The Heavenly Sanctuary

“From heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause” (1 Kings 8:49, NIV).
I’ve tried reading through my Bible several times, but I always get stuck in Leviticus. “Moses, build Me a temple with this many poles and this much gold and these dimensions.”

“Alright, Lord, I will build You a temple with this many poles and this much gold and these dimensions. Hey, Aaron, come help me build a temple with this many poles and this much gold and these dimensions.” Repetition, exactness, rules, order. Is this supposed to be our image of the heavenly sanctuary?

Revelation 4 and 5 paint a different picture. Here we find all manner of living creatures, electrified thrones, spirit lamps, and bowls of prayers. How on earth could this realm of light, color, song, and spontaneous peals of thunder and lightning be related to an inescapably mathematical tent in the desert? That picture of heaven seems as if it were above and parallel to the world’s surface, never intersecting, ever out of reach—a world we can never see or understand.

Dire as the notion seems, I believe it to be correct. Sin altered our world and cut it off from its connection to the Divine. It is that obsessively geometric tabernacle, however, that makes the difference. The precision, respect, discipline, and reverence that God demands in the Old Testament is a foundation of order. As with music or sports, it isn’t until you’ve played a thousand scales or run a thousand laps that you can begin to truly appreciate the accomplishments of professionals. Likewise, God wants us to memorize Scripture, learn discipline, and be devoted, because then we will best comprehend all that His Son did and continues to do.

Christ left that universe of light, color, and joy to live in a hurting world. Here, He followed all the divine rules. He daily constructed a larger foundation of discipline, service, obedience, and humility. He needed every inch of that foundation to climb up Golgotha. And when He could go no farther, they lifted Him up on a cross. It was just a few feet higher, but that was all He needed to break the barrier between heaven and earth. Where those two wooden beams met, where that bleeding head hung, where those aching lungs breathed their last—that is where it all converges. Mathematical precision, spontaneous creativity, dusty tents, seas of glass, broken sinners, and a healing God—a universe of impossible incongruities unified at the apex, fully man, fully God—Jesus Christ, crucified on the cross-section of the universe.
As the key for a complete system of truth, the sanctuary and Christ’s priestly ministry became part of the Seventh-day Adventist faith. The sanctuary doctrine reveals that our Savior is currently in the phase of His intercessory work on behalf of all people who accept Him as their Savior (Heb. 7:25, 26).

Many people mistakenly limit the act of salvation to Christ’s death on the cross, thus denying the relationship between the earthly and the heavenly sanctuaries. Of particular interest is the cleansing of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. On this day, the banishment of sin is symbolized by the expulsion of the scapegoat into the wilderness.

The sanctuary provided a pictorial representation of Christ’s ministry. For example, the altar of burnt offering portrayed His great sacrifice (John 3:16, 17) and the priestly work in the Holy and Most Holy Places of the earthly sanctuary previewed His ministry of intercession in the heavenly sanctuary and that sanctuary’s final cleansing.

According to the book of Hebrews, the earthly sanctuary represented heavenly realities, with the Day of Atonement foreshadowing the investigative judgment. The heavenly sanctuary represents all aspects of the plan of salvation: the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the intercession of Christ the High Priest, the judgment seat, the investigative judgment, and the complete destruction of sin and Satan (Rev. 20:14, 15).

The appearance of the High Priest at the end of the Day of Atonement revealed to the Israelites their sentence. Those who had repented of and confessed their sins as signified by the specified sacrifices, saw their sins removed and figuratively placed on Azazel the goat (Satan), which was led away to perish in the wilderness. The return of Christ coincides with the exit of the high priest on the Day of Atonement. The Israelites who watched their high priest enter the sanctuary for them waited expectantly for his reappearance, which was a welcome sign that he and the sacrifice had been accepted by God. The visible return of Jesus Christ occurs when He lays aside His priestly garments and is clothed in the royal garments of King and Lord (Rev. 19:11–16). As was foreshadowed on the
annual typical Day of Atonement, when the high priest confessed the sins of Israel over the head of the scapegoat and banished him to the wilderness (Lev. 16:21), Satan will finally assume responsibility for the sins of all believers throughout the ages.

**Love, Sacrifice, and Redemption (Leviticus 16; Dan. 8:14; 9:24–27; Heb. 7, 8)**

What the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries teach us about the great controversy between Christ and Satan and the plan of salvation involves love, sacrifice, and redemption. In the earthly sanctuary, the priestly ministry consisted of two phases: (1) a daily service of intercession in the Holy Place, and (2) an annual service of cleansing in the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). These two phases in the earthly sanctuary correspond to Jesus’ ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

The first phase of Christ’s intercessory ministry began at the time of His ascension to heaven (Heb. 8:1, 2). The second and final phase of His heavenly ministry in the Most Holy Place, as in the earthly Day of Atonement, results in the cleansing (Num. 29:11) of the heavenly sanctuary with the removal of the sins of God’s people.

According to Hebrews 7 and 8 and Daniel 8:14, Jesus ministered in the Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary from His ascension until 1844. During this time, the forgiven sins of Christians were transferred to the heavenly sanctuary. In 1844, He entered the Most Holy Place, or Holy of Holies, to cleanse the heavenly sanctuary of its defilement.

The final phase of Christ’s heavenly ministry typified by the Day of Atonement is mentioned in a unique way in Hebrews 9:23: “It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.” How is it possible for things in heaven to require purification when heaven is a place of perfection? The heavenly sanctuary needs to be cleansed from the sins that have been symbolically transferred there through the blood of Christ. In what sense, then, can it be said that heavenly things needed cleansing? Maintaining the records of forgiven sins in the sanctuary allowed the heavenly court to review them. The record of these forgiven sins is kept there until the antitypical Day of Atonement, which is followed by Christ’s second coming.

**REACT**

Spend some time reflecting on what Christ the Lamb has done for you and is doing for you now in heaven. As you do so, ask God to give you fresh insights into how Christ’s ministry on your behalf can change your life for the better.

Karen Wade, South Bend, Indiana, U.S.A.
“The sanctuary in heaven, in which Jesus ministers in our behalf, is the great original, of which the sanctuary built by Moses was a copy. God placed His Spirit upon the builders of the earthly sanctuary. The artistic skill displayed in its construction was a manifestation of divine wisdom. The walls had the appearance of massive gold, reflecting in every direction the light of the seven lamps of the golden candlestick. The table of shewbread and the altar of incense glittered like burnished gold. The gorgeous curtain which formed the ceiling, inwrought with figures of angels in blue and purple and scarlet, added to the beauty of the scene. And beyond the second veil was the holy Shekinah, the visible manifestation of God’s glory, before which none but the high priest could enter and live.”

“Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you” (Exod. 25:8, 9, NIV). The dwelling place God especially wants is in the hearts of His believers. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20, ESV).

“As Jesus died on Calvary, He cried, ‘It is finished,’ and the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom. This was to show that the services of the earthly sanctuary were forever finished, and that God would no more meet with the priests in their earthly temple, to accept their sacrifices. The blood of Jesus was then shed, which was to be offered by Himself in the heavenly sanctuary. As the priest entered the most holy once a year to cleanse the earthly sanctuary, so Jesus entered the most holy of the heavenly, at the end of the 2300 days of Daniel 8, in 1844, to make a final atonement for all who could be benefited by His mediation, and thus to cleanse the sanctuary.”

**REACT**

How are we breaking down our own barriers to have an encounter with God? How are we making disciples so God can dwell in them?

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*Bryan Saint-Louis, Long Island, New York, U.S.A.*
In Genesis 4, we see the plan of redemption unfolding as Abel brings to God the firstborn of his flock (verse 4). We also see Cain disobeying God by bringing Him “an offering of the fruit of the ground” (Gen. 4:3). Cain and Abel represent two groups of Christians that have existed and will continue to exist until the close of earth’s history. One group will have a form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5), while the other group truly believes that Christ, crucified and risen, has the power to deliver them from sin (1 Cor. 1:18).

God’s chosen people were led into captivity by the Egyptians. They forgot the truth and what living truly means. Thus He gave the children of Israel the sanctuary so they could once again dwell in His presence (Exod. 25:8) and be free of sin (Exod. 29:36). The sanctuary consisted of three parts: the courtyard, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place. The Most Holy Place was entered only once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day, the sanctuary was cleansed from all the blood of the sacrifices made during the year. The sacrifices represented Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and the blood represented the blood He would shed for their sins (John 1:29). As our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, Jesus now appears before God on our behalf (Heb. 9:24, NKJV). He “has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (verse 26, NIV).

Yes, the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries point us to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2), the One who grants us the ability to yet again live in the presence of God by removing sin from our lives. “For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). “When the sinner accepts by faith the benefits of that one sacrifice he is accepted in the Beloved, being counted as perfect, because Christ his substitute stands in his place.”

**REACT**

What difference can Christ’s current work in the heavenly sanctuary make in your daily life?


Rayshaun Williams, Astabula, Ohio, U.S.A.
During biblical times, one regular ritual of the sanctuary that was of great significance for God’s people was the daily sacrifice. Today it is no different, for God desires that we “die daily” (1 Cor. 15:31). Following are two practical ways we can continue the daily sacrifice within our own lives:

Pray. David realized the importance of praying to God, and he did so frequently. Let us pray often and longer. Life gets busy. But there are ways to make prayer a greater part of it. For example, when you receive a compliment, take time to thank God for creating you. Another way to incorporate more prayer into your life is to put your alarm clock under your bed. When it rings, you will have to get out of bed and onto the floor to turn it off. This puts you in a perfect position to talk with God and to listen to what He wants to say to you.

God knows the desires of our hearts, and He wants us to have what is best.

Surrender. Giving up something we really want is not always fun, but it can be rewarding. God knows the desires of our hearts, and He wants us to have what is best. Making a conscious effort every day to give up what we know to be wrong for what the Father knows to be best will be a wonderful way to actively practice daily sacrifice.

The earthly sanctuary may no longer be around, but the heavenly sanctuary still exists, and God still desires to have a relationship with His children every day. The prayers of the saints are heard in the heavenly sanctuary, and the surrender of His people is desired there as well.

**REACT**

1. How can you live the sanctuary message in your life?
2. How does knowledge of the heavenly sanctuary affect your life personally?
In order to understand the plan of salvation, it is necessary to understand both the earthly sanctuary and its relationship to the heavenly sanctuary. The earthly sanctuary is a model of what occurs in the heavenly sanctuary.

Jesus lived a life on earth that He didn’t have to live. At any moment He could have told God that He wanted to return to heaven, but He did not. Even just before His crucifixion, when He was physically weak and dreading the suffering that lay before Him, He prayed that God’s plan of salvation would prevail. I want to know about the plan that cost Him His life and that saved me from being forever lost. The earthly and heavenly sanctuaries help me to understand that plan.

“Christ Himself is at God’s right hand, interceding for us.”

Beginning when I was very young, I was told that Someone named Jesus voluntarily died for my sins so that I might be saved. Because I believed this, I decided to be baptized. God is eternal (Ps. 93:2). He does not need to prepare a place for Himself or His angels. He already has a place. But He said that the place He is going to prepare is for us. It is a place where we can be with Him for eternity. God is also love (1 John 4:8). He so loved the world that He sent His only Son so that we could have salvation (John 3:16). God is orderly. He took six days to create our earth, and on the seventh day He rested. The plan of salvation, as demonstrated in both the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries, is also orderly. The earthly sanctuary used the sacrifices of animals as a symbol of Christ’s death on our behalf. The shed blood of these innocent animals represents Jesus’ blood shed for us. Now Christ is interceding for us in heaven. His intercession “offers encouragement to His people . . . (Heb. 7:25). Because Christ mediates for His people, all of Satan’s accusations have lost their legal basis (1 John 2:1 . . . ). Paul asked rhetorically, ‘Who is he who condemns?’ Then he offered the assurance that Christ Himself is at God’s right hand, interceding for us (Rom. 8:34).”*

**REACT**

What does the character of God have to do with the sanctuary?

*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . , 2nd ed. (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 2005), pp. 61, 62.*
CONCLUDE
God’s love for us has no limits. When we became slaves to sin, He acted on a plan to rescue us. This plan is better understood in the visual representation of the earthly sanctuary, which was a copy of the heavenly sanctuary. The priest, the daily sacrifices, the yearly Day of Atonement, all pointed to the shedding of Jesus’ blood and His intercession for us in heaven. As we come to understand the symbolism portrayed in the sanctuary, we come closer to understanding who God is and the depth of His love for us.

CONSIDER
• Reading Exodus 25–27 and choosing a piece of sanctuary furniture described in these chapters. Research its meaning. How does it help you to understand salvation in Christ?
• Writing a list of reasons why you need a High Priest to intercede for you. Take some time to thank Jesus for what He is now doing on your behalf.
• Designing a replica of the Hebrew sanctuary out of modeling clay.
• Singing the hymn “The Old Rugged Cross” (no. 159 in the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal). Meditate on the words and consider which things you need to sacrifice in order to respond in love to Christ’s sacrifice.
• Creating a skit depicting the work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.
• Reflecting upon the characteristics of God expressed through the earthly sanctuary—its furnishings and the rituals performed there. How can you share your findings?
• Meditating on what things you can do to be a sanctuary where God can dwell.

CONNECT
“If He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain’ ” (Heb. 8:4, 5, NKJV).
Don Moen sings, “I just want to be where You are / dwelling daily in Your presence. / I don’t want to worship from afar. / Draw me near to where You are.”* From time to time, I wonder what it would be like to be with Jesus, walking beside Him without the worries of this world, and just basking in His presence. The idea of Jesus bringing His home down to earth so that we can live with Him thrills me and gives me hope as I look forward to that day.

But as I snap back to my earthly life, I remember that this hope comes at a great price—the blood of the spotless Lamb. It’s easy to forget that Jesus gave everything to make it happen and that He continues to work in heaven for those who have accepted Him as their Savior.

The Israelites were reminded of this by the earthly sanctuary. Through it, they discovered how the consequences of their sins would be paid by another—an actual Member of the Godhead. The sanctuary was a peek into the future where all of our sins would be shouldered by Jesus.

Through the sanctuary and its services, the Israelites experienced God’s presence in their midst! Wherever they moved, God was right there with them. How awesome it would be to constantly know that He is right there with us no matter where He sends us! And just as the high priests would intercede for the Israelites, so Jesus is doing that for us now in the heavenly sanctuary.

John 14:2, 3 says, “ ‘In my Father’s house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am’ ” (NIV).

As you study about the sanctuary this week, I hope that you, too, will be filled with the assurance that Jesus is interceding on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary and that He will come back so that we can dwell with Him for eternity.

In the beginning, the Garden of Eden was not simply a home for Adam and Eve. It was a place where they could develop a personal relationship with God. Banished from the Garden after disobeying Him, our first parents and their descendants were forced to live separated from the physical presence of God.

All was not lost, however. God did not create us only to abandon us at the first display of human sin. He loved humankind too much not to have a backup plan. So God told Satan, “‘I will put enmity / between you and the woman, / and between your offspring and hers; / he will crush your head, / and you will strike his heel’” (Gen. 3:15, NIV).

To remind the Israelites of His love and grace and of His constant presence in their lives, God instructed Moses to “‘set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain’” (Exod. 26:30, NIV). The earthly tabernacle and the larger structure of the Israelite temples were a manifestation of the heavenly sanctuary. They were visual aids of God’s salvation. Every part of the earthly sanctuary was built according to God’s instructions (Exodus 25–30).

The sanctuary services revealed the promise of redemption through Christ’s sacrifice and His mediation before the Father on our behalf. This promise was fulfilled on the hill of Golgotha centuries ago. Let us now claim the redemption that is ours through Christ’s sacrifice so that we can develop our own personal relationship with God, our Father.

**REACT**

1. Why did God instruct the Israelites to build an earthly sanctuary in order to reveal truth, instead of simply having it written down or taught orally?
2. If Christ had not died on the cross, where would we be today? Where would you personally be?
3. What visual aids do we have today that help us understand Christ’s salvation?
Symbols are a part of our daily lives. Even the letters used to write this lesson are symbols. Symbols are objects that do not inherently possess meaning. Such meanings are attributed to an external source. We stop our cars at traffic lights when they turn red because that is the color that was decided upon. One of the very first symbols humans received from God was the Garden of Eden.

God tabernacled with humans. He was Emmanuel—God with us.

**Eden (Gen. 2:8, 9; 3:24)**

Genesis 2 tells us that God planted the Garden of Eden for the benefit of humankind. The Garden was to be a place where He could commune with Adam and Eve and their offspring. The Garden was also meant to be a place of enjoyment. “Out of the ground God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Gen. 2:9, NKJV). Thus God was trying to communicate to Adam and Eve that He loved them and that He wanted to build a relationship with them. God also gave Adam and Eve freedom of choice. He wanted them to love Him because they chose to love Him, for true love can never be forced. That is why “the tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9, NKJV). Adam and Eve could choose whether to remain in the beautiful sanctuary of Eden—God’s dwelling place with them—or to leave. Of course, we know that they chose to leave.

**The Old Copy (Gen. 3:8; Exodus 25—30; Heb. 8:4, 5)**

After Adam and Eve sinned, humankind lived for a time within sight of the Garden of Eden—the beautiful sanctuary of God. There God had tabernacled with Adam and Eve. There Adam and Eve had access to the tree of life. It was heaven on earth. But they chose to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

It wasn’t long before Adam and Eve, along with their offspring, lost sight of Eden, both physically and spiritually. So God had to give humankind another sanctuary. This sanctuary was to teach God’s people about how He planned to save them from sin. We read about this sanctuary in Exodus 25–30. The pattern for it follows the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:5). What Moses constructed was actually a “copy and shadow
of the heavenly things” (NKJV). The plans God had for His relationship with humans were fashioned in heaven long before the earthly sanctuary was erected. What He gave to the Israelites during the Exodus was a little piece of heaven on earth. Once again, God tabernacled with His people.

**The Person (John 1:14, 29; 2:19–21; 6:35; 8:12)**

In the pattern given to Moses, there were a few key items—the shewbread, the lamp, and the sacrificial lamb. All of them were symbols. Unfortunately, the symbolism of each item was soon ignored and the items themselves became the focus. Once again, God had to remind His people. But this time, He sent His Son, who was symbolized by the bread and the lamp. Yes, Heaven came down to earth. God tabernacled with humans. He was Emmanuel—God with us.

The earthly sanctuary pointed to Jesus, the ultimate sanctuary. John was quick to point out that, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14, ESV). The phrase “dwelt among us” is a clear reference to the Hebrew word for “tabernacle” which means “dwelling place.”* John the Baptist informed his disciples that Jesus is the “Lamb of God.” Jesus Himself would claim to be the Bread of Life, an allusion to the shewbread found in the Holy Place of the sanctuary. He also would refer to Himself as “the Light,” thus reminding the Israelites what the lamp in the sanctuary symbolized.

Jesus’ goal, however, was not to simply walk with humanity for a short time on earth. Instead, His purpose was to guide us heavenward, to have an everlasting relationship with His people. Through the symbols He has given us, through His own teaching, His life and His sacrifice, He brought heaven to earth so that we would be able to go from earth to heaven. He became the bridge, the ladder.

Jesus has prepared such a beautiful place for us. And He is waiting for us there. Do you want to be with Him?

**REACT**

1. What other symbols remind you that this world is not your home?
2. What is there in your life that is preventing you from being in a growing relationship with Jesus?

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“The question, What is the sanctuary? is clearly answered in the Scriptures. The term ‘sanctuary,’ as used in the Bible, refers, first, to the tabernacle built by Moses, as a pattern of heavenly things; and, secondly, to the ‘true tabernacle’ in heaven, to which the earthly sanctuary pointed.”

“The sanctuary in heaven, in which Jesus ministers in our behalf, is the great original, of which the sanctuary built by Moses was a copy. God placed His Spirit upon the builders of the earthly sanctuary. The artistic skill displayed in its construction was a manifestation of divine wisdom.”

“Happy are those who have a sanctuary . . . .”

“For the building of the sanctuary great and expensive preparations were necessary; a large amount of the most precious and costly material was required; yet the Lord accepted only freewill offerings. ‘Of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take My offering’ was the divine command repeated by Moses to the congregation. Devotion to God and a spirit of sacrifice were the first requisites in preparing a dwelling place for the Most High.”

“From the sacredness which was attached to the earthly sanctuary, Christians may learn how they should regard the place where the Lord meets with His people. . . . The house is the sanctuary for the family, and the closet or the grove the most retired place for individual worship; but the church is the sanctuary for the congregation. . . .

“Nothing that is sacred, nothing that pertains to the worship of God, should be treated with carelessness or indifference. In order that men may do their best work in showing forth the praises of God, their associations must be such as will keep the sacred distinct from the common, in their minds. Those who have broad ideas, noble thoughts and aspirations, are those who have associations that strengthen all thoughts of divine things. Happy are those who have a sanctuary, be it high or low, in the city or among the rugged mountain caves, in the lowly cabin or in the wilderness.”

**REACT**

Why do you attend church? What can you do to add value to the experience?

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2. Ibid., p. 414.

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Jimmy Quek, Singapore
The earthly sanctuary was a symbol of the heavenly sanctuary. When the Israelites sinned, they were to bring an offering to the priest, who would then present the sacrifice to God for the forgiveness of their sins. While the earthly sanctuary no longer applies to us, the concepts taught there are echoed in the heavenly sanctuary. So how can we apply the sanctuary message to our lives? What can we do to follow the instructions given by God?

