

HEBREWS - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
- b. Why did He record it for our study?

“To be permitted to have a view of God is the highest privilege accorded to man. This privilege should be prized above all earthly distinction or honor.” *ST*, June 16, 1898

1. What picture of God would you have if you had only the book of Hebrews? If you had only the ceremonial law to go by? Who do you think wrote Hebrews? To whom was it written? When was it written? When quoting the Old Testament, why did the author of Hebrews quote the Greek Septuagint (*LXX*) almost word for word? Do you think Paul could have written this book to some of the people who had been going around trying to make his Gentile converts into Jews? (See Galatians 1:6-10; 3:1.)

The Book of Hebrews is the only truly anonymous book in the New Testament canon. Clement of Alexandria (circa. A.D. 150–215) referred to Paul as the author but argued that Luke translated the book into Greek. Origen (circa. A.D. 185–253) concluded that the thoughts were those of Paul but that the phraseology and composition were those of someone who was recalling the apostle's teachings (e.g., Clement of Rome or Luke). Many others are suggested as the possible author: Barnabas (by Tertullian), Apollos (by Luther), Philip the evangelist (by William Ramsay), Priscilla and Aquila (by Adolf Harnack). Origen's famous remark still stands: “Who the author of the epistle is, God truly knows.” (*Believer's Study Bible*)

The authorship of Hebrews has been in dispute since early times. While many attributed the book to Paul, others dissented vigorously. Origen, one of the early Fathers, concluded his examination of the book with the declaration, “Who wrote the epistle, in truth God knows” (quoted by Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* vi. 25. 14; Loeb ed., vol. 2, p. 79). Other Fathers thought Barnabas, Apollos, Clement, or Luke to be the author.

This uncertainty in regard to the authorship of Hebrews was a major factor in the reluctance of many early Christians in the western part of the Roman Empire to accept the epistle as canonical. It was, in fact, not until the latter part of the 4th century that Hebrews came to be accepted generally in the West. During the following centuries the discussion regarding the authorship of Hebrews ceased, and most Christians accepted it as the work of Paul. This view was generally held until comparatively modern times, when the question again came under scholarly discussion. As late as 1885 the *RV* ascribes Hebrews to Paul, but at the present time few critics hold this view.—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 7. 1980 (F. D. Nichol, Ed.) (387). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Ellen White supports the idea that Paul wrote Hebrews. (*The Great Controversy* 346; 411-413; 417; 420-421; 436; 511; *5T* 651; *8T* 79; *IHP* 268; *MH* 167; *PP* 294, 357; *UL* 111;

53RH 10/18/81; 3/7/12; SW 3/1/04; PH069 p. 11; 11MR 232; 12MR 12; 1888 p 307; SpM 292)

From a broader standpoint, the general literary style of Hebrews is notably different from that of any of the epistles that bear the name of Paul. The style of the latter is marked indelibly by effervescent yet fervent passages that reveal the surging torrent of the author's thoughts at the expense of polished literary style. Hebrews, on the other hand, presents a thoroughly organized argument, and maintains the highest rhetorical level of any NT book. This marked difference in style was noted by writers of the early church, for whom *Koine* Greek was the native language. Clement of Alexandria (died c. A.D. 215; cited by Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* vi. 14.2–3) suggests that Paul wrote Hebrews in Hebrew, and that Luke translated it into Greek. Although such an explanation is ruled out by the fact that Hebrews contains a number of plays on Greek words that could not have been translated from another language, yet Clement's statement is significant in that it implies the recognition that the Greek of Hebrews does not appear to be the Greek of Paul. Origen (died c. A.D. 254), one of the prominent scholars of the early church, likewise recognized the difficulty of harmonizing the style of Hebrews with that of Paul. His solution was "that the thoughts are the apostle's, but that the style and composition belong to one who called to mind the apostle's teachings and, as it were, made short notes of what his master said" (quoted by Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* vi. 25. 13; Loeb ed. vol. 2, pp. 77, 79).—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 7. 1980 (F. D. Nichol, Ed.) (388). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

It is thought that Hebrews 13:24 suggests that the book was written from Italy (Rome).

Clement of Rome was acquainted with the letter about A.D. 95, for in writing to the Corinthians at that time he quoted Hebrews 1:3-14 (Clement *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 36). This proves not only that the letter was known in Rome before the end of the 1st century, but also that its origin must be sought in the apostolic era.—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 6. 1980 (F. D. Nichol, Ed.) (106). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

It is unlikely that a book written all about the Hebrew's religious services would not mention the destruction of Jerusalem if that event had already occurred. Thus, the book was most likely written before A.D. 70. Based on these considerations, the book was probably written near the end of Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, about the year A.D. 63. Since much of the vocabulary is similar to other books written by Luke, it is possible that Paul provided the ideas and Luke did the writing. Since they were almost inseparable near the end of Paul's life, this seems quite likely. It would help to explain the very careful quotations from the Greek Septuagint (*LXX*) as opposed to the more free translations from the Hebrew sometimes found in Paul's other writings.

It is possible that Paul had some idea—perhaps even based on Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21—that Jerusalem was soon to be destroyed. He wanted to turn the thoughts of Jewish Christians (his "relatives" by birth; see Romans 9-11) away from the mere earthly

sanctuary and temple to a higher vision of the heavenly. This would help to sustain their faith through the trying times ahead when Jerusalem would be totally destroyed.

The book of Hebrews deals to a great extent with the meaning and significance of the Old Testament ceremonial system. There is no other issue in New Testament times that produced more opposition and difference of opinion. Paul seemed to have recognized that the ceremonial law had served its purpose (See Colossians 2:16-17.) and was no longer binding while most of the Jewish Christians thought that it was still necessary, at least for Jewish believers. (Acts 21:20-25)

The theme of the book of Hebrews seems to be a comparison between the Old Testament symbols by which God had previously presented the plan of salvation to His people and the New Testament reality of the ministry, life, and death of Jesus Christ.

The Letter to the Hebrews was written to a group of Christians who, faced with increasing opposition, were in danger of abandoning the Christian faith. The writer encourages them in their faith primarily by showing that Jesus Christ is the true and final revelation of God. In doing this he emphasizes three truths: 1) Jesus is the eternal Son of God, who learned true obedience to the Father through the suffering that he endured. As the Son of God, Jesus is superior to the prophets of the Old Testament, to the angels, and to Moses himself. 2) Jesus has been declared by God to be an eternal priest, superior to the priests of the Old Testament. 3) Through Jesus the believer is saved from sin, fear, and death; and Jesus, as High Priest, provides the true salvation, which was only foreshadowed by the rituals and animal sacrifices of the Hebrew religion.

By citing the example of the faith of some famous persons in Israel's history (Hebrews 11), the writer appeals to his readers to remain faithful, and in Hebrews 12 he urges his readers to continue faithful to the end, with eyes fixed on Jesus, and to endure whatever suffering and persecution may come to them. The book closes with words of advice and warning. (Introduction to Hebrews - *Good News Bible*) [Bold type is added.]

Hebrews

It seems odd to have to say so, but too much religion is a bad thing. We can't get too much of God, can't get too much faith and obedience, can't get too much love and worship. But *religion*—the well-intentioned efforts we make to “get it all together” for God—can very well get in the way of what God is doing for us. The main and central action is everywhere and always *what God has done, is doing, and will do for us*. Jesus is the revelation of that action. Our main and central task is to live in responsive obedience to God's action revealed in Jesus. Our part in the action is the act of faith.

But more often than not we become impatiently self-important along the way and decide to improve matters with our two cents' worth. We add on, we supplement, we embellish. But instead of improving on the purity and

simplicity of Jesus, we dilute the purity, clutter the simplicity. We become fussily religious, or anxiously religious. We get in the way.

That's when it's time to read and pray our way through the letter to the Hebrews again, written for "too religious" Christians, for "Jesus-and" Christians. In the letter, it is Jesus-and-angels, or Jesus-and-Moses, or Jesus-and-priesthood. In our time it is more likely to be Jesus-and-politics, or Jesus-and-education, or even Jesus-and-Buddha. This letter deletes the hyphens, the add-ons. The focus becomes clear and sharp again: God's action in Jesus. And we are free once more for the act of faith, the one human action in which we don't get *in* the way but *on* the Way. (Introduction to Hebrews - *The Message*)

2. Read Hebrews 1:1-2. The author of Hebrews (the available evidence suggests that it was Paul working with Luke) wasted no time in making it clear that **the purpose of this book was to compare Jesus with all of the Hebrew "saints" whose actions were delineated in the Old Testament and even to the "system" of the Old Testament. How would you compare Jesus to the Old Testament?**

This is a thought question. **First of all, we need to recognize that the God of the Old Testament was Jesus. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Luke 24:44; John 5:39-40)** Many of the Old Testament "heroes" lived in very difficult times. There were times when God found it necessary to put to sleep thousands and perhaps even millions of His children. (Genesis 6-8; Exodus 12:29-36; 2 Kings 19:35) These occasions were usually following a time when there was a direct challenge to God's authority. **At the time of the flood, God needed to take action because He was losing contact with the human race.**

By contrast, when Jesus came to this earth, He lived among us as a Human Being. He came to represent the Father. (John 14:7-12; 17:21) One of His main tasks was to show us how loving and caring God really is. Small children sat on His lap and reached up to kiss His face. (3T 422.1; GW92 261.3) It was not His job to wipe out sin or conquer nations. The circumstances made the difference in how He acted. But, we must always remember that the God/Jesus of the Old Testament is the same Person as the Jesus of the New Testament; when deciding what kind of Person God is and how He would act in a given situation, we must consider both testaments. What does that tell us about God and how He wants to relate to us as human beings?

3. How did Jesus "achieve forgiveness for the sins of mankind" and "do away with sin"? (Hebrews 1:3; Romans 8:3)

It was clearly recognized by even the Pharisees that only God has the right to forgive sins. (Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21) Jesus did not argue with them but proceeded to heal the paralyzed victim, proving that He was God and that He could forgive sins! (Mark 2:8-12; Luke 5:22-26) And that was before He had died on the cross! He also forgave those who were crucifying Him even though they did not ask for forgiveness! (Luke 23:34) We must assume that Christ as God had forgiven these soldiers Himself, or He could not have asked the Father to do so! This would suggest that it was not just by His death that He brought forgiveness to mankind.

This passage should be compared with Romans 8:3 where it is suggested that:

What the law could not do, because human nature was weak, God did. He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like our sinful nature, **to do away with sin**. (Romans 8:3, *GNB*) [Bold type is added.]

No one has to plead with God to get Him to forgive us of our sins. (John 16:25-27) By demonstrating the truth about God, the life and death of Jesus makes us want to be His friends. Thus, God deals with sin. He does that not by some legal maneuver but by actually changing people and then recognizing that we have been changed. He will ignore our past sins if we are willing to live a new life with Him. (2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Hebrews 10:18)

4. Hebrews 1:1-13; John 1:1-4; Philippians 2:5-11; and Colossians 1:15-20 are the four most important texts in the entire Bible on the nature of Christ. What do they tell us about Jesus? (See *Philippians - A Teacher's Guide*, #7) Was there ever a time when Jesus did not exist? (See John 1:1) What event or time period is being referred to in Hebrews 1:5 and Hebrews 5:5 saying, "You are my Son, today I have become your Father"? (Compare Psalms 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 17:13; Acts 13:33.) Was there ever a time when Jesus was "born" as suggested in Hebrews 1:6? What does *first-born* mean in this verse? If worshiping a creature (a created being) is a serious sin, (Romans 1:25) would God tell the angels to worship His Son if He were only a created being? (Hebrews 1:6)

This passage—quoted from Psalms 2:7—has been interpreted in various ways. Some think it refers to Christ's resurrection. In that understanding, it suggests that Christ entered a new relationship at the time of His resurrection, confirming His "Sonship" to God the Father. Others think this passage refers to the entire mission of Christ to this earth. Others believe that the passage refers specifically to the birth (incarnation) of Jesus or to His baptism and the beginning of His ministry. This last fits with the prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27.

The Greek word in Hebrews 1:6 and Colossians 1:18 translated as "first-born Son" is *prototokos* which is found also in Matthew 1:25 (a variant reading in some manuscripts); Luke 2:7; Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15,18; and Revelation 1:5. The emphasis in this expression is that Christ stands as an "Elder Brother," or prototype, the Inheritor of the "birthright" among the family of the saved. This emphasizes the fact that the ultimate purpose of the entire plan is to restore peace and harmony in God's family. Incredible as it may seem, Jesus Christ has lived through the human experience as our Example and now wants us to call Him our Brother. (See Hebrews 2:11.)

There is no suggestion in this passage that Christ was "born" in the sense that a creature is born. There never was a time when He was not. The word simply means that He is pre-eminent in the family as the "eldest Son."

5. What is implied by Hebrews 2:14-15? Who is afraid of death?

Jesus fully entered into the human experience. He even allowed Himself as a human being to die. (Philippians 2:5-11) Thus, He entered into Satan's domain, the domain of death. Satan is the father of death since he was the originator of sin and since sin leads to death. (Romans 6:23) Jesus entered that domain and then broke free from death when He rose from the grave on Sunday morning. Thus, He proved that as God He has power over death. And He took with Him many who arose from their graves at the same time. (Matthew 27:52-53) Thus, He destroyed Satan and his kingdom and assured resurrection

to the faithful. (1 Corinthians 15:20-22,51-57) Thus, Satan himself will ultimately be destroyed. (Revelation 20:10)

Christ was the one who entered the strong man's house (Mark 3:27), bound the enemy, and took away his prisoners. Christ entered the realm of death—Satan's stronghold—and wrested from Satan his prey. When he thought he had Christ in his power, when the tomb was sealed and Christ locked in, Satan exulted. [EW 182.2; DA 782.4] But Christ burst the bonds of death and walked forth from the grave, for "it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:24). Not only did Christ Himself rise, but "the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection" (Matt. 27:52,53). And so, though the "strong man armed keepeth his palace, ... a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him" (Luke 11:21,22). The stronger man, Christ, entered the realm of death, and in death overcame him who had the power of death, took away his captives, and spoiled his house (Matt. 12:29); "and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). Henceforth, death for the believers is but a sleep; they rest in peace until God calls them. For many it will even be a blessed sleep (Rev. 14:13). Christ "hath abolished death" (2 Tim. 1:10). He has "the keys of hell and of death." (Rev. 1:18; cf. 1 Cor. 15:51–57)—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 7. 1980 (F. D. Nichol, Ed.) (406). Review and Herald Publishing Association. [Content in brackets is added.]

6. **In the light of Hebrews 2:17-18 and Hebrews 4:14-15, should we believe that there are some things about humans that Jesus understands better than the Father or the Holy Spirit, and that this is why Christ has been chosen as our High Priest? Does Christ need to plead with the Father to get Him to accept us humans into heaven? (See John 16:25-27.)**

If there are some things that the Son as a result of His human experience understands better than the Father, then God (the Father) cannot be considered omniscient. (Psalm 139:1-18; Hebrews 4:12-13) Neither would it be correct to say that the Father and the Son are One. (John 12:45; 14:9; 17:11,21) The point in these passages is that Christ came to help us realize that **God understands our situation**. We can realize that Christ fully experienced and understands our every trial and temptation. The Father completely and fully understands and sympathizes with us as well. But, we may not think that we can relate to Him in the same way as we can to the Son who lived among us. We must realize that if the Father had come instead of the Son, nothing would have been different. We must never create in our minds a barrier or separation or difference between the Members of the Godhead.

Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, humbling Himself, veiling His glory, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed...In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it

is the voice and movements of the Father.—Ellen G. White, *Letter 83* (1895); *That I May Know Him* 338; *21MR* 393. [Bold type is added.]

Christ became human not so that God could understand us better. Instead, Christ became human so that we could understand Him better. It is hard for us to relate to Someone or something that we cannot see, feel, touch, smell, or hear. (1 John 1:1-4) So, God came in human form so we could come to know what He is like. (John 1; 14:9; 16:25-27; Philippians 2; Colossians 1; Hebrews 1) Through Christ, God provides evidence to prove His claims. He would never ask us to believe without providing adequate evidence. (SC 105)

7. Read Hebrews 3:1-6. What is the relationship between Jesus the Leader of the New Testament Christian church and Moses the founder of the Hebrew nation and original writer of the Old Testament?

After comparing Jesus to the angels and showing His superiority to them, the author turns to Moses the founder of the Jewish nation. Moses had predicted that a “Prophet” would come that would be like himself. (Deuteronomy 18:15,18-19) But, Jesus created all of us, and that includes Moses as well. So, just as Jesus is superior to angels, He is superior to Moses and all that he accomplished. In fact, Jesus was the God who led Moses and the people out of Egypt as Paul had already pointed out in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. (Compare Luke 24:44; John 5:39-40,45-46.) Clearly then, this new Prophet will lead a new group of people into a new relationship with Himself. Our picture of Jesus must include the fact that He is the God of the Old Testament as well as the Savior of the New Testament.

8. What are we supposed to learn from the story of Moses and the children of Israel who came out of Egypt? (Hebrews 3) Could we be guilty of the same stubbornness that they exhibited and, therefore, died in the desert?

The people of Israel left Egypt with great hope. With a great leader like Moses and God (Jesus) leading them, it seemed that they could not fail. But, within a very short time and even after that magnificent display on Mount Sinai, they rebelled and turned back to worshiping a golden calf. (Exodus 32) Why did they do that? In fact, every time they were asked to exercise a little faith, they failed. (Numbers 13; 14; 16; 20:1-13; 21:4-9; 25) That whole generation died in the wilderness. And their children were really no better. But, God could not wait any longer to get them into the land that He had promised to them; so, He led them into that land under the guidance of Joshua. And the rest of the Old Testament is the story of the roller coaster ride of the ups and downs of their relationship with God. (See for example Judges 2 and 3.)

David realized all of this and commented on it in Psalm 95:7-11. (Compare Psalm 81:5-16.) The author of Hebrews quotes those verses in support of his claim that the people of Israel, despite entering the land of Canaan, never really experienced that rest that God wanted to give them and would have given them if they had faithfully followed His instructions. David called for the people in his day to enter that rest; for a while under the rule of David and the early years of Solomon, they did a fair job of it.

But, the rest of the story of the Old Testament is a very sad commentary of deterioration and rebellion. The good news for us is that the “rest” which God promised is still available today under the same conditions. Whenever people turn away from God, He

faithfully pursues them until He sees that there is no longer any chance that they will come back to Him. Only then does He allow them to reap the consequences of their rebellion. That sequence is what the Bible describes as “God’s wrath.” So, how will we respond to God’s appeals in our day? Will we respond in faith? Or, will we too experience God’s wrath?

9. **What is the Sabbath-like rest that the Hebrews failed to enter into but which is still available to us? (Hebrews 4:8-10)** What barrier exists between God and man that is most likely to prevent rest and peace? Is there anything you know about God, or that He knows about you that makes you uneasy?

God’s original promise to Israel included at least the following: 1) Permanent settlement in Canaan; 2) A change in character that would make them truly representatives of God’s character and principles; and 3) The opportunity and responsibility to be God’s chosen instruments and representatives for the salvation of the world. The first generation to whom those promises were made died in the wilderness. The next generation clearly failed to enter into the spiritual relationship with God that was intended. The promise was repeated in the days of David. (Psalm 95:7-11; Hebrews 4:7) But, the outcome was the same. The promise is still open to those who will meet the requirements.

God still appeals to us to enter into the kind of relationship of “rest” that will result in a ceasing from all our struggles on this earth. God is asking us to enter not just into the Sabbath-day’s rest that was well recognized by the Hebrews to whom Paul was writing, but also to accept God’s full promise and enter into the final and complete “Sabbath-like rest” (*sabbatismos*) that comes from becoming fully His. (Psalms 119:165)

Where did Paul get this idea of rest? One of the most dramatic places is in the book of Isaiah which Paul had certainly studied and perhaps had memorized in the original Hebrew. In Isaiah 30, look at this illustration of rest, what makes that rest possible, and how it can be lost.

J. B. Phillips did a marvelous translation into modern English of this passage in Isaiah. What do you think of this understanding of God’s rest?

Isaiah 30:1-3 (Phillips): Alas for you, you rebellious children says the Lord who carry out a plan which is none of mine who weave an alliance without My blessing and so add sin to sin. Who set out to go to Egypt without seeking any word from Me, to seek the protection of Pharaoh and shelter in the shadow of Egypt. For the protection shall prove a humiliation. And sheltering in the shadow of Egypt shall prove your undoing.

And that translation goes on to describe what a serious mistake it would be to make an alliance with Egypt, thinking that it would give security, safety, and rest.

But, in verse 8, the prophet goes on.

Isaiah 30:8 (Phillips): Now, go in and inscribe this on a tablet and write it on a scroll to serve as a lasting witness in all the days to come for they are a rebellious people. **Sons who dishonor their Father, children who refuse to hear the teaching of the Lord. Who say to the seers, see nothing, and to the prophets, never tell us what is right. Speak to us pleasant words.**

Prophecy illusions, get out of our way. Leave our path clear. Let us hear no more of the holy one of Israel. [Bold type is added.]

