

Good Word Schedule
“The Sanctuary”
October, November, December 2013

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|------------|---------------|---|
| #1 | Oct 05 | The Heavenly Sanctuary |
| #2 | Oct 12 | “Heaven” on Earth |
| #3 | Oct 19 | Sacrifices |
| #4 | Oct 26 | Lessons from the Sanctuary |
| #5 | Nov 02 | Atonement: Purification Offering |
| #6 | Nov 09 | The Day of Atonement |
| #7 | Nov 16 | Christ, Our Sacrifice |
| #8 | Nov 23 | Christ, Our Priest |
| #9 | Nov 30 | The Pre-Advent Judgment |
| #10 | Dec 07 | The Eschatological Day of Atonement |
| #11 | Dec 14 | Our Prophetic Message |
| #12 | Dec 21 | The Cosmic Conflict Over God’s Character |
| #13 | Dec 28 | Exhortations from the Sanctuary |

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Theme: The Heavenly Sanctuary

Leading Question: How can the sanctuary idea and the picture of a sanctuary be helpful in our search for God?

1. Mental Pictures. In both Testaments, the concept of “sanctuary” is a real one. “Have them make a sanctuary for me and I will dwell among them,” declares the Lord in Exod. 25:8 (NIV). “Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you,” he was told (25:9). In similar fashion, the book of Hebrews likewise speaks of a heavenly sanctuary of which the earthly was a pattern (Heb. 8:5)

Question: What does the image of “sanctuary” mean for people today? Is there a “modern” equivalent? If not, how can the idea and picture of “sanctuary” fire our imaginations and hearts in our day?

2. Where Is God? In his prayer at the temple dedication, Solomon spoke of the heaven as the place of God’s dwelling (1 Kings 8:30). Yet he admitted that even the heavens could not contain God. How much less the earthly temple that he had built (v. 27). So where is God? Up? Down? What does all that mean once we know that the earth is a sphere? Is heaven always up?

3. Saving the Good, Condemning the Evil. In some sense, Scripture depicts the heavenly sanctuary/temple as the central control room for God’s government. In the setting of that temple, Psalm 11:4-7 brings together the two opposing sides in the great struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan. The condemnation of the wicked is stated in no uncertain terms: “The wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion” (vs. 5). How does God – and his followers – mediate a message of grace to the “wicked” without taking the catastrophic results of sin lightly?

4. Sanctuary Imagery in the Book of Revelation. In the Gospels, especially in the synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), Jesus does not stress his visible authority. He mingles with the people and declares that the “son of man” did not come “to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). By contrast, everything in the book of Revelation focuses on divine authority. And the sanctuary/temple imagery contribute to that picture. Revelation 4 and 5 focus on the temple and the worship of God. In short, almost the whole book focuses more on worship than on service. Given that emphasis, it is striking that at the end of the book, the Revelator states that he does not see a temple in the New Jerusalem because “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev. 21:22). Does this final move away from “sanctuary” imagery help us see more clearly an egalitarian future for God and his people?

5. Imagining the Sanctuary in Heaven. One of the reasons why a discussion of the topic of the sanctuary in heaven can be so volatile is the great gulf separating those who think concretely and those who think more abstractly. The concrete imagery that is so important for some is virtually impossible for others to accept. And that gulf can develop in the most surprising ways. The author of this study guide (Alden Thompson), remembers how surprised he was to realize that the 10 commandments would make no sense in a perfect heavenly world. The reference to the “ark of the covenant” in the heavenly temple in Revelation 11:19, suggests the presence of the tables of stone in heaven. But one day a light flashed on in his head and he realized how strange the 10 commandments would seem to angelic beings who had never faced sin in a material world: Honor your father and mother, do not kill, do not steal; even the Sabbath would make no sense without the sunset to mark the beginning and end.

In Alden Thompson’s book, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Review and Herald, 1991), chapter 17, “Visions: Documentaries or Animations?” (pp. 196-204) addresses the question. An excerpt from that chapter follows here:

Alden Thompson, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (RH, 1991)
Chapter 17: “Visions: Documentaries or Animations?”
[excerpt: pp. 199-204]

“The Concrete and the Abstract”

Our dilemma when dealing with visions is that human beings vary greatly in their ability and inclination to shift between concrete and abstract thinking. From my own experience, I have discovered that conservative Christians tend to be more concrete in their way of thinking. That clearly describes the bulk of Adventists: miracles and heaven are real; Jesus was indeed God in the flesh; Resurrection and Second Advent are literal events.

By contrast, I have noticed that so-called liberal Christians tend to be more abstract in their thinking. They are less inclined to put full stock in literal miracles or heaven; a literal Incarnation, Resurrection and Second Advent are also often problematic.

Culture and environment are also at work here. I found a real difference, for example, among our German believers when it came to their way of thinking about heaven and the future life. I watched as otherwise very conservative German Adventists became very uncomfortable listening to Americans wax enthusiastic about birds, flowers, and well-decked tables in heaven. In America, no holds are barred when we talk about the physical pleasures of the future life: boating, sailing, flying, reveling in the tall grass – all that is fair game in an American Adventist heaven.

Understandably then, given the inclination of German students, when we came to the doctrine of the sanctuary, they were uncomfortable if I made the heavenly sanctuary too literal. I well remember my initial irritation and their uneasiness as we tried to come to a meeting of the minds in a seminar setting. I had given the class an article on the sanctuary by an American Adventist scholar. Early on in the article, he makes an appropriate disclaimer about our very limited knowledge of heavenly matters. But then, in good American style, he uses the symbols quite naturally and freely without constantly reminding us that they are just symbols.

That did not go down well with my German students. Almost after every sentence they

needed reassurance that these were just symbols. I agreed with them in principle, of course, and we moved on. But the constant pushing in the direction of the abstract and away from the concrete was having its impact on me. And I didn't realize it until I was chattering away at home with my wife one day and made some casual remark about heavenly matters. She stopped me and questioned what I had just said. Suddenly I realized that for no other reason than the constant pressure of the environment, I was making concessions I probably didn't need to make – indeed should not make.

Some months later, back in America, I took a survey of a standard Adventist audience and asked them how they viewed the Investigative Judgment. I asked: “On a scale of 1 (concrete) to 10 (abstract), how do you picture the events in their own mind?”

I expected to find a much stronger response at the strictly concrete end of the spectrum. As a matter of fact, 46 percent of the crowd did mark 1: the events are concrete. But 54 percent marked something other than 1, though most were very close to 1, with a 2 or a 3. Still, a narrow majority of that crowd was willing to put at least some qualification on our ability to see things as they actually are.

Actually, none of us can get very far with our thought processes without using pictures, and rather concrete ones at that. What do love, or hate, or kindness, or anger mean unless we can put arms, legs and a face with them?

When it comes to the heavenly realm, I like to ask my students to describe for me God's method of keeping records. It is great fun watching thoughtful faces break into amused smiles as the “truth” dawns and everyone comes to virtually the same conclusion: quill pens and scrolls – possibly books instead of scrolls, but the quill pens for sure.

Now, imagine an angel rushing into the heavenly archives with an urgent message: “Quick! We must do something to update our system. Down there on earth they are already using microfiche and computers.”

I can't really imagine something like that happening. But then I can't really imagine changing my mental picture from quill pen to computers either. Gabriel and Company with computers just doesn't ring true. So I am prepared to see quill pens when I think of records in heaven – while telling myself that the reality is something quite different. What is that reality? I don't know. But when God told us about books and records, that was language that human beings could understand. Whether quill pens, microfiche, computers – or the system *really* in use up there, the practical point of the vision is embarrassingly clear, isn't it?

At this point, I am wondering if God ever gives a true documentary. More and more I am inclined to think that all his visions are animations, adaptations to limited human capabilities. He will do what he has to do to make us understand what is important. But I suspect we are in for some real surprises when we take our first tour of the heavenly realm.

For me, the concrete elements of my conservative Adventist heritage are very important. Everything I know in this life is linked with something tangible: my wife, my children, my colleagues, my church, my world. God created a material world and declared it good. It has been distorted by sin, to be sure, He has promised to make it new again. That promise is very precious to me. Why do you suppose “the blessed hope” has as such deep roots in our Adventist experience if it doesn't point us to a real God who cares for real people and who will take us to a real place?

I tell my students that I want them to keep the pictures that make belief possible for them,

concrete or abstract. As C. S. Lewis once said, he didn't mind if someone thought God had a beard, for no one ever went to hell for believing that.

We can be anywhere along the concrete-abstract scale as long as we don't try to impose our pictures on others. And I suppose that is where the "concrete" thinkers are most likely to err. Our images are so important to us that we may react more vigorously than we should if we think someone is trying to snatch them away from us. I well remember the warm note of appreciation on an evaluation form after teaching a class on the doctrine of the sanctuary. "Thank you, Dr. T., for letting me keep my pictures," read the note, "I need them."

We all need our pictures. And it probably wouldn't hurt if we could be more gentle in dealing with one another's pictures.

Finding the right picture was important for the Bible writers, too. In fact, precisely in the area of the sanctuary we find God inspiring his messengers to share pictures that the people could understand. Two biblical contexts can serve to illustrate.

In Exodus 25:9, God told Moses to make the sanctuary "according to all that I show you concerning the pattern." Archaeologists have discovered that the pattern was similar in many respects to that of the Canaanite temples. Surprising? Yes – until we recognize that God wanted a house of worship to be recognized as a house of worship within that culture. The practices inside the Israelite temple differed dramatically from those of the Canaanites. But at least a church looked like a church!

In Hebrews 8:5 we read that the earthly sanctuary was to serve as "a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary." If Exodus spoke to a Canaanite setting, then Hebrews spoke to the Greco-Roman world. And in that world, Plato's concept of the heavenly "ideals" was dominant: whatever object one finds on earth is naturally a reflection of the true idea of that object in heaven. Understandably, then, the author of Hebrews would talk about the copy and the shadow.

For us, that means we should be rather cautious about turning our pictures into absolutes. Adventists probably have more difficulty with the visions of Ellen White than we do with Scripture, at least that has been my experience. Generally, my classes have been more prepared to live with a diversity of understanding of the biblical visions that they are with reference to Ellen White's. Yet the principle is the same.

I suspect some of the conservative force in Adventism stems from the fact that the sanctuary doctrine was instrumental in leading Adventists to accept the Sabbath. Ellen White's vision of the ark in the heavenly sanctuary and the "halo of glory" around the fourth command (EW, p. 255) played a key role originally in Adventism and still does in many circles.

That picture was vivid enough in my own thinking to cause a real jolt when I suddenly realized (I don't remember just when) that the ten commandments, especially the fourth, are meaningful only for this earth. Not only could the angels *not* worship on the same Sabbath, but they would not know what to do with commands 5 or 10 – or with any of the others in between.

As Ellen White observed later, Satan's rebellion brought law to the minds of the angels "almost as an awakening to something unthought of" (MB, p. 109).

I finally concluded that the vision of the halo around the fourth command was a powerful picture that accomplished its purpose in establishing the fourth command. It is not, however, a documentary of the heavenly reality.

In that connection, I have found a couple of quotations from Ellen White to be useful. The net result of both is to caution us about moving too far towards either the concrete or the

abstract extreme in our conceptions of things heavenly:

“A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material has led many to spiritualize away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home. Christ assured His disciples that He went to prepare mansions for them in the Father’s house. Those who accept the teachings of God’s word will not be wholly ignorant concerning the heavenly abode. And yet, “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” (1 Cor. 2:9) Human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God” (GC, pp. 674-675).

“The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God’s condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought. Instead of the expressions of the Bible being exaggerated, as many people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of higher education. Sinful beings can only bear to look upon a shadow of the brightness of heaven’s glory” (ISM, p. 22).

If we could choose, we might want to avoid both the 1 and the 10 on the scale of concrete-abstract. Unfortunately, that is the precisely the kind of thing we are often unable to choose. It is born into us and cemented in place by our environment. But we can ask the Lord to help us learn to let others live with their pictures.

A final word from that survey I have been referring to, in fact, from a woman who did not like my question at all. She ended up marking a 5 on the scale – under protest and quoting C. S. Lewis: “Some things are so terribly real we can’t possibly imagine them.”

I’m inclined to think that both she and he just might be right.

