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Pastor Jones enjoys writing and reading, with a special interest in church history, particularly of the Reformation era. In the past, he has contributed to both the standard and teacher's editions of the adult Sabbath School quarterly. He has written a book entitled *Messengers on Golden Wings* and numerous articles for Adventist periodicals. He enjoys listening to classical religious music and plays the clarinet. His wife, Elizabeth, is a nurse and a writer.

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God's Family, the Church

The Christian church is the communion of all Jesus' believing disciples, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit is reigning and who are committed to sharing the everlasting gospel with their fellow human beings. The church before the Cross was the communion of God's called-out, Spirit-directed people who believed in the saving work of the coming Messiah.

"His church is the court of holy life, filled with varied gifts, and endowed with the Holy Spirit. Appropriate duties are assigned by Heaven to each member of the church on earth, and all are to find their happiness in the happiness of those whom they help and bless."
—*Our High Calling*, p. 164.

Throughout history Satan has struggled to destroy God's true church. And at times he seems to have come close to achieving his aim. But rising as a mighty shield between him and the church is the promise of Christ, "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Christ also promised, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35).

Going forth with these promises, the church conducts itself as the bride of Christ. It is a Rebekah, who hastens to draw water from the wells of salvation to refresh all thirsty strangers. It is a Ruth, who presses close to the feet of her Lord, petitioning, "I am your servant. . . . Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer" (Ruth 3:9, NIV).

The church is a Deborah, who proclaims, "May they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength" (Judg. 5:31, NIV). It is a Hannah, who declares, "I rejoice in Your salvation. There is none holy like the Lord . . . nor is there any rock like our God" (1 Sam. 2:1, 2, NKJV).

The church is an Abigail, who intercedes for the cause of God and with loving devotion accepts His call, urging, "Here is your maid-servant, ready to serve you and wash the feet of my master's servants" (1 Sam. 25:41, NIV). It is a Mary, who in response to the humanly impossible promise of God states in faith, "I am the Lord's servant. . . . May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38, NIV). It is an Esther, pressing to the throne of grace and judgment, saying, "I will go to the king. . . . And if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16, NIV). Once there, her royal husband extends His scepter. She touches it, and overcome by His love, she also overcomes to sit with Him on His throne forever.

We invite you to step forth in the light of these same promises and illustrations of faithfulness. Learn (1) why God established His family we call the church, (2) how He established it, (3) why the church will triumph, and (4) how you can participate in that triumph.

God's People, the Church



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Gen. 12:1-6; 15:18; 1 Cor. 3:9-17; 12:12-17; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 3:14, 15.

MEMORY TEXT: "He [Christ] is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:17, 18, NIV).

KEY QUESTION: What is the church?

CHRIST LOVES HIS BRIDE. She was not stylish, and palace etiquette was to her an unknown art. Nor did her occupation as a farm girl mark her for any special honor. She spoke of being befriended by the king. *What vain delusions!* they all thought. But the king really did come to see this lowly Shulamite maiden. He brought her into his banqueting house and showered her with love. Why did the king choose her over polished society girls?

The answer lay in the maid's deep capacity to appreciate her king's love. His very name to her was as ointment poured forth, his fellowship sweeter than the rarest perfume, his fruit delectable to her taste, his voice more alluring than the songs of 10,000 suitors. Nothing could satisfy the maiden besides the joy of his company.

The king's friendship changed her looks and demeanor. No longer drab, she now appeared all glorious within, radiant with the beauty of holiness. Her garments were of no ordinary texture or weave. Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, she bore a banner inscribed with a message that made holy those who read it and believed.

The story is told in the Song of Solomon. It can be viewed as an allegory of Christ's love for His bride, the church. This week's lesson introduces us to that beautiful relationship.

WE ARE HIS PEOPLE, PART 1 (Gen. 12:1-6).

One of the story lines in the Bible consists of God's search for and establishment of a people who would respond to Him in faith and obedience. Such women, men, and children are the church.

In the Old Testament (KJV), three words refer to the gathering of God's people. Translated from the Hebrew, these words are *assembly* (Num. 20:6; Deut. 9:10), *congregation* (Lev. 4:21; Joel 2:16, NKJV), and *people* (Deut. 7:6; 2 Kings 11:17).

The possessive pronoun *My*, referring to God, is often used with the word *people*. For example, read Exodus 3:7, Leviticus 26:12, and Jeremiah 31:33. What does this tell us about the connection between our relationship with God and our affiliation with the rest of His people?

In the Old Testament, upon what factors is this community of believers based?

Gen. 12:1-6; 15:6 _____

Gen. 15:18; 17:1, 2 _____

Gen. 17:11 _____

Exod. 19:6; Lev. 19:2 _____

Exod. 23:22; Deut. 30:15, 16 _____

God first established a formal community of believers upon His election of Abraham and his descendants, an election legislated by the terms of a covenant or agreement and confirmed by the sign of circumcision. Being a member of the community meant being set apart by God and living by the terms of the covenant.

Abraham's response to God's call was essential in making out of him a people who would respond to God in faith and obedience. Why is this type of response just as essential today? Think carefully about your life as you are presently living it. How have you been responding to God?

WE ARE HIS PEOPLE, PART 2 (Gen. 12:1-3).

Sunday we studied the elements upon which the community of God's people in the Old Testament is based. Take time now to review those elements.

Below are additional elements upon which the community of God's people is based. Match each of the following texts to its proper element: (a) Isa. 58:6-8; Micah 6:8; (b) Judg. 1:1, 2; 1 Sam. 16:1, 13; (c) Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 56:7; (d) Deut. 4:14; (e) Exod. 25:8; 1 Chron. 16:29.

- _____ God's community was to be an inclusive community.
- _____ God Himself would instruct His community through His Law. He would teach them His will for their lives.
- _____ They were to be merciful, as God is merciful.
- _____ They were to be generous and avoid oppression.
- _____ God would guide them through leaders He would appoint.
- _____ God's people were to worship Him. Through the sanctuary services, they were to learn about His solution to the sin problem.

Why is worship such an important element upon which to base God's church? Are the elements we studied yesterday and today all equally important to the church today? Explain.

"The duty to worship God is based upon the fact that He is the Creator, and that to Him all other beings owe their existence. And wherever, in the Bible, His claim to reverence and worship, above the gods of the heathen, is presented, there is cited the evidence of His creative power. . . . 'O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.' "—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 436, 437.

Exod. 25:8. "The sanctuary provided a visible center for the worship of the one true God, and was thus a bulwark against the worship of the many gods of the heathen. It brought God near to His people and made His presence among them real. This too was a protection against idolatry."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 635.

How do today's visible centers of worship bring God close to you? How do other defenses against modern idolatry help us worship God? How can worshipping your Creator improve your life?

PROMISED TO CHRIST (2 Cor. 11:2).

Even though the Hebrews accepted God's call to be His people, they gradually and permanently became saturated with idolatry, pride, isolationism, and selfishness. Jesus' death signaled the end of their mission (Matt. 23:37-39), but not the end of the mission itself. After Jesus' resurrection, the Christian church received the assignment (Matt. 21:43; Gal. 3:28, 29).

New Testament descriptions of the church enlarge our understanding of what it means to be God's people involved in this mission.

How do 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:25, and Revelation 19:7, 8 describe the church? (Also review the Introduction to the lesson quarterly.)

The Old Testament describes Israel as God's bride:

- "For your Maker is your husband" (Isa. 54:5, NIV).
- "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Isa. 62:5, NIV).
- "I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness" (Hosea 2:19, 20, NIV).
- "I am married unto you" (Jer. 3:14).

Perhaps with these texts in mind, it was natural for Paul to think of the church as Christ's bride.

"At a Jewish wedding there were two people called the friends of the bridegroom, one representing the bridegroom and one the bride. . . . They acted as liaisons between the bride and the bridegroom; they carried the invitations to the guests; but they had one particular responsibility, that of guaranteeing the chastity of the bride. That is what is in Paul's thought here. In the marriage of Jesus Christ and the Corinthian Church he is the friend of the bridegroom. It is his responsibility to guarantee the chastity of the bride, and he will do all he can to keep the Corinthian Church pure and a fit bride for Jesus Christ."—William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, Pa: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 246.

How does the church, as the bride of Christ, protect its purity? Eph. 5:25-27; John 17:17.

What improvements could you make in your Bible study to help you maintain purity in your marriage to Christ?

MANY PARTS, ONE BODY (1 Cor. 12:12-27).

Why is Paul's description of God's people as a human body so appropriate? 1 Cor. 12:12-27.

Consider how all the various parts of the body are to function as a unit. How should we, the various parts of the church body, function as a whole? Below we have suggested some possibilities. What others can you think of?

1. As members of the church body, *we need one another*. Many times, individual members become so involved in what they are doing that they believe *their* work is the most important. If the church is to be healthy, we must understand that everyone is needed.

2. *We also need to respect one another*. The left leg is not more important than the right leg. The body cannot function without the heart. Neither can it function without the liver. Likewise, each church member is equally necessary.

3. If a part of the human body suffers, the rest of the body suffers with it. As members of the church body, *we must sympathize with other members who are suffering*, for whatever reason.

"Radio newsman Charles Osgood told the story of two ladies who lived in a convalescent center. Each had suffered an incapacitating stroke. Margaret's stroke left her left side restricted, while Ruth's stroke damaged her right side. Both of these ladies were accomplished pianists but had given up hope of ever playing again.

"The director of the center sat them down at a piano and encouraged them to play solo pieces together. They did, and a beautiful friendship developed.

"What a picture of the church's needing to work together! What one member cannot do alone, perhaps two or more could do together—in harmony."—Larson, *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching*, p. 41.

The role of the Holy Spirit. Harmony is attained when individually we are regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Then our words and deeds will be directed by the growth of the Spirit's fruit in our lives (John 3:3, 5; Gal. 5:22-25).

As what part of the church body do you see yourself? A hand? An arm? An ear? Other? Why do you see yourself in that role? What can you do to improve the work you do?

WHERE PEOPLE ARE LOVED (Eph. 3:14, 15).

To what does Ephesians 3:14, 15 compare those who respond to God in faith and obedience?

To discover what else the Bible tells us about the church as family, match the following texts to the corresponding characteristic of church as family below: (a) Eph. 1:4-6; John 3:8; (b) Gal. 3:26-4:7; (c) Gal. 4:6; (d) James 2:15.

- _____ Members of God's family call Him Father.
- _____ We join God's family through adoption and the new birth.
- _____ Members of God's family relate to one another as brothers and sisters.
- _____ As members of God's family, we are His children.

A nurturing environment. The metaphor of church as family describes an environment "where people are loved, respected, and recognized as somebody. A place where people acknowledge that they need each other. Where talents are developed. Where people grow. Where everybody is fulfilled."—Charles E. Bradford, "What the Church Means to Me," *Adventist Review*, Nov. 20, 1986, p. 15.

The church as family "also implies accountability, a respect for spiritual parents, a watching out for spiritual brothers and sisters. And finally, it means that each member will have toward each other member a love that engenders a deep loyalty that undergirds and strengthens."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 140.

Fellowship is a distinctive feature of the church as family. Christian fellowship not only includes socialization with fellow believers, but a unique association with God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (1 John 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:9). In 1 John 1:3, the Greek word for fellowship suggests mutual sharing between equal partners (such as believers), as well as between unequal partners (such as God and a believer). The idea of fellowship is a major theme of this chapter. If we truly know Christ, we "will always want others to share in that blessed companionship."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 629.

A newly baptized member of a local congregation grew up in a rather dysfunctional family. The concept of church as family is, therefore, meaningless to him. How can the more experienced members help him to understand this idea? What can they do to give him the sense of belonging to a family?

FURTHER STUDY: This week we have been learning about the biblical meaning of church. Part of our study included the New Testament descriptions of the church as a body, a bride, and a family. The New Testament also describes the church as a temple. Read 1 Corinthians 3:9-17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-16; Ephesians 2:13-22; 1 Peter 2:4-6. Also read *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 595-599.

“ ‘Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are laborers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.’ 1 Cor. 3:8, 9. In this scripture the apostle compares the church to a cultivated field, in which the husbandmen labor, caring for the vines of the Lord’s planting; and also to a building, which is to grow into a holy temple for the Lord. God is the master worker, and He has appointed to each man his work. All are to labor under His supervision, letting Him work for and through His workmen. He gives them tact and skill, and if they heed His instruction, crowns their efforts with success. . . .

“Each one has an individuality of his own, which he is not to sink in that of any other man. Yet each is to work in harmony with his brethren. In their service, God’s workers are to be essentially one. No one is to set himself up as a criterion, speaking disrespectfully of his fellow-workers, or treating them as inferior. Under God, each is to do his appointed work, respected, loved, and encouraged by the other laborers. Together they are to carry the work forward to completion.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 275, 276.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How would you answer the Key Question in Sabbath Afternoon’s lesson, “What is the church?”
2. What modern comparisons could you use to describe the church?
3. In Sunday’s and Monday’s lessons, we studied elements upon which the Old Testament church was based. Why are these elements crucial for today’s church?

SUMMARY: The church is worthy of God’s blessing only as we respond to Him in faith and obedience. As His bride, we maintain our faithfulness to Him, working together as a unified body, a closely knit family, sharing His mercy and salvation with the world.



God Squads Storm the Cape Verde Islands

Edwin Eisele

The Cape Verde Islands, 500 miles off the coast of West Africa, are the product of volcanic eruptions. Similarly, recent political and religious eruptions among the islands' 400,000 inhabitants have opened hearts and minds to the gospel.

The official church has warned its members to stay away from Christian churches and evangelistic meetings. So the Holy Spirit inspired Adventist youth to take the gospel to the multitudes in the open markets and public squares—any place where crowds gather. And the people are flocking to hear the gospel.

Armed with their Bibles, accordions, guitars, and megaphones, these youthful "God squads" enter villages that have no Adventist Church, and invite villagers to a gospel concert. They sing praise songs until a crowd gathers, then the leader opens his Bible and declares the saving grace of Christ.

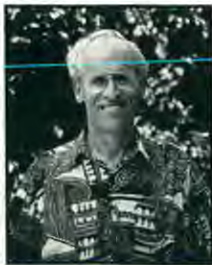
The leaders of the official church have tried to stop these impromptu religious services, but the crowds—including police and city officials—enjoy the music. Instead of stopping the young people, the officials come to listen.

Pray for the youth—and all believers—of the Cape Verde Islands and the 10 other countries of the Sahel Union in West Africa as they proclaim the gospel to willing listeners.

In nearly all 11 nations of the Sahel Union Mission, the doors of opportunity are open as never before. From the southern Sahara Desert to the Atlantic coast of Cote d'Ivoire, pioneer missionary work is producing dramatic growth of 10 to 15 percent each year.

But the work is far from finished. Adventist memberships are small, particularly in the Muslim nations of the Sahel Mission. Niger has only 35 members; Mali has 250; Senegal has 125; and Mauritania has no Adventist presence.

Thank you for your prayers and support through the Sabbath School mission offerings that will enable us to brighten every unentered region of our vast territory with the everlasting gospel.



Edwin Eisele works in the Sahel Union Mission located in Lomé, Togo.

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God's Called-Out People



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Gen. 12:1-6; Acts 7:1-8; Gal. 3:6-9, 29; Heb. 11:9-12.

MEMORY TEXT: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2, NKJV).

KEY QUESTION: How did the church begin?

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM IS TO BE OUR FAITH. God searched for and established a people who would respond to Him in faith and obedience. Abraham is presented in Scripture as a type of God's faithful people. As the forefather of Israel, God's chosen nation and church, Abraham's experience exemplifies the family tie God wishes to have with His children.

Abraham was born in ancient Babylon (Ur), a country steeped in idolatry and sin. Even though his parents partially yielded to the pagan influences surrounding them, Abraham longed for a pure experience, a genuine connection with God. "Faithful among the faithless, uncorrupted by the prevailing apostasy, he steadfastly adhered to the worship of the one true God."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 125. Thus God was able to reveal to Abraham "a distinct knowledge of the requirements of His law and of the salvation that would be accomplished through Christ."—p. 125.

The Lord led Abraham out of his native land, away from the pagan influences of Ur of the Chaldees, so he would be free to develop spiritual strength without interference. We may learn from Abraham's experience how to give the claims and call of God first place without being callous or unkind toward family members or society in general.

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM (Gen. 12:1-5).

Why did God call Abraham out of his home in Ur? Gen. 12:2, 3; 17:4-8.

“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. . . . 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. . . .

“Relying upon the divine promise . . . he abandoned home and kindred and native land, and went forth, he knew not whither, to follow where God should lead.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 126.

In Genesis 14:13, Abraham is called a Hebrew. A Hebrew is one who has passed over from the other side, especially one who has come from east of Canaan, beyond the Euphrates. (See *SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 468.) By implication, this signifies one who has come out of Babylon. It was not Abraham’s national origin that made him great, but his pure worship of the true God.

Who are called by God? Isa. 45:22; Matt. 11:28, 29.

Wanting none to be lost, God calls everyone to be saved (2 Peter 3:9). But only those “who are *with Him* are called, chosen, and faithful” (Rev. 17:14, NKJV). The “called” are, ultimately, those who respond to Christ’s universal plea to let Him be their Saviour and thus receive His righteousness by faith (Rom. 9:7, 8). For this reason Christ said, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14).

Giving God your all. At the age of 30, Florence Nightingale, the famous nurse of the Crimean War, wrote, “I am thirty years of age, the age at which Christ began His mission. Now no more childish things, no more vain things. Now, Lord, let me think only of Thy will.” Near the end of her days, when someone asked for her life’s secret, she replied, “I can only give one explanation. That is, I have kept **nothing back from God.**”—Paul Rees, *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations*, Paul Lee Tan, ed. (Rockville, Md.: Assurance Pub., 1985), p. 271; adapted.

Like Abraham, Florence Nightingale responded positively to Christ’s call. What changes can such a response produce in your life?

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM (Gen. 15:1-18; 17:1-14).

At the heart of God's covenant with Abraham was a revelation of the Messiah's sacrifice for the sins of the world. (Compare Heb. 9: 13-15.)

On what basis did God count Abraham righteous? Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:1-3.

As "the father of all those who believe" (Rom. 4:11, NKJV), Abraham received God's righteousness. Complete trust in God is the power behind the religious experience of the church and each believer. God's true followers are those who base their entire understanding of life on His teachings (John 14:21-23). They recognize that by His word He created, upholds, and orders all things (Heb. 1:1-3).

With Christ as your Saviour. The Lord bestowed righteousness upon Abraham before his circumcision (Gen. 15:3-6; Rom. 4:8-16) because "faith is the condition upon which God has seen fit to promise pardon to sinners. . . . When the sinner believes that Christ is his personal Saviour, then according to His unfailing promises, God pardons his sin and justifies him freely. The repentant soul realizes that his justification comes because Christ, as his substitute and surety, has died for him, is his atonement and righteousness."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1073.

Faith is the means of salvation for all, whether Jew or Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised. In Abraham's day, circumcision was the *token* of the covenant, not its *substance*. Since Calvary, baptism has replaced circumcision as the token of Christ's covenant with us (Col. 2:10-13).

What is the significance of God's changing Abram's name to Abraham? Gen. 17:4, 5.

The change of Abram's name, meaning "exalted father," to Abraham, "a father of nations or multitudes," indicates the worldwide blessing God would bestow through him and his descendants.

When we accept Christ, we also receive a new name—that of Christian. This new name indicates the blessing God desires to work through us. Of what does this blessing consist? How can you be a blessing to your family, friends, and acquaintances?

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM (Heb. 11:8-10).

What practical evidences do we find in Abraham's life illustrating that he was a man of great faith? Gen. 12:1-5; 18:20-33; 22:1-14.

"It was no light test that was thus brought upon Abraham, no small sacrifice that was required of him. There were strong ties to bind him to his country, his kindred, and his home. But he did not hesitate to obey the call. . . .

"Many are still tested as was Abraham. They do not hear the voice of God speaking directly from the heavens, but He calls them by the teachings of His word and the events of His providence. . . . Who is ready at the call of Providence to renounce cherished plans and familiar associations? Who will accept new duties and enter untried fields, doing God's work with firm and willing heart, for Christ's sake counting his losses gain?"—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 126, 127.

Paul says that Abraham was "not weak in faith" and "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief" (Rom. 4:19, 20). But Genesis shows that Abraham, in a moment of weakness, laughed at the idea of having a son by Sarah, because she was well past the childbearing years. How are we to harmonize these scriptures? First, Abraham's faith was *habitually* strong and progressive, in spite of several lapses. Abraham's *ultimate* experience was not one of defeat, but of victory in Christ. This reveals God's great love for His children. He does not judge us by our formative struggles and past failures, but by our ultimate decisions in response to His work of grace.

What was the "secret" of Abraham's faith? Gal. 3:6, 8; Heb. 11:8-10.

Genesis 15 gives an expanded account of God's covenant with Abraham. "The plan of redemption was here opened to him, in the death of Christ, the great sacrifice, and His coming in glory. Abraham saw also the earth restored to its Eden beauty, to be given him for an everlasting possession, as the final and complete fulfillment of the promise."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 137.

What can you learn from Abraham's life that will help to strengthen your faith? How does our faith grow? Is it God's gift or our achievement? If our faith grows as we exercise it, does that imply that greater faith is our achievement?

THE OBEDIENCE OF ABRAHAM (James 2:14-26).

Abraham is widely known for his faith in God. What do the following texts teach regarding other qualities that Abraham possessed? Gen. 18:19; 26:4, 5.

Abraham knew that we are not saved by works, but by God's mercy and power. However, this insight did not counteract his willingness to obey God. Instead, it inspired him to do all that the Lord required of him. He did not suppose that his willing obedience took the place of faith or that it earned him any merit with God. It was his delight to do the will of the Lord, because he recognized the blessedness of the divine will, and he appropriated the grace of God that enabled him to carry out His will.

What lessons does James draw from the life of Abraham to illustrate the qualities of true faith? James 2:14-24.

