Fire destroys home at PAU / The cross / Food for thought

That time of year

It's that time of the year when chocolate bunnies and hot cross buns are on sale, churches are running special services and the *Adventist Record* team is getting ready to start their long weekend. Yes, it's Easter.

Whether you celebrate it, use it as an opportunity for community outreach, or shun it because of its pagan roots, we hope you enjoy your time off work and spend it with family and friends. But we don't need a particular date to reflect on Jesus' sacrifice for us. It is because of His death on the cross that we have hope for the future.

Be sure to check out the latest issue of *Adventist Record*, which looks at the significance of *the cross* and *the greatest tragedy*. 
Fire destroys home at PAU

A fire has destroyed a student village house at Pacific Adventist University (PAU) in Papua New Guinea. Pastor Rex Koi’s house caught fire just after 4pm on Thursday, April 3. The cause of the fire is currently unknown.

The cross

Crosses are everywhere. People wear them around their necks, ink them into their flesh and place them on top of churches, altars and buns—even in their homes. But it’s time we stopped sanitising and merchandising the cross.

Read Adventist Record

Whether you’re at church, camping or chilling at home this long weekend, be sure to check out the Easter edition of Adventist Record.

Watch/download InFocus

Is it possible for God’s blessings to become curses? That was the experience of Julian Archer, whose material wealth threatened to separate him from his Creator.

Don’t miss this week’s special Easter edition of Record InFocus, including Christian news, political commentary and
The Spirit of God

Dr David Tasker takes an in-depth look at the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.

Food for thought

Six miniature horses have their throats cut, and people cry foul. 432 horses, 126,000 cows, sheep and pigs, and 1.14 million chickens are slaughtered for meat production every day in Australia, and people grab their forks.

Just Jesus?

Jesus is everything . . . or is He?

Record poll

How would you prefer Adventists remember Easter?

• Communion service at church
• Evangelistic outreach while the community is focused on Christ
• Passover-like celebration
• Prefer not to celebrate in any way

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The greatest tragedy

There he hung. Motionless. Lifeless. Nothing more than a broken body with a broken heart. Just a few hours earlier he'd been sitting around a table among friends, sharing a meal. Now, he was alone, strapped to a tree. A life cut short. Finished.

It's the most tragic story of the New Testament, one we should all find time to reflect on this Easter—the death of Judas.

Wait, what? Don’t you mean Jesus? No, I mean Judas—the one and only Mr Iscariot.

Don’t get me wrong—there’s no denying the extremity and significance of the suffering of Christ. What He endured will forever remain unparalleled. But there’s also no denying the amazing things that stemmed from His death—the resurrection, the conquering of sin and the saving of humanity.

The same can’t be said of Judas. There’s no silver lining to his story. He is and forever will be known as the man who betrayed the Son of God unto death . . . nothing more, nothing less.

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The story of Judas Iscariot is incredibly tragic for a number of reasons.

1) He walked with God

Not in the way that Enoch walked with God, but in the literal sense. Judas was handpicked by Christ (Matthew 10:4) and for three years walked side by side with Him. He would have heard the parables and witnessed the miracles, including the resurrection of Lazarus. One couldn’t hope for a better opportunity to get to know Jesus.

2) He was skilled

Ellen White in *The Desire of Ages* describes Judas as “a man of keen discernment and executive ability” (p 294). He was also a great leader who the disciples looked up to, and was “called upon to provide the needs of the little company and to relieve the necessities of the poor” (p 717). Imagine the good that could have been achieved if Judas had fully surrendered his heart and talents to the mission of Christ.
3) He was warned

Jesus knew the heart of Judas and gave him every chance to change. “He placed him where he might, day by day, be brought in contact with the outflowing of His own unselfish love” (p 294). When the time for subtlety had run its course, Jesus also tried the direct approach.

“Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, ‘Rabbi, is it I?’ He said to him, ‘You have said it’” (Matthew 26:25).

“. . . But Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’” (Luke 22:47).

The Bible is clear that “Satan entered Judas” (Luke 22:3), but this doesn’t mean he was beyond restoration. If that were so, Jesus wouldn’t have warned him. The fact that He reached out to Judas showed there was still hope of repentance.

4) He wouldn’t repent

“The then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood’ . . . Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:3-5).

Remorse is of the Holy Spirit. Thus, consider this sequence as God’s last-ditch effort to reclaim the life of Judas. But remorse without repentance is useless, and Judas “felt no deep, heartbreaking grief that he had betrayed the spotless Son of God” (The Desire of Ages, p 722).

