

SABBATH SCHOOL LESSONS

for the Second Half 2007

Third Quarter
Reflecting Jesus

Fourth Quarter
The Life of the Apostle Paul

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Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, Every day we come in contact with others in our families, in our workplace, and at school. Their influence, whether positive or negative, will have a decided effect on us. There is a proverb that says: "Tell me with whom you associate, and I will tell you who you are." For this reason, our eyes should not be fixed on human beings but rather on our Saviour, who will erase the negative effects of sin and transform us completely until we reflect His holy image and character. The Word of God has this very purpose, inviting us to behold and look unto Him so we may be changed into His likeness.

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrew 12:2. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Sister Ellen G. White had this holy desire to reflect Christ in her life, and she expressed it in the following words: "I have a continual longing for Christ to be formed within, the hope of glory. I long to be beautified every day with the meekness and gentleness of Christ, growing in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ up to the full stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. I must as an individual, through the grace given me of Jesus Christ, keep my own soul in health by keeping it as a divine channel through which His grace, His love, His patience, His meekness, shall flow to the world. This is my duty and no less the duty of every church member who claims to be a son or a daughter of God."—*God's Amazing Grace*, p. 301.

To reflect Jesus in our life and ministry should be the goal not only of individual members but also of the church as a whole in preaching the gospel to the world.

"The Lord Jesus has made His church the depository of sacred truth. He has left with her the work of carrying out His purposes and His plans to save the souls for whom He has manifested such interest, such unmeasured love. Like the sun in relation to our world, He rises amid the moral darkness—the Sun of Righteousness. He said of Himself, 'I am the light of the world.' John 8:12. He said to His followers, 'Ye are the light of the world.' Matthew 5:14.... By reflecting the image of Jesus Christ, by the beauty and holiness of their characters, by their continual self-denial and their separation from all idols, large or small, they reveal that they have learned in the school of Christ."—*God's Amazing Grace*, p. 301.

To make this exalted goal possible, the Lord permits trials and affliction to come upon us.

"Christ desires nothing so much as to redeem His heritage from the dominion of Satan. But before we are delivered from Satan's power without, we must be delivered from his power within. The Lord permits trials in order that we may be cleansed from earthliness, from selfishness, from harsh, unchristlike traits of character. He suffers the deep waters of affliction to go over our souls in order that we may know Him and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, in order that we may have deep heart longings to be cleansed from defilement, and may come forth from the trial purer, holier, happier. Often we enter the furnace of trial with our souls darkened with selfishness; but if patient under the crucial test, we shall come forth reflecting the divine character. When His purpose in the affliction is accomplished, 'He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.' Psalm 37:6."—Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 174, 175.

It is our sincere desire that these spiritual lessons on "Reflecting Jesus" may be food in due season for all of God's people and be truly helpful in the daily work of sanctification and preparation for the soon coming of Jesus.

—The Brethren of the General Conference

The Special Sabbath School Offering is allotted to
ANGOLA
Remember to give your offering as an expression
of love and gratitude

I

Sabbath, July 7, 2007

Lightbearers in the World

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Matthew 5:14-16.

CHOOSE TO BE A LIGHT

1. With what words did the apostle Peter describe the people of God? 1 Peter 2:9, 11.

"As we read the word of God, how plain it appears that His people are to be peculiar and distinct from the unbelieving world around them. Our position is interesting and fearful; living in the last days, how important that we imitate the example of Christ, and walk even as He walked. 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.' The opinions and wisdom of men must not guide or govern us. They always lead away from the cross. The servants of Christ have neither their home nor their treasure here. Would that all of them could understand that it is only because the Lord reigns that we are even permitted to dwell in peace and safety among our enemies. It is not our privilege to claim special favors of the world. We must consent to be poor and despised among men, until the warfare is finished and the victory won. The members of Christ are called to come out and be separate from the friendship and spirit of the world; their strength and power consists in being chosen and accepted of God."—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 286.

2. What particular role do God's people have in this dark, sinful world? Matthew 5:13-16.

"Christ's followers have been redeemed for service. Our Lord teaches that the true object of life is ministry. Christ Himself was a worker, and to all His followers He gives the law of service—service to God and to their fellow men. Here Christ has presented to the world a higher conception of life than they had ever known. By living to minister for others, man is brought into connection with Christ. The law of service becomes the connecting link which binds us to God and to our fellow men." —Christ's Object Lessons, p. 326.

MINISTERS TO OTHERS

3. How did Jesus break down walls that separated people? John 2:1, 2; 4: 5-7.

"Jesus had begun to break down the partition wall between Jew and Gentile, and to preach salvation to the world. Though He was a Jew, He mingled freely with the Samaritans, setting at nought the Pharisaic customs of His nation. In face of their prejudices He accepted the hospitality of this despised people. He slept under their roofs, ate with them at their tables—partaking of the food prepared and served by their hands—taught in their streets, and treated them with the utmost kindness and courtesy.

"...Jesus, the originator of the temple and its service, drew the Gentiles to Him by the tie of human sympathy, while His divine grace brought to them the salvation which the Jews rejected." —The Desire of Ages, p. 193.

"In every age since Christ was among men, there have been some who chose to seclude themselves from others, manifesting a Pharisaical desire for preeminence. Shutting themselves away from the world, they have not lived to bless their fellow men.

"There is no example in the life of Christ for this self-righteous bigotry...." —Gospel Workers, p. 334.

"It is through the social relations that Christianity comes in contact with the world. Every man or woman who has received the divine illumination is to shed light on the dark pathway of those who are unacquainted with the better way. Social power, sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, must be improved in bringing souls to the Saviour. Christ is not to be hid away in the heart as a coveted treasure, sacred and sweet, to be enjoyed solely by the possessor. We are to have Christ in us as a well of water, springing up into everlasting life, refreshing all who come in contact with us." —The Ministry of Healing, p. 496.

4. What hopes can be realized when we enter into partnership with God? 1 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 5:9; Revelation 7:14, 15.

"To His servants Christ commits 'His goods'—something to be put to use for Him. He gives 'to every man his work.' Each has his place in the eternal plan of heaven. Each is to work in cooperation with Christ for the salvation of souls. Not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God."—Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 326, 327.

5. What can we expect from God when we fulfill His plan to bless and serve others? Philippians 4:4, 7.

"Christ came to this world to reveal the love of God. His followers are to continue the work which He began. Let us strive to help and strengthen one another. Seeking the good of others is the way in which true happiness can be found. Man does not work against his own interest by loving God and his fellow men. The more unselfish his spirit, the happier he is, because he is fulfilling God's purpose for him. The breath of God is breathed through him, filling him with gladness. To him life is a sacred trust, precious in his sight because given by God to be spent in ministering to others."—The Review and Herald, June 25, 1908.

ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD AND MAN

6. Ultimately, to whom will the Christian give account for his lack of ministry to others? Romans 1:14.
7. In what areas of life are we accountable to God? Romans 13:11; James 3:8, 9; Malachi 3:8.

"Our time belongs to God. Every moment is His, and we are under the most solemn obligation to improve it to His glory. Of no talent He has given will He require a more strict account than of our time....

"The power of speech is a talent that should be diligently cultivated. Of all the gifts we have received from God, none is capable of being a greater blessing than this. With the voice we convince and persuade, with it we offer prayer and praise to God, and with it we tell others of the Redeemer's love. How important, then, that it be so trained as to be most effective for good.

"God also entrusts men with means. He gives them power to get wealth....

"Our money has not been given us that we might honor and glorify ourselves. As faithful stewards we are to use it for the honor and glory of God. Some think that only a portion of their means is the Lord's. When they have set apart a portion for religious and charitable purposes, they regard the remainder as their own, to be used as they see fit. But in this

they mistake. All we possess is the Lord's, and we are accountable to Him for the use we make of it."—Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 342, 335, 351.

REACHING THE GOAL

8. Can our accountability be lost sight of amid our hectic everyday life? What can happen? Matthew 25:18; Mark 4:18, 19; 1 Timothy 4:1.

"Look into our churches. There are only a few real workers in them. The majority are irresponsible men and women. They feel no burden for souls. They manifest no hungering and thirsting for righteousness. They never lift when the work goes hard. These are the ones who have but one talent, and hide that one in a napkin, and bury it in the world; that is, they use all the influence they have in their temporal matters. In seeking the things of this life, they lose the future, eternal life, the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. What can be said and done to arouse this class of church members to feel their accountability to God? Must the mass of professed Christian commandment-keepers hear the fearful words, 'Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth?'" —The Review and Herald, March 14, 1878.

9. What high goals can be achieved if we focus on Jesus and do His will? 2 Corinthians 5:17; Acts 4:13; 6:7; Matthew 22:37-39.

"We should live in this world to win souls to the Saviour. If we injure others, we injure ourselves also. If we bless others, we bless ourselves; for the influence of every good deed is reflected back upon our own hearts." —The Review and Herald, October 10, 1882.

CONCLUSION

"But many Christians are waiting for some great work to be brought to them. Because they cannot find a place large enough to satisfy their ambition, they fail to perform faithfully the common duties of life. These seem to them uninteresting. Day by day they let slip opportunities for showing their faithfulness to God. While they are waiting for some great work, life passes away, its purposes unfulfilled, its work unaccomplished." —Christ's Object Lessons, p. 360.

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God's Goals for the Individual and for His Church

- "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 2 Timothy 2:15.
- "Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding." Proverbs 23:23.

CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF DIVISION

1. What deception has Satan used effectively to divide the church? Colossians 2:8.

"Speculative ideas should not be agitated; for there are peculiar minds that love to get some point that others do not accept, and argue and attract everything to that one point, urging that point, magnifying that point, when it is really a matter which is not of vital importance, and will be understood differently."—Counsels to Writers and Editors, p. 77.

"It is presumption to indulge in suppositions and theories regarding matters that the Lord has not revealed."—Gospel Workers, p. 314.

2. What serious consequences can result when divisions appear? James 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:11.

"Now at the present time God designs a new and fresh impetus shall be given to His work. Satan sees this, and he is determined it shall be hindered. He knows that if he can deceive the people who claim to believe present truth, [and make them believe that] the work the Lord designs to do for His people is a removing of the old landmarks, something which they should, with most determined zeal, resist, then he exults over the deception he has led them to believe. The work for this time has certainly been a surprising work of various hindrances, owing to the false setting of matters before the minds of many of our people. That which is food to the churches is regarded as dangerous, and should not be given them. And this slight difference of ideas is allowed to unsettle the faith, to cause apostasy, to break up unity, to sow discord, all because they do not know what they are striving about themselves."—Counsels to Writers and Editors, p. 31.

BIBLICAL SOLUTIONS TO SUCH PROBLEMS

3. How can many theological differences be resolved? John 5:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 21; Proverbs 24:6.

"Do not advocate theories or tests that Christ has never mentioned, and that have no foundation in the Bible. We have grand, solemn truths for the people. 'It is written' is the test that must be brought home to every soul.

"Let us go to the word of God for guidance. Let us seek for a 'Thus saith the Lord.' We have had enough of human methods. A mind trained only in worldly science will fail to understand the things of God; but the same mind, converted and sanctified, will see the divine power in the Word." –Gospel Workers, pp. 309, 310.

"The preaching and teaching of His word is one of the means that God has ordained for diffusing light; but we must bring every man's teaching to the test of Scripture. Whoever will prayerfully study the Bible, desiring to know the truth, that he may obey it, will receive divine enlightenment. He will understand the Scriptures." –The Desire of Ages, p. 459.

"There are a thousand temptations in disguise prepared for those who have the light of truth; and the only safety for any of us is in receiving no new doctrine, no new interpretation of the Scriptures, without first submitting it to brethren of experience. Lay it before them in a humble, teachable spirit, with earnest prayer; and if they see no light in it, yield to their judgment; for 'in the multitude of counselors there is safety.' " –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 293.

4. Why are some brethren not willing to be united in the truth and the body of Christ? Proverbs 16:18.

"Pride of heart is a fearful trait of character. 'Pride goeth before destruction.' This is true in the family, the church, and the nation." –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 377.

"Seek to be of one mind and one judgment with your brethren and to speak the same things. This talking about divisions because all do not have the same ideas as present themselves to your mind is not the work of God but of the enemy. Talk the simple truth wherein you can agree. Talk of unity; do not become narrow and conceited; let your mind broaden." –Mind, Character and Personality, vol. 1, pp. 40, 41.

GOD'S DESIRE FOR HIS CHURCH

5. What supreme goal does God desire for His church at the end of time? John 17:21.

"Union is strength, and the Lord desires that this truth should be ever revealed in all the members of the body of Christ. All are to be united in love, in meekness, in lowliness of mind. Organized into a society of believers for the purpose of combining and diffusing their influence, they are to work as Christ worked. They are ever to show courtesy and respect for one another. Every talent has its place and is to be kept under the control of the Holy Spirit."—Lift Him Up, p. 295.

6. Does the unity of the faith mean that we must lose our distinct individuality? Please explain. 1 Corinthians 12:12-20. What does the Lord teach us in the symbol of the vine and the branches? John 15:1-6.

"By the figure of the vine and the branches Christ illustrated not only the relation that should exist between Him and His followers but also the union between every believer and his fellow believer. The branches of the vine are related to each other; but they are not alike. Each has its own individuality, which cannot be merged into that of another, but all have a special connection with each other. The root that supplies nourishment to one branch supplies nourishment to every other branch. Each must depend alike on the vine for sustenance; all must be joined to the parent stalk. The life and growth and faithfulness of each depend alike on the parent vine. In obedience to the laws of nature, their common hold of the true vine makes them one; in their diversity there is unity.

"The lesson of the vine and its branches holds a deep meaning for the workers in the cause of God. Every worker is to draw his strength from the same Source, and while the individuality of each is to be maintained, unity and harmony is to be preserved. When this spirit of oneness pervades the work, our institutions throughout the world will be united in their interests, while the individuality of any one will not be merged into that of any other one."—Manuscript Releases, vol. 5, p. 362.

UNITY WITH CHRIST AND ITS RESULTS

7. How is unity achieved among God's people? Philippians 2:2-5; Hebrews 12: 2; 13:1.

"All dissension, all differences and faultfinding, should be put away, with all evil speaking and bitterness; kindness, love, and compassion for one another should be cherished, that the prayer of Christ that His disciples might be one as He is one with the Father may be answered."—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 279.

8. What will result when church members draw close to Christ? Galatians 5:22, 23; 1 John 4:20, 21.

"The Bible sets before us a model church. They are to be in unity with each other, and with God. When believers are united to Christ, the living vine, the result is that they are one with Christ, full of sympathy and tenderness and love." –Selected Messages, vol. 3, p. 18.

"The members of the church must come into unity; and in order to do this, they must have less of self, and more of Jesus. They must learn of Christ. They must be meek and lowly of heart. Their selfish pride must die. Then their mountains of difficulty will be reduced to mole-hills." –The Review and Herald, January 6, 1891.

CONCLUSION

"Our only safety is in constant watchfulness and prayer. The nearer we live to Jesus, the more will we partake of His pure and holy character; and the more offensive sin appears to us, the more exalted and desirable will appear the purity and brightness of Christ." –Counsels on Health, p. 623.

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Sabbath, July 21, 2007

The Heavenly Blueprint for Reconciliation

"Nearly two thousand years ago, a voice of mysterious import was heard in heaven, from the throne of God, 'Lo, I come. Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me.... Lo, I come (in the volume of the Book it is written of Me,) to do Thy will, O God.' Hebrews 10:5-7. In these words is announced the fulfillment of the purpose that had been hidden from eternal ages. Christ was about to visit our world, and to become incarnate." –The Desire of Ages, p. 23.

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR MAN

1. What was God's original purpose for man? Genesis 1:27, 28; Isaiah 45:18.

"When Adam came from the Creator's hand, he bore, in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker. 'God created man in His own image' (Genesis 1:27), and it was His purpose that the longer man lived the more fully he should reveal this image—the more fully reflect the glory of the Creator. All his faculties were capable of development; their capacity and vigor were continually to increase." –Education, p. 15.

"God created the earth to be the abode of holy, happy beings." –The Adventist Home, p. 540.

"The tree of life was designed to perpetuate immortality." –The Youth's Instructor, August 1, 1852.

2. Sadly, how did the deceitful enemy entice man to give away the source of his happiness? Genesis 3:6; Romans 5:12.

"He tempts men to distrust God's love and to doubt His wisdom. He is constantly seeking to excite a spirit of irreverent curiosity, a restless, inquisitive desire to penetrate the secrets of divine wisdom and power. In their efforts to search out what God has been pleased to withhold, multitudes overlook the truths which He has revealed, and which are essential to salvation. Satan tempts men to disobedience by leading them to believe they are entering a wonderful field of knowledge. But this is all a deception." –Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 54, 55.

GOD'S PLAN FOR MAN'S RECONCILIATION

3. After man fell into sin, what plan was immediately put into action to reconcile him to God? Genesis 3:15. Actually, when was this plan conceived? Revelation 13:8; 1 Peter 1:20.

"The covenant of grace was first made with man in Eden, when after the fall, there was given a divine promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. To all men this covenant offered pardon, and the assisting grace of God for future obedience through faith in Christ. It also promised them eternal life on condition of fidelity to God's law. Thus the patriarchs received the hope of salvation." –God's Amazing Grace, p. 131.

"When the curse was pronounced upon the earth and upon man, in connection with the curse was a promise that through Christ there was hope and pardon for the transgression of God's law. Although gloom and darkness hung, like the pall of death, over the future, yet in the promise of the Redeemer, the star of hope lighted up the dark future. The gospel was first preached to Adam by Christ." –The Review and Herald, April 29, 1875.

"The purpose and plan of grace existed from all eternity. Before the foundation of the world it was according to the determinate counsel of God that man should be created, endowed with power to do the divine will. But the defection of man, with all its consequences, was not hidden from the Omnipotent, and yet it did not deter Him from carrying out His eternal purpose; for the Lord would establish His throne in righteousness. God knows the end from the beginning.... Therefore redemption was not an afterthought,... but an eternal purpose to be wrought out for the blessing not only of this atom of a world but for the good of all the worlds which God has created." –God's Amazing Grace, p. 129.

4. What was absolutely necessary for Adam and Eve to be reconciled with their Maker? Proverbs 28:13; Acts 3:19; 16:31.

"Adam and Eve felt sincere sorrow and repentance for their guilt. They believed the precious promise of God, and were saved from utter ruin." –The Review and Herald, April 29, 1875.

"Faithfully did he [Adam] repent of his sin and trust in the merits of the promised Saviour, and he died in the hope of a resurrection." –The Adventist Home, p. 541.

SOME PEOPLE ANSWER GOD'S CALL

5. How did Cain and Abel each respond to the gracious gift of redemption? Genesis 4:3-5.

"These brothers were tested, as Adam had been tested before them, to prove whether they would believe and obey the word of God. They were acquainted with the provision made for the salvation of man, and understood the system of offerings which God had ordained. They knew that in these offerings they were to express faith in the Saviour whom the offerings typified, and at the same time to acknowledge their total dependence on Him for pardon; and they knew that by thus conforming to the divine plan for their redemption, they were giving proof of their obedience to the will of God. Without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin; and they were to show their faith in the blood of Christ as the promised atonement by offering the firstlings of the flock in sacrifice. Besides this, the first fruits of the earth were to be presented before the Lord as a thank offering." –Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 71.

6. Who else trusted in and obeyed the prophesied Redeemer to come? Genesis 6:8, 9. What act testified to his strong faith? Genesis 8:20.

"Noah did not forget God who had so graciously preserved them, but immediately [on coming out of the ark] erected an altar and ... offered burnt offerings on the altar, showing his faith in Christ the great sacrifice, and manifesting his gratitude to God for their wonderful preservation. The offering of Noah came up before God like a sweet savor. He accepted the offering, and blessed Noah and his family." –God's Amazing Grace, p. 132.

7. What hope was offered when the Redeemer came and shed His blood for the human race? 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21.

"Not only man but the earth had by sin come under the power of the wicked one, and was to be restored by the plan of redemption. At his creation Adam was placed in dominion over the earth. But by yielding to temptation, he was brought under the power of Satan. 'Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.' 2 Peter 2:19. When man became Satan's captive, the dominion which he held, passed to his conqueror. Thus Satan became 'the god of this world.' 2 Corinthians 4:4. He had usurped that dominion over the earth which had been originally given to Adam. But Christ, by His sacrifice paying the penalty of sin, would not only redeem man, but recover the dominion which he had forfeited. All that was lost by the first Adam will be restored by the second." –Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 67.

8. How is this offer of salvation accepted by God's children? Ephesians 2:8; John 6:37; Revelation 22:17.

"If you see your sinfulness, do not wait to make yourself better. How many there are who think they are not good enough to come to Christ. Do you expect to become better through your own efforts?... There is help for us only in God. We must not wait for stronger persuasions, for better opportunities, or for holier tempers. We can do nothing for ourselves. We must come to Christ just as we are.

"Yield yourself to Christ without delay; He alone, by the power of His grace, can redeem you from ruin." –The Faith I Live By, p. 133.

CONCLUSION

"Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. 'With His stripes we are healed.'" –The Desire of Ages, p. 25.

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The Friend of God Accepts the Heavenly Blueprint

"Jesus is our atoning sacrifice. We can make no atonement for ourselves; but by faith we can accept the atonement that has been made." –The Bible Echo, March 15, 1893.

GOD'S CALL TO A MAN OF FAITH

1. After the dispersion from Babel, whom did God call to pre-serve the true faith? Genesis 12:1.

"But the true faith was not to become extinct. God has ever preserved a remnant to serve Him....

"In order that God might qualify him for his great work as the keeper of the sacred oracles, Abraham must be separated from the associations of his early life. The influence of kindred and friends would interfere with the training which the Lord purposed to give His servant. Now that Abraham was, in a special sense, connected with heaven, he must dwell among strangers. His character must be peculiar, differing from all the world. He could not even explain his course of action so as to be understood by his friends. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and his motives and actions were not comprehended by his idolatrous kindred." –Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 125, 126.

2. What wonderful promise did God give Abraham? Genesis 12: 2, 3.

"And to this was added the assurance, precious above every other to the inheritor of faith, that of his line the Redeemer of the world should come: 'In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.' Yet, as the first condition of fulfillment, there was to be a test of faith; a sacrifice was demanded." –Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 125.

THE SEVEREST TEST

3. Besides the test of leaving his kindred, referred to in the note to question 2, what other test of faith did God give Abraham years later? Genesis 22:2.

"Isaac was the light of his home, the solace of his old age, above all else the inheritor of the promised blessing. The loss of such a son by accident or disease would have been heart rending to the fond father; it would have bowed down his whitened head with grief; but he was commanded to shed the blood of that son with his own hand. It seemed to him a fearful impossibility.

"That command must be obeyed, and he dared not delay." –Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 148.