"Abraham's test was the most severe that could come to a human being. Had he failed under it, he would never have been registered as the father of the faithful. Had he deviated from God's command, the world would have lost an inspiring example of unquestioning faith and obedience."—*Youth's Instructor*, June 6, 1901.

Faith and obedience are linked as closely as fire and heat. Obedience is a natural result of faith.

Rowing with both oars. An elderly Scotsman once operated a small rowboat ferry. One day a passenger noticed that the man had carved on one oar the word *Faith* and on the other the word *Works*. When the passenger inquired about this, the Scotsman, a Christian, proceeded to demonstrate. When he rowed with only the oar labeled *Works*, the boat went around in circles. When he rowed with only the oar labeled *Faith*, the boat went around in circles in the opposite direction. He ended his demonstration with this thought, "Faith and works pulling together make for safety, progress, and blessing."—*Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations*, p. 403; adapted.

What did God call Abraham? Isa. 41:8. To whom else does He apply the same designation? John 15:14.

How do Abraham's faith and obedience correlate with the description of the saved in Revelation 14:12?

THE DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM (Gal. 3:7-9).

Students of Scripture know that while the Israelites prided themselves on their descent from Abraham, descent is never the guarantee of salvation. Yet the Lord frequently reminded the Jews that they were the literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 3:15; 6:2-4; Num. 32:11; Mark 12:26). This was not to encourage pride in their national origins, but to help them remember His perpetual covenant that would make them a distinctive people, called to reveal His righteousness to the world (1 Chron. 16:13-15, 24).

Who are the true children of Abraham? Gal. 3:7-9, 29 (compare Rom. 2:28, 29; Phil. 3:3).

These verses reveal the significance of God's promise to make Abraham a blessing to all the families of earth. God points out the spiritual influence of Abraham's example, an influence whose vastness and depth have been immortalized by the Spirit, not only through the record of Scripture, but through the moral influence of Abraham's godly life. Thus, the light of one incorruptible life illuminates the ages.

True descendants. "Christ recognized no virtue in lineage. He taught that spiritual connection supersedes all natural connection. The Jews claimed to have descended from Abraham; but by failing to do the works of Abraham, they proved that they were not his true children. Only those who prove themselves to be spiritually in harmony with Abraham by obeying the voice of God, are reckoned as of true descent."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 268.

God wanted Abraham and his descendants to spread His truth around the world. As we can see from Galatians 3, this work is now transferred to all believers. How does Ephesians 3:6, 14, 15 refer to these believers?

"Today, as never before, the dissemination of Bible truth by means of a consecrated church is bringing to the sons of men the benefits foreshadowed centuries ago in the promise to Abraham and to all Israel—to God's church on earth in every age—"I will bless thee . . . and thou shalt be a blessing." Gen. 12:2."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 703.

How can you help spread Bible truth so that you will be a blessing to those with whom you come in contact?

FURTHER STUDY: Abraham's consecration and faith qualified him to be the spiritual forefather of the faithful in all ages to come. Scripture repeatedly presents his example as worthy of following because he lived with a conscientious desire to glorify God. One of Abraham's distinguishing characteristics was that he taught and spiritually guided his entire household (Gen. 18:19). His own reverence for God was a convincing example to them.

Furthermore, he was a missionary for Christ to unbelievers. "Wherever he pitched his tent, he set up beside it the altar for sacrifice and worship. When the tent was removed, the altar remained; and many a roving Canaanite, whose knowledge of God had been gained from the life of Abraham His servant, tarried at that altar to offer sacrifice to Jehovah."—*Education*, p. 187.

Read "Abraham in Canaan" and "The Test of Faith" in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 132-155. Compare Romans 4 with Galatians 3 and 4 and James 2.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. After studying this week's lesson, how would you answer the Key Question in Sabbath Afternoon's lesson, "How did the church begin"?
2. When disagreement broke out between Lot's household and Abraham's, Abraham said, "Please let there be no strife between you and me . . . for we are brethren" (Gen. 13:8, NKJV). What can we learn as a church from this spirit of love and conciliation?
3. What can we learn about our mission from Abraham's coming to the rescue of Lot and the captured people of Sodom and Gomorrah? Compare Genesis 14 with Revelation 18.
4. How does the influence of a well-ordered Christian household affect the world and the church?

SUMMARY: Abraham's faith was based on his personal knowledge of God and on love for Him. He obeyed God by faith and guided his household into a pure and godly way of life. Women, men, and children who are part of God's household, His true church, will through faith partake of the same virtues Abraham possessed and will exert the same influence for good on others that he did.



Discovering Peace In Jesus

James Zachary

Rosyen was a beautiful girl from a well-known, affluent family. The young man who came courting had become a Muslim in order to marry her. On their wedding day her father provided the newlyweds with a large home.

One day Rosyen discovered her new husband reading from the Bible. "Let me read that book," she begged. "I would like to know what it says." Her husband warned her what could happen if the Bible was discovered, and Rosyen promised to be discreet.

As Rosyen read the Word of God, the Holy Spirit touched her heart. She was deeply impressed by the story of Jesus' death on the cross. As she thought about what she had read, she began to feel a peace and a hungering that she had never known before. She spent more time with the Bible. Her heart was flooded with joy as she directed her thoughts to Jesus.

"I want to become a Christian," she told her husband one day.

"I don't understand," he said. "I became a Muslim so I could marry you, and now you want to become a Christian?" Rosyen told her husband about what had happened as she read the Bible.

Rosyen's father discovered that she wanted to become a Christian. Angrily he threw the couple out of their new house. They had to move into a cramped apartment. But Rosyen and her husband stood fast for Jesus. "I would rather live in my tiny apartment and have my heart filled with the peace of Jesus than to live in a mansion with an empty heart," Rosyen testified. Rosyen and five other Muslims asked for baptism following evangelistic meetings held in her city in Indonesia.

Her brother, curious about what his sister was discovering in the Bible, borrowed her Bible. Because of his father's anger over Rosyen's conversion, her brother had to hide the Bible and read it secretly. Then one day his father discovered his son with the Bible. "If I see you reading that book again, I will kill you." Her brother is careful to conceal his Bible reading, and has started attending church. He dresses as if he were going swimming, but takes his dress clothes along and goes to church instead.

Many Muslims yearn for a closer walk with God. And God is working on their hearts. Pray for them as they look for opportunities to come to know more about the Christian faith.

Rosyen Bissau lives on the island of Timor in Indonesia. James Zachary is global evangelism coordinator for the Quiet Hour.

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The Church Before the Cross



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Exod. 25:1-9, 21, 22; Isa. 56:1-8; Heb. 8:1-13.

MEMORY TEXT: "You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Psalm 77:20, NKJV).

KEY QUESTIONS: Why did Israel not fully succeed as a church? What lessons does Israel's history have for us as the church of today?

GOD'S COVENANT IS EVERLASTING. Since the day our first parents fell in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15), God has sought to restore the connection between Himself and humanity. The revelation of His covenant of mercy is as ancient as sin, which called forth the exercise of His forgiveness, grace, and restorative power. Since the beginning of time, all who have received His covenant have done so by faith (Heb. 11:4-8).

The Lord raised up a special people, whom He organized into the nation Israel. Their lives were to be guided by the principles of grace, thus enabling them to receive the blessings of His salvation and to show the world the benefits of obedient faith. God chose Moses as the earthly deliverer and shepherd of Israel. And to him He committed a body of laws—moral, civil, physical, and ceremonial—that were to guide the Hebrews to knowledge of the Saviour. Under Moses' leadership, Israel was identified as "the church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38). When as a people they rejected Christ, the Israelites rejected their role as light bearers to the world. Christ transferred that honor to His church, composed of believers from every nation (Matt. 21:43).

GOD'S EVERLASTING COVENANT (Exod. 24:3-8; Ps. 89:34).

"Adam and Eve, at their creation, had a knowledge of the law of God; they were acquainted with its claims upon them; its precepts were written upon their hearts. When man fell by transgression, the law was not changed, but a remedial system was established to bring him back to obedience. The promise of a Saviour was given, and sacrificial offerings pointing forward to the death of Christ as the great sin offering were established."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 363.

What does God say about His covenant? Ps. 89:34. God speaks of two covenants. What was the first covenant? What was the second covenant? Exod. 24:3-8; Heb. 8:6-13; 10:4, 10.

God has always offered humankind the same covenantal terms—grace through faith in the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour (Gal. 3:16, 17). At every stage in history, God has offered grace to obey His requirements. God has always offered the terms of this everlasting or new covenant. By their faulty responses, humans have failed to receive God's grace and have fallen short of covenant fellowship with Him. The result has been the "old covenant," based on faulty human responses. God gave the ceremonial system as an imperfect means of leading humanity to faith in the Messiah to come. Thus the "old covenant" was something bad (humanity's faulty response to God—Gal. 4:22-31) and something good (God's gift of the ceremonial law—Heb. 9:1). Israel's own efforts to obey, without partaking of God's grace and power, nullified for them the experience of the everlasting (new) covenant (Rom. 9:31-33).

"If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of **bondage in Egypt**; they would have kept God's law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon tables of stone."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 364. Nor would there have been any need for the ceremonial law. Paul repudiated legalistic human responses and the ceremonial law as binding after the Cross.

Are you living in the liberating power of the new covenant? If not, why not give your heart to Jesus now? What practical benefits are provided by this new-covenant relationship?

THE SANCTUARY AND THE COVENANT (Exod. 25:8).

At the heart of God's covenant is His desire to restore His relationship with humanity. Sin has separated us from God. But God's covenant provides a way to bridge that gulf. The covenant removes sin and brings into our hearts the everlasting righteousness of Christ (1 John 3:5; Rom. 3:21, 22). And the method of doing so was revealed in the sanctuary (Ps. 77:13).

Give two reasons why God asked the Israelites, His church in the wilderness, to build the sanctuary. Exod. 25:8; 29:43-46.

Hebrews 8 and 9 explain in detail that God's purpose in establishing the sanctuary was to reveal the plan of salvation, with a special emphasis on the atoning sacrifice of Christ as the means of pardon, purification, and reunion with God. The sanctuary was the ordained center of worship and spiritual instruction. But the Israelites were not to idolize it. The Lord wished to dwell among and in His *people*. Their *hearts* were to be His sanctuary, the living repository of His covenant (Lev. 26:11, 12; 2 Cor. 6:16-18; Heb. 10:14-17).

Describe how the Israelites responded to the call for materials and help in building the wilderness sanctuary. Exod. 35:4-10, 20-29; 36:5, 6.

"The murmurings of the Israelites and the visitations of God's judgments because of their sins are recorded as a warning to after-generations. And their devotion, their zeal and liberality, are an example worthy of imitation. All who love the worship of God and prize the blessing of His sacred presence will manifest the same spirit of sacrifice in preparing a house where He may meet with them. They will desire to bring to the Lord an offering of the very best that they possess. A house built for God should not be left in debt, for He is thereby dishonored. An amount sufficient to accomplish the work should be freely given, that the workmen may be able to say, as did the builders of the tabernacle, 'Bring no more offerings.'" —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 344.

Meditate on the relationship between Exodus 35:4-10, 20-29; 36:5, 6 and 1 Corinthians 3:9-16; 2 Corinthians 9:6-13. Where can we find the right sort of "building materials" for our character development?

GOD'S UNIVERSAL PLAN THROUGH HIS SANCTUARY (Isa. 56:1-8).

Jesus taught the woman at the well that "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). This did not mean that the Jewish people had the right to determine who was to be saved, but that the Saviour would come as a Jew. It also meant that to Israel as a people, God had committed the knowledge of the Saviour and His salvation (Deut. 4:5, 6; Rom. 3:1, 2).

Specify two things the Jews were to do with the knowledge God had given them. Deut. 30:15, 16; Isa. 49:6.

1. _____
2. _____

By demonstrating in their own lives the character and teachings of Christ, Israel would be a kingdom of priests, whose wisdom and spiritual purity would make them the religious educators of the world (Exod. 19:6; Mal. 2:7). But because of their apostasy at Sinai, God gave the priestly role to the Levites. Yet His objective for the nation remained the same.

What did the Lord show His people regarding the meaning of the sanctuary service for those who were not native-born Jews? Isa. 56:1-8.

Had the Israelites remained faithful, people from all nations would have come to worship God in the temple. But Israelite fascination with other gods dimmed the lights of the sanctuary, making it difficult for others to find their way.

When fleeing from Saul, David took great comfort in his memories of the sanctuary (Ps. 27:1-6; compare 43:3, 4; 63:1-4). From the sanctuary services he had learned the way of salvation; an education that would sustain him in the days ahead. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh, my enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell. Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear." "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart" (Ps. 27:1-3, 14, NKJV).

What does the sanctuary mean to you?

ISRAEL REJECTS GOD'S CALL (Isa. 5:1-7).

How did the Israelites, as a nation, respond to God's gracious call? Isa. 1:2-6 (compare Isa. 5:1-7; Ezek. 16:14, 15).

The Israelites failed to keep their covenant with God. Instead of honoring Him before the world, they engaged in the idolatrous religions of other nations.

Describe how God called His people back from their apostasy. 2 Chron. 36:14-16; Neh. 9:26-32.

The Israelites lacked faith and love (John 5:42; Heb. 4:2). "They forgot God, and lost sight of their high privilege as His representatives. . . . 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' (Jer. 7:4), while at the same time they were misrepresenting God's character, dishonoring His name, and polluting His sanctuary."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 291, 292.

What relevance does the history of Israel have for us as a church today? 1 Cor. 10:1-15.

Paul's warning to the Christians in Corinth not to depend on their own strength and knowledge is valid for all Christians through the ages. Israel's disobedience caused their ruin in the wilderness and later brought about their captivity in Babylon (Jer. 17:23, 27).

For Christians living in light of Christ's soon return, the counsel to learn from Israel's wilderness ordeal is especially meaningful. Because of their love affair with the world (Numbers 25), many of the Israelites died just before they would have completed their journey to Canaan. We who have been entrusted with the gospel and knowledge of the Second Coming should take care lest we perish in sin before reaching the heavenly Canaan.

Are there any attitudes, habits, or possessions in your life that might prevent you from answering God's call?

THE TRUE ISRAEL OF GOD (Rom. 2:28, 29).

God's purpose did not change even though Israel failed to represent His character to the world. He still has a people who constitute a "holy nation" because they live the truth (1 Peter 2:9; Isa. 26:2). They are God's true Israel.

How did the Old Testament prophets characterize this "holy nation"? Ps. 73:1; Isa. 63:8; Zeph. 3:13.

Jacob, whose name means "supplanter" and "layer of snares," underwent a name change at the River Jabbok, when he wrestled with the Angel. There God changed his name to Israel, which means "a prince with God," "an overcomer with God" (Gen. 32:24-30). The Angel said to Jacob, "For you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed" (verse 28, NKJV). Jacob did not overcome God, but was at last overcome by God's love and goodness. From a schemer he became a man of trust, who relied upon God alone. If Jacob's descendants continued to honor His covenant, God would bless them.

What did Israel's rejection of their role as God's covenant-keeping people lead Jesus, their King, to say? Matt. 21:42, 43; 23:37-39.

Ingratitude, selfishness, pride, contempt for divine righteousness, and hatred for the Messiah all combined to cause the ruin of ancient Israel. Yet in Matthew 23, we read the most tender expression of love toward Israel. "The time was at hand when God must reject the Jews as His chosen people . . . yet how reluctantly Heaven abandoned them to their own perverse way and to their tragic fate! For other statements of Scripture expressing the mercy and longsuffering of God exercised toward unrepentant sinners see Eze. 18:23, 31, 32; 33:11; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 493.

How does the New Testament identify the true followers of Jesus? John 1:47; Rom. 2:28, 29; Phil. 3:9.

The Angel touched Jacob on one of the strongest parts of the human body, indicating that God must "break" us down at the strongest part of our self before we are ready to be productive members of His church body. What part of you must God "break" in order for you to be such a member?

FURTHER STUDY: Choose to read one or both of the following: (1) Matthew 21:33-44; "The Lord's Vineyard" in *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 284-306; (2) Psalms 105, 106; "The Law and the Covenants" in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 363-373.

"The church is very precious in God's sight. He values it, not for its external advantages, but for the sincere piety which distinguishes it from the world. He estimates it according to the growth of the members in the knowledge of Christ, according to their progress in spiritual experience.

"Christ hungers to receive from His vineyard the fruit of holiness and unselfishness. He looks for the principles of love and goodness. . . . It is the atmosphere of grace which surrounds the soul of the believer, the Holy Spirit working upon mind and heart, that makes him a savor of life unto life, and enables God to bless his work." —*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 298.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Repentance, revival, and reformation were the three responses that would have saved Israel from ruin. How can we advance these three "R's" of redemption without being harsh or divisive? How can we respond positively to salvation in Christ?
2. Compare God's warning and appeal to Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22) with His warnings and appeals to Israel (Jer. 3:12-22).
3. How should we relate to God's prophetic warnings and counsels to the church? Should we condemn the church or repent individually and corporately?

SUMMARY: God gave His covenant of deliverance from sin through the atonement of Christ to Adam and Eve the day they sinned. He renewed His promise in the Abrahamic covenant. The "old" covenant at Sinai was so named, not because of its age, but because the Hebrews misunderstood it to mean "Obey in your own strength and live," rather than "Obey by the grace that God provides." As a nation, Israel was blind to the beauty and intent of the everlasting covenant—a living union with God. God's true Israel, therefore, are the men, women, and children in whose hearts dwell the new covenant and its Giver (Heb. 8:10-12; Eph. 3:14-21).



Saved by Translation

Domingos da Silva, Jr.

Domingos da Silva, Jr., enjoyed his work for a major television dubbing company in Rio de Janeiro. He translated English-language television programs into Portuguese so that the words fit the speaker's mouth movements.

But Domingos was uncomfortable when he saw the company he worked for shun religious broadcasters who came for translation services, favoring instead major television producers with large budgets. As a Christian he wanted to help the religious programmers. He decided to open his own dubbing studio to serve religious programmers. When he told his supervisors of his plans, they begged him to reconsider, but he had made up his mind. He purchased the needed equipment and started his business in his own home.

One of his first accounts was *It Is Written*. As he translated the television programs, he was impressed with Pastor George Vandeman's sermons and his honesty. And when he began translating the Bible course, he found that the lessons answered questions he had in his own religious life, questions that were not answered in his own church. When he began to translate the Bible study on Daniel, he saw Daniel's stand on health and his strong faith in God. Da Silva exclaimed, "Daniel was an Adventist!"

After working for *It Is Written* for a year, da Silva could resist the message no longer. He picked up the telephone and called a friend on the *It Is Written* team and told him "It is impossible to resist this message. I want to be baptized."

When a pastor began studying with da Silva, he found that da Silva knew the lesson material—he had studied as he translated them.

Da Silva's wife has supported his religious commitment, although she has not yet been baptized. His young daughter loves Sabbath School. Since he has become an Adventist he says his life has totally changed. His home is happier; he is happier. He thanks God for leading him to change his career. **That decision has changed his life.**



Domingos da Silva and his wife, Marina (left). He recently retired, and now works exclusively for *It Is Written*.

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The Church Has One Foundation



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:18-22; 1 Peter 2:6-8.

MEMORY TEXT: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18, NKJV).

KEY QUESTIONS: How did Christ view the church? What position did He give to it? Are the answers to these questions still relevant to us today?

CHRIST IS THE CREATOR, HEAD, AND SUSTAINER OF HIS CHURCH. He desires that His people reveal His character and the principles of His kingdom to the world.

Christ founded the church upon Himself, the living Rock. He is the foundation stone of which Isaiah and David spoke. "Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation" (Isa. 28:16, NKJV). "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone" (Ps. 118:22, NKJV). His Word, illuminated to our minds by His Spirit, is the means by which He makes Himself known to us as our Saviour (John 14:21-23). Therefore, His Word is the foundation of the true church's beliefs. This places the authority of the church in the hands of the One who gave both the Word and His life for our redemption.

As head of the church, Christ equips His servants with gifts, enabling them to reveal His truth to the world in order that all who desire may become part of its fellowship. Thus the household of faith is built up in love to include every believing man, woman, and child.

JESUS ESTABLISHES THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH (Matt. 16:13-18).

Matthew 16:13-17 records that Jesus asked His disciples what others were saying about who He was. He wanted them to recognize and openly affirm His identity, for only then could they have complete faith in Him. Had Christ been no more than a teacher sent from God, He could not have been anyone's Saviour, let alone the Saviour of the entire world (1 John 2:1, 2).

But Christ was God come to teach, to save, and to restore mankind through His atoning sacrifice. The disciples needed to know that His authority was unquestionably supreme, especially in light of what He and they were to suffer (Matt. 16:21-25).

Upon what did Christ declare He was building His church? What is the significance of the symbol? Matt. 16:18 (compare Deut. 32:3, 4; 1 Cor. 3:10, 11; 10:1-4).

As 1 Peter 2:6-8 reveals, Peter did not think of himself as the rock on which the church was founded. Jesus is the divine Rock, giving a sure and unshakable foundation to the church (Matt. 7:24, 25). And it is upon this Rock that the church maintains its integrity and identity. In a subordinate sense the collective testimony of all the apostles and prophets constitutes the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20-22), with Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone. Their testimony is foundational because it was the Spirit of Christ in them that inspired their teachings (1 Peter 1:10, 11; 2 Peter 1:19-21).

Why can the gates of hell not prevail against the church? Eph. 1:15-23; Rev. 1:10-18.

The word *hell* comes from the Greek word *hades*, meaning "the realm of the dead," "death," or "grave." Christ used the word to refer to the dark, evil forces of the devil (Matt. 16:18).

"For six thousand years, faith has builded upon Christ. For six thousand years the floods and tempests of satanic wrath have beaten upon the Rock of our salvation; but it stands unmoved."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 413.

What is your responsibility as a church member to see that the "fort" remains secure against Satan's wily deceptions? How is this responsibility fulfilled in your personal life and in the corporate body?

CHRIST'S WORD IS FOUNDATIONAL (Matt. 7:24, 25).

