babylon, as seen in the prophets. The devastation that the Babylonians brought to other nations would turn back on them. The Psalms convey divine warnings that evil will not go unpunished forever.

God's retribution is measured with justice and grace. God's children are called to pray for those who mistreat them and even to hope for their conversion (*Ps. 83:18, Jer. 29:7*).

However, while seeking to fit these psalms with the biblical norms of love for enemies, we must be careful not to minimize the agonizing experience expressed in them. God acknowledges the suffering of His children and reassures them that "precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints" (*Ps. 116:15, NKJV*). Divine judgment obliges God's people to raise their voices against all evil and seek the coming of God's kingdom in its fullness. The Psalms also give voice to those who suffer, letting them know that God is aware of their suffering and that one day justice will come.

Who doesn't, at times, have thoughts or fantasies about vengeance on those who have done them or their loved ones terrible wrong? How might these psalms help you put such feelings in proper perspective?

THURSDAY *February 8*

The Lord's Judgment and the Sanctuary

Read Psalm 96:6–10; Psalm 99:1–4; and Psalm 132:7–9, 13–18. Where does God's judgment take place, and what are the implications of the answer for us? How does the sanctuary help us understand how God will deal with evil?

The Lord's judgment is closely related to the sanctuary. The sanctuary was the environment where the psalmist's understanding of the problem of evil was transformed (*Ps. 73:17–20*). The sanctuary was designated as the place of divine judgment as indicated by the judgment of Urim (*Num. 27:21*) and by the breastplate of judgment of the high priest (*Exod. 28:15, 28–30*). Accordingly, many psalms depict God on His throne in the sanctuary ready to judge the world for its sin and evil.

At the sanctuary, the plan of salvation was revealed. In paganism, sin was understood primarily as a physical stain to be eliminated by magic rites. In contrast, the Bible presents sin as a violation of God's moral law. God's holiness means that He loves justice and righteousness. Likewise, God's people should pursue justice and righteousness and should worship God in His holiness. To do that, they must keep God's law, which is an expression of His holiness.

Thus, the sanctuary is the place of forgiveness of sin and restoration of righteousness as indicated by the mercy seat of God's throne and the

“sacrifices of righteousness” (*Deut. 33:19, Ps. 4:5*).

Yet, the “God-Who-Forgives” takes vengeance upon the wicked deeds of unrepentant people (*Ps. 99:8, NKJV*). The practical implications of the sanctuary being the place of divine judgment are seen in the constant awareness of God’s holiness and demands for righteous living according to God’s covenantal requirements.

The Lord’s judgment from Zion results in the well-being of the righteous and the defeat of the wicked (*Ps. 132:13–18*). The sanctuary fostered the jubilant expectations of the Lord’s coming as the Judge, especially during the Day of Atonement. Likewise, the Psalms strengthen the certainty of the impending arrival of the divine Judge (*Ps. 96:13, Ps. 98:9*), namely, Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (*Rev. 11:15–19*).

Read Romans 8:34. How does this verse show us that what Christ is doing in the heavenly sanctuary is good news for His people?

FRIDAY February 9

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Beatitudes,” pp. 6–13, 29–35, in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*.

The Psalms are protests against human indifference to injustice; they are a refusal to accept evil. They are motivated not by a desire for revenge but by a zeal to glorify God’s name. Hence, it is fitting for the righteous to rejoice when they shall see God’s vengeance on evil because in this way God’s name and His justice are restored in the world (*Ps. 58:10, 11*). The Psalms oblige people to raise their voices against evil and to seek the coming of God’s kingdom in its fullness. In the Psalms, we are given assurance of divine comfort and deliverance. The Lord will arise!

“ ‘When men shall revile you, and persecute you,’ said Jesus, ‘rejoice, and be exceeding glad.’ And He pointed His hearers to the prophets who had spoken in the name of the Lord, as ‘an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.’ James 5:10. Abel, the very first Christian of Adam’s children, died a martyr. Enoch walked with God, and the world knew him not. Noah was mocked as a fanatic and an alarmist. ‘Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment.’ ‘Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.’ Hebrews 11:36, 35.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 33.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Because the painful realization of the evil in the world can cause one to wonder whether the Lord actually reigns, how can we grow an unshakable faith that will stand strong even under temptation? That is, what must we focus on in order to maintain our faith in God’s love and goodness and power? What should the Cross say to us about God and His character?

② Why is it important not to rely on human means (leaders, institutions, and social movements) as the ultimate wisdom and solution for justice in the world but rely solely on God's Word and judgment?

③ What are the practical implications of the truth that the sanctuary is the place of divine judgment?

④ How can we understand the harsh language of some psalms? How does that language help us relate to the humanity of those who wrote them?

INSIDE *Story*

Invited to Church: Part 2

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Seventeen-year-old Sekule wanted to know truth as a high school student in Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, so, he started to visit various houses of worship. But he didn't find satisfactory answers to his questions about why a God of love would burn someone in hell for eternity. So, Sekule resolved to find the truth on his own by reading the New Testament.

When he returned to his home village in Montenegro that summer, he read one Bible book a day. On the first day, he read the 28 chapters of Matthew. The next day, he read Mark. Then he read Luke, John, Acts, and Romans. He read only one book a day, even when he came to such smaller epistles as Titus and Philemon.

Some answers to his questions about God emerged in his reading of the New Testament. But he longed for more information. He visited several more houses of worship. But he didn't visit a Seventh-day Adventist church. He had heard that Adventists celebrated "Sweet Sabbaths" every week, a time when they engaged in sexual relations with each other. He thought, *They're crazy. They cannot have the truth.*

Failing to find answers in the many houses of worship that he visited, he decided that God probably did not exist. He stopped reading the Bible.

Then a high school teacher saw Sekule's Bible. She was an Adventist, and she saw the Bible as faculty members conducted random searches of dormitory rooms to see whether boys were hiding alcohol or drugs.

"You have a Bible!" she said.

"Yes," Sekule said.

"What have you learned?"

"Many things."

She quizzed him about Daniel, and Sekule, who had a good memory,

provided clear answers.

“You actually understand!” she exclaimed. “You’re the first person whom I’ve met who understands. You must come to the Seventh-day Adventist church.”

Sekule didn’t dare refuse. She was his teacher. He feared that she would lower his grade if he didn’t go.

“OK, I’ll go,” he said.

But he lied. He had no plans to go to church.

SEKULE SEKULIĆ is an affluent entrepreneur and faithful Seventh-day Adventist in Montenegro. Read more of his story next week. Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the good news of Jesus’ soon coming in Montenegro 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 7 *February 10–16

Your Mercy Reaches Unto *the* Heavens



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 136, Psalm 51, Psalm 130, Psalm 113, Psalm 123.*

Memory Text: “I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing to You among the nations. For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens, and Your truth unto the clouds” (*Psalm 57:9, 10, NKJV*).

The psalmists realize that they are spiritually poor and have nothing good to offer to God; that is, they have nothing in and of themselves that would recommend them before God’s holy throne (*Ps. 40:17*). They understand that they, as do all of us, need grace, God’s grace.

In short, they need the gospel.

The Psalms stress the fact that people are fully dependent on God’s mercy. Fortunately, God’s mercy is everlasting, as evidenced in both God’s creation and the history of God’s people (*Psalm 136*). Before the everlasting God, human life is as transient as grass, but God pities humans and renews their strength (*Ps. 103:3, 5, 15*), and in Him they have the promise of eternity.

God's people take comfort in the fact that the Lord is faithful to His covenant. The people's appeals, no matter how pressing at times, are often filled with hope because they are directed to their compassionate heavenly Father (*Ps. 103:13, Ps. 68:5, Ps. 89:26*). Fresh experiences of God's grace and love strengthen their resolve to worship and serve God and no one or nothing else.

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

SUNDAY *February 11*

His Mercy Endures Forever

Read Psalm 136. What thought predominates in this psalm? Where does the psalmist find evidence for his prevalent claim?

Psalm 136 summons God's people to praise the Lord for His mercy as revealed in creation (*Ps. 136:4–9*) and in Israel's history (*Ps. 136:10–22*). “Mercy” (Hebrew *khesed*, “steadfast love”) conveys God's goodness and loyalty to His creation and to His covenant with Israel. The psalm shows that God's immense power and magnificence are grounded in His steadfast love.

The Lord is “the God of gods” and “the Lord of lords,” which is a Hebrew idiom that means “the greatest God” (*Ps. 136:1–3*), not that there are other gods but that He is the only God.

The Lord's great wonders, which cannot be replicated by anyone else, are the undeniable demonstration of His dominion (*Ps. 136:4*). God created the heavens, the earth, and the heavenly bodies, which are worshiped by the pagans (*Deut. 4:19*). The Psalms, however, strip the pagan gods, and by extent every human-based source of confidence, of their authority. They are mere products of the creation. They are merely created things—not the Creator, a crucial distinction.

The image of the Lord's strong hand and outstretched arm (*Ps. 136:12*) stresses the efficacy of God's power and the far-reaching domain of His mercy.

God's mercy in creation and history should inspire His people to trust in Him and to remain faithful to His covenant. The refrain "For His mercy endures forever" is repeated 26 times in Psalm 136, thus reassuring the worshipers that the Lord does not change and will repeat His past favors to each new generation. God remembers His people (*Ps. 136:23*) and is faithful to His covenant of grace. The belief in the Lord's enduring mercy is at the core of biblical faith, which includes joyous worship and confidence, as well as reticence and repentance.

Psalm 136 closes with God's universal care of the world (*Ps. 136:23–25*). God's mercy is extended not only to Israel but to all creation. The psalm thus speaks of the universality of God's saving grace and exhorts the whole world to join Israel's praise of the Lord (*see also Luke 2:10, John 3:16, and Acts 15:17*).

How does the image of Jesus on the cross, dying as a Substitute for our sins, most powerfully reveal the great truth about God, that "His love endures forever"?

MONDAY February 12

Create in Me a Clean Heart

Read Psalm 51:1–5. Why does the psalmist appeal to God’s mercy?

King David pours out his heart before the Lord, asking for the forgiveness of sin during the spiritually darkest moments in his life (*2 Samuel 12*). Forgiveness is God’s extraordinary gift of grace, the result of the “multitude of Your tender mercies” (*Ps. 51:1, NKJV*). King David appeals to God to deal with him not in accordance with what his sin deserves (*Ps. 103:10*) but in accordance with His divine character, namely His mercy, faithfulness, and compassion (*Ps. 51:1; Exod. 34:6, 7*).

Read Psalm 51:6–19. How is forgiveness of sin portrayed here? What is the goal of divine forgiveness?

Divine forgiveness involves more than a legal proclamation of innocence. It produces a profound change that reaches the most inner parts of human self (*Ps. 51:6, Heb. 4:12*). It brings about a new creation (*Ps. 51:10, John 3:3–8*). The Hebrew verb *bara*’, translated “create,” depicts divine creative power

(*Gen. 1:1*). Only God can *bara'*; only God can produce a radical and lasting change in the repentant person's heart (*2 Cor. 4:6*).

David asks for cleansing with hyssop (*Lev. 14:2–8, Ps. 51:7*). He feels that his guilt keeps him banned from the Lord's presence in the same way as the leper is banned from the community while the state of uncleanness lasts (*Ps. 51:11*). He fears that sacrifices cannot restore him fully because there was no sacrifice that could atone for his premeditated sins of adultery and murder (*Exod. 21:14, Lev. 20:10*).

Only unconditional divine grace could accept David's "broken and contrite heart" as a sacrifice and restore David back into harmony with God (*Ps. 51:16, 17*). By asking for cleansing with hyssop, he wants to return to God's presence.

If God can forgive David for adultery, deception, and murder, what hope exists for you?

TUESDAY February 13

“If You, Lord, Should Mark Iniquities”

Read Psalm 130. How are the gravity of sin and hope for sinners portrayed?

The psalmist’s great affliction is related to his own and his people’s sins (*Ps. 130:3, 8*). The people’s sins are so grave that they threaten to separate the people from God forever (*Ps. 130:3*). Scripture speaks of the records of sins that are being kept for the Judgment Day (*Dan. 7:10, Rev. 20:12*) and of sinners’ names being removed from the book of life (*Exod. 32:32, Ps. 69:28, Rev. 13:8*).

The psalmist thus appeals to God’s forgiveness, which will eradicate the record of sins (*Ps. 51:1, 9; Jer. 31:34; Mic. 7:19*). He knows that “God is not angry by nature. His love is everlasting. His ‘anger’ is aroused only by man’s failure to appreciate His love. . . . The purpose of His anger is not to wound, but rather to heal man; not to destroy but to save His covenant people (see *Hos. 6:1, 2*).”—Hans K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms* (Berrien Springs, MI: First Impressions, 1983), pp. 180, 181. Remarkably, it is God’s readiness to forgive sins, and not to punish them, that inspires reverence of God (*Ps. 130:4, Rom. 2:4*). Genuine worship is built on admiration of God’s character of love, not on fear of punishment.

God’s children are called to wait on the Lord (*Ps. 27:14, Ps. 37:34*). The Hebrew *qawah*, “wait,” literally means “to stretch,” and is the root of the

Hebrew word for “hope.” Thus, waiting for the Lord is not a passive surrender to miserable circumstances but rather a hopeful “stretching” or eager anticipation of the Lord’s intervention. The psalmist’s hope is grounded not in his personal optimism but in God’s Word (*Ps. 130:5*). Faithful waiting on the Lord is not in vain because after the dark night, the morning of divine deliverance comes.

See how the psalmist’s personal plea becomes that of the entire community (*Ps. 130:7, 8*). The individual’s well-being is inseparable from that of the whole people. Thus, one prays not only for himself but for the community. As believers, we are part of a community, and what impacts one part of the community impacts everyone.

Think about the question, “If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” (*Ps. 130:3, NKJV*). What does that mean to you personally? Where would you be if the Lord marked your iniquities?

WEDNESDAY February 14

Praise to the Majestic and Merciful God

Read Psalms 113 and 123. What two different aspects of God's character are depicted in these psalms?

Psalms 113 and 123 praise both the majesty and mercy of the Lord. The Lord's majesty is revealed in the greatness of His name and in the exalted place of His throne, which is above all nations and above the heavens (*Ps. 113:4, 5; Ps. 123:1*). "Who is like the LORD our God" (*Ps. 113:5, NKJV*) is a statement of faith that no power within or outside of the world can challenge the God of Israel.

The unapproachable heights where the Lord dwells are illustrated through the fact that the Lord is willing to "humble Himself" or "*stoops down* to look on the heavens and the earth" (*see Ps. 113:6, NIV; emphasis supplied*). God's abiding on high does not prevent Him from seeing what is occurring here below. The Lord's mercy is manifested in His gracious readiness to be involved with the world and to save the needy and poor from their troubles. His generous hand is obviously not hidden from His servants though His dwelling place is in the distant heavens.

God's greatness and care, which cannot be fully discerned in God's amazing transcendence, becomes explicit in God's deeds of mercy and compassion. The needy, the poor, and the oppressed might experience firsthand God's sovereign power in the remarkable reversals that He can

perform in their favor. The exalted God manifests His greatness by using His power to exalt the downcast. The people are free to approach the Lord because His sovereign majesty and supremacy do not change the fact that He is their gracious Creator and Sustainer and that the people are His servants, His beloved children.

