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**Editorial Office** 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904  
Come visit us at our Web site: <http://www.absg.adventist.org>

**Principal Contributor**

Gary Krause

**Editor**

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Lars Justinen

**Concept Design**

Dever Design

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# Agents of

Swede Ingmar Bergman told a story about a knight named Antonius Block who kneels in front of a confessional to confess his sins. He does not realize until later that he is talking to Death—a shadowy, robed character—rather than a priest. Block declares that he is seeking not faith, not suppositions, but knowledge.

“I want,” he says, “God to stretch out His hand toward me, reveal Himself, and speak to me.”

Death replies that perhaps there is no God, that there is only nothing.

“Then,” says Block, “life is an outrageous horror. No one can live in the face of death, knowing that all is nothingness.”

Today millions live in the face of such nothingness. They have no faith in God, no hope in anything past the world around them. No wonder,

then, that so many focus on the comforts of this life, seeking solace in pleasure and the various worldly distractions. The Christian faith—which calls upon us to “fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18, NIV)—is foreign to them.

**As Christians, we are God’s agents to bring people hope, to show that there is a God who loves and cares for them.**

As Christians, we are God’s agents to bring these people hope, to show that there is a God who loves and cares for them, to show that although life has many outrageous horrors, it is not ultimately an outrageous horror but that God will finally make all things right.

The Bible gives us many inspirational stories of God’s agents of hope. In this quarter’s lessons we will focus on some of these outstanding missionaries; on whom they were and what they did in seeking to bring others to a saving knowledge of the Lord of salvation.

Ellen G. White tells the story of a man nearly chilled to death in deep snow. He was about to give up struggling for his life when he heard the moans from a fellow traveler nearby. His first impulse was to rescue the

# Hope

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other man. When he found him, he rubbed the man's frozen limbs. He finally got him to his feet and carried him through the drifts to safety.

Then "the truth flashed home to him that in saving his neighbor he had saved himself also" by quickening "the blood which was freezing in his own veins."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 319.

The point? A healthy church is a church focused on mission to others. Sharing God's love with the community brings fresh life and energy into the church.

It would be a mistake this quarter to study these biblical agents as interesting historical figures and leave it at that. Rather, we need to catch the inspiration of their lives and focus on our mission to this dying world. There is nothing more refreshing, or more life-giving, than reaching out to others.

Our prayer is that this quarter's lessons on biblical agents of hope will lead us into a renewed commitment to share God's love with our neighbors and friends and in mission fields around the world. In so doing, we may just find that we have entered into a whole new dimension in our Christian lives.

*Gary Krause, an Australian born to missionary parents in Fiji, is director of the Office of Adventist Mission at the General Conference. He is married to Bettina, and they have one daughter, Bethany Grace.*

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**ON THE AIR**

Someone predicted 50 years ago that with the advent of television, radio would die out in a decade. It didn't happen. In fact, radio is just as powerful and prevalent today as it was before television. People listen at work, in the car, and in their homes. The Adventist radio networks in North America are growing, with new stations, new programming, and new listeners.

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will add new stations across Canada and enhance the radio network in the United States. I want to help make this a reality so that thousands of listeners can hear the Gospel message—some for the first time. For me it's personal.

# For Such *a* Time As This: The Apostle Paul



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Acts 9:1–9, 22:3–5, 25–29, Rom. 7:19–25, 11:1, Phil. 3:5, 2 Pet. 1:3–8.*

**Memory Text:** “Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God” (*Romans 15:17, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** The apostle Paul had a powerful impact on the then-known world, spreading Christianity far beyond the geographical confines of Israel and the Jewish people. His life and ministry is a model for our mission today.

The idea that the good news was also good news for the Gentiles was a shocker to people who, despite the teachings of their own prophets, had grown up with a different understanding. God's salvation was for the entire world, not just for Jewish people. Talk about a paradigm shift!

The apostle Paul was a key leader in acting on this revelation. His background, personality, and calling from God made him the right person at the right time to guide the church into this new era of mission to all people.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church went through a similar process during the late nineteenth century, when it began its mission work outside North America. This was a radical step that laid the foundation for today's international Adventist mission work in more than two hundred countries.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 5.*

## Paul's Background

The apostle Paul is arguably the most influential person in the New Testament, apart from Jesus Himself. He took the good news about Jesus to much of the then-known world.

Paul was born in Tarsus, then the capital of Cilicia, a Roman province, in what is present-day Turkey. This area was noted for its goats'-hair cloth that was widely used for tent making, which was Paul's trade (*Acts 18:3*).

**Read** *Acts 22:3–5, 25–29, Romans 11:1, and Philippians 3:5*. What do these texts tell us about Paul that could help us understand why he could be so effective a witness at this time in history?

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Roman citizenship by birth was highly prized. In Paul's day, a person could purchase Roman citizenship for 500 drachmas, close to two years' wages for the average worker. Roman citizenship came with certain privileges—safety from scourging and no death penalty without a trial (*see Acts 22:23–29*); the right to vote, make contracts, and have a legal marriage; and exemption from paying taxes.

And yet, he was also a Jew, one with a rich spiritual heritage. In later years, Paul often referred to his heritage and said, “I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today” (*Acts 22:3, NIV*).

Paul came from the tribe of Benjamin, was reared as a Pharisee, and studied under the great Gamaliel (*vs. 3*), one of the leading Jewish teachers of the time. We learn from Paul's letter to the Galatians that he was “extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (*Gal. 1:14, NIV*). This zeal translated into full-scale persecution of those who became followers of Jesus.

Zealous Jew, Roman citizen, Paul was soon to become the greatest apostle the world has ever seen.

**What aspects of your own life (nationality, education, upbringing, etc.) can be of special use in witnessing? How can you take advantage of your background to better witness for the Lord?**

## Paul: His Conversion and Calling

The apostle Paul was not always the apostle Paul but Saul of Tarsus, persecutor of the early church. He then had an experience that set him on the course that would change not only his own life but history itself.

**Read** Acts 9:1–9, Paul’s conversion experience. What happened to him that changed him so greatly? How hard must it have been for him to accept that he had been so terribly wrong about Jesus?

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Paul did not need any deep theological explanation before surrendering Himself to Jesus. Right then and there Paul gave himself to the Lord, declaring, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (*vs. 6*). The fiery opponent of Jesus was now His humbled and broken servant.

After his conversion, Paul met with Peter, James, and John—the “pillars” among the apostles—and they agreed that Paul’s special calling was to go as an apostle to the Gentiles (*Gal. 2:7–9*).

**Read** Acts 13:47 and Isaiah 49:5, 6. What title and purpose do Paul and Barnabas apply to themselves that was also applied to Jesus? *Luke 2:30–32.*

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Though Paul saw himself as a special envoy or instrument to reach the Gentiles, he also shared the good news with Jewish people. In the same way, other apostles such as Peter preached mainly to Jews, but God also used them to witness to Gentiles. In fact, Peter was the first apostle to reach out to Gentiles (*see Acts 10*).

Most likely, few of us have had the kind of dramatic conversion experience that Paul did. Yet, we all, at some point, need conversion. What has your own conversion experience been? Most important, what have you learned from that experience that could help you lead others toward having their own, as well?



## Paul: A Man of Like Passions

It is so easy to envision Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles and, with the exception of Jesus Himself, the greatest force in all Christianity, as some kind of superhuman being, a flawless saint and herald of the faith.

Yet, that is not the picture presented in the New Testament. Scripture puts us all under sin, paints us all as sinners in need of divine grace. The apostle Paul is no exception either.

At times Paul seems impulsive, almost aggressive. He often stood up for his rights. When he and Silas were in jail, he appealed to his rights as a Roman citizen (*Acts 16:35–40*). Later, when in the court of Agrippa, he appealed to Caesar—which was one of his rights as a Roman citizen (*Acts 25:11, 12*). Had he waited and not demanded his rights, he later might have been freed (*Acts 26:32*).

**What** can we learn about Paul from the following texts? *Acts 15:37–39, Rom. 7:19–25, 1 Cor. 9:27, 2 Cor. 12:7.*

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It is a comfort to know that such a giant of faith as the apostle Paul was not perfect. He sometimes made mistakes. He needed the daily grace and forgiveness of Jesus in his life, just as we do. Indeed, from all that we can tell by his writing, Paul was very aware of his own sinfulness. No doubt it was from, partially at least, this awareness of his own weaknesses and faults that made him such a powerful teacher of God's saving grace.

**Read** Romans 7:24. What does this tell us about Paul's self-understanding? What hope and comfort can you draw from yourself by these words?

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Though Paul was not perfect, God used him anyway. Why is it important that while being aware of our faults and claiming God's promises for victory we not allow them to discourage us from working for the Lord?

## Life and Salvation Through Christ

Several major themes dominated and motivated the apostle Paul's life and mission. At the top of the list was the story of Jesus crucified. This event was the basis of everything he taught and did. He wrote to the Corinthians, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (*1 Cor. 2:2*), and to the Galatians, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Gal. 6:14*). These verses show that for Paul the cross of Christ (which of necessity includes Christ's resurrection, as well) was the central theme of his whole theology.

Throughout his writings, Paul describes in many different ways the enormity of what Jesus did through the Cross to save humanity.

**Read** the following texts in which Paul describes salvation. What do these verses tell us about what Christ has done for us?

*Rom. 5:10*

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*Rom. 6:18*

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*Rom. 7:2-4*

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*Rom. 8:15-17*

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*Gal. 2:16*

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*Eph. 1:7*

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*1 Tim. 2:6*

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*1 Pet. 1:18, 19*

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Paul uses a number of different images and word pictures to describe what Christ has done for us. Most likely that is because no single image alone can do justice to the grandness of what was accomplished for us at the Cross.

**How central is the Cross to your own theology? How focused are you on it? Why is it important to keep the Cross at the center of all our witnessing?**

## Themes of Hope

In yesterday's lesson, we saw how Christ's death on the cross was the key theme in Paul's life and teachings. Today we will touch briefly on some other major Pauline themes.

*Living a godly life (sanctification).* Paul makes it very clear throughout his writings that salvation is free, a gift we cannot earn or deserve (*Rom. 5:15, 6:23, Eph. 2:8*). But salvation does not free us to behave as we did before we met Jesus. In response to His grace, we must live as Jesus asks us to live.

Paul writes to Timothy: "Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness" (*1 Tim. 6:11, NIV*). We do not do what is right in order that Jesus will save us; we do what is right because we have been saved. In fact, says Paul, we were "created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (*Eph. 2:10, NIV*).

We do not obey God so that He will love us, accept us, or give us a ticket to heaven. When we accept Jesus' gift of salvation, we are accepted totally and unconditionally. We obey God because His powerful love leads us to good works. We obey Him because His love compels us (*see 2 Cor. 5:14*).

**Read 2 Peter 1:3–8.** What reasons does Peter give for living a godly life? What other reasons can you add?

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**Paul** wrote that he did not want us to "be ignorant" about what happens when people die (*1 Thess. 4:13*). Why is it important to understand the truth about life after death?

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Paul's key themes are all linked. Through Jesus' self-sacrifice and resurrection, He conquered death. He will return to bring His gift of everlasting life to His faithful children (*see vss. 13–18*) at their resurrection. These followers of Jesus have demonstrated their love for Him in the way they have lived their lives (*see Eph. 4:20–32*).

**What is the one hope of Christianity that means the most to you? That is, of all the promises we have, which one offers you the greatest hope, and why? Write out your response and bring it to class on Sabbath.**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “From Persecutor to Disciple,” pp. 112–122, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“The belief of a falsehood did not make Paul a kind, tender, compassionate man. He was a religious zealot, exceedingly mad against the truth concerning Jesus. He went through the country, haling men and women, and committing them to prison.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 214.

“The apostle Paul had all the privileges of a Roman citizen. He was not behind in the Hebrew education; for he had learned at the feet of Gamaliel; but all this did not enable him to reach the highest standard. With all this scientific and literary education, he was, until Christ was revealed to him, in as complete darkness as are many at this time. Paul became fully conscious that to know Jesus Christ by an experimental knowledge was for his present and eternal good. He saw the necessity of reaching a high standard.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 18, 1899.

“There is one great central truth to be kept ever before the mind in the searching of the Scriptures—Christ and Him crucified. Every other truth is invested with influence and power corresponding to its relation to this theme. It is only in the light of the cross that we can discern the exalted character of the law of God. The soul palsied by sin can be endowed with life only through the work wrought out upon the cross by the Author of our salvation.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1084.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What beliefs are most important to you? How do they affect the way you live? How do you respond to those who hold other beliefs, maybe even contrary beliefs to your own, just as strongly?
- ❷ How central is the Cross in your own local church? What could you do, as either an individual or a class, to help ensure that as with Paul, Christ and Him crucified are central to your church and its outreach to the local community?
- ❸ In class, share your responses to Thursday’s final question.

**Summary:** Paul provides a wonderful example of the fact that there is no limit to what God can do through us—human and weak though we may be. Paul’s unique background and gifts enabled him to take the good news about Jesus to an entirely new mission field.

# The Hidden Money

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Stefka Mancheva lives in Bulgaria. Life for Stefka was never easy, but shortly after Communism fell in Bulgaria, her husband died. Inflation wracked the nation and ate up her meager pension until she could barely afford to buy food for herself and her son. She prayed that God would remember the widowed and the orphaned, that He would somehow meet their needs.

One cold day she needed her scissors. She looked in the drawer, but they weren't there. She emptied her purse of its contents, but couldn't find the scissors. However, she noticed that the lining of the purse had been cut, and it felt as if something had slipped between the lining and the outer shell. She reached into the hole in the lining and pulled out some paper. It seemed to be money, but it wasn't from Bulgaria.

She examined the money and realized that it was Italian lira—100,000 Italian lira. It wasn't hers, for she had never been to Italy. But where could it have come from? *God must have sent it in answer to my prayers*, she thought. *But why is it foreign money?*

Stefka thanked God for the lira and placed it in a safe place. Then she went to the bank and asked the manager how much 100,000 Italian lira were worth. She waited, stiff with apprehension, as the bank manager punched some numbers into his calculator. Then he told her that 100,000 lira were worth about four months' wages at the present rate of exchange. "But," he added, "with inflation, the value should grow."

Stefka thanked him and walked home, praising God. She had bought the purse in which she found the money four years earlier. The money had been there all that time. That meant that God had seen her need years before she even asked Him for help. And God had provided for her by sending foreign currency that wouldn't be eaten up by inflation. *How good You are, God!* she praised Him in her heart. *Before I even called on You, You answered my prayer.*

Stefka saved the money, exchanging only what she needed to buy food and clothes for herself and her son. As inflation continued to climb, the lira became worth more and more. Eventually they were worth the equivalent of more than a year's pension.

"I praise God for His faithfulness to me, a poor widow," Stefka said.

God provides all our needs according to His riches. As He has blessed us, let's give abundantly to mission so that others can know the God who loves them and will never leave them.

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CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN is editor of Mission and "Inside Stories."

# “All Things *to* All Men”: Paul Preaches *to the* World



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Acts 11:19–26, 13:16–42, 17:18–34.*

**Memory Text:** “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (*1 Corinthians 9:22, NKJV*).

**Key Thought:** The apostle Paul, seeking to bring the gospel to the world, gives us an example of how we need to learn to adapt the way we present our message, depending on the context and culture in which we are witnessing.

Adventist missionary pioneers quickly learned that they needed to present our present truth message in as culturally relevant a way as possible. Today the Global Mission initiative of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church sponsors study centers around the world that explore ways to build bridges to people of other religions and cultures. Before we can effectively communicate with other people, we need to understand their culture and ways of thinking.

This week we explore what it means to adapt our message to people in different circumstances. And we do so by looking at the various ways in which the apostle Paul, a firm and uncompromising believer in truth, tailored the message of Jesus for specific audiences. What can we learn from Paul that will better enable us to reach people with present truth?

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 12.*

## Paul Encouraged for Mission

After Paul's Damascus road experience, some of the apostles were not convinced that he was a true disciple (*see Acts 9:26*). Perhaps they feared he was sent as a spy to infiltrate the church and cause further problems. At that time, Barnabas stood up for Paul and defended him (*vss. 27, 28*).

Barnabas was "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith" (*Acts 11:24, NIV*), and he was a tremendous help to Paul as he began his ministry.

**Read Acts 11:19–24. How did the church begin in Antioch? How successful were the missionary endeavors?**

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The leaders of the church in Jerusalem heard about the new group of believers in Antioch—one of the three leading cities of the Roman Empire at that time. Immediately they sent the highly respected Barnabas to help establish and build up the church.

**Read Acts 11:25, 26. Why do you think Barnabas chose Paul to help him?**

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Acts is full of surprising events: Saul, the persecutor, becomes Paul, the missionary; the gospel of salvation becomes good news for all, not just for the Jews; and now Paul ministers to a church established indirectly as a result of his persecution.

For a year Barnabas and Paul taught the people. As the church grew in strength, it developed a spirit of compassion and ministered to others. The new church members sent financial help to their brothers and sisters in Judea, who were suffering from a severe famine (*Acts 11:28–30*). Thus, they were not going to hoard their own blessings; when a need came, they were ready to help.

The church in Jerusalem, hearing about Antioch, sent Barnabas to work with it. And Barnabas, knowing about Paul's calling, brought Paul to help. And that church, hearing about the needs in Jerusalem, sent aid to it.

**What lesson can we learn about helping others with the things that we ourselves have been blessed?**

## All Things to All People

**“I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some”** (*1 Cor. 9:22, NIV*).

What does Paul mean when he says that he has “become all things to all [people]”? We can be confident that whatever his meaning, the apostle is not advocating compromise. He is not talking about changing the gospel, the doctrines, the ethics, or any of the truth of God’s Word. He is talking about making these things as attractive and understandable as possible for different cultures.

Paul modeled this approach by using different methods to reach different people.

For example, in attempting to reach Jews, Paul would arrive in a city, visit the synagogue, and teach (*see, for example, Acts 9:19–22, 13:14–16*).

**Read Acts 13:16–42.** In his sermon, where does Paul’s short overview of biblical history begin and end? To what authority does he appeal to prove that Jesus is the Messiah? What does this tell you about Paul’s approach to Jewish people?

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**Read Acts 14:8–18.** How does the way Paul talks to the pagans—who did not believe the Old Testament—differ from his speeches to the Jews?

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Paul makes no appeal to Scripture as an authority (he does allude to the Old Testament in verse 15, but in the way he might quote a poet, not as an authority). Rather, he appeals to the natural world and the evidence that nature gives of a Creator God. And he points out the futility of worshipping idols.

**How far should we be willing to go in trying to reach people in their own culture? How can we avoid the dangers of going too far; that is, of compromising truth in our attempts to spread it?**



## A Witness to the Philosophers

One of Paul's most well-known missionary endeavors occurred in Athens, home of some of the world's greatest philosophers of antiquity, such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. And yet, how interesting: Even with all the philosophy and all its appeals to reason and logic, the city was still "wholly given to idolatry" (*Acts 17:16*). What a testimony to how, in the end, philosophy cannot answer basic human needs.

**Read Acts 17:18–34.** What approach did Paul take in trying to reach these people? What does he not use? How successful were his efforts?

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Epicureans taught that happiness comes from living a good life with modest pleasures. The Stoics, on the other hand, urged people to be content with what they had. Together, Stoic and Epicurean philosophers heard Paul in the marketplace and started to argue with him, calling him a "babbling" (*Acts 17:18, NIV*).