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The story of Judas may not make for an uplifting read, yet it’s one we all need to consider. Why? Because we are all Judas Iscariots—people handpicked by God, with every opportunity and warning to surrender our lives to Christ.

So are you following Christ or are you a follower? There’s a stark difference. Judas spent three years with Jesus, but “did not come to the point of surrendering himself fully . . . He did not give up his worldly ambition or his love of money. While he accepted the position of a minister of Christ, he did not bring himself under the divine moulding” (p 717).

After his act of betrayal, Judas cast himself at the feet of Jesus (p 722). The eyes of the Saviour looked pityingly upon him, as if mourning a life of what might have been. Each of us will one day find ourselves at the feet of Jesus. How will He look upon us—with pity or with pride?

Linden Chuang is assistant editor of Record—digital.
Fire destroys home at PAU

National Capital District, Papua New Guinea

A fire has destroyed a student village house at Pacific Adventist University (PAU).

Pastor Rex Koi’s house caught fire just after 4pm on Thursday, April 3. The cause of the fire is currently unknown.

Pastor Koi returned from meetings at the Central Papuan Conference headquarters to find his house engulfed in flames. Members of his extended family—as well as his infant daughter—were in the house at the time, but all were safely evacuated.

Pastor Koi’s wife, a final-year Business student, was in class when the incident occurred.

Safe and sound: losing their home hasn’t stopped the Koi family from smiling.

Students and staff members tried unsuccessfully to put out the house fire. However, they did manage to save a nearby duplex from serious damage.

The PAU community is very grateful to God that nobody was hurt, and has asked for prayers for the family.

Dr Barry Oliver, the university’s chancellor and chairperson of the PAU Council, said he was thankful to God that nobody was harmed, and expressed his sadness for the loss of personal property.

A fund will be set up to assist the Koi family as they look to rebuild.
Crosses are everywhere. People wear them around their necks, on their wrists or even ink them into their flesh. They place them on top of churches, altars and buns—even in their homes, on their car bumper stickers—everywhere. Most of them are nice and symmetrical, clean and neat, perfectly proportioned and bare—a logo of the Christian faith.

Sometimes there is a figure on the crosses—a sad looking Jesus in a loincloth, who doesn’t much look like He wants to be there.

It’s familiar to us; comfortable and familiar.

But it’s time we stopped sanitising and merchandising the cross. I want you today to use your imaginations. Strap yourselves in and journey with me.

You see a Man, fairly average—height, weight, build—He’s nothing special to look at. He’s in a courtyard and He’s tied up. He’s surrounded by soldiers.

You know that He’s innocent. You’ve heard the stories of His miracles, His teachings.

All of us, we are there, surrounded by curious onlookers. It’s a particularly nice day, the sun is shining down hot. This is probably all just a misunderstanding; some scare tactics by the local God squad, trying to protect their turf. Should all be cleared up by the end of the day. But soon it starts to turn ugly. You can feel anger beginning to boil over. The guy in charge yells an order. Out steps a burly soldier—a mean-looking brute—he’s the one to carry out the sentence.

In his hand he holds a whip. With a short wooden handle, wrapped in a leather band, the leather splits and splays out at the end.

Tied into the leather are pieces of metal and bone. The Prisoner’s shirt is stripped off and His arms are tied together at the top of a large pole. The soldier begins the flogging. Bright red stripes open on the Prisoner’s back. Blood splatters as the soldier whips, again and again. The pieces of bone cut down into the flesh as the back and sides of the Prisoner become mashed into a bloody pulp. The bones and muscles are exposed.

After this they take a branch from a thorn tree. It has been wrapped around and woven together into a rough circle.
The thorns stick out at all angles. Can you imagine four to six centimetre thorns, thick and sharp? They ram the circle down on His head, mocking Him and calling Him King of the Jews.

Can you imagine stinging pain all over your body from a whipping? Your eyes are stinging from the blood, sweat and tears. Every time you move the thorns rip a different part of your head, digging into your scalp and your forehead.

Now we see the cross: a rough-cut plank, with splinters and jagged edges. It’s heavy but Jesus must carry it. He stumbles under the weight and it digs into the open wounds of His back.

As He falls to the side, you can see where the flogging has sliced through to the bone. And He is marched to the place of the Skull. Golgotha. Only Simon, a foreigner, helps Him. He’s nailed down, with seven-inch nails through His wrists and feet. And He is then hoisted above the heads of the angry mob.