4. At what moment did God intervene to spare Isaac's life? Genesis 22:10-12.

"Abraham's great act of faith stands like a pillar of light, illuminating the pathway of God's servants in all succeeding ages.... Abraham was human; his passions and attachments were like ours; but he did not stop to question how the promise could be fulfilled if Isaac should be slain. He did not stay to reason with his aching heart. He knew that God is just and righteous in all His requirements, and he obeyed the command to the very letter." –Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 153.

TRUE FAITH

5. How did the apostle James describe the faith of Abraham? James 2:17, 21-23.

"There are many who fail to understand the relation of faith and works. They say, 'Only believe in Christ, and you are safe. You have nothing to do with keeping the law.' But genuine faith will be manifest in obedience." –Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 153, 154.

"Faith and works go hand in hand; they act harmoniously in the work of overcoming. Works without faith are dead, and faith without works is dead. Works will never save us; it is the merit of Christ that will avail in our behalf. Through faith in Him, Christ will make all our imperfect efforts acceptable to God. The faith we are required to have is not a do-nothing faith; saving faith is that which works by love and purifies the soul." –Faith and Works, pp. 48, 49.

6. After the deliverance of Isaac from death, why was a ram sacrificed? Genesis 22:13.

"The ram offered in the place of Isaac represented the Son of God, who was to be sacrificed in our stead....

"It had been difficult even for the angels to grasp the mystery of redemption—to comprehend that the Commander of heaven, the Son of God, must die for guilty man. When the command was given to Abraham to

offer up his son, the interest of all heavenly beings was enlisted. With intense earnestness they watched each step in the fulfillment of this command. When to Isaac's question, 'Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' Abraham made answer, 'God will provide Himself a lamb;' and when the father's hand was stayed as he was about to slay his son, and the ram which God had provided was offered in the place of Isaac—then light was shed upon the mystery of redemption, and even the angels understood more clearly the wonderful provision that God had made for man's salvation. 1 Peter 1:12."—Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 154, 155.

LOVE AND SACRIFICE

7. Why did God not intervene in the sacrifice of His own dear Son? Romans 8:32; 1 John 4:11, 16.

"God gave His Son to a death of agony and shame. The angels who witnessed the humiliation and soul anguish of the Son of God were not permitted to interpose, as in the case of Isaac. There was no voice to cry, 'It is enough.'...

"God desired to prove the loyalty of His servant before all heaven, to demonstrate that nothing less than perfect obedience can be accepted, and to open more fully before them the plan of salvation."—Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 154, 155.

LOVING OBEDIENCE

8. How can we demonstrate to others that we love Jesus and appreciate His supreme sacrifice? John 14:15; 1 John 5:3.

"While we are to be in harmony with God's law, we are not saved by the works of the law, yet we cannot be saved without obedience. The law is the standard by which character is measured. But we cannot possibly keep the commandments of God without the regenerating grace of Christ. Jesus alone can cleanse us from all sin. He does not save us by law, neither will He save us in disobedience to law."—Faith and Works, pp. 95, 96.

CONCLUSION

"Christ died a shameful death that He might bring us unto God. When the soul is persuaded that Christ is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto Him, when it resigns itself entirely to Him as an all-sufficient Saviour, when it clings to the promises made and believes fully in Jesus, it is pronounced by God [as] one with Christ. A soul that depends on Christ with the simplicity that a child depends upon its mother is justified, for it becomes one with the Substitute, who was Justification and Redemption. Herein is love, that the heart and will are knit together in Christ Jesus."—Daughters of God, p. 185.

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Obstacles on the Way to Heaven

- "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Hebrews 3:12.
- "And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the Lord thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them." Deuteronomy 28:13.

FREED TO SERVE GOD

1. How and through whom was the plan of God carried out to deliver ancient Israel from Egyptian bondage? Exodus 7:1-3; 12:41; 13:21; 3:21, 22.

"The divine command given to Moses found him self-distrustful, slow of speech, and timid. He was overwhelmed with a sense of his incapacity to be a mouthpiece for God to Israel. But having once accepted the work, he entered upon it with his whole heart, putting all his trust in the Lord. The greatness of his mission called into exercise the best powers of his mind. God blessed his ready obedience, and he became eloquent, hopeful, self-possessed, and well fitted for the greatest work ever given to man. This is an example of what God does to strengthen the character of those who trust Him fully and give themselves unreservedly to His commands."—Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 255.

2. Why was it necessary for the Jews to be freed from slavery? Exodus 8:1; Psalm 105:43-45; Deuteronomy 5:12-15.

"In their bondage the Israelites had to some extent lost the knowledge of God's law, and they had departed from its precepts. The Sabbath had been generally disregarded, and the exactions of their taskmasters made its observance apparently impossible. But Moses had shown his people that obedience to God was the first condition of deliverance; and the efforts made to restore the observance of the Sabbath had come to the notice of their oppressors....

"During all the years of servitude in Egypt there had been among the Israelites some who adhered to the worship of Jehovah. These were sorely troubled as they saw their children daily witnessing the abominations of

the heathen, and even bowing down to their false gods. In their distress they cried unto the Lord for deliverance from the Egyptian yoke, that they might be freed from the corrupting influence of idolatry....

"From a race of slaves the Israelites had been exalted above all peoples to be the peculiar treasure of the King of kings. God had separated them from the world, that He might commit to them a sacred trust. He had made them the depositaries of His law, and He purposed, through them, to preserve among men the knowledge of Himself. Thus the light of heaven was to shine out to a world enshrouded in darkness, and a voice was to be heard appealing to all peoples to turn from their idolatry to serve the living God."—Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 258, 259, 314.

GOD'S PURPOSE AND GUIDANCE

3. After their captivity was over, what visible structure was provided to demonstrate the great plan of salvation and help the Israelites focus on the Redeemer to come? Exodus 25:8; Psalm 77:13.

"The typical service was the connecting link between God and Israel. The sacrificial offerings were designed to prefigure the sacrifice of Christ, and thus to preserve in the hearts of the people an unwavering faith in the Redeemer to come. Hence, in order that the Lord might accept their sacrifices, and continue His presence with them, and, on the other hand, that the people might have a correct knowledge of the plan of salvation, and a right understanding of their duty, it was of the utmost importance that holiness of heart and purity of life, reverence for God, and strict obedience to His requirements, should be maintained by all connected with the sanctuary."—Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 2, p. 1010.

THE PEOPLE'S INGRATITUDE AND DISTRUST

4. Unfortunately, what prevented the Israelites from entering into the promised land of Canaan right away? Hebrews 3:19; Exodus 15:23, 24; 32:8.

"God did not design that His people, Israel, should wander forty years in the wilderness. He promised to lead them directly to the land of Canaan, and establish them there a holy, healthy, happy people. But those to whom it was first preached, went not in 'because of unbelief.' Their hearts were filled with murmuring, rebellion, and hatred, and He could not fulfill His covenant with them."—Evangelism, p. 696.

"With their distrust of God, with their pride and unbelief, they had not been prepared to enter Canaan."—Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 464.

5. Of those who left Egypt, how many Israelites remained faithful and were permitted to enter Canaan? Why did the others perish in the wilderness? Numbers 14:29-32; Romans 9:27; Numbers 14:22, 23.

"I have tried in the fear of God to set before His people their danger and their sins, and have endeavored, to the best of my feeble powers, to arouse them. I have stated startling things, which, if they had believed, would have caused them distress and terror, and led them to zeal in repenting of their sins and iniquities. I have stated before them that, from what was shown me, but a small number of those now professing to believe the truth would eventually be saved—not because they could not be saved, but because they would not be saved in God's own appointed way."—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 445.

THE JEWS' FAILURE

6. Had the Jews who lived before the first advent of Christ learned from the failures and sins of their forefathers who perished in the desert? Matthew 15:3, 8, 9; Romans 9:31-33; 10:3.

"As the Jews had departed from God, faith had grown dim, and hope had well-nigh ceased to illuminate the future. The words of the prophets were uncomprehended....

"Hatred of the Romans, and national and spiritual pride, led the Jews still to adhere rigorously to their forms of worship. The priests tried to maintain a reputation for sanctity by scrupulous attention to the ceremonies of religion. The people, in their darkness and oppression, and the rulers, thirsting for power, longed for the coming of One who would vanquish their enemies and restore the kingdom to Israel. They had studied the prophecies, but without spiritual insight. Thus they overlooked those scriptures that point to the humiliation of Christ's first advent, and misapplied those that speak of the glory of His second coming. Pride obscured their vision. They interpreted prophecy in accordance with their selfish desires."—The Desire of Ages, pp. 32, 30.

7. Whom did the Jews lose sight of? John 1:29.

"As they departed from God, the Jews in a great degree lost sight of the teaching of the ritual service. That service had been instituted by Christ Himself. In every part it was a symbol of Him; and it had been full of vitality and spiritual beauty. But the Jews lost the spiritual life from their

ceremonies, and clung to the dead forms. They trusted to the sacrifices and ordinances themselves, instead of resting upon Him to whom they pointed.” –The Desire of Ages, p. 29.

8. When the Messiah came to save His people, how was He received? John 1:11; Luke 23:20, 21, 33.

“The spotless Son of God hung upon the cross, His flesh lacerated with stripes; those hands so often reached out in blessing, nailed to the wooden bars; those feet so tireless on ministries of love, spiked to the tree; that royal head pierced by the crown of thorns; those quivering lips shaped to the cry of woe. And all that He endured—the blood drops that flowed from His head, His hands, His feet, the agony that racked His frame, and the unutterable anguish that filled His soul at the hiding of His Father’s face—speaks to each child of humanity, declaring, It is for thee that the Son of God consents to bear this burden of guilt; for thee He spoils the domain of death, and opens the gates of Paradise.” –The Desire of Ages, p. 755.

PREPARATION FOR CHRIST’S RETURN

9. Why have God’s people today not yet entered the heavenly Canaan? Matthew 24:45-51; 25:1-5.

“I know that if the people of God had preserved a living connection with Him, if they had obeyed His Word, they would today be in the heavenly Canaan....

“For forty years did unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion shut out ancient Israel from the land of Canaan. The same sins have delayed the entrance of modern Israel into the heavenly Canaan. In neither case were the promises of God at fault. It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration, and strife among the Lord’s professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years.

“We may have to remain here in this world because of insubordination many more years, as did the children of Israel; but for Christ’s sake, His people should not add sin to sin by charging God with the consequence of their own wrong course of action.” –Evangelism, pp. 694, 696.

“You are following the same path as did ancient Israel. There is the same falling away from your holy calling as God’s peculiar people.” –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, pp. 75, 76.

10. Before Christ comes back to this earth the second time, what will the faithful be doing in preparation for this stupendous event? Proverbs 23:26; 1 Corinthians 1:8, 9; 1 Thesalonians 3:13; 2 Peter 3:14.

CONCLUSION

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Romans 15:4.

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Sabbath, August 11, 2007

Spiritual Israel's High Destiny

"... If you are truly consecrated, God will, through your instrumentality, bring into the truth others whom He can use as channels to convey light to many that are groping in darkness."—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 7, p. 63.

ANCIENT ISRAEL AND ITS FAILURE

1. What prophecies foretold the fact that God would have to reject ancient Israel? Matthew 21:37-43.

"With a father's heart, God bore with His people. He pleaded with them by mercies given and mercies withdrawn. Patiently He set their sins before them, and in forbearance waited for their acknowledgment. Prophets and messengers were sent to urge God's claim upon the husbandmen; but instead of being welcomed, they were treated as enemies. The husbandmen persecuted and killed them. God sent still other messengers, but they received the same treatment as the first, only that the husbandmen showed still more determined hatred.

"As a last resource, God sent His Son, saying, 'They will reverence My Son.' But their resistance had made them vindictive, and they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill Him, and let us seize on His inheritance.' We shall then be left to enjoy the vineyard, and to do as we please with the fruit....

"The Jewish people cherished the idea that they were the favorites of heaven, and that they were always to be exalted as the church of God. They were the children of Abraham, they declared, and so firm did the foundation of their prosperity seem to them that they defied earth and heaven to dispossess them of their rights. But by lives of unfaithfulness they were preparing for the condemnation of heaven and for separation from God."—Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 293, 294.

2. Why were many of God's chosen people broken off from the olive tree? Titus 1:16; 1 Peter 2:6-8; Romans 11:20, first part.

"The warning was not heeded by the Jewish people. They forgot God, and lost sight of their high privilege as His representatives. The blessings they had received brought no blessing to the world. All their advantages were appropriated for their own glorification. They robbed God of the service He required of them, and they robbed their fellow men of religious guidance and a holy example. Like the inhabitants of the antediluvian world, they followed out every imagination of their evil hearts. Thus they made sacred things appear a farce, saying, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these' (Jeremiah 7:4), while at the same time they were misrepresenting God's character, dishonoring His name, and polluting His sanctuary....

"The Jewish rulers did not love God; therefore they cut themselves away from Him, and rejected all His overtures for a just settlement." –Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 291-293.

"No one need look upon the sin against the Holy Ghost as something mysterious and indefinable. The sin against the Holy Ghost is the sin of persistent refusal to respond to the invitation to repent." –The Review and Herald, June 29, 1897.

A SOLEMN LESSON FOR US

3. Is any church exempt from being rejected? Romans 11:17-21; Revelation 2:5.

"Because they failed of fulfilling God's purpose, the children of Israel were set aside, and God's call was extended to other peoples. If these too prove unfaithful, will they not in like manner be rejected?" –Christ's Object Lessons, p. 304.

"The church will be weighed in the balances of the sanctuary. If her moral character and spiritual state do not correspond with the benefits and blessings God has conferred upon her, she will be found wanting." –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 83.

"Jerusalem is a representation of what the church will be if it refuses to walk in the light that God has given." –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 67.

ANOTHER PEOPLE AND GOD'S EXPECTATIONS

4. Because of ancient Israel's departure from God, which people were selected to carry on the message of salvation? Matthew 21:43; Romans 2:28, 29; 11:11-13.

"As a people the Jews had failed of fulfilling God's purpose, and the vineyard was taken from them. The privileges they had abused, the work they had slighted, was entrusted to others." –Christ's Object Lessons, p. 296.

"That which God purposed to do for the world through Israel, the chosen nation, He will finally accomplish through His church on earth today. He has 'let out His vineyard unto other husbandmen,' even to His covenant-keeping people, who faithfully 'render Him the fruits in their seasons.' Never has the Lord been without true representatives on this earth who have made His interests their own. These witnesses for God are numbered among the spiritual Israel, and to them will be fulfilled all the covenant promises made by Jehovah to His ancient people." –Prophets and Kings, pp. 713, 714.

5. What fruit produced by God's Spirit is He looking for in spiritual Israel today? Galatians 5:22, 23; 1 Peter 1:16.

"In the spiritual as in the natural world, obedience to the laws of God is the condition of fruit bearing....

"It was the privilege of the Jewish nation to represent the character of God as it had been revealed to Moses. In answer to the prayer of Moses, 'Show me Thy glory,' the Lord promised, 'I will make all My goodness pass before thee.' Exodus 33:18, 19. 'And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.' Exodus 34:6, 7. This was the fruit that God desired from His people. In the purity of their characters, in the holiness of their lives, in their mercy and loving-kindness and compassion, they were to show that 'the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.' Psalm 19:7." –Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 305, 285, 286.

FRUIT BEARING

6. What makes fruit bearing possible? John 15:5.
7. What will motivate "spiritual Jews" to bear fruit, thus revealing to the world that they cherish God's grace? 1 John 4:8; 1 Peter 1:22.

"We are to show to the world and to all the heavenly intelligences that we appreciate the wonderful love of God for fallen humanity and that we are expecting larger and yet larger blessings from His infinite fullness....

"In this crisis, where is the church to be found? Are its members meeting the claims of God? Are they fulfilling His commission, and representing His character to the world?" –Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 299, 302.

"Every member should be a channel through which God can communicate to the world the treasures of His grace, the unsearchable riches of

Christ. There is nothing that the Saviour desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and His character. There is nothing that the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Saviour's love. All heaven is waiting for men and women through whom God can reveal the power of Christianity." –The Acts of the Apostles, p. 600.

FULFILLING OUR MISSION

8. How will modern Israel finish the work that has been entrusted to them? Zechariah 4:6; Revelation 18:1.

"As the time comes for it [the message of the third angel] to be given with greatest power, the Lord will work through humble instruments, leading the minds of those who consecrate themselves to His service. The laborers will be qualified rather by the unction of His Spirit than by the training of literary institutions. Men of faith and prayer will be constrained to go forth with holy zeal, declaring the words which God gives them." –The Great Controversy, p. 606.

9. Who alone will take part in the great work of calling the honest in heart from the fallen churches? Revelation 3:18, 20, 21.

"I saw that none could share the 'refreshing' unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action. We should, therefore, be drawing nearer and nearer to the Lord and be earnestly seeking that preparation necessary to enable us to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord. Let all remember that God is holy and that none but holy beings can ever dwell in His presence." –Early Writings, p. 71.

CONCLUSION

"The truth is soon to triumph gloriously, and all who now choose to be laborers together with God will triumph with it." –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 135.

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God's Love and Justice in His Relationship with Man

"The Lord is represented in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament not only as a God of justice but as a Father of infinite love. The psalmist says: 'The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.... The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.... He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him.'" –Lift Him Up, p. 36.

GOD'S CHARACTER

1. Although Satan and some men present God in a negative way, how did the Bible writers describe His character? 1 John 4:8; Exodus 34:6, 7; Micah 7:18.

"Nature and revelation alike testify of God's love. Our Father in heaven is the source of life, of wisdom, and of joy. Look at the wonderful and beautiful things of nature. Think of their marvelous adaptation to the needs and happiness, not only of man, but of all living creatures. The sunshine and the rain that gladden and refresh the earth, the hills and seas and plains, all speak to us of the Creator's love....

" 'God is love' is written upon every opening bud, upon every spire of springing grass. The lovely birds making the air vocal with their happy songs, the delicately tinted flowers in their perfection perfuming the air, the lofty trees of the forest with their rich foliage of living green—all testify to the tender, fatherly care of our God and to His desire to make His children happy." –Steps to Christ, pp. 9, 10.

2. Since God is love, will He overlook or ignore certain sins? Romans 6:23; Exodus 34:7, last part.

"God does not regard all sins as of equal magnitude; there are degrees of guilt in His estimation, as well as in that of man; but however trifling this or that wrong act may seem in the eyes of men, no sin is small in the sight of God. Man's judgment is partial, imperfect; but God estimates all things as they really are." –Steps to Christ, p. 30.

SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

3. What examples in the Bible demonstrated acts of lawlessness that were not tolerated by God? Genesis 3:6; 2 Samuel 6:6; Numbers 15:32; Joshua 7:1.
4. What terrible consequences followed man's transgression of God's law? Genesis 3:8, 23; Numbers 15:35; 2 Samuel 6:7; Joshua 7:24, 25.

"Adam and Eve persuaded themselves that in so small a matter as eating of the forbidden fruit there could not result such terrible consequences as God had declared. But this small matter was the transgression of God's immutable and holy law, and it separated man from God and opened the floodgates of death and untold woe upon our world. Age after age there has gone up from our earth a continual cry of mourning, and the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain as a consequence of man's disobedience."—Steps to Christ, p. 33.

"There are many in this day that would designate Achan's sin as of little consequence, and would excuse his guilt; but it is because they have no realization of the character of sin and its consequences, no sense of the holiness of God and of His requirements. The statement is often heard that God is not particular whether or not we give diligent heed to His Word, whether or not we obey all the commandments of His holy law; but the record of His dealing with Achan should be a warning to us. He will in no wise clear the guilty....

"The controversy for truth will have little success when sin is upon those who advocate it. Men and women may be well versed in Bible knowledge, as well acquainted with the Scripture as were the Israelites with the ark, and yet if their hearts are not right before God, success will not attend their efforts. God will not be with them. They do not have a high sense of the obligations of the law of heaven, nor do they realize the sacred character of the truth they are teaching. The charge is, 'Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.' " —Seventh-day Adventist. Bible Commentary, vol. 2, p. 998.

BEING FORGIVEN

5. Why was no forgiveness possible for Uzzah and the Sabbath breaker, while Adam and Eve were pardoned of their transgression? James 4:17; Acts 3:19.

"The fate of Uzzah was a divine judgment upon the violation of a most explicit command. Through Moses the Lord had given special instruction

concerning the transportation of the ark. None but the priests, the descendants of Aaron, were to touch it, or even to look upon it uncovered. The divine direction was, 'The sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die.' Numbers 4:15....

"Upon Uzzah rested the greater guilt of presumption. Transgression of God's law had lessened his sense of its sacredness, and with unconfessed sins upon him he had, in face of the divine prohibition, presumed to touch the symbol of God's presence. God can accept no partial obedience, no lax way of treating His commandments....

"One of the people, angry at being excluded from Canaan, and determined to show his defiance of God's law, ventured upon the open transgression of the fourth commandment by going out to gather sticks upon the Sabbath.... The act of this man was a wilful and deliberate violation of the fourth commandment—a sin, not of thoughtlessness or ignorance, but of presumption."—Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 705, 706, 409.

6. What does true repentance encompass? Psalms 32:1, 2; 51:1, 2.

"Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. We shall not renounce sin unless we see its sinfulness; until we turn away from it in heart, there will be no real change in the life.

"There are many who fail to understand the true nature of repentance. Multitudes sorrow that they have sinned and even make an outward reformation because they fear that their wrongdoing will bring suffering upon themselves. But this is not repentance in the Bible sense. They lament the suffering rather than the sin."—Steps to Christ, p. 23.

7. What else, besides repentance, brings a believer in Christ into harmony with God? James 5:16; 1 John 1:9.

"True confession is always of a specific character, and acknowledges particular sins. They may be of such a nature as to be brought before God only; they may be wrongs that should be confessed to individuals who have suffered injury through them; or they may be of a public character, and should then be as publicly confessed. But all confession should be definite and to the point, acknowledging the very sins of which you are guilty....

"Confession will not be acceptable to God without sincere repentance and reformation. There must be decided changes in the life; everything offensive to God must be put away. This will be the result of genuine sorrow for sin. The work that we have to do on our part is plainly set before us: 'Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.' Isaiah 1:16, 17. 'If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the

statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die.' Ezekiel 33:15."—Steps to Christ, pp. 38, 39.

8. What makes it possible for one to have a repentant heart? 2 Corinthians 7:10; Luke 15:18; 2 Samuel 12:13.

"The prayer of David after his fall illustrates the nature of true sorrow for sin. His repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his guilt; no desire to escape the judgment threatened, inspired his prayer. David saw the enormity of his transgression; he saw the defilement of his soul; he loathed his sin. It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart. He longed for the joy of holiness—to be restored to harmony and communion with God.

"A repentance such as this, is beyond the reach of our own power to accomplish; it is obtained only from Christ, who ascended up on high and has given gifts unto men."—Steps to Christ, pp. 24, 25.

ALL GLORY TO GOD

9. When will God's character of love and justice be vindicated before the whole universe? Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10, 11.

"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."—The Great Controversy, p. 678.