Worship is, thus, motivated, not only by God's magnificence but also by His goodness. Praise is not limited by time and space (*Ps. 113:2, 3*). God's greatness and mercy are best manifested in Jesus Christ, who was willing to stoop down from heaven and be brought as low as death on the cross in order to lift up fallen humanity (*Phil. 2:6-8*). Here, in the Cross, we have the greatest reasons possible to worship and praise God for what He had done for us.

Dwell on the Cross and what happened there for you personally. What has Jesus saved you from? Why is it so important to keep the Cross foremost in your mind?

THURSDAY *February 15*

Forget Not All His Benefits

Read Psalms 103. How is God's mercy portrayed here?

Psalm 103 enumerates the Lord's manifold blessings. The blessings include "all his benefits" (*Ps. 103:2*) for a flourishing life (*Ps. 103:3–6*). These blessings are grounded in God's gracious character and in His faithfulness to His covenant with Israel (*Ps. 103:7–18*). The Lord "remembers" human frailty and transience and has compassion on His people (*see Ps. 103:13–17*).

Remembering is more than mere cognitive activity. It involves a commitment that is expressed in action: God delivers and sustains His people (*Ps. 103:3–13*). The powerful images in Psalm 103:11–16 illustrate the immeasurable greatness of God's grace, which can be compared only to the infinite vastness of the heavens (*Isa. 55:9*).

How, then, should people respond to God's loving-kindness?

First, by blessing the Lord (*Ps. 103:1, 2*).

Blessing is generally understood as an act of bestowing material and spiritual benefits upon someone (*Gen. 49:25, Ps. 5:12*). Because God is the Source of all blessings, how can human beings bless God? An inferior can bless a superior as a means of thanking or praising him (*1 Kings 8:66, Job 29:13*). God blesses people by conferring good on them, and people bless God by praising the good in Him; that is, by revering Him for His gracious

character.

Second, by remembering all His benefits and His covenant (*Ps. 103:2, 18–22*), just as the Lord remembers the feeble human condition and His covenant with His people (*Ps. 103:3–13*). Remembering is a crucial aspect of the relationship between God and His people. Just as God remembers His promises to the people, so the people are indebted to remember God's faithfulness and respond to God with love and obedience.

With this idea in mind, these famous words of Ellen G. White are so appropriate: "It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.

FRIDAY February 16

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Sinner’s Need of Christ,” pp. 17–22, in *Steps to Christ*.

In the Psalms, the voices of God’s people join as one in repeating the chorus “His mercy endures forever” in celebration of God’s eternal love (*Ps. 106:1, NKJV; Ps. 107:1, NKJV; Ps. 118:1–4, 29, NKJV; Psalm 136, NKJV*). “Not to praise God would mean to forget all His benefits, not to appreciate God’s gifts. Only those who praise do not forget. Thinking and speaking about God is not yet praising Him. Praise begins when one acknowledges God’s majesty and works and responds with adoration of His goodness, mercy, and wisdom.”—Hans LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms*, p. 178.

The significance of the solemn confession of God’s enduring mercy gains even deeper significance when we remember that God’s *khesed*—namely His covenantal loving-kindness and faithfulness—stands firm and unchanging amid human sin and rebellion against God.

“We have sinned against Him, and are undeserving of His favor; yet He Himself has put into our lips that most wonderful of pleas, ‘Do not abhor us, for Thy name’s sake; do not disgrace the throne of Thy glory; remember, break not Thy covenant with us.’ Jer. 14:21. When we come to Him confessing our unworthiness and sin, He has pledged Himself to give heed to our cry. The honor of His throne is staked for the fulfillment of His word unto us.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 148.

Experiencing God’s graciousness to him (*Ps. 103:2*) encourages the psalmist to say that “the LORD executes righteousness and justice for *all* who are oppressed” (*Ps. 103:6, NKJV*; emphasis supplied). Thus, the final aim of the psalmist’s personal testimony, and praise of God’s mercy in his life, is to reassure others of God’s loving-kindness so that they, too, can open their hearts to God and receive His saving grace and praise God (*Ps. 9:11, 12; Ps. 22:22–27; Ps. 66:16*).

Discussion Questions:

- ① What are the practical implications of the fact that God's mercy is everlasting for the people's salvation? Why does this not mean that one can continue sinning because God's mercy is forever?**
- ② How do we reconcile God's forgiveness of our sins with the idea of God's judgment on sin?**
- ③ How do the expressions of God's mercy in the New Testament fit with those in the Psalms (*Eph. 2:4, 5; 1 Tim. 1:16; Titus 3:5; Heb. 4:16*)?**

INSIDE *Story*

Burden Is Lifted: Part 3

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

On a Friday evening, Sekule was waiting outside the boys' dormitory at his high school in Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was waiting for a boy who had insulted him, and he planned to beat him up.

As he waited, a friend offered him cognac. He drank and, after many more drinks, passed out in a drunken stupor. In the morning, he knew that his friends would tease him mercilessly for not getting revenge. He decided to hide for the day. But where? Then he remembered the invitation from his Adventist teacher to go to church. It was Sabbath morning.

Sekule's hair was long and greasy. He hadn't washed it for a month. His breath reeked. But he went to church. When he arrived, he looked carefully for a place to sit. He had heard that Adventists celebrated "Sweet Sabbath" orgies every week, and he didn't want to be found sitting next to a grandmother. Spotting an attractive young woman, he sat down near her.

When the church pastor began to preach, Sekule's mouth dropped open in surprise. The pastor was giving Bible answers to his questions about God and hell. A huge burden was lifted from his heart as he heard that God, indeed, is love (*1 John 4:8*), desires to save every sinner (*Luke 19:10*), and will cast no one into an eternal hell (*Malachi 4:1, 3; Psalm 37:10, 11*).

After the sermon, someone invited Sekule to evangelistic meetings, and he went. At the end of the meetings, he asked the church pastor, "Tell me, please, what am I allowed to do, and what am I not allowed to do?"

"You can do whatever you want," the pastor said.

"Don't talk that way," Sekule said. "Tell me what I can and cannot do."

"You cannot work on Sabbath anymore," the pastor said.

"OK, done."

"You cannot go to school on Sabbath anymore."

“OK, done.”

“You cannot fight anymore.”

“OK, done.”

“You cannot eat unclean meat.”

“OK. I won’t eat unclean meat.”

“Actually, we suggest that you not eat any meat at all.”

“OK, I won’t eat meat anymore.”

From that day, Sekule never worked or went to school on Sabbath. He never fought, and he never ate meat. He was baptized six months later, at the age of 18. But he accepted Adventist teachings on the spot—all because his questions of God and hell had been answered from the Bible.

SEKULE SEKULIĆ is an affluent entrepreneur and faithful Seventh-day Adventist in Montenegro. Read more of his story next week. Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the good news of Jesus’ soon coming in Montenegro 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 8 *February 17–23

Wisdom for Righteous Living



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 119:1–16, Psalm 90, John 3:16, Ps. 95:7–11, Psalm 141, Psalm 128.*

Memory Text: “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (*Psalm 90:12, NKJV*).

As we have seen, God's grace provides for the forgiveness of sin, and it creates a new heart in the repentant sinner, who now lives by faith. God's Word also provides instructions for righteous living (*Ps. 119:9–16*). Keeping God's law is by no means a legalistic observance of rules but life in an intimate relationship with God, a life full of blessings (*Ps. 119:1, 2; Psalm 128*).

However, the life of the righteous person is not without temptations. Sometimes the righteous can be tempted by the cunning nature of sin (*Ps. 141:2–4*) and even fall to that temptation. God allows times of testing to let His children's faithfulness (or unfaithfulness) be clearly revealed. If God's children heed God's instruction and admonishment, their faith will be purified and their trust in the Lord strengthened. Wisdom for righteous living is gained through the dynamics of life with God amid temptations and

challenges. Thus, the prayer that God would teach us to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom (*Ps. 90:12*) reflects an ongoing commitment to walk in faithfulness to the Lord.

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

SUNDAY *February 18*

Your Word I Have Hidden in My Heart

Read Psalm 119:1–16, 161–168. How should we keep God's commandments, and what are the blessings that come from doing that?

The Bible depicts a daily life of faith as a pilgrimage (“walk”) with God in His path of righteousness. The life of faith is maintained by walking “in the law of the LORD” (*Ps. 119:1, NKJV*) and by walking “in the light of Your countenance” (*Ps. 89:15, NKJV*). These are by no means two different walks. Walking in the light of God’s countenance implies upholding God’s law. Equally, walking “in the law of the LORD” involves seeking God with the whole heart (*Ps. 119:1, 2, 10*).

Being “undefiled in the way” is another way the Psalms describe the righteous life (*Ps. 119:1*). “Undefiled” describes a sacrifice “without blemish” that is acceptable to God (*Exod. 12:5*). Likewise, the life of the righteous individual is a living sacrifice (*Rom. 12:1*). Thus, a love for sin must not defile it. A life devoted to God is also a “perfect way,” meaning that the person assumes a right direction in life that is pleasing to God (*Ps. 101:2, 6*; see also *Ps. 18:32*).

Keeping God’s commandments has nothing to do with a legalistic observance of divine rules. On the contrary, it consists of “a good understanding” of the difference between right and wrong and good and evil (*Ps. 111:10*; see also *1 Chron. 22:12*), and involves the whole person, not

merely outward actions. Being “undefiled,” keeping God’s commandments and seeking God with the whole heart, are inseparable attitudes in life (*Ps. 119:1, 2*).

God’s commandments are a revelation of God’s will for the world. They instruct people on how to become wise and to live in freedom and peace (*Ps. 119:7–11, 133*). The psalmist delights in the law because the law assures him of God’s faithfulness (*Ps. 119:77, 174*).

“Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble” (*Ps. 119:165, NKJV*). The image of stumbling depicts moral failure. As the lamp to the psalmist’s feet (*Ps. 119:105*), God’s Word protects us from temptations (*Ps. 119:110*).

How did Christ demonstrate the power of God’s Word in His life (*Matt. 4:1–11*)? What should this tell us about the power that comes from a heart set on obeying God’s law?

MONDAY *February 19*

Teach Us to Number Our Days

Read Psalm 90, Psalm 102:11, and Psalm 103:14–16. What is the human predicament?

Fallen human existence is but a vapor in the light of eternity. A thousand years in God's sight is "like a watch in the night," which lasted three or four hours (*Ps. 90:4, NKJV*). Compared to divine time, a human lifetime flies away (*Ps. 90:10*). The strongest among humans are analogous to the weakest among plants (*Ps. 90:5, 6; Ps. 103:15, 16*). Yet, even that short life is filled with labor and sorrow (*Ps. 90:10*). Even secular people, who have no belief in God, mourn and lament the shortness of life, especially in contrast to the eternity that's out there and that, they know, threatens to go on without them.

Psalm 90 places the human predicament in the context of God's care for people as their Creator. The Lord has been the dwelling place of His people in all generations (*Ps. 90:1, 2*). The Hebrew word *ma'on*, "dwelling place," portrays the Lord as the shelter or refuge of His people (*Ps. 91:9*).

God restrains His righteous wrath and extends His grace anew. The psalmist exclaims, "Who knows the power of Your anger?" (*Ps. 90:11, NKJV*), implying that no one has ever experienced the full effect of God's anger against sin, and so, there is hope for people to repent and gain wisdom for righteous living.

Wisdom in the Bible depicts not merely intelligence but reverence for

God. The wisdom that we need is knowing how “to number our days” (*Ps. 90:12*). If we can number our days, it means that our days are limited and that we know that they are limited. Wise living means living with an awareness of life’s transience that leads to faith and obedience. This wisdom is gained only through repentance (*Ps. 90:8, 12*) and God’s gifts of forgiveness, compassion, and mercy (*Ps. 90:13, 14*).

Our fundamental problem stems not from the fact that we are created as human beings but from sin and from what sin has wrought in our world. Its devastating effects are seen everywhere and in every person.

Thanks to Jesus, however, a way has been made for us out of our human predicament (*John 1:29, John 3:14–21*). Otherwise, we would have no hope at all.

No matter how quickly our life passes, what promise do we have in Jesus? (See *John 3:16*.) What hope would we have without Him?

TUESDAY *February 20*

The Lord's Test

Read Psalm 81:7, 8; Psalm 95:7–11; and Psalm 105:17–22. What does divine testing involve in these texts?

Meribah is the place where Israel tested God by challenging His faithfulness and power to provide for their needs (*Exod. 17:1–7; Ps. 95:8, 9*). Psalm 81 makes an intriguing reversal and interprets the same event as the time when God tested Israel (*Ps. 81:7*). And, by their disobedience and lack of trust (*Ps. 81:11*), the people failed God's test.

The reference to Meribah conveys a twofold message. First, God's people must not repeat the mistakes of past generations. Instead, they are to trust God and to walk in His way (*Ps. 81:13*). Second, although the people failed the test, God came to their rescue when they were in trouble (*Ps. 81:7*). God's saving grace in the past gives an assurance of God's grace to new generations.

Psalm 105 shows that the trials were God's means of testing Joseph's trust in God's foretelling of his future (*Gen. 37:5–10, Ps. 105:19*). The Hebrew *tsarap*, "tested," in verse 19 conveys a sense of "purging," "refining," or "purifying." Thus, the goal of God's testing of Joseph's faith was to remove any doubt in God's promise and to strengthen Joseph's trust in God's guidance.

The goal of divine discipline is to strengthen God's children and to

prepare them for the fulfillment of the promise, as shown in Joseph's example (*Ps. 105:20–22*).

However, rejection of God's instruction results in growing stubbornness and hardening of an obstinate person's heart.

“God requires prompt and unquestioning obedience of His law; but men are asleep or paralyzed by the deceptions of Satan, who suggests excuses and subterfuges, and conquers their scruples, saying as he said to Eve in the garden: ‘Ye shall not surely die.’ Disobedience not only hardens the heart and conscience of the guilty one, but it tends to corrupt the faith of others. That which looked very wrong to them at first, gradually loses this appearance by being constantly before them, till finally they question whether it is really sin and unconsciously fall into the same error.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 146.

What has been your own experience with how sin hardens the heart? Why should that thought drive us to the Cross, where we can find the power to obey?

WEDNESDAY February 21

Deceitfulness of the Wicked Way

Read Psalm 141. What does the psalmist pray for?

Psalm 141 is a prayer for protection from temptations from within and from without. The psalmist is not only endangered by the schemes of the wicked (*Ps. 141:9, 10*) but also is tempted to act like the wicked. The first weak point is self-control in speech, and the psalmist prays that the Lord will keep watch over the door of his lips (*Ps. 141:3*). This image alludes to the guarding of city gates that, in biblical times, protected the city.

The temptation is also whether God's child will yield to the counsel of the righteous or be lured by the delicacies of the wicked (*Ps. 141:4, 5*). The psalmist depicts his heart as a primary threat because there the real battle happens. Only unceasing prayer of complete trust and devotion to God can save God's child from temptation (*Ps. 141:1, 2*).

Read Psalm 1:1 and Psalm 141:4. How is the progressive and cunning character of temptation depicted here?

Psalm 141:4 depicts the progressive nature of temptation. First, the heart is inclined toward evil. Second, it practices evil deeds (the meaning in Hebrew underlines the repetitive character of the action). Third, the heart eats of the delicacies of the wicked, namely, accepts their evil practices as something desirable.

Likewise, in Psalm 1:1 the temptation comes to prevent God's child from walking in the Lord's way by causing him to walk with the wicked, stand in the path of sinners, and, finally, sit with the scornful. Sinners, wicked, and scornful: we are not to be like them or let them lead us away from the Lord.