Imagine as they lift the cross into place and it drops into its resting hole. Imagine the jolt that would go through His wrists and feet as they hold Him in place.

The Romans were a technologically advanced society and the cross was the cruellest way to die that they could devise. They would not even kill their own citizens this way. You would hang from the crossbar until your arms could no longer support your own weight. And then you would fall, dislocating your shoulders by the heaviness of your own body. As you slumped down low, you would not be able to breathe.

Every time you wanted a breath, you would have to pull up and push up on your hands and feet, supported only by the nails. The pain would be searing and intense. Your lungs would scream for air, your raw back would scrape against the rough wood.

And people looked on and taunted.

This is pure pain. Imagine the most pain you’ve ever experienced. Now imagine it all over your body. You can’t begin to understand the physical agony of the cross. There was no cheat, no short cut, Jesus felt it all as a human, as you or I would.

At that point, Jesus understood loneliness. Jesus, who talked often and for a long time with His Father. Jesus, who knew the plan, had predicted this very event. Jesus should have known.

But up there above the heads of men, hanging from that cross, surrounded, not by the love of His Father who He had known for all eternity but by a wall of suffering and pain. A wall of hatred. Jesus was alone.

Have you ever felt alone? Bullied, pushed to the margin, not accepted, hated. Jesus knows how it feels. He went to the extreme.

Once we’ve been struck by the raw severity and barbarism of the cross, it’s hard to look at it in the same way.

And when we come to terms with the how of the cross what about the why? That’s much harder to define and defend. We talk about words like sacrifice and substitute but some people find it hard to swallow that a loving God would need an atonement sacrifice, like the gods of other nations. However author Ty Gibson in A God Named Desire (p 123) says we need to view the cross through the lens of the incarnation. “Once we understand the incarnation, we realise that the One hanging on the cross is none other than God Himself.” He goes on to say, “Rather than channel His justifiable anger towards us and demand that we pay for our sins, God chose rather to bear the loss in Himself, to take the hit our sin dealt to Him and refuse to return the hit to us.”

There are so many texts that describe the process of the cross and what it means, even from the Old Testament: “The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all . . . because he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:6,12).

The mystery of the cross is hard to grasp but that’s where the faith element comes in. Even if we don’t fully
understand the mechanisms of universal justice, even if we accept the concept, sacrifice, atonement and debt, we still have to accept the cross. We have to make it a part of our daily lives. What are the ramifications of this act?

If what happened at the cross was reconciliation to God, then I can live my life without shame. I will still feel guilty when I miss the mark but I know that if I accept the cross, the sin is washed away. Shame is a weight, a burden that you carry with you. Shame accompanies unrepentant sin. Jesus was heaped with shame so I don’t have to carry it around. That makes my life fuller and lighter and more beautiful.

Also, the cross, which Jesus instructs us to bear, is a reminder of the humility and service of God. We can spend our lives in service to others because of the example of Jesus. Any trials we face, He’s faced before. Any worries ahead, the cross shows us that the God of the universe understands. We have an example at the cross that encourages us that nowhere is too low to stoop and no-one is too lost to help.

Finally, the cross means nothing without the resurrection. Timothy Keller, in his book, *King’s Cross*, calls the resurrection “the hinge upon which the story of the world pivots” (p 221). The resurrection means that God has power over death. So even though death, loss and suffering here on earth are hard, painful and hurt a lot, the resurrection gives us hope.

“The joy of your glory will be that much greater for every scar you bear. So live in the light of the resurrection and renewal of this world, and of yourself, in a glorious, never-ending, joyful dance of grace” (Keller, p 225).

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If the Old Testament lays the foundation for all biblical teaching, then what does it teach about the Holy Spirit? In answering this question we should remember the classic words of R A Torrey: “Before one can correctly understand the work of the Holy Spirit, he must first of all know the Spirit himself.”¹ Let’s see what the ancient Scriptures say to help us understand a little more of the Person of the Holy Spirit. In so doing we must avoid imposing philosophical structures upon the Hebrew Scriptures, but let them speak for themselves². The Holy Spirit is referred to more than 100 times in the Old Testament in a number of ways: the Spirit of God (Elohim)³, the Spirit of the Lord (YHWH)⁴, and simply, the Spirit (Ruach)⁵.

It’s interesting to note that they all pursue similar themes. I will focus on what we can learn from the Elohim and YHWH formulation for the Holy Spirit in my next article. In this piece, I focus exclusively on instances where the word Ruach (Spirit) is used by itself—or prefixed with “my”, “his”, “your” or simply “the”. These various expressions occur 56 times in 49 verses, and they describe divine attributes, define what God does and outline ways that people are empowered to serve Him.