Confess your sins. When an Israelite sinned, he had to bring a sin offering to the sanctuary and confess that sin to the priest. Some sins may be difficult to confess, but the only way for your sins to be forgiven is if you admit that you have sinned and confess those sins to Jesus, your heavenly High Priest (1 John 1:9).

Remember Jesus’ sacrifice. It was not the animal’s death that brought forgiveness of sin. Rather it was the symbol of Jesus’ death on the cross that leads to forgiveness. The unblemished and innocent animal represented the Savior who died for our sins even though He had not sinned. Today you do not have to bring animal sacrifices to a priest. Instead, whenever you confess your sins, you should remember Jesus’ love for you and His sacrifice on the cross so that your sins may be forgiven (John 3:16, 17).

Repent of your sins. After you have confessed your sins and God has forgiven you, you should repent of your sins and with Christ’s help, avoid sin all together. Do not take advantage of Jesus’ sacrifice by continuing to sin. Instead, remember the physical, mental, and spiritual pain He suffered on your behalf, and determine with the Holy Spirit’s help to sin no more (Acts 3:19).

**REACT**

1. What sins would you like to confess to God, and why?
2. Why is it sometimes so difficult to confess our sins?
The word sanctuary evokes two meanings: a sacred place and a safe haven. We know that the church as a sanctuary is a place of worship and is therefore to be treated with respect and reverence.

But what about church members? As part of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27), is each one of us a refuge where hurting people can find healing? A safe haven? God intends for us to cultivate healthy, supportive relationships. It is vital that when hurting people come to church, we are able to respond appropriately.

Is your church a place where people can come as they are . . . ?

Is your church a safe place? A sanctuary of love, grace, and healing?

Or do people often experience more pain when they come to your church? Are their agonies aggravated rather than helped? Do they find themselves disciplined with no plan for restoration? Is their name and reputation slandered through gossip camouflaged as prayer requests? Are they blamed for their own victimization, told to pray about it, to have more faith?

What about church leaders? How emotionally and spiritually vulnerable are they? Do your church members see them as being authentic people who are on the same spiritual journey to maturity? Or are they perceived as being healthy or “perfect” at all times?

What does your church do when a leader falls? Is there a plan for discipline that includes a grace-filled process of restoration? Or do you “shoot” your wounded leaders?

What is the attitude of your congregation toward a leader from a different church who has fallen? Is more emphasis placed upon discipline that redeems or condemns? Do the people attending your church feel a subtle pressure to pretend to be something they are not? Or are they given room to express cultural diversity in how they dress, pray, or use their gifts and abilities to glorify God? Is your church a place where people can come as they are, yet still feel loved and accepted no matter what? Or is your church a place where people feel they have to conform or act a certain way before they will feel loved and accepted?

No church should be just a place for people to learn about respecting and revering God, or about deep prophetic truths. A church also should be an edifying place where we are safe to be vulnerable with each other; a safe place to be honest with each others’ shortcomings and to receive healing; and a safe place to open ourselves up to accountability and encouragement that is grounded in truth. Such a church is a true sanctuary.

Faith Toh, Singapore
CONCLUDE

If you want to see how packed with symbols and metaphors the Bible truly is, look no further than John, chapter 3. The Spirit is wind. We must be born again. The Messiah is like . . . an ancient metal snake? Despite a lifetime of religious instruction drilled into him, a few minutes with Jesus left Nicodemus’s head spinning. His literal mind-set shattered, he had to rearrange everything he’d ever known to see what had been there all along.

So it is with the sanctuary. The earthly sanctuary pointed to the Messiah’s earthly mission. The New Testament’s sanctuary imagery unveils Jesus’ work in heaven, and through it all, our salvation.

CONSIDER

• Reading Revelation, chapters 1–11 and noting all the sanctuary imagery you find.
• Painting abstract images that depict Jesus as the Bread of Life, the Light, or the Sacrificial Lamb.
• Viewing a copy (digital or otherwise) of the 1636 Francisco de Zurbaran painting Agnus Dei (“Lamb of God”), an artistic depiction of a sacrificial lamb. How does it make you feel? What does it make you think about?
• Meditating on the story of the bronze serpent in Numbers 21:4–9, consider how the Israelites would have understood their experience. How does this story help you to understand your personal relationship with the Savior?
• Listing places or moments in your life that have provided you spiritual, physical, and emotional sanctuary. What people in your life have also been a sanctuary?
• Writing a song inspired by the symbols of Scripture that pertain to Christ as our Savior.
• Describing what it would take for your church community to be a sanctuary in every sense of the word.

CONNECT

George Knight, Exploring Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary, chap. 25 (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 2003).
Sacrifices

“I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Rom. 12:1, NASB).
When we think of sacrifice, we tend to think about all the things we might give up for our family, friends, and even people we don’t know. We could give up money so that someone else could fulfill a need. We could give up our careers to fulfill God’s plan for our lives as missionaries. Or a parent could sacrifice his or her life for a child. While all these acts of sacrifice might be genuine, God asks us in Romans 12:1 to give ourselves to Him as living sacrifices.

Our greatest obstacle in doing so is sin and the separation between us and God that sin causes. Ezekiel 18:20 tells us that “the soul who sins shall die” (NKJV). The remedy for this situation was the sacrifice of a male lamb without spot or blemish. An innocent life was taken to pay the price that sin demanded. This sacrificial lamb was a type that pointed toward the true Lamb of God, who would take away the sins of people who committed their lives to Him. Who is this Lamb of God?

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus Christ is referred to as the “Lamb of God.” In John 1:29, John the Baptist says, “‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” (NIV). Like the sacrificial lambs of Old Testament times, Jesus was without sin and perfect. He was the perfect sacrificial Lamb. However, what sets Jesus Christ apart from the sacrificial lambs of the Old Testament is that He chose to be our sacrificial Lamb.

Old Testament believers were taught that the blood of animals could not really take away their sins. They were taught that the lambs pointed to Someone greater—the Son of God. The sacrifices represented God’s willingness to accept a Substitute in order for the worshipers to have an ongoing relationship with Him. What does the sacrifice of Christ mean for us today?

This week’s lesson looks at some of the sacrifices that believers have offered to God. We will discover that God always has been calling for sacrifices, and that He is still doing so today. Most important, we will discuss the fact that God provided the ultimate Sacrifice, that of Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ.
The Bible communicates God’s plan of salvation.

Sinners, however, are faced with a serious problem. There is nothing they themselves can do to atone for their sins. “Only divine power can emancipate us from this slavery. But Christ has assured us, ‘If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed’ (John 8:36). You can only produce righteousness, He said, if ‘you abide in Me’ because ‘without Me you can do nothing’ ” (John 15:4).

Genesis 3:21 and 22 introduce the immediate results of sin. The “skins were a constant reminder of [Adam and Eve’s] lost innocence, of death as the wages of sin, and of the promised Lamb of God, who would by His own vicarious death take away the sins of the world. . . .

“The sacrificial service, though not specifically mentioned here, was instituted at this time. . . .”¹ From these verses onward, all of Scripture revolves around the plan of salvation. And from the very beginning of sin up through today, God desires that fallen humanity should accept this plan.

What Is Sacrifice? (Lev. 1:3; Deut. 15:21; 1 Chron. 21:24)
The Bible communicates God’s plan of salvation. Because the fullness of God cannot be thoroughly communicated to us, and because the language of God is unknown to us, it is necessary for Him to communicate to us in ways we can understand. Therefore, the concept of sacrifice not only serves as the basis of the plan of redemption, but also as a visual object lesson of that plan.

The word which is most often translated “sacrifice” in the Old Testament literally means “to slaughter.”² Yet when used in the context of Deity, this word also conveys the idea of bringing or coming near so that the sacrifice can be made. This suggests that in sacrificing, something must die so that the petitioner can come near.

In addition to the death, there is also the value. Deuteronomy informs
the worshiper that the sacrifice should not be a lame or deformed animal (Deut. 15:21). Rather, it should be without defect (Lev. 1:3). This command points to Jesus’ perfect sacrifice. It also highlights the value of the sacrifice to the giver.

When David sinned and brought calamity upon Israel by ordering a census, God commanded him to make sin offerings upon the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. When he arrived and asked to buy the property from Ornan in order to fulfill God’s command, Ornan offered it to David for free, along with all the animals and wood he needed. David’s response was emphatic, “I will not . . . offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing” (1 Chron. 21:24, NKJV). This is further evidence that the sacrifice must be of value to the one offering it.

**Shadow and Sacrifice: God Will Provide (Gen. 22:1–18; Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8)**

The biblical concept of sacrifice as a substitution runs counter to the concept of sacrifice for appeasement. Before God created the world, He created a plan to save humans should they sin (Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8). This plan of redemption includes the concepts of giving sacrificially and that the sacrifice be sufficient to take the place of the sinner. Unfortunately, however, we often only see sacrifice from the perspective of what we give and/or receive rather than seeing it from God’s perspective.

In Genesis 22:1–18, God commanded Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice. When, in the course of their journey Isaac asked his father for the sacrifice, Abraham stated that “ ‘God himself will provide the lamb’ ” (verse 8, NIV). This reply “constitutes a prophetic utterance from the heights of heroic faith to which his soul had risen. By inspiration it pointed both to the ram of v. 13 and to the Lamb of God.”

**Living Sacrifice (Rom. 12:1)**

In Romans 12:1, the verb translated “to present” can also be translated “to stand.” This is similar in sense to a student presenting his or her research findings, especially when these findings may run contrary to other more popular research. So it is with Christians. Our lives must stand out from the lives of people who are not Christians. We should be willing to stand by the evidence of how Christ transforms us as displayed by our changed lives.

Because we have sinned, we need a substitutionary sacrifice. This sacrifice comes with a price—one that has already been paid. Thus, as Jesus’ sacrifice becomes our own, we, in turn, are free to respond to His gift by becoming sacrifices ourselves.

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5. Ibid., vol. 6, 1st ed., p. 615.
“All, all, all, is God’s, and we are required to render perfect service. Says Paul: ‘I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living [not dying] sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God’ What a privilege is thus allowed us, to prove for ourselves, experience mentally, the mind of the Lord and His will toward us. Praise His dear name for this precious gift!”

“God requires all men to render their bodies to Him a living sacrifice, not a dead or a dying sacrifice, a sacrifice which their own course of action is debilitating, filling with impurities and disease. God calls for a living sacrifice. The body, He tells us, is the temple of the Holy Ghost, the habitation of His Spirit, and He requires all who bear His image to take care of their bodies for the purpose of His service and His glory. . . . It is a duty to know how to preserve the body in the very best condition of health, and it is a sacred duty to live up to the light which God has graciously given.”

With each new day, God gives us the breath so that we can bring praise, honor, and glory to Him. But how can we do so if we do not care for our bodies? Through Ellen White, God has shared with us His health laws. Through the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts, we are able to let these laws govern our lives. How we treat our bodies now determines how we will spend our days when we are older. God loves us and wants us to live with Him for eternity. So let us decide to live healthier and happier lives for Him. Remember that we are bought with a price. Therefore we should glorify God with our bodies (1 Cor. 6:20).

**REACT**

1. What might God be asking you to sacrifice so you can glorify Him with your body?
2. How do rest and service to others help us to glorify God in our bodies?

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2. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 70.
A few years ago it was impossible to go into an appliance store without being subjected to walls of television monitors showing endless sequences of blue giants astride massive flying dinosaurs. The movie Avatar somehow transcended its Hindu implications and presented an alternate reality that had just enough logical hooks to appear feasible. On another world, in a galaxy “far, far away,” a crippled human somehow is able to inhabit the body of a ten-foot-tall primitive alien.

The tree of life took a central position in Eden.

A key scene takes place around the tree of life that the alien primitives are able to invoke into a healing unity. At the end of the story, the tree’s power even infused the human hero permanently into the shell of an alien clone. Whew! Heavy pseudo-theology at work.

As told in Genesis, the tree of life took a central position in Eden. While Adam and Eve were warned to stay away from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they could not survive long without access to the tree of life. Henry Morris notes that some “progressive” creationists “argue that the death pronouncement by God on [Adam and Eve’s] sin was a ‘spiritual’ death, not physical.

“This idea, of course, contradicts the clear statement of God that they would die physically, as well as spiritually, with their bodies returning to the dust. Furthermore, it makes a travesty of Christ’s death on the cross for our sins! Why would Christ have to die physically—and such a horrible physical death at that!—in order to atone for man’s ‘spiritual’ death?”*

Adam and Eve’s disobedience at once began the corruption of their higher powers, even as it truly gave them the “knowledge of good and evil.” God, however, had plans to reclaim them—plans that would come to fruition in the life of His Son who would show perfect obedience, and in His sacrificial death pay the cost of the guilty actions of our parents and the entire human race. In accordance with that plan, Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden and forbidden from the tree, lest they live forever as sinners.

**REACT**

Why is it that so many pagan systems and modern-day fables like Avatar seem to be based on death and regeneration?

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God commanded the Israelites to build a sanctuary so that He could dwell among them. This sanctuary also pointed to the coming of Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, who would die for their sins. John the Baptist made this clear, when he saw Jesus for the first time, by calling out, “Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36, NKJV). Jesus Christ would indeed be the ultimate Sacrifice for humankind. His blood was shed on Calvary’s cross as atonement for our sins. Today the “sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, / A broken and a contrite heart— / These, O God, You will not despise” (Ps. 51:17, NKJV).

What will your life look like when you live by the Spirit?

You can truly accept Jesus only when you are honestly sorry for your sins, repent of them, and desire to sin no more. Then He is able to forgive you and send you His Holy Spirit to live in you and help you to develop the fruit of the Spirit.

What will your life look like when you live by the Spirit? Let’s say that some of your friends invite you to attend a party. You want to go, but a few days after you receive the invitation, you learn that they will be serving alcoholic beverages and a great deal of food that is harmful to the body. You also hear rumors that there will be drugs and that some people are looking forward to activities that are sexually immoral. At first you think that you could go and set a good example. As you pray about what to do, you begin to understand that if you do go, you would be setting yourself in the path of great temptations. So you decide to honor God instead by declining the invitation. You are thankful to God for His love for you. Thus you learn that the sacrifices of a contrite heart involve the following:

1. Thanking God for His love toward you (John 3:16);
2. Fearing God and keeping His commandments, “for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccles. 12:13, NIV); and
3. Loving God “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5, NIV).

REACT

How much are you willing to give up for Jesus, who gave up everything for you?

Phillip Jaggernath, Chaguanas, Trinidad and Tobago
Imagine being in church on Sabbath. The door to the vestry opens, and the minister steps up to the pulpit leading a lamb. He then announces that he is going to sacrifice the lamb right there to atone for the sins of his church members. You look around to see the reactions of others. Everyone looks as shocked as you are. Some members are even preparing to leave.

After the Fall, God instructed His people to offer a spotless lamb to atone for their sins. By symbolically transferring their sins to the innocent creature, they were looking to the future when the spotless Lamb of God would atone for the sins of humanity. Jesus’ death on the cross eliminated the need for the sacrificial system. That is why the scenario in the first paragraph seems unthinkable. Yet, even in modern times, the ritual of animal sacrifices in some Christian denominations still persists. Members of the Greek Orthodox Church engage in kourbania, the ritual sacrifice of a lamb or bull to a patron saint, the Trinity, or the mother of Jesus.¹ In the Armenian Christian tradition, a lamb or rooster is sacrificed to God in a practice known as matagh.²

What do we understand that they do not? Christians are to claim Christ’s death as their own, but in exchange they are to live so that others know they belong to Him. The idea of living for Christ might sound easy at first, but living for Him means that we must sacrifice self. This is something we cannot do on our own. We can do it only through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Thus we become living sacrifices in order that we can live with Him forever.

**REACT**

1. Which type of sacrifice do you think would be easier to live by—the symbolic sacrifice of the lamb or the living sacrifice of today?
2. Why do you think animal sacrifices are still practiced today among certain Christian denominations?

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CONCLUDE
To offer yourself as a “living sacrifice” means to leave sinful habits behind and live according to God’s calling, showing unity with His plan for a joyful universe ruled by love. Doing so wouldn’t be a sacrifice if human nature had not been diverted from God’s original design for a selfless world, at least not in the sense that we often think of sacrifice. We must seek to see what the angels see—the joy of giving self for others. It is by learning that heavenly disposition that we come in tune with “what is pleasing to [God], through Jesus Christ” (Heb. 13:21, NIV).

CONSIDER
• Writing a song, poem, or journal entry about a day in the life of a guardian angel. Do they have “down time” to relax and recharge? What is the source of strength and enthusiasm for this serving being?
• Listening to a variety of Christian and secular songs, and compare how frequently the words I or me are used. Is there a difference even among Christian music (hymns, contemporary, gospel, etc.)?
• Omitting processed foods and sugar from your diet. Search the Internet for delicious vegan or raw recipes, and try one that appeals to you.
• Having an outdoor picnic. As you enjoy nature, consider this quote, “There is nothing, save the selfish heart of man, that lives unto itself.”* How can you see this truth reflected in the life cycles of nature?
• Actively looking for ways to do something little for someone every day.
• Having a surprise party for someone just to show that person how much you care.
• Participating in a 5k walk or run with a group of friends to raise money for a cause.

CONNECT
Matt. 9:37, 38; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; James 1:27.
Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, chap. 1; White, Counsels on Diet and Food, chaps. 1–3.
C. S. Lewis, The Great Divorce.
Amazing Grace (the 2006 film).

Lessons From the Sanctuary

“‘Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them’” (Exod. 25:8, NASB).
A man decides to build his own house. He has observed the construction of many dwellings, so he feels he is capable of building his own. He lays the foundation, but omits the necessary reinforcements. The rest of his house he builds flawlessly. After a while, however, his house begins to crumble because of his failure to recognize the importance of a solid base.

The same gospel preached to Israel through the sanctuary services is what we are to teach, preach, and believe in today.

Each tool and element in constructing a building is significant. It was the same with the sanctuary. Each section, artifact, and ceremony had a message God wanted to convey. But why use the sanctuary to do so? Because God knew that one of the best approaches to learning and memorization is to associate the lesson to be learned with visual aids. “Visual aids allow the speaker to use verbal and nonverbal communication to solidify the message and provide a point of reference for the mind.”*

God went to great lengths to give specific instructions for building the sanctuary, because the lessons it taught about salvation meant the difference between eternal life and eternal death. He gave the Israelites detailed plans. He gave the builders additional knowledge and abilities. What lessons can we learn from the sanctuary and its services? Why are these lessons so important? The same gospel preached to Israel through the sanctuary services is what we are to teach, preach, and believe in today. Salvation, as illustrated in the sanctuary services, can be divided into three parts: (1) Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice, (2) Christ’s mediation, and (3) the final judgment. If we only search for them we can find these components in the symbolism of the sanctuary. This week, we will study some of the lessons that are taught through the artifacts and ceremonies of the sanctuary.

After God led the Israelites out of Egypt, He said to Moses, “‘Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you . . . just so you shall make it’” (Exod. 25:8, 9, NKJV). The sanctuary provided a visible center for the worship of the One true God. It brought God near to His people and made His presence real to them. Everything about the sanctuary was to inspire a sense of awe and reverence. After all, this was the dwelling place of the Creator of the universe.

**God has always sought a home with us. . . .**

Every aspect of the earthly tabernacle was to represent the presence of this Holy Creator God. Exodus 25:9 shows that though the work of building it was to be done by men, the plan was God’s. Moses saw a representation of the heavenly sanctuary, and the one on earth was to be like it. The earthly sanctuary was patterned after the heavenly one even to the extent that it was a vivid representation of the various aspects of Christ’s ministry on behalf of fallen women and men. The typical sanctuary service is fully met in the work of Christ, who tabernacled with His people. Both tabernacles deal with sin and salvation.

God’s detailed instructions were evidence of His holiness and of His desire for His people to be holy (Lev. 19:2). His instructions echoed His eagerness to forgive their sins in response to their repentance (Isa. 56:7) and showed His desire to dwell in them. In a spiritual sense, God has always sought a home with us, and He cannot “rest” until it has been built (Ps. 132:13, 14).

All the services of the sanctuary had deep spiritual meaning. They pointed to Jesus Christ—the Messiah of prophecy, and to His all-prevailing sacrifice on Calvary’s cross for the sins of lost humanity. The earthly sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifice, but the heavenly sanctuary will be purified with the perfect blood of Jesus.
God loves us and desires that we dwell with Him. After sin entered the world and humanity became involved in the great controversy between God and Satan, God knew He had to do something to save us. Because He had created humankind with freedom of choice, He could not put an end to sin or “fix” humans so they could not sin. Instead, He gave us His Son to die for our iniquities, so that when we choose to accept Jesus’ sacrifice for us, we receive eternal life. When we do accept Jesus’ sacrifice, He then becomes our Advocate in the heavenly sanctuary, where He presents His blood on our behalf. The earthly sanctuary demonstrated this process.

The sanctuary shows God’s mercy in dealing with sin and sinners.