The foundation of a government is its laws. All policies and civil functions of a nation are tested by its constitution. The same applies to the church. The foundation of its government, the constitution of its faith, is the Bible, God's Word. (See Isa. 40:8.)

What did Christ say were the two criteria for building "on the rock"? Matt. 7:24, 25.

"The word of God is the only steadfast thing our world knows. It is the sure foundation. 'Heaven and earth shall pass away,' said Jesus, 'but My words shall not pass away.' Matthew 24:35."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 148.

Jesus' words, the everlasting gospel, are to be the foundation, the constitution, of each believer's character and life. Such character building enables the church to witness for the truth because it is character building empowered by Christ (1 Cor. 3:11).

What did Jesus specify as a requirement of true discipleship? John 8:31; Luke 8:21.

This requirement can be met only if we are transformed by His grace. Christ is the living Word (John 1:1-3, 14). He created and upholds all things by His word. Therefore, we, the church, should demonstrate the power of His word as it molds our lives with purpose, principle, and truth.

Are you a tourist or a traveler? Edward Hutton, English author of travel books on Italy, was honored with the highest civilian award of the Italian government—Commendatore of the Order of Merit of the Republic. While describing the difference between the Italy of his first studies and the Italy of the present, he commented that Italy then was the land of travelers. But today it is the land of tourists who do not understand what they see.

This is a good illustration of how many Christians read their Bibles. Instead of travelers, journeying slowly, absorbing the blessings and exploring the depths, they are tourists who rush by at high speed, not knowing what to read.—Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Let Me Illustrate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Fleming H. Revell, 1967), p. 31; adapted.

How does your knowledge that Christ is the living Word affect your attitude toward Scripture?

HE IS THE HEAD; WE ARE THE BODY (Col. 1:18, 24).

The imagery of Scripture regarding the church that we studied in lesson 1 indicates that it is more a living organism than an organization. This is not to suggest that the church lacks organization. What combination of substances and functions could be more subtle, complex, or sensitive than that of something alive? Truly the church is the people whose hearts are filled with Christ.

“**The head of every man is Christ.**” God, who put all things under the Saviour’s feet, ‘gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all.’ 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22, 23. The church is built upon Christ as its foundation; it is to obey Christ as its head. It is not to depend upon man or be controlled by man.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 414.

Why is Christ called the head of the church? Through what agency does Christ, the head, carry out His will? 1 Cor. 12:12, 27, 28.

Christ’s body, the church, is the living instrument through which He ministers to the world. Paul emphasized the need for cooperation among the diverse members of the body (1 Cor. 12:14-25). This diversity, instead of being a cause for alarm or frustration, enables the church to serve a world in need of physical, spiritual, and social help. Sanctified unity in diversity results from the presence of the Holy Spirit among us as a body of believers.

What power or influence gives strength and allows the body to grow? Eph. 4:11-16; John 13:34, 35.

“The more closely we resemble our Saviour in character, the greater will be our love toward those for whom He died. Christians who manifest a spirit of unselfish love for one another are bearing a testimony for Christ which unbelievers can neither gainsay nor resist. It is impossible to estimate the power of such an example. Nothing will so successfully defeat the devices of Satan and his emissaries, nothing will so build up the Redeemer’s kingdom, as will the love of Christ manifested by the members of the church.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 167, 168.

How did Christ show love? How can you show love to those around you?

THE PRICE HE PAID FOR THE CHURCH (Acts 20:28).

The church is a divinely established society of believers. But God's children are living on a planet that is hostile to the interests of the divine kingdom represented by the church. Moreover, members of the church have been ransomed from a life of rebellion against God and from enslavement to the power of Satan.

What ransom price did God pay to establish His church? Acts 20:28.

The church is God's household (Eph. 2:19), whose work it is to reveal the reconciling love of Christ to the world in godly doctrine and godly deeds. By these means, all who are responsive to God's love will be drawn into His family circle, the church.

Throughout eternity, the ransomed church of God will never forget the price He has paid for their redemption. The cross of Calvary will constitute their science and song forever.

Both redemption from sin and membership in God's family while on this earth are precious blessings. What additional privilege does the blood of Jesus open to those who receive Him? Heb. 10:19-23 (compare Heb. 4:14-16; 9:12-14).

Through the blood of Christ, and by the Spirit's power, we have spiritual access to the throne of grace in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. There we may commune with God, receive instruction, and find mercy and grace for help in all times of need. The value of this privilege is beyond words. We must personally have the experience in order to appreciate it.

"Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears, before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to the wants of His children. . . . Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 100.

In view of the purchase price paid for our redemption, how should you treat the gift of life that God has given you? Contemplate 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 and 2 Corinthians 5:14-16. In view of this purchase, how should you treat others, even those people who are most difficult to love?

HIS COMMISSION AND GIFTS TO THE CHURCH (Matt. 28: 18-20).

The church is more than just a group of people who sing, pray, preach, and believe approximately the same things about Jesus. It is "God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world the fullness of His sufficiency. The members of His church . . . are to show forth His glory."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

List the four parts of the commission Christ gave His disciples just before He ascended to His Father in heaven. Matt. 28:18-20. Why is each part not sufficient by itself?

The work Jesus commanded His disciples to do they were not to do on some seasonal or periodic basis, but continuously till the end of the world. Thus, the commission is for us too. Our work will be effective in proportion to the degree of our union with Him. A complete Saviour revealed, a complete message unsealed, makes complete converts, of all sin pardoned and healed, and in all truth fully sealed.

The task of fulfilling Christ's commission in a world becoming more and more corrupt is immense. But Christ has not left us without help. When He ascended to heaven, what did He give the church and why? Eph. 4:7-16.

By exercising these gifts, the church reveals Christ's love to the world. Through the gifts of the Spirit, which Christ's followers exercise by divine grace and power, the world receives the invitation to be reconciled to God through His Son (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

"The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come.' Rev. 22:17. **Everyone who hears is to repeat the invitation.** Whatever one's calling in life, his first interest should be to win souls for Christ. . . . Ministry does not consist alone in preaching. Those minister who relieve the sick and suffering, helping the needy, speaking words of comfort to the desponding and those of little faith."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 822.

If you cherish supreme love for Christ and His purposes, what will God accomplish through you for the benefit of others? How can your love and devotion to Him be increased?

FURTHER STUDY: As you read Revelation 1:10-20, consider the intimate connection between Christ and His church. Also read "The Foreshadowing of the Cross" and "Go Teach All Nations" in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 412-414, 818-828; "The Great Commission" in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 25-34.

"To those who believe, Christ is a sure foundation. Upon this living stone, Jews and Gentiles alike may build. It is broad enough for all and strong enough to sustain the weight and burden of the whole world."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 175.

"Human power and human might did not establish the church of God, and neither can they destroy it. Not on the rock of human strength, but on Christ Jesus, the Rock of Ages, was the church founded. . . . The presence of God gives stability to His cause. 'Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man,' is the word that comes to us. Psalm 146:3. 'In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.' Isaiah 30:15. God's glorious work, founded on the eternal principles of right, will never come to nought. It will go on from strength to strength, 'not by might, nor by power, but my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.' Zechariah 4:6."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 595, 596.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How should knowing that Christ is the founder and head of the church affect your attitude toward being a part of the church?
2. We have learned that Scripture refers to the church as the body of Christ as His bride (Eph. 5:23-32; Rev. 19:7, 8). Discuss the significance of these comparisons with respect to our privileges and responsibilities as members of His church.
3. Compare your life and priorities with the following statement: "All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 822.

SUMMARY: Christ established the church, with Himself as its foundation. He intends that the church shall live in harmony with His Word and teach its precepts to the world. The church is an extension of Himself. Therefore, as members of the church, we are to show the world what Christ is like through our fellowship, character, words, and deeds.



A Matter of Life and Death

Inge Gray

Pray for Juliet and Elizabeth, Adventist women who live in the African country of Benin. They are married to two brothers who are not Adventists. Each of the men has multiple wives.

The brothers wanted their wives to accompany them to a voodoo ceremony, but Juliet and Elizabeth refused to go. They agreed to care for the children—their own and those of their husbands' other wives, who were going to the ceremony.

While the husbands and their other wives were gone, a heavy rainstorm struck the village. The 6-year-old son of one of the other wives went outside to play in the rain. While he was digging in the mud, a papaya tree toppled over onto him and killed him. One of the villagers found the boy and rushed to tell the women. Juliet hurried to the place where the boy lay. When she arrived villagers had already determined that the child was dead. The villagers notified the police of the tragic accident.

When the husbands returned and learned of the tragedy, the boy's father accused Juliet of killing the child and placing his body under the tree. He convinced some of the other villagers that Juliet had killed the child and that Elizabeth had been an accomplice.

In Benin when a person is accused of a crime, the police take the accused to prison while they investigate the crime. There prisoners, especially women, often are abused and molested. Fearing this, Juliet's Adventist brother-in-law, uncle of the dead child, urged the villagers to tell the police what had happened. Because of his quick action, the women have not yet been arrested.

Still unconvinced of her story, Juliet's husband demanded that she and Elizabeth drink a voodoo drink to prove their innocence. The women refused, saying that this would be a violation of their Christian beliefs. But the women did not know how to prove their innocence. The little group of Adventist believers prayed earnestly that God would help them know what to do. When the mission president arrived unexpectedly in their village the following Sabbath, the believers rejoiced that God had answered their prayers!

The pastor counseled the small group, and encouraged them to remain faithful. We still do not know the outcome of this case. Pray for these women and the other Adventists who live in this village, that God's love will shine through their lives, even in tragedy.

Inge Gray lives in Cotonou, Benin, where her husband, Gordon, is president of the Benin Mission.

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The Apostolic Church



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 2; 14:21-27.

MEMORY TEXT: "And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33, NKJV).

KEY QUESTIONS: What characterized the church after Christ returned to heaven? What difference did these characteristics make to the life and mission of the church? Should the church today exhibit these same characteristics? If so, why? If not, why not?

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IN ITS FIRST CENTURY WAS FULL OF VIGOR AND GRACE. The witness of the apostles concerning Christ's life and teachings, His sacrifice and resurrection, activated the vision of all believers and inspired the church to evangelize the entire world rapidly.

The success of the gospel was a result of the Holy Spirit's work through the lives of believers. The apostles were of one accord. "Christ filled their thoughts; the advancement of His kingdom was their aim. In mind and character they had become like their Master, and men 'took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.'" —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 45.

The power and gifts the apostles received at Pentecost gave efficiency to their evangelistic efforts. The promise that this power will be revived among us in these last days makes our study of the apostolic church more meaningful. "Before the final visitation of God's judgments upon the earth there will be among the people of the Lord such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 464.

PENTECOST (Acts 2).

What was Christ's promise and command to His disciples before His final ascension to heaven? Acts 1:6-9.

Promise: _____

Command: _____

"As the disciples waited for the fulfillment of the promise, they humbled their hearts in true repentance and confessed their unbelief. . . .

"The disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ. Putting away all differences, all desire for the supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 36, 37.

How would you describe the result of the apostles' submission to Christ's instructions? Acts 2:1-8, 41-47; 4:13, 33.

The day of Pentecost was not a unique and unrepeatable manifestation of God's power through the apostles' witness. It was the inauguration of the power that increasingly attended their work until the close of their lives, as the entire book of Acts makes evident.

"Everywhere the gospel was proclaimed. . . . The hearts of the disciples were surcharged with a benevolence so full, so deep, so far reaching, that it impelled them to go to the ends of the earth, testifying, God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. As they proclaimed the gospel as the power of God unto salvation, hearts yielded to the power of the Holy Spirit. New territory was daily added to the church."—*My Life Today*, p. 61.

If we put away selfishness, dissension, pride, and vanity as did the early disciples, the same zeal for Christ's glory and for the salvation of others will produce similar results.

Someone has said that "before Christ sent the church into the world, He sent the Spirit into the church. The same order must be observed today." Pray now for the power of Pentecost in your life. Is there anything other than praying that you can do to ensure that the Holy Spirit will fill your life?

AN EXEMPLARY CHURCH (Acts 16:5).

The first-century church, despite its faults and challenges, was fervently committed to Christ, studying His Word and evangelizing the world. The church also demonstrated a spirit of fellowship and practical kindness unparalleled in any social group the world had yet known (Acts 4:31-35; 11:28-30; Rom. 15:25, 26). All this was especially true in the years immediately following Calvary.

What was the secret of the church's vitality and success? Acts 4:9-13.

Being with Jesus. "Our life is to be bound up with the life of Christ; we are to draw constantly from Him, partaking of Him, the living Bread that came down from heaven, drawing from a fountain ever fresh, ever giving forth its abundant treasures. If we keep the Lord ever before us, allowing our hearts to go out in thanksgiving and praise to Him, we shall have a continual freshness in our religious life. Our prayers will take the form of a conversation with God as we would talk with a friend. He will speak His mysteries to us personally. . . .

"In those who possess it, the religion of Christ will reveal itself as a vitalizing, pervading principle, a living, working, spiritual energy. There will be manifest the freshness and power and joyousness of perpetual youth. . . .

"This experience gives every teacher of truth the very qualifications that will make him a representative of Christ."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 129, 130.

As the church grew in size, it was natural for difficulties to arise. The apostles, through their letters preserved for us, counseled the young church regarding controversial matters. How did the churches generally receive these messages and with what effect? 2 Cor. 7:8-16; 1 Thess. 2:13, 14.

The churches' acceptance of God's Word spoken through His messengers gave them strength, unity, restoration, and maturity. Thus they were instilled with a moral stamina not easily corrupted. The apostles did not act as tyrants, but as loving guardians and guides of the flock (2 Cor. 1:24; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

Do you welcome words of correction from God, or do you treat such correction as an insult?

AN ORGANIZED CHURCH (Titus 1:5; Col. 2:5).

The apostles labored to build up the church because they knew that the church is God's visible family, called to evangelize the world. They quickly recognized that organization is *not* a foe of spirituality, if it is designed to maintain gospel order. Without organization and system, the work of the church would fall into disorder, and false teachers would arise. The apostles predicted that although this would happen, consecrated believers everywhere would continue to keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus (1 Tim. 6:3-5; Rev. 12:17).

In the first column, briefly state the circumstances that stimulated the early church to organize. In the second column, state the results of their efforts.

| | Circumstances | Results |
|--------------|---------------|---------|
| Acts 1:14-26 | _____ | _____ |
| Acts 4:31-37 | _____ | _____ |
| Acts 6:1-7 | _____ | _____ |
| Acts 15:1-31 | _____ | _____ |

"The order that was maintained in the early Christian church, made it possible for them to move forward solidly, as a well-disciplined army, clad with the armor of God. The companies of believers, though scattered over a large territory, were all members of one body; all moved in concert, and in harmony with one another. When dissension arose in a local church . . . and the believers were unable to come to an agreement among themselves, such matters were **not permitted** to create a division in the church, but were referred to a general council of the entire body of believers, made up of appointed delegates from the various local churches, with the apostles and elders in positions of leading responsibility."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 95, 96.

What circumstances in your local church or the church at large might be solved in the same manner?

If the early church had not valued organization, how would the progress of the gospel have been affected?

UNITY IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGES (Acts 15:1-6).

Two dangers the early church faced were persecution and theological controversy. But persecution fostered unity and gave unexpected impetus to evangelism. (See Acts chapters 3-5 and 8:1-4.) So Satan decided to stir up disagreements.

What controversy between Jewish and Gentile Christians at Antioch necessitated a general council at Jerusalem? Acts 15:1-6.

Many Hebrew Christians, afraid that the Gentile converts would undermine the distinctive, divinely established features of their faith, sought to bring all believers under the ceremonial law, including circumcision. But Paul, Barnabas, and some of their associates taught that the ceremonial law had been abrogated at Calvary.

How did the apostles deal with the concern the legalistic party among the Jewish Christians felt regarding the increasing number of Gentile believers? What was the outcome of the apostles' efforts? Acts 15:3, 4, 7-31.

The council engaged in theological discussion and received reports on the progress of the gospel among the Gentiles. The delegates settled the debate largely by considering how overwhelmingly the Spirit was revealing the power of salvation worldwide.

"The . . . main question at issue seemed to present before the council insurmountable difficulties. But the Holy Spirit had, in reality, already settled this question, upon the decision of which seemed to depend the prosperity, if not the very existence, of the Christian church."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 192.

The council's Spirit-directed decision made it possible for the church to assimilate Gentile converts.

"The principle at stake was quite simple and completely fundamental. Was the gift of God for the select few or for all the world? If we possess it ourselves are we to look on it as a privilege or as a responsibility? The problem may not meet us nowadays in precisely the same way; but there still exist divisions between class and class, between nation and nation, between colour and colour. We fully realize the true meaning of Christianity only when all middle walls of partition are broken down."—William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 113.

PAUL AND THE CHURCH (Acts 26:19).

Saul the Pharisee once thought himself duty-bound to persecute the church. But Jesus transformed him into a passionate witness for Christ.

Following his dramatic conversion, how did the Lord connect Paul with the church? Acts 9:4-19.

Paul was converted and called directly into apostleship by Christ without the invitation or effort of the church. Yet, once having captured Paul's heart, Jesus led him into direct association with His church, an association that Paul cherished for the rest of his days.

"Thus Jesus gave sanction to the authority of His organized church, and placed Saul in connection with His appointed agencies on earth. Christ had now a church as His representative on earth, and to it belonged the work of directing the repentant sinner in the way of life.

"Many have an idea that they are responsible to Christ alone for their light and experience, independent of His recognized followers on earth. Jesus is the friend of sinners, and His heart is touched with their woe. He has all power, both in heaven and on earth; but He respects the means that He has ordained for the enlightenment and salvation of men; He directs sinners to the church, which He has made a channel of light to the world."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 122.

What action did the Lord direct His church to take regarding Paul and Barnabas? Acts 13:1-3.

Although Paul and Barnabas had already been active and fruitful under God's direct appointment, the Spirit of the Lord directed the leaders of the church to endorse this appointment by a ceremonial laying on of hands.

Through the church, God "communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give to one of His servants an experience independent of and contrary to the experience of the church itself. . . . In His providence He places His servants in close connection with His church in order that they may have less confidence in themselves and greater confidence in others whom He is leading out to advance His work."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 163.

Determine from the following texts Paul's concept of the church. How does it compare with your own? 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 12:4-28; Eph. 4:1-16; 5:25-32.

FURTHER STUDY: If you wish to learn more about how the early church was organized, read "The Seven Deacons" in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 87-96.

Unity in diversity. When Jesus told His disciples to take the gospel to all nations (Matt. 28:19), that is exactly what they did. Read the following texts, and locate the places they mention on the map (This will help you to comprehend the diversity of cultures and nationalities that composed the apostolic church.): Acts 2:5-11; 8:4, 5, 26, 27; 10:1; 13:4.

Acts 13:1 also describes diversity in church leadership. "The different connections and activities of the men mentioned here indicate that the church at Antioch enjoyed a cosmopolitan leadership. Barnabas was a Cypriote; Lucius, a Cyrenian; Manaen, apparently a Palestinian aristocrat; and Saul, a rabbi from Tarsus in Cilicia. . . ."

"Simeon. This man's first name, Simeon, or Simon, indicates that he was of Jewish origin. His second name is a Latin adjective meaning 'black,' which he may have assumed, or may have been given, because of a dark complexion."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 279.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Judging from such texts as Acts 1:14; 9:36-42; 16:11-15; 17:4, 12; 18:1-3, 24-28; Romans 16:1-4, 6, 7, 12, 15, what was the role of women in the apostolic church?
2. How can unity and spiritual purity be preserved in the church in light of Jesus' prayer in John 17? What provision has God made to accomplish this unity?
3. "Primitive godliness" was a hallmark of the apostolic church. What are the true characteristics of such godliness? How can "primitive godliness" be the primary characteristic of our church today?

SUMMARY: Blazing with the light of Christ's love and teaching, the early church forged ahead, planting everywhere the standard of Calvary's cross. The immensity of the work and the diversity of the peoples reached by the gospel did not diminish God's power to preserve unity within the church.

The Lord maintained the integrity of His gospel and the bonds of fellowship in two ways: (1) through councils with appropriately appointed representatives from the world field and (2) through the inspired writings of the apostles and prophets.

Masterpieces Win Convert

Humberto Rasi

God takes sincere people where they are and leads them gently to Himself. Alexei Sergeev is an administrator at the renowned Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. It was his love of art that drew him to the Saviour.

As a child he was awed by the beautiful icons—religious paintings that decorate the walls and ceilings of Russian Orthodox churches. While still a student at the University of Leningrad, Sergeev began working at the Hermitage Museum. He noticed that many of the greatest works of art depicted scenes from the Bible. He wanted to know this God who inspired such magnificent art. He went to the library and asked for a Bible, but he was told that only those with special permits could read the Bible.

For years he sought to get a Bible. One day while on a train, he noticed a man reading a Bible. Boldly he asked how he could get a Bible, and the man told him to meet him the next Saturday at the metro station, and he would try to help him get one.

The men met as planned, and walked some distance to a small house behind a cemetery. Inside Sergeev found 25 Christians meeting secretly. He took a seat near the door—just in case the secret police raided the home. As he watched and listened to the singing and scripture reading, he felt God's love welling in his heart.

He returned the following Saturday, and began studying the Bible with them. For security purposes, he did not even tell them his name. There was no Bible for him, so believers shared their own. One day a visitor came to the church and brought one Russian Bible. The pastor gave it to Sergeev. As he studied, he began to understand God's plan for humanity, and His command to keep the Sabbath. But his work at the Hermitage kept him from attending regularly, and he postponed his baptism until he could obtain Sabbaths off. He attended this house church for 15 years before he could openly join through baptism.

"For years Communism tried to stamp out Christianity in the Soviet Union," he says. "Their leaders destroyed or desecrated many churches, but they could not destroy the faith in the heart of Christians."



Alexei Sergeev (left). Humberto Rasi is director of the General Conference Education Department.

The Missionary Nature of the Church



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 1, 2; Gen. 12:1-3; Matt. 28:16-20.