They did not want to hear the truth at all.

Isaiah 30:12 (Phillips): Therefore the holy one of Israel says this. Because you have spurned this warning and put your faith in force and intrigue and have come to rely on them, this guilt of yours will be like the crack which runs down the bulge of a collapsing wall, whose crash comes suddenly in an instant. Like an earthen pot which is smashed beyond repair. So that among the fragments not a single piece can be found big enough to carry fire from the hearth or to scoop water from the well.

For the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel has said, In returning and in rest shall you be saved.

In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. But you would not agree. Instead you answered, no, we must have horses to ride.

Very well, you shall ride, in full retreat. We must have swift horses you say. Your pursuers will be swifter still. A thousand shall flee at the threat of one man and ten thousand at the threat of five til you are left like a flagstaff on top of a mountain or a beacon high on a hill.

But the Lord is waiting to deal kindly with you. His mercy is not yet shown for the Lord is a God of justice. Happy are those who wait patiently for Him. [Bold type is added.]

That is the setting for *rest* in Isaiah 30. In Isaiah 28, he spoke of rest in a similar setting. And always the rest is associated with trusting God because we have found Him so worthy of our trust.

So, to see God as He really is, is the basis of that rest into which Israel never entered. They never really trusted Him. They never were convinced that He was the kind of Person many of us believe Him to be.

Don't you agree with Isaiah and Paul that this is the kind of rest into which we all need to enter? But, if we are involved in the great controversy, how can that be called a rest? This rest is not the kind of experience that one might have on a vacation! This rest means that our trust and faith are fully and completely in God; nothing the Devil or his angels can do is able to shake us. (4SDABC 1181.6) When we become fully and irreversibly on God's side, we may even become martyrs—as were many of the early disciples and apostles—but our firm trust is in our God who will raise us to life again when He comes. Even death no longer scares us. (Hebrews 2:15; Acts 4:8-22) Recognizing all this, what would happen if we put forth the kind of effort that Paul did to prepare ourselves and others for our future “retirement” in heaven. Do we work as hard for that retirement as we do for our earthly retirement? What would happen if we did?

10. Read Hebrews 4:12-13. What was the author trying to tell us in this apparently sudden switch in his discussion? What does God's ability to judge say to us about entering into God's rest?

Hebrews warns us not to rely on a superficial obedience to God and His Word; we are not to follow the example of the people in the Old Testament. God's judgment will be precise and accurate, taking into account even our motives, our desires, and our thoughts. Nothing can be hidden from God. He is omniscient. (1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Revelation 20:12-13; Psalms 7:9; 26:2; 33:13-15; 44:21; 139:2; Proverbs 15:11; Jeremiah 11:20) And God's judgment is based on His Word. (John 3:17-21; 12:48; 1 Corinthians 14:24-25)

This is an expansion on the new covenant idea expressed in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and repeated twice later in the book of Hebrews (Hebrews 8:7-13; 10:15-18) that what God really wants and needs from us is a new heart in which is written God's law. People who have God's law written in their hearts will accomplish that by getting to know Him personally and intimately. (John 17) When we have that kind of a relationship with God—recognizing that everything He has asked us to do is for our best good—and we are willing to do our utmost to incorporate God's ideals into every act of life, we can have confidence to approach God's throne. (Hebrews 4:16) Our faithful High Priest is none other than Jesus Himself. And He showed us the kind of life that we should seek to copy. While that may seem like a lot of work to some, it is the only way to enter into the peace and security that God has promised.

11. **Was Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6-7:22. Compare Genesis 14:17-24; Psalms 110:4.) an ordinary man? Then how could he have served as a priest to Abraham, the “father of the faithful”? And if so, why does Hebrews say what it does about him? Where do you suppose this “man” came from?**

The author of Hebrews—we believe it was Paul—turned to comparing Jesus, the Christ/Messiah, to the Old Testament priestly system set up after the people begged for an intercessor between themselves and God. (Exodus 20:18-20) To be a priest in the Jewish system required a very distinct lineage and a call from God. But, the author was claiming that Jesus is the great High Priest of the new covenant/New Testament system. So, he needed to deal with the fact that Jesus came from the tribe of Judah which was supposed to produce Hebrew kings, not priests. (Hebrews 7:13-14) The tribe of Levi was the tribe of priests. How could there be a priest coming from the tribe of Judah? Look at the very powerful and convincing argument given in Hebrews.

Melchizedek is mentioned only in Genesis 14:18-20; Psalms 110:4; and here in the book of Hebrews 5:6; 6:20; 7:17,21. People have suggested that he might have been Christ or the Holy Spirit. Some have thought that perhaps he was Shem, or even someone from another world. Based on all the evidence that we can objectively look at, he was apparently a king of a small principality or kingdom in Abraham's time. He was referred to as the “King of Righteousness” (That is what *Melchizedek* means.) and the King of Peace (Salem). (Hebrews 7:2) Many of the things that are said about him are also said about the Messiah.

Read Psalms 110:4. Why did David, who lived in a time when there was a careful lineage of priests functioning in the sanctuary, talk about God making “my Lord” a priest forever? Who was he talking about? The whole argument in Hebrews 5-7 is based on that one verse in Psalms. Therefore, we need to make sure we understand it. And how could

that Priest serve forever? Even in the days of Jesus, was it clear to the Jews who David was talking about? (Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44)

The statements that Melchizedek had no father or mother and no descendants simply mean that we have no record of those individuals. He is described as being “without genealogy.” (Hebrews 7:3) In order to be a Levitical priest in Israel, one had to have proof of unbroken descent from Levi or Aaron. Otherwise, he could not be a priest. But, Melchizedek preceded both Levi and Aaron, and their father gave offerings to him!

Bible commentators have speculated much about the person of Melchizedek, a priest-king who appears suddenly in the Biblical narrative only to disappear again into the impenetrable obscurity of ancient history. Such speculation is almost entirely without value. **“Melchizedek was not Christ” (EGW, RH, Feb. 18, 1890), but his work prefigured that of Christ (Psalms 110:4; Hebrews 6:20-7:21; DA 578).** His unexpected appearance makes him in a certain sense a timeless figure, and his priesthood a type of the priesthood of Jesus Christ.—Comment on Genesis 14:18. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 1. 1980 (F. D. Nichol, Ed.) (406). Review and Herald Publishing Association. [Bold type is added.]

Before the author of Hebrews could move on into a discussion of the whole Old Testament sacrificial system and its meaning, he had to establish the fact that Jesus Christ our High Priest can even be allowed to function as a High Priest. That is the reason for this argument.

12. **Why does the Bible say that Jesus was “made perfect” and “learned obedience”?** (Hebrews 5:8-10) **Is there anything that God needed to learn? What does it mean to be “made perfect through suffering”?** (Hebrews 2:10) How did Jesus develop the “perfection” that He had? Was it not through communing with the Father, and through the study of the Scriptures, etc.?

The word *perfect* in these passages means to “be mature,” “finish a task,” “reach a predetermined goal.” Thus, through the things which He suffered—especially through His death on the cross—He accomplished what He had set out to do. Of course, Jesus was perfect in the usual sense before leaving heaven. He was “perfectly divine” and “perfectly human” here on earth. Nevertheless:

Luke 2:52:

“Καὶ Ἰησοῦς προέκοπτεν [ἐν τῇ] σοφίᾳ καὶ ἡλικίᾳ καὶ χάριτι παρὰ θεῶ καὶ ἀνθρώποις.” (*Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament*) [Brackets and content in brackets are present in the original.]

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” (*KJV*)

“...grew both in body and in wisdom, gaining favor with God and people.” (*GNB*)

“...grew both tall and wise, and was loved by God and man.” (*TLB*)

“...continued to develop physically, to increase in wisdom and to grow in His relationships with both God and man.” (*The Clear Word*)

“...matured, growing up in both body and spirit, blessed by both God and people.”
(*The Message*)

It should be noted that it was not necessary for God to learn anything. But, we needed to realize that God understands all our trials. It was necessary for us to see Jesus go through all of this so that we realize that there is no type of temptation that we face that Jesus did not face. Jesus survived His human experiences even as a child by continual communion with His Father through prayer and Bible study. In the case of Jesus, He may not have had access to all of the scrolls that would be needed to cover even the Old Testament. However, He learned at the synagogue, at His mother’s knee, and even from angels who were sent to instruct Him.

Had Christ come to this world and spent His allotted time in peace and contentment, guarded by heavenly angels and protected from the hazards and temptations common to man, He would not have been perfected for His office. He would have had no opportunity to demonstrate what He would do under pressure. Had He not been tempted in all points, men would have wondered what He would do if He were really hungry, tired out, sick; what He would do if men should revile Him, curse Him, spit upon Him, scourge Him, and at last hang Him on a cross. Would He still retain His composure and pray for His enemies? If those whom He trusted should forsake Him, deny Him, betray Him, and desert Him in His supreme hour, would He, undiscouraged, commit Himself to God? If, as a climax, God Himself should appear to forsake Him and the horror of darkness envelop Him and nearly crush Him, would He still drink the cup or would He draw back? Such questions men would ask if He had been shielded from temptations and suffering.—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 7*. 1980 (F. D. Nichol, Ed.) (405). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Notice these quotations about the childhood training of Jesus.

With deep earnestness the mother of Jesus watched the unfolding of His powers, and beheld the impress of perfection upon His character. With delight she sought to encourage that bright, receptive mind. **Through the Holy Spirit she received wisdom to co-operate with the heavenly agencies in the development of this child, who could claim only God as His Father.**—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* p. 69.1. (1898).

The child Jesus did not receive instruction in the synagogue schools. His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things. **The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother’s knee.** As He advanced from childhood to youth, He did not seek the schools of the rabbis. He needed not the education to be obtained from such sources; for God was His instructor.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* p. 70.1 (1898); *My Life Today* 298.

Thus to Jesus the significance of the word and the works of God was unfolded, as He was trying to understand the reason of things. **Heavenly**

beings were His attendants, and the culture of holy thoughts and communings was His. From the first dawning of intelligence He was constantly growing in spiritual grace and knowledge of truth.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* p. 70.3.

Every child may gain knowledge as Jesus did,—from the works of nature and the pages of God’s holy Word. As we seek to become acquainted with our heavenly Father through His Word, holy angels will come near, our minds will be strengthened, our character will be elevated and refined, and we shall become more like our Saviour. And as we behold the beautiful and grand in nature, our affections will go out after God, while the spirit is awed, the soul is invigorated, by coming in contact with the Infinite through His works.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, March 14, 1900 par. 17. Compare *The Desire of Ages* 70.4; *FE* 443.1; *CG* 51.2; *CSW* 40.1.

Joseph and Mary hoped that He might be led to reverence the learned rabbis, and give more diligent heed to their requirements. **But Jesus in the temple had been taught by God. That which He had received, He began at once to impart.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 78.3.

In childhood, youth, and manhood, Jesus studied the Scriptures. As a little child He was daily at His mother’s knee taught from the scrolls of the prophets. In His youth the early morning and the evening twilight often found Him alone on the mountainside or among the trees of the forest, spending a quiet hour in prayer and the study of God’s word. **During His ministry His intimate acquaintance with the Scriptures testifies to His diligence in their study. And since He gained knowledge as we may gain it, His wonderful power, both mental and spiritual, is a testimony to the value of the Bible as a means of education.**—Ellen G. White, *Education* 185 (1903); *The Signs of the Times*, Sept. 19, 1906. [Bold type is added.]

13. **In light of the comments in Hebrews 5:11-6:3 and Hebrews 12:3-11 (Compare Ephesians 4:14-15.), what does God want us to do in our Christian lives? Does this seem to fit with Jesus’s statement, “I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”?** (Matthew 18:2-4, **GNB**) In what sense are we supposed to be like little children? In what ways are we supposed to grow up? What does Christian maturity or perfection actually mean? (Matthew 5:48) Which would be more serious: To fail to grow physically? Socially? Mentally? Or, spiritually?

The most important characteristic of a child is his capacity to grow. If a child stops growing in any way, we become very concerned. What Jesus was speaking about in Matthew 18:2-4 is this characteristic of children. They are not pompous, or unwilling to learn. They want to grow mentally, physically, and intellectually; and most important of all, they need to grow spiritually as well. It is God’s intention that we constantly have that childlike attitude toward Him so that we are willing to learn and grow.

This was the problem with the Hebrews mentioned in Hebrews 5:11-6:3. They had come to think that they had the truth and were assured of salvation because of their

connection with Abraham. Paul called them little children, retarded in their growth, still needing milk!

In this setting, the word *perfection* simply means maturity. It is even used to describe a “ripe” fruit. This is not some unattainable, impossible goal; it is a condition of being “perfect” at each stage of our growth. This was Jesus’s point in telling the story of the growing corn. (Mark 4:26-28)

Why is it so important for us to continue to grow up spiritually? One of these days soon, the Devil himself will appear pretending to be Christ. If possible, he will deceive the very elect, and the whole world will follow him. (Matthew 24:24; Revelation 13:3-4,7-8) Only those who know God very well will be able to stand firm during that time. (GC 593.2; 4SDABC 1161.6) God is waiting for a group of people who are spiritually mature and able to stand through such a crisis before He can come back. (2 Peter 3:8-12)

14. Does Hebrews 6:4-6 suggest that once a person has been converted and then apostatizes, it is impossible to come back? (See also Hebrews 10:26; 1 John 3:9-10; Matthew 12:43-45.)

It is significant to notice that this passage comes immediately after the passage which speaks of “growing up.” Why did the author put it there? Is this a passage describing people who refuse to take God at His word and thus grow up?

When Jesus at the age of twelve went to the temple for His *Bar Mitzveh*, He apparently began to realize for the first time a deeper understanding of His mission to earth. (DA 77.2-80.3) This led to His asking a lot of questions about the ceremonial system and the sacrifices. However, the Jewish leaders were not prepared for such questions. Soon, they were asking Him questions! Jesus was asking the “why” questions that they should have been asking all along! He wanted to know the meaning of everything they were doing. But, they only wanted to talk about all the details of what the rabbis had taught.

15. **And what about us? By age twelve, we should be asking what these things mean. Shouldn’t an intelligent individual, as he grows older and older, find it less and less satisfactory to live with a lot of beliefs and symbols and phrases and cliches and illustrations for which he has never found the meaning and for which he might even have been discouraged from inquiring as to the meaning?**

You think of the rules we are willing to accept when we are little. Daddy or Mommy says, “Do it,” and you do it. And you may not have the reason. In fact, your parents may not have given you a reason. But, as a little child, we start out that way. And we are told things that we believe very readily even without any reasons when we are children.

But then, as we grow up and we become historians and linguists and scientists and all the rest, we advance in every other area of knowledge, and we learn reasons for everything. That is the intelligent way to go. An intelligent, free person will find out for himself what these things mean. **But, religion has consistently encouraged people just to go on believing things as a little child does—without asking for the meaning.**

Any intelligent person who tries to live with that—tries faithfully to submit to that—will come to the place where it no longer satisfies his need to grow up. But, he may just go on believing it out of sheer faithfulness.

And Jesus came along and said, “Let me tell you the truth about all these things, and it will set you free.” (See John 8:32.) That infuriated them. And they killed Him rather than accept His explanation. How perverse to want to remain as little children.

16. **Do you know any faithful Adventist friends who have never asked for the meaning of the provisions of the plan of salvation? And why Jesus had to die? And what Christ is doing now in the heavenly sanctuary?** They can repeat the phrases most faithfully, but they have never asked for the meaning. They have not thought it was right to inquire for the meaning. But, they are going to stick by those beliefs and those phrases, come what may. And that leads to the kind of relationship with God that He does not want.

And it might explain why some very faithful people do not have a very warm relationship with God—because He has not made sense to them. But, to whom else shall they go? And they are going to go on doing these things. That could have a very deadly effect on them.

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. [If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.] Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul.—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 20*, 1897 (MR # 970); *The Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1897 par. 11 - section in [...] omitted in *That I May Know Him* p. 120; *12 Manuscript Releases* 236. [Bold type is added.]

Isn't it true that to go on believing and doing things for which we have no reason will develop within us maybe a faithful willingness to do what we are told; but, at the same time, it will develop a sullen submission?

17. **We really do not like doing things that do not make sense. But, religion has even placed a premium upon doing things just because we are told to—believe it because you are told to.**

Hebrews 6:4-6 is a very serious passage. However, not for the reasons some have supposed. Although many commentators believe that this passage refers to the unpardonable sin, the context and the original Greek text of the passage suggest a less radical solution.

The idea that repentance was impossible under certain circumstances was current among the Jews. They taught, for example, that such was the case of the man who sinned wantonly, trusting in future repentance: “If one says: I shall sin and repent, sin and repent, no opportunity will be given to him to repent. [If one says]: I shall sin and the Day of Atonement will procure atonement for me, the Day of Atonement procures for him no atonement” (*Mishnah Yoma* 8. 9, Soncino ed. of the *Talmud*, p. 423). They taught also that repentance was impossible for the man who led the multitude into sin: “Whoever causes the many to be righteous, sin occurs not through him; and whoever causes the many to sin, they do not afford him the faculty to repent” (*Mishnah Aboth* 5. 18, Soncino ed. of the *Talmud*, p. 71). Of interest also is a passage from the Book of Sirach: “Say not, ‘I have sinned, but what happened unto me?’ For Jahveh is longsuffering. Count not upon forgiveness, That thou shouldst add sin to sin. And say not, ‘His mercies are

great, He will forgive the multitude of mine iniquities'; For mercy and wrath are with Him, And His indignation abideth upon the ungodly. Delay not to turn unto Him, And put (it) not off from day to day; For suddenly doth His wrath come forth, And in the time of vengeance thou shalt perish" (ch. 5:4-7; R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 332).—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 7. 1980 (F. D. Nichol, Ed.) (434). Review and Herald Publishing Association. [Brackets and content in brackets are present in the original.]

Unfortunately, because we are so surrounded by sin, it is easy to lose our sense of how evil sin is and how serious are its consequences. (Genesis 2:17; Numbers 15:30-36; Romans 6:23) It has always been God's intention that we learn to *love* Him and to *fear* sin and its consequences. But, the Devil has so deceived the human race that it is much more common for humans to fear God and to love sin!

Some Christians who believe that a person is saved once and can never be lost, view this passage as only hypothetical. By contrast, the condition of those who turn back and leave their former Christian beliefs seems to be quite serious in the book of Hebrews. (See Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:29-31.)

18. If we are to believe that God is forgiveness personified, (Luke 23:34) what do we do with passages like Hebrews 6:4-6? Are they talking about the "unpardonable sin"? The only "unpardonable sin" in God's eyes is when we refuse to listen to His pleas for so long that we eventually become so hardened that we are unable to even respond to God.

Sin not only shuts us away from God, but destroys in the human soul both the desire and the capacity for knowing Him.—Ellen G. White, *Education* 29; *1MCP* 13; *PK* 233; *RC* 106; *TSB* 253; compare *1SM* 235. [Bold type is added.]

If by persisting in sin so long we lose even the capacity to respond to God, then we have indeed "crucified Christ again" by making it impossible for Him to save us.

Put with that Hebrews 10:26-27.

Hebrews 10:26-27 (RSV): ²⁶For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries.

And remember, later in Hebrews we are told:

Hebrews 12:29 (RSV): ... for our God is a consuming fire.

Is there any good news in that? Is that very reassuring? Does it mean rest and peace to know that our God is a consuming fire?

And we need to ask ourselves why sin is so dangerous?

1 John 3:9 (RSV): No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God.

Have we managed to go without sinning for even a week? Do we clearly understand what sin is? And how to avoid it?

1 John 3:4 (RSV): ⁴Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

Lawlessness and rebelliousness are just the opposite of truth and righteousness.

19. If this seems very forbidding, we need to remember the story that Jesus told about the prodigal son and the gracious father. (Luke 15:11-32) Was Jesus trying to correctly represent the Father when He told this story?

Through **persistently** cherishing evil, willfully disregarding the pleadings of divine love, **the sinner loses the love for good, the desire for God, the very capacity to receive the light of heaven.** The invitation of mercy is still full of love, the light is shining as brightly as when it first dawned upon his soul; but the voice falls on deaf ears, the light on blinded eyes.—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* 92.3.

No soul is ever finally deserted of God, given up to his own ways, so long as there is any hope of his salvation. “Man turns from God, not God from him.” Our heavenly Father follows us with appeals and warnings and assurances of compassion, until further opportunities and privileges would be wholly in vain. The responsibility rests with the sinner. **By resisting the Spirit of God today, he prepares the way for a second resistance of light when it comes with mightier power. Thus he passes on from one stage of resistance to another, until at last the light will fail to impress, and he will cease to respond in any measure to the Spirit of God. Then even “the light that is in thee” has become darkness. The very truth we do know has become so perverted as to increase the blindness of the soul.**—*Ibid.* 93.1. [Bold type is added.]