The Outer Court (Exod. 31:9; John 1:29)
The sanctuary was surrounded by a courtyard made of curtains. In the courtyard were the altar of burnt offering and the laver. The sinner, whose heart had been convicted of sin, would bring a spotless animal to the sanctuary to be sacrificed. There he would lay hands on the head of the animal, symbolically transferring sin and its penalty to the lamb. Then he himself would slay the animal. The lamb’s death represented the death of the spotless Lamb of God, who would one day come to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

The laver was between the altar and the entrance to the Holy Place. It was made of bronze and filled with water for cleansing. The blood of the lamb was taken by the priest into the second part of the sanctuary. First, however, he must cleanse himself at the laver.

The Holy Place (Exod. 31:8)
In the Holy Place there were three articles: the golden lampstand, the table of shewbread, and the altar of incense. The priests kept the lights of the lampstand burning through the year. The light from the lamp represented Jesus, the Light of the world (John 8:12), and the oil stood for the Holy Spirit that keeps the fire of Christ burning in our hearts (Zech. 4:1–14; Matt. 25:1–13; Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 407, 408). On the table of shewbread were twelve unleavened loaves which represented Jesus as the Bread of Life (John 6:35). The sweet-smelling incense burning on the altar represented the prayers ascending to God (Ps. 141:2; Luke 1:10; Rev. 5:8; 8:3, 4.)

Each day throughout the year, the blood from the sacrifices made in the
courtyard would be brought into the Holy Place and sprinkled on the veil separating the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Through this blood, the guilt of the sin and sinner was transferred to the sanctuary. There the guilt remained until the sanctuary was cleansed.

The Most Holy Place and the Day of Atonement (Exod. 31:7; Lev. 23:26–32)

Hidden behind the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant which contained the Ten Commandments. The cover of the ark was called the mercy seat. The original word for the mercy seat “is from a root [word] meaning ‘to cover,’ that is, ‘to pardon’ sin. It represented divine mercy. Significantly, it was of ‘pure gold,’ implying that mercy is the most precious of God’s attributes. It was placed over the law, inasmuch as mercy transcends justice (Ps. 85:10; 89:14). The ark with its justice and the mercy seat with its mercy were both needed to reveal the full character of God’s dealings with men. Mercy without justice is weak sentimentality, subversive of all moral order. On the other hand, justice without mercy is moral severity, theoretically without a flaw, but revolting to both God and man.”¹

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would slay a goat whose blood would be an atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place, and the altar of burnt offering, because of the sins of Israel. Then upon another goat, the high priest transferred all of the sins that had accumulated in the sanctuary throughout the year and sent it into the wilderness. The following points tell us that this goat represents Satan: “(1) the scapegoat was not slain as a sacrifice and thus could not be used as a means of bringing forgiveness. For ‘without shedding of blood is no remission’ (Heb. 9:22); (2) the sanctuary was entirely cleansed by the blood of the Lord’s goat before the scapegoat was introduced into the ritual (Lev. 16:20); (3) the passage treats the scapegoat as a personal being, the opposite of, and opposed to, God (Lev. 16:8 reads literally, ‘One to Yahweh and the other to Azazel’). Therefore, in the setting of the sanctuary парable, it is more consistent to see the Lord’s goat as a symbol of Christ and the scapegoat—Azazel—as a symbol of Satan.”²

The sanctuary shows God’s mercy in dealing with sin and sinners. It pointed to Christ the Sin Bearer, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, our great High Priest who is now interceding on our behalf.

REACT

1. What symbols of the sanctuary give you the most assurance of God’s love?
2. How are the symbols in the sanctuary still significant to the life of a modern Christian?

¹ The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, 2nd ed., p. 637.

Kemmoy and Malika Haywood, Mount Pleasant, St. John’s, Antigua
“All the furniture of this apartment [the first room of the sanctuary] looked like purest gold and reflected the image of the one who entered the place. The curtain which separated the two apartments was of different colors and material, with a beautiful border, in which were figures wrought of gold to represent angels. The veil was lifted, and I looked into the second apartment. I saw there an ark which had the appearance of being of the finest gold. As a border around the top of the ark, was most beautiful work representing crowns. In the ark were tables of stone containing the ten commandments.”

[God] wants to design our destiny.

“Its walls consisted of upright boards heavily plated with gold and set in sockets of silver, while the roof was formed of a series of curtains, or coverings, the outer of skins, the innermost of fine linen beautifully wrought with figures of cherubim. Besides the outer court, which contained the altar of burnt offering, the tabernacle itself consisted of two apartments called the holy and the most holy place, separated by a rich and beautiful curtain, or veil; a similar veil closed the entrance to the first apartment.

“In the holy place was the candlestick, on the south, with its seven lamps giving light to the sanctuary both by day and by night; on the north stood the table of shewbread; and before the veil separating the holy from the most holy was the golden altar of incense, from which the cloud of fragrance, with the prayers of Israel, was daily ascending before God.

“In the most holy place stood the ark, a chest of precious wood overlaid with gold, the depository of the two tables of stone upon which God had inscribed the law of Ten Commandments. Above the ark, and forming the cover to the sacred chest, was the mercy seat, a magnificent piece of workmanship, surmounted by two cherubim, one at each end, and all wrought of solid gold. In this apartment the divine presence was manifested in the cloud of glory between the cherubim.”

Just as God had a specific plan for the sanctuary, so He has specific plans for us. Just as He designed the sanctuary, so He wants to design our destiny. Won’t you let Him?

REACT

Why did God gave such detailed specifications for the sanctuary?

1. Ellen G. White, Early Writings, p. 252.
When the sanctuary was erected, God intended it to be a holy place where He could dwell with His people. He also wanted each element in the sanctuary to be holy and consecrated unto Him (Exod. 40:9, 10). God clearly indicated to the Israelites that He wanted them to seek for the holiness that was demonstrated in His character (Lev. 19:2). The same admonition was given to the early Christian church and is echoed throughout the ages. First Peter 1:13–16 speaks of the holiness God expects from us. Today, God wants all aspects of our lives to be anointed and consecrated unto Him. With the strength He provides, we can all begin our journey toward holiness. The three items below help us to understand what it means to be holy unto the Lord.

**Our holiness is a result of our relationship with Christ.**

*God is holy.* God’s holiness is absolute perfection. He is unlike any created being and cannot be compared in any way to man. There is absolutely no trace of sin within His perfect character. All His characteristics are holy—His love, His mercy, His grace, even His wrath—are all holy.*

*We must be holy.* God wants us to be distinct from others who are not called by His name. We must be set apart because we are His chosen people. As Christians, we must wear the name of God proudly, and in so doing, our characters must reflect the holiness of this name (1 Pet. 2:9). God is calling us to set a standard in the world, to show others a better way to live in the world, but not by the standards of the world.

*We can become holy.* Our holiness is a result of our relationship with Christ. We must believe in Him, accept His sacrifice for our sins and know that His blood alone can save us. We must allow Christ to set us apart for holy use. We must invite the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts so we can develop the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). We must become like the utensils in the sanctuary—anointed and consecrated for the service of God.

**REACT**

1. How can we find the strength to become more like our holy Father?
2. How can God’s holiness be reflected in us everywhere we go?

My freshman year in college was marked by many changes, which led me to seek a friendship with God. This friendship resulted in a different kind of worship that I call my conversations with “Sir.”

In Exodus 25, we read the instructions God gave the Israelites for the construction of their meeting place with Him. The goal was to make a special place where God could dwell, a place where they could talk with Him and where, through His priests, He would respond. Exodus 25:8 came alive for me in my freshman dorm room as I sought sanctuary with God.

Resorting to what I knew best, I started a “Dear Sir” journal, and thus began my own conversations with my Savior. I took the journal with me to class, the cafeteria, and chapel. I was never without it, and whenever I needed Him most, when it was awkward or impossible to close my eyes or kneel, I would begin scribbling my prayers. Throughout the year, these scribbles expressed everything from my frustrations to my victories, and as each journal filled up, new ones were begun.

I was amazed at how much clarity I discovered in these conversations with “Sir” and by how many times after pouring out my heart to Him in this way, the answers would come from the most unexpected places. Each time my dear “Sir” found innovative ways to respond, and each time I was delighted by His concern for the small details of my life.

Throughout college I prayed this way. And even now, I still journal my thoughts. Every so often when faced with a need to seek the face of God, I grab a pen and the nearest piece of paper and begin my prayer. And every time I do, I enter into the sanctuary experience that God first established with the Israelites. I come fully into His presence. I bring my offerings and sacrifices, and as I write to “Sir,” I dwell in His house of prayer (Isa. 56:7). Each prayer I write chronicles a moment in my experience with God, and each prayer reminds me that I will always have “facetime” with Him. Just today I scribbled Him a note, and as always it began with these familiar, humbling words, “Dear Sir . . .”

**REACT**

1. When was your last intimate conversation with God?
2. Do you usually find sanctuary when you are alone in His presence? If not, why not?

Camaria Holder, St. John’s, Antigua West Indies
CONCLUDE

The sanctuary that God asked Moses to build in the desert was, in almost every way, a type of Christ. Like the sanctuary dwelling in the desert, He came down from heaven to dwell with us on earth. He was the sacrificial Offering, the Light of the world, the Bread of Life, and the veil before the Most Holy Place that was torn in order to give His people access to the throne of God. In the heavenly sanctuary, He is the High Priest who offers up our prayers mingled with incense before the throne, His blood in exchange for our blood, His life in exchange for ours.

CONSIDER

• Marking off a space in your yard or in a park the size of the sanctuary, the inner courtyard, and the outer courtyard. Walk through this space, considering the activities at each part of the sanctuary as they point to what Christ has done for your salvation.

• Making each part of the sanctuary a prayer station in your mind, beginning with confessing your sins to Jesus, imagining His death on your behalf as the Lamb of God, and acknowledging the significance of each piece of furniture as a description of Christ’s work for you.

• Creating a miniature sanctuary out of wood and fabric, and covering the furniture with gold leaf. Share this sanctuary with the children’s Sabbath School divisions for their Bible story lessons.

• Playing and/or singing Psalm 84 (http://www.psalistry.com/pdf/84.pdf) or writing your own music and imagining what worship is like in the heavenly sanctuary.

• Experimenting with weaving a piece of cloth or knitting a curtain like the one before the Most Holy Place, using the colors mentioned in Exodus 36:35. Work angels into the fabric if you can. Contemplate the importance of angels in worship and in your life.

• Writing your own psalm or poem describing your worship experience as you go through the curtain into the Most Holy Place as described in Hebrews 10:19–22.

CONNECT


Atonement: Purification

Offering

“Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:18, 19, NASB)
"I still haven’t received the money." The two furry caterpillars, otherwise known as eyebrows, inched over Hanz’s icy stare. My blood froze. *The transfer didn’t go through?* Oh how I regretted not having enough cash to pay this 6’3” hostel-owner cash. There were only two ATMs on this small island in the Philippines, and they were both three hours out into the pitch-black night.

“Really? OK, well, can I pay with a credit card?”

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"I’ll take care of it."

Hanz glared at me. “No machine.”

“Uhhh . . . Paypal?”

He sized me up for what seemed like a fortnight before finally sighing, “OK, Paypal. But the Internet is slow.” He pointed me toward his Windows ’95 machine. “Transfer.” He didn’t have to say “now” for me to know that’s what he meant. I still felt in control of the situation until the Web site decided that the person logging into my account from a strange location could not possibly be me. For two hours I sat at that computer, poking and prodding Paypal with my dial-up connection, praying that their corporate overlords would allow me to send one small payment to the person seething behind me. No such luck—I was stuck.

So miles away from any hope, I did the only thing a grown-up, independent, professional adult could do. I called Dad. Through a 64 kbps Internet connection, I yelled for him to check his computer where an e-mail explaining the entire situation awaited him. After ten tense minutes of constant browser-refreshing, a message informed me, “I’ll take care of it.” I don’t think there’s much else in the world that can top those five words. “I’ll take care of it” works on so many levels. It’s when you go out to dinner with someone, and that person surprises you by paying your way as well as his. It’s when you make a mistake, and your best friend takes responsibility for it. It’s when you’re all alone with no way out, and your dad pays your bill.

This week, we’ll be studying the ultimate gesture of “taking care of it”—the sacrifice of Jesus. His death was more than the cost of lodging for one week. It was the cost of “lodging” in eternity for the entire world. And He paid for it with His precious blood. As you study this week’s lesson, think about the magnitude of the gift our Lord gave us and humbly thank Him for the greatest payment in history.

Chris Webb, Taipei, Taiwan
The Model (Leviticus 4)

The sin offering or purification offering was the way for a person who “sins unintentionally” to obtain atonement (Lev. 4:2, NIV). The sacrificial animal and a few of the details of the ceremony varied depending on who had sinned, but the symbolism remained the same for all. Sinners were to choose the appropriate offering and bring it to the sanctuary, where they laid their hands on the animal to be sacrificed, thereby transferring their sins to the animal. Then the animal was to be sacrificed in substitution for these sins. Depending on a variety of factors, the priest was to sprinkle the animal’s blood on different parts of the sanctuary and altar. The detailed manner in which the whole process is described helps us to understand the profound meaning of the entire process.

The Covering (Lev. 4:26, 31, 35; Rom. 5:8–11)

The goal of the sin offering was to obtain atonement. But what is atonement? The word in Hebrew is kippurîm, which literally means “a covering.” Hence, we can infer its function. The problem that brought people to the sacrificial system was sin. Sin is breaking God’s law, which causes a separation between us and God. God, who is all–loving, wants to be in a relationship with us, so He devised a plan to cover that separation. Jesus would pay the price of sin on our behalf, thereby allowing every person who accepts Him as his or her Substitute to be restored to harmony with God. Such atonement does not include paying an angry god to appease him. This is a pagan concept that has seeped into Christianity. Rather, atonement is the plan of a loving God who desires to restore the relationship with the people He lovingly created.

The Sin (Lev. 4:27–31; John 1:29–36)

A sin offering was given to purify oneself after unknowingly committing sin. The sacrificial animal was chosen according to one’s position in the community. Note that the sin committed did not determine the sacrifice, but instead the transgressor’s knowledge of truth. A religious leader would be held to a higher standard than a regular member of society. In other words, in the eyes of God, sin is sin. What changes is the effect sin has on those surrounding the sinner. God expects more from those who have received more (with knowledge comes responsibility), and will judge indi-
individuals by how they have reacted to what they have received.

The poor could give a lamb as a sacrifice. John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29–36; also see Isaiah 53:7). This title “implies that the sacrifices of the [Old Testament] typified [Jesus] as God’s appointed sacrifice for sin.”

Confession and Laying of Hands (Isaiah 53; Mic. 7:18–20; 1 John 1:9)

Once sinners chose an animal, they were to publically bring it to the sanctuary in recognition that they had sinned. Such recognition is just as important today. Christ’s death on our behalf as the Lamb of God becomes effective only when we recognize our sinful nature and our acts of sin and turn to Him.

Next, sinners were to lay their hands on the animal to be sacrificed, thus transferring all of their confessed sins to the animal. The animal would then carry the load of guilt and pay the price for sin (Lev. 1:4). This imagery is powerful and explicit. The Lamb of God is to carry all of our confessed sins and pay the price for them! Thus Jesus closes the gap sin has formed between our loving Father and us. We are covered by His blood.

God, seeing that we are thus covered, forgives us. He is compassionate, gracious, and abounding in love and faithfulness.

The Slaying of the Animal (Lev. 4:7, 18, 25, 30; Jer. 17:1)

The ceremony did not end with the bringing of the offering. The animal had to be sacrificed. Its blood had to be shed. The priest would then dip his finger in the animal’s blood and press his finger on the horns of the altar of burnt offering. This mark represented a sin committed, confessed, and a sacrifice offered for that sin.

Sin has a heavy price tag. Even when we confess our sins and Jesus takes them upon Himself to forgive us and to restore our relationship with the Father, the effects (or marks) of sin remain, just as the blood placed on the horns of the altar remained. It is not until the final cleansing that all things will be made new and the effects of sin will be eradicated from the universe. Even then, however, Jesus will still have the wounds from the cross on His body to remind us of the price He was willing to pay for our restoration (John 20:26, 27; The Great Controversy, p. 674). Surely this should inspire us to live a holy life in honor of God’s great love for us.

**REACT**

1. What steps must we take to be covered by the blood of Christ?
2. What responsibility do we have before others for our sins?
3. How has the sanctuary imagery been used to misrepresent the character of God?

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2. Ibid., s.v. “Lamb of God.”

Rilla Westermeyer, Spokane, Washington, U.S.A.
Even though the sacrificial system ended with the ultimate sacrifice of our Savior, there are still many lessons we can learn from it today. Consider the following passages from the Spirit of Prophecy.

“Paul declares that ‘the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry,’ when completed, were ‘the patterns of things in the heavens.’ Acts 7:44; Hebrews 9:21, 23. And John says that he saw the sanctuary in heaven. That sanctuary, in which Jesus ministers in our behalf, is the great original, of which the sanctuary built by Moses was a copy.”

“Present your bodies a living sacrifice.’”

“But Christ, ‘being in the form of God, counted it not a thing to be grasped to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.’ Phil. 2:6, 7, R. V., margin.

“This was a voluntary sacrifice. Jesus might have remained at the Father’s side. . . . But He chose to give back the scepter into the Father’s hands, and to step down from the throne of the universe, that He might bring light to the benighted, and life to the perishing.”

“So Christ, the great High Priest, pleading His blood before the Father in the sinner’s behalf, bears upon His heart the name of every repentant, believing soul.”

“Thus in the ministration of the tabernacle, . . . the people were taught each day the great truths relative to Christ’s death and ministration, and once each year their minds were carried forward to the closing events of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the final purification of the universe from sin and sinners.”

“The apostle Paul points to these sacrifices as an illustration of what the followers of Christ are to become. He says, ‘I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.’ Romans 12:1. We are to give ourselves to the service of God, and we should seek to make the offering as nearly perfect as possible. God will not be pleased with anything less than the best we can offer. Those who love Him with all the heart, will desire to give Him the best service of the life.”

1. Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 357.
3. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 351.
4. Ibid., p. 358.
5. Ibid., p. 352.
While I was grocery shopping one day, I saw one of my former students. My immediate reaction was to blend in with the crowd. I was greatly relieved when the student passed by without noticing me. I was hiding from him, because a few years earlier I was on a school disciplinary committee that had to review his case. He had been involved in violent activities, and the committee had to dismiss him from the school. As members of the committee discussed this decision with the student and prayed for God’s leading in his life, he showed no remorse and became quite angry. Watching him storm out of the meeting, I held little hope for his future.

There was an Individual, however, who had not given up hope. In fact, two thousand years before, this Individual, Jesus Christ, bore “our griefs / And carried our sorrows; / Yet we esteemed Him stricken, / Smitten by God, and afflicted” (Isa. 53:4, NKJV). Christ, the Creator of the universe, was the Lamb of God to which the Jewish sanctuary service pointed. And this beautiful, perfect, innocent Lamb died for my wayward student. He died for you and me. And if we follow Him, then “by His stripes we are healed” (verse 5, NKJV).

So what evidence is there for Christ’s atonement? The answer is simple: changed lives. A few weeks after seeing my student in the grocery store, I was surprised to see him sitting in the front row of a religious conference. Shortly thereafter, I saw him attending church with his family. Then one day I saw him again at the supermarket. This time, I could see that he had a different look in his eyes. Gone was the anger, and in its place was joy. So I decided not to hide. I approached him with a smile on my face. As we talked, I learned that he had met the Lamb of God, and had accepted Him as his Savior. Now this former student of mine is evidence that because of Jesus’ sacrifice, God can change lives.

**REACT**

1. How has Jesus Christ’s atonement impacted the day-to-day reality of your life?
2. Is there anyone in your life who has turned away from God? Pray this week that he or she will look to Jesus Christ and find healing.
In March 2012, the air was abuzz with talk of a huge jackpot. Everywhere people were talking about how many tickets they were going to buy and what they’d do with the prize money. People who’d never even considered purchasing a lottery ticket before were buying them in bulk. Even some money experts, who normally eschew lottery tickets as a stupidity tax, were tempted to buy a few.¹

We need look no further than the cross to see how much we matter to God.

The Mega Millions jackpot was a record setting sum of $656 million. Yet this staggering fortune is but a pittance when compared to the price paid for our redemption—“the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:19, NIV). In light of such a sacrifice, how are we to respond?

Accept the gift. When a United States president leaves office, he grants pardons to people he sees as worthy. Imagine if one of these individuals was to say, “No thanks, Mr. President. I’ll stay in prison.” That would be crazy! The blood of the Lamb is like a presidential pardon. When we accept Christ, we are declared free from sin and its wages. Our sins were nailed to the cross and wiped away by the blood of the One who was blameless (Col. 2:13, 14). He has removed our shackles and unlocked the prison door. Leave the prison of sin behind.

Stop trying to earn it. Gifts by their very nature are free. Jesus took our place, died our death. It was His sacrifice that bought our salvation, “not because of anything we have done” (2 Tim. 1:9, NIV). We could never do enough to be worthy on our own merits. If we could, Jesus’ suffering would be for naught.

Know your worth. There is a poem about an old, battered violin. The auctioneer is about to declare it “sold” for a few dollars when a man makes his way to the front, picks up the instrument, plays a beautiful melody . . . and the value skyrockets. What made the difference? “The touch of the Master’s hand.”³ We need look no further than the cross to see how much we matter to God (1 John 4:9). The poem reminds us that, like the violin, sin brings scars and bruises, but He can make us beautiful.