**Divine attributes**

The Spirit (Ruach) may sometimes be described as having divine attributes: “good” (Psalms 143: 10), “generous” (Psalms 51:12) and facilitating what “might” and “power” are unable to achieve (Zechariah 4:6). The Spirit is everywhere (Psalms 139:7), is grieved by human rebellion (Isaiah 63:10) and remains among God’s people as He promised at the Exodus (Haggai 2:5). Foremost in all this activity is God’s role as Creator. Psalms 104 describes God’s activity in creation and His role in upholding creation: “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth” (Psalms 104:30 NKJV). Job recognises this instrumental role of the Holy Spirit when he says, “by His Spirit, He adorned the heavens” (Job 26:13 NKJV).

**What God does**

The ruach references to God’s activity include the Holy Spirit “striving” with people before judgement, then in judgement, then in restoration. The first reference to the Holy Spirit’s striving is in the context of the Flood: “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever” (Genesis 6:3).
The divine “concern” for human rebellion is also seen in the prophetic oracles: “For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighbouring peoples” (Nehemiah 9:30 NIV; see also Zechariah 7:12).

The connection between the Holy Spirit and judgement is reinforced in Psalms 106:33—the people “rebelle[...]

Consistent with the pattern observed in the Hebrew Scriptures is the restoration that God promises after judgement. It's significant that the Holy Spirit is linked to that process as well. Isaiah champions this aspect of divine action when he states that there will be limits to the judgements to come, and that judgement will continue “. . . till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest” (Isaiah 32:15 NIV).

This same idea is repeated in the biblical wisdom literature. Wisdom calls to the young with the assurance, “Turn at my rebuke; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you” (Proverbs 1:23 NKJV). The hint is that a life of “foolishness” can be turned around and become a life of success from that moment the Spirit is “poured out” on someone. The same principle is at work in the later prophetic statements that speak of judgement and restoration.

People empowered

The third way in which ruach is used is in connection with the empowerment of leaders—both political and prophetic. The 70 elders who were to assist Moses were given of the same “Spirit” enabling them to “bear the burden of the people” along with Moses (Numbers 11:17). When this was done, the elders “prophesied” but only on this one occasion (verse 25). Reports came to Moses that two of the elders who were not able to attend the special ceremony also prophesied, because “the Spirit rested on them” as well (verse 26). Commenting on this, Moses declared that he wished God would put His Spirit upon all of His people (verse 29). It's interesting that the prophet Joel prophesies that God would in fact do just that—He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28). In the context of the Exodus, this universal gift of the Spirit was to instruct and to nurture them (Nehemiah 9:20).

In the same way that the elders were empowered by the Spirit that had rested on Moses, Joshua too was empowered by that same Spirit (Numbers 27:18). Elisha was similarly empowered by the Spirit that empowered Elijah (2 Kings 2:9, 15). Isaiah develops the concept further with the Servant of YHWH motif—the one who would both free His people from the Babylonians and bring justice to the Gentiles because of God's Spirit on him (Isaiah 42:1; 48:16).

Ezekiel adds interesting dimensions to this discussion. In his vision of the moving throne of God, it's the Spirit that directs where the wheels should go (Ezekiel 1:20). And it's the Spirit that physically directs Ezekiel in his movements as well. The Spirit sets Ezekiel on his feet (2:2; 3:24) and lifts him up (3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5). In another of his visions the Spirit of YHWH “took” him and “set him down” in a valley filled with dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1).

A similar physical manifestation of the Spirit may be observed in the account of the God-fearing servant of idolatrous King Ahab. He was afraid that Elijah would be spirited away from him before he had a chance to return with the King (1 Kings 18:12), and later, the “sons (i.e. students) of the prophets” went looking for Elijah after the Spirit of YHWH took him from them (2 Kings 2:16).
Conclusion

The description of the Holy Spirit in the Hebrew Scriptures is very rich. As we will see in the second half of this piece, the two other names for the Holy Spirit are similarly associated with the powerful working of God. From creation through redemption, the Hebrew Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit is intimately involved in the lives of humanity. Let us all open our hearts to His leading as we need His indwelling now more than ever.


3. Gen 1:2; 41:38; Exod 31:3; 35:31; Num 24:2; 1 Sam 10:10; 11:6; 16:15, 16, 23; 18:10; 19:20, 23; Job 33:4; Ezek 11:24; 2 Chr 15:1; and 24:20.