6. Using Scripture Creatively. The official study guide includes the following quote to make the point that we cannot know very much at all about the things of heaven. It was from a sermon that Ellen White preached on December 1, 1888:

Paul had a view of heaven, and in discoursing on the glories there, the very best thing he could do was to not try to describe them. He tells us that eye had not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for those that love Him. So you may put your imagination to the stretch, you may try to the very best of your abilities to take in and consider the eternal weight of glory, and yet your finite senses, faint and weary with the effort, cannot grasp it, for there is an infinity beyond. It takes all of eternity to unfold the glories and bring out the precious treasures of the Word of God. – SDABC 6, p. 1,107

The SDABC enters this quote as a comment on 2 Cor. 4:17-18 where Paul concludes with the admonition to focus on the unseen since anything we see is temporary. Interestingly enough, however, in light of the modern emphasis on using contextually-faithful quotations, Ellen White quotes 1 Corinthians 2:9 *out of context* in a way that is often done with that passage. Paul goes on in 1 Cor. 2:10 to say that the things that eye has not seen or ear heard, God has revealed to us by the Spirit. But that verse is popularly used (as EGW does in the 1888 sermon) to make the point that we cannot imagine what is really there. But what she does falls in line with what the New Testament writers do again and again and with what virtually everyone does in everyday speech as we quote others. It's worth noting that 1 Cor. 9 is quoting Isaiah 64:4, which has yet another contextual understanding. SDABC 6:327, commenting on the Isaiah passage, includes a remarkable survey of varied uses of that passage in the writings of EGW.

With reference to the heavenly sanctuary, we will want to affirm two points in tension: First, that we are not wholly ignorant of the heavenly realm; second, the reality is far beyond anything we can imagine. And we should be very gentle in dealing with one another when it comes to our use of Scripture. Even when we are quoting out of context (e.g. 1 Cor. 2:9), we are often expressing truths that are very clear elsewhere in Scripture. But as believers we are drawn to the words to Scripture and will use them, even if they are not reflecting the author's original intention. And that's perfectly alright.

Theme: “Heaven” on Earth

Leading Question: Do heavenly things tell us about things on earth? Or is it the other way around: things on earth tell us about things in heaven?

The official study guide for this week’s lesson dips into “typology,” a method of Bible study that can be a great blessing to some, but offers little meaning to others. In brief, typology tends to start with things we already know to be true from elsewhere and then reads them back into other passages of Scripture or into other events. It is a kind of meditative approach to Scripture, one in which known truths suggest other truths that are not apparent in the text of Scripture itself. The garden of Eden, for example, is cited as an earlier parallel with the sanctuary on earth. One can find the parallels, but they would not be self-evident from the creation account in Genesis 1-2. There are, however, two areas which we will explore, namely, the relationship of the wilderness tabernacle to other non-Israelite tabernacles, and also the church as a people-centered model replacing the brick-and-board sanctuary of the wilderness era.

1. The Pattern in the Mount. According to Exodus 25:8-9, Moses was instructed to make the tabernacle according to the pattern shown him in the mount. One could easily be tempted to see Moses copying a “real” sanctuary in heaven; yet archeological discoveries in the Middle East have shown that the Israelite sanctuary showed remarkable points of contact with Canaanite sanctuaries.

Question: What practical benefit would result from God’s modeling Israel’s tabernacle after similar tabernacles among the Canaanites? Could we say that the pattern God showed Moses was modeled, in part, on the Canaanite tabernacles so that Israel and her non-Israelite neighbors would recognize the tabernacle as a religious shrine?

Points of Contact: In broad outline, here are some of the ways in which the Israelite sanctuary mirrored the Caananite:

- a) Two compartments: holy and most holy
- b) Festivals at the same time: Spring equinox (Passover) and Autumn equinox (Tabernacles).
- c) Similar hymns: Virtually every line in Psalm 29 can be seen as a parallel with the Canaanite (Ugaritic) hymns to Baal. But instead of a hymn to the powerful Baal, the biblical psalm celebrates the power of Yahweh.

Points of Contrast:

- a) No fertility orgies in Israel. In Israel, Yahweh was the source of all fertility.
- b) No female counterpart for Yahweh in Israel. During the time of Ezra-Nehemiah, a renegade Jewish temple at Elephantine Island in Egypt actually featured a female consort for Yahweh. No wonder Ezra and Nehemiah took such strong action against foreign marriages and foreign gods.

2. The Body of Christ as a People-centered Sanctuary. Paul's first letter to Corinth presents a powerful picture of the church as the body of Christ. Instead of a particular place of holiness, i.e. where a literal sanctuary stands, Paul argues that the people of God constitute God's temple. In that connection, 1 Cor. 3:16-17 is an important passage. The "you" here – "you" are God's temple – is plural, a point that does not come clear in most English translations. The NIV is one translation that does it right:

3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

Question: What might be the advantages of seeing God's people as a "temple" that replaces one located in a particular physical place?

3. God's "Temple" as a Model of Diversity. Both in 1 Corinthians 3 and in chapter 12, Paul presents the body of Christ as a "temple" built out of many different parts. But his choice of metaphor in chapter 12, namely, the human body, is particularly enlightening, for each part, no matter how small, is a significant part of the whole. Thus God's people become a community where God meets them. No "literal" sanctuary on earth is required.

Question: Does the church as the body of Christ have any bearing at all on what one believes about the sanctuary in heaven?

Theme: Sacrifice

Leading Question: Why does the practice of bloody sacrifice stir up such strong passions today?

The first life-taking sacrifice in Scripture isn't even mentioned as a sacrifice, but it is implied. After Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord provided animal skins to clothe them (Gen. 3:21). Is it possible that God intended or hoped that this first sacrifice could be the last? Scripture doesn't say. But Scripture does have a lot to say about sacrifice. That's the topic we will explore in this lesson.

1. Cain's Sacrifice. Genesis 4 tells about the tragic results of Cain's rejected sacrifice. He ended up murdering his brother and was banished from home. Why doesn't Scripture tell us more clearly the nature of his crime? Traditionally Christians have argued that he brought the wrong sacrifice. But that's not at all clear from Scripture. In the end, it was his anger that got him into trouble, not the sacrifice itself. See "The "Anger of Cain" at the end of this lesson.

Question: In Genesis 4, is there any clue that Cain offered the wrong kind of sacrifice as the reason for his rejection?

2. The Sacrifice of Isaac. Some easily overlooked aspects of the Genesis narrative reveal crucial truths about the nature of sacrifice in the Bible. Why should innocent Isaac die at God's command? Genesis 18 records the conversation between an indignant Abraham and the Judge of all the earth over the fate of Sodom. "You can't destroy the innocent and the wicked together," argued Abraham. "You are the Judge of all the earth you can't do that. You have to do what is right" (see Gen. 18:23-25).

In Genesis 18 Abraham fiercely defended the rights of the innocent and he did it to defend God's reputation. But in Genesis 22, without so much as a whimper of protest, Abraham was willing to head to Moriah at God's command to sacrifice the innocent child of promise. He seemed unconcerned either for the innocent Isaac or for God's reputation.

All that suggests an important clue for our understanding the idea of sacrifice in Scripture, for sin had so distorted the human understanding of authority, that child sacrifice had come to be seen as the ultimate gift to demanding and bloodthirsty gods. Exodus 13:11-16 reveals that at the time of the Exodus from Egypt, every firstborn son among the human population had to be killed or redeemed. The same applied to animals. Child sacrifice had indeed come to be seen as the crowning act of worship.

God recognized that deeply-rooted conviction and used it to point Abraham and all God's people to a better and clearer truth about God: Abraham could not sacrifice his son; God must provide the sacrifice. And He did. The ram caught in the thicket (Gen. 22:13) gave his life, a divinely-provided substitute for the first-born Isaac, a first step toward the greater truth that God himself would provide the sacrifice for humankind.

Question: Is it possible to link Micah 6:6-8 (“Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression....?”) with the story of Genesis 22 as an indication that the demand to sacrifice the first-born was driven by distorted human understanding, rather than the demand of a holy God for a blood sacrifice? Perhaps the phrase “psychological and governmental necessity” could explain the sacrifice of Christ, an alternative to the absolute necessity argued by Calvinist theologians. Christ’s death was necessary, but not as an absolute necessity decreed by the nature of the universe and by the character of God.

3. The Prophets Rail Against Sacrifice. In the famous story of Saul and the Amalekites, Samuel tells Saul that it is better to obey than to offer sacrifices (1 Sam. 15:22). But that is a mere ripple compared to the torrent of anger from Isaiah and Amos. Here is Isa 1:1-17 (NRSV):

11 What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
says the Lord;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of goats.
12 When you come to appear before me,
who asked this from your hand?
Trample my courts no more;
13 bringing offerings is futile;
incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—
I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.
14 Your new moons and your appointed festivals
my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.
15 When you stretch out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.
16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
17 learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.

And here is Amos 5:21-24 (NRSV)

- 21 I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
22 Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.
23 Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
24 But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

In short, when ritual trumped righteousness and masked wicked behavior in the name of religion (cf. Jeremiah 7), the prophets erupted in hot fury. In the case of Jeremiah, the anger accompanied the announcement that the temple itself would be destroyed and the people would go into exile. Then there would be no ritual at all.

Question: When the temple was destroyed in 586 BCE and Israel was dragged off to Babylon, was God still able to forgive his people? In other words, were sin offerings essential for the forgiveness of sin, or were they an aid to forgiveness?

4. Christ's Once-for-all Sacrifice. Hebrews 8 - 10 speaks with greatest clarity about the final deliverance from sin through the sacrifice of Christ and it is against the backdrop of the inadequacy of the God-given sacrificial system. Hebrew 10:8-10 is to the point as it celebrates the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ:

8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"—though they were offered in accordance with the law. 9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (NIV)

5. Our Sacrifice in Response to the Sacrifice of Christ. In the light of what God has done in Jesus Christ, Paul calls us to give ourselves as a "living sacrifice" to God. Here are his words in Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV):

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

From gratitude we are to live for God. And the Lord's supper is a perpetual reminder of what the sacrifice of Christ has meant to the human family and to the entire universe.

“The Anger of Cain”
By Alden Thompson
(Cf. “Windows on God’s Word,” *Signs of the Times*, August 1990)

And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.” (Genesis 4:10, RSV)

Strange how the violent, the angry, and the sinful grab more than their share of the headlines, even in Scripture. Abel brings the right sacrifice. Enoch walks with God. But we hear not a word from them. Scripture slips them quickly onto the stage of history and then off again. We catch only a glimpse and then they are gone.

But angry Cain earns almost a whole chapter and speaks more than once. Why?

So we can learn about anger. How it snatches away those we love. How it destroys in a moment the work of a lifetime. How it pushes beyond our reach all that is precious and dear. Cain can tell us about all that. That’s why he has a whole chapter.

Genesis 4 opens on a joyful note: “I’ve gotten a man with the help of the LORD,” exclaims Eve at Cain’s birth. And again she bore Abel his brother. The stage is set. The drama begins.

Abel is a shepherd. But Cain has given his life to “serving” the earth. Yes, given our current interests in ecology, it is noteworthy that the Hebrew word translated as “tiller” (of the ground), is the word for serving. It even carries overtones of worship. Cain is devoted to the earth. He inherited the original charge to Adam “to serve the earth” (Gen. 2:5, 15), and dedicated his life to its fulfillment.

Offering time. Both brothers bring of their best, Cain from the fruit of the ground, Abel from the flock. The word used for both offerings is a general one, suggesting a gift of gratitude or thanksgiving, a sacrifice of homage or of allegiance.

But something went wrong. Horribly wrong. The LORD accepted Abel’s offering but not Cain’s. We can only guess the reason; Scripture does not tell us why.

Traditionally, Christians have said that Cain should have brought an animal. Possibly, especially for a sin offering. But even in the Levitical laws, an offering of first fruits clearly is part of God’s plan. A full chapter (Leviticus 2) deals exclusively with that kind of offering.

Yes, the flaw could have been in the offering or in the manner in which it was presented. But Cain’s reaction suggests that the problem lay deep in his own heart. Hebrews 11:4 says that Abel’s offering was only acceptable “by faith.” Apparently Cain lacked such faith.

The attitude of the worshiper is what counts before God. That means unanswered prayers: “Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen” (Is. 1:15, RSV).

And that is what happened to Cain and his offering: The LORD did not listen. But He was watching. And when Cain’s anger boiled over, the LORD had words with him. Scripture does not record Cain’s response. But his anger is worth pondering.

Somewhere in the depths of Cain’s soul, a hidden fury was smoldering, a deep anger against God and mankind. A gift rejected, especially when presented in adoration to One greatly loved, would be a crushing experience, to be sure. But anger? Would not genuine love search the heart in sorrow and humility and put things right? In one sense, it is more blessed to give than to receive, but surely a “successful” gift, in the first instance, is one that brings joy to the recipient.