MEMORY TEXT: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NKJV).

KEY QUESTION: What is the primary purpose of the church?

THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH IS TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL. The gospel (good news) is the power of Christ's atonement, a clear explanation of prophecy and of God's judgment, and the call to obedience through faith.

In the Lord's plan, the church is a dynamic missionary enterprise that encompasses all humanity. We find the key mandate for that mission in Genesis 12:1-3 and Matthew 28:18-20. "Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 195.

"Churches are to be organized and plans laid for work to be done by the members of the newly organized churches. This gospel missionary work is to keep reaching out and annexing new territory, enlarging the cultivated portions of the vineyard. The circle is to extend until it belts the world."—*Evangelism*, p. 19.

This week we will look at the church as a missionary enterprise and what that means for us.

GOD AND THE NATIONS (Acts 17:26).

The first 11 chapters of Genesis outline the history of the world up to the time of Abraham. In these chapters, the Lord's covenant with Adam and Eve outlines His intention to evangelize lost humanity (Gen. 3:15). Enoch becomes a living example of the power of the everlasting gospel. And Methuselah's very name, meaning "when he dies, it will come," becomes a living testimony that "the hour of His judgment has come." The judgment in this case was the Flood. Thus, we see the essence of the three angels' messages at the beginning of history as well as at the end.

Next, God renews the covenant with Noah and his family, this time with a visible sign still with us—the rainbow. The table of nations in Genesis 10 and 11 outlines God's intention to deal with all humanity under the provisions of His covenant.

Explain Paul's statement recorded in Acts 17:26 that God determines where people should live.

Look carefully at verse 27. Paul is telling the pagan Athenians that they cannot escape the presence of God. He places people close to someone or some group that will witness to them about His love.

"In that age of caste, when the rights of men were often unrecognized, Paul set forth the great truth of human brotherhood. . . . In the sight of God all are on an equality, and to the Creator every human being owes supreme allegiance. Then the apostle showed how, through all God's dealings with man, His purpose of grace and mercy runs like a thread of gold."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 238.

How does Jonah fit this picture? Why did he run? Jonah 4:1-3. Why did the Lord bring him back? Jonah 4:10.

God reaches down into a small town, finds a man with the ability to do the job, and sends him as a missionary. But the man does not want to go, because he dislikes the people God wants him to help. But because the Lord wants the Assyrians saved, He nearly forces him to go. The result is a major revival. That God was determined to evangelize the Assyrians, even if the reluctant missionary was not, illustrates His passion to save the human race.

Are there people you do not like, but who need to know about Christ? God plans to get the message to them some way. Quite possibly through you!

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH (Gen. 12:1-3).

What does Genesis 12:1-3 say regarding the missionary nature of Abraham's call and commission?

Again the Lord reaches down into a pagan, moon-worshipping community and finds a person ready to do His bidding. He moves Abraham and his family to an area that gives access to a continual flow of people, and He commissions them to spread the gospel. Genesis 10-12 tells us in essence that God made space within the nations for a special group (Abraham and his descendants), who would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. 19:6). Thus *the presence of God would be among His people, and the presence of His people would be in the midst of humanity*. The apostle Paul later followed this pattern, recognizing that his mission to the Gentiles was his "priestly duty" (Rom. 15:16, NIV).

"This hope of redemption through the advent of the Son of God as Saviour and King, has never become extinct in the hearts of men. From the beginning there have been some whose faith has reached out beyond the shadows of the present to the realities of the future. Adam, Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—through these and other worthies the Lord has preserved the precious revealings of His will. And it was thus that to the children of Israel, the chosen people through whom was to be given to the world the promised Messiah, God imparted a knowledge of the requirements of His law, and of the salvation to be accomplished through the atoning sacrifice of His beloved Son."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 682.

Review the last phrase in Genesis 12:3. What are its implications for the role of the church in world evangelization?

The act of electing Abraham coincided with the promise or prospect of blessing for the nations. Abraham and his Israelite descendants were elected for service. "The purpose of the election is service, and when service is withheld the election loses its meaning, and therefore fails."—H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950), p. 52.

What does the connection between election and service mean to you personally as a church member today? If you refuse to serve God, are you still one of His elect?

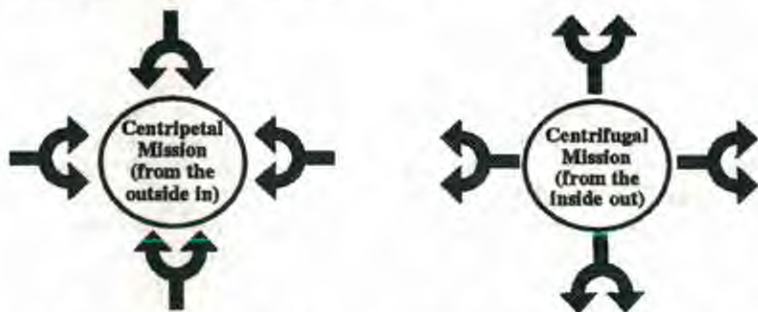
JERUSALEM: MISSION CENTER OF THE EARTH (Isa. 2:2).

What does Isaiah 2:2 say about Jerusalem's (Zion's) role in world evangelization during Old Testament times?

It was always the Lord's plan that Israel would act as a missionary agency to spread the good news. (See Isa. 14:1, NIV.)

A key passage indicates that the coming Messiah would be sent to all nations: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations" (Isa. 42:1, NIV; see also Matt. 12:18).

In Old Testament times, God's main approach to evangelism was to make Israel a model people, conspicuously situated among the nations. Non-Judaic peoples would travel to Jerusalem to see why all these good things were happening, and they would be taken to church—the temple. (See Deut. 4:5-8.) Thus Jerusalem became a magnet, drawing people to a central sanctuary. (See diagram.) Israel's discipleship responsibility rested in their God-given call to be a model for the world in social and religious life.



How does the queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon illustrate the "centripetal" mission concept? 1 Kings 10:4, 5.

The queen of Sheba made the trip to Jerusalem because she "heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the Lord" and wanted to "test him with hard questions" (1 Kings 10:1, NIV). She returned home with a clear picture of the Lord. "Praise be to the Lord your God. . . . Because of the Lord's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness" (1 Kings 10:9, NIV). Centuries later, one of her countrymen would discover the connection between the Jewish religion and Christianity through a missionary he met on a desert road (Acts 8:26-40).

“SO SEND I YOU” (John 20:21).

Yesterday we learned that the method of evangelization used in the Old Testament was “centripetal.” People from other nations were to go to Jerusalem to learn about God.

How did the system change in the New Testament? John 20:21.

Jesus advocated a “sending” message. His mandate to the disciples was, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21, NIV). This system is known as “centrifugal.” (See diagram in Tuesday’s lesson.) It emanates from a center. It no longer only draws people in, but spreads them out to find other people to bring in. “The gospel commission is the great missionary charter of Christ’s kingdom. The disciples were to work earnestly for souls, giving all the invitation of mercy. They were not to wait for the people to come to them; they were to go to the people with their message.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 28.

Study John 4:35-38. What did Jesus “see” that the disciples did not “see”? How urgent is soul winning?

Two major events mark the agricultural year in Palestine—the “early” and the “latter” rain. The early rain germinates the seed, and the latter rain ripens the harvest. In John 4, Jesus pointed out to the disciples that though they knew how to calculate correctly the time between the two rains (“Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’?”—John 4:35, NIV), they overlooked the fact that through Jesus’ eyes the fields were already ripe for the harvest, even before the “latter rain”!

In other words, many people everywhere are waiting for the good news, as was the Samaritan woman whom Jesus found at Jacob’s well. The problem is the lack of harvesters to gather the people!

The disciples had no church-growth eyes. They did not see any Samaritans ready to harvest. But Jesus saw whole villages of them and vast populations beyond Samaria.

“The gospel invitation is not to be narrowed down, and presented only to a select few, who, we suppose, will do us honor if they accept it. The message is to be given to all.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 194.

Is your church-growth vision 20/20? Look around you! People just waiting to be “seen” also fill the city, town, or village where you live!

JESUS—THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD (Matt. 24:14).

To us it does not seem strange to say that Jesus' message is for the entire world. Matthew 24:14 is almost as well known as John 3:16. In Jesus' time it was revolutionary to think that the gospel could go to anyone not of Jewish blood. To the end of his days, Paul, the designated apostle to the Gentiles, called their inclusion in the kingdom "a great mystery." (See Eph. 3:4-6.)

How did Simeon describe the mission of Jesus? Luke 2:32.

When Simeon blessed the Baby Jesus, he said that He would be a "light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32, NIV). In his writings John often directly refers to Jesus as the Saviour of the world.

| Statement | Text (NIV) |
|--|----------------------|
| An atoning sacrifice for the <i>whole world</i> . | 1 John 2:2 |
| "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the <i>world!</i> " | John 1:29 |
| God sent His Son "to save the <i>world</i> ." | John 3:17 |
| "We know that this man really is the Savior of the <i>world</i> ." | John 4:42 |
| "I am the Living bread . . . which I will give for the life of the <i>world</i> ." | John 6:51 |
| I "will draw <i>all men</i> to myself." | John 12:32 |
| "Let the world know that you sent me." "I am sending you." | John 17:23; 20:21 |

What do the three angels' messages say about world evangelization? Rev. 14:6.

The messages borne by these angels is not a departure from the gospel or an alteration of it, but an expansion, clarification, and consummation of the *everlasting gospel*.

"The message of Christ's righteousness is to sound from one end of the earth to the other to prepare the way of the Lord. This is the glory of God, which closes the work of the third angel."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 19.

FURTHER STUDY: Read Isaiah 58. This week we studied in detail the missionary nature of the church and how our election is for the purpose of service. Such service is beautifully yet practically described in this chapter.

"I have been instructed to refer our people to the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah. Read this chapter carefully and understand the kind of ministry that will bring life into the churches. . . . When you meet suffering souls who need help, give it to them. When you find those who are hungry, feed them. In doing this you will be working in the lines of Christ's ministry. The Master's holy work was a benevolent work. Let our people everywhere be encouraged to have a part in it."

"The union of Christlike work for the body and Christlike work for the soul is the true interpretation of the gospel."—*Welfare Ministry*, pp. 29, 33. (Also read "To Meet the Bridegroom," *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 415-419.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Isaiah 58:13, 14 urges God's people to keep the Sabbath. How can doing so help us to assist suffering humanity?
2. Discuss specific ways you can share the three angels' messages in your community while carrying out the type of service described in Isaiah 58. Give special consideration to problems and issues that are affecting individuals in your part of the world.
3. Why is the following statement true? "If left to itself, a church will inevitably spend most of its time and energy taking care of itself." What can your church do to avoid this problem?

SUMMARY: The church, by its very nature and design in the Lord's plan, is a dynamic missionary enterprise that encompasses all humanity. Throughout the Bible it is pictured as such. Evangelization is the core of all the church's activities.

The Changed Heart

James Zachary

"My husband hates the Bible!" the woman wept. "He was angry when he found me reading it. He threw it against the wall, then he tore it up. Finally he tried to burn it. This is all that I have of my Bible." She held up a few torn pages. "Then yesterday he struck my 5-year-old daughter on her head. I don't know what to do."

Sister Dauphney listened carefully as the woman poured out her misery to her. Then she said, "God loves you. And He does answer prayers. May I pray with you now?" After the women prayed, Sister Dauphney told her friend about some seminars being held nearby to help families find happiness.

Just then the woman's husband came home. Out of work, he was angry and desperate. He told how a friend had offered to help him secure drugs he could sell to earn money. Again Sister Dauphney listened, then she said quietly, "God loves you and your family. He wants a better life for you. God is faithful, and His promises in the Bible are true."

The man asked, "Can you help me get a Spanish Bible?"

Sister Dauphney tried not to show her surprise and joy. "Yes, I can get a Bible for you," she smiled.

The following day Sister Dauphney brought the man a Bible, and stayed to study with the couple. She invited them to attend evangelistic series, and to her joy, they both agreed to come. The couple took turns attending the meetings while one of them remained in their unfinished home to guard the family's meager possessions.

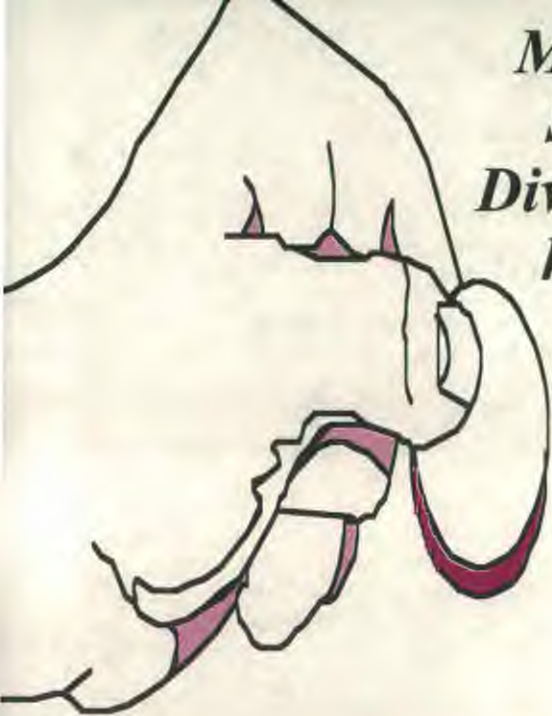
Each morning Sister Dauphney joins the two pastors and 34 church members to give progress reports, plan their daily visitation, and pray for the nearly 500 interests. Through their efforts more than 1,000 people have come to the evangelistic meetings each night.

As she shared how God changed the heart of an angry husband, her eyes filled with tears of joy. He and his wife are preparing for baptism. God used the talents of a simple woman filled with love to win a family to Himself. He can use you, too, if you are willing to let Him.

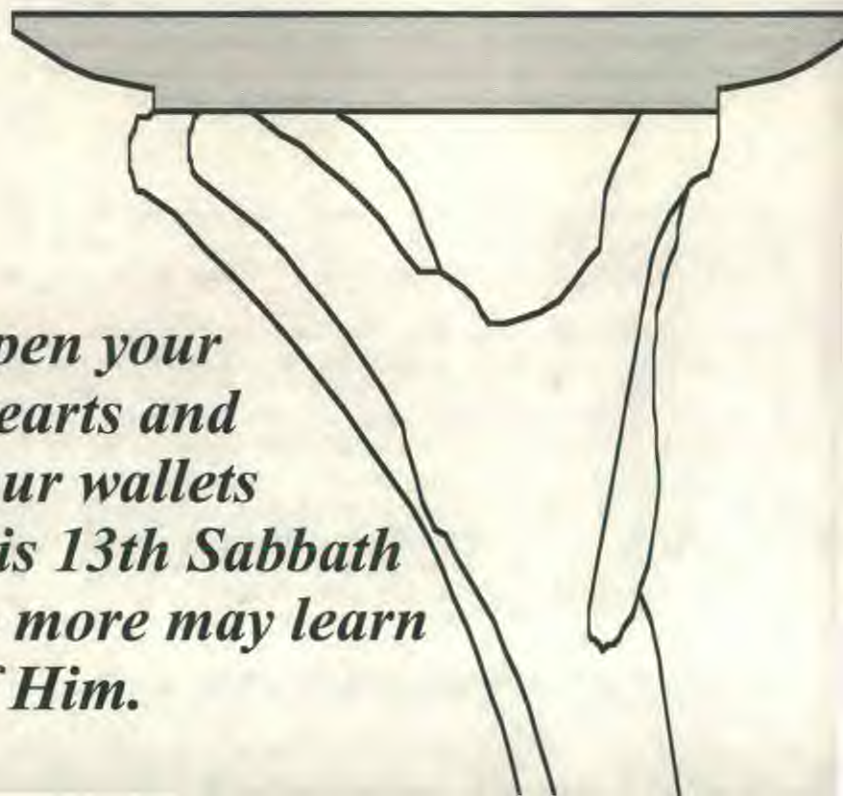


James Zachary is global evangelism coordinator for the Quiet Hour. Sister Dauphney is a layworker in Costa Rica.

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Church Organization



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Exod. 18:20, 21; Mark 3:13, 14; Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Cor. 14:33, 40; 1 Tim. 3:1-8, 15; Titus 1:4, 5.

MEMORY TEXT: "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

KEY QUESTIONS: Why is organization in the church necessary? How can organization help to accomplish the mission goals of the church?

CHRIST IS THE AUTHOR OF ORGANIZATION IN THE UNIVERSE AND IN HIS CHURCH. He established and organized His church for sharing the gospel with the world. Through the church He reveals the fullness of His love. In His church, which is the embassy of His heavenly kingdom, we are sheltered from Satan's power and restored to the image of God. The church is God's visible family, whose fellowship and activities are to reflect the heavenly society of which it is a part.

Organization under God gives peace, stability, harmony, balance, consistency, and purpose to every aspect of our lives. The opposite of organization is anarchy. And the fruit of anarchy is chaos. Sound organization is not opposed to personal uniqueness or individual rights. Instead, it preserves the value and dignity of the individual in proper connection with the social order of the universe (Rom. 14:7, 19). The binding principle of divine organization is love (Eph. 1:9, 10). And the object of the church is to demonstrate the operations of God's love among a united family of believers whose own love, originating with Him, extends to all the world in a ministry of reconciliation (Eph. 4:15, 16; 2 Cor. 5:17-21).

ORIGIN OF CHURCH ORGANIZATION (Exod. 18:13-27; Mark 3:13, 14).

What Old Testament precedent do we have for church organization? Exod. 18:13-27.

“He [God] designs that we should learn lessons of order and organization from the perfect order instituted in the days of Moses, for the benefit of the children of Israel”—*Christian Service*, p. 73.

It is important to note in verse 21 that Moses' appointed counselors were men who held the honor of God supreme and who were free of deceit, partiality, and self-interest. Thus not only were the people properly served, but they could also esteem their leaders as men of outstanding character, whose counsel they could heed and whose authority they could respect.

“Thou wilt surely wear away” (Exod. 18:18, KJV). “You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out” (NIV). Jethro wisely counseled Moses to organize the people before both he and they wore out their health. Overextending ourselves, even for the Lord, seldom accomplishes more. And once we are worn out, we can accomplish nothing. Organization not only helps us to be more efficient, it can also protect our health.

Describe the formal action Christ took to establish His church. Mark 3:13, 14.

“The first step was now to be taken in the organization of the church that after Christ's departure was to be His representative on earth. . . .

“Jesus had called His disciples that He might send them forth as His witnesses, to declare to the world what they had seen and heard of Him. Their office was the most important to which human beings had ever been called, and was second only to that of Christ Himself. They were to be workers together with God for the **saving of the world.**” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 291.

In addition to ordaining the 12, Christ sent forth 70 other laborers, two by two, with instructions on how to conduct their gospel work (Luke 10:1-9, 17-20).

Consider how you feel when you have much to do. Are you able to get more done when you are organized? How could being more organized help you work for God more effectively?

THE HEART OF ORGANIZATION (John 17:19-26).

All true corporate unity in the church is founded in each believer's unity with Christ. Such unity makes it possible for people of various temperaments, talents, and cultures to live in harmony.

For what did Christ pray on behalf of His disciples and all future followers? Why? John 17:19-26.

"The instruction given me by One of authority is that we are to learn to answer the prayer recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John. We are to make this prayer our first study."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 239.

"Those who are truly connected with God will not be at variance with one another. . . . His Spirit ruling in their hearts will create harmony, love, and unity. . . . In union there is strength. In division there is weakness and defeat.

"The most convincing argument we can give to the world of Christ's mission is to be found in perfect unity. . . . In proportion to our unity with Christ will be our power to save souls. . . .

"Little differences, dwelt upon, lead to actions that destroy Christian fellowship. . . . Let us keep drawing near to God, and He will draw near to us. Then, as one, we shall reach upward to Him. The churches will be as gardens of the Lord, under His cultivation."—*Our High Calling*, p. 170.

Describe the role of spiritual gifts in achieving unity. Compare the assigning of various gifts to Moses' act of delegating authority and work. Eph. 4:11-16.

The unity for which Christ prayed cannot be enforced by ecclesiastical edict. The plea for unity is not a call to suppress discussion of important matters among church members (Mark 9:33-37; Acts 15). Unity is grounded in Christ's truth (John 17:17, 19).

How can we discuss important matters and still maintain a spirit of unity? Eph. 4:1-3, 17-32; 2 Tim. 2:19-26.

What "little differences" do you find yourself dwelling upon, disuniting yourself from the body of Christ? Pray that Christ will bring us together in harmony with His teachings and His purpose. (See *Evangelism*, pp. 370-372.)

WHY DO WE NEED ORGANIZATION TODAY? (Rev. 14:6; Luke 10:2).

What makes church organization essential for our time? Rev. 14:6; Luke 10:2.

We have a global task to accomplish—that of preaching the gospel to everyone everywhere. This demands careful planning and cooperative action.

Regarding the development of our work in the early years of our movement, we read: “As our numbers increased, it was evident that without some form of organization there would be great confusion, and the work would not be carried forward successfully. To provide for the support of the ministry, for carrying the work in new fields, for protecting both the churches and the ministry from unworthy members, for holding church property, for the publication of the truth through the press, and for many other objects, organization was indispensable.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 26.

Yet many members resisted the idea of organization, regarding it as too authoritarian. This resistance, however, did not prevail: “We sought the Lord with earnest prayer that we might understand His will, and light was given by His Spirit that there must be order and thorough discipline in the church—that organization was essential. . . . Order is the law of heaven, and it should be the law of God’s people on the earth.

“We had a hard struggle in establishing organization. Notwithstanding that the Lord gave testimony after testimony upon this point, the opposition was strong, and it had to be met again and again. But we knew that the Lord God of Israel was leading us, and guiding by His providence. We engaged in the work of organization, and marked prosperity attended this advance movement.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 26, 27.

This “work of organization” made it possible for our denomination to establish schools, medical institutions, community-service centers, missions, churches, and publishing houses.