5. Gen 6:3; Num 11:17, 25, 26, 29; 27:18; Num 27:18; 2 Kgs 2:9, 15; Isa 4:4; 30:1; 32:15; 34:16; 37:7; 42:1, 3; 48:16; 59:21; 63:10, 11; Ezek 1:20, 21; 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5; Joel 2:28, 29; Hag 2:5; Zech 4:6; 6:8; 7:12; 12:10; Mal 2:15; Ps 51:11, 12; 104:30; 106:33; 139:7; 143:10; Job 26:13; 33:4; Prov 1:23; Neh 9:20, 30; and 1 Chr 28:12.

6. Richard J Sklba observes that the people of Israel lost their land when they violated the covenant that originally made possible the gift of that land, Sklba, Richard J, Reflections on the Role of the Spirit in Exile, 3. Sklba then outlines a number of exiles in the post-Babylonian era, each contributing to an understanding of the Spirit, ibid., 3–9.

7. The NT describes something similar in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. After Philip finished conversing with the Ethiopian, the “Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away” and he “was found at Azotus” (Acts 8:39, 40).

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Talkback radio was crackling with indignation late last year, after six miniature horses were found dead with their throats cut at a horse stud south of Adelaide. Last month, when the man accused of the crime left his court hearing, he was accompanied by a security guard, such was the community outrage at the allegations.¹

But somehow, amidst the furore, the fact was seemingly forgotten that, on the same day those pet horses died, another 432 horses were also slaughtered in Australian abattoirs. If Wikipedia is to be believed, Australia is the world's sixth-largest producer of horsemeat. And on that same day, about 126,000 cows, sheep and pigs died in similar circumstances. Oh, and there's also the small matter of 1.14 million chickens.

A quick web search on animal cruelty in meat production will get your stomach churning and leave images in your mind you'll wish you never saw. Animals are often raised in unnatural and overcrowded conditions, pumped full of hormones and antibiotics, injured and exhausted during long transport, and panicked and abused at the slaughterhouse. Despite the best efforts of governments and their animal welfare legislation, the bottom line of meat production is . . . the bottom line. That means animals are primarily viewed and treated as units of production rather than the sentient miracles of creation that they are.

For about 150 years, Seventh-day Adventists have promoted a vegetarian diet as part of our health message. But I was surprised to discover that Ellen White was also concerned about the suffering of animals in meat production:

"Think of the cruelty to animals that meat eating involves, and its effect on those who inflict and those who behold it. How it destroys the tenderness with which we should regard these creatures of God! . . . What man with a human heart, who has ever cared for domestic animals, could look into their eyes, so full of confidence and affection, and willingly give them over to the butcher's knife?"²

Somewhere along the way, we Adventists lost this wholistic vision of vegetarianism and now focus almost solely on its health benefits. It's a self-centred focus that can limit our hospitality to those of like mind and tends to shut out the world and its uncomfortable problems. It's easy to identify the hypocrisy of those who rise up in anger at the slaying of six pet horses—waving a protest placard in one hand, while clutching a beef-burger in the other. But we, noble
vegetarians and hypocrisy free, are failing to rise up at all, unless you count a trip to the fridge.


2 Ministry of Healing, 205-209, 1905

Kent Kingston is assistant editor for Record.
I thank God that we belong to a church family that has a wonderfully balanced, comprehensive approach to life and faith. I become very concerned when I hear and see people who seem to be wanting to overemphasise one aspect of life and faith at the expense of that balanced perspective. For example, I hear preachers and people from time to time say words like “Only preach Jesus” or “Jesus only”. Our mission is clearly to make disciples for Jesus, but I sometimes wonder what is meant by the words “Jesus only”. I cannot help but be concerned that there is the danger that implicitly could be a dilution of our comprehensive mission: perhaps a reaction against overemphasis on doctrine, or concentration on lifestyle issues or even legalism?

The potential problems I see are these. First, the fullness of the Godhead is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Our life and faith must relate to the fullness of God, not only to Jesus in His incarnation, as precious as He is to us. Second, Jesus was and is multidimensional. You and I cannot talk about Jesus without understanding His life and His teachings—all of them. And beyond that, the story of salvation revealed by revelation through the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit must be taken seriously if we are serious about authentic faith.

I guess what I am saying is that a vibrant, exciting faith journey is a wonderful thing that God intends for all of us. But beware of being too simplistic. Simple faith is beautiful. Simplistic slogans may be hazardous to Christian health.

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