Cain killed his brother. The blood seeped into the very ground which Cain had been called to serve.

“Where is your brother?” called God.

“I don’t know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Then Cain’s beloved earth turned against him in court. “Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground,” said God. “The ground has opened up its mouth to receive your brother’s blood.”

“You can no longer serve the ground, Cain. You are cursed from it. From this day forward it will be forbidden to you. You will be a wanderer and a fugitive.”

Cain’s anger melted into fear. The LORD graciously granted him a mark of protection so that he would not be a hunted man. Yes, the LORD cares deeply even for murderers. And why shouldn’t He? Cain already had paid a terrible price for his sin. His outburst had cost him his brother; then his parents and his beloved earth were wrenched from him as well. Cain could use a touch of God’s grace.

Looking back on Cain’s anger, we ask: Was there a cure?

Scripture tells us nothing about the reasons for Cain’s anger. That is just as well. For if we decide our anger is not his anger we could miss the point, a point we need to hear: the cure for Cain’s anger, for your anger, for mine.

Jesus told us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44). We might think that the enemy is the one who benefits – and there would have been advantages for Abel, to be sure. But think of what it would have meant for Cain.

How does it happen? We all know how impossible it is simply to turn off the anger and turn on love. It doesn’t work. But there is something that does: giving our anger to the Lord. We can even tell Him that we sometimes “enjoy” our anger, but that now we are asking Him to take it away and to give us the gift of love and compassion.

It may not happen immediately. We may often fall short of the mark. But sensing our need, we can pray the prayer of that desperate father who was longing for the healing of his son: “Lord I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

Can you imagine what could have happened if Cain had prayed that prayer?

Theme: Lessons from the Sanctuary**Leading Question:** How does a holy God bring sinners into His presence?

The whole organization of the sanctuary structure illustrated the gulf between a holy God and ordinary people. The covenant, etched in stone, was inside the ark which was inside the most holy place, where the high priest was to enter only once a year. The holy place was where the ordained priests carried on their weekly ministry. The courtyard was a place where ordinary believers could come for special purpose. Beyond the courtyard were the tents of the Levites; beyond the tents of the Levites were the tents of the rest of the congregation. In short, ordinary people were many steps removed from the presence of God in the most holy place.

Contrast this distance with the description of the believer's relationship to Jesus in 1 John 1:1-4:

1 We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – 2 this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us – 3 we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (NRSV)

Question: Do certain people today still need to find a way to negotiate the distance between a holy God and a sinful people? Is the closeness suggested in 1 John 1:1-4 only a rare experience, even for the mature Christian?

1. The Giving of the Law: Keep Your Distance. After the record of the second giving of the law in Deuteronomy 5, a description follows that emphasizes the fear that separated God from his people, a fear that God Himself affirmed as being quite appropriate. Here are the key lines from Deut 5: 22-33 (NRSV):

22 These words the Lord spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and he added no more. He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me. 23 When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you approached me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders; 24 and you said, "Look, the Lord our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the fire. Today we have seen that God may speak to someone and the person may still live. 25 So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer, we shall die. 26 For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and remained alive? 27 Go

near, you yourself, and hear all that the Lord our God will say. Then tell us everything that the Lord our God tells you, and we will listen and do it.”

28 The Lord heard your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me: “I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they are right in all that they have spoken. 29 If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their children forever! 30 Go say to them, ‘Return to your tents.’ 31 But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you all the commandments, the statutes and the ordinances, that you shall teach them, so that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess.” 32 You must therefore be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn to the right or to the left. 33 You must follow exactly the path that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess.

Question: Is there any indication in the Old Testament as to how that fear was to be replaced by an attractive love that was “safe”? Or is one never “safe” in God’s presence?

2. Aaronic Blessing Filtered Through Several Layers of Authority. In Numbers 6:22-27, the Aaronic benediction is filtered through several layers before it reaches the people. The message is passed down from God, to Moses, to Aaron and his sons, and finally to the people:

22 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 23 Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them,

24 The Lord bless you and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

27 So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them. (NRSV)

Question: What are the gains and losses in our “modern” more casual approach to God? Should we take steps to increase the “awe” factor? Or does the story of Jesus change all that forever for everyone?

Theme: Atonement: Purification Offering.

Leading Question: Why does Scripture give us so many stories of restored sinners who seem to have no relationship to the earthly sanctuary service?

Basic Rule: We should always treat people as Jesus treated people and as we would want to be treated if we were in their place: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12, NRSV)

1. People and Rules. The earthly sanctuary service as laid out in the books of Moses is a system of carefully defined rules, rules that are rarely followed in the narratives of the Old or New Testament. Almost no one can obey all the rules all the time. So what happens when we break the rules, by mistake, on purpose, or deliberately in high rebellion?

The official study guide for this week’s lesson focuses on the question of “atonement,” with the subtitle, “Purification Offering.” At one point, the study guides identifies three kinds of “sin” as depicted in the Old Testament:

- A. Inadvertent or unintentional sin (cf. Numbers 15:22-29)
- B. Deliberate or intentional sin (cf. Leviticus 5:1; 6:1-7)
- C. Rebellious sin (cf. Numbers 15:30-31)

When Scripture actually lists the specific sins, the categories begin to merge. In Leviticus 5:1, for example, the sin of keeping silent in court is noted as a sin for which one must offer a sacrifice. Not to speak up would be a deliberate choice. In Leviticus 6:1-3, several other deliberate sins are also noted: deceiving a neighbor about an item entrusted to a person for care, cheating a neighbor, finding lost property and lying about it, or swearing falsely. Sacrifices are designated for each of those sins.

But in Numbers 15:22-31, only two categories are defined: Unintentional sins (vss. 22-29) and defiant sins (vs. 30-31). The Hebrew phrase for “defiant” sins is literally “with a high hand,” a phrase used to describe Israel’s departure from Egypt. They left “with a high hand” (Exod. 14:8; Num. 33:3, KJV), or “boldly” (NIV, NRSV).

Question: Given the “sins” listed in Lev. 5:1 and 6:1-3, sins for which forgiveness could be granted, what kind of sin would be described as being committed “highhandedly” (NRSV) or “defiantly” (NIV) in Num. 15:31-32? In which category would one place David’s sin of murder and adultery? And how would the seriousness of his sins be

compared with the sin of picking up sticks on the Sabbath, a sin for which the Lord commanded the death penalty by stoning (Num. 15:32-36), an incident recorded in Numbers 15 immediately after the comment about the high-handed sin?

Complicating the picture even further is the reference to a required “sin” offering for a mother who has given birth to a child (Lev. 12:1-8). The official study God changes the translation to “purification offering” rather than “sin offering,” noting that the change in vocabulary makes it less likely that giving birth is a “moral fault.” Yet Scripture uses the strong language: “sin offering.”

Question: Why the strong emphasis on requiring a sin offering for unintentional or inadvertent sin? What would be the practical effect of an “official” shrug toward inadvertent sins? **Note:** One does not have to sin deliberately to cause a lot of damage. The engineer who “forgets” or “overlooks” important features so that a bridge collapses under stress, is “guilty” of great wrong, even if it was only a “mistake.”

Question: How many “forgiven” but rebellious or high-handed sinners can you list from Scripture? Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David....

2. No Forgiveness without Shedding of Blood. Hebrews 9:22 declares that “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” Within the Levitical system that would appear to be the case as a general rule. But even here Leviticus 5:11-13 makes an exception for the poor who cannot afford to bring an animal sacrifice. The poor may bring a meal offering of choice flour.

Question: How should we understand the seemingly universal statement about blood in Hebrews 9:22 when there were many sinners in Scripture who were forgiven without a blood sacrifice? During the exile, there were no animal sacrifices. Was no one forgiven? Can we see Jesus’ sacrifice as God’s way of saying that Jesus’ blood covers for all those who could not have access to an animal sacrifice as specified by the Levitical rules?

3. Divine Forgiveness for the Greatest of Sinners. The last verses of the book of Micah give a wonderful promise of salvation and forgiveness and includes the names of two servants of God who certainly committed sins with a high hand. We should never let the “rules” of the sanctuary keep us from hearing this great, good news from Micah 8:18-20 (NRSV):

18 Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency. 19 He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. 20 You will show faithfulness to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.

Theme: The Day of Atonement

Leading Question: In the narrative portions of the Old Testament, why is the Day of Atonement never mentioned?

The popular Christian view of Old Testament history envisions three annual pilgrim festivals as the people streamed toward Jerusalem. Luke 2:41 tells us that every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. That was the occasion when his parents "lost" Jesus, only finding him again after three days of worrisome search (Luke 2:45-48).

But a search of the Old Testament narratives reveals quite a different picture. The great Day of Atonement is mentioned only in Leviticus 16 and 23:27-32. The other great events in the festival calendar fare only a little better. Several key passages are worth noting.

Solomon: 2 Chron. 1:3-6. According to the Chronicler, King Solomon and the whole assembly of Israel made their way to the high place of Gibeon to worship the Lord. No particular festival is mentioned, but what the Chronicler tells us is revealing. The "tent of meeting" was at Gibeon (1:3) as was the bronze altar (1:5). Solomon even offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar (1:6). But the Chronicler specifically states that the ark of the Lord, central to the Day of Atonement service, was not at Gibeon. David had taken it to Jerusalem and had pitched a tent for it there (1:4). Thus it would have been impossible to carry out the regular order of daily or festival services as outlined in the Pentateuch, for the sacred objects were not all in the same place.

Hezekiah: 2 Chron. 30:26. Hezekiah's great Passover is recorded only in Chronicles. It is not even mentioned in Kings. But according to the Chronicler, good king Hezekiah began to prepare the temple for worship almost the moment he took office – in the first month of the first year of his reign (29:3). He opened the doors of the temple and repaired them. The climax of his reform was the keeping of a magnificent Passover and the seven days of the festival of unleavened bread which followed the Passover. Indeed, it was such an event that the people agreed to keep the festival of unleavened for a second full week (30:23). The Chronicler enthusiastically described that event as follows: "There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon son of King David of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem" (30:26). In other words, the festivals had hardly been high on any king's agenda before the time of Hezekiah. The Chronicler dedicates two whole chapters to the Passover (29-30) and an additional chapter to the reforms that follows (31)

Josiah: 2 Chron. 34:1 - 35:19. Good king Josiah came to the throne some 80 years after Hezekiah's Passover. The chronology is uncertain, but the Chronicler describes in some

detail how Josiah gradually came to the place where he was prepared for another reform. With the beginning of his reign at eight years old, the sequence of events is striking:

Age 16: “He began to seek the God of his ancestor David” (34:3). The obvious question is: What god did he serve in the first eight years of his reign?

Age 20: “In the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the sacred poles, and the carved and cast images” (34:3). The narrative continues to describe how Josiah pulled down the altars to Baal, burned the bones of the priests, and demolished the incense altars throughout all Israel. After four years of “Bible studies” Josiah was finally moved to action.

Age 26: “In the eighteenth year of his reign” he began “to repair the house of the Lord his God.” And while they were repairing the temple, the priest Hilkiah “found” the book of the law (34:14). Probably a form of the book of Deuteronomy, they took the book to the king and read it to him. Josiah was horrified – obviously hearing the words of the law for the first time. When the temple was in order, they celebrated another great Passover. This time the Chronicler compares the event with the days of Samuel: “No passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; none of the kings of Israel had kept such as passover as was kept by Josiah, by the priests and the Levites, by all Judah and Israel who were present” (35:18). In short, the great passover and reform of Hezekiah had left not a trace and isn’t even mentioned.

Nehemiah: Neh. 8:1-18. Both Ezra and Nehemiah led out in a great revival some time after Nehemiah’s return around 444 BC. The people wept when they heard the law because they realized how far they were from full obedience. But Ezra and Nehemiah asked the people not to weep; indeed they urged them to eat and drink and give gifts. “For this day is holy to the Lord; and do not be grieved” (8:10). On the second day of the revival they discovered that they should be living in booths in the festival of the seventh month (8:14), so they went out and gathered leafy branches as the law said and celebrated the feast, “for from the days of Jeshua son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so” (8:17).

Question: What lessons can we learn about God and his plans for his people from the description of the Day of Atonement, even though it left no mark at all in the actual history of God’s people in the Old Testament? Five points we can observe:

1. A Fast, Not a Feast. Even though the Day of Atonement is listed in Israel’s festival calendar in Leviticus 23, it is the one event in which fasting, not feasting was commanded. It was thus a somber day, one that is known in Jewish sources as a “Day of Judgment” (cf. *Rosh HaShanah* 16a; see “Atonement, Day of” in SDABC, p. 98).