Despite ridiculing Paul, these philosophers invited him to speak at a meeting of the Areopagus—a group of philosophers that assessed new teachings—on what we know as Mars' Hill.

In his speech, Paul shapes his message to his pagan audience (*vss. 22–25*) by connecting with their culture. He refers to a statue they had built to the unknown god and identifies Him as the Creator God.

At no stage does Paul refer to the Scriptures, as he would with a Jewish audience. Rather, he again points to the natural world with which they are familiar and connects it to the supernatural. And though Paul did not use the Scriptures, his message to them was, clearly, very scriptural.

**In what ways do the things of nature speak to your heart about God? How could you better cultivate an appreciation of our Creator through the things of nature?**

## The Message on Mars' Hill

**Read** again Acts 17:18–34. Look through Paul's discourse. Where do you find these basic doctrines: Creation, Redemption, and judgment? In what ways does it sound like our Adventist message?

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Paul not only knew pagan literature; he quoted parts of it from memory. First, he quotes a Cretan poet who wrote, “‘In Him we live and move and have our being’” (*vs. 28, NIV*). And second, the pagan Cleanthes, whose love poem to the god Zeus contained the line “‘We are his offspring’” (*vs. 28, NIV*). In each case, Paul takes something from their culture and connects it to the truth he wants to teach them.

“With hand outstretched toward the temple crowded with idols, Paul poured out the burden of his soul, and exposed the fallacies of the religion of the Athenians,” writes Ellen G. White. “The wisest of his hearers were astonished as they listened to his reasoning. He showed himself familiar with their works of art, their literature, and their religion.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 237.

Ellen White adds: “Paul's words contain a treasure of knowledge for the church. . . . Had his oration been a direct attack upon their gods and the great men of the city, he would have been in danger of meeting the fate of Socrates. But with a tact born of divine love, he carefully drew their minds away from heathen deities, by revealing to them the true God, who was to them unknown.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 241.

Paul understood that before we can lead people to where we want them to be we must first meet them where they are. That means focusing on their needs, their interests—and shaping our message in a way that connects with them. This does not mean watering down the message. It is just an issue of communication—talking to people in terms and in language they can understand.

**What was the one aspect of Paul's teaching that caused the most dissent in this environment? Why? What should this tell us about the limits of trying to explain rationally all that we believe?**

## Paul's Method of Church Planting

**Read** Romans 15:18–23. How could he claim that “I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (*vs. 19, NIV*), when obviously most of the population were still not Christians? What does the answer tell us about how we are to determine what success is?

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Paul chose to start new congregations in strategic cities throughout the region. He chose places that were major transport hubs—on major Roman roads or seaports—and that were important commercial, trading, or administrative centers. He thus established strategic lighthouses throughout the area, planning that the new groups of believers would take the good news to the areas surrounding these centers. Although Paul's work was finished, the task of outreach had only begun for the new believers.

On his second missionary journey, Paul, with the help of Timothy and Silas, established a Christian church in Thessalonica, the largest city in Macedonia. It was located at the crossroads of two important Roman highways and was the major seaport for the entire region. A strongly established group of believers in this city would provide a center from which other church plants could grow throughout that area.

This is exactly what happened. Paul says, “You became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere” (*1 Thess. 1:7, 8, NIV*).

This church was a model for others. Interestingly enough, the Greek word for church (*ekklesia*) was not a specifically Christian word. It was used for any gathering of people in various settings. However, the Christian *ekklesia* was called to specific functions—not just to worship together but to reach out to their communities with the good news that they themselves had received.

**The church did not exist solely to feed its own members. What is your own attitude? Do you go to church seeking only to get your own needs met, or do you go hoping to give even more than you receive?**

**Further Study:** “Thus [Paul] varied his manner of labor, shaping his message to the circumstances under which he was placed.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 118.

“There are some who will not be convinced by any presentation of the truth. The laborer for God should, nevertheless, study carefully the best method, in order that he may not arouse prejudice or stir up combativeness in his hearers.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 25, 1890.

“They [God’s workmen] are not to be one-idea men, stereotyped in their manner of working, unable to see that their advocacy of truth must vary with the class of people among whom they work and the circumstances they have to meet.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 119.

“By cheerful, patient kindness and Christian courtesy, he won the hearts of the people, quieted their prejudices, and endeavored to teach them the truth without exciting their combativeness. All this he did because he loved the souls of men, and desired to bring them to Christ that they might be saved.”—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, p. 162.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 How would you best communicate what we as Adventists believe to an atheist university student? A person from another religion? Someone who believes the Bible but is not an Adventist? A former Adventist? Someone who seems totally indifferent to the whole question of faith or God?
- 2 No matter how different our approaches might be, what are some of the common things that must always accompany our witness to others? That is, what things should always be front and center of our witness, regardless of the circumstances?
- 3 How mission centered is your local church? What can you do to help your church get more involved in outreach to your local community?

**Summary:** Communication does not take place if the listener cannot understand what is being said. Paul provides many examples of how in our witness we must translate the good news into terms that people can understand.

## Jesus' Helper

by OMAR REYES TORRES

I wanted to be a civil engineer, but God had other plans for my life. I had studied in Adventist schools until I entered the state university in Puerto Rico. I soon discovered the difference between Adventist education and public education. Several teachers were atheists and made it a point to undermine my faith.

When an exam fell on Sabbath, the teacher refused to allow me to take it another day, saying that if there was a God, He would understand why I needed to be in class that day. In this university the teachers are kings, and the classroom is their kingdom.

Eventually I transferred to Antillian Adventist University to finish my studies. As I compared the teachers and the school atmosphere, I realized that the Adventist school had something that the public schools could never have—a Christian atmosphere. While not everyone on campus is an Adventist, the teachers are very committed to their students. For them it's a calling; they believe in what they are doing.

I'm now teaching at this same university. It's a privilege to teach here where I can integrate Adventist beliefs into my class and no one forbids me to talk about God. I feel the atmosphere change when I invite God to come into the classroom.

In this school we don't strive to make Adventists of every student; instead we strive to draw them closer to God and to understand what God wants and who He is.

If I can help one student see the Lord in a different way, understand God in a more mature way, then I have done my job well. I wanted to be an engineer. But I wouldn't have had the influence I have now as a teacher in an Adventist school.

One day a student came to me and said, "You had a worship that changed my life. I was having problems with drugs, but your worship helped me to quit drugs. Thanks." Another boy told me that his mother had died. A worship talk on death helped him work through his feelings of grief and meant a lot to him. I know that God was speaking through me. And it changed this boy's life.

I don't think of myself as a teacher; Jesus is the Teacher, and I am His helper, preparing young people for eternity.

Your mission offerings help support Adventist education around the world. It's an investment we can never take for granted. Thank you for giving so that our children can learn in a Christian environment.

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OMAR REYES TORRES is a professor of mathematics and statistics at Antillian Adventist University in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico.

# John *the* Baptist: Preparing *the* Way for Jesus



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 14:1–12, Luke 1, Col. 2:8, Rev. 14:6–12.*

**Memory Text:** “I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matthew 11:11, NIV).

**Key Thought:** John the Baptist had a special calling from God; we, as a church, have been called in a similar way. What can we learn from the example of John?

Followers of the ancient Mandaean religion venerate John the Baptist as the last and greatest of the prophets. Today Mandaean believers still can be found, mostly in Iraq and Iran. The great irony is that although they venerate John, they believe that Jesus was a false prophet, which is hard to understand since the whole purpose of John's message was to prepare the way for Jesus.

From his base near the Jordan River, John preached a message of repentance, forgiveness, and social justice, all to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. Large crowds gathered to hear him speak; and many followed his teachings. In fact, several of Jesus' disciples were first disciples of John the Baptist.

This week we will discover more about the mission of a man whom Jesus praised more highly than anyone else; plus, we will look at the parallel between John's calling and ours.

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

## A Special Calling

John is one of a small group of people whom the Bible says God chose before birth for a special mission, people such as Samuel and Samson, and even Jesus Himself. Hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Isaiah prophesied the ministry of John as one who would be “a voice of one calling: ‘In the desert’ ” (*Isa. 40:3–5, NIV*; see also *Luke 3:4–6*). John’s father, Zechariah, also predicted that his son would prepare the way for the Lord (*Luke 1:76*).

**Skim** over Luke 1, where John the Baptist’s mission and calling are prophesied. Make notes on the things that it said that John would accomplish. Compare those prophecies with what we know about John the Baptist. In what ways were they fulfilled?

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**After** looking at John’s accomplishments, look at John’s ignoble end (*Matt. 14:1–12*). How does that end match all the glorious things predicted about him?

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John the Baptist’s calling and ministry brought him to a hard and difficult path, one that ended almost as ignobly as His cousin’s, Jesus. Despite the trials, the sufferings, and the misunderstanding, he remained faithful, fulfilling the prophecies made about his life. John is an example of the suffering that any of us could face if we seek to remain faithful to God and to whatever calling He has for us.

**By most standards, John the Baptist’s life and, especially, his death would not have made him someone whom the world would call successful. What should that tell us about the difference between God’s ideals and the world’s? Are your standards of success more like God’s or the world’s, and what does the answer tell you about yourself?**

## Preparing the Preparer

The Lord made many predictions about the life of John the Baptist, saying even before John was born what he could accomplish in his life. This raises the difficult question: Was John predestined to do these things simply because God predicted that he would? In other words, did John have any choice other than to do what God had predicted? Though the question of God's foreknowledge and our free will has challenged theologians and philosophers for centuries (and so we certainly cannot answer the question right now), we can be sure of one thing: John needed a special preparation for the work he was to undertake.

**Read** Luke 1:80. What is found in the text that helps us understand some of the preparation John needed? What principles can we draw from here that could help us strengthen our own spiritual life?

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Luke 1:15 says that John would be filled with the Holy Ghost “‘even from his mother’s womb’ ” (*NKJV*). And yet, even with that special promise, he needed the kind of preparation found in the harshness of the desert. Often in the Bible the desert or wilderness is portrayed as a place for spiritual discipline and growth. Here it was that “the word of God came to John” (*Luke 3:2, NIV*). Certainly, John became a man of prayer and later taught his disciples how to pray (*Luke 11:1*) and fast (*Mark 2:18*). He knew the importance of a spiritual connection to heaven.

The spiritual power John received from God allowed him to proclaim his message with great force. He was a voice crying in the wilderness or, according to the literal Greek, “bellowing like an ox.”

As Jesus later suggested, nobody went to see John because he was some kind of weakling—“‘a reed shaken by the wind’ ” (*Matt. 11:7, NKJV*). On the contrary, they went to hear a man who spoke the truth with power and conviction.

**Take an honest look at your own spiritual life. How often do you pray? How often do you study the Word? How immersed are you in the world and worldly things? What changes do you need to make? Might you need to spend some time in a desert somewhere?**



## The Spirit of Elijah

The angel who appeared to Zechariah alluded to Malachi’s prophecy and applied it directly to John (*Luke 1:17*). Jesus Himself confirmed it—“ ‘If you are willing to accept it, he [John] is the Elijah who was to come’ ” (*Matt. 11:14, NIV; see also 17:11–13*).

Elijah stands tall among the great prophets of the Old Testament. He called on King Ahab and the people of Israel, who were steeped in idolatry and apostasy, to return to God and reform their ways. The test on Mount Carmel, where he stood up for God against the pagan prophets, is one of the watershed moments in the entire Bible.

The “Elijah message” is a phrase deep with meaning for Seventh-day Adventists. Ellen G. White parallels the tasks of Elijah, John the Baptist, and God’s end-time people. She describes the “Elijah message” simply as “ ‘Prepare to meet thy God.’ ”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1184.

### THE ELIJAH MESSAGE

Elijah	John the Baptist	God’s End-Time People
Called to reform Israel and call them to obedience to God’s laws. He delivered a message of judgment to King Ahab and a chance of repentance to Israel.	Preached repentance and the principles of the kingdom of heaven. Delivered a message of judgment to religious leaders and people. Prepared people for Jesus’ first coming.	Reformers who preach righteousness by faith and call people to worship God, repent, and obey His commandments. Message: “ ‘The hour of his judgment has come’ ” ( <i>Rev. 14:7, NIV</i> ). Prepare people for Jesus’ second coming.

The apostle John wrote about three angels with special messages to proclaim to the world (*Rev. 14:6–12*) at the end of time. These messages include a call to worship God (because His judgment has come) and to remain faithful to Jesus. The gospel is central to this warning message. Ellen G. White wrote, “Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel’s message in verity.’ ”—*The Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890.

**Read Revelation 14:6–12, the three angels’ messages. Where do you see warnings, as well as hope, mingled? In what sense was John’s message both warning and hope? How can we use warnings to point people toward hope?**

## Changed Behavior

There were two key parts to John the Baptist's message—repentance and behavior. Both were closely connected.

The Greek word John uses for repentance (*metanoeo*) is a compound word: *meta*, meaning “change,” and *noeo*, meaning “thinking.” Thus, repentance means to change one's thinking about something.

When John says “ ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’ ” (*Matt. 3:2, NIV*), he is telling the people that the coming kingdom of heaven requires a totally new outlook. In other words, in preparing the people for Jesus' arrival, in preparing the way for the Lord and making “straight paths” for Him (*vs. 3, NIV*), John was challenging the people to change their worldview and how they live.

**Read** Luke 3:10–15. What is the essence of John's message here? What is he telling the people? See also James 2:14–26.

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One key aspect of repentance was the confessing of sin (*Matt. 3:6*). The other key aspect was changing behavior according to the principles of the kingdom of heaven (*vs. 8*). Nothing less could prepare them for Jesus, who would bring a time of refreshing such as they had never seen.

Baptism was closely associated with repentance. In fact, Luke says John preached “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (*Luke 3:3, NIV*). Being washed in the water symbolized the changed view of life, the fresh start, and the forgiveness of sin.

Although John's strong words offended some people, the Bible indicates that large crowds came to hear him. “People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan” (*Matt. 3:5, NIV*). But not only did they come and listen, they confessed their sins and were baptized (*vs. 6*).

**OK, you believe in God, believe in Jesus, believe that He died for your sins, and that you have salvation only through His righteousness credited to you, by faith alone. The question is, How well are you following the principles of righteousness as expressed by John the Baptist? How well does your life reveal the faith that you profess to have?**

## A Crucial Lesson From John

**Read** Colossians 2:8. What is it saying to you, in your own culture and tradition? What must you be careful about?

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The Bible has much to say about tradition, and little of it is good. On one occasion the Pharisees and the teachers of the law asked Jesus why His disciples broke the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands before they ate (*Matt. 15:2*). This tradition was based on rules and regulations established by the rabbis, not by the Scriptures.

**Read** Matthew 15:3 and Mark 7:13. What specific points is Jesus making that gets at the heart of why tradition can be faith-destroying?

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An essential part of John the Baptist's mission was to speak out against tradition and point people back to the revealed Word of God. Ellen G. White writes: "What was it that made John the Baptist great? He closed his mind to the mass of tradition presented by the teachers of the Jewish nation, and opened it to the wisdom which comes from above."—*Conflict and Courage*, p. 276.

John the Baptist was not bound by tradition or by accepted modes of speech. He spoke against sin in all its forms, from adultery to social injustice. Whenever God's message is given in a clear, unambiguous way, people react differently. Some people responded to John the Baptist by accusing him of being demon-possessed (*Matt. 11:18*). Of course, exactly the same thing happened with Jesus (*John 7:20*).

**Is tradition always bad? Why, or why not? How can we, in whatever culture we are in, retain aspects of that culture while still staying faithful to the Lord?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Voice in the Wilderness,” pp. 97–108, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“God had directed John the Baptist to dwell in the wilderness, that he might be shielded from the influence of the priests and rabbis, and be prepared for a special mission. But the austerity and isolation of his life were not an example for the people. John himself had not directed his hearers to forsake their former duties. He bade them give evidence of their repentance by faithfulness to God in the place where He had called them.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 150.

“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, such a work as that of John is to be done. God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord. The message preceding the public ministry of Christ was, Repent, publicans and sinners; repent, Pharisees and Sadducees; ‘repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ As a people who believe in Christ’s soon coming, we have a message to bear,—‘Prepare to meet thy God.’ ” (Amos 4:12).—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 55.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What dangers are there in following tradition? Is there any way that tradition actually can help your spiritual life? If so, how? As a class, talk about the traditions in your own culture. Which ones are helpful to faith, and which ones go contrary to it? How can you know the difference, and how can you help others who might have trouble breaking away from the traditions that are harmful to their Christian walk?
- ❷ What has been your own “desert” experience, if any? What have you learned that could be a blessing to others who might be going through something similar?
- ❸ Review the parallels between John’s mission and ours as a church. How well are we doing? What could we be doing better? How could we, as individuals and as a local church, help in fulfilling this high calling?

**Summary:** John the Baptist had the high calling of preparing the way for Jesus. In many ways his mission parallels that given to God’s people at the end of time—to preach the Elijah message to prepare people to meet God.

## Freed From the Devil's Chains

Saketa Balcha lived with his parents on their small farm in western Ethiopia. When Saketa entered his teens, he began to chew chat, a narcotic leaf. His new habit quickly became an addiction, to the dismay of his parents. Friction grew among family members, and Saketa rebelled even more. Then he began to have episodes of dizziness.

His condition worsened until he showed signs of insanity or demon possession. The family didn't know what to do, so they took him to a religious teacher, hoping this man could cure him. The religious teacher called other leaders to his home, where they chewed chat and prayed for the boy's healing. But Saketa began throwing stones, shouting obscenities, and threatening people.

Realizing that they couldn't help the boy, the religious leaders gave up. They tied him up with ropes, but Saketa escaped. So, they chained him and carried him to his parents' home.

Saketa's parents cried when they saw their son returning in chains. They didn't know what else to do for their son. Then someone suggested that they ask the Adventist pastor to pray for their son. Desperate to have their boy back, the parents sent for the pastor. Before going to the boy, the pastor prayed for forgiveness of sin in his own life and for the presence of the Holy Spirit.

When he arrived at Saketa's home, he found the boy chained to the center pole of the house, shouting obscenities and talking nonsense. The pastor told the family, "Humans cannot cast out demons or heal disease. Only God can. We must pray, and we must believe that Jesus Christ has the power to save your son." The pastor invited everyone to kneel with him. Even Saketa knelt down in spite of his chains, and became silent while the pastor prayed.

After prayer, the pastor urged the family to believe in God and His power to heal. Then he left. The next day the pastor returned and found Saketa sitting in a chair, free from his chains. Saketa responded to the pastor's questions. Again he prayed for Saketa's complete healing and the family's faith. The next day the pastor found Saketa helping his father put up a fence. The family and the neighbors were amazed.

On Sabbath the family worshiped in the Adventist church. Saketa and eight members of his family enrolled in the Bible class to learn more about God, who had saved him. Today Saketa sings in the choir and praises God for healing him.

Millions in Ethiopia are bound by fears and superstitions. They don't know the freedom that faith in Jesus brings. Our mission offerings help bring the news of salvation in Jesus to the people of this land. Thank you for giving faithfully to world missions.

# The Son of God Among Us



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matthew 23; Mark 9:12; Luke 24:7; John 1:1–14, 29; Heb. 2:9.*

**Memory Text:** “The one who existed from the beginning is the one we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is Jesus Christ, the Word of life” (1 John 1:1, NLT).