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³ Erin Michelle Lee, Yakima, Washington, U.S.A.
Mary had a little lamb, / Its fleece was white as snow; / And everywhere that Mary went / the lamb was sure to go.”¹ This nursery rhyme rang true as I walked with a group of girls back to the mission camp. One of the girls picked up a cute lamb and stroked it before setting it back down to continue on our way. The lamb, eager for more attention, followed us a long way, bleating loudly, until we were quite far from its mother. The girl that had picked it up decided to take it back so it would not get lost. Thankfully, this time it stayed with the rest of the flock.

I wanted to put a number to the “depths of the sea.”

Its fleece was white as snow. . . .” The lamb stood out in sharp contrast to the dirty landscape around it. The year I was a student missionary, there was a severe drought in Kenya. Dust covered the landscape, which by this time of year should have been green and full of life. That baby animal had not yet been marred by life and was “without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19, NKJV).

Just like that lamb, Christ was perfect and blameless. Yet He died so that we could be forgiven. “He was wounded for our transgressions, / He was bruised for our iniquities; / The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, / And by His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5, NKJV). Because of His death, we can know that we are forgiven and can live in peace because He “will cast all our sins / Into the depths of the sea” (Mic. 7:19, NKJV). Being a scientist and a trivia junkie, I wanted to put a number to the “depths of the sea.” The deepest part of the world’s oceans is the Mariana Trench, at 36,201 feet deep.² That is 7,166 feet deeper than the height of Mount Everest, the tallest mountain.³ Because I have invited Jesus into my life by accepting His gift of atonement, I know that I will live with Him forever.

REACT

1. Why does the Bible use so many analogies to explain salvation?
2. Are there any sins in your life that you need to let God cast into the depths of the sea? Accept the peace that only God can give you.

CONCLUDE

As weak human beings in this sinful world, we cannot obtain our own atonement and enter heaven without the sacrifice of a divine intervention. We have such an intervention in Jesus’ sacrificial death on our behalf. When we accept Him, the Father God looks at us and sees only His blameless Son. Jesus modeled a sacrificial servant’s heart when He walked the earth, and we are all called to do the same.

CONSIDER

- Visiting a sheep ranch and photographing how a lamb interacts with its mother. Contemplate the innocent behavior of the lamb in its daily activities and contrast it with Jesus’ behavior as the lamb offering, giving Himself up on the cross to save us from our inherently evil behaviors. Now imagine the lamb you are photographing offering to give itself up for the coyote that hunts it. If you do not live near such a ranch, research the subject at your library or online.
- Calculating “the depths of the sea,” putting it into miles or converting that measurement to something else that is recognizable, such as the length of a football field. Consider the impossibility of us, on our own and without the use of technology, to ever reach these depths to which God wants to banish our sins.
- Journaling about the invaluable gift of servanthood to humankind that Jesus took upon Himself when He lived on this earth. Write about how the greatest Being in the universe served rather than ruled, even at one point washing the feet of those who would betray Him and deny Him, just like all of us have done at some point in our own lives.
- Cooking or baking something for someone who is having a bad week, or building or repairing something for someone who cannot improve the accessibility or quality of their home or car. Contemplate how Jesus performed many acts of service to those around Him when ministering on the earth.
- Consider helping someone you normally would avoid, remembering that serving with a deliberate heart is what Jesus did.

CONNECT

John 1:29; Romans 5:8; 2 Peter 3:9.

Jeremy Vetter, Moscow, Idaho, U.S.A.
The Day of Atonement

“Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Mic. 7:18, 19, NASB).
One day, my mother decided to remove from our apartment everything we had not been using. All kinds of items were stowed in closets and drawers, on shelves, and in the library. For years most of these items had not been used or worn. So she vowed to go through a room a day and not stop until every single corner of our apartment was clean.

Once a year something different happened.

On opening day of Operation Cleanse, I saw my mother deposit a lot of items on the balcony of our house. She did this for several days, and when everything had been organized, we noticed that the balcony was full of trash. That’s when the rest of us became involved. My dad, my sister, and I took all the rejects to the trash bins and then gave the balcony a thorough cleaning. Once we had finished, we all exclaimed that the place was finally clean!

This experience reminded me of when the people of Israel received direct instructions from God regarding the building of the sanctuary and what they should do in it. Repentant sinners were to bring an unblemished offering to the sanctuary, place their hands on its head, and confess their sins. Thus they transferred their sins to the sacrifice, which represented the Savior.

Then they were to kill the animal and the priest would take some of the blood into the Holy Place, where he sprinkled it before the veil which “hid” the ark containing the law that the sinner had broken. Thus the sins of the Israelites were transferred to the sanctuary.

However, once a year something different happened. On the Day of Atonement, the sanctuary was purified of all the sins that had accumulated during the year. The priest went into the Most Holy Place, where the blood of a goat was sprinkled upon the mercy seat of the ark in which the Ten Commandments lay. It was the day of cleanup, the day in which sin was eradicated from the sanctuary. This week we will study about this important day and how even today it affects our relationship with Christ.

Jose Daniel Sanchez, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Azazel is the name given to the scapegoat. It was one of two goats chosen on the yearly Day of Atonement.\(^1\) On that day the High Priest sacrificed the first goat and sprinkled its blood on the cover of the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary. The second goat, which was the scapegoat, symbolically had the sins of the sanctuary put on it by the High Priest and was taken out into the wilderness (Lev. 16:21, 22).

The sacrificed goat symbolizes Christ, who sacrificed His life for our sins. The scapegoat represents Satan, who is really the one responsible for sin.\(^2\) The sending of this goat into the wilderness represents the condemnation of Satan who will ultimately bear responsibility for all the sins and evil he instigated. Today, the word *scapegoat* is defined as a person or group made to take the blame for the mistake(s) or wrongdoing of others.\(^3\) However, this definition is not accurate in the context of these verses. Satan is very much at fault and deserves the consequences of his mistakes. Jesus represented the sacrificed goat because He died for our sins even though He had no faults. He takes our place and applies His death to us when we accept His sacrifice on our behalf.

Many people today struggle with a dark past full of mistakes, pain, and suffering. However, God’s love for everyone is so great that He removes our sins as soon as we repent. No matter how horrible the sin or how much we feel like He could never love us, He is there waiting to forgive us and to help us change for the better. He sacrificed His Son so that all those who believe and repent may have eternal life (John 3:16, 17). Just one touch from God can last a lifetime, so when you’re thinking of how big your sins are, just think of how much bigger God’s love is for you.

**REACT**

1. Why do you think that the meaning of *scapegoat* in the Bible differs from its common use today?
2. What makes the symbolism of the scapegoat so different from the other symbols in the ritual of the sanctuary services?

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\(^2\) Ibid.
The Holiest Day of All (Lev. 16:16–22; 23:26–32)

Have you ever had to wait a whole year for something that you really wanted? For example, when you had to wait for your birthday, or when you were a child and you had to wait an entire year for Christmas to come around again. How long did that year seem to you? How would you prepare yourself for that day?

In your Christian experience, how would you prepare yourself if you knew that God Himself was coming one day each year to meet with you?

The people of Israel had to wait an entire year for the Day of Atonement to come. This was the day of the year when “all the sins of the preceding year were finally disposed of in the ceremony of cleansing the sanctuary. . . . All who did not afflict their souls on that day were cut off from Israel [see Lev. 23:29].”

Surely the Day of Atonement was the holiest day of all, for which the priest and the people prepared diligently. On all the other yearly festivals, the Israelites maintained their daily work. However, on the Day of Atonement, also called the Sabbath of Sabbaths (Lev. 16:31), the Israelites did no work at all. Like the weekly Sabbath, it was a day to rest in what God, their Creator and Redeemer, had done for them and would do for them in the future.

The Holy Place (Lev. 4:6, 7, 17, 18, 25, 30; Heb. 7:25)

When people break God’s law, they need His forgiveness. Throughout the year, this truth was demonstrated through the sacrifices that occurred in the courtyard of the sanctuary. The blood of the slain lambs, representing the Savior, was placed either on the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard of the sanctuary (Lev. 4:25, 30), or it was sprinkled in front of the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place and placed on the horns of the altar of incense which was also in the Holy Place (Lev. 4:6, 7, 17, 18). The sins were thus taken away from the sinner and transferred to the sanctuary, teaching them (and us) that “Christ’s priestly ministry provides for the sinner’s forgiveness and reconciliation to God (Heb. 7:25).”

The Most Holy Place and the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16)

The sacrifices in the courtyard of the sanctuary taught the people about
God’s forgiveness and their reconciliation to Him. The events that occurred in the Most Holy Place on the yearly Day of Atonement taught them about “the judgment process that deals with the eradication of sin.”

On this day, the high priest cast lots upon two goats—one to become the scapegoat, the other the Lord’s goat. The Lord’s goat was slain and its blood used to cleanse the Holy Place, the Most Holy Place, and the altar of burnt offering of Israel’s sins. In this way, the sanctuary was “cleansed” of the people’s sins that had been placed there by the blood of all the daily sacrifices.

Next, the high priest placed his hands on the head of the scapegoat, confessing over it these sins, “thus transferring them from the sanctuary to this goat, who bore them away into the wilderness.”

**Christ and the Heavenly Sanctuary (Hebrews 8–10)**

The cleansing of the earthly sanctuary shows us how the heavenly sanctuary will be cleansed. Christ will remove “the confessed and forgiven sins of His people thence,” and place “them upon Satan. He will be declared guilty of all the evil he has caused them to commit, and must bear the final penalty.”

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:14–16, NKJV). Indeed, the best is yet to come.

**REACT**

1. What does it mean to you personally that Jesus, our High Priest, was tempted as you are?
2. What troubles and/or sins are weighing heavily on your mind right now? How can you boldly go to the throne of grace to find help?
3. Are you one of the many Seventh-day Adventists who are frightened by the judgment that is now going on in the heavenly sanctuary? If so, how can today’s lesson help to chase away those fears?
4. After studying today’s lesson, how can you prepare yourself for Christ’s return?

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3. Ibid., p. 351.
4. Ibid., p. 353.
6. Ibid., pp. 777, 778.
Jesus’ death pardoned our sins, enabling us to reconcile our relationship with Him. Yom Kippur, also known as the Day of Atonement, celebrates this work that Jesus loves to do for us.

“The Son of God, heaven’s glorious Commander, was touched with pity for the fallen race. His heart was moved with infinite compassion as the woes of the lost world rose up before Him. But divine love had conceived a plan whereby man might be redeemed. The broken law of God demanded the life of the sinner. In all the universe there was but one who could, in behalf of man, satisfy its claims. Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law and bring him again into harmony with Heaven. Christ would take upon Himself the guilt and shame of sin—sin so offensive to a holy God that it must separate the Father and His Son. Christ would reach to the depths of misery to rescue the ruined race.”

“Oh, the mystery of redemption! the love of God for a world that did not love Him! Who can know the depths of that love which ‘passeth knowledge’? Through endless ages immortal minds, seeking to comprehend the mystery of that incomprehensible love, will wonder and adore.”

“The Son of God offered his life to atone for the transgression of the Israeli people. “The plan of salvation had been laid before the creation of the earth; for Christ is ‘the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world’ (Revelation 13:8).”

As our High Priest, the Lord has established us as a nation of priests in Him (1 Pet. 2:9). He also opened the way for us to come boldly into the presence of God by offering Himself as an atonement for our sins (Heb. 10:19–22). Jesus is our High Priest (Heb. 3:1) and Mediator (Heb. 12:24). He lives to intercede for us before God (Rom. 8:34) until He returns to take us home with Him.

2. Ibid., pp. 63, 64.
3. Ibid., p. 63.
The Day of Atonement is all about forgiveness. You’re forgiven. How wonderful! It’s as simple as that. This indescribable love, mercy, and grace that we desire daily is what God pours into our souls. Think of how it felt when you realized He had forgiven you. After pouring out all your secrets before God, He still forgave you. Love forgives. When we become children of God, we learn to love the way He does. So why is it sometimes so difficult for us to forgive? Why do we want to get away from the person who has hurt us? How do we love someone who has caused or is causing us harm?

**Pray with power.** How many times do we have to hear this before we actually do it? Oh, how we underestimate the power of prayer! It is our telephone line to the King of kings! Yes. He is the only One who can give us the power we need to forgive our enemies. So pray. And have faith that God will give us the kind of love we desperately need (John 14:13, 14).

**Forgive and forget.** Memories have emotional connections that cause those memories to affect our lives for long periods of time. The only way we will ever forgive and forget is when we forgive as God does. When He forgives, it’s as if we had never sinned (Ps. 103:11, 12; Mic. 7:19; Eph. 4:32).

**Give it time.** Yes. It will take time. You may not be able to forgive today, tomorrow, in a month, or maybe even a year. Why? When we go out into the world, our hearts get broken. Then the Sculptor must work on it some more to make it whole once again. He must form it back into its original masterpiece (Ezek. 36:26).

If you’re having trouble forgiving, don’t feel like God doesn’t understand you. Trust that He forgives you, and pray that He will provide you with the forgiveness to forgive.

**REACT**

Why is prayer so important to having successful relationships with others?
Aviation has seen significant changes in aircraft design and materials used. These changes have improved efficiency in speed, lift, weight, engine power, and computer systems. In the old days, pilots used charts and tables to manually calculate any information relevant to a flight. Now they rely on electronic LCD screens that calculate such things as distances and the location of landing paths. A few things, however, remain the same. Flight instruments and their functions are still dictated by Pitot tube readings—a small but vital L-shaped tube located on the exterior of a plane’s fuselage. It reads temperature, air pressure, velocity, humidity, and air flow.¹

In a biblical context, our Pitot tube is the history that teaches us about how God saved and protected His children since the beginning of the world. This history is still relevant to all people. Biblical history shows God’s unchanging plan of salvation for humanity. It teaches us that we can always count on His protection, love, forgiveness, and justice.

Isaiah experienced his own personal day of atonement (Isa. 6:1–8). In order to be in God’s presence, he needed to be cleansed of his sins. After such a remarkable experience, he was moved to respond by saying: “‘Here am I! Send me’ ” (verse 8, NKJV). Today, we also have the opportunity to be cleansed of all sins because of Christ’s atonement for our sins. God allowed the death of His Son because He loves us (Jer. 31:3). Now is the time to serve Him. However, “the dedication of means must be preceded by a dedication of life. One is the result of the other. A dedication of life without dedication of means is not provided for in God’s plan. A dedication of means without a dedication of life is not acceptable.”²

Despite our technologically changing world, we can be sure that God’s love, forgiveness, and protection will forever remain unchanged. If we don’t allow the Holy Spirit to transform our characters, if we are not transformed by God’s love and sense of justice, then we can’t be His ambassadors. We need to understand what God has delivered us from and experience cleansing from our sins. Then we, like Isaiah, will cry out, “Here am I! Send me."


Patricia Barboza, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
CONCLUDE
Atonement is God’s plan to reconnect with us and heal us from the damage sin has inflicted. In the Old Testament, the Day of Atonement was a day in which all the sins were eradicated from the sanctuary. The Lord’s goat was slain, and the blood was used to cleanse the sanctuary, representing Christ’s death that cleanses us from our sins. The scapegoat, or Azazel, had all the sins placed on him and was banished out into the desert. When we experience Christ’s cleansing power of atonement, we can also experience the power of God’s presence.

CONSIDER
- Doing a Bible study about the Day of Atonement either by yourself or in a small group. Study the topic until you can easily explain it to someone who doesn’t know anything about it.
- Writing a short story about an Israelite family and their experience on the Day of Atonement in the desert with Moses.
- Drawing or painting the two goats depicted in Leviticus 16. Allow the symbols to help you gain a deeper insight into Christ’s death for us and His forgiveness, as well as Satan’s ultimate responsibility for sin.
- Watching a nature documentary about the deepest explored parts of the ocean. Imagine God casting our sins into the even deeper, inaccessible parts of the ocean so that they will be remembered no more (Mic. 7:18, 19).
- Praying and journaling about parts of your life where you need to more fully experience God’s cleansing power of atonement.
- Compiling a list of hymns and/or praise songs that deal with the theology of atonement—for example, forgiveness from sin, Christ’s cleansing blood, His death for us, and so on. Find an opportunity to sing these in Sabbath School or with a group of friends.

CONNECT
Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 30, “The Tabernacle and Its Services.”
Andrews Study Bible. Notes and cross reference texts listed with Leviticus 16.
The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 1, Leviticus 16.

Christy Yingling Gusse, Fort Worth, Texas, U.S.A.
Christ, Our Sacrifice

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24, NASB).
On a hot, sunny day at Bugema University, two students walking to a lecture were engaged in a heated argument. One argued that there is a sanctuary in heaven, while its antitype is the model that God showed to Moses (see Exodus 25–31).

The other student argued that his colleague was incorrect. According to him, God does not live in buildings. He questioned how heaven, which is holy to begin with, can have a Holy Place and a Most Holy Place. According to him, this presupposes that heaven harbors evil. He argued that God’s temple is the human heart.

This exchange reminded me of an incident that happened in church one Sabbath morning. After the children’s story, the children were asked what they had learned. Instead of answering that question, one child took the opportunity to ask how people who die lose consciousness. The children’s storyteller appealed to the church elders to give an answer.

One church elder tried to diffuse the situation by reading Deuteronomy 29:29, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law” (NIV).

If there is anything God has revealed to us, it is that He gave us His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life (see John 3:16). Imagine! A sacrifice and a promise given to us at the same time!

As many Christian denominations debate and argue about many different things, let us pray to God that He will reveal more and more of Christ, our Sacrifice, to us so that we may know Him better. And as we learn more about our Savior through daily meditation upon His Word, may we find great joy in His promises and love.

Kyaminyawandi Benjamin, Bugema, Uganda
The Sin Problem (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23)

They had sinned! Now Adam and Eve, along with their descendants, would be sinners waiting for one sure thing—death. God had been clear to the first couple about the consequences of disobedience. They were now helpless as a result of their failure to heed God's command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17).

Humans Versus God's Solution for Sin (Gen. 3:7, 21)

Adam and Eve did not die as soon as they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But they did experience the effects of sin as manifested in the feeling of shame. Because of their shame, they attempted to cover up their guilt. Hence, “they sewed fig leaves together, and made coverings for themselves” (Gen. 3:7, NIV).

Even today, humans have their own solutions for their spiritual problems. But today’s solutions are just as futile as Adam and Eve’s. Nothing, however, surprises God. Because of His loving wisdom and foreknowledge, what happened on that day in the Garden of Eden did not take Him by surprise. He and His Son were ready. Christ, the sacrificial Lamb “slain from the creation of the world,” would atone for all of sin. This atonement was symbolized by the “coats of skins” with which God clothed Adam and Eve. When He met them in their fallen state, He made “coats of skins, and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21). Innocent animals had to die to provide the skins by which Adam and Eve’s nakedness was clothed. This is how painful sin can be—it costs life. And the death of these animals and the first clothes represent Christ’s death and His righteousness that becomes ours when we accept Him as our Savior.


Christ’s death for the redemption of humankind was represented in the Israelites’ daily worship services throughout their journey in the wilderness. They were to continually offer animal sacrifices to atone for their sins, and those who could not afford a sacrifice as little as two doves or two young pigeons, could “bring for his offering the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering” (Lev. 5:11). “For the life of the flesh is in the
blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17:11). When Christ did become our ultimate Sacrifice, He cried out, “It is finished” (John 19:30), and the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was torn in half (Matt. 27:51). This symbolized that Christ had fulfilled all of the animal sacrifices with His sacrifice. From then on, all animal sacrifices were to cease because type (Christ and His blood) had met antitype (the blood of the animals).

**Christ Our High Priest (Heb. 2:14–18; 4:15, 16; 7:25, 26)**

Today, because of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf, we can claim salvation in Him. Because He lived on earth as a human, and because He is God, we have a High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, who was tempted as we are, but was without sin (Heb. 4:15, 16). Our redemption was completed at the cross when He took our place and died for our sins. He will come again to take those who have accepted His salvation to live with Him for eternity. It is our privilege to claim the merits of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. And when we do, we will stand justified before the heavenly throne just as though we had never sinned.

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Heb. 2:14–18, NIV).

“Therefore he [Christ] is able also to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens” (Heb. 7:25, 26, NIV).

Christ died on your behalf. If you haven’t already, won’t you accept His sacrifice as yours? He is waiting and longing for you to do so. Always remember that He “is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast” (Heb. 3:6, NIV).

**REACT**

1. How can you benefit from Christ’s role as your High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary?

2. If you have accepted Christ's sacrifice for your sins, what are you doing to tell others about Him? How can acts of service play a role in the telling of His salvation?

*Paul D. Kawanguzi, Bracknell, United Kingdom*
“Nature and revelation alike testify of God’s love. Our Father in heaven is the source of life, of wisdom, and of joy. Look at the wonderful and beautiful things of nature. Think of their marvellous adaptation to the needs and happiness, not only of man, but of all living creatures. The sunshine and the rain, that gladden and refresh the earth, the hills and seas and plains, all speak to us of the Creator’s love. It is God who supplies the daily needs of all His creatures. In the beautiful words of the psalmist—‘The eyes of all wait upon Thee; / And Thou givest them their meat in due season. / Thou openest Thine hand, / And satisfiest the desire of every living thing.’ Psalm 145:15, 16.”