These psalms describe the progressive, alluring, and cunning character of temptation, which underscores the fact that only total dependency on the Lord can secure one's victory. They stress the importance of the words that one speaks, and listens to, amid temptation. The end of both the wicked and the righteous should teach the people to seek wisdom from God (*Ps. 1:4–6, Ps. 141:8–10*). Yet, in both psalms, the final vindication of God's children remains in the future. This means that the believers are called to patiently trust God and to wait upon Him.

THURSDAY *February 22*

Blessings of Righteous Living

Read Psalm 1:1–3, Psalm 112:1–9, and Psalm 128. What blessings are promised for those who revere the Lord?

Of the many blessings promised to those who revere the Lord, peace is perhaps one of the greatest. Psalm 1 depicts the righteous by a simile of a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruits in season and whose leaf does not wither (*Ps. 1:3; Jer. 17:7, 8; Ezek. 47:12*). This simile identifies the source of all blessings, namely, abiding in God's presence in His sanctuary and enjoying uninterrupted and loving relationship with God. Unlike the wicked, who are portrayed as chaff, with no stability, place, and future, the righteous are like a fruitful tree with roots, a place near God and eternal life.

Psalm 128:2, 3 evokes the blessings of the Messianic kingdom, where sitting under one's own vine and fig tree is a symbol of peace and prosperity (*Mic. 4:4*). The blessing of peace upon Jerusalem (*Ps. 122:6–8; Ps. 128:5, 6*) conveys hope in the Messiah, who will end evil and restore peace in the world.

“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.

The New Testament describes the fulfillment of that hope in Christ's second advent and the creation of the new world (*Matt. 26:29, Revelation 21*). Therefore, while the righteous receive many blessings in this life, the fullness of God's favor awaits them when God's kingdom is fully restored at the end of time.

Why is the Cross, and what happened there, the guarantee of the promises found in the New Testament of what God has in store for us? How can we get comfort from those promises even now?

FRIDAY February 23

Further Thought: In these modern times, obtaining wisdom seems not to be so desirable as achieving happiness. People would rather be happy than wise. However, can we truly be happy and live a fulfilled life without godly wisdom? The Psalms clearly say that we cannot. The good news is that we are not asked to choose between wisdom and happiness. Godly wisdom brings genuine happiness.

A simple example from the Hebrew language can illustrate this point. In Hebrew, the word “step” in plural (*’ashurey*) sounds very much like the word “happiness” (*’ashrey*). Although we miss this association in English translations, it conveys a powerful message: “steps” holding to God’s path lead to a “happy” life (*Ps. 1:1, Ps. 17:5, Ps. 37:31, Ps. 44:18, Ps. 89:15, Ps. 119:1*). In the Bible, neither wisdom nor happiness are an abstract concept, but a real experience.

They are found in relationship with God, which consists of revering, praising, finding strength in, and trusting God. Psalm 25:14 says that “the secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant” (*NKJV*).

“Thank God for the bright pictures which He has presented to us. Let us group together the blessed assurances of His love, that we may look upon them continually: The Son of God leaving His Father’s throne, clothing His divinity with humanity, that He might rescue man from the power of Satan; His triumph in our behalf, opening heaven to men, revealing to human vision the presence chamber where the Deity unveils His glory; the fallen race uplifted from the pit of ruin into which sin had plunged it, and brought again into connection with the infinite God, and having endured the divine test through faith in our Redeemer, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and exalted to His throne—these are the pictures which God would have us contemplate.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 118.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** How can God's Word become the source of one's delight and not merely instruction? How is feeding on God's Word related to abiding in Jesus Christ, the Word (*John 1:1; John 15:5, 7*)?
- 2** What happens when people consciously and constantly reject God's teaching (*Psalm 81, Psalm 95*)? Why do you think that happens?
- 3** Why can the way of the wicked sometimes appear more desirable than the counsel of the righteous (*Psalm 141*)? That is, how do we deal with the apparent fact that oftentimes the wicked seem to be doing very well?

INSIDE *Story*

Sabbath Farewell Party: Part 4

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Two weeks after Sekule's baptism, the Bosnian War erupted. Sekule fled his boarding high school in Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and went into hiding for 15 days.

When he returned to the dormitory to retrieve his possessions, he found the building had been torched by soldiers. A small library of religious books that he had collected while seeking to find truth had been dumped in the middle of his room and set on fire. He had lost everything. He returned to his home village in Montenegro.

News that Sekule had joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not sit well with his family. Father could not understand why he had stopped eating meat and took him to a physician. Mother thought a spell had been cast on her son and sought help from someone who practiced black magic. When their attempts failed, they sent Sekule to the military. It was 1992, and the Bosnian War was raging. To enlist a son was to send him to war.

In those days, families threw big celebrations for newly enlisted soldiers. Sekule's parents planned his party for a Sabbath in December. Two hundred guests were expected. But Sekule went to church.

When the winter sun set around 4 p.m., he returned home. He didn't know what to expect. He thought that the house would be filled with relatives from across the country and beyond. He thought he would face criticism for not only arriving late to his own party but also for showing disrespect as the eldest grandson.

He found his grandfather on the front porch.

"Did the people come?" Sekule asked.

"No."

"No?"

“No.”

“Why not?”

“No one knows why.”

Then people started coming. Sekule asked them, “Why are you coming now?”

They all replied in the same way: “Somebody told us to come after 5 P.M.”

“Who told you?” Sekule asked.

No one knew.

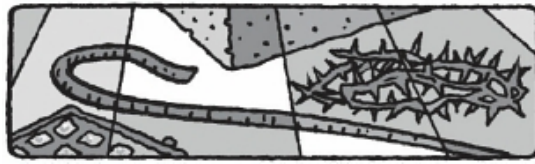
At that moment, Sekule understood that God would protect him. He went to the military.

SEKULE SEKULIĆ is an affluent entrepreneur and faithful Seventh-day Adventist in Montenegro. Read more of his story next week. Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the good news of Jesus' soon coming in Montenegro 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 9 *February 24–March 1

Blessed Is He Who Comes *in the Name of the Lord*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 23, John 10:11–15, Psalm 22, Ps. 89:27–32, Col. 1:16, Psalm 2, Heb. 7:20–28.*

Memory Text: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes” (*Psalm 118:22, 23, NKJV*).

The Psalms testify about Christ’s person and ministry. Almost all aspects of His work in the plan of salvation are seen in the Psalms. In various ways, Christ’s life and work are prefigured and predicted in them, often with remarkable accuracy.

The topics revealed in the Psalms include Christ’s deity, His Sonship, His obedience, His zeal for God’s temple, His identity as the Good Shepherd, His betrayal, His suffering, His bones not being broken, His death, resurrection, ascension, priesthood, and kingship. It’s all there, as predicted many centuries before Jesus came in the flesh.

No wonder, for example, when talking about His ministry, Jesus pointed

back to the Psalms when speaking to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (*Luke 24:44*). He wanted them to find in the Psalms evidence for who He was.

Some of the psalms that have a typological fulfillment in Christ include Psalms 24, 45, 72, and 101 (the ideal King and Judge), as well as Psalms 88 and 102 (prayers of the suffering servant of God).

In all the Psalms, through the psalmists' laments, thanksgivings, praises, and cries for justice and deliverance, we can hear the echoes of Christ's prayer for the salvation of the world.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 2.*

SUNDAY *February 25*

Divine Self-Sacrificing Shepherd

Read Psalm 23; Psalm 28:9; Psalm 80:1; Psalm 78:52, 53; Psalm 79:13; and Psalm 100:3. How is the relationship between the Lord and His people portrayed in these texts?

The image of the Lord as Shepherd and God's people as the sheep of His pasture highlights God's guidance and sustaining care of His people and the people's dependence on God to meet all their needs. The image conveys the notion of closeness between God and His people because shepherds lived with their flocks and cared for each sheep individually. The pastoral imagery also underlines God's ownership of His flock, guaranteed by two strong bonds: creation (*Ps. 95:6, 7; Ps. 100:3*) and covenant (*Ps. 28:9, Heb. 13:20*).

The image of the divine Shepherd who leads Joseph like a flock (*Ps. 80:1*) perhaps alludes to Jacob's benediction of Joseph, which pictures God as the Shepherd of Israel, and so, appeals to this great promise and blessing (*Gen. 49:24*).

Kings were considered shepherds of their people (*2 Sam. 5:2*). Yet, only God truly deserves this title because most human kings did not live up to such a calling. Only Jesus did, which is why He is called the Good Shepherd.

Read John 10:11–15. What does Jesus say about Himself as the Good Shepherd?

The intimate bond between the divine Shepherd and His flock is seen in the flock's unmistakably knowing the Shepherd's voice (*John 10:4, 27*). To the current day, Middle Eastern shepherds can divide their flocks that have mingled simply by calling their sheep, who recognize and follow their shepherd's voice.

At times, God's flock suffers various afflictions that the people understand as the sign of God's discontent and abandonment. Yet, the Good Shepherd never forsakes His strayed sheep but searches to save them. This is a powerful image of God's relationship with His people. He is willing to die for His sheep (*John 10:11, 15*) and paradoxically become a sacrificial lamb on their behalf (*John 1:29*). Also, Jesus confirmed that He would call His sheep in other folds and unite them into one flock (*John 10:16*).

What are ways that you can on a daily and practical level take advantage of what is promised to us in having Jesus as our Good Shepherd?

MONDAY February 26

The Suffering Messiah

Read Psalm 22 and Psalm 118:22. How was the Messiah treated by those He had come to save?

Many psalms express the agonizing feelings of utmost forsakenness of the suffering Messiah (*e.g. Psalm 42, Psalm 88, and Psalm 102*). Psalm 22 is a direct Messianic prophecy because many details in this psalm cannot be historically connected to King David but perfectly fit the circumstances of Christ's death. Jesus prayed with the words of Psalm 22:1 on the cross (*Matt. 27:46*).

The torment of Christ's separation from His Father, caused by Christ carrying the entire world's sins, can be measured only by the extent of their closeness, namely, their unparalleled oneness (*John 1:1, 2; John 10:30*). Yet, even the depths of inexplicable suffering could not break the unity between the Father and the Son. In His utter forsakenness, Christ unconditionally entrusts Himself to the Father, despite the utter depths of despair He faced.

"Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

The threatening animal imagery of strong bulls, roaring lions, and dogs highlights the people's cruelty and animosity that Christ, who is compared to

a harmless and helpless worm, met in His final hours. With amazing accuracy, Psalm 22 conveys the venomous remarks of the crowd that mocked Jesus with His own words to the Father (*Ps. 22:1, 8; Matt. 27:43*) and the soldiers dividing Jesus' garments (*Ps. 22:18, Matt. 27:35*). Little did the people understand then that the "worm" they sought to crush would become the chief "cornerstone" of the Temple and secure its foundation (*Ps. 118:22*).

However, the rejected Messiah became the Source of salvation for God's people after His resurrection from the dead (*Matt. 21:42, Acts 4:10–12*). Christ suffered the rejection of humanity, but God glorified His Son by making Him the living "chief cornerstone" of God's spiritual Temple (*Eph. 2:20–22, 1 Pet. 2:4–8*). For those who reject this Stone, namely, God's means of salvation, it will become the agent of judgment (*Isa. 8:14, Matt. 21:44*).

Jesus on the cross paid in Himself the penalty for every sin you have ever committed. How should the fact that He suffered on your behalf impact how you live now, that is, why you should find sin so abhorrent?

TUESDAY *February 27*

Forever Faithful to His Covenant

Read Psalm 89:27–32, 38–46 and Psalm 132:10–12. What is the Davidic covenant about? What seems to have endangered it?

The Davidic covenant contains God's promise of everlasting support of David's line and prosperity of God's people (*1 Sam. 7:5–16; Ps. 89:1–4, 19–37; Ps. 132:12–18*). The permanence of the covenant was established on God's solemn oath and the king's faithfulness to God. However, even the devoted kings, such as King David, were not always faithful to the Lord. Psalm 89 laments over the harsh reality that seems to indicate that the glorious promises of the Davidic covenant have been lost. Is Israel hopelessly deserted by God? The answer, of course, is—no!

God's wrath is, yes, an expression of divine judgment (*Ps. 38:1, Ps. 74:1*). Yet, it does not last forever because God's everlasting love forgives people's sins when people repent. However, while it lasts, God's discontent with His erring people is serious. The people feel the bitter consequences of their disobedience and realize the gravity of their sins (*Ps. 89:38–46*). Yet, they ask, "How long?" appealing to the passing character of God's wrath (*Ps. 89:46*). Renewed hope springs from new assurance in God's faithfulness to "remember" His grace (*Ps. 89:47, 50*).

In short, although the human component of the covenant failed, the people could rest in the promise of God's unchanging purposes through the Messiah, who embodies all righteousness and salvation of Israel and of the whole world. That is, in the end, God will prevail, and His eternal kingdom will be

established forever—but only because of Jesus and not because of God’s people.

Jesus Christ is the Son of David and the Messiah (*Matt. 1:1, Heb. 1:8*). He is called “the firstborn over all creation” (*Col. 1:15, NKJV*), alluding to Psalm 89:27, which calls David, who was a type of Christ, God’s firstborn. “Also I will make him My firstborn, / The highest of the kings of the earth” (*NKJV*).

Clearly the title “firstborn” does not express David’s biological status, because David was the eighth child of his parents (*1 Sam. 16:10, 11*). It’s the same with Jesus. This title signifies His special honor and authority (*Col. 1:16, 20–22*). God made Jesus the supreme King over the whole world when He raised Jesus from the dead (*Acts 2:30, 31*).

Read Colossians 1:16, 20–22. What do these verses teach us about who Jesus was and what He has done for us? What promise can you take away from this for yourself?

WEDNESDAY February 28

Eternal King of Unrivaled Power

Read Psalm 2; Psalm 110:1–3; Psalm 89:4, 13–17; and Psalm 110:5, 6.
What do these texts teach us about Christ as King?

The portrayal of God as the Messiah's Father points to the coronation of the king when the king was adopted into God's covenant (*Ps. 2:7, Ps. 89:26–28*). Psalm 2:7 foresees Christ's resurrection and exaltation as the dawn of the new everlasting covenant and Christ's royal priesthood (*Acts 13:33–39, Heb. 1:5, Heb. 5:5*). The Messiah sits at God's right hand as Someone who has unprecedented honor and authority (*Ps. 110:1; Acts 7:55, 56*). "Moreover, the interplay between the Lord and the 'anointed' (Messiah) even suggests an intention to identify this Davidic Messiah with the Lord Himself. . . . If the one who sits at the right is the Lord, then, the Lord is the Messiah, since the latter is also seen at the right [*see Ps. 110:1, 5*]."—Jacques Doukhan, *On the Way to Emmaus* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books, 2012), pp. 26, 27.

In the end, Christ will have absolute victory over His enemies. To make the enemies a "footstool" is an image that reflects the custom of the ancient Near Eastern kings to place their feet on the necks of their defeated enemies to demonstrate total dominance over them. Yet, Christ's rod here is not a tool of terror (*Ps. 2:9, Ps. 110:2*).

The rod ("staff") was originally held by tribal leaders as the symbol of the tribe (*Num. 17:2–10*). Christ's rod comes from Zion because He represents the people of Zion. His rod is a symbol of divine judgment, which ends the

rule of evil and depicts Christ's unrivaled reign (*Rev. 2:27, Rev. 12:5*). Even the wicked kings are given a chance to repent and submit to the Messiah (*Ps. 2:10–12*).