CONCLUSION

"Says the apostle: 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.' Only as we contemplate the great plan of redemption can we have a just appreciation of the character of God. The work of creation was a manifestation of His love; but the gift of God to save the guilty and ruined race, alone reveals the infinite depths of divine tenderness and compassion. 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' While the law of God is maintained, and its justice vindicated, the sinner can be pardoned. The dearest gift that heaven itself had to bestow has been poured out that God 'might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.'"—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 739.

Connection with Heaven and God's Church

"Shall we accept the help needed? Shall we enter the blood-stained path that our Saviour trod? Heaven has been opened before us. Christ has been accepted by the Father, and if we will comply we can be accepted also. The plan of salvation has been laid for the human race and they need not be discouraged. Help has been laid on one that is mighty to save." –Manuscript Releases, vol. 3, p. 109.

BECOMING MEMBERS OF GOD'S CHURCH

1. Through what particular channel does the Lord reveal His will to humanity? 1 Timothy 3:15; Philippians 2:15; Matthew 5:14; Ephesians 5:27.

"The church of Christ, every individual disciple of the Master, is heaven's appointed channel for the revelation of God to men." –Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p 40.

"I tell you, my brethren, the Lord has an organized body through whom He will work." –Selected Messages, vol. 3, p. 17.

"The Redeemer of the world does not sanction the experience and exercise in religious matters independent of His organized and acknowledged church, where He has a church.

"Many have the idea that they are responsible to Christ alone for their light and their experience independent of Christ's acknowledged body in the world. But this is condemned by Jesus Christ in His teachings and in the examples of facts given to us for our instruction." –Manuscript Releases, vol. 15, p. 130.

2. How is it possible for a repentant sinner to become a part of this visible channel of light? Mark 16:16; Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Corinthians 12:13.

"By hearing the message of truth, men and women are led to accept the Sabbath and to unite with the church by baptism." –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 196.

"Very close and sacred is the relation between Christ and His church—He the bridegroom, and the church the bride; He the head, and the church the body. Connection with Christ, then, involves connection with His church."—Education, p. 268.

BORN OF THE SPIRIT

3. Why and how does Satan attempt to discourage people from passing through the doorway of baptism into the church? 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; John 10:9.

"It is his [Satan's] studied effort to lead professed Christians just as far from heaven's arrangement as he can; therefore he deceives even the professed people of God and makes them believe that order and discipline are enemies to spirituality; that the only safety for them is to let each pursue his own course, and to remain especially distinct from bodies of Christians who are united and are laboring to establish discipline and harmony of action. All the efforts made to establish this are considered dangerous, a restriction of rightful liberty, and hence are feared as popery. These deceived souls consider it a virtue to boast of their freedom to think and act independently. They will not take any man's say so. They are amenable to no man. It was and now is Satan's special work to lead men to feel that it is God's order to strike out for themselves and choose their own order independent of their brethren."—Evangelism, p. 318.

4. Does baptism assure one of salvation? John 3:5; Revelation 3:21; 22:14.

"It is the grace of Christ that gives life to the soul. Apart from Christ, baptism, like any other service, is a worthless form. 'He that believeth not the Son shall not see life.'"—The Desire of Ages, p. 181.

"Salvation is not to be baptized, not to have our names upon the church books, not to preach the truth. But it is a living union with Jesus Christ to be renewed in heart, doing the works of Christ in faith and labor of love, in patience, meekness, and hope. Every soul united to Christ will be a living missionary to all around him."—Evangelism, p. 319.

DEALING WITH PROBLEMS IN THE CHURCH

5. When a newly baptized member enters the family of God, what can he often see within the body of believers? Ephesians 4:25-32; Matthew 7:3.

"Some people seem to think that upon entering the church they will have their expectations fulfilled, and meet only with those who are pure and perfect. They are zealous in their faith, and when they see faults in church members, they say, 'We left the world in order to have no association with evil characters, but the evil is here also;' and they ask, as did the servants in the parable, 'From whence then hath it tares?' But we need not be thus disappointed, for the Lord has not warranted us in coming to the conclusion that the church is perfect..."

"Although there are evils existing in the church, and will be until the end of the world, the church in these last days is to be the light of the world that is polluted and demoralized by sin. The church, enfeebled and defective, needing to be reproved, warned, and counseled, is the only object upon earth upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard." –Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 47, 49.

6. Although the remnant church is enfeebled and defective, how can believers rise above the problems and be in constant contact with Heaven? 1 Thessalonians 5:17; John 5:39; Hebrews 12:2.

"Christ connects man in his weakness and helplessness with the source of infinite power." –Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 184.

"No man, woman, or youth can attain to Christian perfection and neglect the study of the word of God. By carefully and closely searching His word we shall obey the injunction of Christ, 'Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me.' This search enables the student to observe closely the divine Model, for they testify of Christ. The Pattern must be inspected often and closely in order to imitate it. As one becomes acquainted with the history of the Redeemer, he discovers in himself defects of character; his unlikeness to Christ is so great that he sees he cannot be a follower without a very great change in his life. Still he studies, with a desire to be like his great Exemplar; he catches the looks, the spirit, of his beloved Master; by beholding he becomes changed. 'Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...' –Counsels on Sabbath School Work, p. 17.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

7. What beautiful picture presents to the world Jesus, the Saviour? Genesis 28:12; John 1:51.

"Christ is the ladder..."

"The ladder is the medium of communication between God and man. Through the mystic ladder the gospel was preached to Jacob. As the ladder stretched from earth, reaching to the highest heavens, and the glory of God

was seen above the ladder, so Christ in His divine nature reached immensity and was one with the Father. As the ladder, though its top penetrated into heaven, had its base upon the earth, so Christ, though God, clothed His divinity with humanity and was in the world 'found in fashion as a man.' (Philippians 2:8). The ladder would be useless if it rested not on the earth or if it reached not to the heavens." –Our High Calling, p. 66.

8. What happens when the Christian fully relies on the "Ladder" to connect him or her to heaven? 2 Peter 3:18; Philippians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

"Living in Christ, adhering to Christ, supported by Christ, drawing nourishment from Christ, you bear fruit after the similitude of Christ." –The Desire of Ages, p. 677.

CONCLUSION

"There is but one church in the world who are at the present time standing in the breach, and making up the hedge, building up the old waste places; and for any man to call the attention of the world and other churches to this church, denouncing her as Babylon, is to do a work in harmony with him who is the accuser of the brethren." –Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 50.

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9

Sabbath, September 1, 2007

Jesus Knocks on Our Very Door

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you. Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea." Colossians 4:12-16.

THE TRUE WITNESS SPEAKS TO THE LAODICEANS

1. What timely, solemn message is addressed to everyone living in the Laodicean period? Revelation 3:14, 15.

"The Laodicean message has been sounding. Take this message in all its phases and sound it forth to the people wherever Providence opens the way. Justification by faith and the righteousness of Christ are the themes to be presented to a perishing world." –Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 964.

2. To whom particularly are these words addressed? Revelation 14:12; 12:17; 22:14.

"The Laodicean message applies to the people of God who believe present truth." –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 87.

"The message to the Laodicean church is applicable to all who have had great light and many opportunities, and yet have not appreciated them....

"The Laodicean message applies to all who profess to keep the law of God, and yet are not doers of it." –Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 7, pp. 981, 962.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND GOD'S OFFER

3. Why is the church unaware of its miserable, unhealthy spiritual condition? Revelation 3:17; Proverbs 14:12.

"What greater deception can come upon human minds than a confidence that they are right when they are all wrong! The message of the True Witness finds the people of God in a sad deception, yet honest in that deception. They know not that their condition is deplorable in the sight of God. While those addressed are flattering themselves that they are in an exalted spiritual condition, the message of the True Witness breaks their security by the startling denunciation of their true condition of spiritual blindness, poverty, and wretchedness. The testimony, so cutting and severe, cannot be a mistake, for it is the True Witness who speaks, and His testimony must be correct." –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, pp. 252, 253.

4. What remedy is so generously, lovingly offered to a sick church? Revelation 3:18; Galatians 5:6; Matthew 22:11; John 16:13.

"Faith and love are the true riches, the pure gold which the True Witness counsels the lukewarm to buy. However rich we may be in earthly treasure, all our wealth will not enable us to buy the precious remedies that cure the disease of the soul called lukewarmness....

"The white raiment is purity of character, the righteousness of Christ imparted to the sinner. This is indeed a garment of heavenly texture, that can be bought only of Christ for a life of willing obedience. The eyesalve is that wisdom and grace which enables us to discern between the evil and the good, and to detect sin under any guise." –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 88.

URGENT NEED OF THE FIRST LOVE

5. What are the implications of being in a lukewarm condition? Revelation 2:4.

"The message to the Laodicean church is applicable to our condition. How plainly is pictured the position of those who think they have all the truth, who take pride in their knowledge of the Word of God, while its sanctifying power has not been felt in their lives. The fervor of the love of God is wanting in their hearts, but it is this very fervor of love that makes God's people the light of the world." –Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 357.

"Halfhearted Christians are worse than infidels; for their deceptive words and noncommittal position lead many astray. The infidel shows his colors. The lukewarm Christian deceives both parties. He is neither a good worldling nor a good Christian. Satan uses him to do a work that no one else can do." –S.D.A. Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 963.

"Sin no longer appears repulsive because you are blinded by Satan." –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 233.

6. What is the ultimate, inevitable consequence of remaining in a lukewarm condition? Revelation 3:16.

"The figure of spewing out of His mouth means that He cannot offer up your prayers or your expressions of love to God. He cannot endorse your teaching of His word or your spiritual work in anywise. He cannot present your religious exercises with the request that grace be given you." –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 408.

APPEAL FOR REPENTANCE

7. Before spewing lukewarm Laodiceans out of His mouth, what invitation of grace does Jesus offer them? Revelation 3:19, 20.

"God will prove His people. Jesus bears patiently with them, and does not spew them out of His mouth in a moment." –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 186.

"But the counsel of the true Witness does not represent those who are lukewarm as in a hopeless case. There is yet a chance to remedy their state,

and the Laodicean message is full of encouragement; for the backslidden church may yet buy the gold of faith and love, may yet have the white robe of the righteousness of Christ, that the shame of their nakedness need not appear. Purity of heart, purity of motive, may yet characterize those who are halfhearted and who are striving to serve God and mammon. They may yet wash their robes of character and make them white in the blood of the Lamb.” –Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 966.

8. What keeps people from opening the door from the inside? Luke 12:15; Proverbs 16:18; Matthew 5:22.

“I saw that many have so much rubbish piled up at the door of their heart that they cannot get the door open. Some have difficulties between themselves and their brethren to remove. Others have evil tempers, selfish covetousness, to remove before they can open the door. Others have rolled the world before the door of their heart, which bars the door. All this rubbish must be taken away, and then they can open the door and welcome the Saviour in.” –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 143.

ANSWERING JESUS’ LOVING KNOCK AT OUR DOOR

9. How long will Christ remain at the door of the heart? 2 Chronicles 36:16; Hebrews 10:26, 27; Matthew 12:31, 32.

“But many refuse to receive Him. The Holy Spirit waits to soften and subdue hearts; but they are not willing to open the door and yet the Saviour in, for fear that He will require something of them. And so Jesus of Nazareth passes by. He longs to bestow on them the rich blessings of His grace, but they refuse to accept them. What a terrible thing it is to exclude Christ from His own temple! What a loss to the church!” –Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 262.

“Every warning, reproof, and entreaty in the word of God or through His messengers is a knock at the door of the heart. It is the voice of Jesus asking for entrance. With every knock unheeded, the disposition to open becomes weaker. The impressions of the Holy Spirit if disregarded today, will not be as strong tomorrow. The heart becomes less impressible, and lapses into a perilous unconsciousness of the shortness of life, and of the great eternity beyond. Our condemnation in the judgment will not result from the fact that we have been in error, but from the fact that we have neglected heaven-sent opportunities for learning what is truth.” –The Desire of Ages, pp. 489, 490.

10. What blessings will result when the door is opened to welcome Jesus in? Romans 15:13; Hosea 14:4; Romans 8:1.

"The Lord knocks at the door of your heart, desiring to enter, that He may impart spiritual riches to your soul. He would anoint the blind eyes, that they may discover the holy character of God in His law, and understand the love of Christ, which is indeed gold tried in the fire." –Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 965.

CONCLUSION

"Let us make an application of the words of Christ to our own individual cases. Are we poor, and blind, and wretched, and miserable? Then let us seek the gold and white raiment that He offers. The work of overcoming is not restricted to the age of the martyrs. The conflict is for us, in these days of subtle temptation to worldliness, to self-security, to indulgence of pride, covetousness, false doctrines, and immorality of life." –Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 966.

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10

Sabbath, September 8, 2007

Christ's Righteousness in the Believer

"... Now is the time to entreat that souls shall not only hear the word of God, but without delay secure oil in their vessels with their lamps. That oil is the righteousness of Christ. It represents character, and character is not transferable. No man can secure it for another. Each must obtain for himself a character purified from every stain of sin." –Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, pp. 233, 234.

JUSTIFICATION IS RECEIVED BY FAITH

1. What does "justification by faith" mean for you? Acts 13:39; John 3:14-16; Romans 3:24.

"It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself." –Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 456.

"And what is it to believe? It is to fully accept that Jesus Christ died as our sacrifice; that He became the curse for us, took our sins upon Himself, and imputed unto us His own righteousness. Therefore we claim this righteousness of Christ, we believe it, and it is our righteousness. He is our Saviour. He saves us because He said He would. Are we going to go into all the explanations as to how He can save us? Do we have the goodness

in ourselves that will make us better and cleanse us from the spots and stains of sin, enabling us then to come to God? We simply cannot do it.”
–Faith and Works, p. 70.

2. How alone can a sinner be justified with God? Romans 3:20-22; Hebrews 10:38; Ephesians 2:8.

“Righteousness is obedience to the law. The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner’s account. Christ’s righteousness is accepted in place of man’s failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son. This is how faith is accounted righteousness; and the pardoned soul goes on from grace to grace, from light to a greater light. He can say with rejoicing, ‘Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.’ ”
–Faith and Works, p. 101.

WITHOUT FAITH IN CHRIST THERE IS NO RIGHTEOUSNESS

3. What precedes justification? Proverbs 28:13; Psalm 32:3, 5.

“In like manner you are a sinner. You cannot atone for your past sins; you cannot change your heart and make yourself holy. But God promises to do all this for you through Christ. You believe that promise. You confess your sins and give yourself to God. You will to serve Him. Just as surely as you do this, God will fulfill His word to you. If you believe the promise—believe that you are forgiven and cleansed—God supplies the fact; you are made whole, just as Christ gave the paralytic power to walk when the man believed that he was healed. It is so if you believe it....

“Here is where thousands fail; they do not believe that Jesus pardons them personally, individually. They do not take God at His word. It is the privilege of all who comply with the conditions to know for themselves that pardon is freely extended for every sin. Put away the suspicion that God’s promises are not meant for you. They are for every repentant transgressor.”—Steps to Christ, pp. 51-53.

“God requires the entire surrender of the heart, before justification can take place; and in order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul.”—Faith and Works, p. 100.

4. If a person does not receive Christ's righteousness, what false path may he be led into? Romans 10:3.

"Many are losing the right way, in consequence of thinking that they must climb to heaven, that they must do something to merit the favor of God. They seek to make themselves better by their own unaided efforts. This they can never accomplish. Christ has made the way by dying our sacrifice, by living our example, by becoming our great high-priest. He declares, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.' If by any effort of our own we could advance one step toward the ladder, the words of Christ would not be true. But when we accept Christ, good works will appear as fruitful evidence that we are in the way of life, that Christ is our way, and that we are treading the true path that leads to heaven." —The Review and Herald, November 4, 1890.

"When fastings and prayers are practiced in a self-justifying spirit, they are abominable to God. The solemn assembly for worship, the round of religious ceremonies, the external humiliation, the imposed sacrifice—all proclaim to the world the testimony that the doer of these things considers himself righteous. These things call attention to the observer of rigorous duties, saying, This man is entitled to heaven. But it is all a deception. Works will not buy for us an entrance into heaven." —Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 388.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AND ITS FRUIT

5. What is the relationship between the theory and practice, or experience, of justification by faith? Matthew 7:21; Philippians 2:13.

"A theoretical knowledge of the truth is essential. But the knowledge of the greatest truth will not save us; our knowledge must be practical. God's people must not only know His will, but they must practice it. Many will be purged out from the numbers of those who know the truth, because they are not sanctified by it. The truth must be brought into their hearts, sanctifying and cleansing them from all earthliness and sensuality in the most private life. The soul temple must be cleansed." —The Review and Herald, May 24, 1887.

"The greatest deception of the human mind in Christ's day was that a mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness. In all human experience a theoretical knowledge of the truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the soul. It does not bring forth the fruits of righteousness." —The Desire of Ages, p. 309.

6. If righteousness by faith is truly received, what particular fruit of the Spirit will reveal the indwelling Christ in the heart? Romans 5:1, 2.

"It is peace that you need—Heaven's forgiveness and peace and love in the soul. Money cannot buy it, intellect cannot procure it, wisdom cannot attain to it; you can never hope, by your own efforts, to secure it. But God offers it to you as a gift, 'without money and without price.' Isaiah 55:1. It is yours if you will but reach out your hand and grasp it." —Steps to Christ, p. 49.

JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

7. What makes it possible to develop a righteous, balanced character? John 1:12; 1 John 3:9.

"By receiving His imputed righteousness, through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we become like Him." —Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1098.

"Through Christ, and Christ alone, the springs of life can vitalize man's nature, transform his tastes, and set his affections flowing toward heaven. Through the union of the divine with the human nature Christ could enlighten the understanding and infuse His life-giving properties through the soul dead in trespasses and sins." —Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 341.

"That which was objectionable in the character is purified from the soul by the love of Jesus. All selfishness is expelled, all envy, all evil-speaking, is rooted out, and a radical transformation is wrought in the heart." —The Review and Herald, July 22, 1890.

8. Is Christian perfection obtained in a short period of time? How long does it take to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit and the truth? 2 Peter 1:5-10; Philipians 3:12-14.

"Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime. It is not gained by a happy flight of feeling, but is the result of constantly dying to sin, and constantly living for Christ. Wrongs cannot be righted nor reformations wrought in the character by feeble, intermittent efforts. It is only by long, persevering effort, sore discipline, and stern conflict, that we shall overcome. We know not one day how strong will be our conflict the next. So long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which we can reach and say, I have fully attained. Sanctification is the result of lifelong obedience." —The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 560, 561.

"None are living Christians unless they have a daily experience in the things of God and daily practice self-denial, cheerfully bearing the cross and following Christ. Every living Christian will advance daily in the divine life. As he advances toward perfection, he experiences a conversion to God every day; and this conversion is not completed until he attains to

perfection of Christian character, a full preparation for the finishing touch of immortality."—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 505.

9. How should we consider the time we have to overcome sin and attain to perfection in Christ? 1 Peter 4:7; Luke 21:34-36; Matthew 24:44.

"We believe without a doubt that Christ is soon coming. This is not a fable to us; it is a reality.... When He comes He is not to cleanse us of our sins, to remove from us the defects in our characters, or to cure us of the infirmities of our tempers and dispositions. If wrought for us at all, this work will all be accomplished before that time. When the Lord comes, those who are holy will be holy still. Those who have reserved their bodies and spirits in holiness, in sanctification and honor, will then receive the finishing touch of immortality. But those who are unjust, unsanctified, and filthy will remain so forever. No work will then be done for them to remove their defects and give them holy characters. The Refiner does not then sit to pursue His refining process and remove their sins and their corruption. This is all to be done in these hours of probation. It is now that this work is to be accomplished for us." [Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 355] —God's Amazing Grace, p. 243.

"Those who delay a preparation for the day of God cannot obtain it in the time of trouble, or at any subsequent time. The case of all such is hopeless." —The Great Controversy, p. 620.

CONCLUSION

"A character formed according to the divine likeness is the only treasure that we can take from this world to the next. Those who are under the instruction of Christ in this world will take every divine attainment with them to the heavenly mansions. And in heaven we are continually to improve. How important, then, is the development of character in this life." —Christ's Object Lessons, p. 332.

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Christ's Righteousness and Love

"And this is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment." 1 John 3:23.

GOD'S PRINCIPLES IN HIS CHILDREN

1. What will demonstrate that God's children have internalized the principles of Christ's righteousness? Romans 6:16; 2 Corinthians 10:5.

"The righteous are those who keep the commandments of God, and they will be forever separated from the disobedient and unrighteous who trampled underfoot the law of God....

"The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God." –Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, pp. 296, 91, 92.

2. When His servants obey His sacred Ten Commandments, what will be the influence on the world? Acts 4:13; John 13:34, 35.

"True sanctification unites believers to Christ and to one another in the bonds of tender sympathy. This union causes to flow continually into the heart rich currents of Christlike love, which flows forth again in love for one another." –Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1141.

"There is nothing that the world needs so much as a knowledge of the gospel's saving power revealed in Christlike lives....

"The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian." –The Ministry of Healing, pp. 133, 470.

LOVE AMONG BRETHREN

3. What message of love is desperately needed in this sinful, perishing world? 1 John 4:8, 9, 20, 21; Isaiah 40:9, 10.

"The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them." –Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 415, 416.

"Should the individual members seek to represent Christ to the world in character and life, thousands would be attracted to the Saviour, who now have reason to criticize the words and works of those who profess the name of Christ." –Ye Shall Receive Power, p. 348.

4. How will deep, practical love be demonstrated among believers of the same faith? Galatians 6:10; 1 John 3:17, 18; Isaiah 58:7, 8; James 2:14-16.

"As Christ had loved them, the disciples were to love one another. They were to show forth the love abiding in their hearts for men, women, and children, by doing all in their power for their salvation. But they were to reveal a specially tender love for all of the same faith.

"Christ's love is deep and earnest, flowing like an irrepressible stream to all who will accept it. There is no selfishness in His love. If this heaven-born love is an abiding principle in the heart, it will make itself known, not only to those we hold most dear in sacred relationship, but to all with whom we come in contact. It will lead us to bestow little acts of attention, to make concessions, to perform deeds of kindness, to speak tender, true, encouraging words. It will lead us to sympathize with those whose hearts hunger for sympathy." –Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1140.

5. How far does this this love extend? 1 John 3:16; Matthew 5:39-44.

"It was 'while we were yet sinners,' that 'Christ died for us.' In view of His unmerited love and mercy toward us, how can we cherish malice, or even one feeling of unkindness toward our brethren, the purchase of His blood? Let us put away all suspicion and hatred, and all feelings of bitterness, even toward our worst enemies, those who seek to do us harm. But, brethren, do not wait until the heart is in harmony with your brother before you come to Jesus; for it is His spirit and power working in you that will give you the victory." –Bible Training School, August 1, 1912.