**Key Thought:** Nobody else in history has had such a huge impact on the world or such a divided opinion as much as Jesus. The future of each of our lives comes down to one crucial question Jesus Himself asked: “Who do you say I am?” (Matt. 16:15, NIV).

Some people today dispute whether Jesus ever lived, but the historical evidence is overwhelmingly clear. The real issue concerns His identity and purpose. Was He just a good man or God's Son?

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.”—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1960), p. 52.

As Adventists, we work from the starting point that the Bible is the Word of God and that what it says about Jesus is the truth, period. We do not have the time to waste on nonsensical high-critical speculations about whether Jesus did the things the Bible says that He did.

After all, if we cannot believe the Bible, what can we believe?

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 26.

## Who Was Jesus? Part 1

Over the centuries, people have argued about Jesus, sung about Him, written about Him, preached about Him, cursed Him, made movies about Him, even died for Him; but most people in the world today either do not know Him or know only what He has accomplished in their behalf.

**If** someone were to ask you, Who was Jesus? what would you say, and why?

Your answer, whatever it contained, should have dealt with the fact that Jesus was the divine Son of God and that He died for our sins and rose again. That He did great things while here is fine; that He preached powerful sermons is fine; that He revealed to us the character of God is fine. But none of these things, in the end, really matter if Jesus did not come and die as the Substitute for us, thus giving each of us the promise of eternal life (if we but claim it for ourselves).

**Why** is the death of Jesus, and what it accomplished, so crucial in helping us understand who Jesus was? *Mark 9:12, Luke 24:7, John 1:29, Rom. 5:15–21, Heb. 2:9.*

There have through history been many great men and women who have accomplished marvelous things, things that on the surface seemed even more impressive than what Jesus of Nazareth had accomplished. After all, He was an “unofficial” rabbi from a relatively small and insignificant province of Rome who died an early death and left just a handful of fearful and demoralized followers. On the other hand, when we grasp who Jesus was and just what He did while here, we realize that nothing that any other human being could have done is even worth comparing with Him. In fact, in the end, without Jesus and what He did for us, anything that anyone ever accomplished in this world would, in the large scheme of things, ultimately come to nothing. Because without Jesus and His death, the whole world and everything in it would come to nothing.

## Who Was Jesus? Part 2

What made Jesus unique in human history? It certainly was not a powerful public relations and marketing team. He did not have one. It certainly was not His wealth. He did not have any, at least not as the world understands wealth. And He did not have any political power to speak of either. On the contrary, He had been essentially on the margins of political power.

Jesus did have power, but it was a selfless power. He healed diseases, restored broken lives, and left pious hypocrites speechless. He once said to His disciples, “ ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all’ ” (*Mark 10:42–44, NIV*). Not exactly a formula for those aggressively seeking political power, is it?

**Read John 1:1–14.** What is found in these texts that reveals to us why Jesus was so special, unique, in all human history?

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We can read these famous words so often that we tend to forget just how incredible they really are. Dwell on the implications of what John is telling us. These should be words filled with hope, especially in contrast to the teachings of modern science, which has us all here as the mere by-products of some great cosmic accident, the result of blind forces that, purely by chance, created humanity. In other words, instead of us being the creations of a loving God, One who became “flesh, and dwelt among us” (*John 1:14*), we are just a complicated conglomeration of chemicals that just happened to form on the surface of this planet, and just as there was no meaning or purpose to our creation, there is no meaning and purpose to lives and deaths. What a contrast to the hope offered us through Jesus.

**What do you find especially encouraging about those verses in John 1? Write down your thoughts and bring them to class on Sabbath.**



## Jesus Among Sinners and Publicans

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was also a human who lived and dwelt among us. As such, He had various kinds of human interactions, both with family and friends. The amazing thing about Christ was not so much that as a human He had interaction with other people; no, what is amazing is that He chose to interact with certain types of people.

**Read** Matthew 11:19; Mark 2:15, 16; Luke 15:1, 2. **What kind of people was Jesus associating with? What kind of people in your own society might have elicited the same response from other more “respectable” folk?**

Jesus came to reveal the character of God to all the world through both His life and His death. By associating with those who were considered, at least by worldly standards, lowlifes, Jesus was giving us a message about the character of God and about what God deems good and bad. As humans, we tend to look at the outward appearances (*1 Sam. 16:7*); God, though, looks at the heart, where He can see what we often do not.

**Read** Matthew 21:28–32. **How does that help us understand why Jesus associated with the kinds of people He did? What important message can we, those who are “religious and respectable,” take from this?**

Unlike us, Jesus knew the heart; Jesus saw what was going on inside those who, from the outside, looked so unworthy and so unpromising. At the same time, He knew what was going on inside those who, from the outside, looked so righteous and pious. We might be able to fool each other, and even ourselves, but never the Lord.

**What is your attitude toward the “publicans and sinners” of your own society? How much of the attitude of the scribes and the Pharisees do you harbor in your own heart? (Remember, these men were exceedingly self-deceived.)**

## Exposing the Hypocrites

**“But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in”** (*Matt. 23:13*).

Though we often picture the kind and gentle Jesus working gingerly and softly with the worst of sinners, that is not the whole picture presented in the Bible. On the contrary, when the time was right Jesus unleashed a torrent of warnings about and toward a certain group of people. As we all know, Jesus had strong words to speak against many of the religious leaders of ancient Israel, very strong words, in fact. Indeed, in some ways He sounded just as some of the Old Testament prophets did; which, of course, is not surprising, because He was the One who inspired them to write what they did to begin with. Thus, for centuries, in one venue or another, Jesus was pleading with His people. Is it any different today?

**Read** Matthew 23. What were the charges Jesus was leveling against the leaders? How would you categorize them? Which, in your own mind, would be the worst, and why? If you could summarize in just a few sentences the essence of His complaints, what would you write?

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If you really read carefully, all the things that Jesus accuses them of doing are amazing. One theme, however, comes through very clearly: These men were hypocrites, hiding the ugliness of their souls under the veneer of faith and piety.

What kind of outward show of piety do you put on? How different are you in private than in public? How might your local church view you if they knew the real you? What can you do to make the real you more like the public version?

## Love for the Hypocrites

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8*).

**What** is the message of the above text? How seriously do we take it? That is, do we understand that Christ’s death included the worst sinners, even the hypocrites we read about yesterday?

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The amazing thing about the life of Jesus was that even amid the harshest circumstances He never lost sight of His mission: to save the lost. Even as He hung on the cross, even as the weight of the world’s sin was crushing out His life, the good of others was constantly on His mind. (*See Luke 23:34, 42, 43; John 19:26.*) What a powerful lesson for us, we who are called to follow in His footsteps.

This applies to the religious leaders that Jesus railed against. Yesterday we read His scathing denunciations against them, as recorded in Matthew 23.

**Read** Matthew 23:37. How is it different in tone from the rest of the chapter? What does this tell us about Jesus and His feelings toward even those He just denounced? What very important principle is found here for us? How can we take what we see here and apply it in our own lives and our treatment of others, even those who reject our overtures toward them?

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Missionary work is not easy. Look at what happened when Jesus Himself was here. Look at how so many reacted. Yet, even toward the worst Jesus showed love and care and compassion. Our feelings toward those who reject us should not be anger or resentment; they should be of pity, of concern, and of care. When people refuse to listen, they are not rejecting us personally; they are rejecting Jesus.

**How do you respond to those who react negatively toward your witness? How can you learn to feel compassion, as opposed to anger and resentment? Why would anger and resentment only make things worse?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Woes on the Pharisees,” pp. 610–620, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The Pharisees thought themselves too wise to need instruction, too righteous to need salvation, too highly honored to need the honor that comes from Christ. The Saviour turned away from them to find others who would receive the message of heaven. In the untutored fishermen, in the publican at the market place, in the woman of Samaria, in the common people who heard Him gladly, He found His new bottles for the new wine. The instrumentalities to be used in the gospel work are those souls who gladly receive the light which God sends them. These are His agencies for imparting the knowledge of truth to the world.”  
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 279.

“We may do much in a short time if we will work as Christ worked. We may reflect with profit upon His manner of teaching. He sought to meet the minds of the common people. His style was plain, simple, comprehensive. He took His illustrations from the scenes with which His hearers were most familiar. By the things of nature He illustrated truths of eternal importance, thus connecting heaven and earth.”  
—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 565.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is the idea of Jesus as just a great moral teacher not good enough? What hope do we have if Christ were only a moral teacher and nothing else? Look at the C. S. Lewis quote from the introduction for Sabbath’s study. Why is that such a powerful argument in favor of the deity of Christ? Or is it? What options do we have if Jesus isn’t the Son of God?
- ❷ As a class, discuss your answer to Monday’s last question.
- ❸ Whatever we might have to say about the Pharisees, one point we shouldn’t forget. They were members of God’s remnant church, the elite of the only faith in the world that had present truth. What’s the message, and warning, for us in that fact?

**Summary:** The story of Jesus is the most important story in history. His life and teachings show us not only the way to live and how to treat one another but also the way to eternal life—by believing in the salvation He brought to us through His death on the Cross.

## After-hours Ministry

Dr. Danielle is a dentist in southern Brazil. During the day she works to give people a more beautiful and healthy smile. But after hours, when her patients have gone and the dental hygienists have cleared away the day's tools, the dental clinic transforms into an evangelistic center, where she holds a small group Bible study.

Danielle always wanted to serve God, and she chose dentistry as a way to meet people and share her faith. But she wanted to do more, to sit with friends and patients and share deeply of God's love. It was then that the idea of creating a space in her clinic to study the Bible came about. Now, besides giving her patients quality dental care, she gives them a personal invitation to participate in the Bible study group.

Sandra, 32, accepted Danielle's invitation and came to the Bible study. "I came to participate, and I liked what I was hearing very much, so I invited a friend to the group," she said.

"I was invited by a friend to come to this Bible study group," Ruben, 30, said. "I came, and I really liked it, so I invited my mother to come. She, too, enjoyed the Bible study, and she invited my brother to come with her. Then she invited her husband. Now the entire family is studying the Bible together in this dental clinic."

Danielle is happy that she decided to expand her ministry beyond the dental chair. "The Bible study group grows because people are finding answers to their questions and their doubts," she says. "And when they find something that meets their needs, they invite their family and friends."

And the ministry of this group goes beyond casual Bible studies. So far the small group that meets in a dental clinic has led 60 people to baptism. "I want Jesus to return soon," Danielle says. "But I want as many of my friends and clients to be ready as possible. This is one small way I can share my faith with those with whom I have contact."

Every Christian knows someone, a friend, a neighbor, someone they meet at the store each week or at work every day who doesn't know the joy they've found in Jesus. Danielle's example challenges each of us to find a way to reach out to those we meet with the good news of salvation every day.



DANIELLE CARMEN ROVEDA (left) is a dentist in Curitiba, Paran, Brazil.

# Matthew 10: Jesus *and* His Disciples



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Lev. 25:8–54, Matthew 10, John 10:10.*

**Memory Text:** “So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (*Matthew 10:31, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Jesus, the world's greatest Teacher, gave His disciples instructions before sending them out to witness. What principles can we take from His words for ourselves today?

Jesus knew that an important part of His task was to train a group of His followers to continue His mission. So now, after touring Galilee—preaching, teaching, and healing—He knew it was time to send out His 12 disciples on their first assignment. They were to receive their first practical experience.

The disciples had received a highly specialized education from the greatest Teacher the world has ever known. They had seen in Jesus—in living action—the principles on which the universe is founded. They had seen the ultimate model of how human beings should live.

The disciples had been with Jesus for only a year or so. But they had walked and talked with the One who was, Himself, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (*John 14:6*). The time had finally come to put into practice what they had learned. Before Jesus sent out the disciples, He gave them special instruction.

This week we will explore the highlights from Jesus' words to His disciples as they embarked on their mission.

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

## The Kingdom of Heaven Is Near

**Read** Matthew 10:7. What does it mean that the “kingdom of heaven” is near? What is your understanding of the “kingdom of heaven”?

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A kingdom is the territory under the authority of a king. God’s kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, includes not only geographical territory but spiritual, as well. At one point Jesus even said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (*Luke 17:21*).

**What** does it mean that the “kingdom of God” is within us? How are we to understand this idea?

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Before Jesus and His disciples began their ministry, John the Baptist began preaching that the kingdom of heaven was near (*Matt. 3:2*). The New Testament clearly sees Jesus as Israel’s promised King, fulfilling all the hopes and predictions of the Old Testament (*see Luke 1:32, 33*). But the people were expecting a political king who would establish a political rule over specific geographical territory and free them from the Romans.

The kingdom that Jesus preached about was far different. It was not going to come when the Romans were overthrown. The kingdom of heaven was now. Now people could see Jesus, hear His words, and learn the principles on which salvation and heaven are based. Now they could learn to follow His example of how to live. Now they could see how the principles of God’s government operate in real life. Now they could choose to become part of that kingdom. Now they could have the promises of the Holy Spirit, of victory over sin, of hope for eternal life.

**In what ways are you now enjoying and benefiting from the privileges of living in the “kingdom of God”? What opportunities and promises are you not yet fully taking advantage of?**

## Missionary Instructions

In Matthew 10, Jesus commissions the Twelve to go out and do missionary work. Read over the chapter and then answer the following questions:

**What** does Jesus mean by telling the disciples to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (*vs. 16*)? How can we apply these words to ourselves today?

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**Read** Matthew 10:2–4. What is the one thing that all of Jesus' disciples had in common? What does that tell us about the need always to keep cultural sensitivities before us as we seek to work in various cultures?

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**What** special powers did the disciples have? How can we, without those powers, still minister and witness to the world?

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**What** kind of reception did Jesus prepare His followers to receive? What lessons can we take from those words for ourselves?

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## Gentiles and Jews

**Read** Matthew 10:5, 6. How are we to understand these words in light of His later commission to witness to all the world?

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As He sent out His disciples, Jesus clearly told them to go only to the Israelites, not the Gentiles. Looking back from our perspective, we might deem this unfair. Why should the good news go only to the Jewish people? Why should everyone else be ignored, at least at that time?

The answer, it seems, stems from cultural sensitivities. Jesus did not want the disciples to jeopardize their mission. As Ellen G. White writes, “If they had first preached the gospel to these, they would have lost their influence among the Jews who were first to hear the message of God.”—*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 19, 1892. She also suggests that it would have involved them in controversy with the Pharisees, and this would have discouraged the disciples in their work.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, July 18, 1900.

In our mission today, there will always be certain cultural practices to which we must be sensitive. These practices may be misguided. They may be wrong. They might be exceedingly offensive to us. But we cannot ignore them and be effective witnesses.

**Read** John 10:10. What is Jesus saying here that can help us as we meet people with harmful cultures and traditions?

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As followers of Christ, we need to be very sensitive to the cultures that we are working in. The last thing we need is to portray a sense of arrogance and superiority. If we have something better, if we can point others to a more abundant life, let our message and lifestyle testify to it.

**If someone were to look at your Christian lifestyle, what would they see that would make it appealing? What kind of message does your lifestyle send to others?**

## A Holistic Ministry

**Read** Matthew 10:7, 8. Besides preaching the gospel, what else was involved in the disciples' mission?

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Jesus' commission to His disciples was not concerned with just the spiritual aspect of life. The disciples were to teach and preach, but they were also to care for people's physical needs. Sure, in the end, the ultimate goal for everyone is salvation and eternal life, but that does not mean we need to ignore the pain and suffering we find all around us.

When Jesus spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth, He read from the book of Isaiah and made the words His own (*see Luke 4:18, 19*). Not only is He going to help the poor, the blind, the oppressed, and the imprisoned; He also is going to proclaim “ ‘the year of the Lord's favor’ ” (*vs. 19, NIV*). Jesus here refers to the jubilee year (*Lev. 25:8–54*), where every 50 years the ownership of land returned to the original owners.

**Skim** Leviticus 25:8–54. What seems to be the main moral concern there? What principle is the Lord conveying to His people?

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As Ellen White says, “a safeguard was afforded against the extremes either of wealth or of poverty.”—*Education*, p. 43. In the jubilee year, all slaves were also to be freed, and all debts were to be canceled.

Jesus instructs His disciples to have a balanced ministry. Certainly, they were to prepare people for the kingdom of heaven. But they were also to remember that, in an important sense, the kingdom was already with them. And that meant they were to have concern for people's total needs—including physical and social. By ministering to folks' needs now, we can open them up to the reality and promise of eternal life.

**How do you treat those less fortunate than you? When is the last time you did something for someone purely out of selfless compassion and concern?**

## Do Not Be Afraid of Them

Much of Jesus' address to His disciples is devoted to advice on how to deal with problems they will encounter. The message they proclaim, although it is about love and right living, will encounter opposition in certain places. In fact, said Jesus, they should be prepared for persecution.

**Read** Matthew 10:22 and Hebrews 10:35, 36. What is the crucial message to us in these texts?

Jesus' reference to perseverance is in the context of persecution. The apostle Paul says, "We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (*Rom. 5:3, 4, NIV*). Likewise, James writes, "The testing of your faith develops perseverance" (*James 1:3, NIV*).

**In** what ways can difficult times test your faith? How can you strengthen your spiritual life so that you will persevere in your faith through these times?

Jesus tells His disciples that they should not fear the difficult circumstances they will encounter. They will be brought before governors and kings to be His witnesses.

"'But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it,'" He says (*Matt. 10:19, NIV*). He promises that God will speak through them and give them the words to speak.

The book of Acts provides plenty of examples of what Jesus warned about. Peter and Paul and many others were taken constantly before the authorities to give an account of their actions. Each time they spoke boldly of their faith. Jesus reassures the disciples that God cares even for sparrows and that He has numbered " 'the very hairs of your head. . . . So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows' " (*Matt. 10:30, 31, NIV*).

**Read** Matthew 10:38, 39. What is Jesus promising us? What is He not promising us? What comfort can you draw for yourself from these words?

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The First Evangelists,” pp. 349–358, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Men’s hearts are no softer today than when Christ was upon the earth. They will do all in their power to aid the great adversary in making it as hard as possible for the servants of Christ, just as the people did with Christ when He was upon the earth. They will scourge with the tongue of slander and falsehood. They will criticize, and turn against the servant of God the very efforts he is leading them to make. They will, with their evil surmisings, see fraud and dishonesty where all is right and where perfect integrity exists. They lay selfish motives to the charge of God’s servants, when He Himself is leading them, and when they would give even their lives if God required, if by so doing they could advance His cause.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 234.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In what ways does our mission field today differ from the one Jesus’ disciples went into? What are the similarities?
- ❷ As a class, talk about what it means to be living in the “kingdom of heaven” now. What, if anything, do we have to show for it; that is, if someone were to look at us as a whole, what would they see that is different than what they would see in any other voluntary organization working together for a common cause?
- ❸ How involved are you and your local church in evangelism, in witnessing? How are you working to relieve the suffering of those around you? How can your local church do better in that area? Why is that aspect of our work so crucial? Why, though, is ministering to the physical needs of those around us not enough? At the same time, what happens when we emphasize preaching and ignore the social dimension of the gospel?

**Summary:** The greatest Teacher the world has ever seen took time to give specific instructions to His disciples before He sent them out into their mission field. The principles He outlined to them are timeless, and we must not ignore them today.

# Homes of Hope: Part 1

by LESLEY DAVIDSON

Two years ago I met Robin, an outgoing, witty, and friendly woman. She had come to my church, she said, “for the company.” She was lonely and wanted an outlet. But she made it clear that she didn’t believe what Adventists teach. This might have intimidated me, except our church in Australia had begun a new program called “Homes of Hope.” And Robin fit right into this program. I decided to prayerfully make Robin my Homes of Hope project.