With regard to the church, what are we warned *not* to do? “Let none entertain the thought that we can dispense with organization. . . . It has been built up by His [God’s] direction, through much sacrifice and conflict. Let none of our brethren be so deceived as to attempt to tear it down, for you will thus bring in a condition of things that you do not dream of.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 27, 28.

CHURCH OFFICES (Acts 14:23).

If organization is to succeed, some form of administration and oversight is necessary, for no corporate work ever goes forward without direction and leadership (Prov. 8:14-16; Matt. 8:9; Rom. 13:1-3). Consider Israel under the leadership of Moses and Joshua and the later judges. Consider also the early church under the leadership of the apostles and elders (1 Thess. 5:12, 13).

What did the leaders of the early church do to give impetus, consistency, and lasting effect to the spread of the gospel? Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 3:1-8.

“As an important factor in the spiritual growth of the new converts, the apostles were careful to surround them with the safeguards of gospel order. Churches were duly organized in all places . . . where there were believers. Officers were appointed in each church, and proper order and system was established for the conduct of all the affairs pertaining to the spiritual welfare of the believers.

“This was in harmony with the gospel plan of uniting in one body all believers in Christ, and this plan Paul was careful to follow throughout his ministry. Those who in any place were by his labor led to accept Christ as the Saviour, were, at the proper time, organized into a church. Even when the believers were but few in number, this was done.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 185, 186.

What attitude should people have who are holding office in God's church? Matt. 20:20-28.

How will such an attitude on the part of leaders affect the morale of the people? Prov. 29:2.

Worldly standards assess another person's greatness according to many things: the number of people a person controls; a person's academic standing or intellectual ability; one's yearly income or possessions; the number of committees a person is a member of; etc. But with Christ such things are unimportant. The answer to the question “Are you willing to serve others?” is the true test of the quality of a good leader.

The apostles ultimately caught the vision of the selfless love that Christ perfected. Pray that it will be so with you.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE (Matt. 18:15-18).

Any organization must have a way of upholding its fundamental principles. The disciplinary authority with which Christ invested His church is never to be exercised in a dictatorial, critical manner. *Redemption and restoration are the key purposes of all valid church discipline.*

Read Matthew 18:15-18. How does Jesus' counsel regarding church discipline suggest the responsibility of members to one another? How does the carrying out of these responsibilities aid in the church's growth?

"As the erring one accepts the reproof offered in the love of Christ, and acknowledges his wrong, asking forgiveness from God and from his brother, the sunshine of heaven fills his heart. The controversy is ended; friendship and confidence are restored. The oil of love removes the soreness caused by the wrong; the Spirit of God binds heart to heart; and there is music in heaven over the union brought about.

"As those thus united in Christian fellowship offer prayer to God, and pledge themselves to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God, great blessing comes to them. . . .

"And even if he does not repent, even if he stands outside the church, God's servants still have a work to do for him. They are to seek earnestly to win him to repentance. . . . His brethren are to encourage him in the right way, treating him as they would wish to be treated were they in his place, considering themselves, lest they also be tempted."—*Gospel Workers*, pp. 500, 501.

"Whatever you may bind upon the earth shall be that which has already been bound in heaven" (Matt. 18:18, **Randolph O. Yeager, *The Renaissance New Testament***). Christ was not suggesting in this verse that the church was infallible or had the right to establish its own directives or judgments, but that the church can require only what heaven requires and can forbid only what heaven forbids.

What are some occasions for exercising discipline in the church?
1 Cor. 5:1-5, 9-13; 2 Thess. 3:6, 10-15.

The word *discipline* comes from a Latin word that means "teaching" or "learning." How can church discipline be a form of teaching or learning?

Without being disloyal to the church, how can you help someone whom the church has disciplined?

FURTHER STUDY: The apostle Paul was creative and highly progressive—a definite individualist. Such a person could easily become a “maverick,” a militant nonconformist, unconnected with any organization. What regulating elements existed in Paul’s vision of life that made him an advocate of church unity? Rom. 14:7, 19; 1 Cor. 1:10; 9:19; 10:32, 33; 12:13-27; Eph. 1:22, 23; 3:8-12.

Notice that these same elements kept him from becoming an organizational robot: Acts 20:20-35; Gal. 1:10-12; 2:14-16; 1 Thess. 2:4-6. Also read “Jew and Gentile” in *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 200.

“The great apostle Paul was firm where duty and principle were at stake; he preached Christ with great boldness; but he was never harsh and impolite. He had a tender heart, and was ever kind and thoughtful of others. Courtesy was a marked trait of his character. . . .

“The most Christlike professors are those who are the most kind, pitiful, and courteous; their convictions are firm and their characters strong; nothing can swerve them from their faith or allure them from their duty.”—*My Life Today*, p. 193.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. After studying this week’s lesson, how would you answer the Key Questions in Sabbath Afternoon’s material?
2. What qualities in the teachings and life of Christ encourage the systematic gathering and fellowship that has marked the course of the church in all ages?
3. Why is salvation not a completely private affair that encourages believers quietly to keep their faith to themselves while letting others learn directly from God without human aid?
4. Some large regions of North Africa, Asia, and the Middle East are almost entirely unreached by the gospel. How can church organization contribute to solving this problem?

SUMMARY: Christ has organized His church to complete His family by systematically evangelizing the world. To the close of time, church organization is to reflect the wisdom of heaven, not the policies and programs of humans. Church leaders are not overlords; they are undershepherds. Their authority is centered in the Word of God, which they are to uphold in their own teaching and life practice. Church discipline should be exercised in a spirit of fellowship and community to fairly and faithfully uphold the gospel and reclaim members who are in spiritual jeopardy.



A Child's Song Isabelle Soalahy

Little Hery lay in the hospital bed. His eyes were closed against the pain that threatened to overwhelm him. This chubby 2 1/2-year-old boy had been burned when a pot of hot water spilled on his legs. His parents sat silently at his bedside, wishing desperately that they could take the pain away.

Hery's Sabbath School teacher walked into the children's ward of the hospital in Madagascar, wearing a bright smile and carrying a small gift for her student. Hery opened his eyes and saw his teacher standing at the foot of his bed. "It hurts," he moaned, looking at the bandages that swaddled his legs.

The teacher leaned over and whispered, "Hery, have you asked Jesus to help you feel better? Can you pray the prayer that you learned in Sabbath School?"

Hery looked thoughtful for a moment, then closed his eyes. "Dear Jesus," he said. Bless Daddy and Mommy, and bless me. Amen."

The teacher visited for a few minutes, then reminded Hery that when he felt lonely or hurt, he could sing a song to help him feel better. The little boy nodded from his pillow and smiled bravely as his teacher walked toward the door of the hospital ward.

A few days later visitors in the children's ward of the hospital heard a little boy singing. They stopped talking and listened as the clear words and sweet melody caught their ear. "Jesus loves me, I am happy," little Hery sang. It was his favorite song in the cradle-roll class at Sabbath School. This little boy who bore so much pain was singing of his best Friend.

Little Hery died from his injuries, but the message he left in the hearts of those who heard his song bore fruit for the Saviour. Two of the people who had heard Hery's song were a father and mother whose child was in the hospital ward with Hery. They had seen the little boy's struggle, watched the church members who visited him. They talked with Hery's parents, asked questions about their faith, and accepted the invitation to study the Bible in their home. Today this family—the parents and three children—are members of the church. They look forward to the day they can see little Hery and tell him that his song guided them to heaven.

Isabelle Soalahy is director of children's ministries in the North Malagasy Mission in Madagascar.

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Church Life, Part 1



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 5:13-16; Phil. 2:14-16; Col. 2:6-13; Titus 2:11-14.

MEMORY TEXT: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13, NKJV).

KEY QUESTIONS: What does it mean to be a member of God's family—the church? How and why does one's life change after becoming a part of this family?

FIRMLY PLANTED ON THE ROCK. A young man in Europe who did a great deal of mountain climbing in the Swiss and French Alps was given this advice: "You have two hands and two feet. That makes four. Always be sure that three out of the four are firmly on the rock. It is the only rule of safety."—Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Let Me Illustrate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Fleming H. Revell, 1967), p. 55; adapted.

This advice is also the only rule of spiritual safety. And a close connection with Christ the Rock is the foundation of all church life. The constant question of the member who is clinging to Him will be, "Lord, how shall I best serve Thee, and glorify Thy name in the earth? How shall I conduct my life to make Thy name a praise in the earth, and lead others to love, serve, and honor Thee? Let me only desire and choose Thy will. Let the words and example of my Redeemer be the light and strength of my heart."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 129.

For the next two weeks, we will study about church life—what it includes, how it promotes the mission of the church, and how *you* can be a part of it.

THE SECRET TO CHURCH LIFE (John 15:1-8).

Yesterday, the experience of mountain climbing illustrated that a connection to Christ is the basis of all church life. What image of being connected to Christ do we find in John 15:1-8? Compare the church to this image.

“The branches in the True Vine are the believers who are brought into oneness by connection with the Vine. . . .

“The branches of the vine cannot blend into each other; they are individually separate; yet every branch must be in fellowship with every other if they are united in the same parent stock. . . .

“Christian unity consists in the branches being in the same parent stock, the vitalizing power of the center supporting the grafts that have united to the Vine. In thoughts and desires, in words and actions, there must be an identity with Christ, a constant partaking of His spiritual life.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1143.

What evidence do we have that we are connected to Christ? John 15:5; Gal. 5:16-26.

When the branches abide in the vine, they take on the life of the vine. When we abide in Christ, we will develop a character like His.

To say that we are Christians and members of God’s family is meaningful only when we recognize our complete dependence on Christ and live by faith in Him on a daily basis. This is what it means to “abide.” Then individually and as a church we will mirror the graces and character of our Saviour. Then “we shall see a prosperous church; for its members will not live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and they will be flourishing branches of the living Vine.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1144.

Maintaining a close connection with Christ enables us to have a healthy religious experience on both a personal and a corporate level. But how can the following elements of church life actually *help* us to abide in Christ individually and as a church family? the Sabbath, baptism, Communion, stewardship, active involvement, church attendance, and Christian standards.

How do we avoid legalism, the attempt to obey in our own strength?

WHAT MEMBERSHIP MEANS (Eph. 5:25-27).

List three reasons why Christians should be part of God's church. Eph. 5:25-27; Phil. 1:16, 17; 1 John 1:7.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

To be part of God's church is to be a member of His family, with all the privileges and responsibilities that accompany family relationships. Jesus adopts us as His children, not so we can have that privilege only for ourselves, but so we will tell others how they too can become members of His family.

The church is to be a gleaming temple in a dark world. Our light is not to emanate from resplendent buildings, but from members clothed in the radiant garments of Christ's righteousness.

As God's church, we are not to be showcases of the latest fads and fashions, but rather a benevolent society serving the world. Every aspect of our service is to be filled with soul-winning purpose, for humanity's greatest need is salvation.

How should church members relate to one another? Who benefits from such behavior besides the church itself? John 13:34, 35; Rom. 12:3-13 (compare 1 Cor. 12:12-27).

It is the exercise of Christlike love and mutual respect among church members that makes the gospel attractive and believable. In the goodness, mercy, justice, and love of God among church members, the world has a demonstration of Christ's character. Loving service to *everyone*, church members or not, is the compelling power of the church's witness and the secret of its success.

According to Christ's command, entrance into church membership is ratified by baptism (Matt. 28:19, 20). How does proper preparation for baptism affect each member's influence in the church? Acts 2:37-47; Rom. 6:3-22.

What did baptism do for you?

BAPTISM (Rom. 6:4-6).

Into what twofold association does baptism bring us? Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13.

1. _____
2. _____

Have you ever heard anyone say, "I want to be baptized into Christ, but I don't want to be baptized into any church"? Yet as we can see from the texts above, to be baptized into Christ is also to be baptized into His body, the church. Baptism is the divinely ordained means of signifying conversion to Christ and adoption into the family of God (Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38).

This does not detract from the personal aspects of our communion with God (Matt. 6:6; Ps. 73:23-26). Such communion strengthens us for fellowship and corporate worship. When we are baptized, we confess Christ before the world, and He confesses us before the Father and His angels (Luke 12:8).

What is the spiritual significance of baptism? Rom. 6:3-13; Col. 2:11-13.

We are baptized because we have been "crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). "Baptism symbolizes the crucifixion of the old life. It is not only a death but also a burial. We are 'buried with him in baptism' (Col. 2:12). As a burial follows a person's death, so when the believer goes down into the watery grave the old life that passed away when he accepted Jesus Christ is buried."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 185.

But after His death and burial, Christ arose from the grave. And in baptism we arise from our watery grave to a new life in Him. Then the power that enabled Christ to arise enables us to live that life (Rom. 6:4). "This new life lifts us to a higher plateau of human experience, giving us new values, aspirations, and desires that focus on a commitment to Jesus Christ."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 185.

When people came to John to be baptized, why did he rebuke some of them? Why is repentance (sorrow for sin and a turning away from it) necessary? Luke 3:7-16; Acts 2:36-39.

THE ORDINANCE OF SERVICE (John 13:1-17).

Yesterday we studied about baptism as part of church life. Today and tomorrow we will study aspects of the Communion service.

Jesus wanted to impress upon the church throughout its history the value of His sacrifice and of His second coming. He also longed to impress upon the church a clear sense of what it should be in its spirit of service both within and without its ever-widening circle of fellowship. He symbolized these truths by instituting the Communion service, which includes the ordinance of foot washing.

As you read John 13:1-17, look for the answers to the following questions: (1) Why did Jesus wash the disciples' feet? (2) What did He tell Peter? (3) What did He tell all His disciples?

The roads in Palestine were either dusty or muddy. Because the crude sandals of the people could not protect them against such dirt, servants would wash the feet of guests before they entered the house. But Jesus and His disciples had no servants. And obviously none of the 12 would accept that duty. Only Jesus, the Son of God, would do that!

Christ designed this service to remind us that (1) He "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7, NKJV); (2) we need regular cleansing because we sometimes stumble and fall in the Christian walk, even though we have accepted Christ and were cleansed by His blood; (3) we need the spirit of humble, loving service that is free of jealousy, pride, and self-centeredness.

"This ordinance is Christ's appointed preparation for the sacramental service. . . . There is in man a disposition to esteem himself more highly than his brother, to work for self, to seek the highest place; and often this results in evil surmisings and bitterness of spirit. The ordinance preceding the Lord's Supper is to clear away these misunderstandings, to bring man out of his selfishness, down from his stilts of self-exaltation, to the humility of heart that will lead him to serve his brother."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 650.

When Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He knew that one of them would betray Him and another would deny Him. Yet Jesus met this disloyalty with the greatest of humility and love. Pray that Jesus' attitudes will be yours. If His attitudes do become yours, how will this affect the way you treat your enemies, not only in the foot-washing service but in every situation?

TAKE, EAT, AND DRINK (Luke 22:15-20).

“The Lord’s Supper is to be a joyful season, not a time for sorrow. The preceding foot-washing service provides an opportunity for self-examination, confession of sins, reconciliation of differences, and forgiveness. Having received the assurance of being cleansed by the blood of the Saviour, believers are ready to enter into special communion with their Lord. They turn to His table with joy, standing in the saving light, not the shadow, of the cross, ready to celebrate the redemptive victory of Christ.”—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, pp. 198, 199.

What meaning did Jesus assign to the bread and grape juice? Luke 22:15-20.

The Communion service symbolizes Jesus’ atoning death for our sins and His desire that we should personally appropriate the saving merits of His sacrifice. By instructing us that we are to keep this ordinance until He returns, He made it an occasion for us to anticipate and envision His second coming and the joys of participating in the ultimate Communion in heaven (Mark 14:22-25).

Describe the attitude with which we should approach the Lord’s Supper. 1 Cor. 11:27-29.**How can we develop such an attitude? Luke 15:18-24; Ps. 51:6-12, 17.**

Eating and drinking. Eating the symbol of Christ’s body and drinking the symbol of His blood represents the incorporation of God’s Word into our daily lives. In John 6:63, Christ says, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” And in Matthew 4:4, He tells us that we “shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” As we allow the Bible to teach us how we should live, we will be prepared to partake of the Lord’s Supper.

How can the Communion service help to unite and stabilize the church? As you formulate an answer, consider 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17: “Is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (NIV).

FURTHER STUDY: What aspect of church life does Hebrews 10:25 promote, and why? What is the biblical basis and reason for corporate worship? Exod. 20:8-11; Ps. 96:6-9; Acts 11:26.

The reasons for church and Sabbath School attendance are many and varied. They include the following: worship, praise, fellowship, prayer, studying the Word, spiritual instruction, guidance, inspiration, and the enrichment of personal and collective religious experiences. Furthermore, Christ communicates not only to individual believers but also to His churches (Rev. 2:7; 3:21, 22; 22:16, 17). We, therefore, must be active in His church to receive and value His messages.

“God teaches that we should assemble in His house to cultivate the attributes of perfect love. This will fit the dwellers of earth for the mansions that Christ has gone to prepare for all who love Him.”
—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 368.

Read any or all of the following to learn more about the elements of church life we studied this week: “Baptism” in *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 91-99; “Church Duties” in *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 613-621; “The Lord’s Supper” in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, pp. 194-213.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. After studying this week’s lesson, how would you answer the Key Questions in Sabbath Afternoon’s lesson?
2. Do you think it is necessary to believe all the official doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in order to be a faithful member? Explain your answer from Scripture. (Consider Gal. 1:8, 9; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 4:1-5; 2 John 9; Rev. 12:17.)
3. As a Sabbath School member, how can you become more directly involved with soul-winning activity and the nurture of Sabbath School and church members? Perhaps meet together as a class this Sabbath or next to discuss this matter in detail.

SUMMARY: Church life is a sacred life based on our relationship with our Saviour. It involves commitment, service, and intimate communion with Christ and fellow believers. In joining His family, we pledge ourselves to work with Him and our sisters and brothers to evangelize the world.

Fasting and Suffering

Sandy AcMoody

Flies swarmed inside Miriam's hut where they could escape the afternoon heat of the African sun. Several women sat on the dirt floor admiring Miriam's newborn baby, fat and healthy-looking.

Sixteen-year-old Karia silently slipped into the hut. The fourth wife of a strict Muslim, she wore the traditional blue dress that covered her from head to foot. Her own baby was tied to her back. I wondered how she endured the 110° (41°C) heat. Karia collapsed onto a straw mattress on the floor. She was so young to feel so tired!

It was the Muslim holy month, when no faithful Muslim could eat or drink during daylight hours. They eat and drink only before sunrise or after sunset. And while men cut back on their work during this time, the women work as hard as ever, carrying loads of firewood home on their heads, carrying water from the well, washing clothes in the river, pounding rice, and preparing meals. And Karia was nursing her baby, as well, yet, even though it was the hottest time of the year, during this month she was not even allowed to swallow her own saliva, let alone take a drink of water during the day! She told me she felt weak and dizzy.

My heart ached for Karia. She looked pale, and moved slowly, like a woman far older than her years. But her life was little different from that of other women here in West Africa.

At last, the month-long fast ends. The villagers gather for a mass prayer, followed by feasting.

We pray that someday these people will accept the good news of Jesus' love, and be freed from the beliefs and rituals that bind them.

Slowly people are being introduced to Jesus. One young man borrowed a cassette tape from us and played it on his tape deck to over 40 listening friends. They've asked for more! The people love visual aids—pictures and felts—and we use all we have to tell them of God's love. The Holy Spirit is working on hearts to open them to receive the message of freedom in Christ!



Sandy and Barry AcMoody and their family serve with Adventist Frontier Missions in Guinea, West Africa.

Church Life, Part 2



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Exod. 20:8-11; 1 John 2:3-11; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Ps. 24:1; Mal. 3:9, 10.

MEMORY TEXT: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8, NIV).

KEY QUESTIONS: How are the Sabbath, stewardship, and maintaining church standards a part of church life? How do these help to fulfill the church's mission?

SEEING THE GOSPEL. A man came to a mission station in central China and asked to become a Christian, even though he had never heard the gospel preached and could not read. When he was asked how he knew about the gospel, he said that he had seen it. His neighbor, a man who had long been a "worthless" opium addict, had journeyed to a faraway town and returned transformed; he uprooted the poppies in his garden, repaired his house, planted and tended his crops, and provided for his family as a decent man should. The former addict said that the gospel of Christ had changed his life. His neighbor, hearing about it, came all the way to the mission station to become a Christian.

A genuine Christian life explained the gospel more simply and more effectively than any arguments could have done.

How can the aspects of the Christian life we studied last week explain Christianity to others more effectively than any arguments? Keep this same question in mind for each aspect of Christian life we will study this week.

THE HAPPIEST OF DAYS (Exod. 20:8-11).

To discover the meaning of the Sabbath, match the following texts to the answers below: (a) Exod. 31:13; (b) Heb. 4:1-10; (c) Exod. 20:11; (d) Rev. 14:9-12.

- _____ The Sabbath is a memorial of God's creatorship.
- _____ The Sabbath is a sign of sanctification.
- _____ The Sabbath is a sign of loyalty to God.
- _____ The Sabbath is a sign of righteousness by faith and of resting in Christ.

Christ Himself customarily worshiped on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). And when He spoke to His disciples about the persecution that would befall them after He returned to heaven, He urged them to pray that their "flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath" (Matt. 24:20, NKJV). After His death, He even rested in the tomb over the Sabbath, thereby signifying that He had accomplished our redemption.

The apostles likewise held the Sabbath in holy regard. When Christ died, the disciples suspended His burial arrangements in order to observe the seventh day (Luke 23:56-24:1). And Paul is well known for attending church on Sabbath during his evangelistic journeys (Acts 13:14; 17:1, 2; 18:4).

Isaiah 58:13 states that the Sabbath is a day of delight. How does the Bible's guidance on Sabbath keeping and Christ's example help it to be so? Exod. 20:9, 10; Matt. 12:12; Mark 2:23; Luke 14:1.

"To 'remember the Sabbath day . . .' (Exod. 20:8), we must think of the Sabbath throughout the week and make the preparations necessary to observe it in a manner pleasing to God. We should be careful not to so exhaust our energies during the week that we cannot engage in His service on the Sabbath."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 263.