"The children of God are those who are partakers of His nature. It is not earthly rank, nor birth, nor nationality, nor religious privilege, which proves that we are members of the family of God; it is love, a love that embraces all humanity. Even sinners whose hearts are not utterly closed to God's Spirit, will respond to kindness; while they may give hate for hate, they will also give love for love. But it is only the Spirit of God that

gives love for hatred. To be kind to the unthankful and to the evil, to do good hoping for nothing again, is the insignia of the royalty of heaven, the sure token by which the children of the Highest reveal their high estate.” –Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 75.

A SPIRIT OF RECONCILIATION

6. What are the terrible consequences of hating and despising a fellow believer? Matthew 5:22; 1 John 3:15; 2:11.

“The spirit of hatred and revenge originated with Satan, and it led him to put to death the Son of God. Whoever cherishes malice or unkindness is cherishing the same spirit, and its fruit will be unto death. In the revengeful thought the evil deed lies enfolded, as the plant in the seed.

“God will hold us accountable for even a word spoken in contempt of one soul for whom Christ laid down His life.” –Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, pp. 56, 57.

“Those who claim to believe the truth should obey the Word of God just as it reads, practicing its instruction. Remember that those who love not their brethren, deny the faith.” –General Conference Bulletin, July 1, 1900.

7. If someone has hurt or offended a brother or sister in the church, how can peace be restored? Matthew 5:23, 24.

“When one who professes to serve God wrongs or injures a brother, he misrepresents the character of God to that brother, and the wrong must be confessed, he must acknowledge it to be sin, in order to be in harmony with God. Our brother may have done us a greater wrong than we have done him, but this does not lessen our responsibility. If when we come before God we remember that another has aught against us, we are to leave our gift of prayer, of thanksgiving, of freewill offering, and go to the brother with whom we are at variance, and in humility confess our own sin and ask to be forgiven.

“If matters of difficulty between brethren were not laid open before others, but frankly spoken of between themselves in the spirit of Christian love, how much evil might be prevented! How many roots of bitterness whereby many are defiled would be destroyed, and how closely and tenderly might the followers of Christ be united in His love!” –Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, pp. 58, 59.

CHRIST’S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND CHRISTIAN LOVE

8. How do we obtain that Christian love that will endure and unite those within the household of faith? Matthew 5:6; Isaiah 55:1.

"Not by painful struggles or wearisome toil, not by gift or sacrifice, is righteousness obtained; but it is freely given to every soul who hungers and thirsts to receive it....

"The love of God is something more than a mere negation; it is a positive and active principle, a living spring, ever flowing to bless others. If the love of Christ dwells in us, we shall not only cherish no hatred toward our fellows, but we shall seek in every way to manifest love toward them." –Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, pp. 18, 58.

CONCLUSION

"The love of Christ is a golden chain that binds finite, human beings who believe in Jesus Christ to the Infinite God. The love that the Lord has for His children passeth knowledge. No science can define or explain it. No human wisdom can fathom it. The more we feel the influence of this love, the more meek and humble shall we be." –Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1141.

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Sabbath, September 22, 2007

God's Goals for His Earthly Family

"A character formed according to the divine likeness is the only treasure that we can take from this world to the next." –Christ's Object Lessons, p. 332.

GOD'S GREAT DESIRE

1. What is God's supreme desire for all of humanity? 1 John 2:25; 1 Timothy 1:15; 2:3, 4.

"I want you to be saved; your soul is precious. Jesus loves you. He has created you. You are in His possession, not only by creation, but by redemption. If those who loved you best would give their own life for you, it would not save your soul. Jesus has died that life and immortality might be brought to light, and be comprehended by every son and daughter of Adam." –General Conference Bulletin, April 1, 1897.

2. How many people will be saved when Christ returns? Luke 13:23, 24; Romans 11:5; Jeremiah 3:14; Matthew 7:13, 14.

"To stand in defense of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few—this will be our test."—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 136.

"A few, yes, only a few, of the vast number who people the earth will be saved unto life eternal, while the masses who have not perfected their souls in obeying the truth will be appointed to the second death."—The Faith I Live By, p. 213.

STRIVING FOR CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

3. Before the saints are translated to heaven, what goal does God desire His people to reach? Matthew 5:48.

"God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom. The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God's law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God's commandments. Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven."—Christ's Object Lessons, p. 315.

4. How is this lofty goal attainable? Romans 8:3, 4; Matthew 19:26; Hebrews 12:2.

"Under the discipline of the greatest Teacher the world has ever known, Christians must move onward and upward toward perfection. This is God's command, and no one should say, I cannot do it. He should say instead, God requires me to be perfect, and He will give me strength to overcome all that stands in the way of perfection. He is the source of all wisdom, all power..."—Reflecting Christ, p. 164.

"Satan had claimed that it was impossible for man to obey God's commandments; and in our own strength it is true that we cannot obey them. But Christ came in the form of humanity, and by His perfect obedience He proved that humanity and divinity combined can obey every one of God's precepts."—Christ's Object Lessons, p. 314.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PERFECTION

5. What are some characteristics of those who strive for perfection? Hebrews 12:1; Philippians 3:12-14; 1 Timothy 6:11, 12.

6. What happens when Christians try to cover their faults or make excuses for character defects? Proverbs 28:13; 2 Corinthians 2:11.

"Satan is jubilant when he hears the professed followers of Christ making excuses for their deformity of character. It is these excuses that lead to sin."—The Desire of Ages, p. 311.

"If those who hide and excuse their faults could see how Satan exults over them, how he taunts Christ and holy angels with their course, they would make haste to confess their sins and to put them away."—The Great Controversy, p. 489.

7. What impression will be made on unbelievers who see Christians striving to develop Christlike characters? 2 Corinthians 2:15, 16.

"Our words, our acts, our dress, our deportment, even the expression of the countenance, has an influence. Upon the impression thus made there hang results for good or evil which no man can measure. Every impulse thus imparted is seed sown which will produce its harvest. It is a link in the long chain of human events, extending we know not whither. If by our example we aid others in the development of good principles, we give them power to do good. In their turn they exert the same influence upon others, and they upon still others. Thus by our unconscious influence thousands may be blessed."—Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 339, 340.

FOR GOD'S GLORY

8. What is at stake in the perfection of Christian character? Matthew 5:16; Revelation 4:11; 5:12.

"The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people."—The Desire of Ages, p. 671.

"It is the purpose of God to glorify Himself in His people before the world. He expects those who bear the name of Christ to represent Him in thought, word, and deed. Their thoughts are to be pure and their words noble and uplifting, drawing those around them nearer the Saviour. The religion of Christ is to be interwoven with all that they do and say."—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 21.

9. What glorious event takes place when Christian perfection has been embraced by God's people? Titus 2:13.

"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, p. 69.

CONCLUSION

"There will be no future probation in which to prepare for eternity. It is in this life that we are to put on the robe of Christ's righteousness. This is our only opportunity to form characters for the home which Christ has made ready for those who obey His commandments." –Christ's Object Lessons, p. 319.

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Please read the Missionary Report from
Turkey on page 55.

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Sabbath, September 29, 2007

God's Character Vindicated

"But it was not merely to accomplish the redemption of man that Christ came to the earth to suffer and to die. He came to 'magnify the law' and to 'make it honorable.' Not alone that the inhabitants of this world might regard the law as it should be regarded; but it was to demonstrate to all the worlds of the universe that God's law is unchangeable. Could its claims have been set aside, then the Son of God need not have yielded up His life to atone for its transgression. The death of Christ proves it immutable. And the sacrifice to which infinite love impelled the Father and the Son, that sinners might be redeemed, demonstrates to all the universe—what nothing less than this plan of atonement could have sufficed to do—that justice and mercy are the foundation of the law and government of God." –The Great Controversy, p. 503.

WITNESS OF THE UNIVERSE

1. When and how will God's character of love be vindicated before the whole universe?

"In the judgment of the universe, God will stand clear of blame for the existence or continuance of evil. It will be demonstrated that the divine decrees are not accessory to sin. There was no defect in God's government, no cause for disaffection." –The Desire of Ages, p. 58.

"For thousands of years this chief of conspiracy has palmed off falsehood for truth. But the time has now come when the rebellion is to be finally defeated and the history and character of Satan disclosed." –The Great Controversy, p. 670.

"For six thousand years the great controversy has been in progress; the Son of God and his heavenly messengers have been in conflict with the power of the evil one, to warn, enlighten, and save the children of men. Now all have made their decision; the wicked have fully united with Satan in his warfare against God. The time has come for God to vindicate the authority of his downtrodden law. Now the controversy is not alone with Satan, but with men."—The Great Controversy, p. 656.

2. What declaration will be made by all created intelligences? Deuteronomy 32:4; Revelation 15:3, 4; Psalm 145:10, 17.

"The history of sin will stand to all eternity as a witness that with the existence of God's law is bound up the happiness of all the beings He has created. With all the facts of the great controversy in view, the whole universe, both loyal and rebellious, with one accord declare: 'Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints.'"—The Great Controversy, p. 671.

SATAN'S CHARACTER FULLY EXPOSED

3. What truth about Satan's character during his six thousand years of activity on earth will soon be open for all to see? John 8:44.

4. What will He unwillingly acknowledge? Philippians 2:10, 11.

"God's dealings with rebellion will result in fully unmasking the work that has so long been carried on under cover. The results of Satan's rule, the fruits of setting aside the divine statutes, will be laid open to the view of all created intelligences. The law of God will stand fully vindicated. It will be seen that all the dealings of God have been conducted with reference to the eternal good of His people, and the good of all the worlds that He has created. Satan himself, in the presence of the witnessing universe, will confess the justice of God's government and the righteousness of His law."—Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 338, 339.

5. What event has already transpired that proved that God is love? Galatians 4:4, 5; Romans 5:8.

"In His dying agony on the cross, Christ was scorned by the people who claimed to be waiting for the Messiah, but who showed by their actions the value of their spirituality. Surely Christ has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Surely he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for

our iniquities. But did not Satan understand that while He was bruising the heel of the Son of God, the Son of God was bruising his head? What great and wonderful effects have resulted from the crucifixion! What a view of the character of God, Christ's sacrifice has opened to the universe! His love for man, far surpassing all human love, has lifted the law of God to its own eternal dignity. The attributes of God have been revealed, and the holy requirements of His law have been vindicated. The effects of the sacrifice on the cross are still felt; but all who would be saved must themselves have an interest in the crucified One." –The Signs of the Times, April 14, 1898.

GOD'S PEOPLE TRIUMPHANT

6. How does God portray His people who have maintained their allegiance to Him and kept His commandments? Revelation 15:2.

"From every nation, kindred, tongue, and people is to be gathered out a people who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. This is the work to be accomplished in these last days. Since Satan's rebellion in heaven against the commandments of God, he has kept up a continual warfare against these commandments, and he will continue to carry on his work relentlessly to the end." –Manuscript Releases, vol. 20, pp. 221, 222.

"God will have a people upon the earth who will vindicate His honor by having respect to all of His commandments...." –Faith and Works, p. 42.

7. What is promised to God's elect after Satan's deceptive activities have ended? Daniel 7:18.

"The great plan of redemption results in fully bringing back the world into God's favor. All that was lost by sin is restored. Not only man but the earth is redeemed, to be the eternal abode of the obedient. For six thousand years Satan has struggled to maintain possession of the earth. Now God's original purpose in its creation is accomplished." –Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 342.

WONDERFUL ATTAINMENTS

8. Why will the controversy between good and evil never be repeated in the universe? Nahum 1:9; John 3:16; Revelation 21:4.

"The inhabitants of all worlds will be convinced of the justice of the law in the overthrow of rebellion and the eradication of sin. When man,

beguiled by Satan's power, disobeyed the divine law, God could not, even to save the lost race, change that law. God is love, and to change the law would be to deny Himself, to overthrow those principles with which are bound up the good of the universe. The working out of the plan of salvation reveals not only to men, but to angels, the character of God, and through the ages of eternity the malignant character of sin will be understood by the cost to the Father and the Son of the redemption of a rebel race. In Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, all worlds will behold the marks of the curse, and angels as well as men will ascribe honor and glory to the Redeemer, through whom they are all made secure from apostasy. The efficiency of the cross guards the redeemed race from the danger of a second fall. The life and death of Christ effectually unveils the deceptions of Satan, and refutes his claims. The sacrifice of Christ for a fallen world draws not only men, but angels unto Him in bonds of indissoluble union.

"Through the plan of salvation the justice and mercy of God are fully vindicated, and to all eternity rebellion will never again arise, affliction never again touch the universe of God."—The Messenger, June 7, 1893.

9. What will all of heaven see in those who will be eternally redeemed? 1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 John 2:3.

"God's people are in danger of being separated from the Sun of Righteousness. 'This is the will of God,' the apostle says, 'even your sanctification.' This sanctification means perfect love, perfect obedience, entire conformity to the will of God. We are to be sanctified to him through obedience to the truth. Our conscience must be purged from dead works to serve the living God. If our lives are conformed to the life of Christ through the sanctification of mind, soul, and body, our example will have a powerful influence on the world. We are not perfect; but it is our privilege to cut away from the entanglement of self and sin, and go on unto perfection. 'We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' Great possibilities, high and holy attainments, are placed within the reach of all who have true faith. Shall we not anoint our eyes with eyesalve, that we may discern the wonderful things God has for us?"—The Youth's Instructor, August 24, 1899.

CONCLUSION

"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."—The Great Controversy, p. 678.

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MISSIONARY REPORT FROM TURKEY

To be read on Sabbath, September 29, 2007

The Special Sabbath School Offering
will be gathered on Sabbath, October 6, 2007

Islamic countries are the biggest challenge for Christianity. Twenty percent of all humanity is Muslim, fourteen percent are Hindus, twelve percent are Buddhists, and eighteen percent belong to no particular religion. 500 million people have never heard of Jesus Christ.

Turkey is a part of "The 10-40 Window," a region that encompasses sixty-four countries that have not been evangelized and have heard very little of the gospel. I was privileged to take a trip to Turkey to see if a light could be lit in that country. In Thessalonica, I met Brother Josef Manov, who spoke Turkish, and he served as my guide around Turkey.

We visited the city of Izmir and saw that it was the best place to begin working. We had contact with a family close to the entrance to the ruins of Pergamus, and they invited us to their home without even knowing us. They gave us something to eat, and we could talk to them about the gospel in the Turkish language and give them literature in Turkish.

With the support of the General Conference, we rented a house in Izmir and Brother Josef began working as a salaried Bible worker. He looked very much like a Muslim with his beard and outward appearance. I admire his energy and his method of establishing contact with people, for speaking Turkish helps build a bridge and presents an opportunity to take out the Bible and speak about the wonderful truths of salvation. First he shows the people what is written in the ancient texts about the Injil (the gospel) and about Isa (Jesus). Then he shows them films about Jesus and draws them closer to a knowledge of God.

I returned for a second visit in July 2004 and found a wonderful group of interested souls and some who were ready for baptism. Let us pray for the work in Muslim countries, especially Turkey, and make an earnest effort to contact people who are Muslim in our own countries. We can reach their hearts with sincere affection and a humble spirit. We also want to thank the General Conference for contributions sent to evangelize "The 10-40 Window," an area of the world that desperately needs the message of Jesus.

Please consider seriously this appeal for financial help for Turkey. We need publications, salaries for workers, and funds for travel expenses. Turkey is a new field and needs a lot of prayer and spiritual support.

"As new fields are opened, the calls for means are constantly increasing. If ever we needed to exercise economy, it is now. All who labor in the cause should realize the importance of closely following the Saviour's example of self-denial and economy. They should see in the means that they handle a trust which God has committed to them, and they should feel under obligation to exercise tact and financial ability in the use of their Lord's money. Every penny should be carefully treasured. A cent seems like a trifle, but a hundred cents make a dollar, and rightly spent may be the means of saving a soul from death. If all the means which has been wasted by our own people in self-gratification had been devoted to the cause of God, there would be no empty treasuries, and missions could be established in all parts of the world."—Counsels on Stewardship, pp. 290, 291.

—Gerhard Hunger
Regional Representative, Eastern Europe

SABBATH SCHOOL LESSONS

Fourth Quarter 2007
The Life of the Apostle Paul

“And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” Acts 9:6.

“In the wonderful conversion of Paul we see the miraculous power of God.... Jesus, whose name of all others he most hated and despised, revealed Himself to Paul for the purpose of arresting his mad yet honest career, that He might make this most unpromising instrument a chosen vessel to bear the gospel to the Gentiles.... The light of heavenly illumination had taken away Paul’s eyesight; but Jesus, the Great Healer of the blind, does not restore it. He answers the question of Paul in these words: ‘Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.’ Jesus could not only have healed Paul of his blindness, but He could have forgiven his sins and told him his duty by marking out his future course. From Christ all power and mercies were to flow; but He did not give Paul an experience, in his conversion to truth, independent of His church recently organized upon the earth.” –Conflict and Courage, p. 339.

“No man ever lived who was a more earnest, energetic, and self-sacrificing disciple of Christ than was Paul. He was one of the world’s greatest teachers. He crossed the seas, and traveled far and near, until a large portion of the world had learned from his lips the story of the cross of Christ. He possessed a burning desire to bring perishing men to a knowledge of the truth through a Saviour’s love.” –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 100, 101.

As we study the life history, ministry, and experiences of Paul in this quarter, may God help us to be inspired by the same zeal, vigilance, and devotion for Christ which he demonstrated. May we say boldly with him: Maranatha!

–The Brethren of the General Conference

The Special Sabbath School Offering is allotted to
TURKEY
Remember to give your offering as an expression
of love and gratitude

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Sabbath, October 6, 2007

Paul's Early Years

"But Paul said,... I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day." Acts 21:39; 22:3.

OBJECTIVES

- To trace the apostle Paul's family background
- To learn about his nationality and educational background
- To study how the early lessons of childhood can help shape our lives

PAUL'S CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY

1. What information do we have about Paul's birth and early years? Acts 21:39; 22:3; 23:6; Philippians 3:5.
2. What does the Bible mention about his family and relatives? Romans 16:7, 11, 21; Acts 23:16-22.

HIS MARITAL STATUS

3. Was Paul married? What was his attitude toward married life? 1 Corinthians 7:1-3, 6-9, 25, 26, 32, 33; Matthew 19:11, 12.
4. In his view of the marriage vow, did he intend to nullify the marriage ordinance? 1 Corinthians 7:9-11; Ephesians 5:22-26; Romans 7:2, 3.

"Marriage, a union for life, is a symbol of the union between Christ and His church. The spirit that Christ manifests toward His church is the spirit that the husband and wife are to manifest toward each other. If they love God supremely, they will love each other in the Lord, ever treating each other courteously, drawing in even cords. In their mutual self-denial and self-sacrifice they will be a blessing to each other." –The Adventist Home, p. 95.

PAUL'S NATIONALITY AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

5. Although born in the Gentile city of Tarsus, what was Paul's nationality? Acts 22:25-29; 21:39.

"Saul of Tarsus was a Jew, not only by descent, but by the stronger ties of lifelong training, patriotic devotion, and religious faith. Though a Roman citizen, born in a Gentile city, he was educated in Jerusalem...." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 10.

6. What is known about his education? Where and by whom was he instructed in the Jewish educational system? Acts 22:2, 3; Philippians 3:4-6.

"Prominent among the Jewish leaders who became thoroughly aroused by the success attending the proclamation of the gospel, was Saul of Tarsus. A Roman citizen by birth, Saul was nevertheless a Jew by descent and had been educated in Jerusalem by the most eminent of the rabbis. 'Of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin,' Saul was 'a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.' " –The Acts of the Apostles, p. 112.

"... Paul addressed the throng in the Hebrew language saying, ... 'I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God as ye all are this day.' " –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 218, 219.

7. In his education under the Jewish system and tradition, how was Saul affected by the teachings about the coming Messiah? Acts 22:4, 5.

"Though a Roman citizen, born in a Gentile city, he was educated in Jerusalem by the most eminent of the rabbis, and diligently instructed in all the laws and traditions of the Fathers. Thus he shared, to the fullest

extent, the hopes and aspirations, the lofty pride and unyielding prejudice, of his nation.”—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 10.

8. How can education fail us if mingled with human traditions and cherished customs? Mathews 15:9.

“The substitution of the precepts of men for the commandments of God had not ceased. Even among Christians are found institutions and usages that have no better foundation than the traditions of the fathers. Such institutions, resting upon mere human authority, have supplanted those of divine appointment. Men cling to their traditions, and revere their customs, and cherish hatred against those who seek to show them their error. In this day, when we are bidden to call attention to the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, we see the same enmity as was manifested in the days of Christ. Of the remnant people of God it is written, ‘The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.’ Revelation 12:17.

“But ‘every plant, which My heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.’ In place of the authority of the so-called fathers of the church, God bids us accept the word of the eternal Father, the Lord of heaven and earth.”—The Desire of Ages, p. 398.

FOR FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY

- It was a cherished tendency of the Israelites to be proud of their nationality and traditions but without Jesus in their hearts. Do we regard ourselves especially privileged to belong to the true church of God and therefore to a royal priesthood and holy nation, with Jesus as our King? Read 1 Peter 2:9, 10.
- Paul was highly educated in the Jewish educational system. But it imparted to him self-righteousness and alienation from Jesus. See Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1076. Do we daily seek true education, which draws us closer to Jesus and His righteousness?

* * * *

Saul, the Persecutor

"And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished." Acts 22:4, 5.

OBJECTIVES

- To learn about Saul's religious zeal
- To study why, apart from Jesus, our zeal for God's cause will always work against Him
- To show that the spirit of persecution always originates with Satan and therefore fulfills his will
- To see that God is glorified in the persecution of His people

SAUL, A ZEALOUS JEW

1. How was Saul regarded by the people and leaders of Israel? Acts 22:4, 5; 26:4, 5.

"He was regarded by the rabbis as a young man of great promise, and high hopes were cherished concerning him as an able and zealous defender of the ancient faith. His elevation to membership in the Sanhedrin council placed him in a position of power."—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 112.

"In common with his nation, Saul had cherished the hope of a Messiah who should reign as a temporal prince, to break from the neck of Israel the Roman yoke, and exalt her to the throne of universal empire. He had no personal knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth or of his mission, but he readily imbibed the scorn and hatred of the rabbis toward one who was so far from fulfilling their ambitious hopes; and after the death of Christ, he eagerly joined with priests and rulers in the persecution of his followers as a proscribed and hated sect."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 10.

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

2. Who was the first Christian martyr? Why was he persecuted? Acts 7:54-60.

"Stephen, the foremost of the seven deacons, was a man of deep piety and broad faith. Though a Jew by birth, he spoke the Greek language and was familiar with the customs and manners of the Greeks. He therefore found opportunity to preach the gospel in the synagogues of the Greek Jews. He was very active in the cause of Christ and boldly proclaimed his faith. Learned rabbis and doctors of the law engaged in public discussion with him, confidently expecting an easy victory. But 'they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.' Not only did he speak in the power of the Holy Spirit, but it was plain that he was a student of the prophecies and learned in all matters of the law. He ably defended the truths that he advocated and utterly defeated his opponents." –The Acts of the Apostles, p. 97.