One graphic depiction of Christ's ultimate victory is found in the pre-Advent scene in Daniel 7, which shows that, after judgment is given “ ‘in favor of the saints of the Most High’ ” (*Dan. 7:22, NKJV*), His kingdom is established, and “ ‘His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom’ ” (*Dan. 7:27, NKJV*). Because of the Cross, the promise of the kingdom is assured.

A blessing is promised to all who trust in the King, and the people rejoice in the Messiah's sovereign and righteous reign (*Ps. 2:12, Ps. 89:15–17*).

How nice it is to know that, yes, in the end, good will triumph over evil, justice will be done, and pain and suffering will forever be vanquished. How should this truth give us comfort now when, from a human perspective, evil seems to prosper?

THURSDAY *February 29*

Eternal Priest in the Order of Melchizedek

Read Psalm 110:4–7. How is Christ's priesthood unique, and what great hope can we find in Christ's heavenly priesthood?

God endows the Messiah with an everlasting kingship (*Ps. 110:1–3*) and a priesthood of a superior rank, the order of Melchizedek (*Ps. 110:4–7*). The Lord seals His word with a solemn promise (*Heb. 6:18*). God's oath not to relent from giving us a perfect Priest is a sign of His grace. People's sins and open rebellions constantly provoke God to abandon His people, but God's oath is unchangeable and guarantees God's grace in revoking His judgment over the repentant people (*Exod. 32:14, Ps. 106:45*).

The divine oath introduces a novel element to the Davidic covenant by declaring that the Messiah King is also a Priest (*Ps. 110:4*). Israel's kings could never function as Levitical priests (*Num. 8:19, 2 Chron. 26:16–21*). When Scripture mentions kings or people offering sacrifices, it implies their bringing sacrifices to the priests, who actually offered them. Psalm 110 sets the Messiah King apart from Israel's other kings and priests. Christ's eternal priesthood derives from Melchizedek, who was both the king of Salem (Jerusalem) and the priest of "the most high God" (*Gen. 14:18–20*). The Old Testament never speaks of King David or any other Israelite king as possessing the priesthood in the order of Melchizedek, except for Psalm 110. Clearly, the psalm speaks about a distinctive king-priest in Israel's history.

Read Hebrews 7:20–28. What are some of the implications of Christ's

superior priesthood?

Being both Divine King and everlasting Priest, Christ has unprecedented superiority over human priests and kings; so, we may take hope. Christ upholds a superior covenant that is based on God's oath, not human promises. He serves in the heavenly sanctuary. His priesthood is not affected by sin or death, like that of human priests, and thus, He can intercede for and save His people forever. The reconciling work of Christ as the perfect and compassionate Priest gives His people a lasting assurance of abiding in God's very presence (*Heb. 6:19, 20*). Christ's royal priesthood will abolish the rule of evil, not only in people's hearts but also in the world. He will keep the promise of Psalm 2 that every nation and ruler will be subject to the royal judgment of Christ Jesus (*Ps. 2:6–9; Ps. 110:1, 2, 5, 6*). Jesus' wonderful royal priesthood makes an absolute claim on our obedience and trust.

FRIDAY *March 1*

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “God With Us,” pp. 19–26, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Being both Christ’s prayers and prayers about Christ, the Psalms provide a unique revelation of Christ’s person and redeeming ministry as the One who is “God with us” (*Matt. 1:23*). Jesus is “God with us” in the battling prayers of forsakenness and suffering. He is “God with us” in the cries for justice and deliverance. Jesus is “God with us” by not abandoning us to our lostness and despair but showing us the way of faith victorious. He became for us the eternal Priest and King to save us from the everlasting doom of sin. In Christ, the perfect Davidic King, all God’s solemn promises of salvation find their fulfillment (*2 Cor. 1:20*).

Ellen G. White insightfully describes Christ’s unity with humanity: “By His humanity, Christ touched humanity; by His divinity, He lays hold upon the throne of God. As the Son of man, He gave us an example of obedience; as the Son of God, He gives us power to obey. It was Christ who from the bush on Mount Horeb spoke to Moses saying, ‘I AM THAT I AM. . . . Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.’ Ex. 3:14. This was the pledge of Israel’s deliverance. So when He came ‘in the likeness of men,’ He declared Himself the I AM. The Child of Bethlehem, the meek and lowly Saviour, is God ‘manifest in the flesh.’ 1 Tim. 3:16. And to us He says: ‘I AM the Good Shepherd.’ ‘I AM the living Bread.’ ‘I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life.’ ‘All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.’ John 10:11; 6:51; 14:6; Matt. 28:18. I AM the assurance of every promise. I AM; be not afraid.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 24, 25.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How has God demonstrated His unwavering faithfulness to His covenant despite the people’s unfaithfulness? What reassurance does

that bring to God's struggling children today?

- 2 How does Christ's unique and superior priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek strengthen the certainty of salvation for God's people?**
- 3 The Gospels show that many Messianic promises in the Psalms were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. How does this demonstrate the veracity of God's Word? Why must we resist any and every sentiment that tends to weaken our trust in God's Word?**
- 4 What great consolation can we get from Christ's words, " 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth' " (*Matt. 28:18*)? How do we apply this promise to our own experience?**

Faithfulness Goes Far: Part 5

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

During his first few weeks in the military, Sekule was sent with a company of soldiers to work on a mountain in the former Yugoslavia. On a Friday afternoon, he received orders to shovel coal into the Sabbath hours.

“You have to shovel for 15 minutes, take a 10-minute rest, and then shovel again for 15 minutes,” the commanding officer said.

“I will shovel for 2.5 hours without stopping until the sun goes down, but then I will stop,” Sekule said.

“No one can shovel for two hours,” the officer said.

“I can,” Sekule said.

Sekule, who had learned to work hard while growing up in Montenegro, shoveled as quickly as he could. Other soldiers cautioned him to slow down.

“Why are you working so quickly?” they asked.

“I’m trying to do as much as I can to leave less work for the rest of you,” he replied. “I don’t care about myself. I just want to do the most that I can.”

His words built respect among the other soldiers. They saw that he wanted to help them. To everyone’s surprise, Sekule succeeded in shoveling the required amount of coal by sunset.

But the commanding officer didn’t seem to grasp his desire to keep the Sabbath. On another Sabbath, the officer read a list of duties to the soldiers and declared, “You will work today.”

Sekule stood tall. “Today is my Sabbath, and I can’t do any work,” he said. He knew that he might face prison if he said, “I *won’t* do any work,” so instead, he chose his words carefully and said, “I *can’t* do any work.”

“What do you mean ‘can’t’?” the officer asked.

“I’m a Seventh-day Adventist, and I can’t work on Sabbath,” Sekule said.

The officer stood tall and glared at Sekule. “Soldier, who will work in your place then?” he said.

All the other soldiers stood tall. “We will work in his place then,” they said in unison.

Sekule realized at that moment that it was important not only to be faithful to God but also to be faithful to people. Jesus said, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (*Mark 12:30, 31; NKJV*). Sekule saw that if he treated others fairly, they also would treat him fairly.

SEKULE SEKULIĆ is an affluent entrepreneur and faithful Seventh-day Adventist in Montenegro. Read more of his story next week. Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the good news of Jesus’ soon coming in Montenegro 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 10 *March 2–8

Lessons of the Past



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 78, Psalm 105, Gal. 3:29, Psalm 106, Psalm 80, Num. 6:22–27, Psalm 135.*

Memory Text: “Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done” (*Psalm 78:3, 4, NKJV*).

In numerous psalms, praise takes the form of narrating the Lord's mighty acts of salvation. These psalms are often called “salvation history psalms” or “historical psalms.” Some appeal to God's people, telling them to learn from their history, particularly from their mistakes and the mistakes of their ancestors. Certain historical psalms contain a predominant hymnal note that highlights God's past wonderful deeds on behalf of God's people and that strengthen their trust in the Lord, who is able and faithful to deliver them from their present hardships.

The special appeal of the historical psalms is that they help us to see our lives as part of the history of God's people and to claim that past as our own.

As we have been adopted into the family of the historic people of God through Christ (*Rom. 8:15; Rom. 9:24–26; Gal. 4:6, 7*), the historical heritage of the ancient people of Israel is indeed the account of our spiritual ancestry. Therefore, we can and should learn from their past, which is ours, as well.

The final goal is to realize that each generation of God's people plays a small but significant part in the grand historical unfolding of God's sovereign purposes in the great controversy.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 9.*

SUNDAY *March 3*

The Lord's Unstoppable Faithfulness

Read Psalm 78. What three key historical epochs are highlighted in this psalm? What recurring lessons does Asaph draw from each period?

The reviews of Israel's past highlight God's faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness. They also should teach coming generations not to repeat their ancestors' mistakes but to trust God and to remain faithful to His covenant. The psalmist uses history as a parable (*Ps. 78:2*), which means that the people should deeply ponder the psalm's message and search for the meaning for themselves. Psalm 78:2 is a prophetic description of Jesus' method of teaching in parables (*Matt. 13:34, 35*).

The psalm also reflects on the time of the Exodus (*Ps. 78:9–54*), the settlement in Canaan (*Ps. 78:55–64*), and the time of David (*Ps. 78:65–72*). It demonstrates the Lord's glorious deeds and the consequences of the people's breaking of their covenant with God. Israel's history recounts many forms of the people's disloyalty to God, especially their idolatry (*Ps. 78:58*).

The psalmist, however, stresses the root of the Israelites' unfaithfulness: they forgot what God had done for them, did not trust God, put God to the test (*Ps. 78:18, 41, 56*), rebelled against Him, and failed to keep His law, His covenant, and His testimonies (*Ps. 78:10, 37, 56*). By stressing these specific forms of disloyalty, the psalmist implies that the rejection of Israel in history has resulted from one core sin, namely, the people's failure to trust the Lord (*Ps. 78:7, 8*).

When reading the psalm, one is overwhelmed with the people's constant

stubbornness and spiritual blindness in contrast to the Lord's boundless patience and grace. How was each new generation so slow to learn?

Before we get overly judgmental of past generations, we should consider ourselves. Aren't we, also, forgetful of God's past wonders and neglectful of His covenantal requirements? The psalm does not encourage people to rely on their own deeds. Instead, Psalm 78 shows the futility of human will unless it is grounded in constant awareness of God's faithfulness and an acceptance of His grace. The unsuccessful battles of God's people (*Ps. 78:9, 62–64*) elucidate the psalm's lesson that human efforts apart from faithfulness to God are doomed to end in failure.

What lessons have you learned, or should have learned, from your past mistakes?

MONDAY *March 4*

Remembering History and the Praise of God

Read Psalm 105. What historical events and their lessons are highlighted in this psalm?

Psalm 105 recalls key events that shaped the covenantal relationship between the Lord and His people Israel. It focuses on God's covenant with Abraham to give the Promised Land to him and his descendants, and how this promise, confirmed to Isaac and Jacob, was providentially fulfilled through Joseph, Moses, and Aaron, and in the time of the conquest of Canaan. The psalm gives hope to God's people in all generations because God's marvelous works in the past guarantee God's unchanging love to His people in all times (*Ps. 105:1–5, 7, 8*).

Psalm 105 resembles Psalm 78 (see yesterday's study) in highlighting God's faithfulness to His people in history, and it does so in order to glorify God and to inspire faithfulness. However, unlike Psalm 78, Psalm 105 does not mention the people's past mistakes. This psalm has a different purpose.

Instead, history is retold in Psalm 105 through the lives of Israel's greatest patriarchs, showing God's providential leading and the patriarchs' patient endurance of hardships. The patriarchs' perseverance and loyalty to God were richly rewarded. Thus, Psalm 105 invites people to emulate the patriarchs' faith and trustingly wait on God's deliverance in their time.

Psalm 105 possesses a hymnal note (*Ps. 105:1–7*), showing that in order to truly praise God, God's people need to know the facts of their history.

History provides both validation for our faith and countless reasons for praising God.

The worshipers are addressed as the seed of Abraham and children of Jacob (*Ps. 105:6*), thereby deeming them to be the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham to make of him a great nation (*Gen. 15:3–6*). The psalmist underscores the continuity between the patriarchs and the subsequent generations of God's people. The psalmist stresses that "His judgments are in *all the earth*" (*Ps. 105:7, NKJV*; emphasis supplied), thereby admonishing the worshipers not to forget that "our God" is also the sovereign Lord of the whole world and that His loving-kindness extends to all peoples (*Ps. 96:1, Ps. 97:1*). It is, clearly, a call to faithfulness to every generation of believers.

How should we, as Seventh-day Adventists, see ourselves in this line of people, from Abraham on? (See *Galatians 3:29*.) What lessons should we learn from this history?

TUESDAY *March 5*

Remembering History and Repentance

Read Psalm 106. What historical events and their lessons are highlighted in this psalm?

Psalm 106 also evokes the major events in Israel's history, including the Exodus, sojourn in the wilderness, and life in Canaan. It stresses the heinous sins of the fathers that culminated in the generation that was carried into exile. Thus, the psalm almost certainly was written when the nation was in Babylon, or after they had returned home, and the psalmist, inspired by the Holy Spirit, recounted for God's people these historical incidents and the lessons that the people should have learned from them.

This psalm, too, as the others, points to God's faithfulness to His covenant of grace, by which He saved His people in the past (*Ps. 106:45*). It expresses hope that God will again show favor to His repentant people and gather them from among the nations (*Ps. 106:47*). The plea for present deliverance is not some wishful thinking but a prayer of faith based on the assurance of God's past deliverances (*Ps. 106:1–3*) and the unfailing character of God's faithfulness to His covenant with His people.

The recollection of Israel's historical failures in Psalm 106 is an integral part of the people's confession of their sins and acknowledgment that they are not better than their forefathers. The present generation admits that it is even worse than its ancestors because it knew the consequences of the past

generations' iniquities and how God exercised His great patience and grace in saving them, even though they had deliberately walked in wicked ways in the past. If this were true for them, think about how much more so for us, today, who have the revelation of God's character and saving grace as revealed in Jesus and the Cross.

The good news of Psalm 106 is that God's steadfast love always prevails over the people's sins (*Ps. 106:8–10, 30, 43–46*). The key role of Moses and Phinehas in turning away God's wrath points to the significance of Christ's intercession on behalf of believers. Only personal experience of God's grace can transform a past story into *our* story.

Psalm 106:13 reads: “They soon forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel” (NKJV). Why is that so easy for us to do in our own lives, as well?

WEDNESDAY March 6

The Parable of the Lord's Vine

Read Psalm 80. How are God's people portrayed in this psalm, and what great hope do they plead for?

Israel is portrayed as a vineyard that God uprooted from Egypt, the land of oppression, and transported to the Promised Land of abundance. The image of a vineyard conveys God's election of Israel and His providential care (*read also Gen. 49:11, 12, 22; and Deut. 7:7–11*).

However, in Psalm 80, God's vineyard is under His wrath (*Ps. 80:12*). The prophets announce the vineyard's destruction as the sign of God's judgment because the vine has turned bad (*Isa. 5:1–7, Jer. 2:21*).

However, Psalm 80 does not ponder over the reasons for divine judgment. Given the depths of God's grace, the psalmist is perplexed that God can withhold His presence from His people for such an extended time. The tension between God's wrath and judgment, on the one hand, and God's grace and forgiveness, on the other, causes the psalmist to fear that divine wrath may prevail and consume the people completely (*Ps. 80:16*).

Read Numbers 6:22–27. How is this blessing used by Psalm 80?