Elsewhere, Ellen White said:

Every act of transgression, every neglect or rejection of the grace of Christ, is reacting upon yourself; it is hardening the heart, depraving the will, benumbing the understanding, and not only making you less inclined to yield, but less capable of yielding, to the tender pleading of God’s Holy Spirit.

Many are quieting a troubled conscience with the thought that they can change a course of evil when they choose; that they can trifle with the invitations of mercy, and yet be again and again impressed. They think that after doing despite to the Spirit of grace, after casting their influence on the side of Satan, in a moment of terrible extremity they can change their course. But this is not so easily done. The experience, [34] the education, of a lifetime, has so thoroughly molded the character that few then desire to receive the image of Jesus.

Even one wrong trait of character, one sinful desire, persistently cherished, will eventually neutralize all the power of the gospel. Every sinful indulgence strengthens the soul’s aversion to God. The man who manifests an infidel hardihood, or a stolid indifference to divine truth, is but reaping the harvest of that which he has himself sown. **In all the Bible there is not a more fearful warning against trifling with evil than the words of the wise man that the sinner “shall be holden with the cords of his sins.”** Proverbs 5:22.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* 33.2-34.1. [Bold type is added.]

There are consequences to sin even in this life and certainly for the life to come.

I call upon you who minister in sacred things to be converted men before you go forth to act any part in the cause of my Master. Now is your time to seek a preparation and readiness for the fearful test which is before us—that holiness without which no man shall see God. Let none say, My way is hid from the Lord; God taketh no knowledge of my ways. Now it may be it is not too late. Now it may be you can repent. **But even if pardon is written against your names, you will sustain terrible loss; for the scars you have made upon your souls will remain.**—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* 447.1.

The same law obtains in the spiritual as in the natural world. **He who abides in darkness will at last lose the power of vision. He is shut in by a deeper than midnight blackness; and to him the brightest noontide can bring no light.** He “walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.” 1 John 2:11. **Through persistently cherishing evil, willfully disregarding the pleadings of divine love, the sinner loses the love for good, the desire for God, the very capacity to receive the light of heaven. The invitation of mercy is still full of love, the light is shining as brightly as when it first dawned upon his soul; but the voice falls on deaf ears, the light on blinded eyes.**—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* 92.3.

There are great laws that govern the world of nature, and spiritual things are controlled by principles equally certain.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, 221.3. [Bold type is added.]

20. But, supposing God were to reveal His grace to us and pour out His Spirit without limit. Wouldn't that win us over? He is omnipotent, isn't He? Wouldn't that win us?

Our will is not to be forced into co-operation with divine agencies, but it must be voluntarily submitted. **Were it possible to force upon you with a hundredfold greater intensity the influence of the Spirit of God, it would not make you a Christian, a fit subject for heaven.** The stronghold of Satan would not be broken.—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* 142.1. [Bold type is added.]

God will not take away your desire to be a rebel. You have submitted, but you did not really want to; you were overwhelmed. **That is why the still small voice is God's favorite method.** But, when we respond to that, we do so in the highest sense of freedom.

In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself. True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan's control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and

they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 466.4 (1898); *2MCP* 571.3.

The only condition upon which the freedom of man is possible is that of becoming one with Christ. “The truth shall make you free;” and Christ is the truth. **Sin can triumph only by enfeebling the mind, and destroying the liberty of the soul.** Subjection to God is restoration to one’s self,—to the true glory and dignity of man. The divine law, to which we are brought into subjection, is “the law of liberty.” James 2:12.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 466.5. [Bold type is added.]

But God can and will save and heal all who trust Him. That is what the term *salvation by faith* means. There is no reason for any Christian to fear these words from God so long as we understand that it refers to those who are *persistently* refusing Christ’s and the Holy Spirit’s wooing and are running as fast as they can go in the opposite direction. Our only safety is in growing up spiritually as we grow in other ways and, thus, asking the most important questions as suggested by the great controversy. Then, we may come to know God and learn to trust Him just as Jesus did. That is the basis for salvation.

21. **What is the meaning of the *new covenant*?** What does it mean to have the law written not on the wall or on the tables of stone but in our hearts and in our minds? (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:8-13; Hebrews 10:16-17) Does Hebrews 10:1-25 give us some hints? See also Micah 6:6-8; Isaiah 1:11-20; 29:13-14; Matthew 15:7-9; Amos 5:21-24. Revelation 14:1 talks about God’s name being in our foreheads. Are these the same idea?

Where are the “new” covenant and the “old” covenant found in the Old Testament? First of all, note that in Hebrews 8:9 it seems to suggest that the old covenant was made at Sinai. What agreement was made between God and the children of Israel at Sinai? (Exodus 19:6; 24:3,7) It is of interest to note that the children of Israel promised to obey all of God’s commands even before they had heard them! Then, after hearing them, twice more they promised to obey them. The **people** promised God that they would obey. We know how well they did at that! Quoting from Ellen White:

As the Bible presents two laws, one changeless and eternal, the other provisional and temporary, so there are two covenants. **The covenant of grace was first made with man in Eden**, when after the Fall there was given a divine promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head. **To all men this covenant offered pardon and the assisting grace of God for future obedience through faith in Christ. It also promised them eternal life on condition of fidelity to God’s law. Thus the patriarchs received the hope of salvation.**

This same covenant was renewed to Abraham in the promise, “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Genesis 12:1-4; 22:18. This promise pointed to Christ. So Abraham understood it (see Galatians 3:8,16), and he trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. It was this faith that was accounted unto him for righteousness. [Genesis 15:6] The covenant with Abraham also maintained the authority of God’s law. The Lord appeared unto Abraham, and said, “I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” Genesis 17:1. The testimony of God concerning His faithful servant was, “Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My

commandments, My statutes, and My laws.” Genesis 26:5. And the Lord declared to him, “I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an *everlasting covenant*, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.” Genesis 17:7.

Though this covenant was made with Adam and renewed to Abraham, it could not be ratified until the death of Christ. It [371] had existed by the promise of God since the first intimation of redemption had been given; it had been accepted by faith; yet when ratified by Christ, it is called a *new covenant*. **The law of God was the basis of this covenant, which was simply an arrangement for bringing men again into harmony with the divine will, placing them where they could obey God’s law.**

Another compact—called in Scripture the “old” covenant—was formed between God and Israel at Sinai, and was then ratified by the blood of a sacrifice. **The Abrahamic covenant was ratified by the blood of Christ, and it is called the “second,” or “new,” covenant, because the blood by which it was sealed was shed after the blood of the first covenant.** That the new covenant was valid in the days of Abraham is evident from the fact that it was then confirmed both by the promise and by the oath of God—the “two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie.” Hebrews 6:18.

But if the Abrahamic covenant contained the promise of redemption, why was another covenant formed at Sinai? In their bondage the people had to a great extent lost the knowledge of God and of the principles of the Abrahamic covenant. In delivering them from Egypt, God sought to reveal to them His power and His mercy, that they might be led to love and trust Him. He brought them down to the Red Sea—where, pursued by the Egyptians, escape seemed impossible—that they might realize their utter helplessness, their need of divine aid; and then He wrought deliverance for them. Thus they were filled with love and gratitude to God and with confidence in His power to help them. He had bound them to Himself as their deliverer from temporal bondage.

But there was a still greater truth to be impressed upon their minds. Living in the midst of idolatry and corruption, they had no true conception of the holiness of God, of the exceeding sinfulness of their own hearts, their utter inability, in themselves, to render obedience to God’s law, and their need of a Saviour. All this they must be taught.

God brought them to Sinai; He manifested His glory; He gave them His law, with the promise of great blessings on condition of obedience: “If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ... ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” Exodus 19:5, 6. The people did not realize [372] the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God’s law; and they readily entered into covenant with God. **Feeling that they were able to establish their own righteousness, they declared, “All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.”** Exodus 19:8; 24:3,7. They had witnessed the proclamation of the law in awful majesty, and had trembled with terror before

the mount; and yet only a few weeks passed before they broke their covenant with God, and bowed down to worship a graven image. **They could not hope for the favor of God through a covenant which they had broken; and now, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of the Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant and shadowed forth in the sacrificial offerings. Now by faith and love they were bound to God as their deliverer from the bondage of sin. Now they were prepared to appreciate the blessings of the new covenant.**

The terms of the “old covenant” were, Obey and live: “If a man do, he shall even live in them” (Ezekiel 20:11; Leviticus 18:5); but “cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.” Deuteronomy 27:26. **The “new covenant” was established upon “better promises”—the promise of forgiveness of sins and of the grace of God to renew the heart and bring it into harmony with the principles of God’s law. “This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.... I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more.”** Jeremiah 31:33, 34.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* 370.2-372.1. [Content in brackets and bold type are added. Italics is in the original text.]

Note that the Sinai covenant or old covenant was based on human promises and required human obedience. The “everlasting” covenant or new covenant was based on God’s promises and only required man’s cooperation.

22. So, what do we have to do to partake of the everlasting covenant? It is really another name for the plan of salvation. God will do the work if we just give Him the time and attention needed to allow Him to do so. We need to study His plan and understand it until we become convinced that His way is the only good way. When we recognize that God’s way is always the best way and He has only our best good in mind for us, we can come to the place where we render intelligent obedience to Him. This is referred to in Revelation 14:1 as having God’s name written on our foreheads. Compare Ellen White’s comments.

The pure and holy garments are not prepared to be put on by any one **after** he has entered the gate of the city. All who enter will have on the robe of Christ’s righteousness, and **the name of God will be seen in their foreheads. This name is the symbol which the apostle saw in vision, and signifies the yielding of the mind to intelligent and loyal obedience to all of God’s commandments.**—Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*, August 18, 1886 par. 4; *SD* 370.2.

Unless the name of God is written in your forehead—written there because God is the center of your thoughts—you will not be meet for the inheritance in light.—Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, December 23, 1890 par. 6; *CS* 46.2.

They [His people] are to stand as a separate and peculiar people; the name of God, our Ruler, is to be in their foreheads, showing to all that he is their

Sovereign.—Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, June 21, 1898 par. 31.
[Italics, bold type, and content in brackets are added.]

It is not easy for proud human beings to recognize their inability to keep God's law or to manage on their own. But, when we come to understand what God asks of us, we should be very happy to render Him intelligent obedience.

That is not rote, mechanical, unthinking obedience. It is another way of saying that God's laws have been written in our minds. **It means obeying for an entirely different reason.** This is the "obedience inherent in our faith" described in Romans 1:16-17 and Ephesians 4:13, *NEB*. If we voluntarily come to trust God, doesn't that imply that we understand what He asks us to do? Wouldn't we then try our best to obey because we choose to do what is right because it is right. (*COL* 97,98)

23. **Would you agree that that is the main point being made in Hebrews? Is the point being made in Hebrews that the purpose of Christ's priesthood of righteousness and peace is to fulfill the promise that someday God's laws will actually be written in our minds and our hearts and we will offer Him the intelligent obedience of free members of God's family?**

God's desire to have us understand and agree with Him because we are convinced that it is the right thing to do is so well demonstrated by that experience on the road to Emmaus.

He [Christ] maintained his disguise till he had interpreted the Scriptures, and had led them to an intelligent faith in his life, his character, his mission to earth, and his death and resurrection. He wished the truth to take firm root in their minds, **not** because it was supported by his personal testimony, but because the typical law, and the prophets of the Old Testament, agreeing with the facts of his life and death, presented unquestionable evidence of that truth.—Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 214.2 (1878); *The Signs of the Times*, Oct. 6, 1909 par. 8; *5SDABC* 1125.12; *7aSDABC* 245; *6Red* 32.3; compare *GC* 349.1. [Content in brackets, italics, and bold type are added.]

But shouldn't we agree with whatever God says without doubting or questioning? That would be the response of a robot. God wants us to carefully evaluate the evidence (*SC* 105) about every detail of our beliefs and then agree with Him because it makes very good sense to do so. Does God really plan for us to be that free for the rest of eternity? If we could reach that level of understanding, it would make us completely safe to save because we would never cause any problems in heaven. We would be able to do whatever we wanted to do for the rest of eternity because—understanding all the implications of each act—we will always choose to do what is right because it is right.

Did ancient Israel ever enter into that kind of rest? That is the rest that God promises to every one of His children if they can reach that kind of understanding.

24. Does Hebrews actually tell us what Christ is doing in the heavenly sanctuary right now?

The Old Testament ceremonial system seemed to suggest that by placing one's hands over the head of an animal and confessing one's sins, one transferred one's sins to the animal which was then sacrificed, and the sins were transferred to the altar and then to the priest who carried them into the sanctuary and placed them before the ark. Later, on the

Day of Atonement, those sins were removed by the high priest who then placed them on the head of a goat which was led away to die in the wilderness. Hebrews suggested that all of this was a type or symbol of the actual events that are taking place in heaven. **Is it actually possible to move sins? Is it possible to make an innocent animal “guilty” for my sins? Is it possible to transfer my sins to Jesus? If so, what does He do with them? After my sins have been “removed” (Hebrews 9:26) from me, how am I different? Is the record of my sin wiped clean? Does that mean that even God does not remember the evil that I have done? Are our sins really being moved around in heaven? Is heaven full of “sin”?**

See handout on *Colossians 2:14 - How Are Sins “Blotted Out”?*

25. **In light of Hebrews, what do you think we were supposed to have learned from the Old Testament ceremonial system?**

Almost every ceremony of any kind in the Old Testament sanctuary system was associated with a sacrifice of some kind and, therefore, with death. But, the new plan, the new covenant, is based on a much better “Sacrifice,” Jesus Christ Himself. He not only died because of our sins and for our sins but also rose to life again, and He ministers in the heavenly sanctuary which is not built by human hands. That old system is only a “faint shadow” of the much better system now in place. (Hebrews 10:1-4)

The old system taught us that sin leads to death (Genesis 2:17; Hebrews 9:22; Numbers 15:22-36, especially 30-31; Romans 6:23) and that the law is holy but that God has made provision for our reconciliation if we break that law. There are a lot of “witnesses” from the Old Testament who apparently got the message of the old system and become God’s friends. (Hebrews 11)

Much of what we understand of the Old Testament ceremonial system we learned from the book of Hebrews. Why wasn’t Moses given a handbook of instruction to explain what each ceremony meant? Did Moses himself understand the whole system? Apparently, the prophets who came along much later did understand. The whole system was a kind of sandbox explanation of the plan of salvation. By going to the tabernacle or tent and offering a sacrifice, a repentant sinner could confess his sins over the head of that animal and then cut its throat. The blood, representing the life of the animal, was then carried to the altar and then into the tent. In symbol, those sins were to remain in the tent until the Day of Atonement when the high priest entered the most holy place and carried all of the people’s sins out with him and placed them on the head of the scapegoat. That goat was then led off far away from the camp of Israel, representing the idea that God had removed their sins from them. It was suggested that sin being very serious leads to death. Only by blood could sins be dealt with. (Hebrews 9:22)

Hopefully, Christians today recognize that it is impossible to make an animal guilty of our sins. So, what really happens? If we are truly repentant, God will treat us **as if** we had never sinned. When I am forgiven and “justified,” God will treat me “just as if I’d” never sinned. But, the scars of sin and the remembrance of it are still present. If I kill someone, even if it is by accident, forgiveness does not bring him back to life!

26. Read Hebrews 6 and 7. Unless you take a larger view, these two chapters could become very confusing. We have already noted that Hebrews 5:11-6:3 is the author’s very serious challenge to his Jewish friends to grow up. Why does God talk like that? And what is His point?

God does everything possible to reach out to every one of His children. Jesus Christ was Michael the Archangel to angels before this earth was created. (Daniel 10:13, 20-21; 12:1; Jude 9; Revelation 12:7) But, now that sin has entered our universe and there is a great controversy, every part of the Bible must be understood in this context. There are many parts the Bible that do not make sense without it.

In Acts 16:31, Paul told the Philippian jailer that the only requirement for salvation is trust or faith. Why is faith a problem? Shouldn't everyone just trust God? Unfortunately, the great controversy is all about Satan's efforts to sew discontent and lack of trust, claiming even that God is arbitrary, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe, even an unjust Judge and a Tyrant. And if those things are true, there is no basis for trust, and there could never be freedom or peace. So, can we trust God?

Since the questions were about God, God Himself had to answer them. God Himself descended to this earth and lived as a human being, dying that awful death to answer the questions, the accusations and the claims of His enemy. Has God done an adequate job? Do you find in Scripture a sufficient reason for believing God? This is no idle question. We know that Satan will come just before the second coming of Christ claiming that he is Christ and deceiving essentially the whole world. (Revelation 13:3-4,7-8; *Last Day Events* 167.4)

27. **Then, in this context, we must never accept mere claims.** The Devil would love us to accept his claims. We must learn to demand the most clear evidence; that is what Christ came to give. But, why should we trust God? The first question then is: When someone with "authority" speaks, how can we be sure it is God speaking?

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that if God came in His full glory, we would all be destroyed. (Exodus 33:18-23; *DA* 107.4; 753.4; *8T* 265.2; *MH* 419.1)

So, God needed to make it clear that it is safe for us to approach Him. In Hebrews 2:14-18 and 4:14-16, God tells us that Jesus was sent as our High Priest so we can become comfortable with Him.

During His ministry on this earth, Jesus made it abundantly clear that there is no reason to be afraid of God. (John 3:16; 14:9; 16:25,27; *3T* 422.1; *Gospel Workers* 261.3; *Steps to Christ* 11.2) God is not only friendly and kind to children but also even to His enemies. (Matthew 5:45) Look at the story of Job. God even allowed the Devil to enter into His councils in heaven. (Job 1-2) God wants us to understand that He loves all His children, even the sinful ones. How do you treat your children? How we treat others is a key part of our religious experience. Pretentious piety makes God nauseated. (Revelation 3:16; *Special Testimonies, Series B, # 2*, p. 20.1) Such pretentious piety is a fraud. Why would God say that about His final, end-time church?

28. But, we know how kindly and gently Jesus treated some of the worst sinners. Consider the cases of Mary Magdalene, Peter, and Simon. In light of these cases, how could we ever suggest that God is arbitrary, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe?

But, then the question arises: Could the Father be as loving and friendly as the Son? (1 John 4:18; John 16:25-27; Romans 8:26-39; John 14-16; *TMK* 338) These are just a few of the passages in Scripture and Ellen White's writings suggesting that there is no need to be afraid of God because the Father is just as loving and kind as is the Son. After all, God sent His Son. (John 3:16) Everyone in heaven is on our side if we will just cooperate with Them.

Seventh-day Adventists have claimed Revelation 14:12; 12:17; and 19:10 as evidence that God's faithful people at the end of time will be Sabbathkeepers and have the testimony of Jesus. **What is the testimony of Jesus?** Shouldn't our testimony be the same as Jesus's testimony? If His primary purpose in coming was to teach us the truth about the Father, shouldn't that be our purpose also? If we really came to know Son and Father as Friends, wouldn't that bring rest—maybe even the Sabbath-like rest spoken of earlier in Hebrews? We believe that the Sabbath sums up the good news about God. He is the Creator, and the Sabbath celebrates that. He is our Savior from slavery and sin; (Deuteronomy 5:15) Jesus rested in the grave over the Sabbath after His crucifixion to add additional evidence about the healing effects of the Sabbath.

29. But, more than anything else, the death of Christ answered the questions and provided the essential evidence in the minds of the onlooking universe. How does that actually work? Does a correct understanding of why Jesus had to die bring us freedom from guilt or fear?

At that point in the book of Hebrews, the author turned to talking about the Old Testament sacrificial system. The sacrificial system was like a sandbox that we sometimes use for teaching small children. Look at all the rites, the ceremonies, the detailed requirements that were connected to the ancient sanctuary. What were they all supposed to illustrate? Unfortunately, Israel never seemed to learn what all those things were supposed to mean and became totally engrossed and preoccupied with the individual services and ceremonies as if they would accomplish something by themselves. Buried in the details and symbolism, they forgot—or perhaps never discovered—the real meaning.

30. Is God the Father a harsh Judge? In our day, many Christians have followed the lead of some of the reformers, suggesting that salvation is a legal process. Does God want us to think of Him as a Judge? Was Jesus's illustration of the prodigal son returning to his father just as valid a truth about God as the law courts? Why didn't Jesus talk about law courts if they were so important?

When we read many of the major and minor prophets of the Old Testament, we discover that at least some of God's people back in the Old Testament got the message. **What God has always wanted is truth, honesty, love, humility, and trust.** So, the question comes again: **Do we have any reason to be afraid of God or not to trust Him? Has He told us the truth?** What about that most basic of all questions: God said that sin leads to death. (Genesis 2:17) The Devil said, "That's a lie." (Genesis 3:1-4) Who are we going to believe? The Old Testament sacrificial system was full of death. Every sin was supposed to be dealt with by death. So, is our salvation based on a mere mechanical following of the rules? Or, can we step back a little bit and see the larger picture? **Can we handle big ideas? What are we supposed to learn from all this discussion about Melchizedek, the king of righteousness and peace.**

Looking at the sacrificial system, was it obvious to the Israelites in the Old Testament that all God wanted was righteousness and peace? Could God actually bring our universe to the place where everyone could experience righteousness and peace? And if so, why is that process so difficult to explain? If God had wanted us to know more details about Melchizedek as a person, He certainly could have given them. At this point in Hebrews, Paul was very blunt in saying that to understand these big ideas, we need to grow up. (Hebrews 5:11-6:3. Compare Ephesians 4:11-16.)