As beautiful as the newly created world was, "the greatest gift God could give to . . . [Adam and Eve] was the privilege of a personal relationship with Him. So He gave them the Sabbath, a day of special blessing, fellowship, and communion with their Creator."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 249. How might you reorder your work week so you can have more energy to observe the Sabbath as a day of fellowship with *your* Creator?

PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN STANDARDS (1 Peter 2:21).

The issue of church-advocated standards of conduct and lifestyle is sensitive and often misunderstood. Frequently this subject is connected with the question, Does the church have the "right" to give counsel in such issues as dress, diet, entertainment, and association? For the person who believes in the Bible, the certain answer is yes, *if* the church promotes only standards that the Bible clearly defines. Scripture invests the church with the responsibility of directing its members to observe those standards.

If the church is to be faithful to its mission, it must adhere to the whole counsel of God and, in the spirit of that counsel, uphold it as the duty of its members (Acts 20:27, 28, 32). But the church is not authorized to construct arbitrary standards or to enforce oppressively even divine truths (Luke 11:46; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

As in other matters, who and what should be the basis of church standards? 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:3-11 (compare Gal. 5:16, 19-26).

"Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children. Godliness—godlikeness—is the goal to be reached." —*Education*, p. 18; compare Isa. 55:8, 9. To embrace a lower standard than that of Christ and His law is to deprive oneself of gospel blessings.

What fundamental Bible principles undergird all Christian standards? Rom. 12:1, 2; Gal. 5:16 (compare Phil. 4:8; 1 John 2:15-17).

The practical result of conversion to Christ is to become like Him in character and conduct, through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. This transformation is produced by His Word and His Spirit taking effect in our lives (1 John 2:5, 6). Satan has taught the world to love evil and hate righteousness. It is no wonder, then, that God's children should embrace values and a way of life distinctively different from those of the world.

How do you view God's standards? Why do some people regard standards as burdensome? What can keep us from being either legalistic and self-righteous or lax in observance of Christian standards? How can Bible standards become precious to us, even though they contravene attractive habits?

SPECIFICS OF CHRISTIAN STANDARDS (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

How can the principles we studied yesterday help us define standards regarding entertainment, dress, and health?

“Christians win unbelievers not by looking and behaving like the world but by revealing an attractive and refreshing difference. . . . Instead of adorning the exterior . . . [Peter] counseled, let believers concentrate on developing ‘the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God’ (1 Peter 3:1-4).”—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, pp. 286, 287.

Medical science has repeatedly borne out the validity of biblical health laws with regard to food, temperance, work, exercise, and cleanliness. (See Gen. 1:29; Prov. 23:29-35; Isa. 58:5-12; 2 Thess. 3:7-13.)

“God is as truly the author of physical laws as He is author of the moral law. His law is written with His own finger upon every nerve, every muscle, every faculty, which has been entrusted to man.”—*Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 17. Divine laws do not restrict or limit us, but disclose secrets of happiness, health, and success.

Note next to each text the practical standards taught in the Scriptures.

1 Cor. 10:6-8 _____

Eph. 5:3, 4 _____

Gal. 6:9, 10 _____

Ps. 92:1-3; Col. 3:16, 17 _____

1 Tim. 2:8-10; 1 Peter 3:3, 4 _____

Praising God on a daily basis helps us to keep our concerns in proper perspective. “In looking upon our crucified Saviour who redeemed us from the penalty and delivers us from the power of sin, we are motivated to do only ‘those things that are pleasing in his sight’ (1 John 3:22).”—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 288.

MANAGING GOD'S GOODS (Ps. 24:1).

A steward is a person authorized to manage another person's household or estate. To the Christian, being a steward means that we manage well the gifts God has given us. In its broadest sense, "stewardship involves the wise and unselfish use of life."—Paul Smith, *Managing God's Goods*, p. 21.

Christ demonstrated genuine stewardship through His selflessness, thus teaching us that stewardship involves total self-giving to Him and service to the world. It is willingly sharing for the benefit of others anything and everything God has given to us. Thus, as good stewards we will cease to define life by how much money we earn, the titles we gain, the people we know, where we live, or how much influence we think we have.

What are the five basic areas in which we are to be managers for God?

1. Gen. 1:26; 2:15 _____
2. Mal. 3:8-10 _____
3. Matt. 25:14-28 _____
4. 1 Cor. 6:19, 20 _____
5. Eph. 5:15, 16 _____

"Modern science has made earth one vast laboratory for research and experimentation. Such research yields many benefits, but the industrial revolution has also resulted in air, water, and land pollution. Technology, in some instances, has manipulated nature rather than having managed it wisely.

"We are stewards of this world, and should do everything to maintain life on all levels by keeping the ecological balance intact. In His coming advent, Christ will 'destroy those who destroy the earth' (Rev. 11:18)."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 274.

How can you improve your management of the blessings and gifts God has given you? Can you supply more of others' pressing needs by limiting the supply of your own wants?

SUPPORTING GOD'S CHURCH (Mal. 3:9, 10).

To ensure the spiritual nurture of Israel, God ordained that the priests and Levites, who served in the temple, should devote their lives to full-time ministry. Every Israelite was to support the priests and Levites with the tithe, and those in ministry were also to tithe (Num. 18:20, 21, 26). The Lord designated that the tithe was to be returned to His storehouse, the church. "[The tithe] is holy unto the Lord" (Lev. 27:30).

Other examples of tithing include Abraham's giving Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High, "tithes of all" (Gen. 14:18-20) and Jacob's vow to give God a tenth of all that he received from his Creator's hand (Gen. 28:22). God reaffirmed the tithing law as a holy institution upon which Israel's success depended (Num. 18:24, 26, 28).

In addition to the tithe, God commanded the people to return offerings to build and maintain His temple and sustain its various branches of service to His holy nation (Exod. 30:11-16; 2 Kings 12:4, 5; 2 Chron. 24:8-14).

List the promises God makes to those who are faithful in tithes and offerings. Mal. 3:10-12. What does He say to those who withhold tithes and offerings? Mal. 3:8, 9; Haggai 1:2-11.

What endorsement does the New Testament give to the system of tithes and offerings? Matt. 23:23; 1 Cor. 9:7-14.

"In the days of Israel the tithe and freewill offerings were needed to maintain the ordinances of divine service. Should the people of God give less in this age? The principle laid down by Christ is that our offerings to God should be in proportion to the light and privileges enjoyed. 'Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.' Luke 12:48. . . . As our blessings and privileges are increased—above all, as we have before us the unparalleled sacrifice of the glorious Son of God—should not our gratitude find expression in more abundant gifts to extend to others the message of salvation? The work of the gospel, as it widens, requires greater provision to sustain it than was called for anciently; and this makes the law of tithes and offerings of even more urgent necessity now than under the Hebrew economy."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 528, 529.

With what motives and spirit should we return to the Lord that which He claims? 1 Chron 29:11-16; 2 Cor. 9:6-10.

FURTHER STUDY: What lessons regarding stewardship does the parable of the shrewd manager teach in Luke 16:1-15? Read any or all of the following: "Friends by the Mammon of Unrighteousness" and "Talents" in *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 366-375, 325-365; "The Sabbath" in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 281-289.

"By beholding we are to become changed, and as we meditate upon the perfections of our divine Model, we shall desire to become wholly transformed and renewed in the image of His purity. There will be a hungering and thirsting of soul to be made like Him whom we adore. The more our thoughts are upon Christ, the more we shall speak of Him to others, and represent Him to the world. We are called to come out and be separate from the world, that we may be the sons and daughters of the Most High; and we are under sacred obligation to glorify God, as His children upon the earth. It is essential that the mind should be stayed upon Christ, that we may hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ from heaven."—E. G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1145.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. After studying this week's lesson, how would you answer the Key Questions in Sabbath Afternoon's lesson?
2. A large evangelistic campaign has been conducted in your area. Many converts have joined local Seventh-day Adventist churches, including yours. After a few weeks, many of these converts have fallen away. Some others who attend are still wearing jewelry and have been seen shopping on the Sabbath. How should you respond?
 - a. Blame the pastor and the evangelist for having too many premature baptisms?
 - b. Vow never to support another evangelistic campaign?
 - c. Rebuke these new converts for their shaky commitment and lack of faithfulness to standards?
 - d. Discuss your concern about the situation with the pastor and, perhaps, the church board?
 - e. Personally befriend the new members, continue to study with them, and include them in small-group meetings and social fellowship?

SUMMARY: How we live as Christians can have a significant effect on the church's mission. As the unconverted observe the results of our love for Christ, both in our own character development and in our service to the world, they also will be drawn to believe in Him.



Please Come, Daddy

James Zachary

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The family stood by 8-year-old Kalinga's hospital bed. She awoke and whispered, "A man is coming to visit me." The family wondered who the man was. Later, when the Adventist pastor entered Kalinga's room, she said excitedly, "He is the man that I saw in my dream!"

Kalinga's mother recognized the Adventist pastor. She and her children had attended the Adventist church several times. She introduced the pastor to her husband, an officer in a large bank in Papua New Guinea. Father was always too busy to attend church. His every moment was filled with business contacts.

One Sabbath after Kalinga returned home from the hospital, she saw her father loading his golf clubs into the car. He was on his way to play golf with some business friends. Kalinga asked him, "If Jesus were to come back today and ask me where you are, what should I tell Him? Do you want me to tell Him that you are playing golf?" Kalinga's father was startled. He had never considered religion as important, or thought of God as a person. He thought about his friends who were expecting him at the golf course.

Kalinga took her father's hand. "Daddy, today is Visitors' Day. I want you to be my visitor. Please, Daddy, come with me." The pleading look in his little daughter's eyes touched his heart. He put away his golf clubs and went to change into his suit.

Kalinga's mother was surprised when she saw her husband dressed up. "Where are you going this morning?" she asked.

"To church," he said. "It is Visitor's Day, and I am Kalinga's visitor."

That morning Kalinga did not go to her kindergarten class. "My daddy is a visitor. I will stay with him and help him make friends," she told her teacher.

Kalinga's father enjoyed church. When citywide evangelistic meetings were held on an outdoor field, he and his family attended, even on the nights when it rained. And when the meetings ended, Kalinga's father joined the baptismal classes.



Kalinga is so happy that God used her to help win her father to Jesus.

Kalinga (on her father's lap) with her family and James Zachary, global evangelism coordinator for the Quiet Hour.

For Current Newsbreak, Call 1-800-648-5824.

The Church Militant



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 6:10-18; Phil. 3:7-21; Rev. 12:17.

MEMORY TEXT: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me" (Philippians 3:12, NKJV).

KEY QUESTIONS: How does the Bible describe the church militant? What are its weapons? Who is its general? And what will be the outcome of the battles it must fight?

BOUND BY CHAINS to a Roman soldier, Paul had ample opportunity to study military armor. Perhaps this is how he came to understand that Christians also have their armor (Eph. 6:10-18).

The belt buckled around the soldier's waist held together his armor, allowing him freedom of movement. How does the *belt of God's truth* give us freedom? The soldier's breastplate protected his heart. How does the *breastplate of righteousness* protect the Christian? Sandals were the mark of a soldier prepared to move out. The sign of Christians on the move is their eagerness to share the gospel. The large, oblong, wooden shield of the Roman soldier protected him from a dart dipped in pitch, then set on fire. Upon impact, the shield smothered the dart. What are Satan's darts? And how does the *shield of faith* protect us from them? A soldier's helmet protects his head, the center of will and intelligence. How does the *helmet of salvation* protect us? A soldier wields his sword both defensively and offensively. How is the *sword of God's Word* an offensive and defensive weapon for Christians?

ON THE MARCH (Dan. 11:32-35).

The church militant represents the church's efforts throughout its history to share the gospel with the world. It is called militant, not because it employs violent means to fulfill its commission, but because its spiritual life and endeavors have repeatedly brought it into conflict with the ruling powers of darkness on earth (Gal. 4:29). In addition, spiritual weaknesses and shortcomings have produced strife, discord, and division in the church militant for many centuries.

In the zeal of His love, God will miraculously accomplish His goal to have a pure church (Eph. 5:27). It is our privilege to understand this goal and cooperate with Him in hastening the fulfillment of His plan.

During the Reformation era, how did the church militant fare spiritually? What lessons can we learn from its experience? Dan. 11:30-35 (compare Rev. 3:1-6).

The valor of God's faithful witnesses, who braved privations, persecution, and death, is beyond human estimate. God strengthened mortals who loved Jesus and His Word beyond all else to perform deeds of omnipotence for the advancement of His kingdom.

With flattering, deceptive promises, much like the honeyed talk of modern ecumenism, the rulers of apostate Christendom deceived some of the Reformers and lured them to compromise, thus stalling the progress of the Reformation. (See *The Great Controversy*, pp. 118, 119.)

With what promises does God assure us that His church militant will press forward to accomplish its task despite internal weaknesses and outward opposition? Acts 15:13-17; Rom. 16:17-20, 25-27.

"Paul looks forward to the final victory predicted in Gen. 3:15, which is not far off. This ultimate triumph over the forces of evil is foreshadowed by every victory experienced by Christian believers over temptation and deception. Paul is thinking of the victory he hopes the Roman believers will enjoy by 'avoiding' the false teachers who will seek to divide and confuse them."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 651.

How willing are you to work for the advancement of God's kingdom in the face of trial and enmity? What part does God's love have in maintaining strength for our task?

THE OBJECT OF GOD'S SUPREME REGARD (Eph. 5:25-27).

In what affectionate terms does God speak of His people, the church? Ps. 45:10, 11, 13-17 (compare 2 Cor. 6:16-18).

To our modern senses, the psalmist's language may seem too lavish with praise and affection. But we must remember that God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours. His love is an immeasurable, permeating power (Isa. 55:9). Moreover, He knows what He will perform in the lives of His followers, and at times, He speaks of their glorification as an accomplished fact (Rom. 8:29-31).

"Enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 12.

Why is God's expression of love for His church not misplaced or exaggerated? 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:9-11.

The Corinthian church was riddled with schisms, immorality, legal disputes between members, doctrinal errors, lack of tithing, gluttony at the Lord's Supper, and a warped concept of spiritual gifts. Yet Paul insisted that the Corinthians had been washed, sanctified, and justified in Christ (1 Cor. 6:11).

Paul was not justifying them in their sins, but reminding them of their holy calling and seeking to reawaken their commitment to Christ and the lifestyle that accompanies such a commitment. Moreover, some in the church remained faithful to Christ. For all its problems, Paul did not treat the church as hopelessly apostate. Their response to his letter justified his confidence in them (2 Corinthians 7).

"The Lord has an organized body through whom He will work. There may be more than a score of Judases among them; there may be a rash Peter who will under circumstances of trial deny his Lord; there may be persons represented by John . . . [who] may have a zeal that would destroy men's lives. . . . But the great Teacher seeks to give lessons of instruction to correct these existing evils. He is doing the same today with His church."—*Reflecting Christ*, p. 199.

What lessons of instruction might the great Teacher be trying to give to the church today? To you as a member of that church?

Because the church is the object of Christ's supreme regard, what should be our attitude to the church—even when we see faults and weaknesses?

THE GOOD FIGHT (1 Tim. 6:12).

To what active warfare does Christ call His followers? 1 Tim. 6:12 (compare 2 Tim. 2:2-5).

This warfare is not a hostile encounter with our fellow humans, but the conquest of self, the subduing of our hearts to God's love. This is the hardest battle we can wage and the noblest victory we can win. The Lord can make us more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37).

We are also to contend earnestly for the faith that was once delivered unto the saints. We are to stand up for the truth as it is in Jesus and help rescue others from the enemy camp. All this calls for a determined warfare, unhampered by a belligerent, ill-tempered spirit.

Review the special armaments the Lord has provided for us so we will be triumphant. Eph. 6:10-18.

We must put on the *whole* armor of God. We are to consecrate our *entire* lives to Him without reservation. Only by unconditional surrender to Christ will we enjoy unconditional victory over Satan, our arch foe.

"The Lord has honored us by choosing us as His soldiers. Let us fight bravely for Him, maintaining the right in every transaction. . . . As you strive for the victory over your own inclinations, He will help you by His Holy Spirit to be circumspect in every action."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1119.

Rightly employed, our Christian "weapons" will never be employed to injure or disgrace anyone. How is it possible to be an active, energetic warrior for Christ without being combative and overbearing? 1 Cor. 9:19-27; Col. 3:1-16.

"Genuine faith always works by love. When you look to Calvary it is not to quiet your soul in the nonperformance of duty . . . but to create faith in Jesus, faith that will work, purifying the soul from the slime of selfishness. . . . Every soul is required to fight the fight of faith. If one is a follower of Christ, he cannot be sharp in deal, he cannot be hardhearted, devoid of sympathy. He cannot be coarse in his speech. He cannot be full of pomposity and self-esteem. He cannot be overbearing, nor can he use harsh words, and censure and condemn."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1111.

TAKE HEED TO THYSELF (1 Tim. 4:16).

One of the great challenges of the church militant is to uphold a high standard while at the same time avoiding a spirit of condemnation and hostile reform. Yet neither can we advocate love to the point of permissiveness. "True charity is too pure to cover an unconfessed sin. . . . We are to make no compromise with evil."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 555.

Where is the great work of reform to begin? 1 Tim. 4:16 (compare Deut. 4:9).

We can hardly overemphasize the need for humble, daily self-examination to see that we remain in the faith of Jesus Christ. Those who desire to rescue others from the swift-running current of sin must be sure that their own feet are firmly planted on safe ground. Many zealous reformers have assumed that because they are fighting the battles of the Lord, they are immune to Satan. Meanwhile, others, whose own positions may be questioned, painstakingly subject people to their own special theological litmus tests, hardly realizing that God alone is the judge of a balanced, definitive presentation of the gospel.

Let us prove all things and continually feast upon the Word of God, giving one another opportunity to grow in the understanding of truths that are difficult to express fully. None of us can ever expect to state the truth with such precision and beauty that all honest souls will comprehend it perfectly. Understanding truth is the fruit of grace and of each believer's personal fellowship with Christ and His Word (1 Cor. 8:1-3; 13:8-13).

In 1 Timothy 4:16, "[Paul] asserts the primary importance of dependable Christian character as a qualification for service to the church. Acquaintance with the teachings of the church is important, but this knowledge can never compensate for a questionable reputation. The most winsome argument for Christianity is not unanswerable logic but the fragrance of a Christlike life. Sincere seekers for truth are not interested in theory, but in a working philosophy of life that can solve their problems and help them to overcome their weaknesses. When non-Christians who are honest in heart see that the gospel changes selfish, vain, timeserving men into pure, unselfish Christians they will be drawn to the Christ of the gospel."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 307.

How can we avoid judging others while at the same time discerning and clinging to pure truth as we test all things?

SATAN'S OPPOSITION, GOD'S PROTECTION (Rev. 12:17).

However numerous the arguments regarding various aspects of truth, we must never forget that our chief foe is Satan, who seeks to keep within the church the spirit of controversy and conflict. Unity is not a matter of small consequence (Rom. 15:1-7; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27-29). We must prayerfully seek unity based on the Word of God.

What group of people is under special assault, and how do they overcome? Rev. 12:10, 11, 17.

While it is true in a general sense that Satan walks about like a roaring lion indiscriminately seeking his prey (1 Peter 5:8), it is no less true that he targets those who obey God's law and testimony. But in Christ, their spiritual defense is sure. The Lord Himself strengthens them to repulse Satan's onslaughts.

What promise of protection does the Lord extend to His faithful people, and on what condition? Ps. 18:29-38; 91:9-16; 144:1, 2.

God bids us to be always alert for the enemy. If we trust God, He will never abandon us. His angels stand at the ready to guide and protect us. "As His children draw near to Him for protection from evil, in pity and love He lifts up for them a standard against the enemy. Touch them not, He says; for they are Mine. I have graven them upon the palms of My hands."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 571.

"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."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 174, 175.

"The life of Christ was a life charged with a divine message of the love of God, and He longed intensely to impart this love to others in rich measure. Compassion beamed from His countenance, and His conduct was characterized by grace and humility, love and truth. Every member of His church militant must manifest the same qualities, if he would join the church triumphant."—*Our High Calling*, p. 366.

Ours is an aggressive warfare, yet we are to be a people of peace, in whom dwells the peace that passes all understanding. Stay close to the Captain of your salvation.

How should the principles of this day's lesson influence our behavior when controversy breaks out in the church?

FURTHER STUDY: Read Isaiah 62. Also read "The Object of His Supreme Regard" and "The Church the Property of God" in *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 15-19, 21, 22. Consider the resourcefulness of God's love and the power of His grace to transform weak and unworthy beings into "a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5, NIV). You might also want to read the chapter entitled "Tares" in *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 70-75.

"Some people seem to think that upon entering the church they will . . . 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; and all our zeal will not be successful in making the church militant as pure as the church triumphant. The Lord forbids us to proceed in any violent way against those whom we think erring, and we are not to deal out excommunications and denunciations to those who are faulty."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 47.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is the portrait of God's church as His royal crown and His holy bride (Isa. 62:3, 5) not excessive? (See Isa. 40:1, 2; Rev. 7:14.)
2. How can Christ acknowledge the visible church as His own while "tares" and "bad fish" still remain in it? (See Matt. 13:24-30, 33-43, 47-49; 2 Tim. 2:19-21.)
3. How can we "cleanse the camp from Achans" and yet avoid the urge to separate the wheat from the chaff? (See 1 Tim. 5:20-22; 2 Tim. 4:1, 2; Titus 2:13-15.)

SUMMARY: Encompassed with internal weakness and outward opposition, the church militant has ever been on the march toward fulfilling Christ's purpose. That purpose is to have a people who faithfully reflect His character and do His bidding. They remain the earthly object of Christ's supreme regard. He invites us to unite through the power of His blood and Word personally appropriated in our lives. Through His grace He protects and perfects His church.