The psalm's refrain evokes Aaron's promise of God's perpetual blessing of His people (*Num. 6:22–27*) and highlights the hope that God's grace will triumph over the causes of the people's misery: "Restore us, O God; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!" (*Ps. 80:3, NKJV; see also Ps. 80:7, 19, NKJV*).

The Hebrew word for "restore" here comes from a common word that means to "return," and it is used again and again in the Bible with God calling His people, who have wandered away, to return to Him. It is closely linked to the idea of repentance, of turning away from sin and back to God. " ' "Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart" ' " (*Jer. 24:7, NKJV*).

How have you experienced for yourself repentance as a return to God?

THURSDAY March 7

The Lord's Supremacy in History

Read Psalm 135. What historical events are highlighted in the psalm? What lessons does the psalmist draw from them?

Psalm 135 summons God's people to praise the Lord for His goodness and faithfulness demonstrated in Creation (*Ps. 135:6, 7*) and in Israel's salvation history in the time of the Exodus (*Ps. 135:8, 9*) and in the conquering of the Promised Land (*Ps. 135:10–12*).

The Lord demonstrated His grace by choosing the people of Israel as His special treasure (*Ps. 135:4*). “Special treasure” conveys the distinctive covenantal relationship between the Lord and His people (*Deut. 7:6–11; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10*). The choosing of Israel was based on the Lord's sovereign will, and thus, Israel has no ground to feel superior over the other peoples. Psalm 135:6, 7 demonstrates that the Lord's sovereign purposes for the world did not begin with Israel but with the Creation. Therefore, Israel should humbly fulfill its assigned role in God's salvific purposes for the entire world.

The recounting of God's great deeds on behalf of His people (*Ps. 135:8–13*) culminates in the promise that God will “judge” His people and have compassion on them (*Ps. 135:14*). The judgment here is God's vindication of the oppressed and the destitute (*Ps. 9:4, Ps. 7:8, Ps. 54:1, Dan. 7:22*). The promise is that the Lord will uphold His people's cause and defend them (*Deut. 32:36*). Thus, Psalm 135 aims to inspire God's people to trust in the

Lord and to remain faithful to their covenant with Him.

The Lord's faithfulness to His people leads the psalmist to affirm the nothingness of idols and to the unique supremacy of the Lord in the world (*Ps. 135:15–18*). Reliance on idols renders their worshipers as hopeless and powerless as their idols are (*Ps. 135:18*). The psalm demonstrates that God is to be praised as both Creator and Savior of His people. This is wonderfully conveyed in the two complementary versions of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue (*Exod. 20:8–11, Deut. 5:12–15*). Because God's power in creation and history is unparalleled in the world, God's people should always rely on Him and worship Him alone. As our Creator and our Redeemer, He alone should be worshiped, and worship of anything else, or anyone else, is idolatry.

How can we make sure that we don't have idols in our own lives? Why might idolatry be easier to do than we realize?

FRIDAY March 8

Further Thought: Read Acts 7 and Hebrews 11. What does the New Testament say is the ultimate goal of God's sovereign leading of His people in history?

The historical psalms are a powerful witness to God's fidelity to His people. Each event in the history of God's people was a providential step leading toward the final fulfillment of the divine promise of the world's Savior in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Even the trials, which often perplexed God's people and made them think that God had abandoned them, were under God's sovereign control and part of His providence because God is the supreme Lord of history. The psalmist skillfully presents the truth that even the people's disloyalty cannot prevent God from keeping faith to His people and fulfilling His promises. However, the unrepentant individuals and groups were excluded from the covenantal blessings, and their infamous end serves as a lasting warning of how life without or opposed to God destroys people.

The Psalms encourage God's children in all times to hope in the Lord and remain faithful to Him. "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 196.

For God's people to go forward fearlessly, they need to know the facts of their history. Ellen G. White advises believers to read Psalms 105 and 106 "at least once every week."—*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 98.

The history of God's people demonstrates that no promise that God has made in His Word will be left unfulfilled. This includes both divine promises of present individual care and future promises of Christ's second coming, which will establish God's kingdom of justice and peace on the new earth.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** What are the blessings of remembering God's faithful leading of His people in history? What are the consequences of forgetting or ignoring the lessons of the past? How can we apply that same principle to us, as a church called to do the same thing that ancient Israel had been called to do?
- 2** How do the Psalms encourage us to recognize God's providential care in our life and to exercise patience and trust in God's sovereign ways, even when it's not easy to understand why things are happening as they are?
- 3** How can we make the study of the history of God's people more prominent in our personal and communal worship services? How can we be more intentional in telling our children about the more recent history of God's people?

INSIDE *Story*

No Work, No Food: Part 6

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

After Sekule refused to work for several Sabbaths, his commanding military officer began to understand that he could not compel the young soldier to violate his conscience.

“So, you can’t work on the Sabbath in the army?” the officer said.

“That’s right. I can’t work on the Sabbath,” Sekule said.

“From Friday evening to Saturday evening?”

“Yes, I can’t work.”

“Then you can’t eat during those 24 hours.”

“Why can’t I eat?”

“If you’re not working, you don’t need to eat. Eating is working. Also, some of the food is prepared on your Sabbath, so you shouldn’t eat it.”

Sekule was eating only bread and drinking tea because the other military rations contained lard. But he agreed not to eat bread and drink tea that was prepared on the Sabbath. As a recently baptized Seventh-day Adventist, he wasn’t sure that food prepared on the Sabbath was off-limits. But he needed to give an answer that met the officer’s expectations. If he had refused to work but demanded bread and tea, the officer would think that he was being unfaithful to God.

Several months passed, and the military cooks began to cook one meal a week without lard. It was the only meal that Sekule could eat. But it was prepared and served only on the Sabbath.

Sekule prayed, “God, please, could You change the day from Sabbath to Sunday? Would You do that for me?”

He prayed for a month, and the lard-free meal was moved to Sunday.

Sunday happened to be a recreational day for the soldiers, a time when

they could relax by playing soccer, basketball, and other sports. Sekule wished that the recreational day was on the Sabbath. It would be easier for him to refuse to play soccer than to refuse to work every Sabbath.

He prayed again. “I’m sorry, but could I ask You one more thing? Could You move the recreational day from Sunday to Sabbath so I don’t need to explain every Sabbath why I can’t work?”

A week after the lard-free meal was changed to Sunday, the recreational day suddenly was moved to Saturday.

SEKULE SEKULIĆ is an affluent entrepreneur and faithful Seventh-day Adventist in Montenegro. Read more of his story next week. Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the good news of Jesus’ soon coming in Montenegro 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 11 *March 9–15

Longing for God in Zion



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 84; Rev. 21:3; Psalm 122; Psalm 87; Gal. 3:28, 29; Matt. 28:18–20; Psalm 46; Psalm 125.*

Memory Text: “My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (*Psalm 84:2, NKJV*).

The songs of Zion are joyous hymns that magnify the beauty of Zion and the sovereignty of the Lord, who reigns from His holy mountain. These psalms often praise the merits of the Lord's house and express a love for the sanctuary that can be found in other psalms, as well. Many of these psalms were composed by the sons of Korah, who had firsthand experience of the blessedness of the Lord's house as the temple musicians (*1 Chron. 6:31–38*) and keepers of the temple gates (*1 Chron. 9:19*).

What makes Zion the source of hope and joy? Zion represented God's living presence among His people. As the people of Israel are God's chosen people (*Deut. 7:6*), so Zion is God's chosen mountain (*Ps. 78:68, Ps. 87:2*). God reigns from Zion (*Ps. 99:1, 2*) and founded His temple on Zion, as well

(Ps. 87:1). Thus, Zion is a place of divine blessings and refuge. Zion is often referred to in parallel, or even interchangeably with, Jerusalem and the sanctuary, the center of God's work of salvation for the ancient world.

The blessings of Zion overflow to the ends of the earth because the Lord's person and grace exceed the boundaries of any holy place. Zion is the joy of all the earth (Ps. 48:2), affirming that the whole earth belongs to God.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 16.*

SUNDAY *March 10*

A Day in Your Courts Is Better Than a Thousand

Read Psalm 84:1–4. Why does the psalmist long to dwell in the sanctuary?

The psalmist “longs” and “faints” to make the sanctuary his permanent abode so that he can be near God forever (*Ps. 84:1, 2*). God’s living presence (*Ps. 84:2*) makes the sanctuary a unique place. In the sanctuary, worshipers can “behold the beauty of the LORD” (*Ps. 27:4, NKJV; also, see Ps. 63:2*) and be “satisfied with the goodness of [His] house” (*Ps. 65:4, NKJV*). In Psalm 84, unparalleled happiness is achieved in relationship with God, which consists of praising Him (*Ps. 84:4*), finding strength in Him (*Ps. 84:5*), and trusting Him (*Ps. 84:12*). The sanctuary is the place where such a relationship is nourished through worship and fellowship with fellow believers. The living presence of God in the sanctuary gives the worshipers a glimpse of God’s glorious kingdom and a taste of eternal life.

Read Psalm 84:5–12. Who else can be blessed by the sanctuary?

God's blessings are described as radiating from the sanctuary, bestowed first on those who serve in the sanctuary (*Ps. 84:4*), then on the pilgrims on their way to the sanctuary (*Ps. 84:5–10*), and finally reaching as far as the ends of the earth. The expectation of meeting God in the sanctuary strengthens the faith of the pilgrims (*Ps. 84:7*). Whereas the strength of the ordinary traveler weakens under the burden of the tiresome journey, with the pilgrims to the sanctuary, their strength increases the nearer they come to the sanctuary.

Even when physically removed from the sanctuary, God's children continue to bear a stamp of God's sanctuary by living a worthy life (*Ps. 84:11*), which characterizes the righteous who enter the Lord's sanctuary (*Ps. 15:1, 2*). The Lord is called "a sun," showing that the blessings from the sanctuary, like the sunrays, extend to the ends of the earth (*Ps. 84:11*). Thus, those who abide with God through faith receive His grace, regardless of the place where they are.

Read Revelation 21:3. What hope reflected in the earthly sanctuary is revealed here to us? How do we now even begin to imagine what this experience will be like?

MONDAY *March 11*

Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem

Read Psalm 122:1–5. What are the sentiments of the worshipers upon their arrival to Jerusalem? What do they hope to find in Jerusalem?

Psalm 122 expresses the pilgrims' excitement upon their arrival at Jerusalem. The pilgrimages to Jerusalem were joyful occasions when God's people joined together three times during the year to commemorate God's goodness toward them in the past and present (*Deut. 16:16*). Jerusalem was the center of the nation's life because it contained "the Testimony of Israel" (*Ps. 122:4, NKJV*) and the thrones for judgment (*Ps. 122:5*). "The Testimony of Israel" refers to the sanctuary that was at times called "the tabernacle of the Testimony" (*Num. 1:50, NKJV*) and contained the "ark of the Testimony" (*Exod. 25:22, NKJV*). The thrones set for judgment depict the judicial system in Jerusalem (*2 Sam. 8:15*). Pilgrimage was thus the time when one could seek and obtain justice. Faithfulness to God and administering justice to people were never to be separated.

Read Psalm 122:6–9. What is the main prayer of God's people?

Praying for the peace of Jerusalem invokes God's blessings upon the city

and its inhabitants, and it unites the worshipers, causing peace to spread among them (*Ps. 122:8*). Jerusalem could be the city of peace only if peace existed between God and His people, and among God's children themselves. Thus, prayer for the peace of Jerusalem conveys an appeal to God's people to live in peace with God and one another. In Jerusalem's peace, the people will prosper (*Ps. 147:12–14*).

The psalm teaches us that the prayer for the well-being of the community of faith should be the main subject of the prayers of God's children because only the strong and united people of God can proclaim the good tidings of God's peace and salvation to the world (*John 13:34, 35*).

Praying for the peace of Jerusalem is still a privilege and responsibility of the believers because it keeps alive the hope in the end-time coming of God's kingdom of peace, which will embrace not only the city of Jerusalem but the whole world (*Isa. 52:7; Isa. 66:12, 13; Revelation 21, 22*).

What are practical ways that we can strive for harmony among us as a people now?

TUESDAY March 12

Zion—The Home of All Nations

Read Psalm 87:1, 2. What makes Zion such an esteemed place?

Psalm 87 is a hymn celebrating Zion as God's specially chosen and beloved city. The foundation of God's temple is on Mount Zion (*Ps.* 2:6, *Ps.* 15:1). At the end of time, Zion will rise above all mountains, signifying the Lord's sovereign supremacy over the whole world (*Ps.* 99:2, *Isa.* 2:2, *Mic.* 4:1). Psalm 87 refers to Zion as "mountains" to highlight its majesty (*Ps.* 133:3). God loves the gates of Zion "more than all the dwellings of Jacob" (*Ps.* 87:2, *NKJV*), expressing the superiority of Zion over all other places in Israel that were special gathering places of God's people in the past, such as Shiloh and Bethel. Thus, the psalm affirms that true worship of God is in His chosen place and in His prescribed way.

Read Psalm 87:3–7. What are the glorious things that are spoken of Zion?

The glory of Zion draws all the nations to God, and so, the borders of God's kingdom are extended to include the whole world. Notice that God does not treat the other nations as second-level citizens, even if Zion is

portrayed as the spiritual birthplace of all peoples who accept the Lord as their Savior.

The registering of individuals was done according to their birthplace (*Neh. 7:5, Luke 2:1–3*). Three times the psalm states that the nations are born in Zion, meaning that the Lord provides them with a new identity and grants them all the privileges of lawfully born children of Zion (*Ps. 87:4–6*).

Psalm 87 points to salvation of both the Jews and the Gentiles and their being united in one church through Christ's redeeming ministry (*Rom. 3:22; Rom. 10:12; Gal. 3:28, 29; Col. 3:11*). The psalm's portrayal of the prosperity of Zion is reminiscent of Daniel's vision of God's kingdom becoming an enormous mountain that fills the whole earth (*Dan. 2:34, 35, 44, 45*) and of Jesus' parable about God's kingdom growing into a huge tree that hosts the birds of the air (*Matt. 13:32*).

How does Zion's readiness to adopt all people find its fulfillment in the church's Great Commission to preach the gospel to every nation (*Matt. 28:18–20*)? How does this idea fit in with our call to preach the three angels' messages?

WEDNESDAY March 13

Safety and Peace of Zion

Read Psalm 46:1–7. How is the world poetically depicted here?

This psalm gives a vivid description of the world in turmoil, and it is portrayed with the images of natural disasters of unprecedented intensity (*Ps.* 46:2, 3). The image of disturbed waters often depicts the rebellious nations and various problems that the wicked cause in the world (*Ps.* 93:3, 4; *Ps.* 124:2–5). Likewise, in Psalm 46 the images of natural calamities depict the world controlled by nations waging wars (*Ps.* 46:6).

It is clearly a world without the knowledge of God because God is in the midst of His people, and where God dwells, peace abounds (*Ps.* 46:4, 5). Yet, although the world rejects Him, God does not abandon the world. God is present in the world by being among His people. In other words, no matter how bad things appear, God's presence is here, in the world, and we can draw personal hope and encouragement from knowing this foundational truth.

The Lord, who is the perfect refuge, is the Source of Zion's lasting peace and security. The word that highlights the security of Zion is "though" in Psalm 46:3. Though the world is in turmoil, the people of God are safe. This shows that peace is not the result of total absence of trials but God's gift to His trusting children. Unreserved trust in God can render God's child peaceful and secure in the middle of the storm (*Matt.* 8:23–27). The question that poses itself is: Will God leave the world to its destructive choices and actions forever?