Homes of Hope is a program designed to help church members befriend visitors and those in the community who are searching for something better. Jesus befriended people before He taught them, and we were trying to follow His pattern when we inaugurated Homes of Hope. It seemed easy to just be friends and answer questions if they came up.

I invited Robin to tea to get acquainted. We talked for two hours. She shared her troubled past, her pain, and the issues she was dealing with. Several times she reminded me that she was not attending church because she believed but because she wanted company. That was fine with me. She was welcome to come. Because I did not have to try to “save” her, I was free to be Robin’s friend, to love her for Jesus, to encourage her to taste and see that God was for real.

Soon Robin and I were spending hours talking by phone and visiting. We shared so much, and I found in her a real friend.

Robin enjoyed church and wanted more to do, so I introduced her to Adventurers. She adored the children and often brought them treats or visited them during the week.

Then Robin began feeling tired. She decided to visit a health spa, hoping that the mineral baths would help her feel better. I went along, looking forward to four days alone with my friend, sharing my faith without interruption.

By the end of the second day she began asking questions, hard questions. She told me she believed in reincarnation. *How can I answer that one, God?* I prayed silently. And God gave me the words to say to her. Before I realized it, I was quoting scripture and explaining theology that I had never uttered before. To my amazement, she understood and accepted it.

(Continued next week)

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LESLEY DAVIDSON met Robin in the Central Coast Community Church in Wyong, New South Wales, Australia. She now lives in Karingong, New South Wales.

# The Compassionate Savior



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 1:14, John 3, John 4; 9:1–7, Eph. 4:32, 1 John 2:12.*

**Memory Text:** “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (*Matthew 9:36, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Jesus ever ministered to the needs of the people. What can we take away from His example that can help us do the same?

These lines from “The New Colossus,” by poet Emma Lazarus, sit on the bottom of the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” Her words echo the ministry of Jesus, who said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (*Matt. 11:28, 29*).

Compassion motivated every aspect of Christ’s ministry. He ministered to all types of people, regardless of their social class, gender, or race. He demonstrated unconditional love and forgiveness in His life and, most powerfully, in His death on the cross, paying in Himself the penalty for our sins.

This week we will look more at Jesus and how He ministered, learning what we can that will help us as we minister, as well.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 9.*

## Reaching the Masses

**Read** Matthew 4:25 and Luke 6:17. What two specific points do the texts make about how people responded to Jesus' ministry? Also, what do those points tell us about the effectiveness of Christ's ministry?

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There was no mass transit back then; no one jumped on a plane, in a car, or even on a bicycle to come and see Jesus. Travel back then was, in contrast to our day, painfully slow and exceedingly treacherous. Nonetheless, that did not stop "a great multitude" from coming to hear Jesus.

**What** do the following texts tell us about the motives of some of those who came to hear Jesus? *Mark 5:25–29, 6:15, John 12:9.*

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The crowds who followed Jesus had mixed motives. Some had heard that He had the words of life that He spoke with authority, and they hungered after spiritual food. Others were looking for physical healing for themselves or for friends or family. Some wanted to see for themselves if He was the promised One who would liberate them from Roman rule. Still others were mere curiosity seekers. One time the crowd was so large and pressing against Him that He had to get into a boat and teach them from a distance (*Matt. 13:2*). The crowds grew so big that the Pharisees commented, " 'Look how the whole world has gone after him!' " (*John 12:19, NIV*).

**Write out a paragraph answering this question, What is my motive for following Jesus? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

## The Personal Touch

People were attracted to Jesus. Mark says they listened to him “with delight” (*Mark 12:37, NIV*) and were “amazed at his teaching” (*Mark 1:22, 11:18, NIV*). He often spoke and ministered to large crowds. There was, however, another whole aspect of Christ’s ministry.

**Look** up the following texts. What is the one thing they all have in common? What important message does this send to us regarding ministry? *John 3, 4, 9:1–7.*

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The foundation of Jesus’ ministry was personal contact. “He went journeying from town to town and village to village, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God” (*Luke 8:1, NEB*).

Within decades His message had spread throughout the then-known world. But it happened for one reason—the Master’s hand had personally touched lives, and those lives, particularly His 12 disciples, went on to touch others personally.

The 12 disciples had seen Jesus interact with people. They had seen the way He spoke words of comfort and encouragement to those who were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (*Matt. 9:36, NIV*). They heard Jesus say, “ ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light’ ” (*Matt. 11:28–30, NIV*).

What more attractive message could there be for people today who are stressed, burned out, and looking for comfort and peace?

**Why is the personal touch so important? How have you been blessed by those taking time to minister to you, personally, one on one? Think about ways you can use your gifts and time to minister directly, one on one, to the needs of someone else.**



## Forgiveness

Compassion drove everything Jesus said and did. Note how often the Gospel writers say He was “filled with compassion” or “had compassion.” Sometimes this meant strongly condemning sin. At times Jesus did speak harshly to the religious leaders, but He always did it in love.

And central to that expression of compassion was forgiveness. So often Jesus taught and revealed forgiveness. Considering the essence of Christian theology, that we are sinners in need of God’s forgiveness, no wonder it is such a powerful theme in Jesus’ life and teachings.

**What** do these texts reveal to us about forgiveness? *Matt. 18:21, 22; Luke 23:34; John 8:1–11; Eph. 4:32; 1 John 2:12.*

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Jesus often likens His grace to being forgiven a great debt. Imagine you owed someone one million dollars, and they canceled the debt. Imagine how you would feel. That is what God’s grace is like. And the reason that debt has been canceled is that Jesus, Himself, paid it for us.

Also, again and again, Jesus taught that those who have been forgiven must forgive others. An unforgiving Christian is a contradiction in terms. Think of the parable of the ungrateful servant (*Matt. 18:21–34*), the story of Mary and Simon the Pharisee (*Luke 7:36–50*), and even the Lord’s Prayer—“ ‘Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us’ ” (*Luke 11:4, NIV*). When we consider what happened at the Cross, and what it cost God in order to be able to justly forgive us our sins, it is not that hard to understand why such an emphasis is placed on our learning to forgive others. Think about our world and how different a place it would be if we learned how to forgive others. Think about the difference, not only in world politics but in our own personal relations, our families, our homes, etc.

**How much resentment, anger, and bitterness resides in you because you still refuse to forgive? How can you better learn to forgive those who have done you wrong?**

## God With Us

**Read** John 1:14. What are the amazing implications of that text? What does it tell us about the character of God? Think about the size and complexity of the universe as you contemplate your answer.

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In the 1700s and the 1800s, an idea arose, an outgrowth of the scientific revolution, called deism. Though it taught that God created us, this God—far from being involved in our everyday lives—has left us on our own, basically to fend for ourselves. According to this view, the world was like a clock that God wound up and then left. God created His natural laws, and we here have to live within those laws the best we can. It is like a parent who raises a child until that child is 18 and then says, “OK, Sonny, you’re on your own. I’ll never see you again. Good luck.”

But that god is not the God of the Bible, that is not Jesus Christ, who became one of us, who lived among us, who took upon Himself our humanity and in that humanity died for our sins, the God depicted in John 1:14.

The Greek word translated “dwelt,” *skenoo*, in John 1:14 means to “pitch one’s tent” or “live in a tent.” When Jesus came to this world, He did not live at a distance from the people to whom He ministered. He “pitched His tent” among them, living and working among them—relating to them at their level.

Matthew quotes Isaiah’s prophecy about a virgin giving birth to a son named Immanuel and directly applies it to Jesus. He even translates the meaning of Immanuel—“God with us” (*Matt. 1:23*).

Besides coming to die as a substitute for us, Jesus came to earth to show us exactly what God is like. On one occasion Philip asked Jesus, “‘Show us the Father.’”

**How did Jesus respond to Philip’s request (*John 14:8–11*)? What does Jesus’ answer tell us about what God is like? What aspects of that character come through very clearly? Are there some that you find disturbing? If so, what are they? Bring your concerns, if any, to class.**

## Speaking in Parables

Jesus knew how to communicate with people. His speech was aimed at their level. He did not use deep philosophical and theological language, although He spoke the most profound truth. He spoke in simple, practical terms that everyone could understand. He spoke of things that people could apply to their lives.

Jesus illustrated His teaching with objects from nature and common household items. He spoke about coins (*Luke 15:8–10*); farmers sowing seed (*Mark 4:26–29*); yeast and flour (*Matt. 13:33*); sheep (*Matt. 18:12–14*); fig trees (*Mark 13:28–32*)—and numerous other items to which the people could relate.

**Pick** a few of the parables listed above. Read them. What point was Jesus making in each case? Why were those images so appropriate? Ask yourself this: Were Jesus walking among us today, in the flesh, what images might He have used to make those same points?

As you read those parables, perhaps you noticed something about them, and that was how most, if not all, of those images would be just as appropriate today. That is, there was a timelessness, a universality, of those images that in a way paralleled the timelessness of His message.

**How** does that fact help us understand why, perhaps, Jesus used those specific images?

Matthew records several mini-parables Jesus used to try to describe what the kingdom of heaven is like. He said that the kingdom of heaven is like “a grain of mustard seed” (*Matt. 13:31*); “leaven” (*vs. 33*); “treasure hid in a field” (*vs. 44*); “a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls” (*vs. 45*); “a net” (*vs. 47*); “a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (*vs. 52*); “a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard” (*Matt. 20:1*); “a certain king, which made a marriage for his son” (*Matt. 22:2*).

**Which one of those images works best for you? Why would Jesus use so many different images to make the same point? What message could the Lord be sending us through this deliberate use of different images that could help us learn how to witness to others?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Go Teach All Nations,” pp. 818–828, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In all true teaching the personal element is essential. Christ in His teaching dealt with men individually. It was by personal contact and association that He trained the Twelve. It was in private, often to but one listener, that He gave His most precious instruction. To the honored rabbi at the night conference on the Mount of Olives, to the despised woman at the well of Sychar, He opened His richest treasures; for in these hearers He discerned the impressible heart, the open mind, the receptive spirit. Even the crowd that so often thronged His steps was not to Christ an indiscriminate mass of human beings. He spoke directly to every mind and appealed to every heart. He watched the faces of His hearers, marked the lighting up of the countenance, the quick, responsive glance, which told that truth had reached the soul; and there vibrated in His heart the answering chord of sympathetic joy.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 231.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Since 1983, the majority of new Adventist congregations around the world have been established by Global Mission pioneers (for more information, visit <http://www.adventistmission.org>). These Adventist lay people live among the people to whom they are ministering at the same socioeconomic level. Why do you think they have had so much success?
- 2 As a class, discuss your answers to the questions at the end of Sunday’s and Wednesday’s lessons.
- 3 As we saw, it was the personal touch that was so central to Jesus’ ministry. In what ways did someone’s personal touch influence you to accept Jesus? Share your stories and then ask yourselves, How can we as a local church work better to minister to people’s needs on a personal level?
- 4 Because of Jesus’ example of love and acceptance, should we accept anybody to worship in our church—no matter what their lifestyle?

**Summary:** Jesus, the compassionate Savior, hated sin and loved sinners. His method of ministering to people in crowds and individually should be the model for our witness today. Because of the salvation we have received through Him, we can extend His love and forgiveness to others.

## Homes of Hope: Part 2

by LESLEY DAVIDSON

Robin and I spent our time at the spa talking about issues that interested her. God is so wonderful. He cemented our friendship and drew Robin into His circle of friendship at the same time.

Robin continued to attend church, continued to grow and ask lots of questions. When I couldn't answer her questions, my husband did. By this time Robin was a part of our family.

We invited Robin to camp meeting, where she spent ten days growing in God's love and being loved by other Christians. By the time we returned home, Robin was hooked on God. She believed, and she accepted Jesus Christ as her Savior. But she wasn't interested in being baptized.

Then Robin was diagnosed with cancer. She had battled cancer two years earlier, had undergone surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy, alone. I was determined that this time she would not be alone. I went to her doctor's appointments with her and to every test and appointment after that. She was given just months to live.

Robin grew weaker before our eyes and was in constant pain. She lost her ability to walk. We all knew that she was deteriorating fast. Before long she was seeing double and couldn't read. I read to her a lot. She loved the book of James, and we read it often.

The pastor anointed Robin, and her spirit soared, even as her body grew weaker by the day. She asked to be baptized. But she was growing weaker and was hospitalized. We knew Robin had just days to live. But in spite of her weakening body, she was determined to be baptized.

The pastor arranged for a baptism in a hospital bathtub. Her church friends gathered to witness the beautiful ceremony. Robin, though in pain, was fully alert and had a peaceful countenance during the ceremony. She glowed when she received her baptismal certificate, but the rest of us cried.

Three days later Robin fell asleep in Jesus. Her last words were, "I am saved, I am forgiven."

If it had not been for Homes of Hope to give me the kick I needed, I might never have gotten to know my wonderful friend Robin, and she might never have met the Savior who wanted to be her best Friend. God gave me the words to nurture her, and my church family loved her and gave her the affirmation she so desperately needed. I can't wait to see Robin again, to talk for eternity about our wonderful Lord.

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LESLEY DAVIDSON lives in Kariong, New South Wales.

For more information on Homes of Hope, visit their Web site at <http://www.aucsda.com/australianunion/departments/personalministries/homesofhope.htm>.

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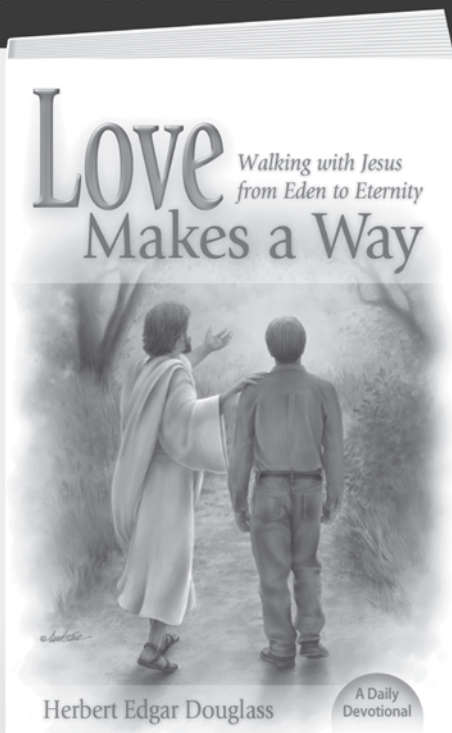
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Recently the pope ratified statements that Protestant "ecclesial communities" are "defective." He has stated that "we intensify our endeavors towards 'the holy objective' of reconciling all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ."

Surely it's time to read again the messages for these last days that have been given to us from God through Ellen White.



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# The Apostle John



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 8:21, 22; Mark 10:35–45; 1 John; 2 John; 3 John.*

**Memory Text:** “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (*3 John 4, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** The apostle John is one of the most loved characters from the Bible. What can we learn from him?

A church tradition describes the apostle John as an old man living in Ephesus. Because of his feeble condition, his followers had to carry him to church. As they met together, his only spoken words were, “Little children, love one another.”

His followers tired of hearing John repeat the same thing all the time and asked, “Master, why do you always say this?”

“It is the Lord’s command,” he replied. “And if this alone be done, it is enough!”

Whether true or not, this story captures the essence of this “son of thunder” who was eventually transformed into a “son of love and grace.”

In John’s three epistles, or letters, we see the heart of a man whose life is motivated by love; we see also some of the most encouraging verses in the Bible, one of the most famous is “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (*1 John 2:1, NIV*).

This week we will explore further the life and mission of this pillar of the early Christian church.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 16.*



## A Special Calling

When Jesus called John and his brother James to follow Him, they were working in their boat fishing. “And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him” (*Mark 1:20*).

**Read** carefully *Mark 1:20* again. What important principles can we take from there about what it means to follow Jesus? See also *Matt. 8:21, 22; Luke 14:26; Phil. 3:8*.

John’s decision to follow Jesus and leave his father’s business would forever change his life. Luke gives the most detailed account of Jesus’ call (*Luke 5:1–11*).

**What** verse in *Luke 5:1–11* again conveys what it means to be a follower of Jesus? What, again, is the point that is being made?

No question, those who follow Jesus need to make a full and complete commitment. Jesus, as Lord of all, is owed all. Yet, He does not demand our hearts out of selfishness; no, not at all. Instead, He knows the reality of the battle that we are in, and if there is any opening, any area of self not surrendered, the evil one will take advantage and use it to try to destroy us. Thus, we need to surrender completely to the Lord.

Which John did. And thus, instead of catching fish, John spent the rest of his life catching people for the kingdom of heaven. From now on, John’s mission field was the world—to carry hope and healing and the good news to those who desperately needed it. Though he would have some hard lessons to learn, because he was dedicated to Jesus, he was in a position to learn them, no matter the pain that would come.

**How committed are you to Jesus? Have you forsaken all for Him? How can you know where your heart truly is? What changes might you need to make?**

## Son of Thunder

Jesus gave John and his brother James a special nickname—“the sons of thunder” (or *Boanerges* in Aramaic). Evidence suggests that this name referred to their disposition—a disposition that Jesus gently corrects.

**Read** Mark 10:35–45. What request do James and John make? How does Jesus respond to their request? What does this tell us about the character of both these men?

John and his brother also showed an unhealthy pride. In response to their request, Jesus asked if they could share His fate. “We can,” they boasted (*Mark 10:39*).

On another occasion Jesus and His disciples were traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem. As appears to have been His normal habit, Jesus went directly through Samaria rather than circumnavigating in order to avoid the hated Samaritans. He sent James and John ahead to find lodging for the night. They approached one village, but when the people learned they were headed for Jerusalem, they showed no hospitality.

**What** does their response to this indignity also reveal about their character? How much does the beloved John have to learn? *Luke 9:54*.

What a contrast we can see in the John depicted here in these accounts and the one who writes the letters he does later. What a changed man; what a changed personality! No doubt, though, the change did not happen easily or overnight. John had some hard lessons to learn that enabled him to become the great missionary that he eventually became.

**Recount some of your most recent hard lessons. What did you learn? What other ways could you have learned what you did other than through suffering? What other lessons do you need to learn? What changes do you need to make in your life now that, perhaps, could spare you from having to learn them the hard way?**

## The Witness of John

As an eyewitness who had spent much time in Jesus' company, John had much to tell; more, in fact, than he could.

**Read** John 21:25. What message do you think John was seeking to convey by that statement? What hope can we find in that text?

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Though not able to tell us everything, John, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, does teach us one of the most important of all truths, that Jesus Christ came in human flesh. That truth is something that all the philosophy, science, and logic could never lead us to. Instead, God uses John to tell it to us.

In the first verse of his Gospel, John refers to the Word, or in Greek, the *logos*. To the Jewish reader, the Word referred to the Word of God that created the world, as well as to His teachings, or law, that guides the way we should live our lives (see Deut. 32:45–47).

For the Greek reader, *logos* had other meanings. The *logos* was a life force that kept the universe together. The symmetry of a leaf, the harmony of the seasons, the stars in the sky—all were kept in balance by the *logos*. The philosophers Heraclitus, Plutarch, Philo, and Plato, as well as various stoic philosophers, wrote about the *logos*.

For both Jewish and Greek readers, John makes a startling claim: This *Logos* is a person. The *Logos* became flesh and broke into human history in a specific place at a specific time with a specific purpose—to bring salvation to humanity.