2. A Tale of Two Goats. After the rebellion Nadab and Abihu, two of Aaron’s sons (Leviticus

10), God gave instructions as to how the high priest should approach the Lord. As spelled out in Leviticus 16, this was the Day of Atonement, observed on the tenth day of the seventh month. In addition to the extensive preparations for the high priest, central to the ceremonies of that day were two goats, one which Aaron was to offer as a sacrifice, sprinkling its blood on the mercy seat over the ark of the covenant (16:15). This was to cleanse the people and the tent from all uncleannesses (16:16).

The other goat was one on which Aaron laid his hands, confessing all the sins of Israel, “putting them on the head of the goat” (16:21). This goat was then led away by a designated person and released in the wilderness. Upon returning to camp, the person who led away the second goat could be readmitted after washing his clothes and body.

Question: What might be the significance in the different ways the two goats were treated? The goat for the Lord was simply sacrificed as a means of cleansing the tent and the people. No sins were confessed over that sacrificial goat. The live goat was a sin-bearer of a different kind. Aaron laid his hands on that goat and put Israel’s sins on that goat before he was led away.

3. Azazel. The name linked with the live goat is a curious one: “Azazel” is the word used in the NRSV, a simple transliteration of the Hebrew. It appears in Leviticus 16:8, twice in 16:10, and in 16:26, but nowhere else in Scripture. The KJV translates it as “scapegoat.” Most modern scholars see it as a reference to a desert demon, a meaning suggested by the fact that in the intertestamental book of 1 Enoch, Azazel is singled out as the leader of the Satans who introduced forbidden knowledge to man (8:1; 10:4, 8; 54:5-6). He is to be bound in darkness so he can no longer lead men astray (10:4). The book of 1 Enoch specifically states that all sin is to be ascribed to Azazel (See Alden Thompson, *Responsibility for Evil in the Theodicy of IV Ezra* [Scholars Press, 1977], 42). All that points to the great controversy theme which becomes important in Adventist theology.

4. What Happened to Forgiveness? The official study guide notes that the verb “forgive” does not appear anywhere in Leviticus 16 or 23:26-32, the two passages that interpret the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament. A paragraph from the official study guide is helpful here:

“The Day of Atonement was the second stage of a two-phase atonement. In the first phase, during the year, the Israelites were forgiven. Their sins were not blotted out but were entrusted to God Himself, who promised to deal with them. The second phase did not have much to do with forgiveness; the people were already forgiven. In fact, the verb ‘forgive’ does not occur at all in Leviticus 16 or in Leviticus 23:27-32. What this shows us is that the entire plan of salvation deals with more than just the forgiveness of our sins, a point that makes even more sense when understood in the wider context of the great controversy.” – from comment for Sunday, November 3, *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, 4th quarter, 2013

5. Cosmic Conflict. The narrative of the two goats points directly to the great struggle between

good and evil, between Christ and Satan. Satan rarely appears in the Old Testament; in only three contexts is he explicitly named and identified as a supernatural being opposed to God: Job 1 and 2, Zechariah 3, and 1 Chronicles 21. But the hints of such a conflict are here in Leviticus 16 and will developed into a larger picture of the conflict between good and evil.

Theme: Christ, Our Sacrifice

Leading Question: Before his death on the cross, neither the disciples nor the people in general accepted Jesus' teaching that he must suffer and die. How did the resurrection turn that all around?

Christians are so accustomed to thinking of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, that it is easy to overlook the ambiguity of the Old Testament evidence. The Jews wanted a conquering king, not a suffering servant, and one can indeed construct such a picture of the Messiah from Old Testament passages. In time, Isaiah 53, the song of the suffering servant, would be applied with enthusiasm to Jesus. But there is no evidence that anyone other than Jesus was willing to accept that application before the crucifixion and the resurrection. Here we will explore the topic under three headings:

1. Suffering Servant. Even from the lips of Jesus, the Gospels rarely apply Isaiah 53, the suffering servant song, to Jesus. In the New Testament, these three passages are the best candidates for application to Jesus:

A. Luke 22:36-37. After Peter exclaimed that he would be willing to go to prison and death for Jesus' sake, Jesus responded that Peter would deny him three times before the rooster crowed. Then Luke gives a quote from Jesus that includes a phrase from Isaiah 53: "He said to them, 'But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. 37 It is written: "And he was numbered with the transgressors"; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.'"

Note that Jesus' usage of Isaiah 53 here is in the context of buying a sword. Yes, he would be numbered among the transgressors. But the portion Jesus quotes does not suggest a suffering servant at all.

B. Acts 8:32-33. Several decades after the resurrection, Luke tells the story of the Ethiopian eunuch who meets Philip on the road to Gaza. The eunuch is reading Isaiah 53 and quotes these lines: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." (NIV)

Here the suffering servant language is clearly applied to Jesus, an application that is quite missing from the Gospels.

C. 1 Peter 2:21-25. Peter's reference to the suffering servant aspects of Isaiah 53 is

unmistakable. But here, too, the quotation comes decades after the resurrection: 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” 25 For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Question: What possible explanations can we offer for the two-fold mystery: A) That Jesus himself somehow discovered the suffering servant in his Bible, but B) That the people did not see it, and, in fact, refused to accept the message when Jesus tried to convince them?

2. The Passover Lamb. Jesus is referred to as the Passover lamb in only one New Testament passage, 1 Cor. 5:7-8: “Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch – as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” Here Paul is not discussing the Passover interpretation, but simply assuming such an application with reference to a very difficult situation in Corinth.

One other “lamb” passage comes to mind, the story in John’s Gospel where John the Baptist exclaims as Jesus approached him: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 2:29, NIV). Writing near the end of the first century, the lamb imagery comes naturally to John, even though the word “passover” is not included.

3. The Cleansing Blood. The official study guide for this quarter, quotes a host of passages that refer to the blood of Christ. Interestingly enough, they are all from the book of Hebrews. And we need to remember that the book of Hebrews is in the New Testament, not the Old. There is no clear evidence in the Old Testament that the people saw the sacrificial lamb as referring to a coming deliverer. Only after the resurrection did the combination of Isaiah 53 and the Passover imagery come together to portray Jesus as the suffering one who died for our sins. The effective blood of Jesus is a clear New Testament teaching. But it comes only after the story of Jesus has become rooted in the lives of the believers. To this day, Jewish readers do not see a suffering messiah in the Old Testament and they would not make the application to Jesus. It is a precious Christian teaching and we need to preserve it, even celebrate it. But it is not everywhere present in Scripture.

Theme: Christ, Our Priest

Leading Question: How can a Messiah from the line of Judah also be a priest, for according to Scripture, the priests were to be from the line of Levi?

The dominant mental picture of a priest is someone who presents human beings to God. One could use the term mediator. By contrast a prophet is someone who presents God to human beings. Where does a king fit into this picture? He rules over his subjects. At the end of the day, Christ is presented in the New Testament as Prophet – God’s message to humankind; as Priest – a human mediator presenting us to God; and as King – the one ruling over all creation. Adding to that picture is the image of Jesus as the submissive Passover lamb. Here we will explore Jesus’ role as priest, particularly in connection with his role as lamb and as Mediator between God and humankind.

1. A New Role: Priest/King. The Messiah was always seen as a royal figure from the seed of David, of the tribe of Judah. So how does the New Testament bring in the role of Priest? In the biblical world, the priests were from the tribe of Levi.

The book of Hebrews establishes the priesthood of Jesus by switching from the earthly line of Aaron to the heavenly line of Melchizedek. The clue for this shift is found in that tantalizing messianic psalm, Ps. 110. The most often cited messianic passage in the New Testament, it was cited by Jesus in the Gospels to confound his critics. In Matthew 22:41-45, Jesus messes with the minds of his listeners by asking them whose son the messiah was supposed to be. “David’s,” they replied confidently. “But then how does David call him Lord?” Jesus returned. His listeners had not yet tumbled to the truth that the Messiah was God incarnate. Indeed, that truth was many years in coming to the followers of Jesus. But Jesus was the one who asked the question.

Also in Psalm 110, is a reference to a the messiah as a “priest forever in the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4, NIV). The book of Hebrews picks up this point and argues at length that Jesus superseded the Aaronic priesthood and was in fact in the line of that mysterious priest/king of Salem who had dealings with Abraham (Gen. 14).

Question: How easy would it have been for Jewish people who were looking for conqueror king in the line of David, to recognize a dual role for their Messiah, a suffering servant king who was also a priest?

2. A Better Mediator. Hebrews argues extensively that Jesus is a better high priest because he comes from human stock. This is especially clear in Hebrews 4:14-16: “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our

weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (NIV)

But an experiential problem lurks in this model of a mediator who pleads on our behalf. The fact that Jesus is pleading on our behalf can give the impression that Jesus is our friend, but that God is more distant and somehow needs to be convinced.

The author of this study guide (Alden Thompson) had a particularly poignant experience in precisely that connection and found himself asking the question during his seminary days, “If the Father loves me, why do I need a mediator?” He embarked on an intense study program to understand the biblical meaning of “mediator,” finding the exciting answer in John 14-17. There he discovered two significant truths. First, that Jesus was and is God incarnate; second, that Jesus can be seen as representing the Father to us, rather than simply as representing us to the Father. The crucial passage there is John 16:25-27 where Jesus actually says that the day will come when he will *not* pray to the Father on our behalf, for the Father himself loves us. The full passage follows:

John 16: 25 “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father. 26 On that day you will ask in my name. I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; 27 for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

Each of us will find the different metaphors for Jesus meaningful in our own way. A fruitful discussion could focus on the question: Which of the following is most meaningful in your walk with God? Jesus as sacrificial lamb, Jesus as priest representing us to the Father, Jesus as mediator representing God to us, Jesus as king our eternal and all-powerful ruler?

Theme: The Pre-Advent Judgment

Leading Question: Why don't other Christians understand the heavenly sanctuary in the same way that Adventists do?

In this quarter's lessons on the Sanctuary, lessons 9 through 11 bring the more specific Adventist elements into the discussion of the biblical material. It is the conviction of the author of this study guide (Alden Thompson) that no one today would possibly come to the Adventist conclusions about Daniel 7 - 9 without a knowledge of and sympathy for Adventist history and of the Great Disappointment in 1844. A similar conviction is that no one would come to the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament without a knowledge of and sympathy for the life and teachings of Jesus. The article at the end of this lesson, "The Great Disappointment[s]," explores the comparison between those two historical events. A knowledge the birth of Christianity can inform our understanding of the birth of Adventism.

This study guide will be more direct in addressing issues than the official study guide. And we will note matters that have been simmering ever since that momentous day, October 27, 1979, when a devout Adventist scholar, Desmond Ford, declared with some forcefulness at a large Adventist Forum Meeting at Pacific Union College in Angwin, California, that it is "impossible to prove the investigative judgment from the Bible."

The crowd at PUC was immediately divided between those who declared Ford to be a messenger of the Lord and those who saw him as an emissary of Satan. He was given a study leave to prepare his case, but at the Glacier View Sanctuary Review Committee, August 10-15, 1980, his ministerial credentials were removed. Since then, while he has distanced himself from the Adventist understanding of the sanctuary, he continues to be a devout Sabbath keeper and has maintained close contacts with Adventists.

From the standpoint of the author of this study guide the real issue is rooted in that basic divide that has always been a tension point within Christianity and within the human family, namely, the tension between the more anthropocentric free will advocates emphasizing human responsibility and sanctification – and who easily slip into sinless perfectionism – and the more theocentric supporters of divine sovereignty emphasizing justification – who easily slip into predestinarian theology.

The "justification" Ford went public with the "attack" on the Adventist sanctuary doctrine because he believed that an overemphasis on "sanctification" in Adventist publications was being destructive for many believers. For all the tragic pain and turmoil that the debate has caused, the official study guide shows that an emphasis on justification has won its way through. Without hesitation, the official study guide declares that salvation is not the result of human works. On

several occasions it quotes Romans 8:1 with emphasis: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (NRSV).

Long-time Adventists will recognize that the “sanctification” side of the debate has been fed by these two quotations from Ellen White, the charismatic co-founder of the Adventist movement:

1. “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.” – *The Great Controversy* (1911), 425
2. “Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.” – *Christ’s Object Lessons* (1900), 69

Neither of these quotations appear to be directly addressed in the official study guide, but they still lurk close at hand in Adventist circles. Indeed, so-called “last generation theology” is currently experiencing an upsurge in popularity, fed by the *Christ’s Object Lessons* quote.