3. After Stephen's trial and death, did Saul's hatred for Jesus' followers abate? Acts 8:1, 3; 26:9-11.

"He continued to persecute the church of God, hunting them down, seizing them in their houses, and delivering them up to the priests and rulers for imprisonment and death. His zeal in carrying forward the persecution was a terror to the Christians in Jerusalem. The Roman authorities made no special effort to stay the cruel work, and secretly aided the Jews in order to conciliate them, and to secure their favor." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 20.

4. How was Saul honored for his satanic zeal against the Son of God and His followers? Acts 26:9-11.

"Saul was greatly esteemed by the Jews for his zeal in persecuting the believers. After the death of Stephen, he was elected a member of the Sanhedrin council, in consideration of the part he had acted on that occasion. This learned and zealous rabbi was a mighty instrument in the hand of Satan to carry out his rebellion against the Son of God; but he was soon to be employed to build up the church he was now tearing down. A Mightier than Satan had selected Saul to take the place of the martyred Stephen, to preach and suffer for His name, and to spread far and wide the glad tidings of salvation through His blood." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 20.

GOD'S HAND IN TIME OF PERSECUTION

5. What testimony has always been borne in the persecution of God's people? Acts 7:59, 60; Luke 21:14, 15.

"The martyrdom of Stephen made a deep impression upon all who witnessed it. The memory of the signet of God upon his face; his words, which touched the very souls of those who heard them, remained in the minds of

the beholders, and testified to the truth of that which he had proclaimed. His death was a sore trial to the church, but it resulted in the conviction of Saul, who could not efface from his memory the faith and constancy of the martyr, and the glory that had rested on his countenance.

"At the scene of Stephen's trial and death, Saul had seemed to be imbued with a frenzied zeal. Afterward he was angered by his own secret conviction that Stephen had been honored by God at the very time when he was dishonored by men."—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 101.

6. How was the church actually blessed by being persecuted? Acts 8:1, second part, 4-8; Matthew 10:16-23; 5:11, 12.

"The persecution that came upon the church in Jerusalem resulted in giving a great impetus to the work of the gospel. Success had attended the ministry of the word in that place, and there was danger that disciples would linger there too long, unmindful of the Saviour's commission to go to all the world. Forgetting that strength to resist evil is best gained by aggressive service, they began to think that they had no work so important as that of shielding the church in Jerusalem from the attacks of the enemy. Instead of educating the new converts to carry the gospel to those who had not heard it, they were in danger of taking a course that would lead all to be satisfied with what had been accomplished. To scatter His representatives abroad, where they could work for others, God permitted persecution to come upon them.

"When they were scattered by persecution they went forth filled with missionary zeal. They realized the responsibility of their mission. They knew that they held in their hands the bread of life for a famishing world; and they were constrained by the love of Christ to break this bread to all who were in need. The Lord wrought through them. Wherever they went, the sick were healed and the poor had the gospel preached unto them."—The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 105, 106.

7. Why is so little persecution seen today among God's people? Romans 12:12-14; 2 Timothy 3:12.

"There is another and more important question that should engage the attention of the churches of today. The apostle Paul declares that 'all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.' 2 Timothy 3:12. Why is it, then, that persecution seems in a great degree to slumber? The only reason is that the church has conformed to the world's standard and therefore awakens no opposition. The religion which is current in our day is not of the pure and holy character that marked the Christian faith in the days of Christ and His apostles.... Let there be a revival of the faith and power of the early church, and the spirit of persecution will be revived, and the fires of persecution will be rekindled."—The Great Controversy, p. 48.

"God in His great love is seeking to develop in us the precious graces of His Spirit. He permits us to encounter obstacles, persecution, and hardships, not as a curse, but as the greatest blessing of our lives. Every temptation resisted, every trial bravely borne, gives us a new experience and advances us in the work of character building." –Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 117.

8. To cover up their wickedness, what do satanic agents commit with the rulers of this earth? Revelation 18:3, middle part.

"The priests and rulers who witnessed the wonderful manifestation of the power that attended the ministration of Stephen, were filled with bitter hatred. Instead of yielding to the weight of evidence he presented, they determined to silence his voice by putting him to death. They had on several occasions bribed the Roman authorities to pass over without comment instances where the Jews had taken the law into their own hands, and tried, condemned, and executed prisoners according to their national custom.....

"There had been no legal sentence passed upon Stephen; but the Roman authorities were bribed by large sums of money to make no investigation of the case." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp.16, 20.

FOR FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY

- Paul's former life spent persecuting God's people proves to us that there are many enemies and opposers of the truth who may be helped to embrace the true message and become very useful instruments and servants of Christ.
- Read The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 116-120.
- It is through persecution and trial that faith is established and improved. It was during the terrible persecution that the gospel truth was extended to Gentile lands. So, we can see the hand of God in this. The Great Controversy, pp. 618-622.

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The Conversion of Paul

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." 1 Timothy 1:12, 13, NKJV.

OBJECTIVES

- To try to fathom the love and power of God in changing the enemy into a faithful servant
- To see how God works to bring our misguided zeal into harmony with His good purpose
- To learn that opposers of the truth of Christ cannot stop the progress God's work of God but will themselves suffer
- To learn about the high calling of the church in the salvation of lost mankind and about God's estimation of the church

MISAPPLIED HUMAN ZEAL

1. In persecuting the church, did Saul know that he was working against the cause of God? 1 Timothy 1:12, 13; Acts 26:9-11.

"Saul had taken a prominent part in the trial and conviction of Stephen, and the striking evidences of God's presence with the martyr had led Saul to doubt the righteousness of the cause he had espoused against the followers of Jesus. His mind was deeply stirred. In his perplexity he appealed to those in whose wisdom and judgment he had full confidence. The arguments of the priests and rulers finally convinced him that Stephen was a blasphemer, that the Christ whom the martyred disciple had preached was an impostor, and that those ministering in holy office must be right.

"Not without severe trial did Saul come to this conclusion. But in the end his education and prejudices, his respect for his former teachers, and his pride of popularity braced him to rebel against the voice of conscience and the grace of God. And having fully decided that the priests and scribes were right, Saul became very bitter in his opposition to the doctrines taught by the disciples of Jesus."—The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 112, 113.

2. In correcting Saul's mistaken zeal, how did the Lord in His wisdom and power interrupt his plans? Acts 26:12-14; 9:1-3.

"Paul honestly thought that he was persecuting a weak, ignorant, fanatical sect. He did not realize that he himself was the one deluded and deceived, and following ignorantly under the banner of the prince of darkness.

"The mind that resists the truth will see everything in a perverted light. It will be fastened in the sure toils of the enemy, and view things in the light of the enemy.

"Saul of Tarsus was an example of this. He had no moral right to be an unbeliever. But he had chosen to accept the opinions of men rather than the counsel of God. He had the prophecies pointing to the Messiah, but the sayings of the rabbis, the words of men, were preferred. In his own wisdom, Saul knew not God nor Jesus Christ, whom He had sent. Afterward in repeating his experience, he declared that he thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Saul was honest in his unbelief. His was no pretension, and Jesus arrested him in his career and showed him on whose side he was working. The persecutor accepted the words of Christ, and was converted from infidelity to faith in Christ."—Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1057.

FROM PERSECUTOR TO DISCIPLE

3. Describe how Paul met Jesus and received the call to discipleship while on special assignment to persecute His disciples in Damascus. Acts 26:15-18; 9:4-6.

"While the light continued to shine round about them, Saul heard a 'voice speaking ... in the Hebrew tongue' (Acts 26:14), 'saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.'

"Filled with fear, and almost blinded by the intensity of the light, the companions of Saul heard a voice, but saw no man. But Saul understood the words that were spoken, and to him was clearly revealed the One who spoke—even the Son of God. In the glorious Being who stood before him he saw the Crucified One. Upon the soul of the stricken Jew the image of the Saviour's countenance was imprinted forever. The words spoken struck home to his heart with appalling force. Into the darkened chambers of his mind there poured a flood of light, revealing the ignorance and error of his former life and his present need of the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit."—The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 114, 115.

4. How were Paul's spiritual eyes opened, and what was his response? Whom does everyone serve who works against the church of God and persecutes His people? 1 Timothy 1:13-16; 1 Corinthians 15:8, 9; Revelation 12:13.

"Saul now saw that in persecuting the followers of Jesus he had in reality been doing the work of Satan. He saw that his convictions of right and of his own duty had based been largely on his implicit confidence in the priests and rulers. He had believed them when they told him that the story of the resurrection was an artful fabrication of the disciples. Now that Jesus Himself stood revealed, Saul was convinced of the truthfulness of the claims made by the disciples.

"In that hour of heavenly illumination Saul's mind acted with remarkable rapidity. The prophetic records of Holy Writ were opened to his understanding. He saw that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, had been foretold by the prophets and proved Him to be the promised Messiah."—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 116.

BLIND SO HE MIGHT SEE

5. What was the effect of the glorious light that shone upon Paul and his companions? According to divine wisdom, why was he stricken with blindness for three days? Acts 9:8, 9.

"What a humiliation it was to Paul to know that all the time he was using his powers against the truth, thinking he was doing God's service, he was persecuting Christ. When the Saviour revealed Himself to Paul in the bright beams of His glory, he was filled with abhorrence for his work and for himself. The power of Christ's glory might have destroyed him, but Paul was a prisoner of hope. He was made physically blind by the glory of the presence of Him whom he had blasphemed, but it was that he might have spiritual sight, that he might be awakened from the lethargy that had stupefied and deadened his perceptions.... In the days and nights of his blindness he had time for reflection, and he cast himself all helpless and hopeless upon Christ, the only one who could pardon him and clothe him with righteousness."—Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1058.

6. In his desperate condition, to whom was he directed for help? What was the role of the church in Paul's conversion? Acts 9:10-12.

"The Redeemer of the world does not sanction experience and exercise in religious matters independent of His organized and acknowledged church. Many have an idea that they are responsible to Christ alone for their light and experience, independent of His recognized followers on earth. But in the history of the conversion of Saul, important principles are given us, which we should ever bear in mind. He was brought directly into the presence of Christ. He was one whom Christ intended for a most important work, one who was to be 'a chosen vessel' unto Him; yet He did

not personally impart to him the lessons of truth. He arrested his course and convicted him; but when asked by him, 'What wilt Thou have me to do?' The Saviour placed him in connection with His church, and let them direct him what to do.

"Saul was a learned teacher in Israel; but, while in the midst of his blind error and prejudice, Christ reveals Himself to him, and then places him in communication with His church, which is the light of the world." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 31, 32.

7. As Ananias laid hands upon Saul, with what loving words did he address him? Acts 9:17, 18.

"In this case Ananias represents Christ, and also represents Christ's ministers upon earth, who are appointed to act in His stead. In Christ's stead, Ananias touches the eyes of Saul that they may receive sight. In Christ's stead, he places his hands upon him, and, praying in Christ's name, Saul receives the Holy Ghost. All is done in the name and by the authority of Christ; but the church is the channel of communication." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 32.

8. At this point, what counsel did Paul come to realize to be the truth? Acts 5:38, 39.

"The realization that Jesus is the Christ marks the point of Saul's conversion, and the end of his persecution rage. He is made to see what his master, Gamaliel, had before suggested (ch. 5:39), that to persecute Jesus was to fight against God." –S.D.A. Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 229.

9. What scar was Paul to bear as a constant reminder of his encounter with Jesus? 2 Corinthians 12:7-9; Acts 9:8, 9.

"Paul had a bodily affliction; his eyesight was bad. He thought that by earnest prayer the difficulty might be removed. But the Lord had His purpose, and He said to Paul, Speak to Me no more of this matter. My grace is sufficient. It will enable you to bear the infirmity...."

"He [Paul] was ever to carry about with him in the body the marks of Christ's glory, in his eyes, which had been blinded by the heavenly light." –Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 6, pp. 1107, 1059.

FOR FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY

- As was the experience of Paul, we also encounter some bitter experiences in life which are intended by Heaven to correct our wrong motives and

actions cherished by us in our blindness. Please read Revelation 3:14-19. How do we react in such situations?

- Paul felt deeply sorry to learn that by persecuting the disciples of Jesus and the truth, he was committing a great offense against God. Have we grasped that any spirit of persecution we manifest toward our fellowmen means we are actually working for Satan? Read Matthew 24:45-51; 25:41-45.
- Paul was directed by Jesus to His servants for help and instruction. Do we have the same esteem for the servants of God as He does?

* * * *

4

Sabbath, October 27, 2007

Paul's Dedication and Consecration to the Ministry

"For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." 1 Corinthians 15:9, 10.

OBJECTIVES

- To learn about the steps taken by Paul before entering the ministry
- To see how he responded to God's call for greater preparation for his high calling
- To study his yearning zeal for his former brethren and associates

PAUL'S DEDICATION

1. When and how did Paul commit himself to proclaiming the gospel message? Acts 9:19-22.

"Paul demonstrated to all who heard him that his change of faith was not from impulse nor fanaticism, but was brought about by overwhelming evidence.

"As he labored in the synagogues, his faith grew stronger; his zeal in maintaining that Jesus was the Son of God increased, in the face of the fierce opposition of the Jews. He could not remain long in Damascus, for after the Jews had recovered from their surprise at his wonderful conversion and subsequent labors, they turned resolutely from the overwhelming evidence thus brought to bear in favor of the doctrine of Christ. Their astonishment at the conversion of Paul was changed into an intense hatred of him, like unto that which they had manifested against Jesus.

"Paul's life was in peril, and he received a commission from God to leave Damascus for a time. He went into Arabia; and there, in comparative solitude, he had ample opportunity for communion with God, and for contemplation." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 33.

2. How determined were his efforts to obtain the acceptance and approval of God both in his life and in his ministry? Where was he led for further preparation? 1 Corinthians 9:16-18; Galatians 1:10-17.

"While in Arabia he did not communicate with the apostles; he sought God earnestly with all his heart, determining not to rest till he knew for a certainty that his repentance was accepted, and his great sin pardoned. He would not give up the conflict until he had the assurance that Jesus would be with him in his coming ministry. He was ever to carry about with him in the body the marks of Christ's glory, in his eyes, which had been blinded by the heavenly light, and he desired also to bear with him constantly the assurance of Christ's sustaining grace. Paul came in close connection with Heaven, and Jesus communed with him, and established him in his faith, bestowing upon him his wisdom and grace." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 34.

3. From Arabia, where did he go next? How much time elapsed before he went to Jerusalem? What experience did he make in Damascus? Galatians 1:17, 18; 2 Corinthians 11:32, 33; Acts 9:23-25.

"Paul now returned to Damascus, and preached boldly in the name of Jesus. The Jews could not withstand the wisdom of his arguments, and they therefore counseled together to silence his voice by force—the only argument left to a sinking cause. They decided to assassinate him. The apostle was made acquainted with their purpose. The gates of the city were vigilantly guarded, day and night, to cut off his escape. The anxiety of the disciples drew them to God in prayer; there was little sleeping among them, as they were busy in devising ways and means for the escape of the chosen apostle. Finally they conceived a plan by which he was let down from a window, and lowered over the wall in a basket at night. In this humiliating manner Paul made his escape from Damascus." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 34.

PAUL'S FIRST VISIT TO JERUSALEM

4. What was the main purpose of his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, and what was the outcome? Acts 9:26; Galatians 1:18-20.

"He now proceeded to Jerusalem, wishing to become acquainted with the apostles there, and especially with Peter. He was very anxious to meet the Galilean fishermen who had lived, and prayed, and conversed with Christ upon earth. It was with a yearning heart that he desired to meet the chief of apostles. As Paul entered Jerusalem, he regarded with changed views the city and the temple. He now knew that the retributive judgment of God was hanging over them.

"The grief and anger of the Jews because of the conversion of Paul knew no bounds. But he was firm as a rock, and flattered himself that when he related his wonderful experience to his friends, they would change their faith as he had done, and believe on Jesus....

"He attempted to join himself to his brethren, the disciples; but great was his grief and disappointment when he found that they would not receive him as one of their number. They remembered his former persecutions, and suspected him of acting a part to deceive and destroy them." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 35.

5. What role did Barnabas play in arousing the confidence of the disciples that Paul was an honest instrument chosen by Christ Himself? Acts 9:27-30.

"Barnabas, who had liberally contributed of his means to sustain the cause of Christ, and to relieve the necessities of the poor, had been acquainted with Paul when he opposed the believers. He now came forward and renewed that acquaintance, heard the testimony of Paul in regard to his miraculous conversion, and his experience from that time. He fully believed and received Paul, took him by the hand, and led him into the presence of the apostles. He related his experience which he had just heard—that Jesus had personally appeared to Paul while on his way to Damascus; that He had talked with him; that Paul had recovered his sight in answer to the prayers of Ananias, and had afterward maintained in the synagogues of the city, that Jesus was the Son of God." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 36.

BEGIN OF HIS MINISTRY

6. Which apostles were present in Jerusalem at that time? Acts 9:27; Galatians 1:18, 19.

"The apostles no longer hesitated; they could not withstand God. Peter and James, who at that time were the only apostles in Jerusalem, gave the right hand of fellowship to the once fierce persecutor of their faith; and he was now as much beloved and respected as he had formerly been feared and avoided. Here the two grand characters of the new faith met—Peter, one of the chosen companions of Christ while He was upon earth, and Paul,

a Pharisee, who, since the ascension of Jesus, had met Him face to face, and had talked with Him, and had also seen Him in vision, and the nature of His work in heaven.”—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 36.

7. With what yearning for his brethren and his former associates did Paul address them? What was the response to his speech? Acts 9:29, 30.

“This first interview was of great consequence to both these apostles, but it was of short duration, for Paul was eager to get about his Master’s business. Soon the voice which had so earnestly disputed with Stephen, was heard in the same synagogue fearlessly proclaiming that Jesus was the Son of God—advocating the same cause that Stephen had died to vindicate. He related his own wonderful experience, and with a heart filled with yearning for his brethren and former associates, presented the evidences from prophecy, as Stephen had done, that Jesus, who had been crucified, was the Son of God.

“But Paul had miscalculated the spirit of his Jewish brethren. The same fury that had burst forth upon Stephen was visited upon himself. He saw that he must separate from his brethren, and sorrow filled his heart.” — Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 36, 37.

8. As Paul was praying earnestly to God in the temple, unwilling to leave Jerusalem after being rejected, what answer did he receive from the Lord in vision? Acts 9:30; 22:17-21; Galatians 1:21.

“While Paul, braving all the consequences of such a step, was praying earnestly to God in the temple, the Saviour appeared to him in vision, saying, ‘Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem; for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me.’ Paul even then hesitated to leave Jerusalem without convincing the obstinate Jews of the truth of his faith; he thought that, even if his life should be sacrificed for the truth, it would not more than settle the fearful account which he held against himself for the death of Stephen. He answered, ‘Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee. And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.’ But the reply was more decided than before: ‘Depart; for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.’” —Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 37, 38.

FOR FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY

- When Paul met Jesus on the way to Damascus, his entire life was transformed from enemy of Christ to faithful servant of Christ. 1 Corinthians

4:1, 2. We need to examine ourselves whether in our spiritual experience we have met Jesus to be fitted to preach Him to others.

- Paul also strongly desired to be reconciled with the apostles and others so they would accept him and work together in harmony and love to spread the gospel truth. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. How much do we strive to make sure this virtue is evident in our ranks?
- Private and solitary meditation and prayer in a quiet place have proved to be a key secret of spiritual strength for all champions of faith. Jesus is our model in this. See Luke 22:39-41. How much time do we dedicate to such prayer?

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5

Sabbath, November 3, 2007

Paul, an Apostle to the Gentiles

"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." Acts 9:15, 16.

OBJECTIVES

- To see how Paul's call to minister to the Gentiles came to fruition
- To find out how strong his devotion to his calling was
- To learn important lessons from his experiences in the ministry

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IN ANTIOCH

1. Because of fierce persecution against the disciples in Jerusalem, what became the center for the gospel work among the Gentiles? Acts 11:19-21.

"Antioch had a large population both of Jews and Gentiles; it was a great resort for lovers of ease and pleasure, because of the healthfulness of its situations, its beautiful scenery, and the wealth, culture, and refinement that centered there. Its extensive commerce made it a place of great importance, where people of all nationalities were found. It was therefore a city of luxury and vice. The retribution of God finally came upon Antioch, because of the wickedness of its inhabitants." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 40.

2. Who were the first missionaries sent to Antioch to establish the church? Acts 11:22-26.

"When the believers in Jerusalem heard the good tidings, they rejoiced; and Barnabas, 'a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith,' was sent to Antioch, the metropolis of Syria, to help the church there. He labored there with great success. As the work increased, he solicited and obtained the help of Paul; and the two disciples labored together in that city for a year, teaching the people, and adding to the numbers of the church of Christ."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 40.

3. Initially in derision or mild contempt for the gospel message proclaimed in Antioch, what name was given to the disciples who believed in Jesus? Why were they given this name? Acts 11:26, last part; 1 Corinthians 1:23, 24.

"It was here that the disciples were first called Christians. This name was given them because Christ was the theme of their preaching, teaching, and conversation. They were continually recounting the incidents of His life, during the time in which His disciples were blessed with His personal company. They dwelt untiringly upon His teachings, His miracles of healing the sick, casting out devils, and raising the dead to life. With quivering lips and tearful eyes they spoke of His agony in the garden, His betrayal, trial, and execution, the forbearance and humility with which He endured the contumely and torture imposed upon Him by His enemies, and the Godlike pity with which He prayed for those who persecuted Him. His resurrection and ascension, and His work in heaven as a Mediator for fallen man, were joyful topics with them. The heathen might well call them Christians, since they preached of Christ, and addressed their prayers to God through Him."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 40, 41.

PAUL'S ORDINATION TO THE MINISTRY

4. How did Paul and his companion Barnabas receive the divine approval for their ministry? Acts 13:1-3.

"God communicated with the devout prophets and teachers in the Church at Antioch. 'As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.' These apostles were therefore dedicated to God in a most solemn manner by fasting and prayer and the laying on of hands; and they were sent forth to their field of labor among the Gentiles.

"Both Paul and Barnabas had been laboring as ministers of Christ, and God had abundantly blessed their efforts; but neither of them had previously been formally ordained to the gospel ministry by prayer and the laying on of hands. They were now authorized by the church, not only to teach the truth, but to baptize, and to organize churches, being invested with full ecclesiastical authority."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 42.

5. What is significant about the ordinance of laying on of hands for the gospel ministry? Does the act impart special power or virtue to the recipient? Acts 14:23.

"The ordination by the laying on of hands, was, at a later date, greatly abused; unwarrantable importance was attached to the act as though a power came at once upon those who received such ordination, which immediately qualified them for any and all ministerial work, as though virtue lay in the act of laying on of hands. We have, in the history of these two apostles, only a simple record of the laying on of hands, and its bearing upon their work. Both Paul and Barnabas had already received there commission from God Himself; and the ceremony of the laying on of hands added no new grace or virtual qualification. It was merely setting the seal of the church upon the work of God—an acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 43, 44.