To live together in righteousness and peace and unity—a unity that is inherent in our faith—we must learn to stand on our own two feet! God knows what is coming in the future. He knows that He cannot let Satan loose for the final events of this earth’s history until His people have become so settled into the truth both intellectually and spiritually that they cannot be moved. (4SDABC 1161.6) When the disciples were becoming too dependent upon Jesus, He said it was time for Him to leave. (John 16:7) But, perhaps an even more impressive evidence of that is the experience with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. (Luke 24:13-35) Those two men would have been delighted just to know that Jesus was alive. But, Jesus maintained His disguise all the way to Emmaus so that He could review for them the solid evidence from the Old Testament that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. (3SP 214.2; 5SDABC 1125.12. Compare GC 349.1.)

God certainly understands the dangers of allowing the Devil to have free access to His children. Look what happened right in heaven! The consequences of misunderstanding the issues in the great controversy are very serious. (*Desire of Ages* 764.2) When we are still little children in the faith, we are inclined to believe whatever someone in authority tells us. But, God never asks us to believe Him without providing adequate evidence, and it is evidence that appeals to our reason. (*Steps to Christ* 105) That produces intelligent obedience. That is the obedience of free people. God will not and, in fact, cannot—unless He were to abandon the principles of His government—use force or compulsion. God cannot produce love that way. (DA 22)

31. So, in light of all of this, why did God make so much use of law in the Old Testament? Galatians says the law was added because of transgression. (Galatians 3:19) It was meant to be a protection for us, a guide to direct our behavior until the time comes when we will learn to do right because it is right. (*Christ’s Object Lessons* 97.3) **Could we actually reach the place where we do what is right because we realize that it is right and we want to do it? What is the problem if we don’t?** Many Christians have the attitude that we do not have to like what God asks us to do; we just have to do it. If we are “obedient,” is that all that is necessary? The Pharisees in the time of Christ were very obedient. Again we read:

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. **[If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.]** Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul.—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 20*, 1897 (*Manuscript Release # 970*); *The Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1897 (3ST 400:2:1) - section in [...] omitted in *That I May Know Him* p. 120; 12*Manuscript Releases* 236. [Bold type is added.]

Would it be safe to take such people to heaven? Why do we obey God? What does God do to prevent that sullen submission? The Holy Spirit presents us with truth and evidence. What kind of evidence? Is God in the least bit arbitrary? What about the Sabbath? We sometimes suggest that the Sabbath is an arbitrary test of our obedience? Could we become so convinced about the truth that we would choose to do what is right because it is right? Will the time come when God can really have order and peace in His universe without any force being exerted? Heaven will be that kind of place because only trusting, trustworthy people will be admitted there. There will be no police in the New

Jerusalem to enforce God's laws! So, what is the role of God's law—including the Sabbath—in all of this?

God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. **This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom.** The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God's law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God's commandments. **Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven.** Clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ's righteousness, they have a place at the King's feast. They have a right to join the blood-washed throng.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 315.1. [Bold type is added.]

32. **Was Paul trying to explain all of this in this section of Hebrews? Why was he finding it so difficult?**

Paul was building up to his main point in Hebrews 9 and 10. The most serious charge that has been leveled against God and His truthfulness and trustworthiness and His claim that He respects nothing higher than our freedom is the question about death being the result of sin.

The Bible speaks about two different kinds of death. What are those two deaths? Which one is God talking about here in Hebrews? The first death is simply a sleep as described by Jesus in John 11:11-14 and Mark 5:36-43. That first death is what we see in our world all the time. The second death is very different. **In the history of our world so far, only Jesus has died that second death.** It is the death that the wicked will die at the third coming. So, what is the cause of that death? Could sin actually be deadly? (Isaiah 59:2) If God is the only source of life and if we choose to separate ourselves from Him, would that lead to death?

What is God's ideal for each one of us?

Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do. The men in whom this power is developed are the men who bear responsibilities, who are leaders in enterprise, and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought.—Ellen G. White, *Education* 17.2.

33. **What does this have to do with growing up? Do we need to reach the place where we understand God, think for ourselves, and choose to do right because it is right? Or, will we always just reflect other men's thoughts? Freedom is so important to God and He was so concerned about preserving our freedom that He would die rather than give it up. In fact, He already has.**

So, is it God who kills sinners in the end? As far as we know, in the days of Adam and Eve, the universe had never seen death of any kind. When Cain killed Abel, I am sure angels and others rushed to God to ask, "Is that what you mean by the death that results from sin?" And God had to say, "No."

When God drowned the world in a flood, no doubt, they came to Him again and asked, "Is that what you meant?" And again, God had to say, "No." But on those occasions, no doubt, the Devil toured the universe saying, "I warned you about God and what He would do to you if you get out of line. Look at how God treats His children!" And the Devil, no doubt, asked the beings in the rest the universe to work with him to throw God out and make Satan the ruler of the universe.

God finally said: "There is only one way I can demonstrate this truth to you. All the deaths that we have seen so far in the history of the world are just sleep. Every one of those people—even those who died in Sodom and Gomorrah and the flood—will be raised to life again. But there is a **terrible second death**, an awful final separation from the source of life." And **what is that like? God Himself came down to this earth to demonstrate it. And as He was expiring on the cross, Jesus said, "It is finished." (John 19:30) That is the answer.** But, if we are not asking the right questions, we will not get the right answers. Without the great controversy, we do not have the right questions. This is not a case of God balancing the books or adjusting our legal standing in the sight of God. It is a question about Who is telling us the truth and Who can be trusted.

And what caused the death of Christ? What did He say just before He died? Not, "My God, My God, why are you torturing Me?" Or, "Why are you killing me?" But rather, Jesus said, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46) When the wicked die at the end of this world's history, it will not be a repetition of the Inquisition. God does not kill His children.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we say that we do not believe in an eternally-burning hell. We say that God would never do anything like that. But, do we have our own version of hell? Just a shorter one? **Will God torture the wicked at the end? Will He make them suffer for every sin which they have ever committed?** During the Inquisition, authorities would burn people at the stake or torture them to try to force them to agree to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. If a person recanted just before dying, his torturers would claim they had won another soul. Does God torture people just because they deserve it and when they have suffered long enough execute them?

Way back in the days of Hosea, God described how He feels about the death of the wicked. In Hosea 11:8, God cried out, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel?" It breaks His heart. In fact, that is what broke His heart on Calvary.

And the children of Israel should have learned that lesson. With all the killing of sacrifices in the sanctuary system, it should have been firmly planted in their minds that sin leads to death. And getting to know God correctly, they should have understood how repulsive that whole system was to Him.

34. But, it was not only the children of Israel who needed that demonstration; the angels needed the cross. (Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19, 20)

The death of Christ upon the cross made sure the destruction of him who has the power of death, who was the originator of sin. When Satan is destroyed, there will be none to tempt to evil; the atonement will never need to be repeated; and there will be no danger of another rebellion in the universe of God. **That which alone can effectually restrain from sin in this world of darkness, will prevent sin in heaven. The significance of**

the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels. Fallen men could not have a home in the paradise of God without the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Shall we not then exalt the cross of Christ? **The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden, the paradise of bliss.** All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God. **The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.**—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, December 30, 1889 par. 4; *5SDABC* 1132.8,9; *7SDABC* 476.3; *TA* 205.2,3. [Bold type is added.]

So, what about it? Our High Priest, Jesus, is waiting to rule over a kingdom established on righteousness and peace—a kingdom like that of Melchizedek, the king of righteousness and king of Salem (peace).

Unfortunately, as Jesus went through those final events in His life on this earth, not a single human being fully realized what was going on. But, the universe, seeing everything, knew the truth. They saw the Father and the Holy Spirit and the role They played. They saw the Devil and his angels and the role they played. They watched the whole controversy in detail. You can be sure that there was not a single being in the entire universe except humans who did not have his eyes glued on what happened on that Thursday night and Friday of crucifixion weekend.

And Ellen White said that the Father suffered with the Son. (*The Signs of the Times*, September 2, 1889 par. 7; November 25, 1889, par. 6; *Bible Echoes*, August 1, 1892 par. 2)

35. Do we understand what was happening there well enough to realize the truth about the second death? Jesus died of separation from the Source of life—the direct result of sin. (Genesis 2:17; Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23) Salvation means healing and not just saving. **What does God need to do to heal sinners?** Do doctors kill their dying patients? God has provided more than adequate evidence about the healing prospects available to us. Sin is self-destructive suicide. And it is so sad. But, the day will come when God must finally eliminate evil in order to bring the great controversy to an end. Then, He will be able to reveal His glory to His children once again. *Desire of Ages* 107 tells us:

To sin, wherever found, “our God is a consuming fire.” Hebrews 12:29. In all who submit to His power the Spirit of God will consume sin. But if men cling to sin, they become identified with it. Then the glory of God, which destroys sin, must destroy them.... The light of the glory of God, which imparts life to the righteous, will slay the wicked.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 107.4.

36. What do we know about God’s glory? God’s glory is sometimes described as His character. But, there are other times when God’s glory is described as being like fire. (Exodus 24:16-17; Ezekiel 1:27-28; Daniel 7:9-10)

Ellen White was given the privilege of viewing things in heaven on several occasions. Things were so bright and beautiful—Was that because of God’s glory?—that she repeatedly begged not to have to come back to this dark earth.

I could not bear the thought of coming back to this dark world again. Then the angel said, “You must go back, and if you are faithful, you, with the 144,000, shall have the privilege of visiting all the worlds and viewing the handiwork of God.—Ellen G. White, *Experience and Views* 22.2; *EW* 39.3; *AH* 543.2; *Mar* 368.6; Compare *LS* 172.1.

Paul described “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6) Did that light have something to do with the covering of beautiful light that Adam and Eve wore?

Before the entrance of sin not a cloud rested upon the minds of our first parents **to obscure their perception of the character of God**. They were perfectly conformed to the will of God. **For a covering a beautiful light, the light of God, surrounded them. This clear and perfect light illuminated everything which they approached.**—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 8, 255.1.

But transgression brought a blight upon the earth and intervened between nature and nature’s God. Had Adam and Eve never disobeyed their Creator, had they remained in the path of perfect rectitude, they (256) would have continued to learn of God through His works. **But when they listened to the tempter and sinned against God, the light of the garments of heavenly innocence departed from them. Deprived of the heavenly light, they could no longer discern the character of God in the works of His hand.** *Ibid.* 255.3.

And through man’s disobedience a change was wrought in nature itself. Marred by the curse of sin, nature can bear but an imperfect testimony regarding the Creator. It cannot reveal His character in its perfection. *Ibid.* 256.1.

In humility and unutterable sadness they bade farewell to their beautiful home and went forth to dwell upon the earth, where rested the curse of sin. The atmosphere, once so mild and uniform in temperature, was now subject to marked changes, and **the Lord mercifully provided them with a garment of skins as a protection from the extremes of heat and cold.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* 61.5. [Bold type is added.]

The purpose of the “covering of light” that surrounded Adam and Eve was to reveal to them the character of God. What kind of changes resulted from the removal of God’s light and glory at the time sin entered our world? We usually talk about all the changes that took place at the flood. But, what about the changes that took place with the entrance of sin?

Moses asked God for permission to see His glory. (Exodus 33:18) And you remember what happened when Christ came to this earth. It was necessary for Him to veil His glory so as not to consume human beings. (*Ministry of Healing* 419.1; *8T* 265.2; *Sons and Daughters of God* 21.4; *Desire of Ages* 23.1)

Apparently, Moses was allowed to see more and more of God's glory so that when he came down from the mountain, it was necessary for even Moses—a human being—to wear a veil to shield Aaron and the rest of the people from that reflected glory of God. (Exodus 34:29-35) So, the glory of God is more than just the truth about His character.

And God knows fully the awful results when He will finally reveal His glory here on this earth to clean up the mess of sin, sinners, disease, and death, and to remake this world into the Garden of Eden. So, He warns us in the strongest possible words—that famous third angel's message!

Revelation 14:9-11, (GNB): ⁹ A third angel followed the first two, saying in a loud voice, "Whoever worships the beast and its image and receives the mark on their forehead or on their hand will themselves drink God's wine, the wine of his fury, which he has poured at full strength into the cup of his anger! All who do this will be tormented in fire and sulphur before the holy angels and the Lamb. The smoke of the fire that torments them goes up for ever and ever. There is no relief day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, for anyone who has the mark of its name."

God hates to talk that way, but He needs to warn us in the strongest possible language about the consequences of not being changed from sinners into faithful trustworthy children of God.

37. The author (we believe it was Paul) then returned to his discussion of Melchizedek and the superiority of his order. His order was an order based on righteousness and peace, the things that God has always wanted. From even a brief look at the Old Testament, it is easy to see that they did not achieve that righteousness and peace that God wanted.

It is important to note that it was not on the basis of some genealogy that this new order served. Melchizedek had no recorded father, mother, or descendants. And Jesus was from the wrong tribe, the tribe of Judah. But, Melchizedek received tithe from Abraham, the father of the faithful. That made him as the one who blessed Abraham, superior to anything connected to the Levitical priesthood since Abraham was the great grandfather of Levi. And it was obvious to the ones to whom Paul was writing that the Levitical priesthood never brought the perfection that was needed.

And most important of all, Melchizedek represented a priesthood that was to last forever. (Psalm 110:4) But, in order to install a new priesthood, the old one needed to be removed or replaced, and the laws connected to that old one needed to be replaced as well. Moreover, God Himself swore an oath when installing that new Priest, saying that He would be a Priest forever. Clearly, this new priesthood was intended to be superior to the old one!

Jesus, the new and perfect, even faultless, Priest of the same order as Melchizedek is the Priest that will serve forever.

38. Read Hebrews 8:1-2. Paul was apparently preparing to summarize his discussion. What had he said so far?

Jesus is superior to angels. Jesus is superior to Moses, Joshua, and everything in the old ceremonial sanctuary system including the Aaronic priests. Jesus belongs to the order of Melchizedek, an order so elevated that even Abraham paid tithes to him. Having proven the superiority of Christ, he then talked about what Christ accomplished and how that

related to the old Jewish ceremonial system. It is important to notice what Hebrews 9:5 says about the ark or “covenant box” where the winged creatures representing God’s presence were. But “now is not the time to explain everything in detail.” Is that a warning that we should not get too involved in all the details of the sanctuary? Some people have gone so far as to try to get a special meaning from every tiny piece of that ancient tent.

Ever since the great controversy began long before this world was created, Christ as Michael the Archangel has represented God to angels, to unfallen beings, and, of course, in more recent times, to us here on this earth. The entire universe has been caught up in this great controversy. And what did the universe learn from the events of the Old Testament? For example, what did they learn from the events recorded in the book of Judges? They may have learned a lot more than we think! Consider how many human beings here on this earth understood what was happening when Jesus died on Calvary. The universe was rejoicing because Christ had accomplished the work He set out to do. It was a day of great victory for them.

Christ did not yield up His life till He had accomplished the work which He came to do, and with His parting breath He exclaimed, “It is finished.” John 19:30. The battle had been won. His right hand and His holy arm had gotten Him the victory. As a Conqueror He planted His banner on the eternal heights. Was there not joy among the angels? All heaven triumphed in the Saviour’s victory. Satan was defeated, and knew that his kingdom was lost.

To the angels and the unfallen worlds the cry, “It is finished,” had a deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished. They with us share the fruits of Christ’s victory.

Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. The archapostate had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 758.1-3.

But, here on this earth, the Pharisees and Sadducees were very worried; the disciples were scared to death and depressed. No one on this earth was talking about the great controversy.

Through His coming to this earth, living and dying as He did God spoke to the entire universe in very specific and forceful terms in ways that were not possible before. Jesus pointed out that the Old Testament bore witness to Him. (John 5:38-39; Luke 24:44; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4) But, while the Old Testament did speak about God, there were many things that still needed to be said. Do you see any answers to Satan’s accusations in the great controversy being given through the Old Testament sacrificial and sanctuary systems? Paul was trying to point out in this portion of Hebrews that the most important questions in the great controversy were not dealt with by the Old Testament. It did show that sin was supposed to be taken seriously. (Numbers 15:30-31) And the sacrificial system certainly involved a lot of death.

Later prophets in the Old Testament deplored the fact that the sacrifices were not taken more seriously. Instead, the temple courtyard became almost a kind of circus with priests killing animals as efficiently and casually as possible. But, what does that tell us about

God? On a few occasions, God spoke specifically about how He felt about sin and its effect on His people. (Hosea 11:8) But, in Paul's day, God gave His definitive answers. He had to do it in language that was meaningful to us. The Old Testament sanctuary was not very different from many of the pagan temples and alters in the nations around them. God had to use symbols and ideas with which they were already somewhat familiar. If God had given them a church like one of ours with a steeple and a pastor standing up in a black suit, they would not have known what to do with it!

Does this suggest that heaven has priests with all those decorated garments we read about in the Old Testament? All of that was a kind of sandbox illustration of what God was trying to teach His people? The children of Israel had just come out of slavery. They were not prepared to think in deep, theological, ethical, and philosophical terms.

Even in the New Testament, God met the people where they were. He came down and lived as an ordinary human being. He looked and dressed and acted like other human beings.

39. So, what did Jesus come to accomplish? What is He doing now as a follow-up? What did He tell us about His ultimate message? (John 14:9; 16:25-27) We are told that Jesus has kept His human form, even in heaven. What does that imply? Is that intended to help us feel more comfortable with God? Why do you think it is necessary for Jesus to maintain His human form including those scars in His hands and His feet for the rest of eternity? We have already considered passages from the Bible and the writings of Ellen White suggesting that what Christ accomplished on the cross was necessary even for angels. (Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19-20; *ST*, December 30, 1889 par. 4) Much in the Old Testament seems to have a pointing function, pointing forward to what was coming when the Messiah arrived. How has a knowledge of the life and death of Jesus affected your life?

Will God continue creating other worlds and other beings after the great controversy is over? What might happen if He does? Does God need to preserve the record of the great controversy so that if anyone is tempted to rebel in the future, He can show them what happened the last time someone tried that? Is that why Jesus will maintain His human form forever?

After seeing the panorama of the great controversy (GC 666.3; Philippians 2:10-11) and talking to Jesus, the Father, and the angels, will we be able to give a more complete and accurate explanation of why Jesus had to die? There are many explanations of why Jesus had to die being given in our world today that actually support Satan's charges that God is arbitrary, unforgiving, even severe, and exacting. Why is there so much talk about adjusting our legal standing in the sight of God? Doesn't that imply that God is unforgiving? Does the complete record of our sinful behavior need to be erased so that the page is clean before God will allow us into heaven?

If we are ever to become comfortable living with God the Father, we need to accept the testimony of Jesus that the Father is just like He was here on this earth and continues to be in heaven. (John 14-16)

Unfortunately, this kind of information never seemed to come across to the vast majority of men in the Old Testament. As we have mentioned, everything in the Old Testament pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah. But, people like Jeremiah had a glimpse. (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

The author of Hebrews then gets to the real point of his discussion. The God we worship is not arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, or severe. He is not a Tyrant or an exacting Judge. He is not even limited to the ways and means used by the ancient priesthood. He is indeed a God in the order of Melchizedek, ready to reign in righteousness and peace. That is what God has wanted all along. That is what He originally set up in the Garden of Eden. And if we come to understand God—and His wishes for us—correctly, God can take those Ten Commandments on the tables of stone and put them back in the museum. He can do that because the law will be written in our hearts and minds where it was always supposed to have been. We will not feel obligated to obey God out of sullen submission, but we will do so because it makes sense and we want to.

So, the sacrificial system described in the Old Testament was simply an emergency measure. We should have learned this already from Galatians and Romans. That was the issue at the Minneapolis General Conference in 1888. God had to add provision after provision in the times of the Old Testament to try to protect and guard His people from sin and its awful consequences. And some seemed to get the picture. The later prophets of the Old Testament spelled things out quite well. This does not mean that God's emergency measures were a failure. It is just that not many of us were listening. How many were listening and understanding when Jesus died on the cross? How many today understand the three angels' messages? God can speak in the most severe and awesome language possible and still only a very few percentage-wise of His children here on this earth are paying attention! The problem was not with God's Old Testament system. It was never designed to be anything more than an emergency measure. It was supposed to protect us from the serious consequences of sin. It did involve a lot of death. But, it could not tell what the real cause of the death was. And it did not spell out God's attitude toward those who die. That only happened with the life and death of Jesus. Look at Ellen White's magnificent description of why all those emergency measures were used in the Old Testament.

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 the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* 364.2.