“None but the Son of God could accomplish our redemption.”

Such was God’s love for humans before sin. And such is God’s love even after sin. When we disregard His mercy, we cannot flourish, and we mock the sacrifice He made for us.

“None but the Son of God could accomplish our redemption; for only He who was in the bosom of the Father could declare Him. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it manifest. Nothing less than the infinite sacrifice made by Christ in behalf of fallen man could express the Father’s love to lost humanity.”

“But this great sacrifice was not made in order to create in the Father’s heart a love for man, not to make Him willing to have. No, no! ‘God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son.’ John 3:16. The Father loves us, not because of the great propitiation, but He provided the propitiation because He loves us. Christ was the medium through which He could pour out His infinite love upon a fallen world.”

**REACT**

1. Christ gave His life for us. He left all the glories of heaven to do so. How can you honor such sacrifice on your behalf? Are you doing anything that does not honor His sacrifice? If so, ask Him to give you the strength and the heart to turn away from such behavior.

2. What does Christ’s sacrifice and love for humanity teach us about how we should treat others, even if they are not Christians?

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3. Ibid., p. 13.

Moses Balunywa, Kampala, Uganda
In traditional African societies, some communities were organized under a centralized government. These communities were under the leadership of a king or monarch and had standing armies. There were also decentralized communities with no leader at the top and no standing armies. Whenever danger arose in one of these societies, an alarm was made to call volunteers to sacrifice themselves for the good of all. Drumming or blowing a trumpet were two ways in which alarms were sounded. Members of such societies who did not heed the call were expected to cooperate by following the rules that governed such dangerous circumstances. For example, they might be asked to abstain from sex or certain foods, or to observe certain rituals that were believed to enhance the success of the volunteers. Whoever failed to cooperate would be punished for not appreciating the sacrifice of the volunteers.

**When the world was threatened by sin, Jesus sacrificed Himself and died on our behalf.**

When the world was threatened by sin, Jesus sacrificed Himself and died on our behalf. The responsibility conferred on us by this sacrifice is to accept Him as our Savior (John 3:16), confess our sins (Rom. 10:5–10), and develop a Christlike character (Gal. 5:16–26; 1 John 3:11–24).

As Christians, let us allow the Holy Spirit to direct us in cooperating with our Savior Jesus Christ in learning how to live exemplary lives based on biblical teaching and the example He set for us while He lived on earth. This way our reward will be eternal life.

**REACT**

1. How can we best show our appreciation for Jesus’ sacrifice in our daily lives?
2. How can we invite others who are not yet aware of this sacrifice to benefit from it? How might our Christian lifestyle and how we treat others be an invitation?
3. How can our knowledge of Jesus’ sacrifice benefit us, our friends, and our families in our daily lives?
The types of gifts that are difficult to turn down are the gifts that we do not deserve. Jesus dying on our behalf so that we might be saved is surely one such gift. His great love for us motivated Him to give us this gift. The greatest revelation of God’s love is the cross, where He Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, was sacrificed for our sins.

**Might it be time to give others better than they deserve?**

How can we extend such love to others when they might not deserve it? One way is by learning to say the following words when they are needed most.

**The six most important words:** “I admit I made a mistake.” Living in peace with everyone else calls for admitting when you were wrong and then being willing to do something to correct that mistake.

**The five most important words:** “You did a good job.” How sweet those words sound when they are meant for you! So might this be how everyone else would feel if they were to hear them too?

**The four most important words:** “What is your opinion?” Life is seldom all about you. Remembering this will help you to consider what others think and how they feel.

**The three most important words:** “If you please.” Putting someone else’s needs ahead of your own reflects in a small way Christ’s sacrifice for us. Sacrificing ourselves even in small ways for someone else reflects our relationship with Christ.

**The two most important words:** “Thank you.” Being thankful for what we have helps us to not focus on what we don’t have.

**The single most important word:** “We.” Christ died that we might live. Are you as concerned about the salvation of others as you are about your own? Are you leading souls to Christ or away from Him?

**The least important word:** “I.” Jesus died not for His sake but for our sakes. Therefore, being of service to others is more important than making sure that life is all about you. At the cross, you certainly got better than you deserved. Might it be time to give others better than they deserve?

**REACT**

1. How can you begin to give others better than they deserve?
2. Why do you think Christ continues to give you better than you deserve even when you take Him for granted?
In Africa, a master-slave relationship was characterized by strict service and obedience on the part of the slave. Strict punishments were normally meted out for slip-ups. A well-known African tale tells about a slave who killed a buffalo during a hunt. Excited by his catch, he hid the buffalo in the bush and went to discuss with his master the reward one receives for killing a buffalo. Surprised at the slave’s ignorance regarding the behavior his social status dictated, the master replied, “Slaves always eat the tails regardless of whether they killed the buffalo or not.” On hearing this, the slave left the buffalo to rot in the bush.

Never has it been known for a master to love his slave enough to make him a son.

In no other setting in the history of humankind do we see anything similar to what our God and His Son did for us. We cannot even begin to contemplate how a master would give up his only son to save a slave. Never has it been known for a master to love his slave enough to make him a son. No amount of justification can begin to explain how a master washes the feet of his slaves.

When we as Christians contemplate the extent of God’s love for us, we cannot help but be in awe of Him. We do not need to hide buffalos because we fear our Master. Instead, He desires that we revel in the pleasure that comes in honoring His sacrifice. He desires that we enjoy all the benefits of serving Him, a Master who sees no difference between a slave and His own Son. First Peter 2:24 is proof that our Master will do anything to ensure that we receive salvation—a salvation that is available to all.

**REACT**

1. Do your actions and feelings toward God reflect a master-slave relationship or a master-child relationship?
2. How would you help Christians who are struggling with transforming their relationship with God from a master-slave relationship to a master-child relationship?
CONCLUDE

Catholic Priest Maximilian Kolbe was imprisoned in Auschwitz for providing shelter to refugees from Greater Poland. When a prisoner in his barracks vanished, the SS picked ten prisoners to be starved to death in retaliation. One of these men cried out, “Oh, my poor wife, my poor children. I shall never see them again.” At that point Kolbe asked that he be the one to starve, not the distraught family man. And so he joined the ranks of the doomed while the other man survived. However moving, Kolbe’s sacrifice is only a shadow of the sacrifice Jesus made for us. Jesus’ sacrifice is symbolized in the sanctuary service.

CONSIDER

- Reading the story of Christ’s crucifixion from at least three different Bible versions. Which one touches your heart the most and why?
- Researching the practice of crucifixion on the Internet or in your local library. Note especially the physical suffering it causes. Then consider the spiritual and mental pain Jesus must have experienced while on the cross. How does this information affect your feelings and respect for what He experienced on your behalf?
- Studying various paintings of Christ’s crucifixion from different time periods and styles of art. What do they teach you about the enormity of Christ’s death on your behalf?
- Having your Sabbath School class organize and conduct a Communion service. Begin with a foot-washing service followed by a re-enactment of Jesus’ trial. End with the serving of the bread and grape juice and a scriptural reading of His death and resurrection.
- Singing a hymn or two about Christ’s suffering and death. (see the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, hymn nos. 154–164.)
- Recording in your journal your thoughts and feelings regarding Christ’s death on your behalf. Consider answering the following questions as a format for this entry: Who? What? Where? When? How? and Why?

CONNECT

Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, all or portion of chapters 71–81.
Christ, Our High Priest

“Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man”

(Heb. 8:1, 2, NASB).
God wanted the Israelites to build the sanctuary so that He could teach them about salvation. Surely God wants to teach us about salvation today. So what can we learn from the sanctuary that will bring us closer to Him? What did God mean when He said He wanted to dwell among His people?

The earthly sanctuary was a sign to God’s children that He desired to save them and that He had an actual plan for doing so.

As High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, Christ serves as our Advocate, Mediator, Intercessor, and High Priest. All these roles have significant meaning for life today and in the life to come. Every architect knows that a structure must have a blueprint from which the builders can work. As the Architect of the sanctuary, Christ instructed the children of Israel to build a sanctuary so that He could dwell among them and teach them about salvation.

The earthly sanctuary was a sign to God’s children that He desired to save them and that He had an actual plan for doing so. Through a series of sacrifices and services and even through the furniture in the Holy and Most Holy Places and the robes of the priests, the sanctuary told the story of salvation and of Christ’s love for them.

In this week’s lesson, we will look at the plan of salvation as depicted through the sanctuary message. This message of justification, sanctification, and glorification has not lost its relevance because it tells the story of what is currently happening in heaven and the role Jesus is playing in the sanctuary on behalf of our salvation. The sanctuary message also teaches us the role we need to be playing while we wait for Him to return.
Understanding the role of the priest in the earthly sanctuary helps us to understand Christ’s priesthood in the heavenly sanctuary. In the earthly sanctuary, the priests officiated daily during the morning and evening sacrifices. Annually, the high priest officiated during the Day of Atonement. Among the various duties in their ministry, probably the most significant was the mediation between the Israelites and God, as noted in the following verses: “Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord . . . for a memorial” (Exod. 28:12). “Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart, when he goes in into the holy place, as a memorial before the Lord continually. And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron’s heart when he goes in before the Lord. So Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel over his heart before the Lord continually” (Exod. 28:29, 30, NKJV).

Jesus Christ is indeed the better High Priest.

Jesus Christ is our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, serving as Mediator between God and us (1 Tim. 2:5). In the same way that Aaron bore the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on his ephod, so Christ brings the names of those who have accepted Him as their Savior before God to intercede on their behalf. In the same manner that Aaron bore the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart, so Christ bore the judgment of our sins on the cross.

What a comfort it is to know that the Savior is our Intercessor, our High Priest, who pleads before God, not with the blood of bulls and goats, but with His own precious blood. What a comfort it is when we realize that He knows and understands our pain because He shared in our afflictions while He lived on earth. Yes, Jesus Christ is indeed the better High Priest.

REACT

1. What other similarities can you find between the priesthood of Aaron and his sons in the earthly sanctuary and the priesthood of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary? Identify the differences as well.
2. How is the priesthood of Jesus Christ better than the priesthood of the earthly sanctuary?
3. What does the ministry of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary mean to you personally? Be prepared to share your answer with your class.
Our High Priest (Heb. 4:14, 15; 8:1–6; Heb. 9:11, 12)

What is a priest? Do we as Christians need one, and if so, why? Some Christian denominations have people they refer to as priests whom they believe represent church members before God. Other Christian denominations, our own included, insist we do not need another human being representing us before God. In all of this discussion and—sometimes—conflict, the participants often don’t fully understand the biblical concept of priesthood, or they understand it so well that they assume others also understand it. So it is important to start from the beginning.

Biblically, a priest was a person who represented worshipers before God. Implicit in this was the idea—or realization—that the average person was not qualified to confront God one on one. But was the human priest really qualified either? Not really. The Bible is quite clear that the human priests called by God to serve Him were nothing in themselves. The account of Joshua in Zechariah 3 revealed that Joshua himself needed an intercessor.

The human priesthood in the Old Testament is therefore just a teaching tool to alert worshipers to their needs and to direct their attention to the coming Christ, the great High Priest, who would provide real forgiveness for sins and communion with God. This would involve not the blood of sacrificial animals, but His own blood, of which the blood of animals was a symbol.

Our Advocate and Intercessor (Rom. 8:31–35)

For generations, Christians have argued about the concept referred to by many as “original sin.” The phrase itself is controversial. But one thing all Christians agree upon: something is very wrong with our hearts and minds that makes us do bad things and think bad thoughts. Paul himself writes that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, NKJV). Only God is holy. He has no dark side (1 John 1:5). We have no right or ability to stand before Him. That is, unless He makes a way (Heb. 10:20). Christ paid that debt for us and when we accept Him as our Savior, He provides us with direct access to God.

Our Mediator (1 Tim. 2:3–6; Heb. 9:8–15)

In the biblical priesthood, there were many priests. All of them had duties important to the spiritual lives of the worshipers. All of the priests mediated in some small way between the worshipers and God. These
duties took place in the first tent of the sanctuary, the Holy Place. But only the high priest was truly a direct mediator. His role was to enter the second tent, the Most Holy Place. This was no mere political appointment, as it became later on. No one in those early days became high priest because they wanted the respect of their peers or an easier life. It was a huge responsibility. The high priest entered the Most Holy Place once a year, on the Day of Atonement, to plead for the remission of the sins the people committed over the previous year. The ceremonial requirements were exacting, and the congregants were never quite certain the High Priest would be coming out again.

This happened every year, and as far as it went, it was effective. But as Christians, we have a Mediator who entered into the real sanctuary in heaven and who obtained the remission of our sins with one act, effective for all time. Through Him, we have communion with God whenever we need it or want it.

**Our Great High Priest (Heb. 4:14, 15; 7:23–28; 8:1–6)**

Throughout the book of Hebrews, the author lays out why Jesus Christ is superior to all that has gone before. He emphasizes Christ’s superiority to and supremacy over angels (1:5–14), Moses (3:1–6), and finally Aaron and all the high priests who succeeded him (5:1–10). As such, Jesus was not merely a high priest, but the great High Priest. Aaron and the other high priests entered into the Holy Place once a year with much fear. Jesus went into the great sanctuary in heaven, where He is our Advocate, Intercessor, Mediator, and Sacrifice. Unlike any of the priests before Him, Jesus is all-sufficient for the work of our redemption.

**The One Sacrifice (Heb. 10:1–14)**

When one examines the Old Testament laws about sacrifices (Num. 15:1–28, for example), one notices the large number of circumstances that require sacrifices, and the varied and specific items to be sacrificed. Some sacrifices were yearly, others daily, and still others as often as one sinned or contracted ritual uncleanliness. Thus the sacrifices were continual reminders of one’s inadequacy and inability to stay clean and innocent.

Like everything else pertaining to the sacrificial system, the sacrifices were shadows of things to come. In this case, what was to come was the offering of Jesus Christ’s perfect life and sacrificial death. Where the other offerings needed to be made again and again and were only marginally effective, Christ’s supreme sacrifice was sufficient once and for all. How can we do any less than to offer Him our hearts and lives?

**REACT**

1. Why was the original Old Testament sacrificial system necessary?
2. How does the awareness of Christ’s high priestly ministry help us to better understand the nature and price of our salvation?

Alan Hecht, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
“As the books of record are opened in the judgment, the lives of all who have believed on Jesus come in review before God. Beginning with those who first lived upon the earth, our Advocate presents the cases of each successive generation, and closes with the living. Every name is mentioned, every case closely investigated. Names are accepted, names rejected. When any have sins remaining upon the books of record, unrepented of and unforgiven, their names will be blotted out of the book of life, and the record of their deeds will be erased from the book of God’s remembrance. The Lord declared to Moses: ‘Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book.’ Exodus 32:33. And says the prophet Ezekiel: ‘When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, . . . all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned.’ Ezekiel 18:24.

“‘I am He that blotteth out thy transgression for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.’”

“All who have truly repented of sin, and by faith claimed the blood of Christ as their atoning sacrifice, have had pardon entered against their names in the books of heaven; as they have become partakers of the righteousness of Christ, and their characters are found to be in harmony with the law of God, their sins will be blotted out, and they themselves will be accounted worthy of eternal life. The Lord declares, by the prophet Isaiah: ‘I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgression for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.’ Isaiah 43:25.”

“The subject of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment should be clearly understood by the people of God. All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. . . . Each has a case pending at the bar of God. Each must meet the great Judge face to face. How important, then, that every mind contemplate often the solemn scene when the judgment shall sit and the books shall be opened, when, with Daniel, every individual must stand in his lot, at the end of the days.’”

**REACT**

How can you personally develop a deeper relationship with Christ, your High Priest?

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2. Ibid., p. 488.

Teclah P. Khumalo, Pretoria, South Africa
Rejoice! Jesus is our High Priest who is interceding for us with His blood before the loving Father in heaven. He became a human and was tempted as we are. Whatever feelings and thoughts we have experienced, whatever pain and temptation we pass through, He also experienced and is ready to intervene on our behalf when we claim Him as our Savior. He bore our sins on the cross and promises to wash them away with His own blood. We have nothing to fear because Jesus is interceding for us now in the heavenly sanctuary. He is ever caring and will help us to be the same when we profess His name. As we grow in His grace, the Holy Spirit lives in us, helping us to love and to show sympathy to others just as He did. Following are some practical ways we can do so:

Teach someone how to read. Many libraries hold classes to train people how to do this. Imagine not being able to read the Bible and what a gift it would be to teach someone how to do that.

Feed the hungry. Whenever you shop for groceries, buy a bit extra to donate to your community’s or church’s food bank.

Donate clothing. If you have good clothes that you no longer wear, donate them to a local charity that can distribute them to those in need.

Knit or crochet. If you live in a part of the world that has a season of cold weather, knit or crochet hats and scarves for people who are homeless or who are on a low fixed income.

Repair someone’s house. Do you know any senior citizens who find it difficult to make house repairs or do yard work? Get a group together and spend a day helping them.

**REACT**

1. Reflect on your relationship with Christ. In what ways does it show how much you appreciate His high priestly work on your behalf?
2. Think about how you treat others. Where and how might you improve? Ask God to help you.
3. Do you accept Christ as your Mediator in heaven? Or do you try to be good in your own strength?
During Bible times, the work of the High Priest was all important. He bore the names of Israel on the two onyx stones. Thus he carried Israel both on his shoulders and over his heart. On his shoulders, he carried the burden of Israel. On his heart, he bore the judgment of the children of Israel. As a representation of the heavenly sanctuary, the earthly sanctuary is an important visual aid to help us understand salvation and Christ’s work on our behalf in heaven.

**God’s Word is true.**

Satan accuses us before God of being hopeless sinners, but our mighty Savior Jesus Christ died in our place. On the cross, He died the eternal death that we are to die if we do not accept Him as our Savior. But when we accept Jesus’ death as our own, and through the help of the Holy Spirit develop a Christlike character, Jesus will present His blood, His sacrifice, to the Father on our behalf. This is His role as our High Priest in heaven.

When people break a law in the country, city, or state in which they live, they will most likely spend time discussing their case with a lawyer. In a similar manner, we are to spend much time with God in prayer. “The darkness of the evil one encloses those who neglect to pray. The whispered temptations of the enemy entice them to sin; and it is all because they do not make use of the privileges that God has given them in the divine appointment of prayer. Why should the sons and daughters of God be reluctant to pray, when prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven’s storehouse, where are treasured the boundless resources of Omnipotence?”

Unless we take our sins to our High Priest, we remain sinners; and as such we are guilty as charged. The pardon of our High Priest works only as long as we cooperate with Him. God’s Word is true. And because we can depend on it, we know that Jesus will soon return to take us home with Him.

**REACT**

1. Will you let Jesus forgive all of your sins? If not, what are you waiting for?
2. Do you believe that God’s promise will come to pass concerning His second coming? If so, are you ready? If you are not ready, what are you waiting for?

CONCLUDE

We are lost. Guilty as charged. We have no case. In the midst of our bleak situation, a powerful ray of light shines through. We have a High Priest, an Advocate, and Mediator. He has never lost a case. We can’t afford Him, so He has covered the cost with His own blood. All we have to do is ask Him to represent us. That’s it. He is our only hope. If we believe in Him, we have nothing to fear.

CONSIDER

- Writing a job description for our High Priest. Include the character qualities you would like to see and the experience you would like Him to have.
- Interceding in prayer for someone who needs to be lifted up before Jesus, our High Priest. Let that person know you are praying for him or her. Pray faithfully until your prayers are answered.
- Comparing and contrasting the priesthood of Aaron with the priesthood of Christ.
- Retelling the story of salvation to a friend, using modern symbols.
- Re-creating a judgment scene. You will need an accuser, an accused, a judge, and a defender. Try the accused based on the infringement of God’s law. What can you learn from this activity about your need for Christ as your Defender?
- Meditating on the temptations you face. Then paraphrase Hebrews 4:15 to include your temptations.
- Designing a bookmark with Hebrews 4:16 written on it. Memorize the verse and ask God to help you live it.

CONNECT

Hebrews, chapters 5 and 7.
The Pre-Advent Judgment

“Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him” (Dan. 7:27, NASB).
Recently, I was watching a news report on the chaos in the Middle East. And as I watched, I found myself wondering how much longer it would be before Jesus comes to take us away from this mess. I know in my head that it will not be much longer. However, my heart wishes it would happen soon.

As we watch the world stage, we see so many signs pointing to Christ’s soon return. There are wars and rumors of wars in the Middle East and elsewhere, famines in Africa, earthquakes in Haiti and Japan, and diseases seeping into America. Most of these signs Jesus spoke about in Matthew 24:4–8 as indicators that the earth is in its final moments.

God does not want us to be fearful during this time in history. Jesus is conducting a judgment in heaven. He wants us to view this pre-Advent judgment with excitement and eagerness, for we are about to enter into a new life without pain and death, wars and disease. We are about to see Jesus face to face, and the glories of all heaven will be revealed.

However, before this can happen, the accusations of the devil must be dealt with. Matthew 25:31–46 describes the terms by which God decides if someone is a “sheep” or a “goat.” For the sheep—those who have confessed their sins and given their lives to Christ—the pre-Advent judgment is when they are exonerated. For the goats, the pre-Advent judgment is the time when they are found guilty and sentenced to eternal death.