MINISTERIAL EXPERIENCES

6. What hindrances from Satan did Paul and his company experience during their missionary trip? Acts 13:6-12.

"The sorcerer had closed his eyes to the evidences of truth, and the light of the gospel, therefore the Lord, in His righteous anger, caused his natural eyes to be closed, shutting out from him the light of day. This blindness was not permanent, but only for a season, to warn him to repent, and to seek pardon of God whom he had so offended....

"Elymas was not a man of education, yet he was peculiarly fitted to do the work of Satan. Those who preach the truth of God will be obliged to meet the wily foe in many different forms. Sometimes it is in the person of learned, and often in the person of ignorant, men, whom Satan has educated to be his successful instruments in deceiving souls and in working iniquity. It is the duty of the minister of Christ to stand faithfully at his post, in the fear of God and in the power of his strength. Thus he may put to confusion the hosts of Satan, and triumph in the name of the Lord."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 45, 46.

7. When they returned to Antioch after visiting Cyprus, Paphos, and Perga, Paul and Barnabas had a good audience in Pisidia. What was the response of the Gentile converts to the gospel message? Acts 13:16-49.

"When they [the Jews] learned that the Messiah preached by the apostles was to be a light to the Gentiles, as well as the glory of His people Israel, they were beside themselves with rage, and used the most insulting language to the apostles.

"The Gentiles, on the other hand, rejoiced exceedingly that Christ recognized them as the children of God, and with grateful hearts they listened to the word preached. The apostles now clearly discerned their duty, and the work which God would have them do. They turned without hesitation to the Gentiles, preaching Christ to them, and leaving the Jews to their bigotry, blindness of mind, and hardness of heart." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 49, 50.

8. When a gospel message is presented and rejected, what should be the attitude of the messengers? Acts 13:45, 46, 50, 51; Matthew 10:23.

"The interest to hear the words of the apostles was so great that the whole city came together on the next Sabbath day. But now, as in the days of Christ, when the Jewish priests and rulers saw the multitudes that had assembled to hear the new doctrine, they were moved by envy and jealousy, and contradicted the word of the apostles with blasphemy. Their bigotry and prejudice were also aroused, when they perceived great numbers of Gentiles mingling with the Jews in the congregation. They could not endure that the Gentiles should enjoy religious privileges on an equality with themselves, but clung tenaciously to the idea that the blessing of God was reserved exclusively for them. This had ever been the great sin of the Jews, which Christ, on several occasions, had rebuked." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 49.

FOR FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY

- Although he was already chosen by Jesus Himself, Paul's formal ordination to the gospel ministry invested him with full ecclesiastical authority from the established church of God. Read Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 42-44.
- His courage, zeal, and determination were so strong that, throughout his later ministry, Paul never lost sight of the Source of his wisdom and strength. Read The Acts of the Apostles, p. 128.

* * * *

Great Opposition and Persecution

"Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." 2 Timothy 1:11, 12.

OBJECTIVES

- To learn from Paul's life about the experiences we may encounter in doing missionary activity
- To see the need to take very good care of the work already established
- To understand the need for respecting order as an effective step in defending the truth and harmony in the church

OPPOSITION FROM UNBELIEVING JEWS

1. After the Jews stirred up persecution against them, to what heathen cities did Paul and Barnabas extend the gospel message? Acts 13:51, 52; 14:1-7.

"The apostles next went to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia. These were inhabited by a heathen, superstitious people; but among them were souls that would hear and accept the doctrine of Christ. The apostles chose to labor in those cities because they would not there meet Jewish prejudice and persecution. They now came in contact with an entirely new element—heathen superstition and idolatry.

"The apostles, in their work, met all grades of people, and all kinds of faith and religion. They were brought in opposition to Jewish bigotry and intolerance, sorcery, blasphemy, unjust magistrates who loved to exercise their power, false shepherds, superstition, and idolatry. While persecution and opposition met them on every hand, victory still crowned their efforts, and converts were daily added to the faith." —Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 55.

2. What miraculous manifestation attended the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra? But how did Satan work to misrepresent the divine miracles? Acts 14:8-18.

"This work performed on the cripple was a marvel to all beholders. The subject was so well known, and the cure was so complete, that there was no room for skepticism on their part. The Lycaonians were convinced that supernatural power attended the labors of the apostles, and they cried out with great enthusiasm that the gods had come down to them from Heaven in the likeness of men. This belief was in harmony with their traditions that gods visited the earth. They conceived the idea that the great heathen deities, Jupiter and Mercury, were in their midst in the persons of Paul and Barnabas. The former they believed to be Mercury; for Paul was active, earnest, quick, and eloquent with words of warning and exhortation. Barnabas was believed to be Jupiter, the father of gods, because of his venerable appearance, his dignified bearing, and the mildness and benevolence expressed in his countenance." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 57.

3. How did the unbelieving Jews stir up the Lystrians against Paul? Who was among the new converts who witnessed the stoning of Paul? Acts 14:19; 16:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:10-12.

"And now a strange change came upon the fickle, excitable people, because their faith was not anchored in the true God. The opposing Jews of Antioch, through whose influence the apostles were driven from that district, united with certain Jews of Iconium, and followed upon the track of the apostles. The miracle wrought upon the cripple, and its effect upon those who witnessed it, stirred up their envy, and led them to go to the scene of the apostles' labor, and put their false version upon the work. They denied that God had any part in it, and claimed that it was accomplished through the demons whom these men served.

"The same class had formerly accused the Saviour of casting out devils through the power of the prince of devils; they had denounced Him as a deceiver; and they now visited the same unreasoning wrath upon his apostles. By means of falsehoods they inspired the people of Lystra with the bitterness of spirit by which they were themselves actuated. They claimed to be thoroughly acquainted with the history and faith of Paul and Barnabas, and so misrepresented their characters and work that these heathen, who had been ready to worship the apostles as divine beings, now considered them worse than murderers, and that whoever should put them out of the world would do God and mankind good service." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 59, 60.

STRENGTHENING THE ESTABLISHED CHURCHES

4. In spite of the great opposition and persecution which they had passed through, what responsibility did Paul and his colleague Barnabas not forget? What lesson can we learn from this? Acts 14:21-23.

"They departed for Derbe, where their labors were blessed, and many souls were led to embrace the truth. But both Paul and Barnabas returned again to visit Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, the fields of labor where they had met such opposition and persecution. In all those places were many that believed the truth; and the apostles felt it their duty to strengthen and encourage their brethren who were exposed to reproach and bitter opposition. They were determined to securely bind off the work which they had done, that it might not ravel out. Churches were organized in the places mentioned, elders appointed in each church, and the proper order established there."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 62, 63.

A THREAT FROM WITHIN

5. What problem soon threatened the harmony of the church? Acts 15:1.

"But certain Jews from Judea raised a general consternation among the believing Gentiles by agitating the question of circumcision. They asserted with great assurance, that none could be saved without being circumcised and keeping the entire ceremonial law.

"This was an important question, and one which affected the church in a very great degree. Paul and Barnabas met it with promptness, and opposed introducing the subject to the Gentiles. They were opposed in this by the believing Jews of Antioch, who favored the position of those from Judea."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 63.

6. To resolve this dispute, what measures were taken by the leadership of the church in Antioch? Acts 15:2-5.

"The matter resulted in much discussion and want of harmony in the church, until finally the church at Antioch, apprehending that a division among them would occur from any further discussion of the question, decided to send Paul and Barnabas, together with some responsible men of Antioch, to Jerusalem, to lay the matter before the apostles and elders. There they were to meet delegates from the different churches, and those who had come to attend the approaching annual festivals. Meanwhile all controversy was to cease until a final decision should be made by the responsible men of the church. This decision was then to be universally accepted by the various churches throughout the country."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 63.

7. Why would this matter have had serious consequences if it had not been properly dealt with? What lesson can we apply today in regard to our own cherished cultural traditions?

"The question of circumcision was warmly discussed in the assembly. The Gentile converts lived in a community of idolaters. Sacrifices and offerings were made to senseless idols, by these ignorant and superstitious people. The priests of these gods carried on an extensive merchandise with the offerings brought to them; and the Jews feared that the Gentile converts would bring Christianity into disrepute by purchasing those things which had been offered to idols, and thereby sanctioning, in some measure, an idolatrous worship.

"Also, the Gentiles were accustomed to eat the flesh of animals that had been strangled; while the Jews had been divinely instructed with regard to the food they should use. They were particular, in killing beasts, that the blood should flow from the body, else it was not regarded as healthful meat....

"The Gentiles, on the contrary, practiced catching the blood which flowed from the victim of sacrifice, and drinking it, or using it in the preparation of their food....

"The Gentiles, and especially the Greeks, were extremely licentious; and many, in accepting Christianity, had united the truth to their unsanctified natures, and continued to practice fornication." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 65, 66.

8. Under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, how was this problem settled by the council of apostles and elders in Jerusalem? Acts 15:6-29.

"The questions thus brought under the consideration of the council seemed to present insurmountable difficulties, viewed in whatever light. But the Holy Ghost had, in reality, already settled this problem, upon the decision of which depended the prosperity, and even the existence, of the Christian church. Grace, wisdom, and sanctified judgment were given to the apostles to decide the vexed question.

"Peter reasoned that the Holy Ghost had decided the matter by descending with equal power upon the uncircumcised Gentiles and the circumcised Jews. He recounted his vision, in which God had presented before him a sheet filled with all manner of four-footed beasts, and had bidden him kill and eat; that when he had refused, affirming that he had never eaten that which was common or unclean, God had said, 'What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.'

"James bore his testimony with decision—that God designed to bring in the Gentiles to enjoy all the privileges of the Jews. The Holy Ghost saw good not to impose the ceremonial law on the Gentile converts; and the apostles and elders, after careful investigation of the subject, saw the matter in the same light, and their mind was as the mind of the Spirit of God." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 66-68.

9. Who presided over this council? Who were considered pillars of the church at that time? Acts 15:13, 19; Galatians 2:6-9.

“... James presided at the council, and his final decision was, ‘Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turned to God.’

“This ended the discussion. In this instance we have a refutation of the doctrine held by the Roman Catholic Church—that Peter was the head of the church. Those who, as popes, have claimed to be his successors, have no foundation for their pretensions. Nothing in the life of Peter gives sanction to those pretended claims. If the professed successors of Peter had imitated his example, they would have taken no authoritative position, but one on an equality with that of their brethren.” —Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 68, 69.

FOR FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY

- “Satan’s assaults have ever been directed against those who have sought to advance the work and cause of God. Though often baffled, he as often renews his attacks with fresh vigor, using means hitherto untried.” —Prophets and Kings, p. 658.
- The souls won to Christ through great opposition were treated with tender regard as precious gems by Paul. We also should learn to protect and strengthen believers in the faith. See also The Acts of the Apostles, p. 207.
- The inherited and cherished cultural traditions of modern times often prove great hindrances to spiritual growth in the church. To respect decisions made by the assembled representatives of God’s church in a General Conference will bring blessing and harmony. See also Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 260.

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Persecution and Imprisonment

"From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Galatians 6:17.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the depth of Paul's zeal for the cause of Christ
- To learn from Paul the need for improving our fitness for the gospel ministry, as did Mark
- To see how divine manifestation accompanies our ministry as we depend on the leading of the Holy Ghost

A NEW CO-WORKER

1. After spending a considerable amount of time strengthening and encouraging the church in Antioch, what was Paul's next plan of action? What caused a separation between him and Barnabas? Acts 15:36-39.

"Mark did not apostatize from the faith of Christianity; but, like many young ministers, he shrank from hardships, and preferred the comfort and safety of home to the travels, labors, and dangers of the missionary field....

"... He had, as the companion of the apostles, rejoiced in the success of their mission; but fear and discouragement overwhelmed him in the face of privation, persecution, and danger; and he sought the attractions of home at a time when his services were most needful to the apostles.

"At a future period there was a sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas concerning Mark, who was still anxious to devote himself to the work of the ministry. This contention caused Paul and Barnabas to separate, the latter following out his convictions, and taking Mark with him in his work. Paul could not, at that time, excuse in any degree the weakness of Mark in deserting them and the work upon which they had entered, for the ease and quiet of home; and he urged that one with so little stamina was unfit for the gospel ministry, which required patience, self-denial, bravery, and faith, with a willingness to sacrifice even life if need be." —Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 46-48.

2. Did Mark overcome his cowardice in the face of privation? How did Paul regard Mark later in his ministry? Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1:23, 24. (See also the Gospel according to Mark.)

"Paul was afterward reconciled to Mark, and received him as a fellow-laborer. He also recommended him to the Colossians as one who was a 'fellow-worker unto the kingdom of God,' and a personal comfort to him, Paul. Again, not long prior to his own death, he spoke of Mark as profitable to him in the ministry."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 48.

3. Whom did Paul choose as his companions after his dispute with Barnabas? Acts 15:40, 41; 16:1-3.

"In company with Silas, Paul again visited Lystra....

"Paul found that Timothy was closely bound to him by the ties of Christian union. This man had been instructed in the Holy Scriptures from his childhood, and educated for strictly religious life. He had witnessed the sufferings of Paul upon his former visit to Lystra, and the bonds of Christian sympathy had knit his heart firmly to that of the apostle. Paul accordingly thought best to take Timothy with him to assist in his labors.

"Paul, with his usual good judgment, caused Timothy to be circumcised; not that God required it, but in order to remove from the minds of the Jews an obstacle to Timothy's ministration."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 72, 73.

THE CROSS IN EUROPE; GOD'S POWER

4. As they were led by the Holy Ghost on their first journey to Europe, where did they set up a center for their work? Acts 16:4-15.

"The time had come for the gospel to be proclaimed beyond the confines of Asia Minor. The way was preparing for Paul and his fellow workers to cross over into Europe. At Troas, on the borders of the Mediterranean Sea, 'a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.'

"The call was imperative, admitting of no delay. 'After he had seen the vision,' declares Luke, who accompanied Paul and Silas and Timothy on the journey across to Europe, 'immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony.

“... Lydia received the truth gladly. She and her household were converted and baptized, and she entreated the apostles to make her house their home.” –The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 211, 212.

5. Seeing that his kingdom was being invaded, how did Satan work through his special agents to attack the work which was just beginning in Philippi? What was Paul’s reaction and its aftermath? Acts 16:16-24.

“The apostles endured this opposition for several days; then Paul, under inspiration of the Spirit of God, commanded the evil spirit to leave the woman. Satan was thus met and rebuked. The immediate and continued silence of the woman testified that the apostles were the servants of God, and that the demon had acknowledged them to be such, and had obeyed their command.

“Satan stirred up a frenzy among the people. A mob spirit prevailed, and was sanctioned by the authorities, who, with their official hands, tore the clothes from the apostles, and commanded them to be scourged. ‘And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely; who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.’

“The apostles were left in a very painful condition. Their lacerated and bleeding backs were in contact with the rough stone floor, while their feet were elevated and bound fast in the stocks.” –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 74, 75.

6. In their terrible ordeal and suffering, what did the apostles do? How was God’s power manifested in answer to their earnest prayers and praise? Acts 16:25, 26.

“... In this unnatural position they suffered extreme torture; yet they did not groan nor complain, but conversed with and encouraged each other, and praised God with grateful hearts that they were found worthy to suffer shame for His dear name. Paul was reminded of the persecution he had been instrumental in heaping upon the disciples of Christ, and he was devoutly thankful that his eyes had been opened to see, and his heart to feel, the glorious truths of the gospel of the Son of God, and that he had been privileged to preach the doctrine which he had once despised.” –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 75.

7. Who was most affected by God’s amazing intervention? What was he ready to do because of fear and confusion? Acts 16:27, 28.

"The keeper of the jail heard with amazement the prayers and songs of the imprisoned apostles. When they were led in, he had seen their swollen and bleeding wounds, and had himself caused their feet to be fastened in the stocks. He had expected to hear from them bitter groans and imprecations, but he heard instead songs of joy and praise. With these sounds in his ears the jailer had fallen into a sleep from which he was awakened by the earthquake and the shaking of the prison walls."—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 215.

8. How was the jailer's life changed by this miracle and the conduct of the apostles? Acts 16:29-34.

"The jailer had trembled as he beheld the wrath of God manifested in the earthquake; when he thought that the prisoners had escaped he had been ready to die by his own hand; but now all these things seemed of little consequence compared with the new, strange dread that agitated his mind, and his desire to possess the tranquillity and cheerfulness shown by the apostles under suffering and abuse. He saw in their countenances the light of heaven; he knew that God had interposed in a miraculous manner to save their lives; and with peculiar force the words of the spirit-possessed woman came to his mind: 'These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.'"—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 216.

9. Later, in writing to the Philippians, of what did Paul remind them? Philippians 1:3, 4, 27-30.

"The apostles did not regard as in vain their labors in Philippi. They had met much opposition and persecution; but the intervention of Providence in their behalf, and the conversion of the jailer and his household, more than atoned for the disgrace and suffering they had endured. The news of their unjust imprisonment and miraculous deliverance became known through all that region, and this brought the work of the apostles to the notice of a large number who otherwise would not have been reached."—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 218.

FOR FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION

- After facing a severe challenge from Paul, Mark later changed and became a very useful instrument for God's cause and also the author of the Gospel of Mark. How do we react when we face a similar situation of being rejected? 2 Peter 1:10, 11; 1 Peter 5:10.
- In this lesson, we learned that Paul, Silas, and Timothy, heeding the divine call, became the first missionaries to take the gospel message to Europe. How much do we yearn to be led by the Holy Spirit into foreign missions? See Matthew 9:35-38; Isaiah 6:8.
- How did the apostles view the persecution they suffered for Christ's sake? 1 Peter 4:1, 12-15, 19; Matthew 5:11, 12; Acts 5:40, 41. —Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, pp. 27-33.

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A Soldier of the Cross

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Galatians 6:14.

OBJECTIVES

- To learn from Paul's experience how to act in times of crisis and opposition to the heavenly message
- To learn the principles behind the method and approach used by Paul in presenting the historical facts about Jesus as the Messiah
- Also to learn from Paul's practical example that when, due to persecution, we are forced to leave one place and flee to another, we can view this as an opportunity to spread the gospel to other places (Matthew 10:23)

OPPOSITION IN THESSALONICA

1. After leaving Philippi, where did Paul and Silas make their next gospel presentation? What was the response of the people who heard the message? Acts 17:1-4.

"For three successive Sabbaths Paul preached to the Thessalonians, reasoning with them from the Scriptures regarding the life, death, resurrection, office work, and future glory of Christ, 'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.' Revelation 13:8. He exalted Christ, the proper understanding of whose ministry is the key that unlocks the Old Testament Scriptures, giving access to their rich treasures.

"As the truths of the gospel were thus proclaimed in Thessalonica with mighty power, the attention of large congregations was arrested. 'Some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.' " –The Acts of the Apostles, p. 229.

2. How did the unbelieving Jews react to the gospel proclaimed by these messengers of the cross? Acts 17:5-9.

"Those who today teach unpopular truths need not be discouraged if at times they meet with no more favorable reception, even from those who claim to be Christians, than did Paul and his fellow workers from the people among whom they labored. The messengers of the cross must arm themselves with watchfulness and prayer, and move forward with faith

and courage, working always in the name of Jesus. They must exalt Christ as man's mediator in the heavenly sanctuary, the One in whom all the sacrifices of the Old Testament dispensation centered, and through whose atoning sacrifice the transgressors of God's law may find peace and pardon."—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 230.

3. In his first letter to them, of what experience did Paul remind the Thessalonians? 1 Thessalonians 1:2-7.

THE MESSAGE EXTENDED TO BEREIA

4. After the mistreatment of Paul and Silas in Thessalonica by the unbelieving Jews, where did the brethren send the apostles? Acts 17:10.

5. What special commendation was made of the Bereans? Acts 17:11, 12.

"The minds of the Bereans were not narrowed by prejudice. They were willing to investigate the truthfulness of the doctrines preached by the apostles. They studied the Bible, not from curiosity, but in order that they might learn what had been written concerning the promised Messiah. Daily they searched the inspired records, and as they compared scripture with scripture, heavenly angels were beside them, enlightening their minds and impressing their hearts."—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 231.

"If the people of our time would follow the example of the noble Bereans, in searching the Scriptures daily, and in comparing the messages brought to them with what is there recorded, there would be thousands loyal to God's law where there is one today. But many who profess to love God have no desire to change from error to truth, and they cling to the pleasing fables of the last days. Error blinds the mind and leads from God; but truth gives light to the mind, and life to the soul."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 88.

6. What kind of spirit controlled the determined opposers of the gospel, and what were the teachers of truth forced to do? Acts 17:13-15.

"The unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica, filled with jealousy and hatred of the apostles, and not content with having driven them from their own city, followed them to Berea and aroused against them the excitable passions of the lower class. Fearing that violence would be done to Paul if he

remained there, the brethren sent him to Athens, accompanied by some of the Bereans who had newly accepted the faith.

"Thus persecution followed the teachers of truth from city to city. The enemies of Christ could not prevent the advancement of the gospel, but they succeeded in making the work of the apostles exceedingly hard. Yet in the face of opposition and conflict, Paul pressed steadily forward, determined to carry out the purpose of God as revealed to him in the vision at Jerusalem. 'I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.' " –The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 232, 233.

THE GOSPEL IN ATHENS

7. How was Paul received by the idol worshipers in Athens? What filled his heart with deep pity for them? Acts 17:16-21.

"His heart was drawn out in deep pity for the citizens of that grand metropolis, who, notwithstanding their intellectual greatness, were given to idolatry. Paul was not deceived by the grandeur and beauty of that which his eyes rested upon, nor by the material wisdom and philosophy which encountered him in this great center of learning....

"As he saw the magnificence of the city, with its costly devices, he realized its seductive power over the minds of the lovers of art and science. His mind was deeply impressed with the importance of the work before him in Athens." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 89, 90.

8. What did Paul do in the face of this great challenge to the gospel? Acts 17:22-34.

"Thus, in the most impressive manner, with hand outstretched toward the temple crowded with idols, Paul poured out the burden of his soul, and ably exposed the fallacies of the religion of the Athenians. The wisest of his hearers were astonished as they listened to his reasoning. His words could not be controverted. He showed himself familiar with their works of art, their literature, and their religion. Pointing to their statuary and idols, he declared to them that God could not be likened to forms of man's device. The works of art could not, in the faintest sense, represent the glory of the infinite God. He reminded them that their images had no breath nor life. They were controlled by human power; they could move only as the hands of men moved them; and those who worshiped them were in every way superior to that which they worshiped." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 94.

9. In presenting the truth to the higher classes of society, what lesson can the church learn from Paul's approach to the Athenians?

"Paul's words contain a treasure of knowledge for the church. He was in a position where he might easily have said that which would have irritated his proud listeners and brought himself into difficulty. Had his oration been a direct attack upon their gods and the great men of the city, he would have been in danger of meeting the fate of Socrates. But with a tact born of divine love, he carefully drew their minds away from heathen deities, by revealing to them the true God, who was to them unknown.