We believe that the Ten Commandments were a transcript of God's character. (COL 315.1) But, they were designed to fit our human condition. They were written on the tables of stone because of our natural tendency to wander away from God's plans for our lives. Unfortunately, that sacrificial system became very mechanical, even heathen, in the way it was practiced. Following the 1888 General Conference meeting at Minneapolis, Ellen White said that all law but especially the moral law was added because we needed it. (1SM 233-235) And God surely is looking forward to the day when a few words in human language written on tables of stone can be put back in the museum and we will never even want to do anything wrong.

40. But don't you think God will preserve those Ten Commandments as a teaching device? It would be just like God to do that. Wouldn't it?

Hebrews suggests that now that trust has been restored on the basis of more than adequate evidence, all those old emergency measures should not be necessary. Does that abolish law? Paul did not think so. (Romans 3:31) If we have true faith in God and come to understand Him as we should, obedience will spring forth naturally because we will understand that God has never asked us to do anything which was not for our best good. It is no threat to our freedom in any way.

So, are we still living under those emergency measures? Do we have to severely warn our children every morning not to kill anyone on the playground at school? Does God need to introduce even more emergency measures to keep us from hurting ourselves?

Or, can we learn to trust God and come to understand why He has given us the commands that He has given us and the fact that they are really for our best good. Can we really accept that? If so, then we can move on and recognize that we do not need that old sacrificial, ceremonial system; we can look up to a new priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. And this new priesthood is functioning in heaven itself, not just in a tent in the desert or even in Solomon's or Herod's magnificent temples.

This new priesthood is located in heaven where the great controversy began and Jesus is the Priest. He is Michael the Archangel Who has provided all the answers. There is nothing that He cannot take care of if we trust Him to do so.

41. Read **Hebrews 8:3-11**. What was/is the offering that Jesus offered? The earthly Aaronic priesthood offered animal sacrifices. But, they were only "a copy and a shadow" of the real offering. What was that "pattern" that was shown to Moses on Mount Sinai? Are we supposed to understand that the pattern God gave Moses for that tent in the wilderness is an exact replica of the heavenly sanctuary? What was/is happening there?

We certainly do not believe that animals are being killed and blood is being spread around all over the "sanctuary" in heaven. God is certainly not confined to some small building somewhere in heaven. "Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool" He says in Isaiah 66:1 and Acts 7:49. So, what Moses was shown on the mountain was a pattern that God created to be appropriate for that time and place, recognizing human limitations and understanding of things.

God Himself recognized the limitations of that old system. Now, He is going to tell us about the true, eternal, faultless system He has set up in heaven.

Hebrews has already demonstrated very clearly that whatever took place in the Old Testament was not a final answer. So, what was new and different about the Melchizedek priesthood—of which Jesus is the prime Example—that was superior to the old system? The life and death of Jesus provided the answers that were needed in the great controversy. The system of the sanctuary and the sacrifices in the Old Testament was just a sandbox illustration—nothing more than a copy and a shadow of what needed to be said. Paul said several times in the next three chapters that the Old Testament system was a mere shadow. So, what is God's ultimate plan?

42. **Hebrews 8:7-8** tell us that the failure of the first covenant necessitated a second covenant. And that new covenant must be based on faith. And that faith must be based on the solid evidences that God has given the necessary answers in the great controversy. But, first the

author pointed out why the old covenant did not work—because they did not trust God. And at least a few of the Old Testament prophets recognized that. (Jeremiah 31:31-34) What was missing? They did not come to understand and know the Lord. And as a result, they did not understand the real reasons for observing His laws and maintaining their covenant promises with Him. But, in the second covenant, God says He will place those laws in our minds and write them on our hearts. As a result, we will recognize Him as our God, and we will be His people.

Many modern-day Christians, even theologians, have described this faith—this trust in God—as a leap in the dark. Does the Bible provide us so little evidence of the truth about God that we have to leap in the dark? Of course, if we are going to come to trust God, we must learn to know Him. God does not expect us to trust Him without providing sufficient evidence on which to base that trust. If we develop that kind of trust in Him, He can take care of whatever needs to be done. He knows all about our former sins and iniquities; but, He will not mention them, and He does not expect that we will mention them either.

Is that really possible? How did your parents treat you when you were young? Did they go around telling everyone about your childish mistakes and sins? Or, did they do everything possible to represent you in the best possible light? Our parents seemed to know us very well. Sometimes, they even seemed to have eyes on the back of their heads when we were up to mischief! But, they still loved us. God is that kind of Parent! And where is the evidence for that? Look how Jesus treated Judas, Peter, Simon, and Mary.

Simon was Mary's uncle. Ellen White says that he was the one who led her into sin. Her sins had become so widely recognized that she was known in the town as a wicked woman. (Luke 7:35) When Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to come to his place to celebrate his recovery from leprosy, Jesus did not expose him or Mary or Judas who was the real culprit. (See *The Signs of the Times*, October 9, 1879 par. 7.)

So, in recognizing the superiority of this new covenant, we recognize that the first covenant was becoming obsolete. But, through the new covenant, we now have a much better way of knowing and understanding God through the life and death of Jesus.

43. Read **Hebrews 9:1-5**. The author of Hebrews began to explain briefly all the details of the ancient sanctuary. But, then he said, "This is not the place or time to review all of that. We have much more important things to talk about."

And what was supposed to happen in that ancient tent-sandbox illustration? The priests who were sinners also would take the blood of the animals to offer for themselves and for the congregation to cover sins which were committed unintentionally. (Numbers 15:22-31; Leviticus 4:2,13) But, there were at least two major problems with that old system. It involved a lot of external rites and ceremonies which people came to regard as an end in themselves. But, more than that, it was never intended to cover anything more than unintentional sins! What are unintentional sins? Sins done in ignorance? How many of our sins are unintentional?

But, the author assumed that his audience already understood that, and he began to compare the heavenly sanctuary with that old system. The Holy Spirit can now work more effectively because He has better evidence. The life and death of Jesus has given the answers to the really important questions. And these were answers that the whole universe had been waiting so long to get. Does sin really lead to death? It is very important to recognize that Jesus fell dying to the ground in the Garden of Gethsemane before any

human being had touched Him, before any crown of thorns, before any beatings, before any crucifixion. Jesus died of sin in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the angel revived Him. (*Desire of Ages* 693.1)

God did not ask any of us or even an angel from heaven to go through that experience of the second death. If one of us died as a result of sin, others might think that God had killed us; that would be support for Satan's charges against our heavenly Father.

The author recognized that almost no human beings have understood this very important point. And he recognized that the point could never be clarified based on animal sacrifices or animal blood. And so, in Hebrews 9:10, he pointed out that a new order, a new way of solving the problem must be established, not based on outward ceremonies but on a real understanding of the issues involved. Killing animals and sprinkling blood does not deal with the basic questions about how to deal with real sin and make a real difference in the lives of people.

Unfortunately, it was easy for the ancient Israelites to think that sacrificing an animal could somehow magically take care of their sins; and then, they could go back and continue living their lives as they had before.

44. Is it obvious to us today that killing an animal should change our lives? Of course, the point was that sin leads to death. That is what they were supposed to learn. But, how few got the message. So, Paul made another human example. A will goes into effect only when the one who made that will dies. In the same way, he went on to say, God's ultimate answers were given by the life and especially the death of Jesus Christ. Christ's death was necessary to complete the plan of salvation.

In that Old Testament system, blood was everywhere. Was there some essential power in the blood? What did the people understand about what happened when they offered animal sacrifices? They were supposed to understand that the shedding of blood would somehow lead to forgiveness of sins and forsaking them. (Hebrews 9:22)

But, what about the new system in the heavenly sanctuary? Are animals being killed? Of course not! **Was some of the blood of Jesus preserved so it could be offered in the heavenly sanctuary? Or, rather, is it the meaning of it all that is significant? If we really understand the meaning of what all those ceremonies were supposed to point to, do we still need actual blood being offered? The only real power is in the meaning.** The blood itself has no power. Then, why do we so often sing things like "There's power in the blood"? Modern Christians have almost made the blood into some kind of idol. That would be hematolatriy—making an idol out of the blood.

Hebrews has already suggested what the answer was back in Hebrews 8. We need to come to know God. (Hebrews 8:11; Jeremiah 31:31-34) Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; and Colossians 1:19-20 make it clear that the death of Christ was necessary even for the benefit of the heavenly angels. And, of course, that is spelled out in great detail in the writings of Ellen White. (See "The Plan of Salvation in the Setting of the Great Controversy" at www.theox.org) Understanding the truth about God confirms the trust of the angels; but, it also "sets us right" and "keeps us right." Those are much simpler words to describe the plan of salvation, and we should use them instead of those long Latin words—*justification* and *sanctification*.

45. So, what about it? Do we live our lives as if we recognize the truth that sin is deadly? We have already mentioned that Jesus fell dying to the ground in the Garden of Gethsemane before any torture had taken place. And it was demonstrated again on Calvary by the fact that Jesus died within a few hours. Crucifixion usually takes several days before the person dies. It is absolutely essential for us to recognize that Jesus did not die because of the crown of thorns, or the beatings, or the blood loss, or the crucifixion, or the nails in His hands and feet; He died of sin.

Satan would like us to believe that sinners will die because they are being tortured and executed by God. Has that question been adequately answered? Romans 1:18,24,26,28 make it clear that when there is nothing more that God can do for them, God gives sinners up. (Compare Isaiah 59:2 and Hosea 4:17.) Romans 4:25 says that Jesus was given up. And how did Jesus react and respond when He was given up on the cross? Matthew 27:46 records His cry: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

But most Christians think that Jesus died because He was executed. They look at His sufferings which were certainly extreme—the thorny crown, the nails, the beatings—and they believe that is why Jesus died. And who was it that tortured and tried to execute Jesus? It was the Sabbathkeeping, tithing, health-reforming, Bible-quoting “adventists” of the day! They were so busy just doing what they thought God wanted them to do—following all the rules and all the ceremonies—until their sullen submission had turned them into rebels and enemies of the Son of God. (*12MR* 236.1; *ST*, July 22, 1897 par. 11; *TMK* 120.4) They were so concerned about following all the rules that they were anxious to get Him down off the cross and buried so they could rush home to keep the Sabbath in honor of the Person they had just crucified! That was insane!

They were following the blueprint! Do we need a blueprint? Or, do we need the truth about God? And they spelled out that blueprint in incredible detail. There was almost nothing they could do day or night that was not covered by the blueprint. And did that make them friends of God? No! It led them to torture and try to execute/kill God’s prophets and, ultimately, the Son of God Himself.

So, today, Christians read the Bible, and many of them think it is a kind of blueprint. And what have we learned from that blueprint? Well, what do people believe today about God’s role in the death of sinners? Don’t most Christians believe that God will torture sinners forever in hell? God’s answer to that question was given very clearly in Gethsemane and on Calvary. Sin kills people very quickly. But, it is not God who is killing them. It is sin. So, what about hell? Seventh-day Adventists say that we do not believe in hell. But, we go on to explain that we have just a shorter version of hell! Does God torture the wicked in the end for a period of time according to their sins?

It is essential for us to recognize what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane. The entire universe was watching intently every moment of that experience. They saw what Satan was doing. They saw what the Father and the Holy Spirit were doing as They were withdrawing Their beams of light and love and life support from the human Jesus. And they saw Satan doing everything he could possibly think of to get Jesus to sin—or if not to sin, to give up and go back to heaven. There are so many things we need to learn from that experience. The moment for which the universe had been waiting for thousands of years had come. What had God meant when He said that sin leads to death? (Genesis 2:17) In Gethsemane they saw the answer. God was not just making claims; He was providing evidence.

46. What killed Jesus? The unity of the Godhead was broken up. (*DA* 686.5; *3SP* 95.3) Sin separates us from God. (Isaiah 59:2) Of course, Jesus was not a sinner; but, God allowed Him to go through the experience of being separated from the Source of life—like a sinner—so all of us could get the point. (2 Corinthians 5:21) If Jesus had been a sinner, He would have perished in the glory of God when it came upon Him on the mount of transfiguration. (Matthew 17:1-8) What were the human companions of Jesus doing during that incredible struggle in Gethsemane? Were they coming to understand those very important issues in the great controversy? No! They were sleeping!

Even in the Old Testament, God had given some evidence about how He felt when sinners die. (Hosea 11:8) So, how do you suppose He felt as Jesus died? God was weeping. Our heavenly Father was suffering right along with the human Jesus, and the experience was so awful that we read in *Desire of Ages* 753.1 that the physical pain of crucifixion was hardly felt.

Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. **The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 753.1. [Bold type is added.]

As humans we tend to focus on the physical pain when we talk about His death. We must not minimize the physical suffering in any way. But, unfortunately, we have become so accustomed to living on “life support”—separated from God—that we think it is somehow normal. But, without that life support, we would suffer that terrible death. Somehow, God is trying to convince us how serious it is to be separated from Him. Both the Father and the Son suffered terribly. (See *ST*, March 26, 1894 par. 5; *BE* August 6, 1894; *FLB* 50.4; *5SDABC* 1108.)

But, in all of this, we must remind ourselves that to understand the answers, we must be asking the right questions. Failure to recognize the issues in the great controversy has led many Christians to a lot of so-called legal explanations of the death of Christ. Does God kill His sinful children? What about the flood? The firstborn in Egypt? Lot's wife? The stoning of Achan and his family? The burning of Sodom and Gomorrah? These are the Devil's key events or key texts; he has used them very effectively in trying to convince us that God tortures and kills His sinful children. Do we understand why all those deaths recorded in the Old Testament took place? What more could God do beyond what Jesus has already done to convince us of the seriousness of sin?

And God said, “What I have just done is so important that I want you to set aside some time every week to think about it.” And so, Jesus rested in the tomb over the Sabbath. The universe was celebrating because they recognized the victory that Jesus had accomplished. But, they were willing to wait, and the Father and the Holy Spirit were willing

to wait to add even more meaning to the seventh-day Sabbath. The Sabbath was already important because it was a memorial of creation. (Exodus 20:8-11) More than that, when the children of Israel were freed from slavery in Egypt, the Sabbath was given to them as a reminder of that freedom. (Deuteronomy 5:12-15) Lying in the grave over the Sabbath, Christ added new and even more important reasons for keeping the Sabbath. The Sabbath is supposed to be a celebration of the good news that we learn from the life and death of Jesus. It is a time for us to look at the evidence and grow our trust and faith in God.

So, why do we sometimes call the Sabbath an arbitrary test of our obedience? How could we ever suggest that the Sabbath is some kind of legalistic temptation to sullen submission! The Sabbath should become the best antidote to legalism—a remedy to sullen submission—because it gives us the evidence and the reasons for trusting God.

Hebrews tells us that all that blood of animals flowing in the Old Testament did not fully answer the real questions. We needed a true demonstration with unequivocal evidence of what sin does to people.

47. In Hebrews 9:1-22, we are reminded first of the furniture in the ancient Hebrew sanctuary and then of the actual proceedings that took place there. The author was building up to his main point. He did not think that he needed to review all the details of the ancient sanctuary system. But, in going over them briefly, he pointed out the superiority of the heavenly sanctuary system. And he concluded by reminding them that in that ancient Hebrew sanctuary, “almost everything was purified by blood, and sins are forgiven only if blood is poured out.” (Hebrews 9:22)

48. Read **Hebrews 9:23-27**. Proof that the ancient sanctuary system was not effective can be seen in the fact that the sacrifices had to be offered again and again. But, when Christ goes into the heavenly sanctuary, He is in the very presence of God. And what kind of sacrifice did He bring into the very presence of God? It only needed to be offered once; it was far superior to the animal sacrifices in that ancient tent-tabernacle. And that one superior Sacrifice is sufficient to remove sin—to deal with sin forever. And after that happens, there is the judgment. When Christ comes the second time, He will not have to deal with sin; He will come to save those who are waiting for Him.

So, how does He deal with sin? What is required to deal with sin? First John 3:4 tells us that “sin is the transgression of the law.” (KJV) Or, “Sin is lawlessness. (RSV) Since the law points out sin, it often irritates people. It is very easy to take the approach that God is trying to test us or maybe even to find fault with us. That is often the understanding people get from 1 John 3:4 in the *King James Version*. We need to compare Romans 14:23 which says, “Anything that is not based on faith is sin” and James 4:17 which says, “Those who do not do the good they know they should do are guilty of sin.” Sin is not something that is recorded in a book somewhere to be confessed and forgiven so the page can be wiped clean. Sin happens in the minds of human beings. So, in order to deal with sin, God must find some way to convince us to think differently about it.

49. Read **Romans 7:7-13**. In these verses we see Paul struggling with his own understanding of sin. And what about us? Down deep inside ourselves, what is our attitude toward sin?

Well, the tenth commandment made Paul angry when he first began to understand its implications. But, it is our guarantee of future freedom and safety in eternity. Those who, because of sullen submission, are obedient because they think they have to obey cannot be admitted into heaven or the earth made new. They are still rebels. And sooner or later,

they would just cause the rebellion to arise again. So, how do we really feel about that tenth commandment? And what does the death of Christ tell us about the very nature of sin? If we think that breaking one of the commandments will lead God to torture us and finally execute us, it will surely produce a rebellious attitude. Do we truly understand the truth that God will never kill His rebellious children in that second, final death? It is sin that kills. Hasn't that become clear from the life and death of Jesus?

It is true that God disciplines. And there have been times when He has had to put many of His children to death in the first death. But, God's discipline is carefully calculated to try to produce a reform in us that will eliminate sin. And all the time, God is crying, "How can I give you up? How can I let you go?" (Hosea 11:8)

50. What have we learned from the death of Christ? Are we asking the right questions? Are we still sleeping through Gethsemane and Calvary? Or, have we learned the truth that the angels learned from those incredible experiences?

God is begging us to get to know Him better so we can trust Him. In effect, He says, "If you trust Me, I can take care of whatever needs to be done." And what does it mean to trust Him? It means that when faced with choices, we choose to do God's will instead of our will—to do the loving thing instead of the selfish thing. But, it is not possible for us to do this in our own power. Paul understood that and described it in Romans. But, it is possible for us to set aside time for Bible study, prayer, and witnessing. These are the ways that we come to know God better and understand His ways for our lives and eventually learn to choose to do what is right because it is right.

The most incredible and costly evidence ever given in the history of the universe was the life and death of Jesus. Can we in the highest sense of freedom say: "Yes. We agree, God. You have won your case"? When He comes back the second time, that costly evidence will not need to be repeated.

51. Read **Hebrews 10:1-10**. In these verses the author placed his final condemnation on the old sanctuary system. It was never more than a shadow of the true things. And the proof that it did not work is the fact that it had to be repeated year after year. And many in the Old Testament—starting at least as early as with David in Psalm 40:6-8—recognized that dead animals burned on altars were not what God wanted. What He wants is for us to do His will. And yet, it is true that He asked for all those sacrifices to be made in that way. But, now a new way has been opened up directly into the heavenly sanctuary. And the life and death of Jesus are what opens the way.

Hebrews tells us that when God gave the final answer, it only needed to be done once. The Old Testament moral law pointed out sin. But, to too many people, the Law is only an irritation. A correct understanding of why Jesus had to die and how He died deals with that problem. And the tenth commandment is a guarantee of our future freedom and safety in heaven. Rebels will not be admitted to heaven. They would just start the great controversy—the costly war of ideas—all over again.

So, what do we think about God's laws? Is it now clear to us why God has asked us to do everything which He has asked us to do? Is God still threatening us with torture, even execution, if we do not obey? Unrepentant rebels will die, but it will not be at the hands of our gracious God. He is still crying and weeping: "How can I give you up? How can I let you go?" (Hosea 11:8)

52. Now for the big question: How does God deal with sin? What does it take to eliminate sin?

Hebrews 9:28 and Romans 8:3 suggest that Christ has done it. Consider the possibility that Jesus lived a sinless life to prove that it is possible for a human being to live that kind of life. Was He able to do that only because of His divinity? We believe that His life said something about how to deal with sin. But, what about His death? Does His death demonstrate the awfulness of sin? Wasn't that demonstrated before the flood? What about Judges 19? Or, was the rejection of the Son of God by His own people in the land of Palestine an even worse sin? (John 1:14) What could we learn from that experience that would help us to live better lives? Does it help us to understand the consequences of sin? Or, God's punishment of sin?

Often Christians have suggested that the life and death of Jesus provides a covering for us. How does Christ's righteousness cover us? Does it cover our sins? Are our filthy, sinful "garments" still under there? Why would we need to be covered? Is this a case of Jesus Christ helping us to slip into heaven without the Father really knowing what we are like? Are we really wolves in sheep's clothing? Or, is it that God does not have 20/20 vision? What do we mean when we say that when God looks at us, He sees only Christ?

Or, are Jesus and the Father dealing with some legal problems in heaven that we do not and cannot fully understand? Are we just supposed to trust God without understanding what is going on?

53. What is actually needed to turn a rebel into a trusting saint? Would that be a remedy for sin? We believe that whatever was necessary, God has done. But, what if He had not taken care of these legal matters? Would we be hopelessly lost? Could God have just sent word from heaven that He has taken care of everything and we do not need to worry about it anymore? Or, is it that sin demands the death of the sinner? Or, does someone or something else demand the death of the sinner? Why did Christ need to die that death and pay the price of sin?