**Read** John 1:1–3, 14. What does this mean? In your own words, write out your best understanding of what the Lord is revealing to us here.

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Jesus, our Creator, entered into humanity and became a human being. That alone is amazing; add to it the reason He came, to die for our sins, and we are given a revelation of the character of God that should bring us to our knees in gratefulness, faith, and humble obedience.

## Life-Giver

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (*John 20:31, NIV*).

In these words John summarizes the reason he wrote his Gospel, and the entire purpose of his life—to lead people to believe in Jesus in order that they might gain eternal life. A key theme, all through the New Testament, is that eternal life exists only in Jesus.

**Look** up the following verses to see some of the things John says about this key theme, that of “life.” Also, as you read them, where can you see how the idea of “life” applies not only to eternal life but has immediate implications for life now?

*John 3:15, 16, 36*

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*John 6:35*

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*John 6:63*

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*John 10:28*

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*John 12:25*

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*John 14:6*

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*John 17:3*

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What makes these promises of eternal life so important is that, although all creatures on earth die, human beings alone are capable of contemplating the idea of eternity. We alone can grasp the vast gap between our short existence and the prospect of eternity, and the cold reality of that gap hangs over us every instant of our lives—lives that are just a clogged artery, a drunken driver, or an AIDS virus away from ending.

What a wonderful hope we have, then, to know that death is not the end; on the contrary, it is just a sleep that to us will seem like a second, and the next thing we know we will be with Jesus, for eternity.

**How should the hope of eternal life impact how we live now? In what ways do you live this life differently, knowing that you have the promise of eternal life?**

## Spending Time With Jesus

“Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God” (3 John 11).

**What** does John mean about those who had not seen God? What is his point? How does one see God?

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John had much to learn from Jesus. Even after spending time in His compassionate presence, John was still protective of his own turf and intolerant of others. On one occasion he stopped someone from casting out demons in Jesus’ name because he was not an official disciple (Mark 9:38). Jesus gently taught him that “ ‘whoever is not against us is for us’ ” (vs. 40, NIV).

John grew in strength of character at the Master’s side. At the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, when other disciples had fled, John alone remained at the foot of the cross. The regard Jesus held for John is shown in the way He entrusted His mother into John’s care (John 19:26, 27).

**Read** 2 Corinthians 3:18. What important principle is found there? What practical ways can we apply this principle to our own lives?

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If you read the epistles of John, you cannot help noting the kindness, the gentleness, the compassion found all through them. What a profound difference from the John presented in the Gospels. Truly something utterly remarkable happened to that man. We, of course, know what it was: He had been with Jesus, and his life and character had been radically altered from the experience.

**Skim through the three epistles of 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. Look at the character revealed there. How did Jesus change John’s life? What aspects of your own life could use change, as well? What practical steps are you taking in order to allow God to bring those changes?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “John the Beloved,” pp. 539–545, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“In the terrible persecution that followed, the apostle John did much to confirm and strengthen the faith of the believers. He bore a testimony which his adversaries could not controvert and which helped his brethren to meet with courage and loyalty the trials that came upon them. When the faith of the Christians would seem to waver under the fierce opposition they were forced to meet, the old, tried servant of Jesus would repeat with power and eloquence the story of the crucified and risen Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 568.

“John lived to be very old. He witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the ruin of the stately temple. The last survivor of the disciples who had been intimately connected with the Saviour, his message had great influence in setting forth the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world. No one could doubt his sincerity, and through his teachings many were led to turn from unbelief.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 569.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Go through the three epistles of John again. What other elements of John’s character can be found there? What strong words can you find there for those who are not following truth? How does this help us understand what love is all about?
- ❷ What is your understanding of the idea of character development? How does it work? How does Jesus change our characters? Though the Bible does relate many supernatural events, is there any event in which a person’s character is changed immediately, supernaturally, in the same way the blind were given sight or the lepers cured? If not, why not? What does the answer tell us about the process of character development?
- ❸ As a class, talk about the answers to these questions: How loving and accepting is your local church? What things can you do to help your church become more loving and accepting of others?

**Summary:** Having experienced firsthand the life-giving love of his Savior, the apostle John let that experience flow into all his words and actions. His life and writings remind us of the primacy of love in the Christian life and how it must be the basis of all our mission activity.

# Midnight Cry in Malawi

by MIKE NYONDO

A group of lay men and women in northern Malawi have a passion for souls. Although they lack equipment and supplies, they are making an impact on unreached areas of Malawi.

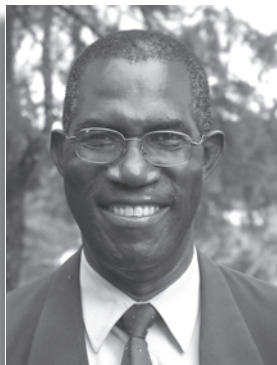
In one prison where they serve, they held evangelistic meetings, baptizing 100 prisoners. Among those who responded was Samson, a robber. Some prisoners doubted his sincerity, for he had attended only a few of the meetings. But Samson testified, "Even though I did not attend the meetings, I listened from my cell. I heard God's voice calling me, and I have answered."

Several of the newly baptized prisoners have been released and live in northern Malawi, where they faithfully attend church. The lay evangelists continue to work in the prison and have held subsequent baptisms.

Few Adventists live along the shores of Lake Malawi, an area dominated by another Protestant denomination. When Midnight Cry held meetings there, opposition was strong, and few came the first week. But then attendance picked up.

When 16-year-old Vizezgo (vee-AY-joh) responded to the first altar call, his parents were angry and locked him out of the house. He was forced to sleep outside. But he kept coming to the meetings. His parents tried to send him to stay with his aunt in Lilongwe, but on his way to the bus station, he met his aunt, who was coming to visit the family. He walked home with her then hurried to Lake Malawi to be baptized. When he returned home that evening, his parents again locked him out of the house. They sent him to Lilongwe with his aunt, where he attends the Adventist church.

The group is energized as they see God working through them. God invites every believer to become a lay evangelist and share His love in their corner of the world.



MIKE NYONDO (left), leader of the Midnight Cry, is a civil engineer living in Mzuzu, Malawi.

# From Folly to Faith: The Apostle Peter



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** Acts 2:14–40, Acts 3, 5:1–11, 1 Peter, 2 Peter.

**Memory Text:** “Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’” (John 6:68, NIV).

**Key Thought:** The apostle Peter was one of the central pillars of the early church. Jesus changed Peter from an unreliable but passionate disciple into a rocklike tower of strength in sharing the gospel.

Peter's impulsive, emotional character has made him an interesting study. He was a disciple whose heart was in the right place but who made many mistakes.

Peter's story especially helps us understand the role of emotions in the Christian life. When you are lost in a forest, your senses can take you only so far. You can see, hear, and smell—and still be lost. You need a compass and a map, something more than what you have naturally.

So it is in our spiritual lives. What we feel is not the final test of what is truth. We need something more—something outside of us. We need a spiritual compass and map. Emotions are a vital part of the Christian life but not the most important part. Without appropriate care, they even can be dangerous. Peter was someone whose emotions got him into trouble more often than not. However, once placed under submission to Jesus, his emotions and zeal became powerful tools for the Lord's work.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 23.*



## The Fisherman

Peter came from Bethsaida, a fishing village on the northeastern coast of the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida, which means House of Fishing, was where Jesus later performed many miracles. For nearly two thousand years, Bethsaida was lost to history. Not until 1987 was the archaeological site of this village discovered.

Although Peter was married (*Matt. 8:14*), we know nothing about his wife or any children he might have had. We do know he was living with his wife and mother-in-law in Capernaum when Jesus called him to be His disciple.

**Read** Matthew 4:18–20. How did Peter respond to Jesus’ call? What significance is found in the fact that they “left their nets” (*vs. 20*)?

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The simplicity of this description leaves us to guess what went through Peter’s mind. Obviously, something about Jesus was so compelling that Peter was prepared to leave his home and livelihood to follow this itinerant Teacher. The point should be obvious to all of us. We need to be ready to do the same thing; that is, to follow Jesus no matter the personal cost (*see Luke 14:26, 27*).

**Peter** came from a humble working-class background. Contrast that to Paul’s background. *Acts 22:3, Rom. 11:1, Phil. 3:5; see also Acts 5:34*. What point can we take away from this contrast?

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Either way, for both Peter and Paul, regardless of their different backgrounds, the call of Jesus required total commitment on their part. Upper class, working class, it does not matter.

**Recount your own experience when being called by Jesus. What did it cost you? What did you have to give up? If someone asked you, Was it worth it? how would you respond, and why?**

## Peter's Folly

Like the other disciples, Peter had a unique opportunity to learn from Jesus. He walked many miles with Him, ate with Him, worked with Him. He listened to Jesus speak, watched the way He dealt with people, saw Him heal the sick. He witnessed dramatic spectacles—the Mount of Transfiguration, where Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah; Jesus raising the dead; Jesus arrested; Jesus risen from the grave.

Peter also had many opportunities for practical learning. Often Peter found himself in the middle of experiences that provided life-changing object lessons. All these lessons were preparing him for his role as one of the great missionaries of the early church.

**In** the course of his experiences with Jesus, Peter made many mistakes. Read the mistakes depicted below. What were they, and what lessons should Peter have learned from them?

*Matt. 14:22–32*

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*Matt. 26:36–46*

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*Mark 14:29–31, 66–72*

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*John 18:10, 11*

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Brash, presumptuous, prone to violence, collapsing under pressure, sleeping on the job, Peter on one level appeared to be everything that a humble, meek, faithful Christian should not be. And yet, before it was all over, Peter became one of the key leaders in the early Christian church, a powerful evangelist and missionary for Jesus. What a testimony to what God can do in a life surrendered to Him.

**What lessons can you learn, from this account, about not judging others? Or even judging yourself?**

## Learning From Jesus

**Read** Matthew 16:13–26. What was the nature of the exchange? Why did Peter respond as he did? What basic lesson was Jesus seeking to teach the disciples?

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Though Peter had declared that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, he had a false understanding of what that meant. The view Peter and the other disciples had of the Messiah reflected the common understanding of the day. The Messiah would come from the line of David and would overthrow the Romans and bring justice and peace.

Yet, Jesus clearly taught the disciples and the crowds that the kingdom of God was a spiritual kingdom. They would not establish it by power, swords, and daggers but by love, forgiveness, and righteousness.

At a pivotal stage of His ministry, Jesus decided to tell the disciples about His death—that He would go to Jerusalem, be killed, and rise again after three days. Peter was offended by the idea that Jesus was going to die—even though this death was to be the central pillar of the plan of salvation.

Within Peter's worldview, there was no room for this. Peter had left his home village and his fishing business to follow Jesus. He had given his life to supporting Him and His ministry. The death of his Master, therefore, had no place in the scenario Peter had painted in his mind. Jesus would set up His kingdom on earth, and Peter would play a key role in that kingdom of justice and peace. How could such a wonderful movement of righteousness and healing end in the death of its Leader? It is almost as if Peter either did not hear or did not understand Jesus' promise to rise on the third day.

**Notice the degree of selfishness seen in Peter here. That explains, it seems, Christ's words in Matthew 16:23–26. Read those verses again. In what areas of your own life might you apply those words?**

## The Peter of Acts

No doubt, much of the Gospels do not paint Peter in a particularly great light. He is shown, time and again, floundering, falling, making great mistakes. Yet, the Gospels end with a clear indication of the bumbling disciple's future.

**Read** John 21:14–19. What is Jesus saying to Peter here? Why is that so astonishing, considering Peter's past?

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“Feed my sheep”? That is exactly what Peter eventually comes to do. Again, what a powerful testimony to what God can do in the life of someone dedicated to Him. The fiery, impetuous Peter now takes a key role in the formation of the early church.

**Browse** through the following texts. What do they tell us about the role and work of Peter?

*Acts 2:14–40*

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*Acts 3*

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*Act 5:1–11*

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The transformation was astounding, and the lessons for us should be obvious. Through the surrender of himself to Christ, Peter became a powerful witness for the Lord. Despite Peter's numerous mistakes and shortcomings, the Lord was still able to use him as a powerful witness.

**How different are you today from when you first started following Jesus? What progress have you seen? What areas need more improvement? Why, no matter how slow the progress seems, should you never give up?**

## The Peter of the Epistles

When Jesus told Peter, “Feed my sheep,” no doubt the discouraged fisherman had no idea what was coming, or the role he would play in the Lord’s church. Though we have seen, in Acts, Peter fulfilling that command, we can see it also in the fact that this same Peter was also the author of two epistles, his way of “feeding the sheep” not just in his own time but for all church history. In a sense, every time we read one of his letters, we are seeing another fulfillment of Christ’s words to His disciple.

**Pick** one chapter, any chapter, from either of the epistles of Peter. Read it over, pray over it, and try to imagine the character of the person writing it. What can you learn about the new Peter from what you have read in that chapter?

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In some ways it is hard to imagine these deep, eloquent words coming from the same man seen in the Gospels, the harsh, brash fisherman whose mouth ran faster than his mind or his faith. Yet, this is the Peter transformed by God’s grace into what Paul called “a new creature” (*2 Cor: 5:17*).

Particularly powerful are Peter’s words in 1 Peter 1:18–21 and in 1 Peter 2:24, in which Peter puts emphasis on the death of Jesus for the redemption of our souls. The Peter who once was determined that Jesus should never go to the Cross is now the Peter who is proclaiming the Cross as the means of redemption, as the place where Jesus, our Substitute, bore our sins. Notice, too, the wording of 1 Peter 2:18–23 in which Peter is advocating a kind of pacifism, a turning of the cheek that one would not have found in the Peter of the Gospels. Truly, the change was remarkable. It should give us all hope, regardless of where we are in our own personal character development.

**Go back over the chapter you picked from one of Peter’s epistles. What was the main point? How can you take what this shepherd is feeding you and make it your own?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “A Night on the Lake,” pp. 377–382, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In his early discipleship Peter thought himself strong. Like the Pharisee, in his own estimation he was ‘not as other men are.’ When Christ on the eve of His betrayal forewarned His disciples, ‘All ye shall be offended because of Me this night,’ Peter confidently declared, ‘Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.’ Mark 14:27, 29. Peter did not know his own danger. Self-confidence misled him. He thought himself able to withstand temptation; but in a few short hours the test came, and with cursing and swearing he denied his Lord.

“When the crowing of the cock reminded him of the words of Christ, surprised and shocked at what he had just done he turned and looked at his Master. At that moment Christ looked at Peter, and beneath that grieved look, in which compassion and love for him were blended, Peter understood himself. He went out and wept bitterly. That look of Christ’s broke his heart. Peter had come to the turning point, and bitterly did he repent his sin. He was like the publican in his contrition and repentance, and like the publican he found mercy. The look of Christ assured him of pardon.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 152–154.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Go through Peter’s epistles and look for things in there that specifically show how different a person he was from the Peter of the Gospels. What encouragement can you draw from what you find?
- ❷ It is easy to criticize Peter’s lack of faith as he sank into the water. But Peter was the only disciple who had the courage to get out of the boat. What are some of the ways you need to “get out of the boat” in your Christian life? What about your own church? Does it need to do the same?
- ❸ Ellen G. White writes, “Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 195. Many followers of Christ lose their early enthusiasm to share what they have learned with others. How can church members recapture that passion for sharing the good news? How can you help each other regain this desire for witnessing?

**Summary:** The story of Peter is a tribute to what God can do through even the weakest disciple. Jesus harnessed Peter’s passion and good intentions and strengthened him in the faith to be a mighty pillar of the early Christian church.

# God Hater Becomes a God Lover

by ROSELLE MONTEBON

Pangilinan, a lay evangelist, and his team of volunteers, held evangelistic meetings in a rural area in the northern Philippines. Toward the end of the meetings a number of people asked to prepare for baptism.

Pangilinan asked his team for a volunteer to stay behind and care for the new believers, and Roselle agreed to stay. She lived in a room provided by the village and spent her days visiting the people, holding evening worships, and teaching a literacy class twice a week. Two young women from the village stayed with her to protect her.

In this village lived a man, Totoy, who hated Adventists and didn't want them in the village. When the team left the area, he showed his anger toward them by sprinkling blood outside the door of Roselle's room while she slept. Most of the villagers suspected that Totoy had done this to frighten Roselle into leaving the village, but they had no proof. Roselle wasn't frightened by the demonstration of hatred, and she continued her work in the village.

Several months later Totoy became ill and was hospitalized with tuberculosis. After being released, he asked his physician for the medicine he needed to continue his recovery. But to his surprise, the doctor refused to give it to him. "You must go see Pangilinan," the doctor said. "He will give you the medicine." The doctor chose to distribute medicines to tribal people through trusted local workers, and in Totoy's area that trusted person was the Adventist lay evangelist.

Totoy didn't want to visit Pangilinan, but he needed the medicine. Finally he gave in and went to Pangilinan to ask for the medicine. Pangilinan gave him the medicine and vitamins he needed. Then Totoy went to live with relatives in another village, away from Adventists, he thought.

But in his new village lived Mar, another lay evangelist. Mar didn't know about Totoy's hatred for Adventists, and when he met Totoy, he invited him to church. Totoy agreed to go and began attending church regularly. He even brought his family with him. In time this man who hated God and His people surrendered his life to the Savior and asked to be baptized. He testified, "I hated God, and I hated Adventists. But God did not give up on me. His great love has saved me."

Your mission offerings help support lay evangelists such as Pangilinan, Roselle, and Mar, who work to bring people to the Savior in difficult and isolated areas of the world. Thank you.

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ROSELLE MONTEBON is a graduate of Adventist University of the Philippines.

# A Pillar of Mission: The Apostle Peter



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Pss. 18:2, 31; 95:1; Matt. 16:18; Acts 5:15; 10:25, 28–43; 11:19–26; Gal. 2:11–14.*

**Memory Text:** “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (*Acts 4:13, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Peter, the transformed Peter, became one of the greatest missionaries the world has ever seen, even despite some lessons he still needed to learn.

Last week we looked at the amazing transformation of Peter, how he went from instability to a pillar in the church. How easy it would have been, after his disastrous fall, to have written him off from the service of the Lord. As we saw, however, that was not God's intention for this flawed hero.

Indeed, after his restoration, Peter would devote his life to one mission: to share spiritual food with Jesus' flock—both inside and outside the sheepfold.

Last week we also saw what Christ did in Peter's life to make him the great missionary that he became. This week we will look at the results of his mission. We will follow some of Peter's experiences as he played a key role in the work of the early church and in helping spread the gospel to the Gentiles.

There are some powerful lessons for us today from the story of Peter, both his successes and his failures.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 30.*



## Peter's Commission: A Closer Look

**“I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”** (*Matt. 16:18*).

These are some of the most controversial words in all of the Bible. A lot of Christian history has been based on how people have interpreted the meaning of this text.

For many, it meant that Jesus built His church on Peter, that he was what has been called “the first pope,” and that he, Peter, was the rock that Jesus was talking about.

Others, however, interpret it as Jesus saying, essentially, “You are Peter, but on this Rock, Myself, I will build My church.” The evidence, as we’ll see below, is strongly in favor of the latter.