Although the Judgment Day is nearly upon us, we still have time. Time to send the gospel into all the world, time for revival to sweep God’s church, and time to make sure our hearts are right with God. He does not want any of us to be lost. Otherwise, He wouldn’t have allowed Jesus to take our place.

I invite you to take this time to renew your heart with God and confess any sins you may be holding on to. Let us prepare ourselves so that when Christ returns, we can stand before Him, thrilled and excited to meet our Savior.

Asheley Woodruff, Nampa, Idaho, U.S.A.
A Godly Judge (Rom. 2:1, 2, 5)

England’s popular Simon Cowell of *American Idol* and *X Factor* fame is a direct judge of musical talent. His caustic and sometimes rude criticism of young talent can cut like a knife. His genuine evaluation of “wannabe” stars can be seen in his face. He makes no effort to conceal his true thoughts about someone’s potential. He is one of the most feared and respected judges on TV today. But because he’s human, he’s sometimes wrong.

**Jesus, the One who sees everything in our hearts, conducts a perfect judgment of all.**

However, we know a Judge who is all knowing and all seeing, and who applies His “righteous judgment” (Rom. 2:5). We have confidence in knowing that He is fair and just in all His decisions and actions.

If you were God, looking into a life like yours right now, what would you see? What do you see in yourself that even the best human judge might miss? How does God see you? How do you see yourself?

The Genesis of the Problem (Gen. 3:8–19; 4:1–17)

Just after the fall of Adam and Eve, God visited them in the cool of the evening. When He saw that they were hiding from Him, He called out to them. Something had changed in Adam and Eve. Of the three beings present, the human beings were the ones who had changed their heart and behavior, while God, of course, had stayed the same.

Fast-forward to Cain and Abel. God comes to Cain, warning him about what He saw in him—trying to help him overcome sin as it was growing in him. However, Cain succumbs and strikes down his brother, taking life with his own hands. God then sends Cain to live on his own—a sentence he feels so deeply that his response to the banishment from God’s presence is such that it’s almost more than he can take. Cain, however, learns to adapt, and so he survives. But he carries with him the burden of his action for the rest of his life.

The Investigative Judgment (Ps. 26:1–3; Dan. 7:14, 22, 25–27; Rev. 2:23)

Jesus’ three and half years of public ministry were marked with intention in every step He took, every miracle He performed, and every word He spoke, all with the singular purpose of redeeming humankind. Today, in heaven, He is still intent on this purpose.
Revelation 2:23 gives us insight into His current work: “‘I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds’” (NIV). (See also David’s prayer in Ps. 26:1–3.) Yes, Jesus currently is searching our hearts and minds. What does He find in your heart and mind right now?

Your Wrath Used Against You (Romans 1; 2:1–11)

My grandfather set me up with a valuable spiritual lesson when I was a teenager. He had me read Romans 1 out loud. In this chapter, sinners and their inevitable destruction are described in detail. At the end of the chapter, he asked me what I thought about it. “Sinners will get what they have coming,” I responded.

He smiled and then directed me to read on, beginning with Romans 2:1, “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things” (NIV). Now hold on a second. What? He had me. And it gets even more challenging. Verse 5 says, “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed” (NIV).

The One who searches our hearts and minds, the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:22), sees the judgment we hold toward others. He sees how this judgment is converted within ourselves to a form of wrath that, combined with God’s wrath, leads an unrepentant person to perish (Rom. 2:12). In Luke 6:37, Jesus says, “‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven’” (NIV).

Heart Surgery (Ps. 51:1–10)

Removing a judgmental heart and transplanting it with a clean heart is a result of repentance combined with a “surgical” act of God’s Spirit when the sinner requests it. “Create in me a pure heart, O God, / and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10, NIV). Those whom God forgives and grants a new heart will in the judgment be counted as saved because they allowed the Holy Spirit to live in their hearts. They faced their sin and turned to Jesus to save and transform them because they knew that their best efforts were as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6).


In the judgment of Matthew 25:31–46, the sheep and goats are separated. What each group says to God when He calls them to Him shows what is in their hearts and minds. It is most interesting that neither the goats nor the sheep realized they were or were not serving God by their actions or inaction. Neither were any of them aware of the consequences. They were all acting from the heart.

Jesus, the One who sees everything in our hearts, conducts a perfect judgment of all.

Fred Cornforth, Boise, Idaho, U.S.A.
“We are in the investigative judgment, and the work for the time is solemn heart-searching. The duty devolves upon everyone to consider, to watch, and to pray. You are not bidden by the Lord to examine your neighbor’s heart. Let your investigative powers be put to work to discover what is in your own heart, the defects in your own character, the work to be done in your own home.”

2. Ibid., January 15, 1907.

“Every individual has a soul to save or to lose.”

“Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent efforts, they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away sin, among God’s people on earth.”

“The subject of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment should be clearly understood by the people of God. All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise, it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time, or to occupy the position which God designs them to fill. Every individual has a soul to save or to lose. Each has a case pending at the bar of God. Each must meet the great Judge face to face. How important, then, that every mind contemplate often the solemn scene when the judgment shall sit and the books shall be opened, when, with Daniel, every individual must stand in his lot, at the end of the days.”

Jeremy Wong, Kettering, Ohio, U.S.A.
The doctrine of the pre-Advent judgment has its origin in the connection between Artaxerxes’ decree to rebuild the Israelite temple in 457 B.C. (Ezra 7) and the prediction of that decree in Daniel 9.* This decree began the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:25 and is accepted as the start for the 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14 because the 70 weeks were given as an explanation for the 2,300 days in Daniel 9:22. Using the day-for-a-year principle for understanding prophetic use of time (Ezek. 4:5), one can calculate that the 2,300 days that would end with the cleansing of the sanctuary indicates the year 1844.

The Millerites, who waited for Christ to come in 1844, assumed that “sanctuary” referred to this earth. However, further Bible study revealed that there is a sanctuary in heaven (Heb. 8:1, 2), of which the earthly sanctuary was a copy (Heb. 9:23, 24). When Christ returned to heaven, He began His role of High Priest in that sanctuary (Heb. 4:14). At the end of the 2,300 days, the heavenly sanctuary began to be cleansed in a cosmic Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:16–20, 30–33; 2 Cor. 5:19). The judgment looks at whose name is written in the book of life and whose is not (Dan. 7:9–14; Rev. 13:8; 20:15).

The earthly Day of Atonement was kept with fasting and prayer as people prepared for that day. We should also treat the heavenly Day of Atonement the same way (Rev. 14:6, 7). We must also remember that God really is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV). The Day of Atonement vindicates God’s character to the universe. God’s character is represented by His work in the sanctuary (Rom. 3:21–26). The judgment, then, shows what God has done for us so that we can be saved (Isa. 1:18).

The pre-Advent judgment also depicts the intimate process of salvation that takes place in the human heart. We recognize that in comparison with God’s goodness (James 1:17), our righteousness is worthless (Isa. 64:6; James 1:17). That recognition justifies us with God (Rom. 10:10). The pre-Advent judgment is not a message of condemnation. It is a message of hope.


Janelle Sundin, Vancouver, Washington, U.S.A.
The investigative judgment can rule in your favor only if you are “in Him.” Only then can you stand righteous before God. But, how can you become one with Jesus, the Holy and Infinite God? The Bible gives these steps:

**He wants to transform your heart to be like His.**

Go to Him. Jesus invites us to, “‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’” (Matt. 11:28, NIV). Don’t wait to feel repentant. Go to Him now, with the stains of sin on you and with your heart still rebelling. Give Him your will. Tell Him you are willing to be made willing. Then be assured that “it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Phil. 2:13, NIV).

Give Him your heart and will. As Jesus works with you, He will give you the ability to repent (Acts 5:31). Repentance is as much a gift as forgiveness. You cannot achieve either on your own. Ask Jesus to give you both, and He will. And when He does, you will stand “in Him,” covered with His righteousness.

Then rinse and repeat daily with all your heart while He completes the work He has begun in you. Jesus is faithful and just not only to forgive you, but to remove all of your sin (1 John 1:9). He wants to transform your heart to be like His. The same power that created the universe and that raised Jesus from the grave is at work in you for this one great purpose. And your part? It’s the same as above. Go to Him. Give Him your will. Ask for repentance and forgiveness. Then respond to His guidance. When you do, He will “equip you with everything good for doing do his will” (Heb. 13:21, NIV). And “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6, NIV). He who does the work in you can justly rule in your favor.

**REACT**

1. What prevents you from going to Jesus when you have sinned?
2. What changes is God working in your heart right now, and how do you need to respond?
There are times in life when we reach a fork in the road. Sometimes both roads lead to good; but many times one way is clearly better than the other. One of these forks comes when we find ourselves face to face with the Truth. Jesus declares that He is Truth (John 14:6). And it is during the pre-Advent judgment that Jesus, as the Truth, sets us free. When we invite Him into our lives, He provides salvation, growth, and eternal reward. No longer does sin hold us captive. We are set free to truly live and follow Him (John 8:36). Like Paul, we can claim, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20, NIV).

Before Jesus’ death and resurrection, people believed that one day God would send a Sacrifice who would become our High Priest and Intercessor. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, we look back in faith, knowing that the Sacrifice has been made, and that our High Priest lives to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25). The author of Hebrews lists people who lived before Jesus but who were certain that the Truth had set them free: Joseph, who believed that God could turn what was intended to harm into incredible good (Gen. 50:19, 20); and Abraham and Sarah, who believed that He who made the promise is faithful (Heb. 11:11). Then there is Moses, who believed that even when you’re backed up against the sea, God will bring deliverance (Exod. 14:13, 14), and Job, who claimed that regardless of circumstances, his “redeemer lives” (Job 19:25).

It is not easy to say Yes to Christ, because when we do so, we give up control—and we definitely like to be in control! But we can learn from Moses, who “regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to His reward” (Heb. 11:26, NIV). Or consider the words of Peter: “’Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that You are the Holy One of God’ ” (John 6:68, 69, NIV). They knew, and they followed—no matter the cost. And in following, they became “more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37, NIV). God’s judgment set them free, and today it will set you free.

**REACT**

1. Why is it important for us to be set free?
2. How are we to be set free?
CONCLUDE
Judgment always seems to worry us despite the Bible’s constant re-assurances that we have nothing to fear. Perhaps it’s no surprise that a church birthed in a new understanding of God’s judgment has so often crept to the flip-side of anxiety. Yet the Bible is packed with stories of God doing a fair investigation before taking action, investigations that assure us that He makes no arbitrary judgments and that He always desires to give mercy. From the Tower of Babel, to the heavenly visitors investigating Sodom, to the angel passing over Egypt to see who was covered by a lamb’s blood, God always studies before taking action. And we can take comfort in that.

CONSIDER
• Tracing the various examples of investigative judgments in Scripture, for example, the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31–46).
• Looking at your own life in light of Jesus’ sacrifice.
• Listening to the song “Investigate” by Delirious from the album Glo.
• Counting the ways in which God has shown you mercy as you’ve claimed His promises.
• Studying the use of the word atonement through a Bible concordance.
• Praying for wisdom to understand God’s purpose for you.
• Pondering why the book of Revelation’s judgment scenes center on worship, yet Matthew 25’s depiction centers on how we treat others.

CONNECT
Jon Paulien, What the Bible Says About the End-Time (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 1994), chap. 11.
The Eschatological Day of Atonement

“And he said unto me, ‘Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed’” (Dan. 8:14).
Have you ever awakened from a dream that was so vivid you had difficulty distinguishing between imagination and reality? Within the last few months, I found myself caught up in a suspenseful book. For a few days, I was so engrossed in this book that I spent every spare minute pouring over its pages. The plot sucked me in to the point that I felt personally invested in the lives of each character, and the images that my mind envisioned while I read found their way into my dreams at night.

Whenever I awoke, heart pounding and eyes darting from side to side, it always took me a few minutes to adjust to reality and to discover that it had only been a dream. Can you identify with this scenario? If so, place yourself in the shoes of the prophet Daniel, who wrote, “‘After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns’” (Dan. 7:7, ESV).

As you read all of Daniel 7, notice the vivid detail he uses to describe the unique features of this beast. Apparently, when God has a message to deliver, He wants to make sure that it won’t be easily forgotten. “‘As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart’” (verse 28, ESV). Did Daniel realize the weight and importance of his dreams that night? Did he comprehend how the images in the dream would shape people’s beliefs and faith for generations to come?

For God to deliver this message to Daniel in such a memorable fashion can indicate only one thing: it was highly important. There are only a few other instances in the Bible when God chose to make a point so graphically. As you study this week’s lesson about the eschatological Day of Atonement, keep in mind that it is a critical message God intended specifically for you.
In the midst of all our gadgets that keep us connected to the world and the activities that keep us busy around the clock, it is often hard to wrap our thoughts around the importance of the Day of Atonement. Culturally, socially—and most importantly—spiritually, the people of Israel considered this the most important day of the year. It represented a chance to create a fresh start and to remember not only the consequences of their sins, but also the nature of the Messiah’s atonement for their sins. The word *atonement* denotes a sense of reconciliation between God and His people,* and that was exactly what the Day of Atonement was all about.

*It is no ordinary thing for us to confess our sins and be forgiven.*

Once a year, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place with blood, which he offered for himself as well as for the sins of the people. Once a year, the people would anxiously wait for their ceremonial cleansing to take place. The Lord was clear about the significance of this special day: “‘This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites’” (Lev. 16:34, NIV).

Understanding this ceremony helps us to glimpse the blessings we have through the mediation of our High Priest, Jesus Christ. Jesus is able to fulfill this Day of Atonement once and for all through the presentation of His own blood in the Most Holy Place of heaven, where He appears “for us in God’s presence” (Heb. 9:24, NIV). The implications of His sacrifice are eternal: He “entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption” (verse 12, NIV).

While we are not Israelites waiting in the desert or in Jerusalem for the atonement of our souls, the truth of the Day of Atonement is just as important to our redemption as it was back then. We must confront the significance of our sin and repent, knowing that our atonement has been obtained “once for all by his own blood” (verse 12, NIV). It is no ordinary thing for us to confess our sins and be forgiven. It is our Day of Atonement.

**REACT**

1. In what ways does the atonement of our sins almost sound “too good to be true?”
2. How can we prevent our guilt from getting in the way of true atonement?

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* *The SDA Bible Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v. “Atonement.”*
Dreamers and Interpreters (Dan. 2:27, 28)

When Nebuchadnezzar had his dreams, Daniel interpreted them. God used Daniel to reveal Himself to the king. God is always revealing His plans and purposes (Dan. 2:22). When Daniel “resolved” not to defile himself with the king’s food and wine (Dan. 1:8), he aligned himself with God. God could therefore use Daniel as an interpreter as He revealed Himself to Nebuchadnezzar.

Sin and salvation are not just personal issues.

In Daniel 7, it was Daniel’s turn to receive visions and dreams that would reveal God’s purposes. This experience caused him to be “deeply troubled” (verse 28), “exhausted” (verse 27), “and terrified” (verse 17). God sent Gabriel to tell Daniel the meaning of the vision. Daniel was “highly esteemed” (Dan. 9:23, NIV). This is similar to the greeting the angel gave to Mary when announcing the birth of Christ (Luke 1:28). Because he was trustworthy, God showed Daniel a panoramic view of history. It is revealing that God is intimately involved in history and therefore in the lives of people. Today, we are called to be interpreters of the times in which we live. God highly esteems us, a chosen generation. We, too, can be His instruments in building His kingdom during the eschatological Day of Atonement.

Twenty Three Hundred Evenings and Mornings Is a Long Time (Dan. 8:13, 14)

The “2,300 evenings and mornings” cannot be 2,300 literal days, because the prophetic fulfillment of the kingdoms in the visions took longer than 2,300 days. Gabriel also reveals that “the vision concerns the time of the end” (verse 12) and “the distant future” (verse 26). Therefore, it must be 2,300 prophetic years (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:5, 6). This period begins in the year 457 B.C. with the decree by Cyrus to rebuild Jerusalem. This is the same year as the beginning of the 70 weeks (490 years) when the Messiah would be anointed (Dan. 9:25). There is a progression in chapters 2 and 7–12 which culminates in the “end of times.”

The Little Horn Strikes Again (Dan. 8:23–25)

“How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?” (Dan. 8:13, NIV). This is the question posed by one of the “holy ones” that Daniel saw. The little horn from Daniel 7 appears again in Daniel 8:9. In verses 23–25
(NASB), we read that it is “insolent and skilled in intrigue” and “mighty.” He “will destroy to an extraordinary degree” and “prosper.” He will “destroy mighty men and the holy people” and he “will cause deceit to succeed by his influence.” He “will magnify himself in his heart” and “destroy many.” Finally, he “will even oppose the Prince of princes.” This horn also attacks the “daily sacrifice” and the “sanctuary” (verse 11, NIV) by putting in place a false path to salvation.

**The Judgment and the Day of Atonement (Ps. 76:8, 9)**

While Daniel 7 describes a judgment, Daniel 8 describes the Day of Atonement. “Jewish tradition has longed portrayed Yom Kippur as the day of judgment—a day when God sits on His throne and judges the world.”

Sin and salvation are not just personal issues. For God, they are cosmic issues. When God sits on His throne, He is setting the record straight for both sinners and the righteous. Read Psalm 76:8, 9.

“How can a judge be a savior? . . . The Hebrew word for ‘judgment’ (mishpat) is also the word for ‘justice.’ Imagine that a woman is abused by her husband, and that he is arrested and put in prison. This judgment of him is salvation for her from her abuser. When God saves the ones being wronged from those who are wronging them, he is both judging and saving at the same time—bad news for one side, good news for the other.”

**A Day of Atonement, a Day of Cosmic Restoration (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31)**

Daniel uses the expression “evenings and mornings” for a reason. He wants to frame the Day of Atonement in the context of Creation week, thus giving the idea of returning to the original plan God had for the earth. The sin problem involves a cosmic conflict that affects every aspect of the human experience. God, however, will restore the earth to its original beauty. There will be no more death or sickness. The Day of Atonement tells God’s people that He is working to make all things new. They can rejoice that Jesus has entered the Most Holy Place and is putting an end to evil. As God worked during Creation week, so today He works in our lives to give us an eternal rest from sin. John paints a picture of the final hour of judgment and of a Creator who deserves to be worshiped. The first of the three angels said in a loud voice “ ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water’ ” (Rev. 14:7, NIV).

**REACT**

1. How is God a Judge and a Savior?
2. How are you a participant in God’s final work of restoration?

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“As Jesus died on Calvary, He cried, ‘It is finished,’ and the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom. This was to show that the services of the earthly sanctuary were forever finished, and that God would no more meet with the priests in their earthly temple, to accept their sacrifices. The blood of Jesus was then shed, which was to be offered by Himself in the heavenly sanctuary.”

“The blood of Christ, while it was to release the repentant sinner from the condemnation of the law, was not to cancel the sin; it would stand on record in the sanctuary until the final atonement; so in the type the blood of the sin offering removed the sin from the penitent, but it rested in the sanctuary until the Day of Atonement.

“The sins of all the truly penitent will be blotted from the books of heaven.”

“In the great day of final award, the dead are to be ‘judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.’ Revelation 20:12. Then by virtue of the atoning blood of Christ, the sins of all the truly penitent will be blotted from the books of heaven.”

“As in the final atonement the sins of the truly penitent are to be blotted from the records of heaven, no more to be remembered or come into mind, so in the type they were borne away into the wilderness, forever separated from the congregation.”

“In the typical service only those who had come before God with confession and repentance, and whose sins, through the blood of the sin offering, were transferred to the sanctuary, had a part in the service of the Day of Atonement. So in the great day of final atonement and investigative judgment the only cases considered are those of the professed people of God. The judgment of the wicked is a distinct and separate work, and takes place at a later period. ‘Judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel?’”

2. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 357.
3. Ibid., p. 358.
Prayer is powerful. When prayer comes from the deepest part of our souls, it transcends language, pride, and self, and meets God face on. Very few things are as powerful and life-changing as the pleadings of God’s people.

God listens to the things we don’t even dare to say.

In Daniel 9, the prophet loses all self-respect and pride as he opens up to the all-knowing God. He bears his soul to the only One who can actually do something to bring hope to all people. That takes courage—courage that comes only after nothing else has worked and only truth remains. This is where the healing begins.

Coming clean with God regarding our sins and the big and little things that keep us from completely surrendering to His will is tough, but absolutely necessary if we’re going to have a fighting chance. Let’s look at the example Daniel left us:

*Recognize that God’s covenant (commitment) is unwavering.* He’s not the One who leaves us. We leave Him (Dan. 9:4). We have sinned in every way possible, yet He remains faithful. He has done everything right to pursue us and bring us back to Him.

*Recognize that we’ve messed up.* If we’re going to have a chance at living a purposeful life in accordance with God’s will, then we must realize that our compassionate God is our only hope.

*Confess our sins.* The condition of our lives and this world is directly connected to how we handle sin in our lives (Dan. 9:15). Acknowledging our role in this lets God know we finally realize how much we need Him and that we are ready to be shaped by Him.

*Pray as if your life depended on it.* That is prayer at its best. God listens to the things we don’t even dare to say. He loves it when we trust Him with the good, the bad, and the ugly. Because He is compassionate, He sees us for whom we can become in Him.