Does our heavenly Father say to us: "Trust Me and obey Me and I will work with you as long as necessary. But after a considerable period of time and perhaps even some discipline if you don't obey Me, I will have to execute you"? Our earthly fathers would not do that. Does that mean that our earthly fathers are kinder or more loving than our heavenly Father? Is that why we need a "Friend in court"? Are we glad that we have Someone up there that we can understand and maybe is friendlier? Do we actually need Someone to plead with the Father on our behalf? Or, maybe a lot of "saints"? Does Jesus need to continually say, "My blood, Father, My blood"? If Christ's righteousness does not cover us in the final judgment, are we hopelessly lost? What difference does it make in our lives today to be covered with Christ's righteousness? Could you tell by observation whether or not a person is covered by Christ's righteousness?

In Jesus's death in Gethsemane and on Calvary, the universe watched everything that took place; they now understand the consequences of sin. Does that make it possible for God to deal with us sinners?

We often describe all of this in long Latin terms. And theologians down through the generations have added more and more of those long Latin terms until we almost spend more time wrestling with the terms than we do with the great questions!

When Jesus spoke to the crowds in Palestine, no one needed to consult a dictionary or a learned doctor to understand the meaning of His words.

Christ reached the people where they were. He presented the plain truth to their minds in the most [50] forcible, simple language. The humble poor, the most unlearned, could comprehend, through faith in Him, the most exalted truths. **No one needed to consult the learned doctors as to His meaning.** He did not perplex the ignorant with mysterious inferences, or use unaccustomed and learned words, of which they had no knowledge. The greatest Teacher the world has ever known, was the most definite, simple, and practical in His instruction.—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* 49.3; *CT* 240.2; *ST*, April 16, 1894, par. 3; *RH*, April 17, 1888, par. 7. [Bold type added.]

54. Instead of reading the commentaries and struggling with their explanations, wouldn't we be better off to go back to the original Scriptures?

So, what went wrong back in the beginning? Can we agree on what went wrong in our universe? Before we can get the right answers, we need to get the right questions. God must find a way to right whatever has gone wrong. Do we all agree on what has gone wrong? Is it a legal problem? Is it a problem with our records in heaven? First John 3:4, *RSV* says that "sin is rebelliousness." Romans 14:23 agrees. So, is the problem a rebellious attitude? Wouldn't rebelliousness be just the opposite of faith and trust? Is that why Paul said in Acts 16:31 that the only requirement for salvation is faith? So, we come back to our question: How does the death of Christ deal with my sins? Does it help to know that if I go on sinning, I will face the "fury of fire" (Hebrews 10:27) and my "very elements" are going to "melt with fervent heat"? (2 Peter 3:10,12) Wasn't that Jonathan Edwards's theme?

55. Christian evangelists have repeatedly made appeals to people asking, "Do you want to go to heaven or to hell?" Billy Graham used the third angel's message as his description of hell! Do you want to go up? Or, do you want to go down? Is hell a punishment from God? What is the punishment for breaking the law? If you read all five books of Moses, you will discover that every one of the commandments has a death penalty connected to its infraction except the tenth. (See *Leviticus - A Teacher's Guide #7* - https://www.theox.org/images/images_A2115/LEVITICUStg1.pdf) Will there come a day when God's mercy runs out? If we believe that the pre-advent judgment is now taking place, will it be the end of probation for us when our names come up? Jesus tells us that there will be people who claim in the judgment that they have even cast out devils in His name; He will have to say to them: "Go away; I never knew you." (Matthew 7:22-23)

So, we ask again, what is the cause of sin and rebelliousness? It might be easy for us to blame Satan. But, who caused Satan to sin? We have suggested that the remedy for rebelliousness is to learn the truth about God. But, what about Lucifer? Didn't he know the truth about God? If Lucifer really believed all the awful things that he has said about God—that God is arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe—would he even have dared to rebel in heaven? Shouldn't God have zapped him on the spot?

Learning the truth about God and how He feels about us and about sin is a major part of the great plan of salvation. But, we have to take advantage of it. And if we continue to rebel even when we know better and even when we understand God's attitude toward us, it makes rebelliousness absolutely inexcusable.

We have already looked at Ellen White's comment about a sullen submission to the will of the Father developing the character of a rebel. (*The Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1897, par. 11; *TMK* 120.4)

The inhabitants of heaven and of the worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen **the justice of God in the destruction of Satan. Had he been immediately blotted out of existence, some would have served God from fear rather than from love. The influence of the deceiver would not have been fully destroyed, nor would the spirit of rebellion have been utterly eradicated.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* 42.3.

At the beginning of the great controversy, the angels did not understand this. Had Satan and his host then been left to reap the full result of their sin, they would have perished; but it would not have been apparent to heavenly beings that this was the inevitable result of sin. A doubt of God's goodness would have remained in their minds as evil seed, to produce its deadly fruit of sin and woe.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 764.2. [Bold type is added.]

56. So, would it be dangerous to obey God out of fear? Wouldn't that produce a sullen submission? And isn't that exactly what God is trying to eliminate in His universe? If we believe that God tortures and finally executes His disobedient children or even burns them forever in hell, would that tend to produce fear or a sullen submission?

But, what about all of the people God has killed as described in the Bible? We think of the flood (Genesis 6-8), the firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 12:29-32), the 185,000 Assyrians (Isaiah 37:36; 2 Kings 19:35), and even in the New Testament, Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5) What about them? It is absolutely essential to our understanding of all this to distinguish between the first death—the sleep death—and the second or final death. Everyone who dies the first death will be raised to life again. But, the second death is final; there is no resurrection from that. Only Jesus who was also divine could arise from the second death. (John 10:18; *DA* 785.2)

What was clarified by the death of Jesus? Was it clarified sufficiently well so that it removes or even eliminates rebellion and sullen submission? Is it important for us to understand how both God and the Devil were involved in the death of Jesus? Has our understanding of exactly what happened in the death of Jesus had an effect on us personally? This, then, would **not** be an external matter to be dealt with legally and perhaps behind a cloud in heaven somewhere; instead, it is something very personal, internal, involving my attitude toward God? What kind of attitude change is necessary? Would it be correct to say that we have moved from rebelliousness, lawlessness, and a sullen submission to an understanding, trust, and faith? Would it be correct to say that that former lack of trust is the primary thing that has gone wrong in our universe? Ellen White said repeatedly that even the sinless angels needed to understand what happened on Calvary and in Gethsemane. (*5SDABC* 1132.8; *ST*, December 30, 1889; *BTS*, December 1, 1907 par. 4. Compare Ephesians 1&3 and Colossians 1.)

57. So, do we live in a family presided over by a Father who says if we refuse to live exactly as He tells us to, He will kill us? Do we believe the words of Jesus that if we have seen Him, we have seen the Father? (John 14:9) Does it help us to understand when He goes

on to say that He wants to call us no longer servants but friends? (John 15:15) God is doing everything possible to encourage us to grow up. He wants to treat us like adult friends. (Hebrews 5:11-6:3; Ephesians 4:11-16)

It is true that God could save everyone. He would need to turn heaven into a solitary confinement penitentiary, putting each one of us into an individual cell so we could not hurt each other; but He could save everyone. Would you want to be saved under those circumstances? God refuses to be a prison warden. He chose to die rather than to do that. But, that means that He will have to let some of us go. And what happens when He gives us up and lets us go? Christ was given up. (Romans 4:25) What did He cry when He was given up? (Matthew 27:46) Does understanding the following facts help to remove all cause for rebellion? 1) God does not torture His children, and He does not kill them. 2) But, if they insist on going their own way, He will finally have to give them up and let them go. (Hosea 4:17) Does it help us to understand sin?

58. Could we say that what God wants most of all is an intelligent obedience?

All who enter will have on the robe of Christ's righteousness and the name of God will be seen in their foreheads. **This name** is the symbol which the apostle saw in vision, and **signifies the yielding of the mind to intelligent and loyal obedience to all of God's commandments.**—Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor*, Aug. 18, 1886, par. 4; SD 370.2. [Bold type is added.]

And that is the obedience of a free person. (*Christ's Object Lessons* 97,98)

Does all of this help us to understand the following words from Ellen White?

The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes....

Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God. In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, “I have manifested thy name.” [John 17:6, KJV] “I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” [John 17:4, KJV] When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890, par. 6,9 (2ST 351:2:0-3:1); compare ST December 4, 1893; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 18, 359; RH August 14, 1900; YI November 21, 1883. [Content in brackets and bold type are added.]

59. Would it be correct to say that the good news is that God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be? Can we really understand the character of Jesus? Do we believe that the Father is just like Jesus?

Do we understand why the sacrificial system of the Old Testament could not accomplish everything that needed to be done? What could the death of animals teach us about the Father?

Why do people who really want to be saints continue to sin? (Romans 7:7-13) And how was it that Paul, having admitted that he could not stop sinning, could go on to thank God? (Romans 7:25-8:1) The condemnation was gone. All three Members of the Godhead are on our side. (Romans 8:26-39) For what more could we possibly ask?

60. So, what do we need to do now in the 21st century? We need to realize that it is impossible to stamp out sin; we can only crowd it out. We need to fill our lives full of thoughts and ideas that turn our attention to God instead of the sins of this world. Isn't that what Moses did? (Hebrews 11:24-26)

Consider an illustration. We say that at baptism we are burying the old man of sin and giving birth to a new babe in righteousness. But, we discover very quickly that if we do not keep hammering down the lid on the coffin of that old man of sin, he keeps popping out! And he is more than a match for the new babe in righteousness. Is that why every morning we need to take a hammer and go around the coffin and pound down the nails so the old man of sin cannot get out? How do we do that? Unfortunately, we often fail to nail down the lid of the coffin, and we even pry it up sometimes and slip the old man a sandwich! And perhaps worse, we fail to nourish the new babe in righteousness because we do not spend sufficient time in Bible study, prayer, and witnessing.

God will always accept us if we come back. But unfortunately, each time we come back after sinning, we are a little more scarred. God is a perfect Physician, and He can heal anything that is wrong with us. But, if we finally reach the place that we are just one big lump of scar tissue and we do not even want to come back to God, then He cannot heal us if we do not come back.

61. One question that has been raised repeatedly is the question about perfection. Can we be perfect? (See Matthew 5:48.) That is the wrong question to ask. What we need to ask is, "Can God completely heal us?" Do we really trust Him to heal us? Or, do we want to do it our way? The good news is about God and His capacity to heal and forgive. The good news is never about us. So, in Hebrews 10 we recognize that the old system did not accomplish what needed to be done; but, we believe that the death of Christ following His perfect life answered the questions fully, completely, and adequately and provided a valid basis for dealing with rebelliousness and making possible our sanctification.

One thing we should note is this: For all those who believe that Jesus paid the legal penalty for our sins, what was that penalty? Don't we believe that the final result of sin is the second death? And what is so serious about the second death? There is no resurrection from the second death. Then, if Jesus paid the full legal penalty for our sins, He should still be dead! Christ was able to demonstrate the consequences of sin. By the time He was dead, the questions had been answered. Christ was Victor because He understood the character of His Father.

Amid the awful darkness, apparently forsaken of God, Christ had drained the last dregs in the cup of human woe. In those dreadful hours **He had relied upon the evidence of His Father's acceptance heretofore given Him. He was acquainted with the character of His Father; He understood His justice, His mercy, and His great love.** By faith He rested in Him whom it had ever been His joy to obey. And as in submission He committed Himself to God, the sense of the loss of His Father's favor was withdrawn. By faith,

Christ was victor.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 756.3. [Bold type is added.]

In the final minutes or seconds before His death, Christ exercised His final measure of faith and triumphantly trusting His Father; He died a Victor. Do we understand why He died? Do we understand the danger of sin? Do we understand why the angels needed the cross? Could we explain it to an unbeliever? Or, even another Adventist?

As Seventh-day Adventists in the past, we have been very defensive about our church. We are almost afraid to have someone ask us about it. The good news is not about our church. The good news is not about us individually. The good news is about God, and we should never be embarrassed or defensive when talking about God. Everything about God is good news.

62. Does anyone really need any more evidence that God can be trusted? If we are still afraid of God or even not too sure if we can trust Him, has He won His case? If we cannot trust God, can He trust us? This explanation of why Jesus had to die involves the whole universe and is a much larger view of the issues in the great controversy than suggesting that God had to adjust our legal standing! Are we ready to grow up and wrestle with these bigger questions?

The atonement of Christ is not a mere skillful way to have our sins pardoned; it is a divine remedy for the cure of transgression and the restoration of spiritual health. It is the Heaven-ordained means by which the righteousness of Christ may be not only upon us but in our hearts and characters.—Ellen G. White, *Letter 406*, 1906; 6SDABC 1074.2; 7aSDABC 464.2. [Bold type is added.]

That is not accomplished by some legal adjustment somewhere in the universe; it requires our understanding and cooperation. We need spiritual healing, not just legal help.

63. **Why is it that “according to the Law almost everything is purified by blood, and sins are forgiven only if blood is poured out”? (Hebrews 9:22, GNB. Compare Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 10:4.) What is being referred to in these texts? (See Hebrews 9:9-10:10.)** Please note that this is a reference to what happened in the Old Testament.

Hebrews 9:22:

“...καὶ σχεδὸν ἐν αἵματι πάντα καθαρίζεται κατὰ τὸν νόμον καὶ χωρὶς αἱματεκχυσίας οὐ γίνεται ἄφεσις.” (*Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament*, 27th ed.)

“...by the law...without effusion of blood, is no remission.” (*Tyndale*)

“...by the law...without the effusion of blood there is no forgiveness.” (*Dickinson*, 1833)

“...according to the Law, ...without effusion of blood there is no absolution.” (*Schonfield*)

“...by the law ...without shedding of blood is no remission.” (*Geneva, KJV*)

“...according to the law...apart from blood shedding cometh no remission.” (*Rotherham*)

“...according to the law,...without blood-shedding there is no remission.”
(*Darby*)

“...according to the law, ...apart from shedding of blood there is no remission.” (*ASV*)

“The Law says... no sins can be forgiven unless blood is offered.” (*CEV*)

“...under the Law...unless blood is poured out nothing is forgiven.”
(*Goodspeed*)

“...according to the Law... sins are forgiven only if blood is poured out.”
(*GNB*)

“...according to the law ...without shedding of blood there is no remission.”
(*NKJV*)

“...according to the Law...if there is no shedding of blood, there is no remission.” (*Jerusalem*)

“...under the old agreement ...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” (*TLB*)

“According to the law ...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” (*NEB, NAB*)

“The law says that ...sins cannot be forgiven without blood to show death.”
(*NCV*)

“...the law requires that ...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” (*NIV*)

“...according to the law of Moses, there is no forgiveness [of sins] apart from the shedding of blood.” (*Wm. Paul*) [Brackets and content in brackets are present in the original.]

“...according to the law of Moses, ...Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.” (*NLT*)

“...under the law ...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” (*RSV, NRSV*)

“...in the Law... No shedding of blood, no remission of sin.” (*Phillips*)

“...according to God’s instructions,...without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.” (*Clear Word*)

“Practically everything in a will hinges on a death. That’s why blood, the evidence of death, is used so much in our tradition, especially regarding forgiveness of sins.” (*Message*)

It is extremely important to note that the focus in the meanings of ἀφίημι, ἄφεσις, and ἀπολύω is upon the guilt of the wrongdoer and not upon the wrongdoing itself. **The event of wrongdoing is not undone, but the guilt resulting from such an event is pardoned.** To forgive, therefore, means essentially to remove the guilt resulting from wrongdoing.

Some languages make a clear distinction between guilt and sin, and terms for forgiveness are therefore related to guilt and not to the wrongdoing.

Therefore, “to forgive sins” is literally “to forgive guilt.” Though terms for “forgiveness” are often literally “to wipe out,” “to blot out,” or “to do away with,” **it is obviously not possible to blot out or to wipe out an event, but it is possible to remove or obliterate the guilt.**—Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Vol. 1: *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (Electronic Edition of the 2nd Edition.) (502). New York: United Bible Societies. [Bold type is added.]

64. The author of Hebrews was reminding us in chapter 9 of the important points of the Old Testament system. In that old system, there was no provision for forgiveness of sin without the bringing of a sacrifice and the death of the designated animal. We need to see the seriousness of sin and to realize that “sin pays its wage—death.” (Romans 6:23, *GNB*; Genesis 2:17; Numbers 15:27-31) Christ came and lived His life to show us the unmistakable consequences of living a life like that of Christ, or instead, rebelling against Him. If we choose to rebel, we will die the awful death which He died. But, if we choose to be like Him, we will be treated as if we had never sinned. (Hebrews 10:17-18) The Old Testament system could never take away sins. (Hebrews 10:11)

The Old Testament is very explicit about what they were to do when someone committed a deliberate sin. (Numbers 15:30-31. Compare Numbers 15:32-36.) There were sacrifices for unintentional sins but not for deliberate sins. (Numbers 15:22-29) How many of our sins are deliberate? Why is deliberate sin so serious? It damages us by developing in us the character of a rebel!

65. **What relationship do you see between the original “sanctuary and its services” and the picture of “the heavenly sanctuary and its services” as portrayed by Hebrews? Do either one of these pictures represent the actual “transactions” that are taking place in heaven right now? (See Hebrews 10:1-18. Compare Daniel 7:9-14; Revelation 21:22.)**

Moses was told to build a sanctuary after the pattern shown to him in the mount. (Exodus 25:40; Hebrews 8:5; 9:23-28) But, there are several challenging questions that could be raised about this pattern. Was it a pattern that God showed to Moses because it was similar to other pagan temples with which people on this earth were familiar? Or, was it patterned after the temple in heaven? If it was patterned after the temple in heaven, are there dead sacrifices being offered in heaven? If Jesus was the once-for-all sacrifice, why do they need an altar of burnt offering? Do we need something to remind us eternally of death? And what about all of that blood carried around in the sanctuary? Will there be dead animals and blood in the temple in heaven? And how do we explain Revelation 22:21 saying: “And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it”?

If all that blood was for the purpose of reminding us of our sins (Hebrews 10:3, *GNB*: “As it is, however, the sacrifices serve year after year to remind people of their sins.” Compare Hebrews 10:8.), will we need to be reminded of our sins in heaven? But, if the sacrifice of Jesus has made all of that obsolete, then could we just put the “tabernacle” in the museum? (Hebrews 10:18)

66. **Why is it that “the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4,8,11, *GNB*) but Christ’s blood does? Is there something different about the blood itself? Or, is it, in turn, a symbol of something more? Why would God give**

them a system that did not work? If the ceremonial system could not take away sin, what was its purpose?

This is a continuation of the previous question. God seemed to be speaking about several important things through the sacrificial system. First of all, sin is deadly! We need to avoid it like the plague! But, God recognizes that we are weak human beings. So, He tells us that He will make arrangements to deal with our sins. (Romans 8:3) This is not to suggest that all sins have somehow been permanently buried in the bottom of the sea. (Micah 7:19) If God has completely forgotten about our sins, then He is not truly omniscient. Satan has not forgotten! Furthermore, the whole history of sin must be preserved as an eternal safeguard against sin ever arising again.

The death of Christ upon the cross made sure the destruction of him who has the power of death, who was the originator of sin. When Satan is destroyed, there will be none to tempt to evil; the atonement will never need to be repeated; and there will be no danger of another rebellion in the universe of God. **That which alone can effectually restrain from sin in this world of darkness, will prevent sin in heaven. The significance of the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels.... The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden, the paradise of bliss. All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God. The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.**—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times* Dec. 30, 1889, par. 4; 5SDABC 1132.8,9; OHC 45.4; TA 205.3.

Satan's rebellion was to be a lesson to the universe through all coming ages, a perpetual testimony to the nature and terrible results of sin. The working out of Satan's rule, its effects upon both men and angels, would show what must be the fruit of setting aside the divine authority. It would testify that with the existence of God's government and His law is bound up the well-being of all the creatures He has made. **Thus the history of this terrible experiment of rebellion was to be a perpetual safeguard to all holy intelligences, to prevent them from being deceived as to the nature of transgression, to save them from committing sin and suffering its punishments.**—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 499.1; PP 42.4. [Bold type is added.]

In the future, it will be impossible to discuss the plan of salvation if all traces of sin will have been eradicated. And there would be no guarantee that sin would not rise again in "another Lucifer"!

Every question of truth and error in the long-standing controversy has now been made plain. The results of rebellion, the fruits of setting aside

the divine statutes, have been laid open to the view of all created intelligences. The working out of Satan's rule in contrast with the government of God has been presented to the whole universe. Satan's own works have condemned him. God's wisdom, His justice, and His goodness stand fully vindicated. It is seen that all His dealings in the great controversy have been conducted with respect to the eternal good of His people and the good of all the worlds that He has created. "All Thy works shall praise Thee, O Lord; and Thy saints shall bless Thee." Psalm 145:10. **The history of sin will stand to all eternity as a witness that with the existence of God's law is bound up the happiness of all the beings He has created. [59] With all the facts of the great controversy in view, the whole universe, both loyal and rebellious, with one accord declare: "Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints."** [Revelation 15:3]....—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 670.3; *Darkness before Dawn* 58.2; *Heaven* 128.2; *Maranatha* 346.2.