**Look up the following texts. How do they help us understand what the rock is that Jesus is talking about here?** *Deut. 32:4; Pss. 18:2, 31; 95:1; 1 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6.*

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No matter how privileged Peter was, no matter his gifts, no matter the importance of his role, God’s church has never been built upon a sinful human being. Heaven forbid! Jesus Himself is the Rock, the foundation upon which His church rests. All of us, including Peter, whatever our role and position, are secure as long as we rest on that foundation, that Rock, and we can do that only to the extent that we are surrendered in faith and obedience (*see Matt. 7:24*) to the words and command of our Lord. Sure, the Lord knew the future of Peter and knew what Peter would become, but He certainly was not going to make Peter, a sinful, fallen human being, the foundation rock of His church.

**What should Christ’s words tell us about the importance of humility in our lives and especially in our work for the salvation of others? Why, whatever our gifts, are they nothing if not surrendered to the Lord?**

## The Shadow of Peter

It appears that immediately after Jesus returned to heaven, Peter took the role of leader among the believers, about 120 people. In the book of Acts he is usually named first in lists of the apostles, and he led the believers in choosing an apostle to replace Judas. As we saw last week, however, it is not until after Pentecost, when he stands up and preaches powerfully to the crowd, that we fully see the amazing transformation in Peter's life (*Acts 2:14–41*). As a result of the Holy Spirit's working through his preaching, 3,000 people accept Jesus and are baptized.

The next time we see Peter, he is walking up with his fellow apostle and longtime friend John to the temple to pray. Peter then performs the first healing miracle recorded in Acts, as he heals a man crippled from birth (*Acts 3:6–8*).

**Compare** Acts 3:6, 12, 13; 4:10. What common theme runs through Peter's words?

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Peter had a long and bitter experience of trying to do things in his own strength. He would never forget sinking into the dark waters after he took his eyes off Jesus. He would never forget betraying his Master after His arrest. He would never forget Jesus rebuking him for trying to do things his own way. Peter, apparently having learned his lessons, was leaning on the power of the Lord. He would need to.

**Read** Acts 5:15, 10:25. What was going on in these two accounts? What kind of incredible pressure was being placed on Peter here? What great danger would he, or anyone, face in that situation?

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People wanting only to have “the shadow of Peter” touch them? In many ways now, Peter, filled with power from on high, would face his greatest spiritual challenges.

**What would it do to you if people responded to you the way they did to Peter? What is the only way you could keep yourself from spiritual pride of the most damaging kind?**

## Organizing the Early Church

In the early stages of the Christian church, the new believers shared their possessions and goods, met together daily for worship, and enjoyed fellowship together. They were “praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people” (*Acts 2:47, NIV*). Things were going well under the leadership of the apostles.

But, as the church grew, problems arose. It became clear that the church needed an organizational structure. Peter and the other apostles realized there had to be a proper balance between maintenance work and their main mission. They decided: “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables” (*Acts 6:2, NIV*).

As new congregations were formed in new areas, proper church organization became even more critical. It was vital to ensure that the believers were properly established and nurtured in their new faith.

The Jerusalem church began sending missionaries in groups of two (following the example of Jesus when He sent out the apostles and the disciples two by two).

**What** did the leaders in Jerusalem do when they heard about the new group of believers in Samaria that Philip had established? *Acts 8:14*. Or when a new church was founded in Antioch? *Acts 11:19–26*. What is the significance of these actions?

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Throughout the book of Acts, we see Peter and the other church leaders in Jerusalem keeping a close administrative and spiritual eye on the rapid growth of the church, particularly among the Gentiles. They realized how easy it would be for them to slip back into paganism or to be led astray by false doctrines. Having come to Jesus as babes in the faith, these new believers needed to be weaned from the “milk” of the Word and firmly planted in solid doctrine.

**What more could you do to help new members be better grounded in Jesus and our message? Why not take a new member under your wing and help him or her along?**

## A Wider Vision

After Pentecost, Peter's life was transformed, and he became a mighty pillar of the church. But there still was more for him to learn. Like the other apostles, Peter still saw his mission as exclusively to the Jews.

**Read Acts 1:8.** What was Jesus saying that should have helped Peter and others understand that things were not going to be quite what they expected, at least in terms of mission?

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In Acts 10:1–14, Peter was given a vision in which he was told to eat unclean foods. As a Jew, he was astounded at what was told him. “‘Surely not, Lord!’” Peter replied.

“‘I have never eaten anything impure or unclean’” (*Acts 10:14, NIV*). It would be the same as a Seventh-day Adventist being told in vision to smoke a cigarette and drink from a bottle of alcohol.

Of course, God was not literally telling Peter to eat unclean foods—just as He would not ask us to smoke tobacco or drink alcohol. Peter's vision was a parable. At first he wondered about the meaning (*vs. 17*), but soon it became apparent as he was invited to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile.

**Read Acts 10:28–43.** What was the real meaning of the vision? What did Peter now understand that he did not before?

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For us today, it is obvious that the gospel was a message for the whole world, but it must have been quite a surprise for someone like Peter, coming out of the background that he did. How important that, whatever our position in the church, we not let our cultural prejudices put blinders on us. How important that, as with Peter, we get a wider vision of the mission of our church.

**What are some personal or cultural blinders that you have had to deal with? Or, perhaps, that many in your church still do? How can you get a wider vision?**

## Growing in Grace

Even when church members in Christ are working together for the same mission, misunderstandings and disagreements can arise. The early Christian church was no exception.

Nor was Peter. However singularly blessed of God, however crucial to the work of the church, even Peter, after Pentecost, still had some growing to do. How nice to know that even with his faults, God was still using him.

**Read Galatians 2:11–14. What did Peter still not understand?**

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Paul was upset because he believed that Peter was acting like a hypocrite. After Peter's vision about unclean foods and his encounter with Cornelius, he had begun associating with Gentiles. For this he was criticized by the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (*Acts 11:2*). Peter defended his actions, and as a result, his critics changed their minds. "They had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life' " (*vs. 18, NIV*).

But now, to Paul's disgust, after having achieved so much on behalf of the Gentiles, Peter was reversing his behavior. He was now bowing to pressure from Jewish Christians and going against his convictions. He was now refusing to eat with Gentiles, because he did not want to offend the Jewish Christians. Paul, though, was offended by Peter's actions, even though in another place he warned about a stronger brother being an offense to a weaker one (*1 Cor. 8:9–14*).

Obviously, though, in this case, that of associating with Gentiles, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, thought that the sense of mission to others, the sense of all being one in Christ, was the overriding and most important principle.

**Read 1 Corinthians 8:9–14. What is Paul talking about there? How could you take what he is saying and apply it to yourself and your church? What things might you be doing that are offending weaker members?**

**Further Study:** “The Saviour’s manner of dealing with Peter had a lesson for him and his brethren. Although Peter had denied his Lord, the love which Jesus bore him had never faltered. And as the apostle should take up the work of ministering the word to others, he was to meet the transgressor with patience, sympathy, and forgiving love. Remembering his own weakness and failure, he was to deal with the sheep and lambs committed to his care as tenderly as Christ had dealt with him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 516.

“After all the failures of Peter, after his fall and restoration, his long course of service, his intimate acquaintance with Christ, his knowledge of Christ’s pure, straightforward practice of principle; after all the instruction he had received, all the gifts and knowledge and great influence in preaching and teaching the Word, is it not strange that he should dissemble and evade the principles of the gospel, for fear of man, or in order to gain his esteem? Is it not strange that he should waver, and be two-sided in his position? May God give every man a sense of his own personal helplessness to steer his own vessel straight and safely into the harbor. The grace of Christ is essential every day. His matchless grace alone can save our feet from falling (MS 122, 1897).”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 1108, 1109.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss the issue of dealing with weaker folk in the church who might be offended by certain practices. How far do we go in accommodating them? What principles should we follow so that we do not, as did Peter, sacrifice a higher purpose in our well-meaning attempts not to offend?
- ❷ Spiritual pride is always a danger for anyone. How can we protect ourselves from this, especially if we are having great success in soul winning, in ministering, or in any area of church life? How does the Lord help keep His servants humble?
- ❸ Is your church organized more as a club than a mission organization? If so, what can you do to help restructure the church for its central mission?

**Summary:** The apostle Peter went through a dark night of the soul before, during, and after Jesus’ death. When Jesus was resurrected, he was given another chance to be faithful to his Lord. Peter dedicated his life to that task and led the church from strength to strength in challenging times.

# God Healed Me

by MARINA

I live in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. For years I suffered from a serious heart-related illness that filled my body with fluid. Whenever I tried to move, I would lose my breath. I spent two years in a wheelchair and thought I would die. The treatments the doctors offered promised little help, and I feared the consequences of them.

One day a friend visited me. She brought a young man who asked to pray for me. I agreed, thinking, What other hope do I have? I just want to get better. After that my friend and other Christians came often to pray for me.

Little by little I felt better and could breathe more easily. In one month I could leave my wheelchair and walk. Every day I felt stronger. My new friends urged me to exercise to regain strength. Their encouragement and their prayers saved my life. Soon I could walk to the little church to worship.

Then tragedy struck. One of my sons was killed and then a daughter died. I grieved and wondered how God could heal me but allow my children to die. Eventually I realized that I must be grateful for the healing I have experienced and not allow anger to destroy my faith.

My children are amazed at how healthy I am, and I tell them that God healed me. My doctors were amazed at my strength, and I told them what God has done for me. I tell everyone who asks that God healed me, and I invite them to church. I know now that in life we have shadows and sunlight. In both places God is with us. He was with me when I was sick, and He was with me when my children died.

My grandsons who live with me attend church, and I pray that my other children will accept God as their God, even as I have.



Pray for the people of Mongolia. The church here is young and growing. And remember, your mission offerings support lay evangelists such as the one who prayed for me and touched me with God's love.

MARINA (left) shares her faith in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

# Women of Mission



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Luke 8:41–55; John 4:1–40; Acts 16:14–16; 18:1–3, 24–28; Rom. 16:3–5.*

**Memory Text:** “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little” (*Luke 7:47, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Though women were often given background roles, the New Testament shows them heavily involved in advancing the mission of the church.

Women play key parts in biblical history. They include good and bad queens, righteous maids, praying mothers, powerful leaders, influential wives, generous givers, prostitutes, prophets, deaconesses, gracious hosts, and faithful supporters and friends of Jesus.

In such stories as Esther and Deborah, women take center stage. Throughout the Bible's broad canvas, we can see how women with a mission have helped advance the kingdom of heaven in many ways.

In the New Testament we see examples of how Jesus dealt with women. At the same time, many women followed Jesus and supported Him financially (*Luke 8:1–3*) and helped care for His needs (*Mark 15:41*). Jesus specifically ministered to women on several occasions. When many of His disciples deserted Jesus at His death, women remained true and stayed with Him to the cross. Women were the first witnesses of His resurrection.

This week we will look at just a few of the women in the New Testament who, although their stories may be brief, played a vital part in the mission of the church.

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



## Breaking the Rules

In the society in which Jesus lived and worked, women were largely kept out of public life. At Sabbath worship, they were mere onlookers, not participants. Like the Gentiles, women had a specially designated outer court at the synagogue, from which they could not stray. Significantly, it was located beneath the court for the men.

In public, men were restricted in how much they could talk to a woman, even their wives. Women were not allowed to study the Torah; in fact, they were not even allowed to touch the Scriptures, lest they contaminate them.

Jesus took a different approach. Women were His beloved children, just as much as men. His death covered them just as much as any male.

Although rabbis of the time were not permitted to teach women, Jesus happily did. On one occasion, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, sat at His feet like a pupil (*Luke 10:38–42*).

Prejudice against women entered every aspect of life. Men were allowed to divorce women, even for the most trivial offenses, but women were not allowed to divorce men, even for the most serious of offenses. Jesus had strong words to say about the current practice of divorce, which treated women as if they were objects owned by men (*Matt. 19:3–8*).

**In the space of two chapters in Luke, Jesus breaks the laws regarding contact with ceremonially unclean women. He touches a dead girl and restores her to life (*Luke 8:41, 42, 49–55*); allows a hemorrhaging woman to touch Him (*Luke 8:43–48*); and lets a woman of ill repute wash His feet (*Luke 7:37–39*). Read each of those accounts. What principles do you think led Jesus to break these rules? How are those principles applicable today?**

While He was on earth, Jesus broke down earthly, human barriers. As the apostle Paul said, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (*Gal. 3:28*).

**What kind of prejudices are you still harboring against any group? How can you recognize those prejudices? More important, why must you overcome them?**

## The Woman at the Well: Part 1

The division between Jews and Samaritans was long and bitter (*for its historical roots, see 2 Kings 17:24–41*). When the exiles returned from Babylon and attempted to rebuild Jerusalem’s temple and walls, the Samaritans tried to stop their work (*see Ezra 4:7–22 and Neh. 4:1–5*). Incidents such as this, as well as the dispute over the true site for the temple, fueled hatred between both groups. On one occasion a group of people tried to insult Jesus by calling Him demon-possessed and a Samaritan (*John 8:48*).

The most direct and quickest route between Jerusalem in the south and Galilee in the north was through Samaria. However, when making this trip, people would often take a detour around Samaria—despite the inconvenient longer distance in order to avoid their long and bitter enemies.

**Look up the following passages in Luke. What do they reveal about Christ’s attitude toward Samaritans? What should this tell us about what our attitudes toward those traditionally despised by our own culture must be?** *Luke 9:51–56, 10:30–37, 17:11–19.*

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On more than one occasion the Gospel writers show Jesus traveling directly through Samaria. One time on His way from Judea to Galilee, He stopped at the Samaritan town of Sychar—the site of Jacob’s well and near Mount Gerizim, the holy place for the Samaritans, the site of their temple. It was here that He had His famous exchange not just with a Samaritan but a Samaritan woman (*see John 4*).

Much to the woman’s surprise, He asks her if she would draw water for Him to drink. The request shocks her, because Jesus was a Jew and she was a Samaritan and a woman!

As Jesus speaks to this woman, He breaks several cultural taboos. The apostle John says that when he and the other disciples returned, they “were surprised to find him talking with a woman” (*John 4:27, NIV*). It was not considered appropriate for a man, even a religious teacher, to be seen talking to a woman in public—especially, of all people, a Samaritan woman.

**Jesus did not let social custom interfere with His mission. How do you find the right balance between not giving social offense and doing what is right?**

## The Woman at the Well: Part 2

**Read** John 4:1–40, Christ’s encounter with the woman. In what way does Jesus connect the woman’s daily life and circumstances to the spiritual truth He wants to share? That is, how was He able to connect to her spiritual needs?

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The woman is so excited by what she has seen and heard that she rushes back to town, not even bothering to take her water jar (*John 4:28*). She has met the Messiah, and she just has to share the news with others.

The first part of her testimony is an invitation for them to meet for themselves the Man who knew her life story (*vs. 29*). Here is a simple but classic truth about witnessing. Our mission is not to convert people. Our task is to sow the seed and bring people to Jesus. From there, the Holy Spirit cares for conversion. As the people later testify after meeting Jesus—“Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (*John 4:42*).

The second part of her testimony is a question—“Is not this the Christ?” (*vs. 29*). The way this question is structured in the Greek suggests that she is assuming that the answer to her question is negative. Thus, her question is literally: “He could not be the Messiah, could He?” or “This is not the Christ, is it?”

Either the woman was still not 100 percent certain about Jesus being the Messiah or, more likely, she was breaking the news gently to people who could be hostile to her for making such a claim.

Though many lessons could be taken from this account, one important one is that by doing what He did, Jesus clearly broke with the traditions of His time, witnessing to not only a woman but a Samaritan woman but then using this woman to be a messenger and evangelist for the gospel.

**Jesus uses a Samaritan, a woman, and one of hardly the best moral background, too, to be a witness for Him. It is as if He purposely went against every taboo and prejudice of His time. What lessons should we draw from this for ourselves about who is or is not qualified to work for the Lord?**

## Women in the Early Church

Throughout the book of Acts and in Paul's letters, women are often mentioned as playing a role in the early church. The early Christians did not worship in churches but instead met in people's homes, often around the meal table.

Many of these homes were owned by women such as Lydia, a businesswoman who traded purple cloth. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke met her in Philippi, in Macedonia, when they worshiped on Sabbath with a group of women gathered by the river.

**Read** Acts 16:14–16. In what role do we see Lydia?

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What a rich story must lie behind these few words. In the space of two sentences Lydia accepts Jesus, witnesses about her newfound beliefs to her entire household, is baptized with her household, and opens up her home to the apostles. Lydia is the first recorded convert in Europe, and her home provides the base from which the apostles minister in the area.

**Read** Acts 18:1–3, 24–28; Romans 16:3–5; 1 Corinthians 16:19. From these various texts, how was the Lord able to use Priscilla for ministry?

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After some time in Corinth, Paul sailed to Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Here Priscilla and Aquila opened up their home to a Jew named Apollos and taught him about Jesus (*Acts 18:24–26*). Apollos later became a great help to the church in Achaia (*vss. 27, 28*).

**Look again at Romans 16:3–5. Paul is expressing thanks to both Priscilla and her husband. She, obviously, had a crucial role, one that Paul wanted to acknowledge. How can we be more sensitive in affirming women in whatever role they are in?**

## “I Commend to You Phoebe”

Although limited by social customs and expectations, many women in the early Christian church distinguished themselves through lives of service. The Bible rarely gives many details, but it is clear that women played an active role in the mission of the church.

**Read** Acts 21:9. What important principle can we get from this one short text?

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Writing to the church in Rome, Paul commends to them a woman by the name of Phoebe—whom he refers to as “our sister” (*Rom. 16:1, NIV*). Phoebe belonged to the church in Cenchrea—a port city a few miles from the city of Corinth.

Paul describes Phoebe as “a servant of the church” (*vs. 1*). In his writings, Paul often uses the Greek word *diakonos*, translated here “servant” and in other places “deacon.” Whatever the correct word, the meaning is that Phoebe was one who served the church. Paul continues: “She has been a great help to many people, including me” (*vs. 2*).

**Many** other women in the New Testament are known for their good works. Look up the following texts. What can we gather from them and the ones already looked at about the various positions women held in the early days of Christianity? *Acts 9:36; Rom. 16:7, 12; Phil. 4:2, 3; Philemon 2.*

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Not only did women play an important role behind the scenes in supporting the early church; it appears that many played a leading role in the frontline work of sharing the good news. No doubt, in the closing work of the gospel, in the work of spreading the three angels’ messages to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6*), women will continue to have an important role.

**Man or woman, what is the best way you can utilize your gifts in the work of ministry and mission?**

**Further Study:** “The Samaritan woman who talked with Jesus at Jacob’s well had no sooner found the Saviour than she brought others to Him. She proved herself a more effective missionary than His own disciples. The disciples saw nothing in Samaria to indicate that it was an encouraging field. Their thoughts were fixed upon a great work to be done in the future. They did not see that right around them was a harvest to be gathered. But through the woman whom they despised a whole cityful were brought to hear Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 102.

“The Lord has a work for women as well as for men to do. They can accomplish a good work for God, if they will learn first in the school of Christ the precious, all-important lesson of meekness. They must not only bear the name of Christ, but possess His spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, December 4, 1907.

### Discussion Questions:

**1** In some parts of the world, women rarely play any leadership roles in the church. This is often dismissed as just a cultural issue; others see it as a moral one. When do customs and cultural issues become moral issues?

**2** Ellen G. White says that the woman at the well proved a more effective missionary than Jesus’ disciples did. What special strengths can women bring to the mission of the church? Without delving into the controversial issue of women’s ordination, how can we better affirm and use the women who are part of our movement and message?

**3** As a class, talk about Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Take that story and put it into your own culture and context. Imagine Jesus ministering so readily to someone despised and hated by your own culture, someone many folk would not even talk to. What can you learn from this exercise about what the gospel commission is really all about?