The author of this study guide offers here a short response to each quotation, based on his own experience:

1. The call to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator can be transformed from a threat into a promise in the light of John 16:25-27: (NRSV)

25 “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father. 26 On that day you will ask in my name. I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; 27 for the Father himself loves you....”

As long as we need a mediator, we have one. But someday all God’s children will be one with the Father. That is a promise, not a threat.

2. The call for the character of Christ to be “perfectly reproduced in His people” can be seen from a communal/corporate setting, rather than an individual and personal one. When Christ’s character is reflected in the body of Christ, with all the members contributing their particular strengths, then Christ will return. That interpretation is actually suggested in the COL quotation itself.

The shift in title for this lesson from “The Investigative Judgment” to “Pre-Advent Judgment” is due, in part, to the theological turmoil triggered by Ford.

Lesson #9 focuses on Daniel 7. Three particular points deserve attention:

- 1. The Court Sat in Judgment (Dan. 7:10).** In conjunction with Leviticus 16 (Day of

Atonement) and Revelation 14:6-7 (Judgment hour message of the first angel), Daniel 7 provides the judgment perspective in the Adventist understanding of the heavenly sanctuary. Revelation 14:6-7 declares that the hour of God's judgment has come. The first angel's message also summons the world to worship the creator God, the God whose creative work is celebrated in the Sabbath command.

In Daniel 7, the "little horn" is judged for tampering with God's law (7:25), a reference applied to the attempt by Roman Catholicism to tamper with the Sabbath command. This provides a link between Daniel 7 and with Revelation 14:6-7.

2. Judgment Was Given for the Holy Ones (7:22). The chapter clearly teaches that "judgment was given for the holy ones of the Most High" (7:22) and the kingdom "shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High" (7:27). This is reassuring and affirming, countering the deeply-rooted feeling that God's own are being called to account for their sins.

Question: Is it possible to see that the clear teaching of Daniel 7 is that judgment is given for the saints, without undermining the call to holy obedience?

3. The Beast and the Little Horn are Judged (7:26). The chapter clearly teaches that it is God's enemies who are judged (7:23-26). In the broader view, both the beast and the little horn can be seen as types of God's enemies at different times and in different places. And the remarkable prophecy in Isaiah 19:18-25 can show that no enemy of God is beyond God's reach, for there, Israel's two greatest enemies, Egypt and Assyria are promised a place in God's kingdom, along with his people Israel:

Isaiah 19:23-25: On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. 24 On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, 25 whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage."

In that connection one could see the wisdom in the suggestion from Ellen White:

There is need of a much closer study of the word of God; especially should Daniel and the Revelation have attention as never before in the history of our work. We may have less to say in some lines, in regard to the Roman power and the papacy; but we should call attention to what the prophets and apostles have written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit has so shaped matters, both in the giving of the prophecy and in the events portrayed, as to teach that the human agent is to be kept out of sight, hid in Christ, and that the Lord God of heaven and His law are to be exalted. – *Testimonies to Ministers* (1923), 112

Question: How can the church move from an either/or mode to a both/and approach?

“The Great Disappointment[s]”

by Alden Thompson

Cf. Adventist Review, 24 September 1992, 1016-18.

Spring is supposed to be such a happy time. But this spring was different. The year was A.D. 31, the place was Jerusalem, and life was turbulent. The crowds had eagerly thronged about Jesus as He rode triumphantly into Jerusalem. They cheered when He cleansed the Temple. This was their King, their Messiah, and they were ready to march on Rome.

But something went terribly wrong. Within a week their Hero hung helplessly from a Roman cross. His stunned followers stared in disbelief. It was finished. The darkness and thunder, the scorn of the milling throng, the free flowing tears, all threatened to engulf His most devoted friends as they stumbled toward Joseph’s tomb with the body of their Master, their Messiah. Two of His followers dejectedly commented to a stranger near Jerusalem:

“We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21 RSV). Disappointment Friday had indeed left its mark.

Many centuries later a strikingly similar experience occurred. It was autumn 1844. Thousands of Jesus’ followers had eagerly spread the word that their King was coming. The blessed hope had touched their hearts and quickened their steps. Jesus Himself had promised: “I will come again” (John 14:3). Tuesday, October 22, was the day and His faithful ones were ready.

But something went terribly wrong. The appointed day came and the minutes ticked mercilessly away. The last hour crept upon the believers like some sinister creature that would snatch away their most precious possession, their hope. Never had a clock sounded so ominous as it did when it chimed out the last moments of that fateful day. “Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. . . . We wept, and wept, till the day dawn.”*

Disappointment upon disappointment. Why? Must God always bury our most precious seeds in the dark, damp soil before they can burst forth and bear fruit? Why does the Lord kindle such a warm and comforting flame only to spill our oil and break our lamps?

Perhaps He simply wants us to have deep roots. Perhaps we cannot appreciate the light until darkness has truly engulfed us. Only God really knows the answer. Nevertheless, we can still learn from our disappointments. In fact, we must learn. But that is possible only when we remember them and seek understanding.

My own experience has been greatly strengthened by comparing the two great disappointments. The parallels are numerous and striking. Just as God comforted His people, guiding them through the first disappointment, so He comforted and guided them through the second. As the apostle Paul said, these things are “for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11, RSV).

Both disappointments reveal a fascinating interplay between “landmarks” and “present truth.” Every new experience that God brings His people is firmly anchored in the past. But for that very reason the temptation simply to remain in the past is always acute. When God’s people succumb to that temptation, landmarks become roadblocks rather than guideposts on the way to the kingdom. Tradition and custom bar the way of life. The joyous expectations that led up to

both disappointments were firmly based on Scripture, but a correct understanding was obscured by traditional views of Scripture. The ease with which tradition can blind God's people to "present truth" is certainly one of the most important lessons that we should learn from the two disappointments.

For Israel it happened this way. The glories of the Davidic kingdom were a haunting memory in the minds of God's people. In succession, Babylon, Greece, and Rome had run roughshod over Israel's dream of a Messianic kingdom. The hope of an anointed one, a Messiah, to restore the fortunes of the house of David became a burning passion in the minds of every Jew. With restless hatred they waited for the "day of vengeance of our God" (Isa. 61:2). Many were convinced that Jesus was the promised deliverer. He Himself shared their conviction, but had a radically different conception of His mission and work: they expected a warrior to deliver them from oppression and humiliation; Jesus promised them deliverance from sin through humiliation – His own humiliation.

But every time Jesus focused on the true nature of His mission, His people refused to listen. Hometown admirers, disciples, priests and rulers, all knew the kind of Messiah they wanted, and it had nothing to do with suffering and humiliation. Unless, of course, it was Roman suffering and humiliation; that they could accept.

Modern Christians are so accustomed to seeing Jesus as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 that they often forget that the application of this passage to the Messiah came as a brand-new idea to the Jews of Jesus' day. God intended it to be "present truth" for them, but the truth did not touch their hearts. They knew what they wanted, and nothing could deter them. Even the disciples, after three years with Jesus, still held tenaciously to the traditional view of the warrior Messiah. That explains the tears, the agony, and the darkness on Disappointment Friday. They thought it was finished.

Yet deep in their hearts they knew that God had been with them, so they did not give up. They were perplexed and confused, but they waited on the Lord. When they finally saw Him and began to understand, their enthusiasm knew no bounds. Furthermore, they began to see things in Scripture that they had never seen before.

Theirs had been a one-track mind focused on the warrior Messiah from the house of David. But under the guidance of the Spirit and in the presence of their risen Lord, they began to synthesize an understanding of Jesus' life and work that has become a Christian landmark. There was no single place in the Old Testament that described the totality of Jesus' work, but many elements fell together to make up the New Testament understanding. Jesus was not just the Davidic Messiah, but also the prophet promised by Moses (Deut. 18:15-18), the suffering servant (Isa. 53), and the Son of man (Dan. 7). Ultimately, as the book of Hebrews reveals, the believers saw Him as both sacrifice and priest, the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system.

But the thrust of the book of Hebrews is not clear in the Old Testament. Its message became "present truth" after the cross. That is why Hebrews is in the New Testament, not in the Old. It took time for God's people to put the pieces together. Significantly enough, only those who experienced the power of Jesus' presence were prepared to accept this "present truth." The unbiased observer, the skeptical Jew, saw it not. Only those who had been with Jesus, only those who had felt His power and had agonized for truth allowed this "present truth" to transform their lives. The others remained untouched. And so it is to this present day.

Disappointment Tuesday

Now let us draw the parallels with Disappointment Tuesday. Just as Jesus' message and mission developed in the midst of a boiling caldron of Messianic hopes, so the blessed hope of Jesus' return was preached amid the great religious awakening of the early nineteenth century. The preaching of the blessed hope was solidly based in Scripture, just as the Jewish Messianic hope of Jesus' day had been. But traditional interpretation led the believers astray: they thought the sanctuary was the earth; they even failed to understand Matthew 24:42: "You do not know on what day your Lord is coming." That explains the tears, the agony, and the darkness on Disappointment Tuesday. They thought their Lord had failed them.

Yet deep in their hearts they knew that God had been with them, so they did not despair. They were perplexed and confused, but they watched and waited. The Lord did answer their prayer, but He picked such a humble place and such an ordinary man as a means of rekindling the blessed hope: a cornfield and a New England farmer by the name of Hiram Edson. It would have been so much more impressive for the light to shine from a great cathedral or a significant university and through the lips of a learned and renowned scholar. The Lord has indeed used great scholars: Paul, Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley. But often His greatest deeds begin in humble places: an ark of bulrushes, a Bethlehem manger, a dusty road to Emmaus, an upper room, an abandoned cornfield. God does not despise the day of small beginnings.

As hope was rekindled among the early Adventist believers, they returned to Scripture with new vigor and enthusiasm, just as the apostles had. In their preaching before 1844, the believers had already made use of Leviticus 16, Daniel 8-9, and Revelation 14. Now they saw these passages in a fresh new light. Using the analogy based on the Old Testament Day of Atonement, they came to an understanding of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment, a significant landmark in the Adventist experience.

But this doctrine of the investigative judgment stems from a synthesis of biblical material, a synthesis that could take place only under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in conjunction with the experience of the Great Disappointment. Just as no individual context in the Old Testament clearly reveals the mission of Jesus, no individual biblical context clearly reveals the doctrine of the investigative judgment. This truth became clear only after the Disappointment. It took time for God's people to put the pieces together. And significantly enough, only those who had experienced the hand of God through the Disappointment were prepared to accept this "present truth." The unbiased observer, and even the skeptical fellow Christian, could not see it. Only those who were prepared to recognize the hand of God in that disappointment experience allowed this "present truth" to transform their lives. The others remained untouched. And so it is to this present day.

God's message contains a mysterious element that is open only to the one who wishes to hear and see. Isaiah described this phenomenon in his day (Isa. 6:9-10), and Jesus applied it to His (Matt. 13:14-15). I suspect that it applies with equal cogency to ours. The evidence of the hand of God is clear enough to the one who wishes to believe, but it is never coercive. We may choose to follow Him in the way of truth, or we may choose to turn away. The choice is always ours. God will not force the will.

One further aspect is of great importance in understanding the two great disappointments,

and that is the change in perspective with the passage of time. Subconsciously, most of us probably expect everyone to think as we think and to interpret events as we interpret them. But every age is different, and even at any given point in history, a great variety of human thought patterns can be found. God recognizes that even when we don't. But since He must meet us where we are, God has presented truth "in many and various ways" (Heb.1:1 RSV). Even Scripture is handled differently, depending on the thought patterns of the time. That is why some parts of the Old Testament seem very strange to us. The same is true of the New Testament, though our greater familiarity with it often enables us to overlook most of the problems.

In our own day, the intense interest in "reading in context" is a relatively recent emphasis that can cause difficulties when we turn to Scripture and when we note the use of Scripture in the early Advent movement. To cite an example, I, for one, was rather unhappy when I discovered that Matthew quotes Scripture out of context. Initially I was tempted to insist that God should have made Matthew think like I think. I have since discovered that Matthew was simply using a standard and acceptable Jewish method of his day (Midrash). I am now willing to let Matthew be Matthew and allow him the "privilege" of using first-century methods in the first century. That has always been God's plan, even though I had been reluctant to admit it.

God has employed a great variety of ways in presenting truth to man. So we must keep searching. We can never assume that our perception of truth is complete. Scripture is always open to new applications. Nevertheless, when we come to a fresh understanding, we must not deny the validity of the treasures that God has bequeathed to His people in ages past. Often God expects us to accept both one and the other, not either one or the other.