"Today the truths of Scripture are to be brought before the great men of the world in order that they may choose between obedience to God's law and allegiance to the prince of evil....

"Some will acknowledge their ignorance of the things of God and will take their place as humble learners at the feet of Jesus, the Master Teacher.

"In every effort to reach the higher classes, the worker for God needs strong faith. Appearances may seem forbidding, but in the darkest hour there is light above. The strength of those who love and serve God will be renewed day by day."—The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 241, 242.

FOR FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY

- The experiences of Paul demonstrated that to follow and work earnestly for Jesus means to be confronted with opposition and persecution. With what beautiful words did the apostle encourage the believers to be strong in the Lord? Ephesians 6:10-18.
- In spite of the great opposition and persecution they experienced, the apostles were privileged to win souls in every city where they worked, as fruits of their labors. May the Lord grant that this will be our experience as well!

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9

Sabbath, December 1, 2007

Missionary Activities in Corinth and Ephesus

"For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me." 1 Corinthians 9:16, 17.

OBJECTIVES

- To study how Paul worked in the large cities
- To learn from His example of engaging in manual labor to support himself, instead of burdening his hosts
- To examine alternative strategies used by Paul when public outreach was too difficult.

THE GOSPEL IN CORINTH

1. During Paul's visit to Corinth, one of the major cities in the world at that time, who were his hosts? What occupation enabled Paul to support himself? Acts 18:1-3.

"Among the Jews who took up their residence here were many who were innocent of the wrongs that prevailed among them as a people. Of this class were Aquila and Priscilla, who afterward became distinguished as believers in Christ. Paul, becoming acquainted with the character of these excellent persons, abode with them; and having in his youth learned their trade of making tents, which were much used in that warm climate, he worked at this business for his own support." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 99, 100.

2. What was a special attribute of the city of Corinth? What was the cultural and moral conduct of its dwellers, about which Paul later admonished the believers in his letter? 1 Corinthians 5:1, 2, 9-13; 6:8-11.

"... Corinth was now more prosperous than Athens, which had once taken the lead.... Athens was the acknowledged center of art and learning; Corinth, the seat of government and trade.

"This large mercantile city was in direct communication with Rome, while Thessalonica, Ephesus, Alexandria, and Antioch were all easy of access, either by land or water. An opportunity was thus presented for the spread of the gospel. Once established at Corinth it would be readily communicated to all parts of the world.

"Yet the apostle saw on every hand serious obstacles to the progress of his work. The city was almost wholly given up to idolatry. Venus was the favorite goddess; and a great number of dissolute women were employed in connection with the worship of this reigning deity, for the purpose of attracting the devotees of popular vice. The Corinthians had become conspicuous, even among the heathen, for their gross immorality." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 98, 99.

ANOTHER PLAN OF LABOR

3. How did Paul's method of preaching in Corinth differ from that which he followed in Athens? What is the most successful way to win souls for Christ? 1 Corinthians 2:2.

"At the very beginning of his labors in this thoroughfare of travel, Paul saw on every hand serious obstacles to the progress of his work. The city

was almost wholly given up to idolatry. Venus was the favorite goddess, and with the worship of Venus were connected many demoralizing rites and ceremonies. The Corinthians had become conspicuous, even among the heathen, for their gross immorality. They seemed to have little thought or care beyond the pleasures and gaieties of the hour.

"In preaching the gospel in Corinth, the apostle followed a course different from that which had marked his labors at Athens. While in the latter place, he had sought to adapt his style to the character of his audience; he had met logic with logic, science with science, philosophy with philosophy. As he thought of the time thus spent, and realized that his teaching in Athens had been productive of but little fruit, he decided to follow another plan of labor in Corinth in his efforts to arrest the attention of the careless and the indifferent. He determined to avoid elaborate arguments and discussions, and 'not to know anything' among the Corinthians 'save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.' He would preach to them 'not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.' 1 Corinthians 2:2, 4."—The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 243, 244.

"Here the apostle has given the most successful manner of converting souls from ignorance and the darkness of error, to the light of truth. If ministers would follow more closely the example of Paul in this particular, they would see greater success attending their efforts. If all who minister in word and doctrine would make it their first business to be pure in heart and life, and to connect themselves closely with Heaven, their teaching would have greater power to convict souls."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 103.

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER FROM CORINTH

4. When Silas and Timothy joined Paul, what encouraging news did they bring about the church in Thessalonica, which inspired him to write the letter which is considered to be the very first of his epistles? 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10; 3:6, 7.

"The arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia, during Paul's sojourn in Corinth, had greatly cheered the apostle. They brought him 'good tidings' of the 'faith and charity' of those who had accepted the truth during the first visit of the gospel messengers to Thessalonica. Paul's heart went out in tender sympathy toward these believers, who, in the midst of trial and adversity, had remained true to God. He longed to visit them in person, but as this was not then possible, he wrote to them.

"In this letter to the church at Thessalonica the apostle expressed his gratitude to God for the joyful news of their increase of faith."—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 255.

5. How did he clarify two issues which caused the believers in Thessalonica great concern and sorrow? 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 2:1-11.

"The Thessalonians had eagerly grasped the idea that Christ was coming to change the faithful who were alive, and to take them to Himself. They had carefully guarded the lives of their friends, lest they should die and lose the blessing which they looked forward to receiving at the coming of their Lord. But one after another their loved ones had been taken from them, and with anguish the Thessalonians had looked for the last time upon the faces of their dead, hardly daring to hope to meet them in a future life.

"As Paul's epistle was opened and read, great joy and consolation was brought to the church by the words revealing the true state of the dead....

"While laboring at Thessalonica, Paul had so fully covered the subject of the signs of the times, showing what events would occur prior to the revelation of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven, that he did not think it necessary to write at length regarding this subject. He, however, pointedly referred to his former teachings. 'Of the times and the seasons,' he said, 'ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them.'"—The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 258-260.

DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT

6. What was Paul's great desire for his people Israel? Acts 18:5; Romans 10:1; 9:1-5.

"Paul 'testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.' From the Old Testament Scriptures he showed that according to the prophecies and the universal expectation of the Jews, the Messiah would be of the lineage of Abraham and of David; then he traced the descent of Jesus from the patriarch Abraham through the royal psalmist. He read the testimony of the prophets regarding the character and work of the promised Messiah, and His reception and treatment on the earth; then he showed that all these predictions had been fulfilled in the life, ministry, and death of Jesus of Nazareth."—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 247.

7. In spite of Paul's great desire and efforts to reveal Christ Jesus to them, how did the Jews of Corinth react to his message? Acts 18:6.

"But the Jews of Corinth closed their eyes to the evidence so clearly presented by the apostle, and refused to listen to his appeals. The same spirit that had led them to reject Christ, filled them with wrath and fury against His servant; and had not God especially protected him, that he might continue to bear the gospel message to the Gentiles, they would have put an end to his life."—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 248.

8. Did Paul's labors in Corinth bear fruit? Acts 18:7, 8. As he was considering leaving the city, how did the Lord encourage him to continue proclaiming the message? Acts 18:9-11.

"As he was planning to leave the city for a more promising field, and seeking earnestly to understand his duty, the Lord appeared to him in a vision and said, 'Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.' Paul understood this to be a command to remain in Corinth and a guarantee that the Lord would give increase to the seed sown. Strengthened and encouraged, he continued to labor there with zeal and perseverance."—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 250.

9. During his prolonged stay in Corinth, were Paul's efforts confined to public speaking? How did God use the civil authorities to protect His servant? Acts 18:12-17.

"The apostle's efforts were not confined to public speaking; there were many who could not have been reached in that way. He spent much time in house-to-house labor, thus availing himself of the familiar intercourse of the home circle. He visited the sick and the sorrowing, comforted the afflicted, and lifted up the oppressed. And in all that he said and did he magnified the name of Jesus. Thus he labored, 'in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.' 1 Corinthians 2:3. He trembled lest his teaching should reveal the impress of the human rather than the divine."—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 250.

FOR FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY

- Paul focused his ministry on the large cities as an effective strategy of reaching many nationalities. This helped to spread the gospel rapidly.
- Although his health was not strong, Paul "... labored during the day in serving the cause of Christ, and then toiled a large share of the night, and frequently all night, that he might make provision for his own and others' necessities."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 101.
- In Corinth, in addition to public evangelism, Paul spent a lot of time in house-to-house labor.

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Successful Work, Miracles, and Trials in Ephesus

"For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised." 1 Corinthians 4:9, 10.

OBJECTIVES

- To learn how God prepares new workers for the ministry, as was the case of Apollos
- To learn that when God's servants are firm and active in the ministry, as was Paul, God will work many miracles amid the darkness of sin
- To understand that whenever God's messengers invade the enemy's stronghold, one must expect attacks from Satan through his agents

PAUL'S NEW FIELD OF LABOR

1. After a long stay in Corinth, where did he plan to extend his missionary activities? Why did he not stay longer in Ephesus? Acts 18:18-23.

"After leaving Corinth, Paul's next scene of labor was Ephesus. He was on his way to Jerusalem to attend an approaching festival, and his stay at Ephesus was necessarily brief. He reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue, and so favorable was the impression made upon them that they entreated him to continue his labors among them. His plan to visit Jerusalem prevented him from tarrying then, but he promised to return to them, 'if God will.' Aquila and Priscilla had accompanied him to Ephesus, and he left them there to carry on the work that he had begun." —The Acts of the Apostles, p. 269.

APOLLOS IN EPHESUS

2. During Paul's trip to Jerusalem, which took him to Caesarea, Antioch, Galatia, and Phrygia, who else visited Ephesus? How was he led to accept the Lord Jesus Christ? Acts 18:24-26.

"It was at this time that 'a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.' He had heard the preaching of John the Baptist, had received the baptism of repentance, and was a living witness that the work of the prophet had not been in vain. The Scripture record of Apollos is that he 'was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.'

"While in Ephesus, Apollos 'began to speak boldly in the synagogue.' Among his hearers were Aquila and Priscilla, who, perceiving that he had not yet received the full light of the gospel, 'took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.' Through their teaching he obtained a clearer understanding of the Scriptures and became one of the ablest advocates of the Christian faith." —The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 269, 270.

3. After receiving a fuller knowledge of the gospel truth, where did Apollos plan to go? How were his labors received in Corinth? Acts 18:27, 28; 19:1; 1 Corinthians 1:11-13; 3:4-6.

"Apollos was desirous of going on into Achaia, and the brethren at Ephesus 'wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him' as a teacher in full harmony with the church of Christ. He went to Corinth, where, in public labor and from house to house, 'he mightily convinced the Jews,... showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.' Paul had planted the seed of truth; Apollos now watered it. The success that attended Apollos in preaching the gospel led some of the believers to exalt his labors above those of Paul. This comparison of man with man brought into the church a party spirit that threatened to hinder greatly the progress of the gospel." —The Acts of the Apostles, p. 270.

PAUL'S RETURN TO EPHESUS

4. When he returned to Ephesus, Paul worked there for two years. Analyze and explain how extended and successful his labors were and how they were vindicated by the Holy Ghost? Acts 19:1-12; Ephesians 1:13-23; Revelation 2:1-3.

"While Apollos was preaching at Corinth, Paul fulfilled his promise to return to Ephesus. He had made a brief visit to Jerusalem and had spent some time at Antioch, the scene of his early labors. Thence he traveled through Asia Minor, 'over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia' (Acts 18:23), visiting the churches which he himself had established, and strengthening the faith of the believers.

"In the time of the apostles the western portion of Asia Minor was known as the Roman province of Asia. Ephesus, the capital, was a great

commercial center. Its harbor was crowded with shipping, and its streets were thronged with people from every country. Like Corinth, it presented a promising field for missionary effort.”—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 281.

5. What great miracle attended Paul’s labors in Ephesus? How did this supernatural phenomenon help impress God’s name on Paul’s ministry? Acts 19:13-20; Ephesus 2:11-13.

“Ephesus was not only the most magnificent, but the most corrupt, of the cities of Asia. Superstition and sensual pleasure held sway over her teeming population. Under the shadow of her idol temples, criminals of every grade found shelter, and the most degrading vices flourished.

“The city was famed for the worship of the goddess Diana and the practice of magic. Here was the great temple of Diana, which was regarded by the ancients as one of the wonders of the world....

“As Paul was brought in direct contact with the idolatrous inhabitants of Ephesus, the power of God was strikingly displayed through him. The apostles were not always able to work miracles at will. The Lord granted His servants this special power as the progress of His cause or the honor of His name required.”—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 134, 135.

SATANIC ATTACKS AND DIVINE ASSISTANCE

6. Realizing that his stronghold in this territory was in danger through the labors of Paul and his companion, whom did Satan use to stop their work? How was Paul’s life endangered? Acts 19:21-34.

“There existed also another cause of dissatisfaction. An extensive and profitable business had grown up at Ephesus from the manufacture and sale of small shrines and images, modeled after the temple and the image of Diana. Those interested in this industry found their gains diminishing, and all united in attributing the unwelcome change to Paul’s labors.

“Demetrius, a manufacturer of silver shrines, calling together the workmen of his craft, said: ‘Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at naught; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshipeth.’ These words roused the excitable passions of the people. ‘They were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

“A report of this speech was rapidly circulated. ‘The whole city was filled with confusion.’ Search was made for Paul, but the apostle was not to be

found. His brethren, receiving an intimation of the danger, had hurried him from the place. Angels of God had been sent to guard the apostle; his time to die a martyr's death had not yet come." –The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 292, 293.

7. Whom did God use to stop the uproar in Ephesus? How were Paul and his colleagues proven innocent? Acts 19:35-41.

"At last, from sheer exhaustion, they ceased, and there was a momentary silence. Then the recorder of the city arrested the attention of the crowd, and by virtue of his office obtained a hearing. He met the people on their own ground and showed that there was no cause for the present tumult. He appealed to their reason....

"The decision of the recorder and of others holding honorable offices in the city had set Paul before the people as one innocent of any unlawful act. This was another triumph of Christianity over error and superstition. God had raised up a great magistrate to vindicate His apostle and hold the tumultuous mob in check. Paul's heart was filled with gratitude to God that his life had been preserved and that Christianity had not been brought into disrepute by the tumult at Ephesus." –The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 294, 295.

PASTORAL LETTERS WRITTEN IN EPHESUS

8. Which letter written by Paul in Ephesus is the richest, most instructive, and most powerful of all his letters? 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; 16:8, 9.

"The first Epistle to the Corinthians was written by the apostle Paul during the latter part of his stay in Ephesus. For no church had he felt a deeper interest or put forth more earnest effort than for the believers at Corinth. The good seed sown by him had seemed to promise an abundant harvest; but tares were planted by the enemy among the wheat, and ere long these sprung up, and brought forth their evil fruit. The period of Paul's absence was a time of severe temptation to the Corinthians church. They were surrounded by idolatry and sensualism under the gayest of most alluring aspect....

"The apostle's worst fears were more than realized.... Then, summoning all the courage of his nature, and keeping his soul stayed upon God,... and throwing his whole soul into the work, he dictated to the faithful Sosthenes one of the richest, most instructive, and most powerful of all his letters—the first extant Epistle to the Corinthians." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 149, 151.

9. What can we learn from Paul's careful planning and manner of work? What was his main objective in all of his exhortations, whether by direct speech or by letter? 1 Corinthians 15:58; 16:13, 14, 21-24; Ephesians 6:10-12.

"The apostle thus sought, in the most decided and impressive manner, to correct the false and dangerous ideas and practices which were prevailing in the Corinthian church. He spoke plainly, yet in love for their souls. In his warnings and reproofs, light from the throne of God was shining upon them, to reveal the hidden sins that were defiling their lives and characters. Yet how would it be received?

"While writing to the Corinthians, Paul had firmly controlled his feelings; but when the letter had been dispatched, a reaction came. He feared lest he should wound too deeply those whom he desired to benefit. He keenly dreaded a further alienation, and sometimes longed to recall his words. With trembling anxiety he waited to receive some tidings as to the reception of his message.

"Those who, like the apostle, have felt a responsibility for beloved churches or institutions, can best appreciate his depression of spirit and self-accusings. The servants of God who bear the burden of his work for this time, share the same experience of labor, conflict, and anxious care that fell to the lot of the great apostle." —Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 171, 172.

FOR FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY

- Paul's work in Ephesus was so successful that when Satan's attacks were intensified, God saved his life through the efforts of a great magistrate. This has happened many times to God's people throughout history.
- Paul also ministered to the established churches and workers through letters. This is another way of laboring that we need to learn.

* * * *

Sabbath, December 15, 2007

Paul's Last Pastoral Ministry

"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more." Acts 20:24, 25.

OBJECTIVES

- To try to grasp the depth of Paul's concern for and devotion to the churches he had established
- To evaluate his pastoral work and the time he spent confirming the believers in the truth during his visits
- To learn from his courage and sacrificial spirit, which he showed during his ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles

VISITS TO ENCOURAGE THE BELIEVERS; NEW OUTREACH

1. After the tumult in Ephesus, how did Paul plan for his journey to visit and encourage the established churches? Acts 20:1-6.

"Paul was accompanied to Corinth by a little band of fellow-laborers, some of whom had been his companions during the months spent in Macedonia, and his assistants in gathering funds for the church at Jerusalem. He could rely upon these brethren for sympathy and support in the present crisis. And though the condition of the Corinthian church was in some respects painful and discouraging, there were also reasons for joy and gratitude. Many who had once been corrupt and degraded worshipers of idols, were now sincere and humble followers of Christ. Not a few still regarded the apostle with warm affection, as the one who had first borne to them the precious light of the gospel."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 186.

2. What was one of Paul's greatest hopes for this journey? Which cities did he visit? Acts 20:7-16; Romans 1:1-13.

"For three months Paul stayed at Corinth. During this period he not only labored unweariedly for the church in that city, but he found time to look forward to wider missions, and to prepare for new conquests. His thoughts were still occupied with his contemplated journey from Jerusalem

to Rome. To see the Christian faith firmly established at the great center of the known world, was one of his dearest hopes and most cherished plans. A church had already been raised up at Rome, and the apostle desired to secure their cooperation in the work which he hoped to accomplish. To prepare the way for his labors among these brethren, as yet strangers, he addressed them by letter, announcing his purpose to visit Rome, and also by their aid to plant a standard of the cross in Spain.

"In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul set forth the great principles of the gospel which he hoped to present in person." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp, 186, 187.

3. In his Epistle to the Romans, which was written during his stay in Corinth, what great truth did Paul set forth with clarity and power? Romans 3:21-26; 5:1, 2; 10:9, 10; 11:13-22.

"With great clearness and power he presented the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ. While addressing the Roman Christians, Paul designed to instruct other churches also; but how little could he foresee the far-reaching influence of his words! The great truth of justification by faith, as set forth in this epistle, has stood through all the ages as a mighty beacon to guide the repentant sinner into the way of life. This light scattered the darkness which enveloped Luther's mind, and revealed to him the power of the blood of Christ to cleanse from sin. It has guided thousands of sin-burdened souls to the same source of pardon and peace. Every Christian has reason to thank God for that epistle to the church at Rome." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 188, 189.

PASTORAL COUNSEL AND ADMONITION

4. While in Corinth, what news reached Paul in regard to the spiritual condition of the churches in Galatia, compelling him to write to them immediately? Galatians 1:1-9; 3:1-5, 23-26.

"While Paul looked with interest and hope to new fields of labor in the west, he had cause for serious apprehension concerning the fields of his former labor in the east. Tidings had been received at Corinth from the churches in Galatia, revealing a state of great confusion, and even of absolute apostasy. Judaizing teachers were opposing the work of the apostle, and seeking to destroy the fruit of his labors.

"In almost every church there were some members who were Jews by birth. To these converts the Jewish teachers found ready access, and through them gained a foot-hold in the churches. It was impossible, by scriptural arguments, to overthrow the doctrines taught by Paul; hence they resorted to the most unscrupulous measures to counteract his influence and weaken his authority. They declared that he had not been a dis-

ciple of Jesus, and had received no commission from Him; yet he had presumed to teach doctrines directly apposed to those held by Peter, James, and the other apostles. Thus the emissaries of Judaism succeeded in alienating many of the Christian converts from their teacher in the gospel. Having gained this point, they induced them to return to the observance of the ceremonial law as essential to salvation. Faith in Christ, and obedience to the law of ten commandments, were regarded as of minor importance. Division, heresy, and sensualism were rapidly gaining ground among the believers in Galatia."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 188.

5. What dangerous error was being taught in the Galatian churches? How did the apostle address this situation? Galatians 2:16-21; 6:11-16; 4:19-30; 5:1-6.

"In the Galatian churches, open, unmasked error was supplanting the faith of the gospel. Christ, the true foundation, was virtually renounced for the obsolete ceremonies of Judaism. The apostle saw that if these churches were saved from the dangerous influences which threatened them, the most decisive measures must be taken, the sharpest warnings given, to bring them to a sense of their true condition.

"To deal wisely with different classes of minds, under varied circumstances and conditions, is a work requiring wisdom and judgment, enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit of God. The minister of Christ should learn the importance of adapting his labors to the condition of those whom he seeks to benefit. Tenderness, patience, decision, and firmness are alike needful; but they are to be exercised with proper discrimination. It is only by maintaining a close connection with God that His servants can hope to meet judiciously the trials and difficulties that still arise in the churches."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 190.

PAUL'S LAST JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

6. Having completed his work in Corinth, why did Paul suddenly change his course while traveling to Jerusalem? Acts 20:13-16.

"Paul greatly desired to reach Jerusalem before the Passover, as he would thus have an opportunity to meet the people who came from all parts of the world to attend the feast. He had a continual hope that in some way he might be instrumental in removing the prejudice of his countrymen, so that they might accept the precious light of the gospel. He was also desirous of meeting the church of Jerusalem, and bearing to them the liberalities donated by other churches to the poor brethren in Judea. And he hoped, in this visit, to bring about a firmer Christian union between the Jewish and Gentile converts to the faith.

"Having completed his work at Corinth, he determined to sail directly for one of the ports on the coast of Palestine. All his arrangements had been made, and he was about to step on board the ship, when he was informed of a plot laid by the Jews to take his life. These opposers of the faith had been foiled in all their efforts to put an end to the apostle's work."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 194, 195.

7. What route did he take, and who were his companions? Why did he and Luke tarry in Philippi, while the other members of the company went on?

"Upon receiving a warning of the plot, Paul decided to change his course, and go round by Macedonia, accompanied by a sufficient number of brethren to protect him. His plan to reach Jerusalem by the Passover had to be given up, but he hoped to be there at Pentecost. An overruling Providence permitted the apostle to be delayed on this occasion; for had he been present at the Passover, he would have been accused of instigating a riot and massacre which was caused by the pretensions of an Egyptian impostor claiming to be the Messiah.

"At Philippi Paul tarried to keep the Passover. Only Luke remained with him, the other members of the company passing on to Troas to await him there."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 196.