**Summary:** Throughout the New Testament, women appear more in background roles. However, Jesus and the apostle Paul often commended women—for their acts of love and mercy and for advancing the mission of the church.

# The Green Robes

by ADRIAN GEORGE

I grew up in Liberia, West Africa. I lived with my uncle until he died when I was a teenager. Suddenly I was on my own. In Africa it is almost impossible for a student to find work.

One day I dreamed I was singing in a choir. I noticed that we weren't wearing the blue and gold robes that the choir in my church normally wore. Instead, the robes were green with gold trim. I had this same dream again a few weeks later, but I wasn't sure what it meant.

I became sick and went to stay with my sister in the capital city. When I was feeling better, she invited me to attend evangelistic meetings. At first I resisted going, for I knew that my sister was an Adventist. But she kept inviting me. Finally I went with her.

The pastor spoke on what happens when we die. I still remember the sermon to this day. Then the choir sang, "Now is the time, make up your mind, there is no time to wait." I felt impressed to respond to the pastor's call, but I resisted. I didn't want to become a Seventh-day Adventist. Then it felt as if someone was pulling me out of my chair. I hung on tightly to the arms of the chair. Finally I couldn't resist any longer. I stood and walked forward.

I took Bible studies with the pastor and was baptized before I returned to my home to finish school. But when my friends learned that I had become an Adventist, they laughed at me. I decided I wouldn't go to the Adventist church anymore. Then I heard a voice saying, "You'd rather serve men than God?" I turned to see who was talking to me, but no one was there. That scared me. Still I didn't attend the Adventist church.

School ended, and I went to stay with my sister for the summer. My sister didn't have money to take a taxi to go to her own church, so we went to the Central church, which was closer. After Sabbath School, the choir marched into the sanctuary from the back as they sung an anthem. I turned to look at them, and to my amazement, the choir was wearing green gowns, the very gowns that I had dreamed about months earlier. So this is where God wants me to be, I thought to myself. I knew then that God had given me that dream to cement me in the faith. Since then I have never gone back on my faith.

Your mission offerings helped to raise up a new congregation in Monrovia, Liberia, and in 2007 your Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings are helping to build a church for this group. Thank you!

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ADRIAN GEORGE *shares his faith in Monrovia, Liberia.*

# Mission in a Pagan Land: Daniel and Company



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Daniel 1–3, 6.*

**Memory Text:** “But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way” (*Daniel 1:8, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** The accounts of Daniel and his companions in Babylon offer us insights into faithfulness and mission that remain relevant even after twenty-six hundred years.

**A**nd we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (*Rom. 8:28*).

In the darkest of circumstances, when things seem to be going totally wrong, we can comfort ourselves that in the end all things will work together for good. Not that all things are good but only that, with God, they can work together for good. We are not guaranteed it will be the way we want it; and we may never witness the good that does finally result. But the promise remains.

This week we will focus on God turning bad into good in the experience of four young Jewish men who, through no fault of their own, were exiled to a foreign country. Yet, because of their unwavering commitment, God was able to use them as witnesses for His purposes and power. Through various ordeals, such as a fiery furnace and a den of lions, God not only displayed His care for Daniel and his friends, but He demonstrated His power before pagans who knew only their idols. Who but God knows the eternal results of the faithfulness displayed by these young Hebrews?

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



## A Spiritual Foundation

Most of us know the basic story of Daniel and his friends, who were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, about six hundred years before Christ. Through their faithfulness, God used these young men to further His plans and mission in Babylon, the world's most powerful nation at the time. Yet, to a large extent the stories of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are a tribute to the faithful training by their parents.

Jewish families were not to take lightly the duty of instructing their children. Much of this took place through storytelling, an important part of family life. Parents were to tell and retell the stories of God's leading in the history of their nation. Children were to learn how following God's commandments leads to life, while disregarding them leads to death.

**Read** Deuteronomy 6:6, 7 (*see also Deut. 4:9*). **What spiritual principle is found here that is important, not just for children but for all of us? In what ways is daily, personal devotions a means of applying this principle in our own lives?**

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The parents of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah could not have predicted what would happen to their children. But through faithful, daily religious instruction, they provided a strong spiritual foundation for the rest of their lives. How important that parents seek to do the same for their own children today. At the same time, the constant dwelling upon God, the constant recounting of the miracles, the goodness, and the love of God can be as much a benefit to the parents as to the children. Even for those who do not have children or for those whose children are gone, how important to keep the reality, goodness, and power of God before us at all times. After all, how can we share with others what we, ourselves, have not experienced?

**How consistent are you in your personal devotions? How can they help strengthen faith and make us better witnesses?**

## The Early Tests

Immediately after the boys arrived in Babylon, it was clear that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah would face many temptations and negative influences.

**Read Daniel 1:4.** Where does the first potential attack on their faith occur? Why could it be so deadly?

It is all too true that what we read, what we are exposed to, cannot help influencing our thoughts. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, these young men were exposed to literature that espoused values and beliefs opposed to what they had been taught. In Babylonian literature they were confronted with astrology, false gods, and myths of various descriptions. The battle for their minds, and hence their souls, had begun (*see Phil. 4:8*). And it was a battle for their bodies, as well, which, as modern science has aptly shown, is linked intimately with our minds.

**Read Daniel 1:8.** What key word there shows why Daniel and his friends (*see vs. 12–14*) did not want to partake of the king's food?

The key word is *defile*, which in Hebrew means just that, to “pollute, defile.” Thus, for these young men, the issue was not just healthful living or a mere preference. It was a moral issue.

**What** kind of excuses could they have made to themselves to justify eating the food?

From the beginning of their time in Babylon, the four young men resolved to stand for principle, no matter what the cost. It set the pattern for the rest of their time in Babylon, where more than once they were tested for their faith. Through their faithfulness, they bore a strong witness to the God of heaven.

**It is a human tendency to make excuses for bad choices or wrong behavior. In what areas of your life do you rationalize what you do? What steps can you take to deal with this spiritually dangerous tendency?**

## No Compromise

The biblical story clearly shows God's involvement in the lives of the Babylonians—interacting with King Nebuchadnezzar and later with King Cyrus. He is portrayed as the God not only of the children of Israel but of all nations.

**Read** Isaiah 56:1–8. Think of the time when it was written. What is the crucial point made there?

**Read** Daniel 1:6, 7. What is going on here? What reasons did their captors have for doing this?

The meaning of names was important to Jewish families, and children were named carefully. The names Daniel (God is my Judge), Hananiah (God has favored), Mishael (who is what God is), and Azariah (Jehovah has helped) reflect the high priority the parents placed on their children's spiritual lives.

Nebuchadnezzar's top official, Ashpenaz, gives the four young Jewish men new Babylonian names—Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—which were mainly tributes to Babylonian gods.

But that is the closest these four men would get to idolatry, names over which they had no choice but to go by. Under God's blessing they soon moved into prominent positions in the court and government of Babylon.

After their period of preparation, Ashpenaz presents the four young men to the king. The king talks with them and “found none equal” to them (*Dan. 1:19, NIV*). “In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom” (*vs. 20, NIV*).

What a tremendous testimony to what God could do through four faithful young men. Taken from obscurity in Jerusalem to the court of the most powerful person in the world, they rose to the occasion and stood before the king as witnesses to the power of God.

**Why was it acceptable for the four Jewish young men to take pagan names but not acceptable for them to eat pagan food? How do we draw the line in our own lives between what are merely cultural issues and what are moral or religious ones? Be prepared to discuss your answer in class.**

## Interpreter of Dreams

Daniel and his companions had made it to the highest levels of the court in Babylon, the greatest empire in the world at that time. However, as in most of the courts of power, perils awaited them.

**Read** Daniel 2:1–13 and answer the following questions:

**1** How were the wise men trying to fool the king?

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**2** How did the king ensure that their tricks would be of no avail?

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**3** What words of the wise men revealed the impossibility of what the king asked? Why would those words later help witness to the power of God?

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God had earlier given Daniel the gift of interpreting dreams and visions (*Dan. 1:17*), but Daniel was not going to be presumptuous and take anything for granted. He gathered together his three friends and urged them to pray (*Dan. 2:18*), for clearly without divine intervention they were going to meet the same fate as the charlatans and frauds in the king's court.

**Read** Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving (*Dan. 2:20–23*). What is the essence of his prayer? What hope and encouragement can you take from it for yourself, whatever situation you are facing?

Most of us know the rest of the story (if not, then read the chapter). Think about what it meant for the monarch of the greatest empire in the world to bow down and worship a foreign captive in his court (*vss. 46–48*)! The king was obviously impressed, no matter how much more he had to learn.

Through Daniel, then, God spares the lives of the wise men throughout Babylon, leads a pagan king to at least the beginnings of belief in the true God, and advances Daniel and his friends to positions of authority, where they can be greater witnesses for Him.

## Two Life-or-Death Tests

Two more major tests give Daniel and his three friends opportunity to witness to the true God in a public and influential way.

As much as your time allows, read through Daniel 3 and the test of faith the three Hebrew boys faced there.

**Read** Daniel 3:16–18. What is the essence of what they were saying? How is the principle still important for all believers today? *See also Matt. 10:28.*

Read Daniel 3:28–30 to see just how impressed the king was regarding what he had seen. Though the king still had a lot to learn, through the faithfulness of these young men, a powerful witness for the living God was spread through the pagan world.

Again, as much as your time allows, read through the story of Daniel in the lions' den (*Daniel 6*), another test of faith but now in a new kingdom.

**What** evidence can you find in the chapter that shows that the king already knew something about the power of Daniel's God?

**What** kind of testimony does Darius give about Daniel's God? How accurate a testimony is it? What does this show about what God can reveal to pagans about His power and wisdom without the Written Word?

Imagine if in both stories these Jews would have compromised to save their own lives. Again, how easy in both situations it would have been to rationalize doing the easy thing. Instead, they remained faithful, and as a result, they helped spread a knowledge of the true God.

**In the past, have you sought the easy way out and compromised what you knew was right? How did you feel? How can you fortify yourself in faith so that whenever the next test comes, you do what you know is right?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “In the Court of Babylon,” pp. 479–490; “Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream,” pp. 491–502; and “The Fiery Furnace,” pp. 503–513, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“As God called Daniel to witness for Him in Babylon, so He calls us to be His witnesses in the world today. In the smallest as well as the largest affairs of life, He desires us to reveal to men the principles of His kingdom. Many are waiting for some great work to be brought to them, while daily they lose opportunities for revealing faithfulness to God. Daily they fail of discharging with wholeheartedness the little duties of life. While they wait for some large work in which they may exercise supposedly great talents, and thus satisfy their ambitious longings, their days pass away.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 487, 488.

“The tidings of their wonderful deliverance were carried to many countries by the representatives of the different nations that had been invited by Nebuchadnezzar to the dedication. Through the faithfulness of His children, God was glorified in all the earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 512.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, talk about your answers to the question at the end of Tuesday’s lesson.
- ❷ The stories in Daniel are powerful lessons of how, by staying faithful to God in trying circumstances, these men were able to witness to others about the Lord. At the same time, how many of us have heard stories of folk doing crazy things in the name of God, even to the point of losing their lives? When faced with a difficult situation, how can we know whether we should stand firm or whether we could be a more effective witness for God by showing our willingness to compromise with the given situation?
- ❸ For every Daniel in the lions’ den story, there is a story of John the Baptist. How are we to understand these different endings?

**Summary:** The book of Daniel describes the experience of four young men who, in the face of massive challenges to their faith, remain true to principle and to their God. Their faithfulness is a dramatic witness not only to the people and rulers of Babylon but also to people of surrounding nations.

# Terrorist Meets the Savior

by VASANTHAKUMAR VETHAMUTHU

I was a political activist in my village in India. I worked for justice and fair treatment for the poor of the community. But some politicians didn't like me and wanted me out of their way. So, when a clash between two groups in the community resulted in the death of several people, I was accused of inciting the riot. I had nothing to do with it, but some politicians called me a terrorist and had me put into jail. The judge, however, saw the injustice and gave me probation. However, the accusation made me an outcast in my own village and among the people I had sought to help.

My own church disfellowshipped me, so I decided to build my own church on land at the edge of the village where my family and I could worship. As I was building the church, I met an Adventist pastor. When he learned why I was building a church, he said, "That's a good idea. But since you are building a new church, why not make it a true Bible-believing church, an Adventist church?"

I was intrigued and listened to this man explain the Sabbath, the state of the dead, and other basic Bible doctrines I didn't know. I agreed to make my church a Sabbath keeping church. I helped the pastor hold evangelistic meetings in the area, though some of my political enemies accused me of political activism again, and we had to stop the meetings.

After explaining our position to the police, they finally allowed the meetings to continue. The pastor focused his talks on God's love, salvation, and general topics, but in our private studies, he challenged me to study the Bible to understand the Sabbath and other important doctrines. I did, and I realized they all were true. I began telling people about the Sabbath. I knew that the Christians in the village would not accept it, so I told my idol worshiping friends and invited them to come to meetings in the half-finished church.

Following the pastor's meetings, 35 people were baptized, including my wife, my father, and me. The new church members and even some non-Adventist believers worked to finish the new church. Some two hundred people came to the dedication, including some political officials. It was a grand day for the entire village.

I have given up my political activity and now work for Christ. I am driven by the love of God rather than social justice. Now I work as a lay evangelist in my area, helping the pastor and going from village to village to teach people about Christ. We now have congregations in eight nearby villages. Your Thirteenth Sabbath offerings provided two of these congregations with simple chapels. Thank you for your gifts to God that support God's work in India.

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VASANTHAKUMAR VETHAMUTHU is a lay evangelist in India.

# Gifted *for* Service: Philip



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Acts 6:3; Acts 8; Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:1–11, 27–31; 1 Tim. 3:8–12.*

**Memory Text:** “And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (*Acts 8:6*).

**Key Thought:** Through Philip's ministry, Samaria is turned upside down by the good news, and an influential Gentile Ethiopian comes to Jesus. When we surrender our lives to God, there is no limit to what He may choose to do through us to advance His kingdom.

Fleeing persecution, confronting a sorcerer, casting out demons, healing those crippled and paralyzed, converting a rich Ethiopian from the royal court, being physically transported long distances by the Holy Spirit—life for Philip was anything but dull.

When many people think of Christianity, they picture long sermons in church, lists of do's and don'ts, and bored-looking people with long faces. These stereotypes, of course, could not be further from the truth. Following Jesus is the most exciting life possible.

For example, this week we will be looking at the exciting life and mission of Philip, a man whose world took on a totally new dimension when he was ordained for service. Chosen as one of the seven deacons for the early church, Philip took a course he could never have predicted. He personally shared the good news of Jesus in Samaria and, indirectly, with the continent of Africa.

**What** can we learn from his story?

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



## Called to Service

The church in Jerusalem chose Philip and six other men to serve as deacons, or servants. The Greek word translated here as deacon, *diakonos*, is translated as servant in other parts of the New Testament (in the King James Version and many other translations). Speaking to the crowds and to His disciples, Jesus said, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant [or your deacon]” (*Matt. 23:11*). And in predicting His death, He said, “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant [or deacon] be” (*John 12:26*).

**Read** Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8–12. From these scriptures, what assumptions can we make about the character of Philip?

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**Read** Acts 2:46, 47; 4:32, 33. What kind of picture do these texts present of the church at that time?

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The good times did not last, however. Eventually, a major crisis arose (*see Acts 6:1*). Although at this stage almost all the new believers were Jewish, there were two major types of Jews: the Grecian Jews, who were not born in Israel, spoke Greek, and approached things from a Greek cultural outlook; and the Hebraic Jews, who spoke Aramaic and/or Hebrew, and their worldview was strictly Jewish. As the church grew rapidly, the Grecian Jews complained that when food was distributed, their widows were overlooked in favor of those of the Hebraic Jews.

Faced with their first major problem from within the community, the 12 apostles met together and implemented one of the key strategies of good leadership: delegation. The role of deacon was created.

**How much time does your local church waste dealing with members fighting among themselves? How can you help the local church direct its energy toward reaching the lost?**

## Missionary to Samaria

When Philip reappears in the biblical record, we find him in Samaria, the area north of Judea. Jesus had predicted that His followers would become missionaries not only in Jerusalem but “in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (*Acts 1:8, NIV*). Now Philip is part of the fulfillment of this prophecy but perhaps not in the way he and the other believers would have predicted.

The leaders did not send Philip to Samaria as a missionary. He was not part of the early church’s Global Mission plan to reach unentered areas.

**Read** Acts 8:1–5. What events caused Philip to flee to Samaria? What did the scattered believers do when they fled?

After the stoning of Stephen, Saul’s persecution of the Christian church grew stronger, and all the believers, except the 12 apostles, scattered. This is the first example we see in history of the underground church. Many times since then we have seen God’s faithful followers driven into hiding for their faith. Even today, in many parts of the world, Adventist believers are forced to worship in secret.

**As** they scattered, these believers “preached the word wherever they went” (*Acts 8:4, NIV*). Ironically, persecution ensured that the good news spread more widely. What other examples of this happening can you think of?

This was a terrible time for the early Christians—forced from home, scattered to foreign areas, living in fear of further attacks. Philip was the father of four daughters, and no doubt this would have been a stressful time for his family (*Acts 21:9*). And yet, despite their difficult circumstances, Philip and the other Christian believers continued to share the good news of Jesus faithfully.

**Despite the trials, the believers worked hard to spread the message. Why? Because they had a sense of mission, of purpose. Why are so many of us lacking that same sense of mission? Could it be because we are too busy looking inward and not outward, too busy thinking of our own needs and not the needs of a lost world? Think about this and be prepared to discuss your thoughts on Sabbath.**

## Opportunities for Witness

As Adventists we often speak of finding an entering wedge for our mission. In many places we cannot, because of prejudice, immediately start speaking about Jesus or the Bible. People often put up barriers as soon as we start talking about spiritual things. The health message often has broken down barriers in many parts of the world. Personal friendship is perhaps the most effective entering wedge. When we become friends with people, they often start to ask us about our Christian beliefs.

**Read** Acts 8:26–39, the story of Philip and the eunuch, and then answer the following questions:

**1** What prompted Philip to go where and when he did? What important message is there for us in your answer?

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**2** What entering wedge did Philip use in order to start witnessing to this person? That is, what need did he help fulfill for the eunuch? What important lesson can we take away from this, as well?

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**3** What was required of the eunuch in order for him to be baptized? What message can we take away from this for ourselves?

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The Ethiopian had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and the chances are that he was returning disappointed. He would have quickly discovered that, as a Gentile and as a eunuch, he was doubly disqualified from worshiping in the court of the Jews (*see Deut. 23:1*).

Now, new light breaks through his discouragement as he learns of the One who, through His death, has “broken down the middle wall of partition” (*Eph. 2:14*). In response to the wonderful news he hears, the eunuch asks Philip to baptize him. And here we read of the first recorded Gentile convert to Christianity—a wealthy and powerful African.

**How often do you have opportunities to witness for your faith? How well do you use those opportunities? What could you do better?**

## Gifted for Service

Each of us as followers of Christ are given spiritual gifts to accomplish the mission God has for us. Spiritual gifts were vital in the life of the early Christian church and fired the missionary zeal of the new believers. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers and told them that he did not want them to be ignorant about spiritual gifts (*1 Cor. 12:1*). The Greek word Paul uses for gifts, *charismata*, emphasizes that these are gifts of grace—totally unearned by us.