In the Adventist experience we have seen this happen with law and righteousness by faith. The fresh emphasis on righteousness by faith in 1888 did not negate the Advent position on law; it simply balanced the picture. It is not God's will that we choose between "landmarks" and "present truth," but we need them both. To reject one or the other would simply lead to another disappointment.

We have had enough disappointments. It's time to go home.

*Hiram Edson as cited by C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World* (1977), p. 48.

Theme: The Eschatological Day of Atonement

Leading Question: How can Jesus help us address the issues in Daniel 8?

In addressing the multiple issues connected with Daniel 8, let's start with the answers instead of the questions, and here Jesus should be our guide. First, it's clear that in Daniel 8, God's enemies are polluting his sanctuary. Even the two beasts, the ram and the goat are "religious" symbols, clean animals suitable for sacrifice – in contrast with the wild and vicious animals of Daniel 7, for example. God's enemies must be confronted because they are destroying people and undermining the principles of God's kingdom. But how do we confront God's enemies according to Jesus? Jesus himself taught us that we should love our enemies (Matt. 5:44) and on the cross he prayed to the Father to forgive his enemies (Luke 23:34). But Jesus wasn't just gentle. When faced with those who were destroying other people he could flash with anger. And there was something special about his anger, for when he cleansed the temple, the evil people fled and the children came running (Matt. 21:12-17). That is a blessed kind of anger that we could all covet. And it is interesting to note that nowhere in the Gospels is there any record that Jesus ever struck anyone. Yet Jesus told stories with violent endings and punishments. Clearly one shouldn't just shrug at evil. But how we approach it requires careful thinking and much praying. In the New Testament epistles there are numerous virtue lists. Anger doesn't appear on any of them and patience appears in them all. Yet holy anger still has its place.

When Jesus summarized his message, it was very simple. "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). In other words, in its simplest form, Jesus focused on the second great command, not the first. With reference to Daniel 8, that means we should deal gently with opposing views, seeking whenever possible to develop a both/and approach. We will take up the various issues in turn.

1. Multiple Applications. In a sense, this issue is the easiest one to address from a biblical point of view, but one of the hardest for devout believers to accept. Two examples are crucial here:

A. Day of the Lord/Dark Day. In the historicist view of things, each event has its own special niche in history. Each event happens just once en route to the final fulfillment. In the lead up to the Great Disappointment, three events took a central place in the thinking of those who expected Jesus to come: 1) The Lisbon earthquake of 1755; 2) the dark day of 1780; and 3) the falling of the stars in 1833. But even a superficial study of the Old Testament prophets reveals that the heavenly wonders were a standard feature of the "Day of the Lord" expectation. And "Day of the Lord" was any imminent disaster. These local disasters then became types of the final "Day of the Lord." Thus in Joel, for example, the dark day is a grasshopper plague in Joel's day; Peter picks up this same prophecy and

applies it to the events surrounding the crucifixion; those same events were picked up and applied in the 19th century, and in Revelation 6:12-16, they appear again with reference to the second coming. But writing from a strict historicist perspective, Uriah Smith still dates the earthquake, dark day, and falling stars to the traditional historicist dates and events. On balance, however, these celestial signs are all repeatable events leading up to the final climax of history.

B. Desecration of the Sanctuary. When Daniel heard that the sanctuary would be restored, his only thought was of the sanctuary desecrated by Babylon in 586 BC. As history moved on, Antiochus IV Epiphanes invaded the temple precincts and offered pig on an altar to Zeus erected over the altar of burnt offering. For three years, the sanctuary had been desolated. The event was so striking that 1 and 2 Maccabees, apocryphal books of the intertestamental period, used all the language of Daniel to apply to the desecration perpetrated by Antiochus. Even such a traditional scholar as C. Mervyn Maxwell, in his *God Cares*, Vol. 1, 1981 (p. 269), declares that it is “possible” that the disciples themselves may have accepted that application. Then in Matthew 24:15 Jesus spoke of Daniel’s “desolating sacrilege” as an event still future, most likely pointing to the destruction of Herod’s temple in AD 70. Summing up, one can apply the “desolation” language of Daniel to the destruction of 586 (Babylon), the pollution of 168 (Antiochus), the destruction of AD 70 (Rome) – and still look for the ultimate desolation of the heavenly sanctuary. When all earthly sanctuaries have been destroyed, what sanctuary remains? We have two choices: the heavenly sanctuary, or we could adopt the dispensationalist futurist approach and envision a rebuilt earthly sanctuary on the site of the Moslem mosque in Jerusalem. Given those options, the heavenly sanctuary should be a clear choice.

2. Applied Historicism: Broadening the Possibilities. The phrase “applied historicism” is one that seeks to retain the basic “historicist” application while allowing for other applications in light of the characteristics of the original “historicist” application. [See Alden Thompson, *Beyond Common Ground* (PPPA 2009), 194-220.] The book of Revelation already seems to have adopted such an approach by referring to Babylon as a “code” name for Rome. Rome is never mentioned in the book of Revelation. It would not have been safe. But the readers could make the application as needed.

If events and characters in Scripture can be seen as types, then the types can be applied as needed. Such an approach has another advantage of allowing “historical” applications without requiring the application be locked in concrete forever. This correlates well with the biblical presentation of conditional prophecy. Jonah, for example, preached to Ninevah – and Ninevah repented; by contrast, the Prophet Nahum preached a strong condemnation of Ninevah; but by contrast once again, Isaiah 19:24-25 promises that the Assyrians will be part of a restored kingdom with Israel and Egypt. Something like that approach allows Garry Wills, a devout American Catholic, to write a scathing rebuke of his own Catholic tradition under the title, *Papal Sin* (Doubleday, 2000). As one thoughtful Adventist commented, “We don’t have to give

away the book *The Great Controversy*; we can just give the people *Papal Sin!*”

3. Advantages of a Both/And Approach. A simple reading of Daniel 8 without an array of scholarly resources yields a straightforward result: God’s enemies have desecrated his sanctuary, and God promises that it will be restored. And when God gives Daniel the interpretation of the vision, Scripture clearly states that the vision applies to the “time of the end” (Dan. 8:17, 19). That is not in the past as preterist interpreters would argue, applying the vision only to the time of Antiochus Ephiphanes; that is not a one-time event in the future as the dispensationalist futurists would argue; it is not even a specific time period beginning in 1798 as strict historicists would argue. The “time of the end” will be a great surprise and we simply must be ready for it at any time. One of the clearest statements of that truth is from the pen of C. S. Lewis, and it would apply to our understanding of Daniel 8:

We must never speak to simple, excitable people about ‘the day’ without emphasizing again and again the utter impossibility of prediction. We must try to show them that the impossibility is an essential part of the doctrine. If you do not believe our Lord’s words, why do you believe in his return at all? And if you do believe them must you not put away from you, utterly and forever, any hope of dating that return? His teaching on the subject quite clearly consisted of three propositions. (1) That he will certainly return. (2) That we cannot possibly find out when. (3) And that therefore we must always be ready for him. – C. S. Lewis, “The World’s Last Night,” in *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays*, 107.

4. The Link between Daniel 8 and 9. In the official study guide, just one day’s study is assigned to the link between 8 and 9. A host of important issues lurk there. Establishing the link between the 2300 days of Daniel 8 and the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 is an important exercise and the traditional arguments are sound. What is so striking from the standpoint of our place in history is that Adventists are almost alone in seeing Jesus as the “anointed one” in Daniel 9 – all the more reason to explore a both/and approach to our prophetic heritage. After the article on Daniel 8, another one follows on Daniel 9.

Daniel 8: Let’s Not Lose Our Nerve

By Alden Thompson

Spectrum On-line (15 April 2002)

Revision of 2013.09

In recent decades the traditional Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8 has been under steady attack. I’ll be candid: I’m not eager to defend the “traditional” Adventist interpretation, at least not in the way that it typically has been defended, but I am even less eager to capitulate to critics who often ignore great chunks of biblical material in their eagerness to jettison the Adventist position. The objections generally fall under three major headings:

1. **Historicism.** Since the historicist approach to apocalyptic is virtually ignored in today’s religious world, Adventists are judged to be out of date if not just plain wrong in

continuing to adhere to it.

2. **Context.** In Daniel 8, Antiochus IV Epiphanes is said to be a much better candidate for the little horn than is papal Rome. Antiochus polluted the Jerusalem sanctuary for three years (168/67 to 165/64 BCE), among other things, offering pig to Zeus on an altar erected in the temple court.

3. **Assurance.** It is claimed that the Adventist doctrine of the “investigative judgment,” which owes its existence to the 1844 experience, robs believers of security in the Lord, and therefore, declare its detractors, should be abandoned.

There are counter observations with reference to these objections. As I see it, they contain important kernels of truth, but usually are developed in ways which could jeopardize key features of the Christian faith. Here are some comments relative to each.

1. Historicism. In its thorough-going mode, historicism is indeed dated. No one today would simply pick up a Bible and interpret the parable of the 10 virgins in Matthew 25 as a road-map of the 1844 experience, the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 as seven successive eras of history, or the bittersweet little book of Revelation 10 as reflecting the Disappointment and its aftermath. Our Adventist forebears saw the historicist pattern in places where their heirs and descendants do not.

But let us not be too quick to snicker. Indeed, we would do well to ponder Norman Porteous’s comment on the link between “the contemporary climate of thought” and methods of interpreting Scripture. In a preface justifying the exceptional reprinting of a 1928 book in 1955, he said: “Books of Biblical exposition tend to date very rapidly, and eventually to become almost unreadable; so close is the connection between such writing and the contemporary climate of thought” (preface to Adam Welch, *Jeremiah: His Time and Work*, Oxford, 1955, p vi). In short, the “wisdom” which tempts us to laugh at yesterday, could make us the laughingstocks of tomorrow. A modicum of humility is in order.

Furthermore, in a more moderate form, historicism is still the obvious interpretation for the book of Daniel. The successive kingdoms in Daniel 2 and 7 move toward climax and the establishment of divine rule; the sanctuary in Daniel 8 and 9 moves toward restoration; and history flows toward the resurrection in Daniel 10-12. These are all examples of “historicism” at work. The book of Revelation may be another matter, but historicism is alive and well in Daniel.

I will also argue that we don’t need to be ashamed of our historicist heritage. Scholars of the nineteenth century openly state that “historicism” was standard fare among premillennial Protestants at the time Adventism was born. Here are two quotes worth noting:

“In the immediate post-Napoleonic era, events took place that appeared to confirm the pre-millennial view for a number of British Christians. *As historicist premillennialists – and all premillennialists were such between 1815 and 1830* – they saw a number of signs that indicated the nearness of the Second Coming” (Ian Rennie, “Nineteenth-Century Roots,” in Carl Amerding and Ward Gasque, eds., *A Guide to Biblical Prophecy* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson (1977) 1989], 46 [emphasis supplied]).

“All Protestants expected some grand event about 1843, and no critic from the orthodox

side took any serious issue on basic principles with Miller's calculations" (Whitney R Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* [New York: Harper & Row, 1965], 321. Cited by Rolf Poehler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching* [Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000], 23).

2. Context. The language of Daniel 8 is sufficiently mysterious that any precise application to historical figures is fraught with hazards. But two points are clear: one is contextual: 8:17 and 8:19 state that the vision is for the time of the end. If the Jerusalem sanctuary is gone, what sanctuary is left? The heavenly. There is an alternative view, of course: With our futurist friends, the dispensationalists, we could project the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple on the site where a Moslem mosque now stands. I'll take the Adventist perspective any day.

The other clear point is the historical fact, confirmed by 1 and 2 Maccabees, that Jews in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes applied the language of Daniel to the abominations practiced by that evil king. Yet Jesus spoke of the abomination "spoken of by the prophet Daniel" (Matt. 24:15) as still being future in his day. In short, taking the full sweep of Scripture into account, we are looking at multiple applications: Babylon the desolator in 586, Antiochus in 168/67, Rome in 70 CE. And in our day? Anything that diminishes the effects of Christ's heavenly ministry is yet another desolating sacrilege.

3. Assurance. This may be the crux of the matter, for we live in an age that craves assurance. If our Adventist forebears over-emphasized human responsibility (and I think they did), the spirit of our age overemphasizes assurance. But my New Testament reminds me that it is possible to live with assurance and still be lost: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven," said Jesus (Matt. 7:21). The painful truth is that some of us are too easily frightened, others too readily assured. That's why Paul gave the believers in Corinth a choice: "Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?" Quite frankly, I don't think Adventists do a good job preaching Romans and Galatians. We can do better. But dumping the doctrine of judgment is not the right cure for our disease.