Read Psalm 46:6–11. What is God’s response to violence and destruction in the world?

God responds with such a force of displeasure that His word, which had created the earth, now causes the earth to melt (*Ps. 46:6*). Yet, the melting does not end in destruction but renewal. Notice that God extends His peace from Zion to the ends of the earth. God will make wars cease and extinguish the tools of destruction, which the wicked nations used to bring oppression into the world (*Ps. 46:9*). This is the great hope that Christians have, which will occur at the second coming of Jesus.

How do we learn to have peace and to trust God amid a world that, indeed, has so much turmoil?

THURSDAY *March 14*

Immovable Like Mount Zion

Read Psalm 125:1, 2. **How are those who trust God portrayed here?**

Those who trust in the Lord are compared to Mount Zion, the symbol of steadfastness and strength. The magnificent view of the mountains surrounding the city of Jerusalem inspired the psalmist to acknowledge the certainty of divine protection (*Ps. 5:12, Ps. 32:7, 10*). Unlike the mountains ruled by the wicked, which are being tossed into the seas (*Ps. 46:2*), the impressive durability of the mountain upon which Jerusalem was built inspires profound trust. The confidence in God's protection becomes even bolder in the face of the painful reality in which evil seems to prevail so often. Yet, even amid that evil, God's people can have hope.

Read Psalm 125:3–5. **How are the righteous tempted? What is the lesson for us?**

God's children can be discouraged by the success of the wicked and, perhaps, tempted to follow their ways (*Ps. 73:2–13, Ps. 94:3*). The utmost stability of Mount Zion cannot secure those who depart from the Lord. The people are still given freedom to "put forth their hands unto iniquity" (*Ps.*

125:3) and “turn aside unto their crooked ways” (*Ps. 125:5*). The Lord is just and will judge the individuals who remain in rebellion along with other unrepentant sinners.

Here is the call for God’s people to remain immovable in faith and trust in the Lord, just as Mount Zion is their immovable refuge. That is, even when we don’t understand things, we can still trust in the goodness of God.

“The entrance of sin into the world, the incarnation of Christ, regeneration, the resurrection, and many other subjects presented in the Bible, are mysteries too deep for the human mind to explain, or even fully to comprehend. But we have no reason to doubt God’s word because we cannot understand the mysteries of His providence. . . . Everywhere are wonders beyond our ken. Should we then be surprised to find that in the spiritual world also there are mysteries that we cannot fathom? The difficulty lies solely in the weakness and narrowness of the human mind. God has given us in the Scriptures sufficient evidence of their divine character, and we are not to doubt His word because we cannot understand all the mysteries of His providence.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 106, 107.

FRIDAY *March 15*

Further Thought: Contemplate the message of Isaiah 40 and Isaiah 51:1–16.

The songs of Zion make an absolute commitment to staying mindful of Zion and the living hope in God's sovereign reign that it represents. While many blessings of God's sanctuary are experienced in this life, the hope in the fullness of life and joy in Zion is still in the future. Many of God's children long for the heavenly Zion with tears (*Ps. 137:1*). To remember Zion implies not merely an occasional thought but also a deliberate mindfulness and decision to live in accordance with that living memory (*Exod. 13:3, Exod. 20:8*).

Therefore, singing the songs of Zion carries a passionate resolve to keep alive the hope in the restoration of God's kingdom on the new earth (*Rev. 21:1–5*). "There, immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. There is no cruel, deceiving foe to tempt to forgetfulness of God. Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 677.

A commitment not to forget Zion is an implicit pledge of the Lord's pilgrims that they will never accept this world as their homeland but await the new heavens and the new earth.

Thus, the psalms of Zion can be sung by believers of all generations who long to live in the New Jerusalem (*Rev. 3:12*). The songs of Zion encourage us to anticipate the future world with hope, but they also oblige us to be agents of God's grace in this present world.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** How do we take the spiritual and theological principles that centered on God's people in Zion, a literal place in Jerusalem, and apply them to the church and its mission to the world?
- 2** How can believers abide in God's sanctuary today? (*John 1:14–18, Heb. 12:22–24*).
- 3** How will Zion become the city of all nations as envisioned in Psalm 87? (*Rom. 5:10, Eph. 2:11–16, Col. 1:19–23*).
- 4** How do you answer the person who points to the reality of the wicked prospering in this world while many “good” people suffer? What do you say? Why is it important to acknowledge that we don't have full answers for everything here now?

INSIDE *Story*

Skin and Bones: Part 7

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Returning to the barracks after a short stint of shoveling coal on a mountain, Sekule informed his commander that he would not bear arms, even in the ongoing Bosnian War.

“I don’t want to shoot people,” he said.

“You must take a weapon,” the commander insisted. “Otherwise, you will have to serve two years instead of one.” Noncombatants were required to serve two years rather than one in the army.

“I don’t care,” Sekule said. “I won’t carry a weapon.”

The commander sent Sekule to an intelligence officer. Only soldiers who were in deep trouble were sent to the officer. He could imprison soldiers.

Sekule explained his position to the officer.

“Fine,” the officer said. “Take a gun and, if you are sent to the front, give it back. That way you will serve only one year instead of two.”

“What do you mean?” Sekule said.

“Agree to carry a gun during training, but the training that you will receive will be on teleprinters instead of the shooting range,” the officer said.

Sekule agreed. He was assigned to office work, helping run military communications by typing on a teleprinter.

The Sabbath turned out to be a bigger challenge than guns for Sekule. Because of the war, Sekule needed to be trained quickly to work on a teleprinter. But he refused to attend training sessions on Sabbath.

Food, also, was a challenge. Military rations were prepared with lard. Sekule’s parents refused to send money for food because they hoped he would change his diet.

Sekule prayed, “Please bless me like You blessed Daniel. He decided not

to eat unclean food, and I want to do the same.”

Sekule’s commander didn’t know what to do.

“You won’t work on Saturday?” he asked.

“No,” Sekule said.

“Do you have any suggestions about what we can do?”

“No.”

“You won’t eat meat?”

“No.”

“Do you have any suggestions about what we can do?”

“No.”

The only thing Sekule could eat was bread and tea. In four months, he lost 50 pounds (23 kilograms), dropping to 137 pounds (85 kilograms). He was skin and bones.

SEKULE SEKULIĆ is an affluent entrepreneur and faithful Seventh-day Adventist in Montenegro. Read more of his story next week. Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the good news of Jesus’ soon coming in Montenegro 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 12 *March 16–22

Worship That Never Ends



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 134; Isa. 42:10–12; Rev. 14:3; Psalm 15; Ps. 101:1–3; Psalm 96; Rev. 14:6–12; John 4:23, 24.*

Memory Text: “I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being” (*Psalm 104:33, NKJV*).

As our experience of God's grace and power increases, we are prompted to ask with the psalmist: “What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me?” (*Ps. 116:12, NKJV*). The inevitable reply is to devote one's life to being faithful to God.

In the Psalms, Israel is not simply a nation but “the great assembly” (*Ps. 22:22, 25, NKJV; Ps. 35:18*). This reveals Israel's primary calling to praise God and to bear witness about Him to other nations because the Lord wants all the world to join His people in worship. The Lord's people are identified with the righteous, who worship the Lord and whose hope is in Him and in His love.

Praising the Lord in the congregation is perceived as ideal worship. This does not mean that the prayer and praise of the individual in Israel assume a secondary meaning. By contrast, the individual's worship of God feeds the

communal worship with renewed praise (*Ps. 22:22, 25*) while in turn individual worship develops its fullest potential in close relationship with the community. The worshiping community also is called the “assembly of the upright” (*Ps. 111:1*). The upright know God (*Ps. 36:10*) and are known by God (*Ps. 37:18*), and this experience permeates every aspect of their existence.

** Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 23.*

SUNDAY *March 17*

Lift Up Your Hands in the Sanctuary

Read Psalm 134. Where is the worship offered here? What is the outcome of the worship of the Lord?

Psalm 134 recalls the Aaronic priestly blessing in Numbers 6:24–26 (*also Ps. 67:1*) and highlights blessing as the underlying principle and outcome of the relationship between God and Israel. The people bless God in the sanctuary, and God blesses His people from Zion. The blessings extend to all of life because the Lord is the Creator of heaven and earth. The mention of Zion as the place of divine special blessings underlines the Lord’s covenantal bond with His people. It is thus within the covenant of grace that Israel exercises the privilege to bless the Lord and is blessed by Him.

Read Psalm 18:1; Psalm 36:1; Psalm 113:1; Psalm 134:1, 2; and Psalm 135:1, 2. How are the worshipers depicted here?

The Psalms often depict the worshipers as the servants of the Lord. “Who by night stand in the house of the LORD” (*Ps. 134:1, NKJV*) likely refers to the night guard of the Levites (*1 Chron. 9:23–27*) or to the praise that was offered to God by the Levites both day and night (*1 Chron. 9:33*).

Because the Israelites worshiped the invisible God, who could not be represented in the form of any image, the sanctuary served to reflect the glory of the Lord and provide a secure environment for sinful people to approach their holy King. This encounter is initiated by the Lord Himself and is regulated by His statutes and decrees.

“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (*1 Pet. 2:4, 5, NKJV*). What we see here, in the words of Peter, is a New Testament expression of the same ideas presented in these psalms, that of God’s people, now a holy priesthood, offering praise and thanksgiving to their Lord Jesus Christ, their Creator and Redeemer, for all the good things that He had done for them.

As New Testament believers, we, also, have a priestly role in that we are called to mediate the good news of the gospel to the world. What are the most effective ways we can do this?

MONDAY *March 18*

Sing to the Lord a New Song

Read Psalm 33:3, Psalm 40:3, Psalm 96:1, Psalm 98:1, Psalm 144:9, and Psalm 149:1. What is the common motif in these texts?

These psalms summon people to sing a “new song.” What is a “new song” here? The reason for the “new song” is the fresh recognition of the Lord’s majesty and sovereignty over the world and gratitude for His care and salvation as the Creator and Judge of the earth. Deliverance from enemies and from death, and God’s special favor toward Israel, are some of the more personal motives to sing “a new song.” While other songs also praise the Lord for His loving-kindness and wonders, the “new song” is a special song, expressing rekindled joy and promising renewed devotion to God. The new experience of divine deliverance inspires the people to acknowledge the Lord as their Creator and King. The common themes in the psalms that tell of “a new song” are trust in God, praise of His wonderful works, and deliverance from affliction, among other things.

Read Isaiah 42:10–12, Revelation 5:9, and Revelation 14:3. What can we infer about the “new song” from these biblical texts?

God's people Israel is depicted in affectionate terms as "a people near to Him [God]" (*Ps. 148:14, NKJV*), implying that of all the creation, Israel has the most special status, and thus is most obliged and privileged to praise God. The Bible thus encourages believers of all generations to sing the new song in praise of their Redeemer, which carries their unique testimony about salvation in the blood of the Lamb. A "new song" can depict a fresh song that no one has ever heard before, a song that commemorates a vivid experience of God's grace in one's life. The "new song" can also express hope, in which case the newness of the song is demonstrated in the anticipation of the unique, unprecedented experience of God's majesty in the future. True worship goes beyond sacrifices and offerings and reflects a living relationship with God that is always fresh and dynamic. In a sense, one could simply say that the "new song" is a new expression, even each day, of our love and appreciation for what God has done for us.

Dwell on God's blessings in your life. If you were to sing a new song, what would it be?

TUESDAY March 19

Lord, Who May Abide in Your Tabernacle?

Read Psalm 15. Who are the people worthy of worshiping in God's presence?

The answer given in this psalm is the summary of the requirements already given in God's law and the prophets: the ones whose actions ("works righteousness") and character ("in his heart") (*see Deut. 6:5, Mic. 6:6–8*) are a reflection of God. The sanctuary was a holy place, and everything in it, including the priests, was consecrated. Thus, holiness is a mandatory requirement for entering the presence of God. Israel's holiness was to be comprehensive, uniting worship with ethics and exercised in all aspects of life. The law was given to God's people to enable them to fulfill their greatest potential (i.e., live as a kingdom of priests). The royal priesthood includes a life of holiness in the presence of God and bringing the covenant blessings to other nations.

Read Psalm 24:3–6 and Psalm 101:1–3. What does it mean to be holy?

"A perfect heart" is the worshiper's greatest quality before God. The Hebrew *tamim*, "perfect," conveys the notion of "completeness" and

“wholeness.” A “perfect” vine is whole, undamaged, and healthy (*Ezek. 15:5*). Animals offered as sacrifices had to be *tamim*, or without blemish (*Lev. 22:21–24*). “Perfect” speech is entirely truthful (*Job 36:4*). A “perfect heart” thus is a “pure heart” (*Ps. 24:4*) or a heart of integrity (*Ps. 15:2*). It seeks God (*Ps. 24:6*) and is restored by God’s forgiveness (*Ps. 51:2–10*). A blameless life springs from the acknowledgment of God’s grace and His righteousness. Divine grace inspires and enables God’s servants to live in the fear of the Lord, which means to live in unhindered fellowship with God and in submission to His Word. A testimony of a devoted and pious life brings praise to God and not to one’s own self. Notice that most requirements in Psalm 15 are given in negative terms (*Ps. 15:3–5*). This is not about earning God’s favor but about avoiding the things that would separate us from God.

How can we make conscious choices to avoid the things that push us away from God? What are some of those things, and how can we avoid doing them?

WEDNESDAY March 20

Declare His Glory Among the Nations

Read Psalm 96. What manifold aspects of worship are mentioned in this psalm?

Worship includes singing to the Lord (*Ps. 96:1, 2*), praising His name (*Ps. 96:2*), proclaiming His goodness and greatness (*Ps. 96:3, 4*), and bringing gifts to His temple (*Ps. 96:8*). In addition to these familiar traits of worship, Psalm 96 highlights one not so obvious aspect of worship—the evangelical dimension in proclaiming the Lord’s kingdom to other peoples (*Ps. 96:2, 3, 10*).

Yet, singing, praising, bringing gifts, and proclaiming the gospel are not separate actions but are varied expressions of worship. The proclamation of God’s salvation to all nations gives substance to praise and content to worship. Notice how the reasons for worship coincide with the message proclaimed to other peoples: “for the LORD is great” (*Ps. 96:4*), “for all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens” (*Ps. 96:5, NKJV*), “ ‘the LORD reigns’ ” (*Ps. 96:10, NKJV*), and “for He is coming to judge the earth” (*Ps. 96:13, NKJV*). Thus, the goal of evangelism is to unite other peoples with God’s people, and ultimately the whole creation in the worship of the Lord (*Ps. 96:11–13*).

Worship springs from the inward recognition of who the Lord is, that is, Creator, King, and Judge (*Ps. 96:5, 10, 13*). Worship thus involves remembering God’s past acts (Creation), celebrating His present wonders (God’s sustaining of the world and His present reign), and anticipating His

future deeds (end-time judgment and a new life in a new heavens and earth).

Judgment in the Psalms means restoration of the divine order of peace, justice, and well-being in a world presently burdened by injustice and suffering. Hence, the whole earth rejoices in anticipation of God's judgments (*Ps. 96:10–13, Ps. 98:4–9*). The fact that the Lord is a righteous Judge should additionally motivate people to worship Him in holiness and “tremble,” and should caution them against taking worship lightly (*Ps. 96:9*). Worship involves both immense joy and confidence (*Ps. 96:1, 2, 11–13*) and holy fear and awe (*Ps. 96:4, 9*).