**REACT**

1. When you pray, do you let God into the dark places in your heart?
2. Do you believe that God is compassionate, loving, and kind enough to restore your life to what He wants it to be? If not, why not?
Symbols and visions. Beasts and horns. Kingdoms and 2,300 days. Memories start flooding in of those ghastly drawings that frightened us when we were kids. I always wondered where God was in all this weird symbolism. Well, now I know. His life is woven through every word we read in Daniel 8 and 9.

In a day and age where beasts, goblins, and symbols are featured in films, TV shows, and video games, we should not be shocked by what we find in the Bible, especially in the book of Daniel. The symbols there play a pivotal role in the Bible’s overall story. But they are not the entire story. These symbols paint a simple, yet beautiful truth—we are in need of redemption. The story of the sanctuary circles around Christ and His unending love for us. In Daniel 9:4, we find the following prayer: “O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands” (NLT).

Daniel knew that he had created a safe space with God. Daniel begins by acknowledging God’s sovereignty. But as you read on, you quickly realize that the people of Israel had turned from God. They were in desperate need of redemption. Daniel knew that he had created a safe space with God, one where he could be completely himself and lay it all out before Him. And so he shares with God the good, the bad, and the ugly. And what I find most beautiful about this interaction is how much Daniel trusted God. He knew he could be completely honest with Him.

God desires that type of authentic communion with us. The sanctuary may be full of symbolism and truths we might not completely comprehend. But the one thing we can understand is the beauty of having an authentic relationship with our Creator. So the next time you think about the sanctuary, may you see our Fearless Leader who is ready to hear your most intimate thoughts and who freely extends His love, grace, and mercy to anyone who accepts the invitation to join Him on this crazy journey called faith.

Are you up for the ride?

REACT
1. What is keeping you from entering into an honest relationship with God?
2. How can you deepen your relationships with your friends and family so you can create a safe space where you can be yourself one hundred percent?

Andrea Torres, Winter Park, Florida, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE

Even though the people’s sins were forgiven after offering their sacrifices, the blood—the record of their sin—still stained the sanctuary. On the Day of Atonement, there was a final reckoning, and the accumulated sin was done away with for good. Embodying what those ceremonies represented, Christ is now reviewing our sins in order to make the final, lasting judgment. Life on earth is not guaranteed. We are but a car accident or an illness away from eternal restoration or eternal death.

CONSIDER

- Going to a petting zoo or researching online to see what goats and sheep are like. Then put together an image (InDesign, Photoshop, etc.) that evokes some of the feelings the Israelites might have felt when sacrificing an animal for their sins.
- Drawing a timeline of the Daniel and Revelation prophecies and memorizing the key dates.
- Visiting a senior citizen and asking that person about what really matters in life. Ask if you can use his or her counsel to write an article or make a scrapbook.
- Listening to the song “Three Wooden Crosses.” Imagine what verse might go in the middle if you had been on that bus. What is your legacy?
- Conducting a science experiment. Use vinegar to represent God’s powerful cleansing. In a bowl or cup, sprinkle spoonfuls of confessed sins (baking soda). Pour the vinegar over the baking soda and watch the irreversible results. God’s final judgment, like the vinegar, will blot out all the sin from our past. Bare your soul to God, and He will restore you.
- Discussing with a group of friends how you would all react if you found out you had just a few months left to live. How would your behavior change/stay the same? Why?

CONNECT


Watch a film or a clip on YouTube that makes you think about life’s frailty and what really matters.
"Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ”

(Rev. 14:6, 7, NKJV).
As it was in the days of Noah, so it is today. Destruction is ahead, and we can find safety only in a message from God. It’s a loving message that leads us to safety, well-being, and life.

“But the people said nothing.”... So Elijah stood alone on God’s side.

The year is approximately 90 A.D. John is in exile on the island of Patmos, when he hears a great voice saying, “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega... who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty... Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea’” (Rev. 1:8–11, NIV). As he turns to investigate, he catches a glimpse of the speaker standing amid seven lampstands. Then he faints. When he revives, the speaker, who is Jesus Himself, instructs John to write down what he has seen, “what is now, and what will take place later” (verse 19, NIV). Now let’s go back to approximately 550 B.C. Elijah is on Mount Carmel. He is asking the Israelites, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” But the people said nothing” (1 Kings 18:21, NIV). So Elijah stood alone on God’s side.

Returning to the current century, we see that the theory of evolution has most people believing that a Creator God does not exist, thus putting Genesis 1 and 2, the Cross, and the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12 in the realm of fantasy. Now more than ever, it is essential that we understand and share the angels’ prophetic messages that John received. Let us encourage one another to do so. Let us study this message together so that together we can share it with others where we live and work.
War Zone (Rev. 10:1–4)

“Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion” (Rev. 10:1–3, NIV). This angel is Jesus Christ, and his feet spread apart on both land and sea “implies the worldwide proclamation of his message, and also his power and authority over the world.” God has been delaying His judgments so that people will have a chance to come to Him. However, this angel states that “‘there will be no more delay!’” (Rev.10:6, NIV). Prophetic time has come to a close. The 2,300 day period (Dan. 8:14) is over. Thus, the angel’s message signals that probation, the time granted to us to choose which side of the great controversy we are on, is soon to close. In this war, there is no middle ground. If we do not choose Christ, we choose Satan. What choice do you make?

In any war, things get ugly, and this war zone is no different.

Raise Your Flags (Rev. 13:3–15; 14:12)

During a battle, an army’s flag serves as a form of identification. In Revelation 14:12, we learn that God’s people are identified as such because they “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (NKJV). The Ten Commandments describe God’s loving character and point out our sinfulness that only God’s grace can cover. The “faith of Jesus” is better translated as “faith in Jesus.” Our faith in Him enables Him to extend His grace to us. And through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit we are empowered to keep the commandments—God’s moral law. Revelation 13:3–15 describes how a religious-political power will oppose God and His people. “According to Daniel the power here represented as the beast was to ‘think to change times and laws’ (7:25). History records a most audacious attempt to change the divine law—in the substitution of Sunday in place of the Sabbath of the Lord.”

Open Fire on God’s Sovereignty and Great Commission (Rev. 14:6, 7)

Once we have identified with Christ through the keeping of His commandments and faith in Him, our enemy, Satan, becomes intent on de-
stoving us (1 Pet. 5:8). He realizes that no one can remain neutral in the war against good and evil. The first angel’s message is presented in Revelation 14:6: “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people” (NIV). “The angel represents God’s saints engaged in the task of proclaiming the everlasting gospel.” In any war, things get ugly, and this war zone is no different. Revelation 13:15 explains that “the second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed” (NIV).

**On the Front Line (Gal. 5:7–24; Rev. 14:13)**

Satan orchestrates situations that tempt us to break God’s law. He does so because he knows far too well that his time is short. He wants us to stand on the front line for the sins he urged us to commit. But the good news is that we won’t have to if we accept Christ as our Savior and allow the Holy Spirit to transform us.

**REACT**

1. Since the end-time events are already written out in Daniel and Revelation, do you ever feel that your choices are predestined as well? What biblical evidence and/or personal experiences remind you that you do have a choice?

2. How does it affect you to know that your eternal salvation is essentially the root of the great controversy?

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 798.
4. Ibid., p. 833.
5. Ibid., p. 821.
6. Ibid., p. 827.

Jhonaton Thomas, Antigua, Leeward Islands
The first angel’s message is simply to fear God, worship Him, and keep His commandments because the time of judgment is upon us. The angel warns us in hopes that we will heed his command and be saved. God sends this angel because He loves us dearly, and knowing the outcome of the great controversy, He longs for us to choose the winning team.

[God] longs for us to choose the winning team.

“A great religious awakening under the proclamation of Christ’s soon coming is foretold in the prophecy of the first angel’s message of Revelation 14. An angel is seen flying ‘in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth.’ . . .

“The fact that an angel is said to be the herald of this warning is significant. By the purity, the glory, and the power of the heavenly messenger, divine wisdom has been pleased to represent the exalted character of the work to be accomplished by the message and the power and glory that were to attend it. And the angel’s flight ‘in the midst of heaven,’ the ‘loud voice’ with which the warning is uttered, and its promulgation [declaration] to all ‘that dwell on the earth,’—‘to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,”—give evidence of the rapidity and world-wide extent of the movement.

“The message itself sheds light as to the time when this movement is to take place. It is declared to be a part of the ‘everlasting gospel;’ and it announces the opening of the judgment. The message of salvation has been preached in all ages; but this message is a part of the gospel which could be proclaimed only in the last days, for only then would it be true that the hour of judgment had come.”*

Only they that resist the mark of the beast shall be saved, only they that are sealed with the seal of the King of kings shall enter into His kingdom. When that great day comes, will you be able to stand? Or will you be caught off guard. Will you be changed with the twinkling of an eye, or will you be pleading with the rocks to fall on you? Hold on with all you’ve got so that you can hear Him who died for you say, “Well done, My good and faithful servant, well done!”

REACT

1. What prevents you from worshiping God whole-heartedly?
2. How does the first angel’s message change your perspective of life?


Abigail Harewood, Tortola, British Virgin Islands
The book of Hebrews helps us to understand Christ's ministry in heaven. It does so by comparing and contrasting the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries and priesthoods. The Greek word for “mediator” is mesitès,¹ which means one who intervenes “between 2 parties with a view to effecting a reconciliation.”² In Hebrews 9, we read about how Christ intervenes between us and God to achieve our salvation.

When Jesus died, He paid the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

Israel had two types of earthly sanctuaries. The first one was established after their release from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 25–40). It helped them to relearn God’s plan of salvation, a plan that had largely been forgotten while they were slaves. The other was the permanent temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem (1 Kings 5–8). The Greek word for “sanctuary” is hagion and means “what is holy.”³

The sanctuary had two rooms—the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. A curtain separated the two. Only the Levitical priests were allowed to enter the Holy Place, and only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place where the ark of the covenant resided. Among other items, the ark contained God’s holy law. “In that sanctuary the earthly priests performed their service; in this Christ, our great High Priest, ministers at God’s right hand.”⁴

When Jesus died, He paid the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. When He returned to heaven, He became our Mediator and High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. Then, in “1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. . . . This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus.”⁵

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¹. The SDA Bible Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v. “mediator.”
². Ibid.
³. Ibid., s.v. “sanctuary.”
The script was written centuries ago. The final scenes are similar to those of the film adaptation of Suzanne Collins’s book, *The Hunger Games*. Just as the Capitol exhibited power over the entire nation, a lamb-like beast will emerge in the time of the end to impose a new world order. Just as Katniss, the main character in *The Hunger Games*, must face decisions that pit survival against love, so must the main characters of Revelation’s centuries-old plot face an ultimatum that will determine their fates. It’s the future played out in the book of Revelation—the final scenes of the controversy between good and evil.

**Do you worship God, and only Him?**

The Creator developed the script so that the fate of all human beings could be eternal life. Yet some will still perish. As with any plot, it’s all about making a choice. Each of us must choose which type of character in the story we want to be. So how do we ensure that we make the right choice, that we develop characters fit for the roles the Creator originally intended for us? Consider the following objectives as outlined by C. Mervyn Maxwell:*  

**Objective 1: Have the power to make the right choices.** In the end times, God’s people will keep His commandments while the rest of the world will follow the beast. If we are to endure, we must learn now to follow the Holy Spirit’s leading, even when those around us do not.  

**Objective 2: Distinguish truth from lies.** The end times are Satan’s last chance to ensnare the world. Most people will be easily fooled by the wonders he will perform. We must study God’s Word regularly in order to gain an understanding that transforms into an internal armor against his lies.  

**Objective 3: Be loyal to God and His people.** The end-time test involves worship. Do you worship God, and only Him?  

**Objective 4: Have the ability to express faith in words and acts of service.** So many people are ignorant of the present and future dangers. Your words and service to them could be their lifeline.

**REACT**

Technology is a medium caught in the tug-of-war of the great controversy. God is using technology to equip soldiers for spiritual warfare while Satan is using it to build his army. On which side of the plot are your gadgets pulling you?

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Wyndi Ambrose, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands
The first of the three angels in Revelation 14:6–11 calls for people of the earth to fear God, give glory to Him, and worship Him.

1. **Fear God.** To fear God is to revere Him. Many people in these last days have given their affections to worldly pursuits. Many of us often show more reverence to things and people than to God. But let us revere Him, because the time for His judgment has arrived. This “judgment-hour message points particularly to the time when, as the last phase of His high-priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, Christ entered upon His work of judgment.”

2. **Give glory to Him.** This means to honor God and praise Him.

3. **Worship Him.** This is a call to everyone to worship God, our Creator. The first four commandments are all about worshiping Him, and the “first angel’s message . . . calls for the restoration of true worship by presenting before the world Christ the Creator and Lord of the Bible Sabbath.”

Yes. The first angel wakes us up and guides us back to our Creator. This angel calls us to give God the praise and worship that He not only desires but deserves. If today you are not worshiping God as your Creator, if you are not by His grace obeying His commandments, this message is for you. Do not miss out! Worship God and give Him glory!

**REACT**

1. Considering the state of the world today, why is the first angel’s message still so relevant?
2. What part do you personally have in giving and living the first angel’s message?
3. How do you imagine that we can we reach every corner of the world with the gospel?
4. John 15:8 states that we glorify God in our words and actions. Why must we glorify Him in both ways?

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2. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 194.
The message of the first angel proclaims for all the earth to hear that it is time for judgment. All tribes, tongues, and peoples are called to honor, worship, and obey the Creator of heaven and earth. No one is exempt, and no one can put it off. This is the designated hour. It is only when we choose to have faith in the gospel of Jesus and when we choose to obey His commandments through the strength He provides, that we are prepared to stand in the judgment, covered by His grace.

CONSIDER
- Walking along a nature trail to search for evidence of the Creator's power. Look for qualities of the Creator that make Him worthy of deep awe and respect, honor, and worship.
- Making a PowerPoint or video presentation that illustrates a wide variety of reasons why we should honor the Creator with our worship and obedience.
- Gathering a small collection of natural objects that demonstrate the Creator’s care, wisdom, and power. Share these objects with the residents of a nursing home or with one of the children’s Sabbath School divisions.
- Examining the global mission work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for an opportunity to personally share the first angel’s call with other tribes, languages, and peoples. Learn another language if necessary.
- Writing a dramatization of Revelation 14:1–12 for your Sabbath School class to share with the other Sabbath School divisions in your church.
- Contemplating the role of the gospel of grace in the call to fear God, give glory to Him, and worship Him. Study Bible passages that illustrate the connection between the gospel and judgment.

CONNECT
John 5; 6:26–59; 8:1–11, 23–29
The Cosmic Conflict Over God’s 

Character

“And I heard another [angel] out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments” (Rev. 16:7).
In the western world, cities and towns have church buildings. Some are magnificent, like the great cathedrals: Chartres in France, St. Paul’s in London, and St. Peter’s in Rome. However, they are mostly empty and/or tourist attractions. In Europe, many churches have been converted into factories, warehouses, offices, and apartments. They no longer bear witness to God. Why?

Adam and Eve had two sons, one a righteous man, the other a murderer. Why? Samuel was a judge and a prophet chosen by God. His sons were evil men. Why? If there are answers to these whys, they will not be found in wishful thinking, superficial study, or blind faith.

**Life can be complex. Salvation is not.**

Why evil exists has baffled even the most creative thinkers in history. John Calvin and others found the answer in a God who predestined some people to life and others to death. They make God responsible for ultimate human destiny. To them, atonement was limited.

John and Charles Wesley believed in atonement for all of humankind. “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (John 1:29, NIV). Yes. God desires the salvation of all. Through Christ’s birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, intercessory ministry, and Second Advent, God has made a way for all people to be saved.

Life can be complex. Salvation is not. Through Christ’s life and death, He demonstrates the nature of His love (Rom. 5:8). It is also a declaration of His righteous character and His appeal to all of us to trust Him until that day when the following song will be sung by all:

“Great and marvelous are your deeds,
Lord God Almighty.
Just and true are your ways,
King of the nations.
Who will not fear you, O Lord,
and bring glory to your name?
For you alone are Holy.
All nations will come and worship before you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed”
(Rev. 15:3, 4, NIV).

This week we’ll discover why we can echo the sentiments of this song.

Amanda Powell, Garston, England
About 6,000 years ago, Satan launched an offensive against the first human couple. His tactic was fundamentally the same as the offensive he implemented in heaven: slander. Approaching Eve, Satan whispered words that meant: “God is not protecting you. He is restricting your joy because He is mean” (see Gen. 3:1). However, this totally contradicts God’s character and, if believed, robs us of the opportunity to experience and believe in God’s love.

Most legal systems require that a derogatory statement is proven to be not only false, but also negligent, public, and damaging to be successfully tried in a court of law.¹ These requirements, which are the result of the tension between one person’s freedom of expression and another’s right to reputation, make perfect sense in the context where two human beings are equal under the law. Yet, that God—the Judge of judges—would allow His creatures to put Him on trial, and would freely provide irrefutable evidence (the blood of Jesus) of His loving character, seems absurd. Why would He, or should He, go so far?

“Truth as sufficient defence” is a legal expression that basically means that someone’s right to reputation is “obviously not infringed by a truthful imputation.”² Truth is the best defense. Thus, if Satan could have proved God to be unloving, the dispute would have been resolved. But instead, the apostle John testifies thusly: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV). Jesus is the incarnate and irrefutable proof of God’s love. Thus, on the final Judgment Day, Satan’s malice will be proved, and he will be condemned.

REACT

1. Consider social networks like Facebook or Twitter in light of your country’s Internet Libel Law. How do measures that are taken to protect users’ reputations compare with God’s plan to vindicate His character?

2. Could God have proved Satan’s malice before sin entered our world?


The Question (Job 11:7)

Does God exist? If He does, what is He like? These questions reflect the essence of the search for meaning in life. If there is not a God behind the universe, then we are adrift in a meaningless existence. If answers are to be found to these fundamental questions, it is reasonable to recognize that they must come from outside ourselves. Job asked, “‘Can you search out the deep things of God?’” (Job 11:7, NKJV). We are born into a world that existed before us and will exist after us. We did not create it nor can we control it. The mystery of life is beyond our ability to find. We are not the measure of the universe. We know the answers by revelation rather than by reason.

“What kind of God is the God of the Bible?”

Moving Toward the Answers (Exod. 34:5–7; John 1:18)

Does God exist? If He does, what is He like? Christians discover the answers to these questions in the person of Jesus. Of Him we read: “‘No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known’” (John 1:18, NIV). This verse is best understood in light of what Jesus said of Himself in John 14:9; “‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’” (NIV). We can understand what God is like when we study the life of Jesus.

When Moses asked God to show him His glory, the answer he received was: “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished” (Exod. 34:6, 7, NIV).

The Revelation of God’s Nature and the Cost of Love (Exod. 25:8–40; Psalm 73; John 3:16, 17; Phil. 2:5–11; 1 John 4:8–10)

John 3:16 and 17 announce the extent, purpose, and non-condemnatory nature of God’s love for a lost world. He has given the greatest gift—His only Son—to save a perishing world.

To demonstrate His love, our heavenly Father suffered the greatest pain by allowing His Son to die on the cross.

In Psalm 73, the writer struggles to understand why the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer. He found understanding when he entered the sanctuary (verses 16, 17). There he saw and understood the nature of the controversy between good and evil. The sanctuary services show how Satan and sin are destroyed and how we are saved. Exodus 25:8–40 sets...
out four basic truths regarding the sanctuary: (1) Its purpose is to bring a holy God and sinful humans together. (2) God takes the initiative in fulfilling this purpose. (3) The sanctuary is a copy of the heavenly sanctuary. (4) All of its services are designed to show how God saves us.

The Altar of Burnt Offering (Exod. 27:1–7; Lev. 1:1–17; Isa. 53:4–7, 10)

The burnt offering teaches two truths: (1) The wages of sin is death, and (2) This death is the death of the Substitute, not of the sinner. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he identified Him as the ‘Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (John 1:29, NIV). It is perhaps best to translate this verse as, “Consider God’s Lamb,” because the contrast is between a human’s lamb, which achieved nothing, and God’s Lamb (Jesus), who provides salvation for all who accept Him.

The Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (Exodus 25, 26)

These two places of the tabernacle focus on Jesus’ intercessory ministry, which can save all who come to Him. In the Holy Place, the bread symbolized Jesus as the Bread of Life (John 6:35, 48, 51). The light of the candlestick symbolized Jesus as the Light of the World (John 8:12). The incense represented Jesus’ merits which make our prayers acceptable to God (Luke 1:10).

Hebrews 7:24, 25 explains the saving power of Jesus’ High Priestly ministry. His intercessory ministry has the potential to save all who choose to avail themselves of it. If we wanted a job description for Jesus, it is found in these verses. His ministry can apply the benefits of His atonement to all who accept it.

The services in the Most Holy Place typify the final judgement in which all the beings in the universe are involved. In the final judgement, God puts Himself on trial. God’s vindication and the full revelation of His love is found in all He has done in Jesus to save humankind. He asks one question. We find it in Isaiah 5:4. “ ‘What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?’ ” (NIV).

The existence of evil in our world raises questions about the righteousness and love of God. In the Scriptures, God reveals to us the story of evil and what He has done and is doing to defeat it and declare us righteous. Those who want an answer to the question “What kind of God is the God of the Bible?” can find it in the atonement He provides in Jesus and illustrates in the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries.