BACK IN EPHESUS

8. When he arrived in Miletus, Paul found out that the ship would be delayed. Taking advantage of this, what did he immediately do? Acts 20:17-27.

"As the travelers sailed southward from Assos, they passed the city of Ephesus, so long the scene of the apostle's labors. He had greatly desired to visit the church there; for he had important instruction and counsel to impart to them. But upon consideration he relinquished this purpose. Any delay might render it impossible for him to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost. On arriving at Miletus, however, he learned that the ship would be detained for a short time, and he immediately sent a message to the elders of the Ephesian church to come to him. The distance was but thirty miles, and the apostle hoped to secure at least a few hours' intercourse with these men upon whom the prosperity of the church must largely depend."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 198.

9. What specific instructions and admonition did he give to the elders from Ephesus? What atmosphere prevailed at this meeting, which seemed to be the last for Paul in this church? Acts 20:28-38.

"The apostle admonishes his brethren: 'Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood....'

"Paul trembled for the church as he looked forward to the attacks which they must suffer from external and internal foes.... With solemn earnestness he bids his brethren guard vigilantly their sacred trust. He points them for an example to his own unwearied labours: 'Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.'

"And now, brethren,' he continued, 'I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel!... 'I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 200-202.

FOR FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY

- Paul's mind and heart were constantly with the established churches, as well as with the new missionary fields yet to be reached. He was a true pastor, as Jesus defines one in John 10:11.
- When false doctrines were introduced into the church, especially in Galatia, he stood firm to admonish and correct. This should be a lesson to all gospel messengers.

* * * *

Paul's Bitter Experience and Trial in Jerusalem

"For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." 2 Timothy 1:12.

OBJECTIVES

- To see how Paul was willing to sacrifice his very life to carry out his divinely appointed mission
- To learn that, even when we perform and execute our duties and responsibilities faithfully and diligently, we cannot always expect appreciation from our colleagues; rather, our faithfulness may provoke bitter criticism, false accusation, and persecution, as was the case with Paul
- To learn from the fact that through Paul's imprisonment, a door was opened for rulers and prominent people to hear the gospel message and the testimony of the truth that Jesus Christ was the Messiah

PROPHECY CONCERNING UPCOMING PERSECUTION

1. Shortly before his arrival in Jerusalem, what warning was given to Paul through the Spirit by several disciples? Acts 21:3-6. What were the predictions of the prophets? Acts 21:7-14.

"The apostle's anxiety about reaching Jerusalem was now at an end. There were a few disciples at Tyre, and having succeeded in searching them out, he spent the next week with them. The Holy Spirit had revealed to these brethren something of the dangers which awaited Paul at Jerusalem, and they endeavored to dissuade him from his purpose. But the same Spirit which had warned him of afflictions, bonds, and imprisonment, still urged him forward, a willing captive....

"The brethren at Caesarea also united their prayers and tears with those of his companions: Why should he face this great peril? Why expose his precious life to the malice of the Jews? Would it not be presumptuous to go, after receiving definite warning from the Spirit of God?

"The apostle was deeply moved by the entreaties of his beloved brethren. To human judgment he had sufficient reason to relinquish his plan as unwise. But he felt that he was moving in obedience to the will of God, and he could not be deterred by the voice of friends, or even the warning of the prophet."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 203, 205.

2. What was Paul's last stop before reaching Jerusalem? Who was his host here? Acts 21:7, 8; 6:5.

"Pursuing their journey southward, the travelers arrived at Caesarea, and 'entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven, and abode with him.' Here Paul tarried until the very eve of the feast. These few peaceful, happy days were the last days of perfect freedom which he was for a long time to enjoy. Before he should enter upon the stormy scenes that awaited him at Jerusalem, the Lord graciously refreshed his spirit with this season of rest and happy communion.

"Philip the evangelist was bound to Paul by ties of the deepest sympathy. A man of clear discernment and sterling integrity, Philip had been the first to break away from the bondage of Jewish prejudice, and thus had helped prepare the way for the apostle's work.... Precious hours were these that Paul and Philip spent in each other's society." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 203, 204.

MEETING WITH THE ELDERS IN JERUSALEM

3. How was Paul received by the elders and brethren in Jerusalem? With whom did he stay? Acts 21:15-20.

" 'And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.' Thus Luke describes the reception of the apostle to the Gentiles on his arrival at Jerusalem. Although Paul everywhere encountered prejudice, envy, and jealousy, he also found hearts that were open to receive the glad tidings which he brought, and that loved him for the sake of Christ and the truth. Yet, cheering as was the kindly greeting he received, it could not remove his anxiety as to the attitude of the church at Jerusalem toward himself and his work. Their real feelings would be more fully seen in the meeting with the elders of the church, to take place on the morrow.

"... He had come to Jerusalem for no other purpose than to remove the barriers of prejudice and misunderstanding which had separated them, and which had so greatly obstructed his labors." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 207, 208.

4. In spite of the good report presented by Paul to the elders of his labors among the Gentiles, what negative information and accusations had been circulated by conservative Jewish converts? Acts 21:20-22.

"Paul now gave his brethren an account of his labors since he parted with them four years before, and 'declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. ...'

"The effort was not without good results. The Spirit of God impressed the minds of the brethren and affected their hearts. The tidings of the progress of the gospel, the evidence that the power of God was working with the apostle's efforts, softened their feelings toward Paul, and convinced them that their prejudice against him was unfounded; and they glorified God for the wonders of His grace. At the close of Paul's address, the brethren joined in a season of solemn praise, and the Amen, expressive of their hearty sanction of his work, was swelled by many voices." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 210.

5. What was the counsel of the elders to Paul concerning the bitter claims held against his ministry among the Gentiles? Was this counsel motivated by the Spirit of God? Acts 21:23, 24.

"Now was the golden opportunity for these leading men to frankly confess that God had wrought through Paul, and that they were wrong in permitting the reports of his enemies to create jealousy and prejudice against him. But instead of doing justice to the one whom they had injured, they still appeared to hold him responsible for the existing prejudice, as though he had given them cause for such feelings. They did not nobly stand in his defense, and endeavor to show the disaffected party their error; but they threw the burden wholly upon Paul, counseling him to pursue a course for the removal of all misapprehension.

"... The Spirit of God did not prompt this advice. It was the fruit of cowardice." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 211, 212.

PAUL IMPRISONED

6. Did Paul comply with the advice given by the elders? What were the vows held by the four men, and how did this whole situation work against Paul? Acts 21:26.

"When we consider Paul's great desire to be in harmony with his brethren, his tenderness of spirit toward the weak in faith, his reverence for the apostles who had been with Christ, and for James, the brother of the Lord, and his purpose to become all things to all men as far as he could do this and not sacrifice principle—when we consider all this, it is less surprising that he was constrained to deviate from his firm, decided course of action. But instead of accomplishing the desired object, these efforts for conciliation only precipitated the crisis, hastened the predicted sufferings of Paul, separated him from his brethren in his labors, deprived the church of one of its strongest pillars, and brought sorrow to Christian hearts in every land." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 214.

7. What was Satan's plan, which Paul's counselors had not considered? Acts 21:27-36.

"Those who had counseled Paul to perform this act of concession had not fully considered the great peril to which he would be exposed. At this season, strangers from all regions of the world thronged the streets of Jerusalem, and delighted to congregate in the temple courts. As Paul, in the fulfillment of his commission, had borne the gospel to the Gentiles, he had visited many of the world's largest cities, and was well known to thousands who came from foreign parts to attend the feast.... These men had been defeated in their controversy with him in the synagogue at Ephesus, and had become more and more enraged against him as they witnessed his success in raising up a Christian church in that city. They now saw him where they had not supposed that he would trust himself—within the very precincts of the temple. Now he was in their power, and they determined to make him suffer for his boldness."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 215, 216.

TRIAL IN CAESARIA

8. After Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, what followed? (Study carefully the proceedings of the case and how God opened a chance for leading men among the Jews to hear the last testimony of Paul.) Acts 21:37-40; 22:1-30; 23:1-22.

"It is a fearful thing for those who profess to be children of God, to cross the line of demarcation that should separate the church from the world. Such are Satan's most effective agents. He works through them with decision, zeal, and persistency, to devise and execute such enormities against those who are true to God, as the common sinner would seem incapable of. The very light they have slighted makes their darkness tenfold greater than it otherwise would be. When men refuse to accept the light which God in mercy sends them, they know not where they are going. They take only one step at a time away from the right path; but these successive steps lead directly to perdition. They place themselves on Satan's ground, and his spirit controls them. They cannot perceive the great change in themselves. None are transformed at once; but they enter Satan's school instead of the school of Christ, and the great deceiver educates them to do his work."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 233, 234.

9. To whom was the case against Paul referred? Who was engaged as the counsel for the accusers, and who formulated the charges against the apostle? Acts 23:23-35; 24:1-9. (Analyze carefully the accusers' statement, and take note of the blatant falsehood presented.)

"Five days after Paul's arrival at Caesarea, his accusers also came down from Jerusalem, accompanied by one Tertullus, an orator whom they had engaged as their counsel. The case was granted a speedy hearing. Paul was brought before the assembly, and Tertullus proceeded to specify the charges against him. This wily orator judged that flattery would have more influence upon the Roman governor than the simple statements of truth and justice. He therefore began his speech with praise of Felix: 'Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.'

"Tertullus here descended to bare-faced falsehood. The character of Felix was base and contemptible. It was said that he 'practiced all kinds of lust and cruelty with the power of a king and the temper of a slave.' The treacherous cruelty of his character is shown by his brutal murder of the high priest Jonathan, to whom he was largely indebted for his own position.

"There are many today who estimate character in the same manner. Prompted by the adversary of all righteousness, they call evil good, and truth falsehood. It is as the prophet has described—'Truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.' " —Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 234, 235, 236.

FOR FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY

- The faithless advice given to Paul by the leading brethren in Jerusalem caused the arrest of Paul. Here we can learn the consequences of good versus bad advice.
- Like Tertullus, many corrupt elements will be employed to testify against God's servants and suppress the truth; but God will defend His servants in many different ways, as Jesus promised in Matthew 28:20 and 10:17-19.

* * * *

PLEASE READ THE MISSIONARY REPORT FROM
BRAZIL ON PAGE 115.

Paul's Martyrdom and Life Record

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

OBJECTIVES

- To learn how the powerful testimony of God's messengers can convict rulers of their guilt
- To see how ready the apostles were to suffer and die for the sake of the gospel and in defense of Christianity
- To realize that all the teachings, counsel, and admonitions we find in the epistles of Paul were possible because he had a living experience with Christ

PAUL'S APPEAL TO CAESAR

1. In his first trial before Felix, how did Paul defend himself? What was Felix' response to Paul's words?

"But Felix, who had never before listened to the truth, was deeply agitated as the Spirit of God sent conviction to his soul....

"But instead of permitting his convictions to lead him to repentance, he eagerly sought to dismiss these disagreeable reflections. The interview with Paul was cut short. 'Go thy way for this time,' he said, 'when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.'

"For two years no further action was taken against Paul, yet he remained a prisoner. Felix several times visited him, and listened attentively to his words. But the real motive for this apparent friendliness was a desire for gain, and he intimated to Paul that by the payment of a large sum of money he might secure his release. The apostle, however, was of too noble a nature to free himself by a bribe." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 243, 244.

2. At his second trial in Caesarea two years later, before whom was Paul to appear? Despite the fact that no guilt was found in him, did he receive a just verdict? Acts 24:27; 25:1-12.

"The governor appointed in the place of Felix, was Porcius Festus, a far more honorable ruler. He had a higher sense of the responsibility of his position, and, refusing to accept bribes, he endeavored to administer justice....

"At Caesarea, Festus had already met the popular clamor against Paul, but at Jerusalem the demand for his death was not merely the cry of the mob. A deputation of the most honorable personages of the city, headed by the high priest, formally presented the request concerning Paul, not doubting that this new and inexperienced official could be molded at pleasure, and that to gain their favor he would readily grant all that they desired.

"But Festus was not a man who would sacrifice justice to gain popularity....

"The Jews repeated their charges of heresy, treason, and sacrilege, but could bring no witnesses to sustain them....

"Heartily desiring to end it all, he [Festus] turned to Paul, who stood calm and self-possessed before his adversaries, and asked if he was willing to go to Jerusalem under his protection, to be tried by the Sanhedrim.

"This would virtually transfer the matter from Roman to Jewish jurisdiction. Paul knew that he could not look for justice from that people who were by their crimes bringing down upon themselves the wrath of God.

"... He had nothing more to hope for from Jewish priests or rulers; but as a Roman citizen he had one special privilege, he could appeal to Caesar, and for a time, at least, his enemies would be kept at bay." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 246-250.

3. To what other dignitary did Paul have the opportunity to testify of his faith and the gospel of Jesus Christ? In Paul's own words, what was the desire of his heart for his hearers? Acts 25:13-27; 26:1-29.

"King Agrippa's curiosity was satisfied, and rising from his seat, he signified that the interview was at an end. As the assembly dispersed, the case of Paul was freely discussed, and all agreed that, while he might be an enthusiast or a fanatic, he could not in any sense be regarded as a legal criminal; he had done nothing worthy of death or imprisonment.

"Though Agrippa was a Jew, he did not share the bigoted zeal and blind prejudice of the Pharisees. He had no desire to see freedom of thought suppressed by violence. 'This man,' he said, 'might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.'" –Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 260.

PAUL IN ROME BEFORE NERO

4. How was Paul, a prisoner, welcomed in Rome by the believing brethren? For two years how did he use the opportunity given him by Julius the centurion? Acts 28:13-30; 23:11; 27:1-3; 23, 24.

“... Though somewhat delayed by contrary winds, the voyage was safely accomplished, and the ship cast anchor in the beautiful harbor of Puteoli, on the coast of Italy.

“There were a few Christians in this place, who entreated the apostle to remain with them seven days, and the privilege was kindly granted by the centurion. Since receiving Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, the Christians of Italy had eagerly looked forward to a visit from the apostle. They had little expected to see him in chains as a prisoner, but his sufferings only endeared him to them the more....

“Few realize the significance of those words of Luke, that when Paul saw his brethren, ‘he thanked God, and took courage.’ The apostle praised God aloud in the midst of that weeping, sympathizing throng, who were not ashamed of his bonds. The cloud of sadness that had rested upon his spirit had been swept away. He felt that his labors had not been in vain.”
—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 272, 274.

5. How was Paul’s first trial before Emperor Nero judged? 2 Timothy 4:14-17.

“... The first year of his reign had been marked by the poisoning of his young stepbrother, the rightful heir to the throne. From one depth of vice and crime to another, Nero had descended, until he had murdered his own mother, and then his wife. There was no atrocity which he would not perpetrate, no vile act to which he would not stoop. In every noble mind he inspired only abhorrence and contempt.

“The details of the iniquity practiced in his court are too degrading, too horrible, for description. His abandoned wickedness created disgust and loathing, even in many who were forced to share his crimes....

“From the viewpoint of human judgment, Paul’s condemnation before such a judge was certain. But the apostle felt that so long as he was loyal to God, he had nothing to fear. The One who in the past had been his protector could shield him still from the malice of the Jews and from the power of Caesar.

“And God did shield His servant. At Paul’s examination the charges against him were not sustained, and, contrary to the general expectation, and with a regard for justice wholly at variance with his character, Nero declared the prisoner guiltless. Paul’s bonds were removed; he was again a free man.” —The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 486, 487.

PAUL’S DEATH

6. Although Paul was set free at his first trial, what charge caused his second arrest? Why was Nero so incensed against him? 2 Timothy 4:17, 18.

"The apostles Paul and Peter were for many years widely separated in their labors, it being the work of Paul to carry the gospel to the Gentiles, while Peter labored especially for the Jews. But in the providence of God, both were to bear witness for Christ in the world's metropolis, and upon its soil both were to shed their blood as the seed of a vast harvest of saints and martyrs.

"The emperor's malice against Paul was heightened by the fact that members of the imperial household, and also other persons of distinction, had been converted to Christianity during his first imprisonment. For this reason he made the second imprisonment much more severe than the first, granting him little opportunity to preach the gospel; and he determined to cut short his life as soon as a plausible pretext could be found for so doing. Nero's mind was so impressed with the force of the apostle's words at his last trial that he deferred the decision of the case, neither acquitting nor condemning him. But the sentence was only deferred." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 328, 329.

7. When and how was the life of Paul cut short? What other prominent apostle died as a martyr at about the same time? 2 Timothy 4:6-8; 1 Peter 4:12, 13, 19.

"About the time of Paul's second arrest, Peter also was apprehended and thrust into prison.

"... It was not long before the decision was pronounced which consigned Paul to a martyr's grave. Being a Roman citizen, he could not be subjected to torture, and was therefore sentenced to be beheaded.

"Peter, as a Jew and a foreigner, was condemned to be scourged and crucified.... As a last favor he entreated his executioners that he might be nailed to the cross with his head downward. The request was granted, and in this manner died the great apostle Peter.

"Paul was led in a private manner to the place of execution. His persecutors, alarmed at the extent of his influence, feared that converts might be won to Christianity, even by the scenes of his death. Hence few spectators were allowed to be present....

"The apostle was looking into the great beyond, not with uncertainty or in dread, but with joyful hope and longing expectation. As he stood at the place of martyrdom, he saw not the gleaming sword of the executioner, or the green earth so soon to receive his blood; he looked up through the calm blue heaven of that summer's day to the throne of the Eternal....

"Paul carried with him through his life on earth the very atmosphere of Heaven. All who associated with him felt the influence of his connection with Christ and companionship with angels. Here lies the power of the truth. The unstudied, unconscious influence of a holy life is the most convincing sermon that can be given in favor of Christianity." –Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 328-331.

THE RECORD OF PAUL'S LIFE

8. Summarize Paul's lifetime principles, conviction, and commitment to Christ. Galatians 6:14, 17; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 4:1, 2; Philippians 3:7-11; 2 Corinthians 11:21-23; 12:1-5.

"The Captain of our salvation has prepared His servant for the last great conflict. Ransomed by the sacrifice of Christ, washed from sin in His blood, and clothed in His righteousness, Paul has the witness in himself that his soul is precious in the sight of his Redeemer. His life is hid with Christ in God, and he is persuaded that He who has conquered death is able to keep that which is committed to His trust. His mind grasps the Saviour's promise, 'I will raise him up at the last day.' His thoughts and hopes are centered in the second advent of his Lord. And as the sword of the executioner descends, and the shadows of death gather about the martyr's soul, his latest thought springs forward, as will his earliest thought in the great awakening, to meet the Lifegiver who shall welcome him to the joy of the blest."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 333.

9. What were Paul's last testimony and hope? Does the memory of his words and faithfulness still speak to us? 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

"When a servant of God is withdrawn from active duty, when his voice is no longer heard in encouragement and reproof, we, in our shortsighted judgment, often conclude that his usefulness is at an end. But the Lord does not so regard it....

"Let no one feel that because he is no longer able to labor openly and actively for God and His truth, he has no service to render, no reward to secure. A true Christian is never laid aside. God will use him effectually in health and in sickness, in life and in death.... And when the grave receives the child of God, he being dead yet speaketh. His works do follow him. The memory of his words of admonition and encouragement, of his steadfast adherence to the truth under all circumstances, speaks more powerfully than even his living example."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 293, 294.

FOR FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY

About Paul's life record: "No man ever lived who was a more earnest, energetic, and self-sacrificing disciple of Christ than was Paul. He was one of the world's greatest teachers. He crossed the seas, and traveled far and near, until a large portion of the world had learned from his lips the story of the cross of Christ. He possessed a burning desire to bring perishing men to a knowledge of the truth through a Saviour's love."—Sketches from the Life of Paul, pp. 100, 101.

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MISSIONARY REPORT FROM BRAZIL

To be read on Sabbath, December 29, 2007
The Special Sabbath School Offering
will be gathered on Sabbath, January 5, 2007

Dear brothers and sisters in all the world: We are living in the last moments of this earth's history. Current events show us the nearness of Jesus' return; and the command to each of us is: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Matthew 28:19, 20. "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." Isaiah 60:1.

The Federal Republic of Brazil is the largest and most populous nation in Latin America and the fifth largest in the world in both area and population. It spans a vast area of 3,286,742 square miles in the central and northeastern part of South America. It shares borders with every other South American country except Ecuador and Chile (i.e., Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and the French section of French Guiana). In addition to its continental territory, Brazil also claims several small island groups in the Atlantic Ocean: Saint Peter and Saint Paul Archipelago, Fernando de Noronha, and Trindad and Martim Vaz. It also owns a group of small coral islands called Rocas Atoll. Brazil is a federation consisting of twenty-six states and one federal district, making a total of 27 federal units. The population is 187,268,800 inhabitants.

In this country, the presence of religion is very important, as attested to by the fact that very few Brazilians are atheists—less than 10% of a population that numbers almost 190,000,000. Until recently, Catholicism was the dominant religion; but the latest statistics show that Protestants and charismatics (including charismatic Catholics) make up 49%.

We, the International Missionary Society of the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement, are represented in 11 of the 27 Brazilian states with 300 members, but we have church buildings in only seven states.

This large territory and population present us with a great challenge, for on one hand we feel a sacred obligation; and, on the other, we have a fervent desire to evangelize this land.

In 1927, Pastor Carlos Kozel began the work in Brazil, in the city of Apucarana, Parana state. After a while, his first health books were translated into Portuguese; and thus the message was spread through the canvassing work. This was one of the most successful ways to work. There were times when the canvassing work in Brazil supported the missionary work of pastors and Bible workers. Now we are passing through a great crisis, and the colporteur work has declined. One of the reasons for this decline is the fact that our publications no longer meet the needs of the people.

We are convinced that through the colporteur work the preaching of the gospel will have a great impetus. The servant of the Lord stated: "This is a work that should be done. The end is near. Already much time has been lost, when these books should have been in circulation. Sell them far and near. Scatter them like the leaves of autumn. This work is to continue without the forbiddings of anyone. Souls are perishing out of Christ. Let them be warned of His soon appearing in the clouds of heaven. -The Review and Herald, Aug. 13, 1908." -Colporteur Ministry, p. 25. For this reason, we are in contact with the Publishing Department of the General Conference, to which we are grateful for their concern and support in this very important branch of the work of God. With the goal of reviving this work here, we wish to translate into Portuguese and publish two important books: A Better Way to Health and Healthful Nutrition.

From neighboring countries we have received requests for places where young people can work as colporteurs; and therefore we have a good prospect of success, because in this country of continental proportions we have plenty of places where those who wish to may labor. Unfortunately, we find ourselves without resources to carry out this project, and so we turn to our dear brothers and sisters in all the world to ask for your assistance. Come and help us, extend us your hand across the ocean, and be an active co-worker and sower in this cause, always remembering: "... He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." 2 Corinthians 9:6.

We gratefully look forward to your cooperation. May our loving God doubly recompense your generous effort.

-Adalicio F. de Souza
Brazilian Field