Guerrilla Finds God, part 1

Romulo Gemino

I joined a band of guerrilla soldiers in the Philippines when I was only 10 years old. I learned to fight, to trust no one, to rely only on myself. The guerrillas carried on their hit-and-run warfare from hiding places in the forested mountains of the central Philippines. Violence dominated our lives; killing had little meaning. Eventually I became commander of the guerrillas in the National People's Army. Religion had no part in my life. I thought God was for the weak; I was strong and fearless.

One Sunday we walked into a church, machine guns loaded, and forced the congregation stand along the church's aisle and place their Bibles on the floor. Then we made them walk on their Bibles and leave the church. Shoving a gun at the pastor, we ordered him to lead the way, and the congregation followed. The people scattered like bats as they stepped outside the church. What a sight to see these poor people run for their lives!

But I heard a sound inside the church and saw an old woman lying under one of the pews, sobbing and clutching her Bible to her chest. I ordered her to get up and leave, but she would not go. Her refusal irritated me, and I pointed the barrel of my gun at her chest. Still she would not move. I pulled the trigger.

Killing and looting, striking fear into the hearts of peasants, made us cold and heartless, but not omnipotent. Eventually I was captured and charged with rebellion against the government and murder. I was sentenced to death for killing 282 people.

With two other men I stood before a firing squad at the edge of a freshly dug ditch. Suddenly I felt powerless. As the soldiers aimed their guns at us, I called out to every saint whose name I could remember. Gunshots rang out, and the two other men fell to the ground. I waited, still praying. But the bullets never came.

A soldier grabbed me and led me into the prison, where guards questioned me for hours about the the guerrilla army. Cooperate, I was told, and I might live; refuse, and I would die.

continued next week



Romulo Gemino, a former guerrilla, has joined God's army and works with prisoners in San Jose, Philippines.

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For Current Newsbreak, Call 1-800-648-5824.

The Remnant Church



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Isa. 37:31, 32; Jer. 31:7-11; Joel 2:32; Zeph. 3:13-19; Rom. 11:1-5.

MEMORY TEXT: "And 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).

KEY QUESTIONS: Who are God's remnant people? And how can you be one of them?

THE RULER HAD ISSUED THE DECREE. And as it reached the corners of his realm, the children of God sang and laughed. They could go home at last! Many of them, including Daniel, had studied the prophecies, beseeching God to intervene on their behalf. He had heard their prayers! Soon, approximately 50,000 of them chose to restore their homeland. Their friends who stayed behind showered them with precious objects to assist them with the task.

"The long journey across the desert wastes was accomplished in safety, and the happy company, grateful to God for His many mercies, at once undertook the work of re-establishing that which had been broken down and destroyed."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 560.

As quickly as they could, they built an altar and reestablished the holy services that had been discontinued when Jerusalem was destroyed. They were a faithful remnant, pleased to do God's will. It is readily possible to imagine them singing the words of Psalm 126:1-3. As you study this week's lesson, look for comparisons between this remnant and the remnant that will work and rejoice during earth's last days.

THE IDENTITY OF THE REMNANT (Rev. 12:17; 14:12).

The biblical concept of the remnant deals with any group of faithful people who endure trial, apostasy, persecution, or some form of calamity. Noah and his immediate family survived the Flood. A remnant came out of Ur of Chaldees with Abram. A remnant did not apostatize in the days of Israel's and Judah's kings. The remnant in the last days will remain loyal to God, rejecting the mark of the beast (Sunday observance) despite persecution.

What proportion of people prove faithful to God? Matt. 7:13, 14 (compare Prov. 20:6).

Genuine conversion and righteousness are rare, not because they are so difficult to obtain, but because most people allow themselves to be overcome by pride and selfishness.

"If we ever attain unto holiness, it will be through the renunciation of self and the reception of the mind of Christ. Pride and self-sufficiency must be crucified. Are we willing to pay the price required of us? Are we willing to have our will brought into perfect conformity to the will of God? Until we are willing, the transforming grace of God cannot be manifest upon us."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 143.

What three things in particular characterize the remnant? Rev. 12:17; 14:12.

Faith of Jesus. The Greek of Revelation 14:12 may indicate "faith in Jesus" (J. B. Phillips; NASB). Such faith and the observing of God's commandments are major features of the Christian life. God's commandments reflect His character and describe His righteous standard. Jesus lived to show us what God is like. And in His strength, we are able to obey God, reflecting His image.

"The remnant church thus honors the commandments of God, and observes them, not in any legalistic sense but as a revelation of the character of God and of Christ, who dwells in the heart of the true believer."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 833.

God's last-day remnant keep the fourth commandment. The Sabbath is a sign of God's creative power and "the witness to His claim upon man's reverence and homage. The wicked will be distinguished by their efforts to tear down the Creator's memorial."—*Our Father Cares*, p. 228.

THE CHARACTER OF THE REMNANT (Rev. 14:1-5; Matt. 24:13).

Describe the character qualities possessed by God's remnant. Zeph. 3:13; Rev. 14:1-5.

It is not just the beliefs of the remnant that constitute their identity and strength, but the quality of their religious experience. Integrity and pure conduct, the fruit of intimate fellowship with Christ, distinguish the remnant from the mass of self-deluded "Christians" whose religious experience is a tissue of evasions and lies. The remnant experience a joyful religion, expressed in unselfish labor for the salvation of others.

List other qualities that the remnant possess. Matt. 24:12, 13; Titus 2:11-14.

Persecution will plague God's last-day remnant (Rev. 12:17). But they will exhibit a perseverance sustained by their attachment to Christ and dependence on His blood and Word (Rev. 12:11). They will be fortified with the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18).

The Bible is full of examples of those who persevered. "Even the fear of death could not make the fainting David drink of the water of Bethlehem, to obtain which, valiant men had risked their lives. The gaping lions' den could not keep Daniel from his daily prayers, nor could the fiery furnace induce Shadrach and his companions to fall down before the idol which Nebuchadnezzar set up. . . . Mark the character of Joseph. Virtue was severely tested, but its triumph was complete."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 43. We also think of Hannah, Abraham, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and John the Revelator on Patmos.

The remnant's experience will parallel that of the apostle Paul, described in 2 Corinthians 6:3-10. And, as they fight the battles of the Lord, not as aggressors, but as able defenders of the faith and liberators of Satan's unwilling captives, they will keep steadily in view "the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13, NIV).

Think about the following statement in relation to Revelation 14:1-12. "Every addition to the church should be one more agency for the carrying out of the great plan of redemption. The entire church, acting as one, blending in perfect union, is to be a living, active missionary agency, moved and controlled by the Holy Spirit."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 47.

GOD'S SPECIAL GIFT TO THE REMNANT (Rev. 19:10).

As we have seen, the remnant are distinguished by their obedience to God's commandments and their having the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17). How does Scripture define "the testimony of Jesus"? Rev. 19:10 (compare 22:9).

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Spirit of Prophecy is manifested in our time in the writings and ministry of Ellen White. (For a more thorough study of this subject, which, owing to space constraints, cannot be supplied in the quarterly, we recommend Frank B. Holbrook's article "The Biblical Basis for a Modern Prophet" and Roger Coon's book *A Gift of Light*, available from the White Estate.)

Ellen White's writings harmonize with Scripture and give a full, balanced exposition to Bible prophecy, a subject that Jesus emphasized the importance of understanding (Matt. 24:15; Rev. 1:3). The fruit of her counsel has helped us as a church to maintain organizational and theological integrity. The guidance of her pen also has helped us to consolidate as a movement, break down cultural prejudice, expand our vision of missions, and undertake a vast work in publishing, education, welfare ministry, and medicine.

From a theological standpoint, Ellen White's writings illuminate our understanding of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, a theme woven throughout Scripture and culminating in the final triumph of God's love.

Of her own writings Ellen White said: "Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light."—*Evangelism*, p. 257. Thus, her writings magnify Christ and His Word and expose Satan and his lies.

Because her writings teach us to love Bible truth and detect and spurn every type of delusion, Satan has incited an aversion to the testimonies. Ellen White prophesied that this would happen: "There will be a hatred kindled against the testimonies which is satanic. The workings of Satan will be to unsettle the faith of the churches in them, for this reason: Satan cannot have so clear a track to bring in his deceptions and bind up souls in his delusions if the warnings and reproofs and counsels of the Spirit of God are heeded."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 48. (See also "The Nature and Influence of the Testimonies" in *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 654-672.)

Do you want your love for Christ and the Bible to grow? Reading Ellen White's books will enrich your spiritual life. Since the Holy Spirit inspired Ellen White's messages, what attitude to the Holy Spirit is manifested by rejection of the messages?

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE (Rev. 18:1-5; Micah 2:12, 13).

Jude forewarned that the church would become increasingly blighted with self-serving pretenders who would preach a false gospel (Jude 2-4, 7-13). This degeneracy has progressed almost nonstop since then. All forms of vice and immorality find a secure home in apostate churches. Sexual disorders, alcoholism, and child molestation occur among pastors and priests. It seems that addiction to violent, lewd entertainment abounds almost as much among some churchgoers as among those to whom religion is nothing. It also appears that the incidence of gluttony, gossip, greed, divorce, and enslavement to fashions is nearly as great among some professed believers as among nonbelievers.

Yet to many other Christians, Jesus is their Lord and Saviour. God desires His visible, organized remnant church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to shine forth "fair as the moon and clear as the sun." Others can follow that beacon into pure Christian fellowship.

In the days of Elijah, how "visible" were the remnant? 1 Kings 19:12-18. In these final days, how will God's invisible remnant, scattered throughout the world, become united and visible? Rev. 18:1-5; Micah 2:12, 13.

"Among earth's inhabitants, scattered in every land, there are those who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Like the stars of heaven, which appear only at night, these faithful ones will shine forth when darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people. . . . God has in reserve a firmament of chosen ones that will yet shine forth amidst the darkness, revealing clearly to an apostate world the transforming power of obedience to His law. . . ."

"Then let . . . everyone have a heart of flesh, a heart of tender sympathy, a heart that, like the heart of Christ, reaches out for the salvation of a lost world."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 188, 189.

Since the Reformation, God's truth has been progressively restored. That restoration is consummated in His final remnant, who are guided by the law and testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17). The remnant appeal to members of fallen churches and other religious systems to follow the Lord (Rev. 18:4). Jesus said: "I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16, RSV).

Resolve that you will cleave to Christ and live by the Word He calls you to follow.

REACTION AND INFLUENCE (Rev. 12:17; Joel 2:32).

How do the majority of people react toward the children of God? Matt. 24:9; Rev. 12:17.

“The decree that will finally go forth against the remnant people of God will be very similar to that issued by Ahasuerus against the Jews [see Esther 3]. Today the enemies of the true church see in the little company keeping the Sabbath commandment, a Mordecai at the gate. The reverence of God’s people for His law, is a constant rebuke to those who have cast off the fear of the Lord, and are trampling on His Sabbath.

“Satan will arouse indignation against the minority who refuse to accept popular customs and traditions. Men of position and reputation will join with the lawless and the vile to take counsel against the people of God. . . . To secure popularity and patronage, legislators will yield to the demand for Sunday laws. But those who fear God, cannot accept an institution that violates a precept of the Decalogue. On this battlefield will be fought the last great conflict . . . between truth and error. And we are not left in doubt as to the issue. Today, as in the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Lord will vindicate His truth and His people.”—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 605, 606.

Describe the positive effect the message and work of the remnant have on the world. Isa. 60:1-5; Joel 2:28-32.

The truth, as it is shared by the remnant in words and deeds, will work under the power of the latter rain to separate multitudes of souls from Babylon’s influence.

When tragedies such as hurricanes, famines, earthquakes, or floods devastate any given part of the world, generous people everywhere rally to support the victims with bundles of food, clothing, and household utensils. Sin is the greatest tragedy of all, causing far more serious devastation than any natural calamity. As stewards of God’s grace and truth, His children will rally to provide relief for the “refugees” from Babylon. These “victims” will not be cast adrift, but will become part of the remnant church, which keeps the commandments of God and has the testimony of Jesus.

Consider afresh the privilege and responsibility of devoting your life to Christ and sharing His gospel with the world. Because this is our task, consider the need of having a completely biblical understanding of the gospel.

FURTHER STUDY: Read Zechariah 3 and the chapter “Joshua and the Angel” in *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 582-592. Learn from Joshua’s experience how you can be victorious over sin and fruitful in God’s service.

To understand better the role of Ellen White in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, read “The Remnant Church and the Spirit of Prophecy” in *Symposium on Revelation*, book 2, pp. 295-333, published by the Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Occasionally, some have taken the position that the Holy Spirit calls the remnant to depart from the Seventh-day Adventist Church and form a separate, “pure” organization, wholly committed to the straight testimony. But consider the following statement by Ellen White:

“God has not given them any such burden of labor. They would tear down that which God would restore by the Laodicean message. . . . The Lord lays upon no man a message that will discourage and dishearten the church. He reproveth, He rebuketh, He chastens; but it is only that He may restore and approve at last.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 22, 23.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read 2 Chronicles 30:1-13, Isaiah 10:22, Romans 9:27-29, and 11:2-5. Reflect on the lessons we, as God’s last-day remnant, can learn from these texts.
2. Read Isaiah 37:31, 32. Discuss the meaning of the phrase “the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this” (NIV). What part does God’s zeal play in our redemption? (See also Isa. 9:7.)
3. As a member of God’s last-day remnant, what gives you hope and courage? How can you pass on this spirit of hope and courage to your fellow church members and to your unbelieving neighbors and friends?

SUMMARY: The remnant are God’s faithful people who love Him and therefore obey Him. Under Satan’s instigation, the whole world will seek to destroy God’s remnant people in the last days. But under the anointing of God’s Spirit, this embattled group of believers will arise to proclaim the everlasting gospel with purity, power, courage, and love. When this occurs, many in the enemy camp will separate from Babylon to join them, thus becoming part of the remnant.

Guerrilla Finds God, part 2

Romulo Gemino

The guards had just saved me from the firing squad, but I knew they were not interested in my life. They wanted information on the guerrilla organization I led. They didn't mince words. If I lied, I died; if I cooperated, perhaps they could recommend clemency.

After hours of questioning, the soldiers pushed me into a tiny prison cell, so small I could not stand up or lie down. I had no bed to sleep on, no blanket to protect me from the dampness or the mosquitoes that were ever present.

Isolated from other prisoners, I learned that I was sentenced to die after all. Just as soldiers were preparing to carry out my execution, the Philippine president commuted my sentence to life in prison.

For three years that damp, dark cell was my home. The mosquitoes were my constant companions. I had a lot of time to think about life and death.

Then one day I heard beautiful singing. I asked the guard to bring the singers to see me. They came to my cell and sang for me. I learned that they were Seventh-day Adventists who held religious services in the jail. Right there I heard the good news of salvation. I accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour. I was still a prisoner, but I was forgiven—and free in Christ. I was baptized inside the jail.

I learned how to give Bible studies and spoke to many other prisoners about Christ. Sometimes prisoners threatened me, and sometimes I was afraid, but with the help of Adventist laymen, we led many prisoners to spiritual freedom in Christ. We eventually started a church, right inside the prison. I was honored to become an elder in that church.

In March 1992 Philippines' new president granted amnesty to many political prisoners, and I was released from prison. A month later a pastor from the 1000 Missionary Movement asked me to join this movement and work for other prisoners.

By God's grace, I am back in prison, not serving time, but serving God full time. By God's grace I will find many who want true freedom in Jesus.



Romulo Gemino is working with the 1000 Missionary Movement, a lay missionary organization in the Philippines. He has prepared 108 people for baptism in two years.

The Church—Shaken and Sifted



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Luke 3:16, 17; 1 Cor. 15:57, 58; Heb. 12:25-29.

MEMORY TEXT: "For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth" (Amos 9:9).

KEY QUESTIONS: What are the shaking and sifting of the modern church? Why does it occur? And what will be the results?

TOSSED AND STAGGERING. The ancient method of separating grain from its encasing chaff involved shaking and sifting it in a sieve. As the grain kernels were tossed upward, the wind would blow the chaff away, and the kernels, which were heavier than chaff, would fall back into the sieve. The sieve also would be shaken repeatedly and the grains sifted by hand. Dirt, pebbles, and smaller particles of chaff would fall through the sieve, leaving only the grain.

The phrase *I will sift* in our memory text literally means "I will toss about," or "I will cause to stagger." Amos is prophesying that God would cause Israel to be scattered among the nations and "there tossed about, as it were, in the 'sieve' of affliction and persecution that it might be determined through this trial who will remain loyal followers of God."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 983.

This purifying process finds its spiritual counterpart today in the trials, temptations, and tests of life. As you study this week's lesson, consider how a knowledge of the shaking can draw you closer to Christ, thereby increasing your strength to overcome.

WHAT THE SHAKING AND SIFTING ARE (Luke 22:31, 32).

From the Memory Text for this week, we learn that God sifts through our lives to separate us from all dross. Who else does a sifting work and why? Luke 22:31, 33, 34. What is Christ's counsel regarding this sifting? Luke 22:40.

How confident Peter was! Do you know someone like him? Perhaps yourself? If someone is so emphatic about never doing a particular thing, that is often the act against which he or she must guard. Usually the seemingly most secure areas of a stronghold are left unprotected in order for the defenders to stabilize weaker areas. Thus it is not unusual for the enemy to attack at these secure areas. Our spiritual foe often attacks in this way.

"Pray that you will not fall into temptation" (Luke 22:40, NIV). The Greek word for "temptation" means "trial" or "test." If Peter had been more attentive to Christ's counsel to pray, he would have been given the strength to acknowledge his Saviour. Much of the shaking and sifting we undergo comes because we are too self-confident and complacent.

What did Christ do for Peter that He will also do for us? Luke 22:32 (compare Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). How does Christ's interest in our welfare enable us to respond? Heb. 4:14-16.

"I have prayed for you" (Luke 22:32, NIV). "What a comfort to know that the Master takes so personal an interest in the problems and temptations of us as individuals!"—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 868.

If we value Christ's intercessory prayers for us and also pray in harmony with His will, Satan's temptations will only bring us closer to our Saviour until we are beyond Satan's reach. "From grateful hearts, from lips touched with holy fire, let the glad song ring out, Christ is risen! He lives to make intercession for us. Grasp this hope, and it will hold the soul like a sure, tried anchor. Believe, and thou shalt see the glory of God."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 794.

During the closing days of earth's history, the church and the world will be shaken mightily. How can you improve your prayer life so that you will not find yourself in Peter's position? How else can we ensure that we will not be shaken out of Christ's last-day church?

CAUSES FOR THE SHAKING, PART 1 (Rev. 3:14-17; 1 Cor. 11:19).

The shaking is not an arbitrary decree on God's part. The Bible and Spirit of Prophecy give distinct reasons for it. We will study these reasons in the lessons for today and tomorrow. It is especially important to understand this matter so we will not be among the people sifted out.

What is one basic reason for the shaking? Rev. 3:14-17 (compare Matt. 25:1-14).

Self-satisfaction and a presumptuous sense of security, which breed indifference, cause many to be shaken out, especially when they or the church receive trials that they have no inner strength to bear. Such people have few spiritual struggles, because they have no idea what it means to "press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called" them (Phil. 3:14, NIV). When sacrifice and trial are called for, they depart from the faith, offended and dismayed.

"Lukewarm Christianity preserves enough of the form, and even of the content of the gospel, to dull the perceptive powers of the spirit and renders men oblivious to the earnest effort necessary to the attainment of the high ideal of a victorious life in Christ. The typical Laodicean Christian is content with things as they are and proud of the little progress he has made. It is almost impossible to convince him of his great need and of how far he is from the goal of perfection."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 761.

Frequently associated with this spiritual lukewarmness is an obsession with worldly gain. "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17, NIV).

Read 1 Corinthians 11:19 and Ephesians 4:14. How do "every wind of teaching" (NIV) and "deceitful scheming" (NIV) cause the shaking?

False teachings that undermine the power of truth have been introduced into the church since its inception (Acts 20:29, 30). Opinions that question God's Word will continue to enchant unstable believers until Christ returns. "The mighty shaking has commenced and will go on, and all will be shaken out who are not willing to take a bold and unyielding stand for the truth and to sacrifice for God and His cause."—*Early Writings*, p. 50.

CAUSES FOR THE SHAKING, PART 2 (John 6:55-71; Matt. 24:9, 10).

What third major cause brings on the shaking? John 6:55-71 (compare Gal. 4:16; Isa. 30:8-17).

“I asked the meaning of the shaking I had seen, and was shown that it would be caused by the straight testimony called forth by the counsel of the True Witness to the Laodiceans. This will have its effect upon the heart of the receiver, and will lead him to exalt the standard and pour forth the straight truth. Some will not bear this straight testimony. They will rise up against it, and this will cause a shaking among God’s people.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 181.

Describe the fourth major reason for the shaking. Matt. 13:20-22; 24:9, 10.

“Hated by all nations because of me” (Matt. 24:9, NIV). Those who choose not to follow their Creator and Saviour are offended by the indictment implied by the lives of Christ’s disciples. Christians, therefore, should expect misunderstandings and persecution.

When the church prospers, it is easy to profess belief. But when the church members personally, or the church corporately, must pass through hardship, how quickly their profession turns to dust and their hatred multiplies toward those who, through God’s grace, stand firm.

“The time is not far distant when the test will come to every soul. The mark of the beast [the false Sabbath] will be urged upon us. Those who have step by step yielded to worldly demands and conformed to worldly customs will not find it a hard matter to yield to the powers that be, rather than subject themselves to derision, insult, threatened imprisonment, and death. The contest is between the commandments of God and the commandments of men. In this time the gold will be separated from the dross in the church. True godliness will be clearly distinguished from the appearance and tinsel of it. Many a star that we have admired for its brilliancy will then go out in darkness. Chaff like a cloud will be borne away on the wind, even from places where we see only floors of rich wheat.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 81.

Pray for strength to meet the smaller tests so when the bigger ones arrive, you will be able to stand firm. Apart from understanding and believing Bible truth, what experience is vital if we are to stand firm for Christ?

EFFECTS OF THE SHAKING (Luke 3:16, 17).