REACT

“God so loved the world that he would not suffer it to be possible that the infinite One could do more than has been done.”* Why do you believe that this view is sustainable?

* Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, May 22, 1894.

Patrick Boyle, Watford, England
“In the atonement the character of God is revealed. The mighty argument of the cross demonstrates to the whole universe that the course of sin which Lucifer had chosen was in no wise chargeable upon the government of God.”

“Satan’s lying charges against the divine character and government appeared in their true light. He had accused God of seeking merely the exaltation of Himself in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, and had declared that, while the Creator exacted self-denial from all others, He Himself practiced no self-denial and made no sacrifice. Now it was seen that for the salvation of a fallen and sinful race, the Ruler of the universe had made the greatest sacrifice which love could make; for ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.’ 2 Corinthians 5:19.”

“After the Fall, Satan bade his angels make a special effort to inculcate the belief in man’s natural immortality; and having induced the people to receive this error, they were to lead them on to conclude that the sinner would live in eternal misery. Now the prince of darkness, working through his agents, represents God as a revengeful tyrant, declaring that He plunges into hell all those who do not please Him, and causes them ever to feel His wrath; and that while they suffer unutterable anguish and writhe in the eternal flames, their Creator looks down upon them with satisfaction.

“Cruelty is satanic. God is love; and all that He created was pure, holy, and lovely, until sin was brought in by the first great rebel. Satan himself is the enemy who tempts man to sin, and then destroys him if he can.”

“The great deceiver endeavors to shift his own horrible cruelty of character upon our heavenly Father, that he may cause himself to appear as one greatly wronged by his expulsion from heaven because he would not submit to so unjust a governor.”

**REACT**

How can we witness in a credible way to unchurched people about the controversy between good and evil? How do we present God’s character in a way that will appeal to them?

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2. Ibid., p. 502.
3. Ibid., p. 534.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
Caesar Augustus erected a golden milestone in ancient Rome. All places in the empire were measured from this point—or to state it another way, “all roads lead to Rome.” In 1919, the idea was adapted in the U.S.A. when the zero milestone was erected in Washington D.C. It was supposed to be the starting point for all measuring distances, but it never got off the ground.

Milestones provide reference points along the road, offering reassurance and guidance for the traveler. They inform you how far you have traveled or how far you have to go. Throughout the centuries milestones have come in many shapes and sizes. However, their function is the same: to clearly mark the way.

God has provided milestones to reassure His people that they are on the right road. We also have personal milestones that help us to see where we have come from and where we are going.

The cross. This is the Christian’s golden milestone, the pivotal point in world history where Jesus died to disprove Satan’s lies. It points back to a time before the great controversy began and forward to when the controversy will end. It is best described in John 3:16, 17. On the cross, Jesus made it clear that He was unreservedly committed to saving humankind. Success or failure in life is measured by how we relate to the cross. Creating daily milestones by spending time with Jesus is the only way to ensure that we are moving in the right direction.

Faith. This is essential. Self-reliance in a spiritual context is a recipe for disaster. Yet despite our failures and inability to succeed on our own, Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross makes it possible for us to be counted righteous through faith in Him (Rom. 3:21–26). Faith is fragile. Unless it is constantly used, it disintegrates and disappears.

Changed mindset. In Philippians 2:1–8, Paul explains what happens when Jesus’ mind-set permeates our lives. It transforms us as individuals and our relationships with others. Self is no longer of primary concern. Others have priority. Our lives become a milestone pointing others to the cross. When our lives reflect Jesus’ unconditional love, we become pathways to Him.

**REACT**

What difference has the transforming power of Jesus made in your life? List milestones where God has helped you.
It is something of a mystery why different people can look at the same object and come to different conclusions. In His life and ministry, Jesus was constantly faced with attitudes toward Himself and His work that were quite distorted. When He cast out demons, some people questioned, “‘Could this be the Son of David?’” (Matt. 12:23, NIV). The Pharisees, however, accused Jesus of working on behalf of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Our Lord pointed out the absurdity of their understanding by saying that if “‘Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself’” (verse 26, NIV).

Belshazzar knew all these things, but ignored them.

The best conclusions come when we examine as much of the evidence as we can find. God, in whose image we are made, is a reasonable God. Thus, He invites us to reason with Him (Isa. 1:18). His desire is that we come to know Him (John 17:3) so that we might have eternal life. Neglecting to seriously consider the issues of life will have serious consequences.

The dialogue between Daniel the prophet and Belshazzar the king of Babylon demonstrates the importance of recognizing how the issues of our lives relate to God.

Belshazzar lived carelessly. He dismissed the experience of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar. When God intervened at the last great feast of his life, reality confronted him. Daniel told him how God spoke to Nebuchadnezzar, how He humbled him, and how He restored him and blessed him. Belshazzar knew all these things, but ignored them. He set himself against the God of heaven. He made a feast and praised the gods of wood and stone.

In Scripture, there is evidence that illustrates the conflict between God and Satan. As we examine this evidence, we can form our own conclusions regarding the God of whom it is written, “He is love.”

**REACT**

1. It is winter. The heating system breaks down on Friday. The repairman can come no sooner than Sabbath to fix it. The husband says, “No. It’s the Sabbath.” The wife says, “You are unreasonable. The children could catch a cold.” How might God see the issue? How do you see it?

2. A young boy prays with the family before going to school. He sets out, falls off his bike, and breaks his leg. His friend says “It’s no use praying to a God who doesn’t protect you.” Is this statement valid? Why or why not?

Ann Lawrence, London, England
CONCLUDE

Ever since Lucifer’s rebellion in heaven, God’s character has stood trial throughout the universe. The great working out of this trial occurs on earth, where Lucifer and his angels tempt and coerce us to believe that God behaves unjustly toward us. Scripture, however, points to a day when the trial stands closed, God’s character is vindicated, and our tempter and his evil angels receive punishment for their rebellion. Abundant evidence exists in Scripture of God’s unrelenting love for us in His willingness to send His Son to die in our place.

CONSIDER

• Watching a nature program or reading about how a mother black bear protects her cubs. Observe in this relationship a hint of God’s fierce desire to protect us, His children.
• Writing John 3:16, 17 in your own words, paying close attention to how the meaning of the texts influences you when it appears in your own words.
• Writing a two-page autobiography about your struggles with understanding God’s character based either on bad things that have happened to you or your wrestling with why bad things happen in this world to those undeserving of them.
• Putting together a skit or one-act play in which God is put on trial by Satan, paying close attention to the types of evidence Satan has brought and will bring against God and His evidence for His love for humankind.
• Decorating a room for a Bible study or Sabbath School event to represent God’s beautiful creation and the horrible marring of that creation caused by Satan’s rebellion.
• Collaborating with someone else to plan an event for your church or community. Imagine as you plan this event and carry it out that someone in your group is trying to sabotage it by causing bad things to happen to those for whom the party is intended, then blaming these things on you. How is this similar to Satan’s relationship and his intentions toward God?

CONNECT

Acts 26:17, 18; 2 Corinthians 4:2–4; 1 John 4:4–6; 5:18, 19.

Jeremy Vetter, Moscow, Idaho, U.S.A.
Exhortations From the Sanctuary

“Since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our body washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:21, 22, NASB).
Three applicants sit next to each other on a leather sofa in the lobby of a Fortune 500 company. They are the final candidates for the best position this company has to offer, and they are waiting to be called for their last interview. They steal glances at each other in an effort to size up the competition. Finally, the mahogany double doors swing open and the executive assistant to the hiring Director comes out. “Congratulations on being the final selectees for this position. In a moment you will be called in one at a time for your final interview. I hope you each have prepared accordingly.”

She is prepared; and she wants this job.

The first candidate smiles. “I’ve got this in the bag,” he says. “I graduated top of my class and interned at all the right places, making all the right connections.” He’s dressed in a wrinkled tee shirt and shorts. Flip-flops adorn his feet. He is unshaven and his hair looks like he just rolled out of bed. “I never even applied for this job. They recruited me!”

The second candidate is dressed in a bright pink dress with sequins and ruffles. Her hair encompasses her face which is painted with bright red lipstick, dark eye shadow, and thick liquid foundation. “Whatever! My daddy is like totally the boss of this company, and he said I could have any job here that I want.”

The third candidate sits quietly. She is dressed in a modest business suit. Her hair is pulled back in a ponytail, and her makeup is natural looking. Her notes and research are organized in a portfolio that rests on her lap. She is prepared; and she wants this job.

As you study this week’s lesson, you will notice a recurring theme: When you come before the Lord, you need to be prepared and you need to be sincere. In the Old Testament, the high priest had to prepare, repent, and atone for his sins as well as for the sins of the Israelites before he could enter the Holiest of Holies where he stood before God. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice, we are able to have a direct relationship with God. But does that mean we should be any less prepared to stand in His presence? In your journey to have a relationship with your heavenly Father, which of the above candidates are you most like? Are you the guy with all the right connections? Are you entitled? Or have you prepared to stand face to face with the Creator of the universe?

Arthur Parrino, Avon, Indiana, U.S.A.

Hebrews assures us that because of Christ’s work as our High Priest, we can come boldly before the Father. Our sins that once separated us from God have been cleansed by His blood so that we can draw near to Him. The barrier that once divided us has been overthrown. The veil that hid the presence of God has been torn down. That means that nothing except our own free will can separate us from God and His love (Rom. 8:35–39).

Through the sanctuary, God lived with His people (Exod. 25:8). In the Incarnation, Christ took on humanity and dwelt with us. But in the process of drawing near to us, the All-powerful makes Himself vulnerable. The Creator invites us, rather than demands us, to draw near to Him. The choice is ours.

Nearer to God’s Heart (Exod. 34:6; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:22, 23; Heb. 10:22; James 4:7, 8; 1 John 1:9)

How do we respond to Christ’s invitation? The first step is to accept it (Matt. 22:1–14). All of us are invited, but not all of us decide to accept the gifts of redemption, restoration, and healing found in Jesus.

The second step involves getting to know God better. The best place to find out what God is like is in the Bible. First John 4:16 says that God loves us. He is a “compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Exod. 34:6, NIV). He is also loving and forgiving (verse 7). The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23 also describe God’s character. Spending time with God helps us to become like Him (2 Cor. 3:18). And as we get to know Him, our own wretched condition becomes apparent. As we become convicted of our own sinfulness, we will want to confess our sins and be cleansed of them by the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:9). As we daily invite God to dwell in our hearts and change us, He will help us to mature in our Christian walk.

The Ultimate Change (Isaiah 58; Matt. 5:44; John 13:34, 35; Rom. 14:19–21; Gal. 5:13, 22, 23; Eph. 2:1–10)

Experiencing God’s love changes us. It helps us to be more aware of
others and their needs. If we fail to experience God’s love, we will feel empty and try to fill that emptiness with worldly distractions. But at the end of the day, we will be dissatisfied. Only God’s love can fill that gap. It is His love that will help us pursue that which will bring peace and edify others.

Not only will God’s love fill up the emptiness, it will also help us see things more clearly. As we experience His love, we will no longer be double-minded. Even though there seems to be the tendency within us to want to have it all, sitting on a fence with each leg on either side never feels comfortable. We want the temporary happiness sin offers. But at the same time we want the assurance of eternal life. God’s love compels us to choose between the two. His love clearly helps us define where we want to stand.

What we will discover is that we, who once cared only about our own interests, who followed after pleasure, power, and position, now desire the good of others above our own (Eph. 2:1–10). We begin to love where we once hated. Instead of cursing people who betray us, we pray for them (Matt. 5:44). Instead of seeking revenge, we seek restoration. Instead of gossiping about people who hurt us, we lovingly attempt to reach out to them. Instead of doing things that hurt and offend others, we seek to uplift our brothers and sisters in Christ (Rom. 14:19–21).

Moreover, we begin to recognize and meet the needs of people who need our help. We feed the hungry, clothe the poor, give water to the thirsty, help the oppressed, and visit the sick and outcasts (Isa. 58:6, 7; Matt. 25:31–46). Love for God and love for our fellow humans is what the Ten Commandments are all about. As we draw near to God, His love will become more and more obvious in our lives. It is a love that has no conditions. It is no respecter of persons. All should be blessed with its warmth. It is a love that cannot be bought or sold, only given and received.

In the sanctuary, we witness the greatest love story ever told, a story of God drawing near to His people and inviting them to draw near to Him. It has all of the usual types of characters we know today: the hero, the villain, the rescued, and those who choose not to be rescued. The question is, which type of character are you?

**REACT**

1. How have you experienced God drawing near to you?
2. Why does a life apart from God leave you feeling empty?
3. What are practical ways you can draw near to God?

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Steven Manoukian, Avon, Indiana, U.S.A.
“When the tempter offered to Christ the kingdom and glory of the world, he was proposing that Christ should yield up the real kingship of the world, and hold dominion subject to Satan. This was the same dominion upon which the hopes of the Jews were set. They desired the kingdom of this world. If Christ had consented to offer them such a kingdom, they would gladly have received Him. But the curse of sin, with all its woe, rested upon it. Christ declared to the tempter, ‘Get thee behind Me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.’ . . .

In Jesus we are new creatures.

“So we may resist temptation, and force Satan to depart from us. Jesus gained the victory through submission and faith in God, and by the apostle He says to us, ‘Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.’ James 4:7, 8. We cannot save ourselves from the tempter’s power; he has conquered humanity, and when we try to stand in our own strength, we shall become a prey to his devices; but ‘the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.’ Prov. 18:10. Satan trembles and flees before the weakest soul who finds refuge in that mighty name.”

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James L. Defibaugh, Brownsburg, Indiana, U.S.A.
Throughout history there have been three groups of people who had a sanctuary message. The Israelites were the first group. God instructed Moses regarding every detail of the wilderness sanctuary. These details were important for they represented the plan of salvation. The sanctuary gave a glimpse of God’s character and how He would rescue humanity. It also gave God’s people access to Him. It was a place where the finite met the Infinite. And in that meeting, something extraordinary happened—the sinner found forgiveness and cleansing from sin.

The second group to have had a sanctuary message was the early Christian church. The New Testament is full of references to the sanctuary. This group had greater understanding of the sanctuary and its significance, for type had met antitype. Christ’s ministry on earth gave a clearer picture of what the sanctuary was all about. Not only that, now, we can boldly approach God’s throne because of the blood of Jesus (Heb. 4:16). We no longer need an earthly mediator in the form of a high priest, because Jesus is our High Priest (verse 14). Today, the sinner finds the ultimate cure, not in the bleating of sheep, but in the bleeding of Jesus.

The third group to have a sanctuary message is the Seventh-day Adventist Church that came out of the Millerite movement of 1844. Through careful study and much prayer, this small band of believers came to understand of Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

What is clear from these three groups is that God is in the business of reconciling us to Him. He longs to save us. This longing gives us hope of not only receiving forgiveness today, but of one day seeing God face to face. All of this is due to Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and continued mediation on our behalf in the sanctuary.

**REACT**

1. What significance does the sanctuary message hold for you personally?
2. How has God led you in the past that gives you hope during difficult times?
Hebrews 11 chronicles the faith of great biblical men and women. But have you ever wondered how to live your faith? Certain elements of the sanctuary teach us how to forge a living relationship with God. Let’s take a look.

The altar of burnt sacrifice. Here the priests slaughtered the lambs as atonement for sin. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, died for our sins. Every morning, let us rededicate our lives to the One who gave His life for us.

The laver. The priests washed their hands and feet in this receptacle before entering the Holy Place. Likewise, God calls us daily to cleanse our hearts through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, God’s grace and mercy are always available (James 4:7, 8; Heb. 4:16).

The shewbread. These twelve loaves pointed to Jesus, whose life and words are to daily nourish our soul.¹

The candlestick. This item teaches us that we are the light of the world. Through us, we must let Christ shine into the darkness of a lost world. Whether it be at work, home, school, or on the street, let’s stand unswervingly in Christ, so that others who might see our faith can be encouraged (Matt. 5:14–16; Heb. 10:23).

The altar of incense. If the Bible is the bread of life, then “prayer is the breath of the soul.”² Maintaining a connection with God through daily prayer equips us to overcome whatever trials come our way. Prayer keeps us connected to the Source of Life (Ps. 55:17; Luke 18:1–8).

The Most Holy Place. Here we learn that Christ has reconciled us to the Father, so that we can commune directly with the Father. Because of what Christ has done for us on the cross and because of His current work in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf, we can abide with God daily, and receive the Holy Spirit to help us live according to His commands.

**REACT**

1. As you consider your walk through the sanctuary, where do you most need to stop and reflect on your relationship with Christ?

2. Why is it imperative to remember the lessons taught by the sanctuary?

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¹ The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, 2nd ed., p. 638.
² Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, October 30, 1900.
All too often, we approach God timidly. It’s almost as if we decide that we are not good enough to come into His presence. So let me say it clearly: It’s not about us. It’s about God. We are able to come boldly into His presence, not because of anything we have done, but because of what Jesus Christ did for us. End of story!

Hebrews 4:16 says we are to come boldly to the “throne of grace.” I absolutely love this text. It mixes metaphors so well—the power of a King who at the snap of His fingers could have your head, yet this same King is willing to offer grace instead of the death penalty, forgiveness instead of the deserved consequences of your actions. How awesome is that?

The problem with our faith is this: We have all too often bought into Satan’s lie, which says that we do not deserve to be in the presence of God. Therefore we don’t even go to Him, even though He invites us to do so (Matt. 11:28). In addition, we are all so often distracted by other messages that we do not hear what God is asking us to do.

What is Salvation 2.0? What is the message of the sanctuary to us today? It is simply this: Because of Jesus’ shed blood on the cross, because of His death and His resurrection, God, in His grace, allows us to come into His presence with a boldness reserved only for those who have faith in Him.

**REACT**

1. What distracts you from coming boldly into the presence of God?
2. How can you boldly witness to others about what God has done for you?
CONCLUDE

Sin separates us from God. So in order to have a full-access relationship with Him, we must accept His gift of cleansing. The more time we spend with Him, the more we become like Him. In a continued effort to connect with His people, God has continually shared the sanctuary message for the Old Testament Israelites on through the New Testament church, and to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The sanctuary shows us that we are able to come boldly into God’s presence because of what Jesus did for us.

CONSIDER

- Drawing the earthly sanctuary to scale on graph paper, labeling all the different parts and contemplating their symbolism. (See Exodus 25–27; 30.)
- Rereading the description of the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 and taking the time to visualize everything that is happening in the passage. Imagine you are there.
- Brainstorming how you can uplift your brothers and sisters in Christ. Reread Romans 14:19–21. Take action on one or two of your ideas.
- Compiling a list of Bible verses that provide sanctuary from the attacks of Satan and the difficulties of this life.
- Spending some extra time in your devotional life focusing on the concept, “It’s not about us. It’s about Christ.” Put your list of requests and concerns about this life on hold and spend time finding out more about what God is like.
- Listening to or watching a sermon about the sanctuary at www.audioverse.org. This Web site has Adventist sermons about many different topics. Type “sanctuary” in the search bar at the top right of the home page.

CONNECT


If you have not yet received a copy of CQ for first quarter 2014, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1 Disciples and Scripture


**Memory Text:** “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

**Key Thought:** A comprehensive understanding of discipleship must include a passionate desire to follow Jesus and a passionate desire to lead others to Christ.

Using a metal detector, Englishman Terry Herbert discovered gold-plated Anglo-Saxon weaponry and silver artifacts buried in a farmer’s field. The estimated value of the find exceeded 5 million U.S. dollars. Like someone seeking treasure in a field, we must be careful not to let things get in our way and make us miss the real treasure above: Jesus Christ. Searching for eternal riches, Pharisees and Sadducees alike “excavated” the ancient sacred writings. Ironically, their treasure map, Scripture, had been so radically misread that they missed the point—Jesus. Jesus incorporated Scripture into His disciple-making methodology. The ultimate “treasure quest” was rooted in the prophetic writings, which pointed to Him. Thus, to miss Jesus is to miss the mark. This means that all of our disciple-making endeavors must be about Jesus and what He has done for us.

Lesson 2 Discipling Through Metaphor

**Logos:** 2 Sam. 12:1–9; Isa. 28:24–28; Jer. 13:12–14; Ezek. 15:1–8; Matt. 5:13–16; Mark 4:3–8; Luke 16:19–31; John 6:1–14; Rom. 7:1–6; 1 Cor. 3:10–16; James 2:2–7; Rev. 12:7–17.

**Memory Text:** “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: ‘I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world’ ” (Matt. 13:34, 35, NIV).
**Key Thought:** Christ’s sacrifice offers us liberty, forgiveness, and the opportunity for restoration to humanity’s original state.

Christianity is reasonable and logical. Intellect should be cultivated. However, intellect alone insufficiently expresses the complete human personality. Unlike robots, humans are capable of loving, hurting, crying, caring, laughing, and imagining. Thus, Jesus framed eternal truths in ways that went beyond intellect. Jesus spoke through concrete pictures drawn from everyday life in order to reach people where they were. Children and adults could understand deep truths delivered through parables wrapped in images and metaphors. Complex concepts like justification, righteousness, and sanctification were easily grasped through Jesus’ ability to tell a story. He knew that difficult concepts can often be understood through symbols and metaphors.