He [Satan] has an accurate knowledge of the sins which he has tempted them to commit, and he presents these before God in the most exaggerated light, representing this people to be just as deserving as himself of exclusion from the favor of God. He declares that the Lord cannot in justice forgive their sins and yet destroy him and his angels. He claims them as his prey and demands that they be given into his hands to destroy.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 618.2; *Mar* 272.3. [Content in brackets and bold type are added.]

Although God has no problems with His memory, we have nothing to worry about. There will be no gossips in heaven. (Romans 1:29) And most important of all, God chooses "not to remember" our sins any longer. (Isaiah 65:17. Compare Jeremiah 3:16; 31:34; Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:17-18.)

67. How was God involved in the death of Jesus? Did God place our sins on Jesus; and then, in response, kill Him? What do we mean when we say that God's wrath was poured out on Jesus? Was the death of Jesus a threat? Or, a warning? Is God saying to us: "If you do not obey Me, I will kill you as I killed Jesus"? Or, is God warning us that sin is deadly? If sin is deadly, does it cause the first death? Or, the second death? Or, both?

Does God preserve the peace and security of the universe for all eternity by threatening anyone who gets out of line? If the message of the cross is that God will do to us what He did to Jesus if we do not obey, wouldn't that lead to sullen submission which we already know will eventually produce the character of a rebel? Or, do we really believe—as hard as it might be for us to do so here in a sin-polluted world—that sin is actually deadly? Jesus did not die of crucifixion; He died of sin.

Do we believe that Jesus died the death of sinners? Don't we believe that the death of sinners in the end will be in the fires of hell? Our Christian friends believe that sinners will burn forever. Most Seventh-day Adventists disagree with that—they just have a shorter version of hell! But, Jesus was not burned! There were no fires of hell in Gethsemane or on Calvary. So, how can we say that Jesus died the death of sinners? What will kill sinners in the end? Just as Jesus died as a direct result of sin, so sinners will die of sin in the end. The "cleansing flames" which are sometimes described as the "fires of hell" will consume

only dead corpses in the process of cleaning up this earth so God can re-make it like the Garden of Eden. (Isaiah 66:24) And the universe will be eternally secure because both angels and humans will have learned the truth about sin. Thus, Jesus died for sinless angels also.

68. In light of all this, can we be sure that God can be trusted? Would you trust the God of the Old Testament? Can you give a clear reason why God destroyed virtually the whole world in the flood? Why did He kill all the firstborn in Egypt? And why did God kill so many others in the Old Testament? Can we explain all those stories sufficiently well so that we can be sure that there is no need to be afraid of God? God must totally, completely, and finally eliminate all fear. (1 John 4:18) If God cannot fully and completely eliminate fear, there will eventually be sullen submission and more rebels.

So, what was the purpose of all those sacrifices in the Old Testament? And what about Sabbathkeeping? Is the purpose of taking medicine when you are sick just to take the medicine?

In the Old Testament, the children of Israel came to the place where they believed that going through all the ceremonies was an end in itself. They kept the Sabbath just because they thought that was what they were supposed to do. They killed lambs and went to the ceremonies at the temple because that was what they were supposed to do. It is like believing that the ultimate aim of taking medicine is to take the medicine. If you can say that you have taken it regularly all your life, would that be a healthy life? Does taking the medicine guarantee a healthy life? Or, is the purpose of taking medicine to actually get well?

The Pharisees in the days of Jesus had become so involved in the details of “taking the medicine” that they could not seem to realize that they were supposed to learn something from all that medicine taking. And finally, on one very special Passover Friday, they killed their Messiah, the Son of God, and raced home to keep another seventh-day Sabbath. A misunderstanding of the reasons for keeping the commandments including Sabbathkeeping turned out to be a curse for them. How many of God’s gifts when misunderstood can turn into curses? And because the children of Israel as described in the Old Testament refused to follow God’s life-giving rules, God had to use emergency measures. The flood; killing the firstborn in Egypt; swallowing up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16:31-35); and striking Uzzah dead (2 Samuel 6:6-8) were only stopgap measures. God needed to get our attention and hold it long enough for us to learn something.

And when Jesus tried to explain all those things recorded in the Old Testament, they killed Him rather than accept His explanations. And while God’s Sabbathkeeping, tithe-paying, health-reforming “adventists” of Jesus’s day were rushing home to faithfully keep another seventh-day Sabbath, the universe was celebrating because God had given the answers that were needed in the great controversy. And where were the friends of Jesus? Hiding in the upper room behind locked doors! They still had not gotten the point either. And when will we get the point? Almost 2000 years have passed since those events took place. And clearly, the book of Hebrews is intended to help us get the message from the Old Testament and from the life and death of Jesus.

69. Read **Hebrews 10:19-20**. What does it mean to say that we have “complete freedom to go into the Most Holy Place by means of the death of Jesus” (*GNB*)? The more traditional

and literal translations say, “By the blood of Jesus.” And what does it mean to say: “He opened for us a new way, a living way, through the curtain—that is, through his own body” (GNB)?

The Shekinah, God’s symbolic presence in the temples of the Old Testament, dwelt in the most holy place. So, does our understanding of why Jesus had to die make us more comfortable approaching our Father-God? Is there any fear left? Or, only reverence? The questions have been answered, and God’s love should be overwhelming. Is that enough for us? Are we fully convinced that God can be trusted? That is what it means to have faith.

70. Read **Hebrews 10:21-22**. Do we understand why the author of Hebrews was suddenly talking about a Great High Priest? And what is the point of “bodies washed with clean water”?

Hebrews is trying to explain the events of the sanctuary service recorded in the Old Testament. The high priest was the only person allowed to directly approach God in the most holy place. But, before he did that, he had to go through an elaborate process of cleansing by sacrifices and clean water.

71. Read **Hebrews 10:23-25**. And what is to be our response? We can trust God to keep His promise. And we should help each other to understand all of this by showing love and doing good. We should go on meeting together, especially as we see the “Day of the Lord” coming near.

72. Read **Hebrews 10:26-31**. What happens if we do not get the message? What if we go on sinning after we have understood what God wants us to know? Hebrews tells us we will be left “to wait in fear for the coming Judgment and the fierce fire which will destroy those who oppose God!” (Hebrews 10:27, GNB) And then, Hebrews reminds us of what happened to those who were found to be guilty in the Old Testament. How much more terrible will be the punishment “of those who despise the Son of God? who treat as a cheap thing the blood of God’s covenant which purified them from sin? who insult the Spirit of grace? Just think how much worse is the punishment they will deserve!” (Hebrews 10:29, GNB)

Hebrews 10:30-31 (GNB): ³⁰ For we know who said, “I will take revenge, I will repay”; and who also said, “The Lord will judge his people.” ³¹ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God!

73. Was the author of Hebrews warning us of how serious it will be if we misunderstand the death of Jesus? In Hebrews 12:29, he went on to say, “Our God is a consuming fire!” Is God using fear to motivate us to learn the truth and eliminate fear? When Martin Luther read these verses, especially Hebrews 10:26, it led him to reject the book of Hebrews, saying that it could not be inspired. Could we make a similar mistake? How important is it to understand why Jesus had to die?

74. Read **Hebrews 10:32-39**. Paul reminded his readers that they had already been through many struggles. They were publicly insulted and ill-treated. Their belongings had been seized. But, they had survived through all of that. And why? Because they claimed a much better prize, the prize of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. So, we must not become discouraged. We need to be patient. The second coming may be delayed; but, it will not be delayed forever. We must not turn back and be lost. We must come to trust our heavenly Father. (Hebrews 11)

75. Read **Hebrews 10:38-39**. Are we willing to take time to carefully investigate the truth about God? Or, are we among those who have turned back and rejected Him? When God's children turn against Him, it is a defeat for Him! Millions of His angels and millions of people living here on this earth have rejected Him. God is severely disappointed every time this happens. But, God understands that trust and love cannot be forced. So, He has chosen a different method. He provides all the evidence He possibly can and says: "Look at the evidence. Do you see enough evidence that I can be trusted?"

A biblical definition of *faith* based on all of Scripture, and stated many times so well by one of God's best modern friends, Dr. A. Graham Maxwell, is as follows:

Faith is [just] a word we use to denote a relationship with God as with a Person well known. The better we know Him, the better this relationship may be.

Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deep admiration. It means having enough confidence in Him, based upon the more than adequate evidence revealed, to be willing to believe whatever He says [as soon as we are sure that He has said it], to accept whatever He offers [as soon as we are sure that He is the one who is offering it], and to do whatever He wishes [as soon as we are sure He is the one who wishes it]—without reservation—for the rest of eternity.

Anyone who has such faith is perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven.

[Faith also means that like Abraham and Moses, God's friends, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, "Why?"]—A. Graham Maxwell, *You Can Trust the Bible*, p. 81. [Content in brackets is added based on Dr. Maxwell's lectures.]

Salvation means healing—they are the same word in Greek, *sōzō*. Salvation is much more than just forgiveness. God can heal any problem that we have except an unwillingness to listen and cooperate with Him. The Greek word for *obedience* is *hupakoe* which means literally "a humble willingness to listen." It was the word used to describe a faithful gatekeeper. Since locks were not as strong or reliable in those days, slaves were employed to guard the gates of wealthy homeowners. When the owner came home, he would simply call out to the gatekeeper, and the gatekeeper who was expected to be always at the ready and listening carefully would open the door from inside. The obedient may not be capable of performing all that God asks of us. But, we are willing to listen and cooperate as far as possible.

The surprising number of people whose deeds are recorded in the books of Joshua and Judges who made it into Hebrews 11 tells us that we do not have to be "supersaints" to have faith and to be healed so that we are a part of the family of God. These names should give us great courage as we struggle against the temptations that assail all humanity.

76. How are the three Members of the Godhead involved in the process of salvation? (Hebrews 10:12-18; Romans 8:26-39) After the Holy Spirit is finished, it seems there is no need for any further sacrifice. What does the Holy Spirit actually do about our sins?

Consider these words from the *SDA Bible Commentary*:

The one sacrifice of Christ accomplished that which the continual sacrifices of the priests could not, for they could not purge the conscience (see on Hebrews 9:9,14; 10:2). When the sinner accepts by faith the benefits of that one sacrifice he is accepted in the Beloved, being counted as perfect, because Christ his substitute stands in his place (see on Rom. 5:1; cf. SC 62).—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 7. 1980 (F. D. Nichol, Ed.) (461). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Romans 8 makes it clear that all three Members of the Godhead are for us and will do whatever They can to save us. Does Christ then have to plead with the Father on our behalf? For millennia, that has been the traditional teaching of the Christian church. But, Jesus Himself said that He would not need to do that.

John 16:26-27 (Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament 27th): 26 ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου αἰτήσεσθε, καὶ οὐ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐρωτήσω τὸν πατέρα περὶ ὑμῶν· 27 αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ φιλεῖ ὑμᾶς.”

John 16:25-27 (GNB): ²⁵ [Jesus said:] “I have used figures of speech to tell you these things. But the time will come when I will not use figures of speech, but will speak to you plainly about the Father. ²⁶When that day comes, you will ask him in my name; and I do not say that I will ask him on your behalf, ²⁷for the Father himself loves you. He loves you because you love me and have believed that I came from God.”

John 16:25-27 (Message): [Jesus said:] “I’ve used figures of speech in telling you these things. Soon I’ll drop the figures and tell you about the Father in plain language. Then you can make your requests directly to him in relation to this life I’ve revealed to you. I won’t continue making requests of the Father on your behalf. I won’t need to.” [Content in brackets is added.]

For those who are very worried about their past sins and what God might do to them because of those sins, the idea that Jesus is in heaven pleading on their behalf is a most precious gift. God is willing to have us think that if we need it. But, when we come to know God as Jesus revealed Him and realize that the Father is just like the Son and further that the Son was the “God” of the Old Testament, (1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Luke 24:44; John 5:39-40) we can relax and get to know the truth about both the Father and the Son. What we need to be afraid of is sin. (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23) It is sin that is deadly.

Romans 8 points out that the Holy Spirit is on our side just as much as Jesus is—and so is the Father. Since all three Members of the Godhead on our side, we have nothing to fear if we are willing to cooperate with Them.

77. Why would God say, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay”? (Hebrews 10:30; Romans 12:19; Deuteronomy 32:35) What does this statement mean?

There are many Christians who think that they have been deeply wronged by someone else. And they are looking forward to the day when vengeance will be poured out! No doubt, they wish that they could pour out the vengeance themselves; but, they are hoping that God will do an even more complete and thorough job than they could!

However, God regards each person as His son or daughter. He does not want to pour out vengeance on anyone. (Ezekiel 33:11; Hosea 11:7-9) He wants everyone to repent and come home to Him. So, while we may want God to pour out His vengeance on our enemies, God wants to save them.

The idea of personal vindictiveness must be eliminated from the word as used here of God's avenging justice. It means rather the full meting out of justice to all parties. In the day of God's vengeance the wicked will receive the inevitable consequences of their own choice. **By their lives of rebellion they have placed themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire (2 Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 6:15-17).**—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 6. 1980 (F. D. Nichol, Ed.) (624). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

To sin, wherever found, "our God is indeed a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:29. [GNB] In all who submit to His power the Spirit of God will consume sin. But if men cling to sin, they become identified with it. Then the glory of God, which destroys sin, must destroy them.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 107.4.

By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them.—*Ibid.* 764.1. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

How does this fit with the idea that sin is deadly? When God removes His veil and His life support for sinners, they will self-destruct. We live in a very artificial environment. Sin should not be able even to exist in God's universe.

78. Does Hebrews 11:1 tell us what faith is? Or, does it tell us what faith does? In what sense is faith a "substance" or "evidence"?

Hebrews 11:1:

“Ἔστιν δὲ πίστις ἐλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων.”
(*Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament*, 27th Ed.)

“Faith is a sure confidence of things which are hoped for, and a certainty of things which are not seen.” (*Tyndale*, 1525)

“Now faith is the ground of things, which are hoped for, and the evidence of things which are not seen.” (*Geneva*, 1599) [Footnote: An excellent description of faith by the effects, because it representeth things which are but yet in hope, and setteth as it were before our eyes things that are invisible.]

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (*KJV*, 1611; *NKJV*)

“Now faith is an assumption of what is being 'expected', a conviction concerning matters which are not being observed.” (*Concordant Literal*)

“Now faith is *the* substantiating of things hoped for, *the* conviction of things not seen.” (Darby)

“Now faith is confidence in respect to things hoped for, and convincing evidence of things unseen.” (*Dickinson*)

“Faith means the assurance of what we hope for; it is our conviction about things that we cannot see.” (*Goodspeed*)

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (*RSV, NRSV*)

“Now faith is the title-deed of things hoped for, the putting to the proof of things not seen.” (*Montgomery*)

“Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.” (*NAB*)

“Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it.” (*NCV*)

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” (*NIV*)

“To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.” (*GNB*)

“Faith makes us sure of what we hope for and gives us proof of what we cannot see.” (*CEV*)

“Now, [having] faith is being sure of [receiving] what is hoped for, and certain [of the existence] of what is not visible.” (*Wm. Paul*) [Brackets and content in brackets are present in the original.]

“To have faith means to be sure of the things we hope for and to be certain of the things we can’t see.” (*Clear Word*)

“What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead.” (*TLB*)

“What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see.” (*NLT*)

“Now faith means that we have full confidence in the things we hope for, it means being certain of things we cannot see.” (*Phillips*)

“Now faith is the solid ground of our expectations, the proof of unseen actualities.” (*Schonfield*)

“Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen.” (*Jerusalem*)

“And what is faith? Faith gives substance [footnote: *or assurance*] to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see.” (*NEB*)

“The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It’s our handle on what we can’t see.” (*Message*)

This verse tells us what faith does, not what faith is. There are several Greek words that are important in this verse. The first is *hupostasis*, a word of which the original translators of the English Bible did not know the meaning. So, they took the two parts of the Greek word, *hupo-* meaning “under” (like *hypodermic* is a needle to go under the skin, the Latin is *sub-*) and *stasis* which in Greek means “standing” and in Latin is *-stance* and that is how we got the word *sub-stance*.

Hupostasis is used in the ancient papyri of the legal documents by which a person proved his ownership of property. The documents were not the property, but they provided evidence of its existence and of his right to it. Accordingly, *hupostasis* might here be rendered “title-deed”—“Faith is the title-deed ...”—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 7. 1980 (F. D. Nichol, Ed.) (471). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

The other important word in Hebrews 11:1 is *elegchos* which is a noun derived from a verb which means “to be convinced.”

Elegchos, here meaning “proof,” “conviction.” Faith is not abstract belief that evidence exists, but a settled assurance, based on confidence that God will fulfill His promises. We may never have seen the generator that produces the electricity we use in our homes, but we rightly consider the presence of the electricity sufficient evidence of the existence of the generator. Similarly, we believe that our physical, mental, and spiritual energy testify to the existence of a supernatural Source of life and power.—*Ibid.*

79. So, what is faith? And what is its role in salvation? (Acts 16:31) What do we learn about faith from Hebrews 11:1,6? How could so many people whose deeds are recorded in Judges be included in Hebrews 11? Why would the author pick these people as examples of faith: Rahab? Barak? Gideon? Samson? Jephthah? What about the people who followed Jim Jones to Guyana? Or, David Koresh at Waco? Didn’t they have faith?

Often, apparent miracles are pointed to as a basis for trusting someone. But, the Bible clearly warns us against that. See Deuteronomy 13:1-3; 1 Kings 13; Matthew 24:24; and Revelation 13. And what about Michaiah and the 400 lying prophets as recorded in 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18? In light of all that, how do we decide who we can trust? And what is the basis for such a decision?

God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth

will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* 105.2.

Jesus Christ Himself gave us the best example of the fact that He wants us to trust solid, reliable evidence. On resurrection Sunday on the road to Emmaus, He could have identified Himself, and those two disciples would have been delighted and, no doubt, would have rushed back to the upper room to give the good news to the others. But instead, He led them through the Old Testament quoting passage after passage to support the idea that the life and ministry of Jesus were a correct and authentic fulfillment of prophecies in the Old Testament. (Luke 24:13-35)

Jesus did not first reveal himself in his true character to them, and then open the Scriptures to their minds; for he knew that they would be so overjoyed to see him again, risen from the dead, that their souls would be satisfied. They would not hunger for the sacred truths which he wished to indelibly impress upon their minds, that **they might impart them to others, who should in their turn spread the precious knowledge, until thousands of people should receive the light given that day to the despairing disciples as they journeyed to Emmaus.**

He maintained his disguise till he had interpreted the Scriptures, and had led them to an intelligent faith in his life, his character, his mission to earth, and his death and resurrection. He wished the truth to take firm root in their minds, not because it was supported by his personal testimony, but because the typical law, and the prophets of the Old Testament, agreeing with the facts of his life and death, presented unquestionable evidence of that truth. When the object of his labors with the two disciples was gained, he revealed himself to them that their joy might be full, and then vanished from their sight.—Ellen G. White, *6Redemption* 32.3 (1877); *3Spirit of Prophecy* 214.1-2 (1878); *ST*, Oct. 6, 1909; *5SDABC* 1125.12. [Bold type is added.]

Try to imagine the incredible freedom offered to us by God when He says, “Do not trust Me unless you see good evidence for it.” Of course, God took this approach because He knows how the Devil operates. In light of all this, how do you understand Hebrews 11:1? The New-Testament Greek word *hupostasis* means a “title deed,” a document proving the ownership of a piece of property or building. It is a business transaction entered into. Notice these words from Ellen White.

Many hold faith as an opinion. **Saving faith is a transaction by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God.** Genuine faith is life. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 347.1; *MH* 62.2; *AG* 140.2; *GW* 261.1; *LHU* 85.7. [Bold type is added.]

At first glance, it might seem that faith is not enough for salvation. Don't we have to confess our sins? And maybe do a lot of other things that the Bible says are necessary before we can hope to be saved? And what about passages like Ecclesiastes 12:13-14;

Romans 2:6; and Revelation 20:12-13 that suggest that we will be judged by our works? If we are saved by faith, how can we be judged by our works?

80. So, what kind of faith is Christ asking us to have? Does He want us to believe that He is God without providing adequate evidence? Doesn't everyone believe that s/he should trust God? Our understanding of the great controversy helps us to realize that Satan's focus for thousands of years has been to get people to doubt God. And so, he has accused God of many awful things—of being arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, severe, a Tyrant, and an unjust Judge. So, how is God supposed to respond to such accusations? Do we have solid evidence about what kind of a Person God is? Didn't Jesus say that if we have seen Him, we have seen the Father? (John 14:9) So, what is it about Jesus and about the Father that we are supposed to have faith in, or to trust? Hebrews seems to make it clear that faith is essential!