The universal appeal of Psalm 96 to worship the Creator and the Judge is reflected in God's final gospel proclamation to the world, the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6–12. In many ways this psalm seems to incorporate this end-time message: creation, salvation (“everlasting gospel”), worship, and judgment. It's all there.

Compare this psalm with the three angels' messages (*Rev. 14:6–12*). In what ways does it teach the same basic truths as does this end-time message that we are to proclaim to the world?

THURSDAY March 21

When God Does Not Delight in Sacrifices

Read Psalm 40:6–8, Psalm 50:7–23, and Psalm 51:16–19. What important issue do these texts address? Why does God not delight in the sacrifices that He prescribed in His Word (*Exod. 20:24*)?

Like the prophets, the psalmists decry various misuses of worship. Their main point in these verses is not the Lord's aversion to Israel's sacrifices and festivals but the reasons for such repugnance: the fatal distance between worship and spirituality.

God is not rebuking His people for their sacrifices and burnt offerings but for their wickedness and acts of injustice that they had done in their personal lives (*Ps. 50:8, 17–21*). The Psalms are not preaching against sacrifice and worship but against *vain* sacrifice and *empty* worship, demonstrated in the unrighteousness of these worshipers.

When the unity between the outward expression of worship and the correct inner motivation for worship falls apart, rituals usually become more important in and of themselves than does the actual experience of drawing close to God. That is, the forms of worship become an end in themselves as opposed to the God whom those rituals are supposed to point to and to reveal.

Read John 4:23, 24. What point is Jesus making here that fits exactly with what the psalms for today are warning about?

Sacrifices alone are not enough. What good were these sacrifices if the hearts of those offering them were not filled with repentance, faith, and a sorrow for sin? Only when accompanied by repentance and sincere thanksgiving could the sacrifices of bulls please God as “sacrifices of righteousness” (*Ps. 51:19, see also Ps. 50:14*). Jesus, quoting Isaiah, expressed it like this: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me” (*Matt. 15:8, NKJV*). The problems the psalmists saw were the same problems that Jesus encountered with some of the people, especially the leaders, during His earthly ministry.

How can we make sure that we, as Adventists, with all this light and knowledge, don’t fall into the trap of thinking that merely knowing truth and going through the rituals of the truth is enough?

FRIDAY March 22

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “How to Pray,” pp. 39–42, in *A Call to Stand Apart*.

Central to worship is the need for repentance, true repentance: “Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. We shall not renounce sin unless we see its sinfulness; until we turn away from it in heart, there will be no real change in the life.

“There are many who fail to understand the true nature of repentance. Multitudes sorrow that they have sinned and even make an outward reformation because they fear that their wrongdoing will bring suffering upon themselves. But this is not repentance in the Bible sense. They lament the suffering rather than the sin. Such was the grief of Esau when he saw that the birthright was lost to him forever. Balaam, terrified by the angel standing in his pathway with drawn sword, acknowledged his guilt lest he should lose his life; but there was no genuine repentance for sin, no conversion of purpose, no abhorrence of evil. Judas Iscariot, after betraying his Lord, exclaimed, ‘I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.’ Matthew 27:4.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 22, 23.

“Although God dwells not in temples made with hands, yet He honors with His presence the assemblies of His people. He has promised that when they come together to seek Him, to acknowledge their sins, and to pray for one another, He will meet with them by His Spirit. But those who assemble to worship Him should put away every evil thing. Unless they worship Him in spirit and truth and in the beauty of holiness, their coming together will be of no avail. Of such the Lord declares, ‘This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoreth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me.’ Matthew 15:8, 9. Those who worship God must worship Him ‘in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.’ John 4:23.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 50.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** What is the worshiper's greatest offering to God (*Ps. 40:6–10; Rom. 12:1, 2*)?
- 2** How are individual and communal worship related? Why do we really need both? How does each one enhance the other?
- 3** Many people understand worship to pertain only to prayer, singing of hymns, and study of the Bible and spiritual literature. While these activities are essential for worship, is worship limited to them? Give some examples of other forms of worship.
- 4** Ellen G. White wrote: “His service should not be looked upon as a heart-saddening, distressing exercise. It should be a pleasure to worship the Lord and to take part in His work.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 103. How can worship of the Lord become a pleasure?

INSIDE *Story*

No Hair, but a Hat: Part 8

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Sekule learned of two other Sabbath-keepers in the military: a lieutenant preparing for baptism and an older man born in a Seventh-day Adventist home. The Bosnian War was raging, and the lieutenant tried to convince Sekule that desperate times called for desperate measures.

“This is a special time, and you have to eat what you have,” he said. “You can practice your religion after you leave the military, but now you have to eat for your health.”

Sekule decided that the lieutenant wasn’t an Adventist. He was talking like Sekule’s unbelieving parents, and Sekule didn’t want to eat meat.

Sekule longed to meet the soldier born in an Adventist home. He wanted to ask for advice about what to eat, what to do if he were sent to the front, or just to pray together. He felt so alone.

One day, someone pointed out the Adventist to Sekule in the mess hall. Sekule watched as the man sat down with a plate of pork sausages and brown beans fried in lard, removed the sausages, and ate the beans.

A struggle broke out inside Sekule. *He’s eating unclean food*, he thought. *Are you stupid? You’ve lost so much weight and you don’t have strength because you don’t want to eat anything. Look at him. He’s smart. When you leave the military, you can eat whatever you want.*

Sekule took a step toward the serving line. Then he took another step. He wasn’t hungry—he was famished after eating only bread with tea for 20 days.

A few steps away from the food, he stopped. *I won’t take it*, he thought. *If God died for me, I will be faithful to Him.*

After a few months, spring arrived, and Sekule ate budding leaves on trees. He also ate grass that he knew was edible from his childhood.

Four months into his military service, he left the barracks to eat his first

meal with a spoon. An Adventist pastor invited him to his home for a meal.

Not long after that, Sekule was sent to Serbia's capital, Belgrade, to serve under the military's top general. He was one of the best teleprinter typers in the country. His new barracks were located only a 20-minute walk away from a Seventh-day Adventist seminary. In his new role, he was allowed to leave the barracks whenever he wanted, and he ate vegetarian meals at the seminary nearly every day. Sekule believed God was rewarding his faithfulness.

Sekule enjoyed good health in the military. Never once did he fall ill. He lost only his hair. He entered the military with hair and left with none. He says it was as if God were saying, "If you are faithful to Me, I will take care of you. Yes, you will have problems. Yes, you lost your hair. But it is not a problem. I have a hat for you."

Read about SEKULE SEKULIĆ's post-military life in the third quarter 2023 Mission quarterly available at bit.ly/adultmission. Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the good news of Jesus' soon coming in Montenegro 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 13 *March 23–29

Wait on the Lord



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 27:14, Rom. 8:18–25, Psalm 131, Matt. 18:3, Psalm 126, Psalm 92, Mark 16:1–8, 2 Pet. 1:19.*

Memory Text: “Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!” (*Psalm 27:14, NKJV*).

We have reached the last week in this quarter's study of the Psalms. The spiritual journey has taken us through the experience of awe before the majestic Creator, King, and Judge; through the joys of divine deliverance, forgiveness, and salvation; through moments of surrender in grief and lament; and through the glorious promises of God's everlasting presence and the anticipation of the unending universal worship of God. The journey continues, though, as we live in the hope of the Lord's coming when our longing for God will find its ultimate fulfillment. If there is a final word that we can draw from the Psalms, it should be “wait on the LORD.”

Waiting on the Lord is not an idle and desperate biding of one's time. Instead, waiting on the Lord is an act full of trust and faith, a trust and faith

revealed in action. Waiting on the Lord transforms our gloomy evenings with the expectancy of the bright morning (*Ps. 30:5, Ps. 143:8*). It strengthens our hearts with renewed hope and peace. It motivates us to work harder, bringing in the sheaves of plentiful harvest from the Lord's mission fields (*Ps. 126:6, Matt. 9:36–38*). Waiting on the Lord will never put us to shame but will be richly rewarded because the Lord is faithful to all His promises (*Ps. 37:7–11, 18, 34; Ps. 71:1; Ps. 119:137, 138*).

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 30.*

SUNDAY March 24

The Call of Waiting

Read Psalm 27:14; Psalm 37:7, 9, 34; Psalm 39:7; Psalm 40:1; Psalm 69:6; Galatians 5:5; and Romans 8:18–25. What do these texts implore God’s people to do?

Perhaps one of the greatest stresses in life is the stress of waiting. No matter who we are, where we live, what our station in life is, we all at times must wait for things. From waiting in line in a store to waiting to hear a medical prognosis, we wait—which we don’t always like doing, do we?

What, then, about waiting for God? The notion of waiting on the Lord is found not only in the Psalms but abounds all through the Bible. The operative word in all this is *perseverance*. Perseverance is our supreme commitment of refusing to succumb to fear of disappointment that somehow God will not come through for us. God’s devoted child waits, knowing with certainty that God is faithful and those who wait on Him can trust that if we leave our situation to Him, we can be sure that He will work it out for our best, even if at the time we don’t necessarily see it that way.

Waiting on the Lord is more than just hanging on. It is a deep longing for God that is compared to intense thirst in a dry land (*Ps. 63:1*). The psalmist waits on many blessings from God, but his yearning to be brought close to his God surpasses any other desire and need in life.

As we read in Paul, in this amazing passage in Romans, God and the whole creation are waiting for the renewal of the world and the blessed meeting of God and His people at the end of time. He writes: “For the earnest

expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God” (*Rom. 8:19, NKJV*).

What an incredible promise!

Yet, while we are waiting for the ultimate salvation and reunion with God, even as “the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs” (*Rom. 8:22, NKJV*), the Lord still abides with His people now, through the Holy Spirit.

Meanwhile, we are called to bear witness (*Acts 1:4–8*) to the plan of salvation, which will culminate in a new creation. That new creation is, ultimately, what we are waiting for, the final fulfillment of our hopes as Adventist Christians, whose very name, Adventist, contains the idea of the hope that we await. We wait, but we know that it’s not in vain. Christ’s death and resurrection, at the first coming, is our surety of His second coming.

What are some things you are waiting for now from God? How do we learn to wait in faith and in trust, especially when what we are praying for hasn’t yet come?

MONDAY *March 25*

Peace of a Weaned Child

Read Psalm 131. What does this psalm teach us about our relationship with God?

God's people live in a world that afflicts the faithful, a world full of temptations and hardship for almost everyone. A refreshed conviction that he is a child of God and dependent on God for his life consoles the psalmist and brings him to confess that his pride has no value. The deceitfulness of pride is that it causes the proud to become self-centered and unable to look beyond themselves. The proud are thus blinded to the higher reality of God.

In contrast, the righteous lift their eyes to God (*Ps. 123:1, 2*). The acknowledgment of God's greatness makes them humble and free from self-seeking and vain ambition. The psalmist confesses that he does not seek "great matters" and "things too high" (*Ps. 131:1*). These expressions describe God's works in the world that are beyond human comprehension. Modern science has shown us that even the "simplest" things can be incredibly complicated and far beyond our understanding, at least for now. In fact, there's a great irony: the more we learn about the physical world, the greater the mysteries that appear before us.

Meanwhile, the metaphor in Psalm 131:2, "like a weaned child with [its] mother" (*NKJV*), is a powerful image of one who finds calmness and who is quieted in the embrace of God. It points to the loving relationship a child has with its mother at various stages in that child's young life.

Through weaning us from insubstantial ambitions and pride, God

introduces us to the nourishment of solid food, which is to “do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (*John 4:34, also Heb. 5:12–14*). The childlike trust depicted in Psalm 131 is mature faith that has been tried and tested by the hardships of life and has found God to be faithful and true to His Word.

The psalmist’s attention at the end rests on the well-being of God’s people. Ultimately, we are called to use our experience with God to strengthen His church. That is, from what we have learned, personally, of God’s faithfulness and goodness, we can share with others who, for whatever reason, still struggle with their faith. Our witness about Christ can even be within the church itself, where many need to know Him for themselves.

“ ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’ ”
(*Matt. 18:3, NKJV*). What is Jesus saying to us here? What does this idea entail?

TUESDAY March 26

Bringing in the Sheaves

Read Psalm 126. What gives strength and hope to God's people? What is being said here, in this context, that we can apply to our own lives today?

The Lord's miraculous deliverances in the past are an inexhaustible source of inspiration for God's people and their source of hope for the future. The past deliverance was so great that it could be described as a dream-come-true experience (*Isa. 29:7, 8*). Notice that the generation that praises the Lord in Psalm 126 for His past deliverance of His people from captivity (*Ps. 126:1*) is presently in captivity (*Ps. 126:4*).

Yet, the past joy and relief are relived through songs and appropriated in present experience. The new generations keep biblical history alive by counting themselves as present among those who saw the events firsthand. Thus, a living faith cherishes God's great deeds for His people in the past as something that the Lord has done for us and not simply things that the Lord did only for *them* (the past generations of believers).

In fact, the memory of the past spurs renewed hope for the present. The image of "the streams in the south" (*Ps. 126:4*) is a powerful metaphor of God's acting suddenly and powerfully on behalf of His people. The very south of Judah was an arid desert region. The streams were formed suddenly and filled with rushing waters after heavy rainfalls during the rainy season. The early and late rains played a crucial role in the success of the agricultural year (*Deut. 11:14, Deut. 28:12*). Similarly, the image of sowing in tears and

reaping in joy (*Ps. 126:5, 6*) is a powerful promise of divine leading from a difficult present to a happy future.

The end of the harvest season was the time when the ancient Hebrew pilgrimages brought the fruits of the season to God's temple in Jerusalem (*Exod. 34:22, 26*). The harvest motif provided a potent spiritual lesson to the people at that time. Just as the hard labor of sowing and caring for the fields, orchards, and vineyards is rewarded with the joy of a plentiful harvest, so the present trials of God's people will be crowned with the joy of salvation at the end of time. The image of the great harvest points to God's restoration of His kingdom on earth at Christ's second coming (*Amos 9:13–15, Matt. 9:37*). Here, too, however, the theme of waiting arises. As with the harvest, we must wait to see the fruit and results of our labor.

Dwell on some times when you clearly and unmistakably saw the Lord working in your life or in the lives of others. How can you draw hope from those experiences for whatever you might be going through now?

WEDNESDAY March 27

Waiting in God's Sabbath Rest

Read Psalm 92. What two aspects of the Sabbath day are highlighted in this song for the Sabbath day?

The praise of God for the great works of His hands (*Ps. 92:4, 5*) and the Eden-like portrayal of the righteous (*Ps. 92:12–14*) clearly point to Creation, the first aspect that the Sabbath commemorates. The psalm also magnifies the Lord for His victory over enemies as the God of justice (*Ps. 92:7–15*) and so reinforces the second Sabbath theme—redemption from evil (*Deut. 5:12–15*). Thus, Psalm 92 extols God for His past Creation and present sustaining of the world, and it points to the end-time hope in eternal divine peace and order.

The people can enjoy Sabbath rest because God is the “Most High” (*Ps. 92:1, NKJV*); His superior position on the high places gives Him an unparalleled advantage over their enemies.

Yet, although He is the Most High, the Lord readily reaches down to rescue those who call on Him. The Lord's work of creation and especially redemption of that creation should inspire people to worship God and love Him. After all, living in a fallen creation, without the hope of redemption, isn't anything to be particularly thrilled about. We love, we suffer, we die—and do so without any hope. Hence, we praise the Lord, not only as our Creator but as our Redeemer, as well.