In sum, our Adventist heritage enables us to be consistent with the entire book of Daniel, for each major line of prophecy points to restoration: In Daniel 2 the mighty rock fills the whole earth; in Daniel 7, the saints receive the kingdom; in Daniel 8-9, the sanctuary is restored; and in Daniel 10-12, Michael stands up for his people. Let's not lose our nerve....

Daniel 9: Putting the Focus on Jesus

By Alden Thompson

Spectrum On Line (15 April 2002)

For those who worry about the loss of traditional “Adventist” interpretations, Daniel 9 is at least as scary as Daniel 8. The 1844 movement was born out of the conviction that the time for the cleansing or renewal of the sanctuary (October 22, 1844) is established by linking the 70-weeks prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27) with the 2300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14. While we have always stood alone in our interpretation of Daniel 8, we once had lots of good company in our interpretation of Daniel 9. Now most of those friends have vanished.

While the interpretation of Daniel 8 and 9 presents numerous puzzling challenges, Adventists have never been alone in linking the two chapters together. And the linkage is based on solid arguments from the text. In both chapters Gabriel is the angelic interpreter; 9:21 and 9:23 refer to an antecedent “vision,” logically the vision of chapter 8; the sanctuary is the focal point of both chapters; and finally, the time period in 8:14, the 2300 days, is the only feature left unexplained in chapter 8.

But if scholars from every school of interpretation agree in linking the two chapters together, they quickly part company when interpreting the 70-week prophecy itself. And that diversity is even reflected in modern translations of the Bible. In so-called “mainstream” Protestant communities, that is, in the more “liberal” churches which are less inclined to talk about the return of Jesus and the end of the world, Daniel 9:24-27 is interpreted as focusing on Antiochus Epiphanes and his desecration of the Jerusalem temple (168/67 BCE). On such a view, the text has no application whatsoever to Jesus Christ. That is the interpretation suggested (dictated?) by the New Revised Standard Version.

Dispensationalist evangelical communities take quite a different approach, typically interpreting the first 69 weeks as extending to Christ’s triumphal entry, but moving the 70th week to the end of time where it is marked off at the beginning by the secret coming of Christ (rapture) and at the end by Jesus’ public return. During that 70th week, Palestine is the focal point of the political and religious turmoil described in 9:24-27.

Meanwhile, supporters of the traditional Reformation view (our fellow-travelers in Daniel 9) are becoming ever more scarce. Sir Isaac Newton, in his commentary on Daniel, described the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-47 as “the foundation stone of the Christian religion.” Very few Christians would now agree with him on that point; at least very few would see any reference to the death of Christ in Daniel 9. In the standard dispensationalist interpretation, the classic KJV phrase, “in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease,” is no longer applied to the death of Christ, but to the cessation of sacrifice in the restored Jerusalem temple.

Even if one holds to the traditional Reformation interpretation of Daniel 9, the complications multiply. Adventists begin the 70 weeks in 458/57 BCE and end them in 34 CE. But those particular dates were first proposed (apparently) by Johann Funck (d. 1566) in the Reformation era. Today, commentators are far from unanimous in their choice of starting dates. There are at least three popular alternatives for the restoration “decree” of Daniel 9:25: 538 (Cyrus), 458/57 (Artaxerxes), and 445 (Artaxerxes). What may be even more troubling for traditionalists is the fact that it is virtually impossible to find a modern reference work which

dates the crucifixion at 31 CE. Most scholars, regardless of their theological assumptions, place it somewhere between 27 and 32 CE and leave it at that.

So now let's be "practical" in the light of all those "technical" challenges to the traditional interpretation. What is likely to happen in Adventist churches around the world? What is already happening? Here are some "facts of life":

1. Lack of Interest. The detailed study of the prophecy of Daniel 9 is virtually ignored by the vast majority of Adventists and interest in the traditional interpretation will continue to wane. Every week thousands join the church with only the barest knowledge of Daniel 9 if they know anything at all.

2. Lack of Competence. A few years ago the US Department of Education literacy survey showed that 47% of all adults in the United States "cannot read dense, continuous text." If half the adults in America can't handle Romans or Matthew, what will they do with Daniel 9? William Miller took his Bible and concordance and immersed himself in the study of Scripture for two years. For his day, he developed admirable competence in Bible study, even if we might part company with him in some of his methods. But even if there were a comparable level of interest today combined with good reading skills, the question still remains: who has the ability to master the Hebrew of Daniel 9 and to mount a convincing argument for a particular interpretation? The Hebrew of Daniel 9 is some of the most difficult in all of the Old Testament. Any way you look at it, very few Adventists could study it out for themselves. Should the rest of us simply adopt the conclusions of the few and have the church mandate that all Adventists "believe" them? That might work for Roman Catholics, but that's not the Adventist way.

So what is the Adventist way? First, it must be biblical, rooted in Scripture. Second, it must be simple, yet capable of sophisticated development. All that is there in our heritage, just waiting to be applied. And in that connection, I have two specific suggestions.

1. Focus on Jesus and His Ministry, Rather than on Dates. In the traditional Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8 and 9, the 2300-day prophecy directs our attention to the heavenly sanctuary and to Jesus' ministry on our behalf; the 70-weeks prophecy points to Jesus' sacrificial death. The reality of those events is now much more important than the dates themselves. While keeping our primary focus on Jesus' sacrifice and ministry, we can also recognize that the prophecies of the 2300 days and 70 weeks lie at the heart of our birth story. And when telling our story, we should use the Bible of our pioneers (KJV) and show how they came to their conclusions. We would use their texts, their dates, not moving a pin. It's the story of our birth and we don't need to be ashamed of it. But our primary focus must always be on what Jesus has done and continues to do for his people.

2. The Covenant. My second suggestion is just as important: a call for the rediscovery of the original covenant used when Adventists organized our first local conference (Michigan) in 1861. Apparently the covenant was also recommended for use in the formation of local churches. Normally I'm not keen on signed statements of belief. Adventists have always been opposed to any creed other than the Bible. But that first "covenant" is a statement I would gladly sign: "**We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ [Rev. 14:12].**"

Throughout the world, the bond which holds Adventists together consists of God's law

which gives us structure, and Jesus who gives us hope. At the practical level of day-to-day living, dates and time prophecies are virtually irrelevant. When I first became seriously interested in messianic prophecy, I was startled to discover a similar reality in the New Testament era. Here are my conclusions:

A. The messianic hope in Jesus' day apparently was not based on time prophecies.

Given *our* interest in time prophecies, we have too readily assumed that they are implied in the New Testament by such phrases as “the time is fulfilled” (Mark 1:15) and “when the fullness of the time had come” (Gal. 4:4). But there is virtually no evidence in the New Testament itself or in early literature outside the Bible, that the time prophecies (including the 70 weeks of Daniel 9) were a key factor in the messianic hope.

B. Jesus exploded popular views of the Messiah – and was rejected as a result. The New Testament clearly shows that Jesus' message flew in the face of popular messianic expectations. And Jesus' opponents had good Scriptural support for their hopes of a conquering hero: Balaam's “star” would crush every enemy in sight (Num. 24:17); Isaiah's “shoot” from the stump of Jesse would “strike the earth with the rod of his mouth” and “kill the wicked” with the “breath of his lips” (Isa. 11:4). And there's plenty more where those came from. When Jesus declared that he had come, not to kill his enemies, but to die, the people rejected him; even his own disciples deserted him. In short, Jesus' first coming was a “Great Disappointment.” Everyone had expected the messiah; the real question was not if, whether, or when. No, the real question was: What kind of Messiah? Only after the resurrection did the truth of the Suffering One break through to their hearts. I suspect a truth is lurking there which we need to hear.

In conclusion, one more word about birthdays, anniversaries, and other such events. The first coming of Christ as God incarnate and the birth of our own Advent movement are both crucial events for those of us who call ourselves Adventists. As I suggested above, however, the reality of the events is now much more important than the dates. And I have an example close to home that helps me keep such priorities straight. You see, because the records in Buckley Washington are not clear, my Dad was never sure whether he was born in 1914 or 1915. I'm quite certain of the *fact* of my Dad's birth. We celebrated his birthday regularly. But none of us ever knew for sure *when* it actually happened. I look at prophetic dates in somewhat the same way: the realities are clear even if the dates are not.

I now live in hope of another event, a future one, resting on the good promises of one who lived among us, died, rose from the dead and said he would come back to take us home. That's precious stuff. You can't take it away from me.

See also: Alden Thompson, “The Best Story in the Old Testament: The Messiah,” chapter 7 in *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?* (Paternoster, 1988; Zondervan, 1999; Pacesetters, 2000; Energion 2011).

Theme: Our Prophetic Heritage

Leading Question: What is the most effective way today to direct attention to the work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary?

Several issues present themselves in connection with the study of the three angels' message of Revelation 14. Those are addressed below

1. Historicism and the Original Context: A Both/And Approach. While those who are deeply rooted in strict historicism may find traditional arguments convincing, increasingly it is important to develop ways of recognizing the original contextual understanding of passages that have been interpreted from within a historicist perspective. Three examples present themselves, all of which can be viewed from a both/and perspective:

A. Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). The SDA Bible Commentary on the parable of the ten virgins doesn't even mention the "historicist" interpretation of the parable. But in the writings of Ellen White, one can find (without comment) both the historicist interpretation, where the parable provides a roadmap of the Disappointment experience, and the contextual interpretation where it focuses on the Second Coming. The historicist interpretation can be seen as a valid application of the parable, even if one recognizes that the contextual interpretation is the most valid from an exegetical perspective.

Historicist Interpretation: "The coming of Christ as our high priest to the most holy place, for the cleansing of the sanctuary, brought to view in Dan. 8:14; the coming of the Son of man to the Ancient of days, as presented in Dan. 7:13; and the coming of the Lord to His temple, foretold by Malachi, are descriptions of the same event; and this is also represented by the coming of the bridegroom to the marriage, described by Christ in the parable of the ten virgins of Matthew 25" (GC 426).

"The proclamation, 'Behold the Bridegroom cometh,' in the summer of 1844, led thousands to expect the immediate advent of the Lord. At the appointed time the Bridegroom came, not to the earth, as the people expected, but to the Ancient of days in heaven, to the marriage, the reception of the kingdom. "They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage, and the door was shut." They were not to be present in person at the marriage; for it takes place in heaven, while they are upon the earth. The followers of Christ are to 'wait for their Lord, when He will return *from* the wedding.' [Luke 12:36] But they are to understand His work, and to follow Him by faith as He goes in before God. It is in this sense that they are said to go in to the marriage." (GC 427)

Contextual Interpretation: “As Christ sat looking upon the party that waited for the bridegroom, He told His disciples the story of the ten virgins, by their experience illustrating the experience of the church that shall live just before His second coming.” (COL 406)

“The coming of the bridegroom was at midnight – the darkest hour. So the coming of the Christ will take place in the darkest period of this earth's history.” (COL 414)

B. Seven Churches in Revelation 2-3. The “preterist” interpretation, the most natural exegetical approach, would simply see the seven churches as seven literal churches in Asia Minor in cities that one can still visit today. The historicist application views them as seven churches typifying seven eras of history, with the last church being the Laodicean church. The idealist/multiple application approach sees each church as typifying a particular type of experience that one could find in any era of the life of the church. Again, this is a good example of a passage of Scripture that can allow for a variety of applications while preserving the original contextual understanding.

C. The Little Book of Revelation 10. Revelation 10 tells the story of the little book that was sweet in the mouth but bitter in the belly, understood within the historicist framework as illustrating the Disappointment experience. Contextually, it most likely represents John’s call experience. Again, a both/and approach is quite acceptable.

2. Type and Antitype. The Adventist understanding of the sanctuary and judgment doctrines illustrates the use of type and antitype in the interpretation of Scripture. The term “antitype” is confusing because modern usage more typically things of the word “anti” as suggesting opposition (e.g. anti-biotics, anti-aircraft fire); but in the word antitype, “anti” means in place of. This antitype refers to the *real* thing, while type refers to the image that points forward to the real thing. Thus Jesus was the once-for-all antitypical passover lamb, while the typical passover lamb would be the lamb that was sacrificed in the yearly festival in the Old Testament. As noted in Lesson #7 (Nov. 16), the idea of seeing the dying messiah as being represented by the passover lamb was apparently not recognized in the Old Testament and only came clear in the years following the resurrection.

In Adventist history, seeing Jesus as the once-for-all antitypical lamb suggested to our forebears the possibility of seeing a once-for-all antitypical day of atonement as the ultimate fulfillment of the annual Day of Atonement. The fact that such an antitypical application was developed in the light of the Disappointment without direct exegetical “proof” from Scripture correlates with the “late” parallel development of the idea that Jesus was the once-for-all Passover lamb.