Hebrews 11:6 (GNB): No one can please God without faith, for whoever comes to God must have faith that God exists and rewards those who seek him.

In this verse, is God threatening us? Is He saying that He is watching for those who have faith? Is He saying that if we do not trust Him and obey Him, He is going to be very upset? Would it be safe to displease God?

Unfortunately, the word *faith* has come to be used to describe many things which it was never intended to mean. Religious people often suggest that *faith* means knowing something for which you may not have real evidence. You just know it by faith; you do not need any evidence. How would you feel about a surgeon who planned to operate on you who said, "I just know by faith that I need to cut here"?

And what about other decisions we make? Don't we need to make a careful investigation before we purchase a new or used car? Is that a more important decision than our choice about God? Some believers just say that believing in God is a matter of the heart and not of the mind. They may say, "God has said it, I believe it, and that is all there is to it." They seem to have forgotten Proverbs 23:7 which clearly points out that the biblical understanding was that we think with our "heart." In fact, in biblical understanding, thinking took place in the heart and feeling took place in the gut—in the intestines. In modern times, we understand that thinking takes place in the brain, and we assign feelings to the "heart" even though feelings are actually also in the brain or mind.

81. Who was the greatest example of faith in the Bible? Read Hebrews 11:17-19, *GNB*.

Read the original story in Genesis 22. Why is Abraham considered the greatest example of faith? What does this test tell us about Abraham? And about God? Notice these very significant words regarding that experience from Ellen White.

That day—the longest that Abraham had ever experienced—dragged slowly to its close. While his son and the young men were sleeping, he spent the night in prayer, still hoping that some heavenly messenger might come to say that the trial was enough, that the youth might return unharmed to his mother. But no relief came to his tortured soul. Another long day, another night of humiliation and prayer, while ever the command that was to leave him childless was ringing in his ears. Satan was near to whisper doubts and unbelief, but Abraham resisted his suggestions. As they were about to begin

the journey of the third day, the patriarch, looking northward, saw the promised sign, a cloud of glory hovering over Mount Moriah, and he knew that the voice which had spoken to him was from heaven.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* 151.3.

Abraham's great act of faith stands like a pillar of light, illuminating the pathway of God's servants in all succeeding ages. Abraham did not seek to excuse himself from doing the will of God. During that three days' journey he had sufficient time to reason, and to doubt God, if he was disposed to doubt. He might have reasoned that the slaying of his son would cause him to be looked upon as a murderer, a second Cain; that it would cause his teaching to be rejected and despised; and thus destroy his power to do good to his fellow men. He might have pleaded that age should excuse him from obedience. But the patriarch did not take refuge in any of these excuses. Abraham was human; his passions and attachments were like ours; but he did not stop to question how the promise could be fulfilled if Isaac should be slain. He did not stay to reason with his aching heart. He knew that God is just and righteous in all His requirements, and he obeyed the command to the very letter.—*Ibid.* 153.3.

Satan did everything that he could to try to convince Abraham that this command from God was ridiculous, unnecessary, and unfair. But, Abraham stood the test, and the purpose of the test had a much larger meaning in the great controversy.

The sacrifice required of Abraham was not alone for his own good, nor solely for the benefit of succeeding generations; but it was also for the instruction of the sinless intelligences of heaven and of other worlds.

The field of the controversy between Christ and Satan—the field on which the plan of redemption is wrought out—is the lesson book of the universe. Because Abraham had [155] shown a lack of faith in God's promises, Satan had accused him before the angels and before God of having failed to comply with the conditions of the covenant, and as unworthy of its blessings. God desired to prove the loyalty of His servant before all heaven, to demonstrate that nothing less than perfect obedience can be accepted, and to open more fully before them the plan of salvation.

Heavenly beings were witnesses of the scene as the faith of Abraham and the submission of Isaac were tested. The trial was far more severe than that which had been brought upon Adam. Compliance with the prohibition laid upon our first parents involved no suffering, but the command to Abraham demanded the most agonizing sacrifice. All heaven beheld with wonder and admiration Abraham's unfaltering obedience. All heaven applauded his fidelity. Satan's accusations were shown to be false. God declared to His servant, "Now I know that thou fearest God [notwithstanding Satan's charges], seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." God's covenant, confirmed to Abraham by an oath before the intelligences of other worlds, testified that obedience will be rewarded.

It had been difficult even for the angels to grasp the mystery of redemption—to comprehend that the Commander of heaven, the Son of God, must die for guilty man. When the command was given to Abraham to offer up his son, the interest of all heavenly beings was enlisted. With intense earnestness they watched each step in the fulfillment of this command. When to Isaac’s question, “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham made answer, “God will provide Himself a lamb;” and when the father’s hand was stayed as he was about to slay his son, and the ram which God had provided was offered in the place of Isaac—**then light was shed upon the mystery of redemption, and even the angels understood more clearly the wonderful provision that God had made for man’s salvation.** 1 Peter 1:12.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* 154.3-155.2. [Content in brackets is in the original; bold type is added.]

This is an excellent example—perhaps the best in all the Bible—of what it means to have a true, trusting relationship with God and to follow God’s direct command even though it apparently did not seem to make sense at the time. Will we ever be asked to follow commands which perhaps do not seem to make sense to us at the time?

A couple of points of clarification will make the story easier to understand. To the ancient Hebrews, offering something to God was not considered killing. If you had asked Abraham if he was going to kill his son, his answer would have been, “No, I am offering him to God.” The real difficulty in Abraham’s mind was trying to harmonize the previous promises he had been given concerning Isaac and this command now to sacrifice him. Through three long days of walking all day and pleading with God all night, Abraham demonstrated that his trust of God was more important to him than life itself. This passage in Hebrews 11 suggests that Abraham eventually came to the conclusion that God would either provide a substitute or resurrect his son. And Abraham knew God well enough that he came to the right conclusion.

As we know, Abraham had failed God on several previous occasions including: 1) Lying about his wife being his sister, and 2) Not trusting God’s promise to give him a son but at Sarah’s suggestion taking Haggar as a secondary wife. But, now at the age of 120, Abraham’s faith is a shining example to all. Just as the universe was watching on this occasion the experience of Abraham, don’t you think they will be watching with intense interest the final days of this earth’s history and the experiences of the 144,000? Are we prepared to demonstrate Abraham-like faith?

82. Read **Hebrews 11:23-26**, *GNB*. Think of the life story of Moses. After 12 years spent at home with his Hebrew parents and then 28 years receiving the best education the Egyptians could give him including training about all the details of their religion, Moses believed he was ready to free his people from slavery. But, God realized that his education had only begun. Forty years of herding sheep gave him plenty of opportunity to think. What do you think Moses was thinking about during all those years? What led him to take the longer, larger view of things and cast his lot with his people instead of being a pharaoh in Egypt or avoiding the whole issue by staying in Midian as a shepherd?

83. Read **Hebrews 11:27-40**, *GNB*.

How do we explain the fact that so many of the characters recorded in the book of Judges made it into this list of God's people showing "faith"? Was the author of Hebrews trying to list the most extreme cases of which he could think? Rahab put her life on the line to defend the Israelite spies. Was she exercising faith? We should go back and review the stories of each of these individual characters and see where they exercised faith in God.

Does reading this list encouraged you? You may doubt that you have the faith of Abraham or Moses, but what about Rahab, Jephthah, or even Samson? Look at all the things these people went through. During the seven last plagues, will the 144,000 go through similar things?

84. Read **Hebrews 12:1-6**, *GNB*. Who are the crowd being referred to? Aren't they the people mentioned in Hebrews 11? In light of their experiences, why do the saints need discipline? Or, do they? And who is bringing the discipline? Why is it necessary for the saints to go through all those troubles to prepare them for living in a world where there will be no troubles?
85. **Hebrews 12:7-11** suggests that God disciplines His children to perfect their characters. What is Satan's role in all of that? Is God cooperating with Satan in this disciplinary process? Or, is God's discipline completely separate from Satan's temptations? How can we distinguish between the two? Does God allow Satan to "try" us?

As we approach the end of time, God will have a people who are loyal to Him. Since the days of Adam and Eve, Satan has had many loyal followers. But God has not had a significant core group of people who are absolutely committed to Him even to the point of death. Job was one such person, but God needs a group large enough to be able to be "seen and heard" around the world as they witness for their faith. They will fit the description given by Ellen White many years ago.

Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads,—**it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved**,—just as soon as God's people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come. Indeed, it has begun already; the judgments of God are now upon the land, to give us warning, that we may know what is coming.—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript* 173, 1902, 3-6. ("Medical Missionary Work in Southern California," November 20, 1911.); *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1161.6; *LDE* 219; *Maranatha* 200.2; *FLB* 287.7; *OFC* 83.6, 328.2; *1MR* 249.2-250.0; *10MR* 252.1.

Satan recognizes even now that if such a group forms and is able to stand firm in their faith, he is finished. He will do everything he can possibly do to tempt, discourage, even destroy these people to prevent this from happening. He has been successful at this for 2000 years, and he is determined to keep it that way. But, the day is coming when God's people will be triumphant; God knows that in preparation for that day, He must discipline them to prepare them for what is coming.

86. Read **Hebrews 12:15-17**, *GNB*. What are we supposed to learn from the story of Esau? He sold his birthright for a good meal! He did not care about the spiritual inheritance. All he wanted was the material benefits. But, he was apparently tricked out of them by his

mother and his brother. If we follow the story through, we discover that Esau did receive the material benefits from his father, and Jacob received the spiritual benefits.

Does Esau's experience in begging for the blessings remind you of Satan? After Satan was cast out of heaven, he begged to be taken back; he wept as he begged. (See *The Story of Redemption* 26.1; *Early Writings* 146.1 and *1 Spiritual Gifts* 18.1.)

Satan trembled as he viewed his work. He was alone in meditation upon the past, the present, and his future plans. His mighty frame shook as with a tempest. An angel from heaven was passing. He called him and entreated an interview with Christ. This was granted him. He then related to the Son of God that he repented of his rebellion and wished again the favor of God. He was willing to take the place God had previously assigned him, and be under His wise command. **Christ wept at Satan's woe** but told him, as the mind of God, that he could never be received into heaven. Heaven must not be placed in jeopardy. All heaven would be marred should he be received back, for sin and rebellion originated with him. **The seeds of rebellion were still within him.** He had, in his rebellion, no occasion for his course, and **he had hopelessly ruined not only himself but the host of angels also**, who would then have been happy in heaven had he remained steadfast. The law of God could condemn but could not pardon.—Ellen G. White, *Story of Redemption* 26.1.

After Satan and those who fell with him were shut out of heaven, and he realized that he had forever lost all its purity and glory, he repented, and wished to be reinstated in heaven. He was willing to take his proper place, or any position that might be assigned him. But no; heaven must not be placed in jeopardy. All heaven might be marred should he be taken back; for sin originated with him, and the seeds of rebellion were within him. **Both he and his followers wept, and implored to be taken back into the favor of God.** But their sin—their hatred, their envy and jealousy—had been so great that God could not blot it out. It must remain to receive its final punishment.—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* 146.1; *1SG* 18.1. [Bold type is added.]

Try to imagine what it would be like to see Satan and all his followers weeping and Christ weeping with them because of their rebellion. But, Jesus knew that they could not be taken back because their characters were not really changed. And so, He wept.

Does this teach us anything about how God will respond at the third coming when He sees all the wicked perish? Our Christian friends who believe that God will be vindictive and torture the wicked for eternity in hellfire believe that God's justice must be satisfied. But, what we see in that situation is not a vindictive, sovereign God but a weeping Savior. This is perhaps the best evidence available to prove that God will be weeping as the wicked perish in the end.

87. How do we explain Exodus 20:18-20 and Deuteronomy 9:19 and fit that with **Hebrews 12:18-23**? Was Moses afraid? Or, wasn't he afraid?

Moses had come to know God pretty well. Shortly after the giving of the Ten Commandments, Moses was able to spend long periods of time with God in the mountain; and finally, he came down with his face shining with God's glory. It was thus that he could say, "Don't be afraid." (Exodus 20:20, *GNB*) But then, he looked at the condition of the people and realized how far they were from God's ideal, and he became afraid again—this time for them! So, where do we stand on that spectrum? Is our relationship with God more like that of Moses? Or, more like that of the people?

Some people suggest that God is all-loving and kind and saving toward those who respond well; but, when the day of judgment comes, He will act with strict and severe vengeance. Surely, we have come to know from our reading of all of Scripture that God is not two-faced! Even after the war in heaven, Christ wept over Satan because He had lost him. In the end, the wicked will not die because God is zapping them or punishing them in some way. They will die because they are so out of harmony with God that His very presence will destroy them. (See # 77 above for *DA* 107.4; 764.1)

88. **What kind of worship is promoted by the idea that "Our God is indeed a destroying fire"?** (Hebrews 12:28-29, *GNB*) **Does it make you comfortable to think that, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"?** (Hebrews 10:31, *GNB*) **How can we fit this with 1 John 4:18; Romans 13:8,10; 1 Corinthians 13; and 1 John 4:8,16, which say, "God is love"?**

It is hard for us to put these two extremes together. How could a God who is so powerful that He can reverse the reactions in a nuclear bomb be kind and loving at the same time? But, that is exactly true! There are a lot of things about God that we cannot fathom in their depths; but, that should inspire us to look forward to an eternity of learning. The God who creates beautiful new babies is also the God who created our sun! Why should we want to limit His abilities?

89. Having finished his extensive and impressive theological arguments, the author turned in Hebrews 13 to some practical aspects of Christian living. The author had to deal with ethics as well as theology. He assured us that if we stand at the foot of the cross, we will learn what we need to know to live a truly Christian life and be saved in the end. Our homes here are only very temporary. We may suffer all kinds of persecution and torture and be separated to stand singly and alone; but, like Paul and Timothy—which he mentioned in Hebrews 13—we look for a better land. Anything—including life itself—may be sacrificed by those with the larger view in mind.
90. Read **Hebrews 13:5-6**. Is it really possible to keep ourselves free from the love of money? Virtually everything that is precious to us comes through the use of money: raising a family, having a home and a car, even supporting the church. The author was suggesting that God should be our dependence and not our money. The disciples seemed to manage to live like that; but, could we do so in our day? Does God expect us to? What percentage of our time does God expect us to use in supporting ourselves and our families, and what percentage of our time should we use in helping to finish the gospel? In our race to keep up with the Joneses, it is very easy to use more and more of the time that should be used in God's cause.
91. Read **Hebrews 13:7-8**. Who were the former leaders who spoke to these readers of the book of Hebrews on God's behalf? Paul suggested that they lived and died and were

excellent examples of faith. Would we take our religion, our Christianity, more seriously if we knew of friends or even pastors who had given their lives for their faith? Will that day come again? Yet, through all of it, God will be the kind of Person He has always been—completely reliable and trustworthy.

92. Read **Hebrews 13:10-13**. Paul was suggesting that just as the bodies of some of the animals given in sacrifice were burned outside the camp, we need to remember that Jesus was crucified outside the city. In imagination, we need to go there and kneel at the foot of the cross and ask all the important questions about God. Why was it necessary for Jesus to die? What does it tell us about God? Looking to the cross and its impact on the disciples and the kind of lives they lived thereafter, should inspire every one of us to follow God at all cost. There is nothing—not even life itself—on this world that is more important than learning the truth about God and maintaining a correct relationship with Him.
93. Paul closed by asking for the prayers of his readers and then giving a prayer himself. He was delighted to tell his readers that Timothy had been released from prison and he himself was awaiting to be released soon. He rejoiced in the grace and care that God is willing to give each one of us.
94. Try to imagine yourself among the group of Hebrew believers who first received this letter from Paul. No doubt, they were very excited to receive the news that the letter had come from him. First of all, it was evidence that he was still alive. No doubt, they came together—probably secretly—in someone’s home to listen to someone who was qualified to read the entire letter. How much do you think you would learn from listening to the book of Hebrews read from beginning to end without a stop? Of course, those who heard it were very familiar with all the Old Testament history and the Old Testament stories and could recognize the examples Paul was using. As the reader read through the list of names in Hebrews 11, would you be able to recount the examples of faith that he mentioned and why they were given as examples?
95. Hebrews is a kind of summary book, especially of what we were supposed to learn from the Old Testament. Surely, his first readers recognized that God has used many and various ways to try to communicate with us. Did they have any doubts about the life and death of Jesus? Did they recognize it as the most important evidence that God has ever given? As he was reviewing that evidence and comparing it to the events in the Old Testament, Paul had to suddenly stop and say, “I’m sorry, but I realize that you are not grown up enough for me to explain what I really want to talk about!” (Hebrews 5:11-6:3) A short time earlier, Paul had written something similar to the Ephesians. (Ephesians 4:11-16) But, Paul probably also recognized that it is dangerous to ask people to grow up and think for themselves. But, that is exactly what God wants. Our day is not a time for childish, even slavish, obedience.
96. As we think of the world in which we live, how many people would have any idea how to explain what is taught in the book of Hebrews? Are we any better off than Paul’s first readers?

Down through the generations, God has used so many methods to get our attention. There was the flood, the plagues in Egypt, the experience of Mount Sinai, and many other events. What methods will God use as we approach the final events in this world’s history? Elijah thought he was the only one still serving God. God came to him on Mount Carmel

and later followed up with wind, earthquake, and fire. (1 Kings 18,19) But, God was not in the earthquake, wind, or fire. God then spoke to Elijah in that quiet whisper of a voice. Are we listening for God's whispers? If we need God to shout, He will. He floored Paul on the road to Damascus. But, that is not His preferred way of communicating with us.

When dealing with the people in Corinth, Paul had to write that very strong letter which is probably what we read in 2 Corinthians 10-13. And it worked! And Paul reminded us in Hebrews that our God is very powerful! In fact, He is a consuming or destroying fire! (Hebrews 12:29) In a world where so many people think He does not even exist, how can we convince people of that power? And can we trust Him with all that power? Remember that less than six weeks after having seen that incredible display of power at Mount Sinai, the children of Israel were dancing drunk and naked around the golden calf. (Exodus 32) And that represents so much of the history of the Old Testament. God does something dramatic, and for a short time everyone sits up and pays attention in fear. Then, God relaxes and says, "What I really want is for you to love Me"; and everyone says, "Okay, I guess things are not so serious," and they go back to their old habits!

97. So, with God's guidance, how can we get people to take God's Word seriously without scaring them? In Hebrews 6:4-8 and 10:26, Paul made it clear that this message is very serious. But, what if we do not like God's methods? Turning away from God means we will reap the consequences which are truly unspeakable.

Do we understand the truth about God clearly enough so we can explain the third angel's message without scaring people? Or, to get started, do we need to read it in a way that scares them? But ultimately, we must recognize the truth that God knows that one cannot produce love and trust by force or fear. (DA 22.1)

God could force us to do His will. But, He died rather than compromise freedom in any way. Faith, trust, and love are impossible without freedom. But, freedom has serious consequences. If we choose to exercise our freedom and go our own way, we will die. But, it is not God that is killing us, it is our own sin. (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23)

98. Having been given this sort of summary book, do we find that many people have been convinced of the truth and are hastening to prepare themselves for the second coming? What is God waiting for? A certain, fixed number of believers? Should it be the goal of our church to reach that fixed number? Or, is God waiting for a certain quality of faith? Unfortunately, the quality of someone's faith is not easy to determine or measure! If we have understood God's message throughout Scripture, we recognize that faith is based on evidence. How much evidence do we need? Don't we have enough evidence? How much faith do we need? Do we really need the book of Hebrews?

Think of the incredible efforts God has put forth to preserve the entire biblical record for us. If we recognize that effort and realize the value of the Scriptures, how is it that we spend so little time reading and studying them? Do we believe as suggested by Hebrews 1:1 that every part of Scripture is a revelation about God?

99. For example, why is Judges 19-21 in the Bible? Do we really need to know about that Levite who cut his second wife into pieces and mailed her around to the tribes causing a war that wiped out almost the entire tribe of Benjamin? What could that possibly teach us

about God? Paul recognized that there are some things hard to understand, maybe even hard to explain. But, we need it all.

100. **The book of Hebrews has been adopted by Christians as the most important explanation of the sanctuary and its services as set forth in the Old Testament. The most important questions arising from a study of both the Old Testament sanctuary/ceremonial system and the book of Hebrews are: 1) Why was there so much killing of sacrifices in the Old Testament? And 2) What is that supposed to teach us about the relationship between sin and death? Millions of animals were slaughtered from the days of Adam until the destruction of Jerusalem and Herod's Temple in A.D. 70. Christians believe, largely based on the book of Hebrews, that the death of Jesus was the all-sufficient Sacrifice in New Testament times; and therefore, it is no longer necessary to sacrifice animals. So, what are we supposed to learn from all that killing of sacrifices? Does sin really lead to death? (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23) Are we living our lives as if we really believe that sin leads to death?**

These are mostly thought questions. Can you answer them to your own satisfaction? These are the kind of questions that people should be discussing in their Bible studies and churches. Are we ready to lead out in such a discussion?

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Last Modified: April 22, 2016

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