The fifth fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit, says: “He extends spiritual gifts to the church.” This is an important concept. Although the gifts are given through the believer, they are really gifts for the church.

Spiritual gifts are never given merely for the benefit and edification of individual believers. They are always given in the context of mission and service. Spiritual gifts are given to believers in the context of the wider church community, so they can benefit the church in its mission to the world.

The account of Philip’s experience in Samaria (*Acts 8:4–8*) is not detailed. At some stage God gave him extra spiritual gifts, and he changed from Philip the deacon to Philip the evangelist. It must have been a significant step for Philip to go from administering the church in Jerusalem to casting out demons and healing the sick in Samaria.

**The two main biblical sources for our understanding of spiritual gifts come from Romans 12:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:1–11, 27–31. Read these passages and compare with Acts 8:4–8. What spiritual gifts did Philip display, and how did he use them?**

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**“When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculolous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said” (*Acts 8:6, NIV*). Even if we are not able to perform miracles, as did Philip, what principle is seen here? What is it about us, our lives, our teachings, that would cause anyone to pay close attention to what we say?**

## Philip and Simon Magus

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard of the tremendous success in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to visit Philip and the new believers. They both arrived in Samaria at a providential time to support Philip. They first prayed for the new believers to receive the Holy Spirit—something that, apparently, Philip had not done. Then they helped Philip deal with a former sorcerer named Simon.

**Read** Acts 8:9–25, the story of Simon, Philip, Peter, and John, and then answer the following questions:

**1** Why are miracles and other supernatural manifestations not absolute proof that God is directly behind what is happening?

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**2** Simon wanted the right thing, just in the wrong way, or so it seemed. (After all, what is wrong with wanting to bestow the Holy Spirit on others?) Judging by Peter's reaction, what might have been the true motive for Simon's request?

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**3** In what way was Peter's reaction to Simon similar to Jesus' reaction to Peter? *Matt. 16:21–27.*

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**4** Where do we see, in this section, the grace of Christ and the gospel of forgiveness?

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No matter how gifted Philip was, even he needed help, which explains why Peter and John came. The important point is, no one is good enough or gifted enough to do the work of the Lord alone. We all need the help of others.

**Wanting to buy the power to bestow the Holy Spirit? Come on! Yet, Simon was said to be a believer, and he was even baptized. What kind of foolish things did you once believe early in your walk with God that you now know better about? How could this help you be more tolerant of those who, in their ignorance, might be holding foolish beliefs, as well?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Gospel in Samaria,” pp. 103–111, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“In this instance we have an illustration of the care of God for his children. He called Philip from his successful ministry in Samaria, to cross the desert and go to Gaza to labor for a single inquiring soul. The promptness with which the eunuch accepted the gospel and acted upon its belief should be a lesson to us. God designs that we should be prompt in accepting and confessing Christ, prompt in obeying him, and in answering the call of duty. The eunuch was a man of good repute, and occupied a high and responsible position. Through his conversion the gospel was carried to Ethiopia, and many there accepted Christ, and came out from the darkness of heathenism into the clear light of Christianity.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 305.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1** As a class, talk about your answer to Monday’s final question. In fact, before you do that, it would be better to discuss your answer to Sunday’s question.
- 2** Early on in the Lord’s church, ethnic divisions arose. Even today, in various parts of the world, similar tensions exist among church members. What about in your own local church? How can you as an individual help your church see just how contrary to every principle of the gospel these attitudes are?
- 3** Philip baptized the eunuch immediately after he accepted Jesus as his Savior. Why does the Adventist Church not do the same today? Should or should we not? Justify your answer.
- 4** What are some of the needs in your community that your church could use as an entering wedge in order to reach people with the gospel of Christ? How could you help your church in the crucial area of outreach?

**Summary:** Philip provides another powerful example of what God can do through somebody who has dedicated his or her life to Him. Whether witnessing to the eunuch, sharing with the Gentiles in Samaria, or converting Simon the sorcerer, Philip’s one goal was to uphold the name of Jesus.

## Salwa's Blessing

Salwa was a faithful wife and mother living in a displaced persons camp in southern Sudan. Women were not allowed to worship in the mosque, and she knew little about God. Then she learned that some Adventist lay evangelists were holding meetings in the camp. She asked her husband for permission to go to the meetings. When he learned that Adventists have many beliefs in common with Muslims, he allowed her to go to the meetings.

Salwa shared what she was learning with her husband, and soon he joined her. She learned that she was a sinner but that Jesus had come to forgive her and save her. She stopped brewing and selling alcohol, and soon her back pain, caused by carrying heavy loads of wood used to prepare the beer, was gone.

Salwa gave her heart to God and asked to be baptized. Her husband didn't object, for he saw the differences in her since she learned about Jesus. She shared her new faith with other women in their homes and in the marketplace. Her enthusiasm was contagious, and several of her friends began attending church. Some even brought their husbands.

When Salwa began attending the church, it had only four members, but within a year the church had grown to 32.

Salwa's friends, Hidia and Alima, had new babies and couldn't attend the meetings, so Salwa shared with them what she was learning. Later these women began attending the church. Alima earned a living brewing beer, as Salwa had. She, too, stopped making alcohol and found another way to earn money. When people came to buy Alima's beer, she told them she was no longer making it. People asked questions, and more people learned about God's love and salvation.

Sadia, one new convert, sums up the feeling of these women. "We fled here because of war, but here we have found peace in Jesus. I thank God that I had to be displaced by war in order to meet the Savior and have His peace."

When it is again safe to return to their own villages, many will take with them a faith they found during a time of war, a faith in Jesus, who brings peace to their hearts.

Your mission offerings help support the lay evangelists who serve God in Sudan and many other countries around the world. Thank you for your part in bringing peace to troubled hearts.

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*Salwa has returned to her home village near Bahr Naam, in southern Sudan, where she continues sharing her faith.*

# “Here Am I! Send Me”: The Prophet Isaiah



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Lev. 16:30, 17:11, Isa. 6: 1–10, 49:6, Jer. 3:22, Matt. 28:18–20, Heb. 1:2.*

**Memory Text:** “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me.’” (*Isaiah 6:8, NKJV*).

**Key Thought:** Isaiah was a powerful eighth-century prophet who spoke out against sin and corruption, championed justice and righteousness, and prophesied the coming of the Messiah. What parallels can we find for ourselves today?

A central part of Isaiah’s mission was to reform the southern kingdom of Judah. He spoke out against sin and corruption and the nation’s rebellion against God.

But Isaiah’s mission extended further than just reform within Judah. He envisioned a day when Judah’s mission would be to represent God to the world. Judah was not to remain inward-looking; it had a mission to all other nations. Isaiah quotes God as saying, “‘I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.’” (*Isa. 42:6, NIV*).

This large vision of mission extending to the whole world was lost sight of in following years. Not until Jesus’ own ministry, and the ministry of the apostles in the book of Acts, do we see this vision of the gospel to all the world put into action, a vision that we are called to be part of in our day and age, as well.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 27.*



## Woe Is Me!

**Read** Isaiah 6:1–6. What was happening to Isaiah?

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God transports Isaiah through vision into the heavenly throne room, where he sees God Himself seated on a throne, “high and lifted up” (*Isa. 6:1*).

In his vision of God’s throne room, Isaiah is treated to an amazing spectacle. He sees the train of God’s robe filling the temple and six-winged flying beings called seraphim. He hears them calling to each other in praise to God. Their voices must have been powerful, because they caused the doorposts to shake and the temple was filled with smoke.

**Compare** Isaiah’s vision with these others who had an experience of seeing God. What was the common reaction? What important lesson can we take from these reactions about ourselves and our relationship to our Creator? *Exod. 20:18, 19; Judg. 13:22; Job 42:5, 6; Rev. 1:17.*

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In response to his vision of “the King, the Lord of hosts,” Isaiah cries out, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (*Isa. 6:5, NIV*).

*Damah*, the Hebrew word for undone, means “cut off” or “finished.” The King James Version also translates the word as “perish” (*Ps. 49:12, 20*) and as “destroyed” (*Hos. 4:6*). This word indicates that the experience totally devastated Isaiah. The vision of God helped Isaiah understand what he, himself, was really like in contrast to his Maker.

**What was it about seeing God that caused this reaction? How does this help us understand why Jesus came in human flesh to reveal to us what God is really like?**

## Thy Sin Is Purged

Isaiah's encounter with the Divine is an extraordinary occasion. He describes it as an experience that affects all his senses: He sees the six-winged seraph and God on His throne; he hears the seraphims' thundering voices; he smells the smoke in the temple; and he feels and tastes the live coal the seraphim places on his lips (*Isa. 6:1–6*).

As we saw in yesterday's lesson, after this experience of seeing God, Isaiah is overcome by his own unworthiness.

Indeed, his utterance in Isaiah 6:5 is a confession of his sin and that of his people.

**Why** the emphasis on “unclean lips”? Was Isaiah's and his people's only sin that of what they spoke? What might that have been a symbol of? See also *Prov. 13:3, Matt. 12:37, Luke 6:45*.

As soon as Isaiah confesses, a seraphim takes a live coal from the heavenly altar, flies with it to Isaiah, and touches it to his lips.

**Read** Isaiah 6:6, 7. What happens here? What is symbolized by this act? What message can we take from this for ourselves?

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In and of himself, Isaiah, a man of unclean lips, has nothing to offer God. But through the work of the Lord Himself, Isaiah's sin is purged. The Hebrew word translated purged comes from the root *qaphar*, commonly translated in the Old Testament as “atone” or “atonement” (see *Exod. 29:36, 30:10, Lev. 16:30, 17:11*). The point is that Isaiah, without divine intervention, without his sin being purged or covered (*qaphar has also been understood to mean covered; see Gen. 6:14*) would not have been able to do anything for the Lord. He had to be made right with God first; only then could the Lord use him.

**What things in your own life are standing in the way of God's being able to use you? What must you submit to in order to have your sin purged?**

## “Here Am I! Send Me”

When Isaiah hears the call from God, he immediately responds, “Here am I! Send me” (*Isa. 6:8*). Notice that Isaiah answers the call before he knows the details of the assignment (*see also Heb. 11:8*).

Isaiah does not respond because he believes he has the necessary gifts and talents or because he knows that he will do a good job. And he does not respond because it is a task that appeals to him (he does not even know what the task is). Isaiah responds because he knows that although he is unworthy, God is worthy. Although he is powerless, God is all powerful. Although it may not be a mission he would have chosen for himself, it is a mission God has chosen.

**Read** the Great Commission to go and teach all nations—perhaps the most important commission in all of Scripture (*Matt. 28:18–20*). Read carefully the first part of this commission. Why is this an important section that we must not overlook?

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The “therefore” is critical. The only reason we can go and teach all nations is because we go in the power of the One who has all authority in heaven and on earth. If we had only our own strength, we could not go. If we relied on our own skills, we could not go. Our mission is fired by Jesus, who owns “all authority” (*NIV*) or “all power” (*KJV*) in the universe (*see Acts 17:28, Heb. 1:2, Col. 1:16*).

If we are willing, God gives us the power we need to accomplish the mission He gives us. He purifies Isaiah’s unclean lips (*Isa. 6:7*); He gives Mary the Holy Spirit and “the power of the Most High” (*Luke 1:35, NIV*); Jesus prays for Peter (*Luke 22:32*); He anoints Saul with the Holy Spirit (*Acts 9:17, 18*); He puts words in Jeremiah’s mouth (*Jer. 1:9*). Should we expect any less for ourselves, now at this crucial time in earth’s history?

**What, if anything, is holding you back from doing more for the Lord? What changes must you make? How can you learn to rely on God’s power and not your own gifts, whatever they are?**

## Isaiah's Call

**Read** God's commission to Isaiah (*Isa. 6:9, 10*). How are we to understand what God was telling Isaiah here?

Most translations of the Bible, including the King James Version, make these verses sound as if God is purposely aiming to dull the people's hearts and minds. Yet, if you read the texts carefully, you can see a bit of sarcasm, a bit of irony, in them. Why would God—who otherwise is constantly pleading with His people to listen to Him, to understand Him, to open their hearts to Him, to know Him, to look to Him, to return to Him, and to be healed by Him—say what He was saying unless He meant something else?

**Read** the following texts. How are we to understand them in light of the texts we have just seen?

*Deut. 30:6*

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*Prov. 2:5*

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*Jer. 3:22*

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*Jer. 4:1*

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All through the Bible, God was calling His people to listen, to obey, to return to Him, to be healed by Him. And yet, as we know, many did not listen. Thus, what seems to be happening here is that God is simply stating how the people will respond to Isaiah; He is not saying what He wants to happen or what He will cause to happen. As the people continually reject Isaiah's warnings, their hearts naturally harden. But this does not mean that Isaiah or God wanted this result. On the contrary, the whole Bible is a call of God to people to do all the things Isaiah said to do; as we know, however, many did not.

**What about us today? How different are we from the folk in Isaiah's time? And though, perhaps, there is not much we can do about others, what about ourselves, individually? How can we make sure we do not fall into the same spiritual trap as those depicted in Isaiah?**

## A Light to the Gentiles

Isaiah's mission was far larger than just reforming Judah. He also cast a vision of Jerusalem as a light on a hill, a witness to all nations about the one true God, and His commandments: "the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established . . . and all nations will stream to it" (*Isa. 2:2*).

**How** do we, as Adventists, understand our role in the outreach to the world? See *Rev. 14:6*.

**Read** Isaiah 42:6, 7. What role does God call Judah to play? How do we see ourselves in that role today?

**Read** Isaiah 49:6. What does this have to do with us, as Seventh-day Adventists?

It was not until the late 1860s that the Seventh-day Adventist Church realized it had a mission to foreign lands. Early Adventists had assumed the gospel commission extended only to the various people groups within North America. America was a multicultural society, and early Adventists thought they were reaching out to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people right there at home. Arthur Spalding suggests that it was a "comforting rationalization" for the early Adventist Church to assume that its mission was only to North America. —Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1962), vol. 2, p. 193.

But it was not long before the young church realized that its vision was too limited, and it launched out and began establishing the church in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Pacific, and all over the world, a work that we, individually, can be a part of, one way or another.

**What are ways you, or even your local church, could be more involved in outreach, in bringing "salvation unto the ends of the earth" (*Acts 13:47*)?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Call of Isaiah,” pp. 303–310, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“This assurance of the final fulfillment of God’s purpose brought courage to the heart of Isaiah. What though earthly powers array themselves against Judah? What though the Lord’s messenger meet with opposition and resistance? Isaiah had seen the King, the Lord of hosts; he had heard the song of the seraphim, ‘The whole earth is full of his glory’ (verse 3); he had the promise that the messages of Jehovah to backsliding Judah would be accompanied by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit; and the prophet was nerved for the work before him. Throughout his long and arduous mission he carried with him the memory of this vision. For sixty years or more he stood before the children of Judah as a prophet of hope, waxing bolder and still bolder in his predictions of the future triumph of the church.”—Ellen G. White, “The Call of Isaiah,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 11, 1915.

“The exhortations of the prophet to Judah to behold the living God, and to accept His gracious offers, were not in vain. There were some who gave earnest heed, and who turned from their idols to the worship of Jehovah. They learned to see in their Maker love and mercy and tender compassion. And in the dark days that were to come in the history of Judah, when only a remnant were to be left in the land, the prophet’s words were to continue bearing fruit in decided reformation. ‘At that day,’ declared Isaiah, ‘shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel.’ Isaiah 17:7, 8.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 320.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is a prophet never popular? Imagine if Isaiah came back to life and functioned as a prophet to the Adventist Church. What do you think he would have to say? Would his message have changed? What about our views toward Ellen G. White? Are many of us, perhaps, doing the same thing to her that many in Israel did to their own prophets? Discuss.
- ❷ Just what role do we have in the worldwide mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? How do we balance our own local needs, our own local outreach, with the divine call to spread this message to the world? How can we be faithful to both callings?

**Summary:** The prophet Isaiah accepted a mission from God that was unpopular and, in many ways, unrewarding. It was also a mission that ended with his being sawn in half. And yet, through his ministry, lives were changed—and the power of his words is still felt today.

## A New Direction

by JEAN GILBERT GAËTAN

I'm from southern Haiti. When I was young, my father wanted me to become a priest. Every day after school I spent time with a priest, learning the teachings of our church.

But when I started secondary school, I lived with my sister. I found other passions, karate and the cinema. I made new friends at my new school, friends of every religion. I realized that not everyone believed as I did, and I began examining the beliefs of my friends. I joined a Protestant church, but I kept my beliefs a secret from my parents, for I knew they wouldn't be happy if they found out. I read the Bible in secret and went to church services only at night, when my friends wouldn't see me and tell my sister or my parents.

Two of my friends were Adventists; they invited me to some evangelistic meetings, but I wanted to go to the movies instead. However, one night toward the end of the series, I had nothing to do and went to the evangelistic meeting. The pastor's message was so compelling that when he invited those who wanted to take a stand for God and be baptized, I stood up. Some people objected, knowing that I had not attended all the meetings. They feared that I was playing with God, but I was serious!

I told my family that I was an Adventist. Mother objected, but I was determined to stand true to my new faith. I was 18 at the time, old enough to make such a decision. But I still was under my parents' rule.

Life became difficult at home. Mother refused to cook without pork, so many days I went without food. But I felt strong. My parents refused to pay my school fees or buy me clothes, but God provided someone to pay my school fees and give me clothes.

My parents are disappointed that I didn't become a priest, and to this day I'm the only one in the family to become an Adventist. I pray that my family will embrace the truth I've found. Thank you for your mission offerings, which helped finance the evangelistic meetings that brought me to God.



JEAN GILBERT GAËTAN (left) has completed his ministerial studies and is a pastor in Haiti.

The atonement is the biblical doctrine around which all others revolve. It is centered in Christ's life, death, resurrection, ascension, mediation, and return. It presupposes the presence of sin, our fundamental and desperate need of salvation, and God's loving disposition to save us.

This quarter's study will explore the rich meaning of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice. The aim of the lessons is to move you toward a greater commitment to the One who suffered so much in order to reconcile us to Himself.

## Lesson 1—God's Nature: The Basis of Atonement

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Eternal God** (*Gen. 21:33, Ps. 90:2*)

MONDAY: **A Loving God** (*Ps. 118:1–4, Rom. 5:8, 8:37–39*)

TUESDAY: **God as Creator** (*Ps. 100:3, 24:1, 2*)

WEDNESDAY: **Holy God** (*Isa. 40:25, 57:15*)

THURSDAY: **Omniscient God** (*Heb. 4:13, 1 John 3:20*)

**Memory Text**— *Isaiah 46:10*

**Sabbath Gem:** God's work of salvation is a self-willed outflow of His very nature; it does not require sinners to persuade Him to love them.

## Lesson 2—Cosmic Crisis: The Disruption of God's Established Order

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Sin: Its Origin** (*Ezek. 28:14–17*)

MONDAY: **Attack on God** (*Isa. 14: 13, 14*)

TUESDAY: **Sin and the Law of God** (*Ps. 40:8*)

WEDNESDAY: **Sin as Rebellion Against God's Government**  
(*Job 1:8–11*)

THURSDAY: **War in Heaven** (*Ezek. 28:16*)

**Memory Text**—*Colossians 1:17*

**Sabbath Gem:** Christ came to bring fair and just resolution to issues that caused the cosmic crisis of the great controversy between God and Satan.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired** The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.