For the full development of the Adventist understanding of the sanctuary/judgment doctrine four key biblical contexts come into play: Leviticus 16, the annual Day of Atonement; Daniel 7, the development of the judgment theme; Daniel 8-9, the desecration and restoration of the earthly sanctuary; Revelation 14:6-12, the three angels’ messages representing the final preaching of the

everlasting Gospel (Rev. 14:6) and the Judgment hour message (Rev.14:7). The book of Hebrews can be added to that cluster, but operates from within quite different framework to make the point that the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus is the clearest revelation of God.

3. The Role of Jesus in the Heavenly Sanctuary. Some devout Adventists almost panic when critics argue that the Adventist understanding of the sanctuary isn't "biblical" in the traditional exegetical understanding of the term. And if Adventists feel that this is the only unique feature of our faith, reaction to the critics can be very intense indeed.

But if we can see the Sanctuary/Judgment doctrine as simply another way of pointing to those things that are very important throughout Scripture, then the sanctuary/judgment theme can be very profitable. And we have stripped all the weapons from the hands of the critics. Paul summarized his two-pronged approach to Christian living at the end of the fourth chapter of 1 Corinthians (4:21): "What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?" Some of us need more of the stick, some of us a lot of the stick; but some gentle and conscientious people need almost no stick at all. Ellen White made this application to a brother who was inclined to use more of the stick:

You need to educate yourself, that you may have wisdom to deal with minds. You should with some have compassion, making a difference, while others you may save with fear, pulling them out of the fire [Jude 22-23]. Our heavenly Father frequently leaves us in uncertainty in regard to our efforts. – *Testimonies* 3:420 (1875)

When making the application to the sanctuary/judgment model, we can say that those who need more threats will need more of the judgment metaphor; but those who need love in the spirit of gentleness, can envision Jesus as our high priest applying his blood on our behalf within the sanctuary and in judgment. In short, we have a model that is useful for anyone, anywhere, and it is the work of the church as a body to help each of us find what we need most. That is why Paul's view of the church as an incarnational model of God's temple/sanctuary is so important (see Lesson #2 for October 12): "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple." – 1 Cor.3:16-17, NIV

Theme: The Cosmic Conflict Over God’s Character

Leading Question: How can a good and all-powerful God produce a world like this one?

“Theodicy” is a word that describes the issue posed in our leading question. Given the fact that the world is a tragic mess, how could God be both all good and all powerful? The story of the Great Controversy is an attempt to address that question. But it should be noted that the “theodicy” question interests only believers in the free-will tradition. For them, God must win the hearts of his children. By contrast, from the perspective of the predestinarian Calvinist tradition, God doesn’t have to win anyone. He is free to do as he pleases.

In seeking to interpret the Biblical view of the Great Controversy, devout conservatives tend to give all the words of Scripture equal weight without making allowance for historical context. It is a once-true-always-true perspective that easily bypasses or remodels passages that do not seem to place God in a positive light. *The Clear Word* attempts to do that for the entire Bible, sometimes putting considerable distance between its text and what the Bible really says. Taking account of the historical context of biblical passages, however, significantly enhances the interpretive power of the Great Controversy theme, allowing us to bring otherwise difficult passages into the service of a good God. For further development of some of the ideas noted below, see Alden Thompson, *Who’s Afraid of the Old Testament God?* (Energion, 2011), especially Chapter 2, “Behold it was very good, and then it all turned sour” and chapter 3, “Whatever happened to Satan in the Old Testament?”

1. God Meets People Where They Are. The Great Controversy story means that God grants his creatures the freedom to rebel. The results are shocking. After the rebellion in heaven (cf. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28), the story shifts to the garden where the serpent leads human beings astray. Remarkably, Genesis does not identify the serpent as Satan. In Genesis 3:1 he is simply “more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God has made.” The identification of the serpent as Satan doesn’t come clear until Revelation 12:7-12.

After the sin in the garden, the chapters that follow document the unhappy history of the human race. God has stepped back and allowed sin to take its course; every major event is simply more bad news, from the murder of Abel, to the Flood, to the tower of Babel, ending in God’s call to Abraham. Given the traditional good news perspective, one of the more shocking passages in the Bible is Joshua 24:2 which states that even Abraham’s own family “served other gods.”

The good news is that the often horrific narratives that follow reveal just how far God will go to reach people where they are. It is a story of radical divine accommodation in which he intervenes with great care, often adapting his methods to meet people who are far from him.

The Role of Satan in the Old Testament: Almost Invisible. Given the prominent role of Satan in the Great Controversy story, it can be a great shock to learn that for much of the Old Testament, Satan is not identified as a supernatural being opposed to God. He simply vanishes from sight. Believers can accept that he is still functioning; but for pastoral reasons, God does not tell his people about Satan lest they worship him as another deity. Instead, God assumes full responsibility for both good and evil. That's why it is so difficult for thoughtful Christians to read the Old Testament, for God is described in such violent terms. But in order to reach increasingly violent people, God will be violent in dealing with them as that is the only language they understand.

Only three passages in the Old Testament clearly identify Satan as God's opponent and all three appear in books that were either written or canonized at the end of the Old Testament: Job 1-2, Zech. 3, and 1 Chron. 21. The last one, telling the story of David's census, is particularly striking for in the earlier parallel in 2 Sam. 24, it is God who incites David to number the people while in 1 Chronicles, the same deed is attributed to Satan. All the other passages which Christians (rightly) use as applying to Satan were apparently not so understood by believers in the Old Testament. That would include Genesis 3, Leviticus 16, Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. Even Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 were not applied to Satan until well into the Christian era.

War in Heaven: The Issues Snap Clear at the Cross. The same passage that finally identifies the serpent as Satan is the one that comes closest to telling the full Great Controversy story: Revelation 12:7-12. From the traditional perspective of a war in heaven beginning before creation, what is so startling about this passage is that indicates that Satan was not fully cast out of heaven until the cross: "The accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb...." Apparently war began before creation, but only came to a climax at the cross. An Ellen White quotation from *Desire of Ages*, 57 places the whole history in perspective: "At the cross of Calvary, love and selfishness stood face to face. Here was their crowning manifestation."

In short, Satan is so evil, that he would even seek to destroy God. But God is so gracious that he would even be willing to die. And that's why the story of the Great Controversy is so crucial for understanding the work of Christ on our behalf. Because of Christ's work, the closing lines of the book *The Great Controversy* can describe the glorious vision of God's goodness:

There the redeemed shall know, even as also they are known. The loves and sympathies which God Himself has planted in the soul shall there find truest and sweetest exercise. The pure communion with holy beings, the harmonious social life with the blessed angels and with the faithful ones of all ages who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, the sacred ties that bind together "the whole family in heaven and earth" (Ephesians 3:15)--these help to constitute the happiness of the redeemed. {GC 677.1}

There, immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. There will be no cruel, deceiving foe to

tempt to forgetfulness of God. Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body. {GC 677.2}

All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's redeemed. Unfettered by mortality, they wing their tireless flight to worlds afar--worlds that thrilled with sorrow at the spectacle of human woe and rang with songs of gladness at the tidings of a ransomed soul. With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings. They share the treasures of knowledge and understanding gained through ages upon ages in contemplation of God's handiwork. With undimmed vision they gaze upon the glory of creation--suns and stars and systems, all in their appointed order circling the throne [677/678] of Deity. Upon all things, from the least to the greatest, the Creator's name is written, and in all are the riches of His power displayed. {GC 677.3}

And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise. {GC 678.1}

"And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Revelation 5:13. {GC 678.2}

The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love. {GC 678.3}

Theme: Exhortations from the Sanctuary

Leading Question: What would happen to our understanding of God and our responsibilities before him if the book of Hebrews were simply to disappear from our Bibles?

1. The Special Content of the Book of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews brings us a thorough mix of theology and practical applications. The official study guide has chosen to focus on Hebrews 10:19-25 for the summarizing lesson for this quarter's study of the sanctuary. If we didn't have the book of Hebrews, could we find the same teachings and exhortations elsewhere in Scripture?

It is worth pondering some of the unique features of various books in the Bible and some of the things that are surprisingly absent from certain parts of Scripture. Here is a partial list to ponder:

Old Testament

A. Day of Atonement. In the historical narratives of the Old Testament, the Day of Atonement is not mentioned even once. It only appears in Leviticus 16 and in Leviticus 23: 26-32.

B. Passover Lamb. There is no evidence in the Old Testament that the Passover lamb was seen as pointing forward to the coming Messiah.

C. Death Penalty for Adultery. The Old Testament doesn't give us even one example of the death penalty for adultery. Numbers 15:32-36 describes death by stoning – at God's command – for the man who picked up sticks on the Sabbath. But there is no comparable example for adultery.

D. Ecclesiastes. There is no reference to prayer or praise of God in the book of Ecclesiastes. The closest thing to an explanation is in Eccl. 5:2: "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few."

New Testament:

A. Gospel of John. There is no reference to "forgiveness" anywhere in the Gospel of John.

B. Philippians. In Philippians Paul doesn't quote the Old Testament even once.

C. James. The book of James never refers to the death and resurrection of Christ and contributes nothing to our understanding of the doctrine of the Atonement.

Question: Given such a remarkable pattern in Scripture, shouldn't we be cautious about imposing our favorite book on others?

A remarkable emphasis on diversity from Ellen White appears in this quotation from *Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, 431-32, a call for a variety of teachers in our schools. Note how she links that call for diversity among teachers with the diversity among the Bible writers:

In our schools the work of teaching the Scriptures to the youth is not to be left wholly with one teacher for a long series of years. The Bible teacher may be well able to present the truth, and yet it is not the best experience for the students that their study of the word of God should be directed by one man only, term after term and year after year. Different teachers should have a part in the work, even though they may not all have so full an understanding of the Scriptures. If several in our larger schools unite in the work of teaching the Scriptures, the students may thus have the benefit of the talents of several. {CT 432.1}

Why do we need a Matthew, a Mark, a Luke, a John, a Paul, and all the writers who have borne testimony in regard to the life and ministry of the Saviour? Why could not one of the disciples have written a complete record and thus have given us a connected account of Christ's earthly life? Why does one writer bring in points that another does not mention? Why, if these points are essential, did not all these writers mention them? It is because the minds of men differ. Not all comprehend things in exactly the same way. Certain Scripture truths appeal much more strongly to the minds of some than of others. {CT 432.2}

The same principle applies to speakers. One dwells at considerable length on points that others would pass by quickly or not mention at all. The whole truth is presented more clearly by several than by one. The Gospels differ, but the records of all blend in one harmonious whole. {CT 432.3}

So today the Lord does not impress all minds in the [432/433] same way. Often through unusual experiences, under special circumstances, He gives to some Bible students views of truth that others do not grasp. It is possible for the most learned teacher to fall far short of teaching all that should be taught. {CT 432.4}

It would greatly benefit our schools if regular meetings were held frequently in which all the teachers could unite in the study of the word of God. They should search the Scriptures as did the noble Bereans. They should subordinate all preconceived opinions, and taking the Bible as their lesson book, comparing scripture with scripture, they should learn what to teach their students, and how to train them for acceptable service. {CT 433.1}

2. Last Words from Hebrews 10: Entering the Most Holy. In Hebrews 10:19 we are told that in Jesus we can actually enter the Most Holy Place. What does this tell us about the change that

Jesus brings? In the Old Testament, only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place, and then only once a year. Any deviation from that plan meant death for the high priest.

3. Last Words from Hebrews 10: Drawing Near to God. In Hebrews 10:22 states that we can now draw near to God through Jesus. A similar message is told in 1 John 1:1-4 where the author emphasizes that human beings have actually seen and touched the incarnate God.

4. Last Words from Hebrews 10: Meeting Together. The author of Hebrews knew nothing about the modern discipline of the Sociology of Knowledge which tells us that much of what we consider reasonable is the consensus of the people around us. But Hebrews tells us a truth which sociologists would later identify. In short, if we want to keep our faith alive, we need to meet together. That's the word from Hebrews 10:23-25:

23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching (NIV)

In that connection, another author who never claimed to know anything about sociology of knowledge is C. S. Lewis. From his practical observations, he spoke the same “truth”: “The society of unbelievers makes Faith harder even when they are people whose opinions, on any other subject, are known to be worthless.” – C. S. Lewis, “Religion: Reality or Substitute?” *Christian Reflections* (Eerdmans, 1967), 42.

So let us worship together and keep alive the blessed hope.