How will the manifestation of Christ's righteousness among us affect those who love the truth? Isa. 52:7-9.

Deliverance and peace are a joyful message. The deliverance mentioned in these verses was first for literal Israel from their oppressors. But such liberation also represents deliverance from sin, deliverance through the Messiah. The good tidings referred to thus become the gospel story, the triumph of which proves that God, not Satan, reigns.

What time is it? "The time has come for a thorough reformation to take place. When this reformation begins, the spirit of prayer will actuate every believer and will banish from the church the spirit of discord and strife. Those who have not been living in Christian fellowship will draw close to one another. One member working in right lines will lead other members to unite with him in making intercession for the revelation of the Holy Spirit. There will be no confusion, because all will be in harmony with the mind of the Spirit."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 251.

The result will be the outpouring of Heaven's blessings on the church—in "good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over" (Luke 6:38, NIV).

How will this same revelation affect the rebellious in the church and the world? Luke 3:16, 17 (compare Isa. 17:4-6, 12, 13).

John the Baptist uses the common sight of sifting and shaking grain to symbolize a spiritual shaking. But it is a shaking professed Christians can meet with confidence as long as they are clothed with Christ's righteousness.

"Chaff like a cloud will be borne away on the wind, even from places where we see only floors of rich wheat. All who assume the ornaments of the sanctuary, but are not clothed with Christ's righteousness, will appear in the shame of their own nakedness."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 81.

Study Luke 3:16, 17 in relationship to verses 7-14. What do verses 7-14 tell us about the nature of Christ's righteousness? How do verses 7-14 inform us regarding the basis of the sifting referred to in verse 17?

What steps can you begin taking now to be sure that the shaking will consolidate your relationship with Christ?

THE SHAKING CONSUMMATED (Amos 9:9-11).

How will the shaking ultimately affect the church? Amos 9:9-11.

The church is not destroyed by the shaking; those members who remain do so because of their relationship with Christ. Thus the way is paved for the church militant to become the church triumphant. (See lesson 13.)

Appearances do not mean much. "The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out—the chaff separated from the precious wheat. This is a terrible ordeal, but nevertheless it must take place. None but those who have been overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony will be found with the loyal and true, without spot or stain of sin, without guile in their mouths. We must be divested of our self-righteousness and arrayed in the righteousness of Christ."—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 380.

Understanding that the sifting is necessary shields us from a false concept of the shaking, a concept that Satan very much wants us to believe: "You will take passages in the Testimonies that speak of the close of probation, of the shaking among God's people, and you will talk of a coming out from this people of a purer, holier people that will arise. Now all this pleases the enemy."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 179.

What strength will God's people have during even the most advanced stages of the shaking? Ps. 46:1-5; Heb. 12:26-28.

"When the storm of persecution really breaks upon us, the true sheep will hear the true Shepherd's voice. Self-denying efforts will be put forth to save the lost, and many who have strayed from the fold will come back to follow the great Shepherd. The people of God will draw together and present to the enemy a united front. In view of the common peril, strife for supremacy will cease; there will be no disputing as to who shall be accounted greatest. . . . Then will the message of the third angel swell to a loud cry, and the whole earth will be lightened with the glory of the Lord."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 401.

"Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number take their stand upon the Lord's side."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

FURTHER STUDY: Read "The Shaking" in *Last Day Events*, pp. 172-182. Consider what susceptibilities and weaknesses you may have that would endanger you during this time.

Find in Ezekiel 37:1-14 how the Holy Spirit can give you victory during the shaking.

"Fellow Christian, Satan knows your weakness; therefore cling to Jesus. Abiding in God's love, you may stand every test. The righteousness of Christ alone can give you power to stem the tide of evil that is sweeping over the world. Bring faith into your experience. Faith lightens every burden, relieves every weariness. Providences that are now mysterious you may solve by continued trust in God. Walk by faith in the path He marks out. Trials will come, but go forward. This will strengthen your faith and fit you for service. The records of sacred history are written, not merely that we may read and wonder, but that the same faith which wrought in God's servants of old may work in us. In no less marked manner will the Lord work now, wherever there are hearts of faith to be channels of His power."
—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 175.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is an accurate knowledge of doctrine not sufficient to fortify us against deception and apostasy? (See James 1:22-27; 1 John 3:11-20.)
2. A popular speaker in the church departs from the faith that he once taught. You were often blessed by the messages of this speaker. Some fellow believers who were once a strong encouragement to you leave the church to join a Sunday-keeping fellowship in which they joyfully declare themselves to be "set free" in Christ. Meanwhile, your local congregation is confused and divided on some basic doctrinal issues. What will keep *you* from being shaken out of the church? (See Ps. 125:1, 2.)

SUMMARY: God purifies His church through the shaking. Laodicean lukewarmness, heresies, the straight testimony of the True Witness, and persecution are the principal causes for the shaking. But the church does not disintegrate. Instead, the falsehearted leave its fellowship, while the consecrated remain, their experience deepened and purified by the trial.



Seeking Searching Hearts in China

Eugene Hsu

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Wu Lan Ying is a 72-year-old retired teacher in China. She may have retired from teaching school, but not from teaching others about Christ. Born into a Christian family, her father and uncle were among the first to become Adventists in her home village. She married and bore six children before her husband died at age 28.

Wu Lan taught school in a remote mountain area to support her young family, retiring in 1979 to devote her time to working for he Lord in her community. And her efforts have born fruit in tremendous growth in the Adventist church in that area.

She moved to an area where she was the only Adventist. She began worships in her home. Soon neighbors began to join her for worship. Within a year more than 100 people were attending the house church.

People began asking for Bible studies and baptism. This presented a problem, for there were no Adventist pastors or elders in the area. The only pastors authorized to baptize were from the official Three-Self church. And baptism by one of these pastors meant joining the Three-Self church.

After prayerful searching, Wu Lan decided to baptize them herself. So far Sister Wu has baptized more than 800 people into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She has established six churches, including one with about 500 members in the next province, and more than 10 house worship groups in the area.

The church in Sister Wu's area has continued to grow in size and strength, and now has more than 2,000 members. Four laymen have been trained and ordained as local elders, and another 12 have trained to become deacons. Thus Sister Wu now has spiritual leaders to assist her. But so far she has not slowed down in her work for God.

"I don't pay any attention to what people say. I only do what God wants me to do," she said.

Wu Lan Ying (right) lives and works in Southeastern China. Dr. Eugene Hsu is director of the Eastern Asia Association, located in Hong Kong.



For Current Newsbreak, Call 1-800-648-5824.

The Church Triumphant



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Isa. 60:1-3; Dan. 12:1-3; Zech. 2:7-13; Rev. 19:7-9.

MEMORY TEXT: "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" (Song of Solomon 6:10).

KEY QUESTION: When and how does the church militant become the church triumphant?

VICTORY! William A. Ward once said, "God wants us to be victors, not victims; to grow, not grovel; to soar, not sink; to overcome, not to be overwhelmed." This sounds much like God's vision for the church triumphant.

Knowing that the power of Calvary's love ultimately proves invincible, the church militant boldly, bravely, and humbly exhibits the righteousness of Christ amid apostasy. Those who receive Christ as Saviour and Lord not only gain victory over sin but are also knit together in fellowship with heaven to work for the salvation of others. When all that God's grace can do for the church and for others has been accomplished, Christ will return to claim it as His bride. Then, "the church triumphant will emerge. At that time He will be able to present 'to himself a glorious church,' the faithful of all ages, the purchase of His blood, 'not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:27)."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 141.

As you study this week's lesson, remember that God wants *you* to be a victor and that through the power of His grace you can be just that!

GUIDED BY GOD (Ps. 32:8; John 16:13).

A marked feature of the church in the wilderness was God's direct and visible guidance (Ps. 78:52). He governed their itinerary with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Thus, their movements were never random or arbitrary. Moreover, wherever the Lord bade the children of Israel to encamp, He manifested His presence in the cloud, which hovered over the sanctuary until He planned for them to move to another place. God's last-day church receives guidance no less sure.

List some of God's promises to guide and protect His remnant church. On what conditions does He fulfill these promises? Ps. 25:9, 10; 32:8; 119:105; John 16:13.

As the church trusts in God's will and Word, revelations of Christ's righteousness will illuminate the hearts of the faithful and bless their endeavors to fulfill the gospel commission.

"The Word of God illuminates the way so that men may walk safely in the spiritual darkness of this world. He who has this light to guide him need not stumble even though his path is beset with evil."
—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 902.

The church militant triumphs as it follows the Captain of its salvation in His campaign to rescue all who consent to be freed from Satan's bondage. Members of the church are Christ's support troops in the final and most intensive phase of His campaign.

What promise of guidance especially sustains the church in the last days of its work? Matt. 28:18-20; Heb. 13:5, 6.

"The work is soon to close. The members of the church militant who have proved faithful will become the church triumphant. In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Oct. 12, 1905.

How have you already experienced God's guidance in your life? Are you confident that God is guiding His church now and that He will continue guiding it in the future? If so, what is the basis of your confidence?

PURIFIED BY GOD (Rev. 7:13, 14).

How does God purify His church?

Eph. 5:25-27 _____

Heb. 10:19-23 _____

1 John 1:7 _____

Rev. 7:13, 14 _____

Washed their robes. "The reason for the purity of the robes is given. The saints are triumphant, not on their own account, but because of the victory won by Christ on Calvary. . . . The close connection between righteousness and victory—both symbolized by white garments . . . —is demonstrated here. The battle is against sin; righteousness is the victory; Christ's righteousness has won the victory; and upon accepting His righteousness sinners become both righteous and victorious."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 785.

The pattern God's people are to follow is the character of Christ. They rejoice in their adoption as His children, recognizing as they mature in their fellowship with Jesus how deeply His blood needs to be applied to their lives. Their appreciation of Christ's atonement is at the very center of their experience, motivating them to advance with the assistance of the Holy Spirit from faith to faith, from strength to strength, from glory to glory. Knowing how desperately they need purification, the church members thankfully accept His offer.

"Let the church commence the work of purification before God by repentance, humiliation, deep heart searching, for we are in the antitypical day of atonement—solemn hour fraught with eternal results."—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 378. (See Joel 2:15-23; James 4:4-10.)

When will the purification process be made complete? Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43.

Contemplate the end result of God's purification process. Jer. 50:20.

EMPOWERED BY GOD (Ps. 110:3).

How does God promise to empower the church so it will triumph? Eph. 3:16-21.

“The church is God’s agency for the proclamation of truth, empowered by Him to do a special work; and if she is loyal to Him, obedient to all His commandments, there will dwell within her the excellency of divine grace. If she will be true to her allegiance, if she will honor the Lord God of Israel, there is no power that can stand against her.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 600.

What spirit or attitude must the church have if it is to be triumphant? Ps. 110:3; Rev. 12:11, 17.

God’s people will fearlessly press the battle forward. Glorious rescues from Babylon will be made. The faithfuls’ courage and gentleness will give strength to many once-fearful slaves of tradition who loved the truth but were too timid to take an open, unyielding stand for Jesus.

More than one hundred years ago, an earthquake disrupted the citizens of a small seashore village in Japan. But because the people were used to them, they quickly resumed their daily lives. On a plain above the village resided a rice farmer who, after the quake, observed that the sea looked dark and was moving against the wind. Knowing what this meant, he longed to warn the people living in the village. “Bring me a torch! Quickly!” he called to his grandson. The man rushed with the torch to his rice, harvested and ready for market. As the dry stalks erupted into a conflagration, the bell from the temple alerted the villagers to the fire. Up the cliff they scrambled to help their neighbor.

“As they reached the plain, the old man shouted back at the top of his voice, ‘Look!’ At the edge of the horizon they saw a long, lean, dim line—a line that thickened as they gazed. That line was the sea, rising like a high wall and coming more swiftly than a kite flies. . . .

“On the plain no word was spoken. Then the voice of the old man was heard, saying gently, ‘That is why I set fire to the rice.’ He stood among them almost as poor as the poorest, for his wealth was gone—but he had saved 400 lives by the sacrifice.”—Larson, *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching*, p. 201; adapted.

Pray daily that God will empower you to save souls, no matter what the cost.

PRESERVED AND DELIVERED BY GOD (Ps. 91:14-16).

How do the following promises of protection and deliverance inspire you? Ps. 27:5, 6; 34:19; 91:1-16.

These are only a few of God's promises to protect us from the enemy. These promises are not contradicted by martyrdom, for Satan and his hosts can go no farther than killing the body. They cannot rob God's children of their heavenly inheritance (Matt.10:28-33; Heb. 11:32-40).

In Romans 8:31-39, Paul declares his confidence that nothing can separate us from God's love unless we allow it. Paul bases his confidence on the fact that when God gave us His Son, He gave us Himself, thus showing how willing He is to save us. "Surely, then, no matter what trials may come, we should never doubt that God is ever working for us and that He will give us all that is necessary for our present and future good."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 577.

How will Christ rescue His people in their last hours on this earth? Dan. 12:1-3; Matt. 24:30, 31; Rev. 19:11-20.

Ellen White reported the following as it was given to her in vision: "It was at midnight that God chose to deliver His people. As the wicked were mocking around them, suddenly the sun appeared, shining in his strength. . . . The wicked looked upon the scene with amazement, while the saints beheld with solemn joy the tokens of their deliverance. . . . Dark, heavy clouds came up and clashed against each other. But there was one clear place of settled glory, whence came the voice of God like many waters, shaking the heavens and the earth. There was a mighty earthquake. The graves were opened, and those who had died in faith under the third angel's message, keeping the Sabbath, came forth from their dusty beds, glorified, to hear the covenant of peace that God was to make with those who had kept His law. . . ."

"The Israel of God stood with their eyes fixed upward, listening to the words as they came from the mouth of Jehovah and rolled through the earth like peals of loudest thunder. It was awfully solemn. At the end of every sentence the saints shouted, 'Glory! Hallelujah!' Their countenances were lighted up with the glory of God."—*Early Writings*, pp. 285, 286.

How should God's promises affect the way we view trials and temptation? How has God already preserved you?

GLORIFIED AND TRANSLATED BY GOD (1 Cor. 15:51-58).

When God comes to deliver the final generation of His faithful people, what other event also occurs? 1 Thess. 4:15-17; 1 Cor. 15:50-57.

Ellen White reports these sights and sounds from a vision she received: "Soon I heard the voice of God, which shook the heavens and the earth. There was a mighty earthquake. Buildings were shaken down on every side. I then heard a triumphant shout of victory, loud, musical, and clear. I looked upon the company, who, a short time before, were in such distress and bondage. Their captivity was turned. . . . Their enemies, the heathen around them, fell like dead men; they could not endure the light that shone upon the delivered, holy ones. This light and glory remained upon them, until Jesus was seen in the clouds of heaven, and the faithful, tried company were changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, from glory to glory. And the graves were opened, and the saints came forth, clothed with immortality, crying, 'Victory over death and the grave'; and together with the living saints they were caught up to meet their Lord in the air."—*Early Writings*, pp. 272, 273.

Why will the joy of the saints be complete as they ascend heavenward with Christ and His angels? Ps. 126:1-6; 1 Thess. 2:19, 20; 3 John 3, 4.

The widow's mite, the hungry boy's five loaves and two fish, Mary's alabaster box—all have encouraged countless numbers of people to participate in God's service. How these three will rejoice in heaven when they behold the outcome of their simple, yet meaningful actions. Likewise, we can only imagine the effect our seemingly insignificant, daily acts of service will have on others. In heaven we will meet the people we have fed, sheltered, clothed, nursed, encouraged, educated, and prayed for or with. "What rejoicing there will be as these redeemed ones meet and greet those who have had a burden in their behalf! And those who have lived, not to please themselves, but to be a blessing to the unfortunate who have so few blessings—how their hearts will thrill with satisfaction! They will realize the promise: 'Thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.'"—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 312.

This is the church triumphant!

FURTHER STUDY: Project yourself into the description of the saints' deliverance portrayed in the chapter "God's People Delivered," *The Great Controversy*, pp. 635-652. In your mind, contrast the destiny of the saved and that of the lost, and resolve anew to remain unshakably loyal to Christ and His gospel. Or read Revelation 21 and 22, and contemplate the glory of being in the New Jerusalem. Consider the priorities you might need to reorganize if truly "your citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20, NIV).

"Through them [His people] the Sun of Righteousness will shine with undimmed luster to the world. Christ has given to His church ample facilities, that He may receive a large revenue of glory from His redeemed, purchased possession. He has bestowed upon His people capabilities and blessings that they may represent His own sufficiency. The church, endowed with the righteousness of Christ, is His depository, in which the riches of His mercy, His grace, and His love, are to appear in full and final display. Christ looks upon His people in their purity and perfection, as the reward of His humiliation, and the supplement of His glory."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 680.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Carefully review the character description of the 144,000 in Revelation 14:1-5. What changes will you have to make in order to follow the Lamb wherever He goes?
2. Discuss the idea of covenanting as a class to pray daily for the latter rain. What part will the experience described in Revelation 12:11 have in obtaining the latter rain?
3. After studying this week's lesson, how would you answer the Key Question in Sabbath Afternoon's lesson?

SUMMARY: Guided, empowered, and protected by God, the church will be enveloped with Christ's glory at His second coming. Because each member will be clothed with Christ's righteousness—the full manifestation of His indwelling power in every believer's heart—He will be able to take them to heaven, where there will be no more sorrow, death, or pain and where God Himself shall wipe away every tear (Rev. 21:4). "Glory to God in the highest."

My God Hears!

James Zachary

She was a Hindu, but she married a Christian. Her family and Hindu priest told her that her god would punish her if she became a Christian. Obediently, she continued to cling to Hinduism.

Then she became ill with jaundice. Local remedies did not help her. One day in desperation her husband, Stephen, told her, "My God is the living God. He can heal you. Please pray with me. My God will hear your prayers." They knelt together and prayed for her healing.

The next day Stephen met a woman from a distant village. She told him of a Christian teacher who treats jaundice with a medicine he prepares from a certain plant. When he applies the medicine, he prays to Jesus, and the sick are cured from their jaundice. The couple went to see this Christian teacher and receive treatments. For ten days Stephen's wife received daily treatments and prayed with her husband and the Christian teacher. She was healed. She decided to follow her husband in Christianity.

Her family greeted her decision with anger. "We are Brahmans [the highest class of Hindus]. But look at you! You have gotten rid of all of your jewelry! You go to a Christian church. You are a disgrace to our family. We don't want to see you again without your jewelry and your *kukum* [the red dot on the forehead]."

But Stephen's wife had renounced her Hindu past and had taken a Christian name—Rachel. She is determined to remain faithful to Jesus, her new friend. She supports her husband, who is a full-time lay preacher. In just four months Stephen and his pastor won 40 people to the Lord in Bombay, India. "With the Lord's help, we will have another 60 before long," Stephen said.

Rachel goes from home to home with her husband, telling her powerful testimony of what Jesus has done for her. "I know that the Christian God hears my prayers. He is my best Friend," she smiles. "I was a Hindu, but now I believe in Jesus. I have experienced Him in my life. He has brought me along a good path. He will be with us forever."



James Zachary serves as global evangelism coordinator for the Quiet Hour. Rachel (left) and her husband, Stephen Tode, in the Bombay area of India.

Lessons for First Quarter, 1997

The first quarter's lessons are entitled *Spiritual Gifts, Keys to Ministry*. The lessons focus on the New Testament doctrine of spiritual gifts.

Lesson 1: What the Bible Says About Spiritual Gifts

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Peter 4:10, 11; Matt. 25: 14-30; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Rom. 12:1-8.

MEMORY TEXT: 1 Peter 4:10.

KEY THOUGHT: The Bible outlines what spiritual gifts are and how they work.

OUTLINE:

- Grace in Action (1 Peter 4:10).
- Equipping for Action (Eph. 4:12).
- The Body Analogy (Rom. 12:1, 2).
- Spiritual Gifts and the Call to Discipleship (Rom. 12).
- Talents and Gifts

Lesson 2: The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 1:1-26; 2:1, 2; 13:2-4; Ps. 68:28-35; John 16.

MEMORY TEXT: Luke 11:13.

KEY THOUGHT: The Holy Spirit is the effective agent in accomplishing the work of the church in the world.

OUTLINE:

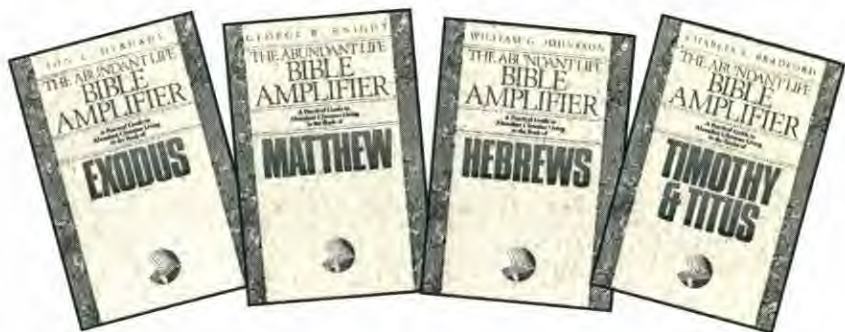
- The Holy Spirit: Church Administrator (Acts 13:2-4).
- The Holy Spirit: Source of Power (Acts 1:8).
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SOUTH PACIFIC DIVISION



| Conferences/Missions | Churches | Membership | Population |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Central Pacific Union Mission | 191 | 27,073 | 1,345,400 |
| Papua New Guinea Union Mission | 666 | 160,656 | 4,100,000 |
| Trans-Australian Union Conference | 192 | 20,377 | 9,225,000 |
| Trans-Tasman Union Conference | 297 | 38,064 | 11,806,000 |
| Western Pacific Union Mission | 242 | 35,395 | 716,300 |
| Totals June 30, 1995 | 1,588 | 281,565 | 27,192,700 |

Mission Projects:

1. A new men's dormitory at Kabiufa High School, Papua New Guinea.
2. A new men's dormitory at Sonoma College, Papua New Guinea (near Rabaul, on the island of New Britain).