“Fresh oil” conveys the psalmist's renewed devotion to serve God as His reconsecrated servant (*Ps. 92:10*). The anointing with oil was done for

consecration of chosen people such as priests and kings (*Exod. 40:15, 1 Sam. 10:1*). Yet, the psalmist chose an unusual Hebrew word, *balal*, to describe his anointing that does not typically depict anointing of God's servants but denotes "mixing" of oil with other parts of the sacrifice (*Exod. 29:2, NKJV; Lev. 2:4, 5*). The psalmist's unique use of *balal* implies that the psalmist wishes to present himself as a living sacrifice to the Lord and to consecrate his whole self to God (*Rom. 12:1*).

It is not surprising to find thoughts about consecration in a psalm that is dedicated to the Sabbath because the Sabbath is the sign that the Lord sanctifies His people (*Exod. 31:13*). The images of palm trees and cedars of Lebanon portray God's people growing in faith and true appreciation of God's wonderful purposes and love. The Sabbath is the sign of the Lord's eternal covenant with His people (*Ezek. 20:20*). Thus, the Sabbath rest is essential to God's people because it empowers them to trustingly wait upon the Lord to fulfill all His covenantal promises (*Heb. 4:1–10*).

Read through Psalm 92 again. What great hope is offered to us there, and how can we, even right now, take comfort in what it says?

THURSDAY *March 28*

Joy Comes in the Morning

Read Psalm 5:3, Psalm 30:5, Psalm 49:14, Psalm 59:16, Psalm 92:2, Psalm 119:147, 2 Peter 1:19, and Revelation 22:16. What time of day is symbolically portrayed as the time of divine redemption and why?

In the Psalms, morning is typically the time when God's redemption is anticipated. Morning reveals God's favor, which ends the long night of despair and trouble (*Ps. 130:5, 6*). In Psalm 143, God's deliverance will reverse the present darkness of death (*Ps. 143:3*) into the light of a new morning (*Ps. 143:8*), and from being in the pit (*Ps. 143:7*) into residing in "the land of uprightness" (*Ps. 143:10*).

Read Mark 16:1–8. What happened in the morning talked about here, and why is that so important to us?

The resurrection morning of Jesus Christ opened the way for the eternal morning of God's salvation for all who believe in His name. Jesus' disciples experienced the full strength of the promise in Psalm 30:5: "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning," when they met the resurrected Lord. It is only by God's favor and unconditional love that our weeping is transformed to joy (*Ps. 30:5, 7*).

As the morning star announces the birth of a new day, so faith heralds the new reality of eternal life in God's children (*2 Pet. 1:19*). Jesus is called the bright and morning star (*Rev. 22:16*), whom we eagerly await to establish His

kingdom in which there will be no more night, evil, and death (*Rev. 21:1–8, 25*). In the end, more than anything else, this is what we are waiting for when we talk about waiting on the Lord. And, surely, the wait is worth it.

“Over the rent sepulcher of Joseph, Christ had proclaimed in triumph, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life.’ These words could be spoken only by the Deity. All created beings live by the will and power of God. They are dependent recipients of the life of God. From the highest seraph to the humblest animate being, all are replenished from the Source of life. Only He who is one with God could say, I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again. In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 785.

Death, it has been said, has been etched in our cells at birth. Though true, at least for us fallen beings, what has the resurrection of Jesus promised us about the temporality of death? Why must we never forget just how temporal death is for us?

FRIDAY March 29

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Growing Up Into Christ,” pp. 67–75, in *Steps to Christ*.

The Psalms utter fervent appeals to wait on the Lord. “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him” (Ps. 37:7, NKJV). When waiting strikes us as burdensome, uncertain, and lonely, we should remember the disciples on the day of Jesus’ ascension to heaven (Acts 1:4–11). Jesus was taken up to heaven before their eyes, while they were left behind to wait for Him to come back on some unknown future day. Who has ever experienced a more intense yearning to receive God’s blessing now than the disciples on that day? They surely longed, “Lord, take us with You now.” Yet, they were instructed to wait for the promise of the Father and for Jesus’ return. If we think that the disciples were filled with despair and disappointment, we will be surprised. They returned to Jerusalem and did exactly what Jesus told them—they waited for the gift of the Holy Spirit and then preached the gospel to the world with power (Acts 1:12–14, Acts 2).

Our Lord’s commandment to wait on Him is an impossible one unless He has done His work in us through the Holy Spirit. No amount of human enthusiasm will ever stand up to the strain that waiting will impose upon our frail self. Only one thing will bear the strain, and that is abiding in Jesus Christ, namely, a personal relationship with Him. “Then if Christ is dwelling in our hearts, He will work in us ‘both to will and to do of His good pleasure.’ Philippians 2:13. We shall work as He worked; we shall manifest the same spirit. And thus, loving Him and abiding in Him, we shall ‘grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.’ Ephesians 4:15.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 75. As we continue to wait on the Lord, we will find peace and contentment in the Psalms. Our prayers and songs are where God’s heart and our hearts meet daily.

Discussion Questions:

1 Why is waiting significant in our spiritual life? Discuss the experiences of waiting of some biblical heroes of faith. How did waiting purify and strengthen their faith? (*Rom. 4:19–22, Hebrews 11*).

2 What is the end of our waiting? (*Ps. 37:34–40*). That is, what are we promised when all things are, finally, resolved? What hope do we find in these texts, for instance, about the justice that has so long been missing in this life?

3 Why, as far as the dead are concerned, and as far as their own experience goes (*Eccles. 9:5*), is their waiting for Jesus almost done? What hope can we take from the answer?

Waldensians in Poland

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Ryszard Jankowski couldn't get the police to leave him alone. Every time he set up a stand to sell Ellen White's *The Great Controversy* and other books in a Baltic resort town in Poland, the police showed up and demanded that he remove the stand and the books.

Then the Polish Seventh-day Adventist publishing house released a special issue of the *Signs of the Times* magazine, and church leaders sent copies to members of the Polish government. One government minister liked the issue so much that he wrote a letter asking towns across Poland to support its distribution. Ryszard took the letter and a copy of the magazine to the mayor of the resort town where he had trouble with the police.

The mayor was impressed. He knew the government minister.

"He was my university professor," he said. "Of course, you can freely distribute this magazine here."

"Can I get your permission in writing?" Ryszard asked.

The mayor wrote a letter and gave it to Ryszard.

Ryszard took the letter and again set up his book stand on the street. He placed the *Signs of the Times* magazine on the stand together with *The Great Controversy* and other books. Before long, the police appeared.

"You can't sell your books in our city," a police officer said.

"Look, I have a letter from the mayor," Ryszard said.

The police officers read the letter carefully. Then they saluted.

"OK, you can stay," one said.

But that wasn't the end of the story. Shortly afterward, a grandmother stopped by the book stand. Someone had given her *The Great Controversy* some time earlier, and she had read it to her grandson. He had liked it very

much, especially the portrayal of Waldensian young people clandestinely sharing the Word of God at the risk of their lives in the Middle Ages. The grandmother told Ryszard that her grandson wanted to be like the Waldensians. Her grandson understood that he needed to be like them—faithful to the Word of God at all costs.

“He saw your stand and your book *The Great Controversy*,” she said. “He said to me, ‘Grandma, the Waldensians are in our town.’ ”

So, the grandmother sought out Ryszard to tell him about her grandson. She later joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2017 that helped build a television studio for Hope Channel Poland. Ryszard Jankowski is the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Poland and a regular speaker on Hope Channel Poland, the local affiliate of Hope Channel International.

Join the global church in the mass promotion and distribution of The Great Controversy in 2023 and 2024. Visit greatcontroversyproject.org for details or ask your pastor.

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.

What We Believe

28 FUNDAMENTAL *Beliefs*

OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH



Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Below is an abbreviated version for your reference. A complete version can be found at www.Adventist.org/beliefs.

1. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)

2. THE TRINITY

There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. God, who is love, is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Gen. 1:26; Deut. 6:4; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 28:19; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 1:21, 22; 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2.)

3. THE FATHER

God the eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. (Gen. 1:1; Deut. 4:35; Ps. 110:1, 4; John 3:16; 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:28; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 John 4:8; Rev. 4:11.)

4. THE SON

God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly human, Jesus the Christ. (Isa. 53:4-6; Dan. 9:25-27; Luke 1:35; John 1:1-3, 14; 5:22; 10:30; 14:1-3, 9, 13; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; 2 Cor. 3:18; 5:17-19; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 2:9-18; 8:1, 2.)

5. THE HOLY SPIRIT

God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He is as much a person as are the Father and the Son. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God. (Gen. 1:1, 2; 2 Sam. 23:2; Ps. 51:11; Isa. 61:1; Luke 1:35; 4:18; John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:7-13; Acts 1:8; 5:3; 10:38; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 12:7-11; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Peter 1:21.)

6. CREATION

God has revealed in Scripture the authentic and historical account of His creative activity. He created the universe, and in a recent and literal six-day creation the Lord made "the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" and rested on the seventh day. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of the work He performed. (Gen. 1-2; 5; 11; Exod. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Isa. 45:12, 18; Acts 17:24; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; 11:3; Rev. 10:6; 14:7.)

7. THE NATURE OF HUMANITY

Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7, 15; 3; Ps. 8:4-8; 51:5, 10; 58:3; Jer. 17:9; Acts 17:24-28;

Rom. 5:12-17; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 John 3:4; 4:7, 8, 11, 20.)

8. THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. (Gen. 3; 6-8; Job 1:6-12; Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-18; Rom. 1:19-32; 3:4; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 1:14; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Peter 3:6; Rev. 12:4-9.)

9. THE LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

In Christ's life of perfect obedience to God's will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life, and the whole creation may better understand the infinite and holy love of the Creator. (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22:1; Isa. 53; John 3:16; 14:30; Rom. 1:4; 3:25; 4:25; 8:3, 4; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4, 20-22; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 19-21; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 2:15; 1 Peter 2:21, 22; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.)

10. THE EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION

In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, Substitute and Example. (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 33:11; 36:25-27; Hab. 2:4; Mark 9:23, 24; John 3:3-8, 16; 16:8; Rom. 3:21-26; 8:1-4, 14-17; 5:6-10; 10:17; 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13, 14, 26; 4:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10; Col. 1:13, 14; Titus 3:3-7; Heb. 8:7-12; 1 Peter 1:23; 2:21, 22; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rev. 13:8.)

11. GROWING IN CHRIST

By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. (1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Matt. 20:25-28; 25:31-46; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Rom. 8:38, 39; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph.

5:19, 20; 6:12-18; Phil. 3:7-14; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thess. 5:16-18, 23; Heb. 10:25; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 1 John 4:4.)

12. THE CHURCH

The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to humanity, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. (Gen. 12:1-3; Exod. 19:3-7; Matt. 16:13-20; 18:18; 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38-42; 7:38; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:22, 23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11; 5:23-27; Col. 1:17, 18; 1 Peter 2:9.)

13. THE REMNANT AND ITS MISSION

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. (Dan. 7:9-14; Isa. 1:9; 11:11; Jer. 23:3; Mic. 2:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3, 14; Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4.)

14. UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. (Ps. 133:1; Matt. 28:19, 20; John 17:20-23; Acts 17:26, 27; Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; 2 Cor. 5:16, 17; Gal. 3:27-29; Eph. 2:13-16; 4:3-6, 11-16; Col. 3:10-15.)

15. BAPTISM

By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Saviour, become His people, and are received as members by His church. (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38; 16:30-33; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12, 13.)

16. THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper is a participation in the emblems of the body and blood of Jesus as an expression of faith in Him, our Lord and Saviour. The communion service is open to all believing Christians. (Matt. 26:17-30; John 6:48-63; 13:1-17; 1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:23-30; Rev. 3:20.)

17. SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND MINISTRIES

God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts that each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people. (Acts 6:1-7; Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 27, 28; Eph. 4:8, 11-16; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.)

18. THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church, and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Her writings speak with prophetic authority and ... make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Num. 12:6; 2 Chron. 20:20; Amos 3:7; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 22:8, 9.)

19. THE LAW OF GOD

The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 28:1-14; Ps. 19:7-14; 40:7, 8; Matt. 5:17-20; 22:36-40; John 14:15; 15:7-10; Rom. 8:3, 4; Eph. 2:8-10; Heb. 8:8-10; 1 John 2:3; 5:3; Rev. 12:17; 14:12.)

20. THE SABBATH

The gracious Creator, after the six days of Creation, rested on the seventh day

and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. (Gen. 2:1-3; Exod. 20:8-11; 31:13-17; Lev. 23:32; Deut. 5:12-15; Isa. 56:5, 6; 58:13, 14; Ezek. 20:12, 20; Matt. 12:1-12; Mark 1:32; Luke 4:16; Heb. 4:1-11.)

21. STEWARDSHIP

We are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow human beings, and by returning tithe and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15; 1 Chron. 29:14; Haggai 1:3-11; Mal. 3:8-12; Matt. 23:23; Rom. 15:26, 27; 1 Cor. 9:9-14; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; 9:7.)

22. CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR

We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life. For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things that will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. (Gen. 7:2; Exod. 20:15; Lev. 11:1-47; Ps. 106:3; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 10:5; Eph. 5:1-21; Phil. 2:4; 4:8; 1 Tim. 2:9, 10; Titus 2:11, 12; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 John 2:6; 3 John 2.)

23. MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between a man and a woman who share a common faith. (Gen. 2:18-25; Exod. 20:12; Deut. 6:5-9; Prov. 22:6; Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:3-9, 12; Mark 10:11, 12; John 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 7:7, 10, 11; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:21-33; 6:1-4.)

24. CHRIST'S MINISTRY IN THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY

There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle that the Lord set up and not humans. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to

believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. At His ascension, He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the holy place of the earthly sanctuary. (Lev. 16; Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Heb. 1:3; 2:16, 17; 4:14-16; 8:1-5; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; Rev. 8:3-5; 11:19; 14:6, 7; 20:12; 14:12; 22:11, 12.)

25. THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Saviour's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-6; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:8; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 1:7; 14:14-20; 19:11-21.)

26. DEATH AND RESURRECTION

The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later. (Job 19:25-27; Ps. 146:3, 4; Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10; Dan. 12:2, 13; Isa. 25:8; John 5:28, 29; 11:11-14; Rom. 6:23; 16; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 20:1-10.)

27. THE MILLENNIUM AND THE END OF SIN

The millennium is the thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints in heaven between the first and second resurrections. During this time the wicked dead will be judged; the earth will be utterly desolate, without living human inhabitants, but occupied by Satan and his angels. At its close, Christ with His saints and the Holy City will descend from heaven to earth. The unrighteous dead will then be resurrected, and with Satan and his angels will surround the city; but fire from God will consume them and cleanse the earth. The universe will thus be freed of sin and sinners forever. (Jer. 4:23-26; Ezek. 28:18, 19; Mal. 4:1; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Rev. 20; 21:1-5.)

28. THE NEW EARTH

On the new earth, in which righteousness dwells, God will provide an eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy, and learning in His presence. For here God Himself will dwell with His people, and suffering and death will have passed away. The great controversy will be ended, and sin will be no more. All things, animate and inanimate, will declare that God is love; and He shall reign forever. Amen. (Isa. 35; 65:17-25; Matt. 5:5; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev.11:15; 21:1-7; 22:1-5.)