

## ***Atonement and the Cross of Christ*** ***Born of a Woman: Atonement and the Incarnation***

Lesson #8 for November 22, 2008

Scriptures: Matthew 1:18-25; 3:13-17; 4:1-11; 9:35; Mark 1:12,13; John 1:1,2,14; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3; 1 John 3:5.

1. The word “incarnation” comes from the Latin and means “in flesh.” It is used in theological circles to express the idea that God came down and lived as a human being “in the flesh” as Jesus Christ of Nazareth.
2. This lesson discusses the incarnation and its implications for our salvation.
3. What needed to happen for us to be saved? Do we need to be reconciled to God? Does God need to be reconciled to us?

The trials and sufferings of Christ were to impress man with a sense of his great sin in breaking the law of God, and to bring him to repentance and obedience to that law, and through obedience to acceptance with God. His righteousness he would impute to man, and thus raise him in moral value with God, so that his efforts to keep the divine law would be acceptable. **Christ’s work was to reconcile man to God through his human nature, and God to man through his divine nature.** {RH, August 4, 1874 par. 6; 1SM 272.5; *Confrontation* 38.1}

Did God really need to be reconciled to man? In this passage Ellen White was expressing the idea that Jesus brings us back together with—reconciles us to—God. This is not to suggest that God was somehow upset with man and that Jesus needed to appease Him. She strongly denied that idea in many other places. If “God so loved the world,” (John 3:16) does He need to be reconciled to us? Does He need to be appeased like some pagan “god”? When God sends a “being” down to seek to reconcile us, that Being is God! Even when God told people in the Old Testament to bring an animal sacrifice, we must remember that the animal for that sacrifice was really given to them by God! The people did not give life to that animal!

4. 1 John 3:5 suggests that Jesus came to take away our sins. (Psalms 103:12; Micah 7:19) **Do we need to have our sins “taken away” before we can be reconciled to God?** (John 3:16) Is there a relationship between the taking away of our sins and the reconciliation? Sin separates us from God! What does it literally mean to “take away” our sins? Is there a way to physically separate our sins from us? What impact do the life and death of Jesus have upon our sins? My sins? God treats me “just as if I had” (this is justification) never sinned! (Jeremiah 31:31-34) But then He asks me to go on to experience salvation which means “healing.”
5. Why was it necessary for Jesus to come, and live, and die for my sins “to be taken away”? **If God is omnipotent, why couldn’t He take away my sins without Jesus living and dying on this earth? Why couldn’t He just take away Satan’s sin, or even Satan’s desire to sin?** God refuses to violate our freedom. God will be standing “on the wall” of the New Jerusalem crying as the wicked perish! He will be losing His children. God will not be zapping people! He will not be “satisfying His justice.” He will be crying. The wicked will look up into the kindest face they have ever seen. There will be no “wrath”—in the usual English language meaning—there. There will be no “anger” there. That kind face will be crying. The purpose of the whole great controversy is to demonstrate once and for all what are the results of choosing our own selfish ways over the ways of God. A permanent record of this great controversy will be preserved to guarantee that sin will never rise again.

Islam feels that Judaism and Christianity developed the whole notion of a sacrificial system to try to manipulate God! And they believe that God cannot be manipulated. Where did the whole notion of a substitutionary sacrifice come from? Doesn’t it seem—at least superficially—to be an attempt to manipulate God? No doubt Adam was nauseated as he tried to kill that first lamb and saw the blood coming out. But God needed to impress upon us that sin leads to death. (Romans 6:23)

6. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* discusses the “mystery of salvation.” Do you believe that salvation is a great mystery? What is mysterious about our salvation? Is it a mystery that Christ came down to this earth and lived and died? Is it a mystery *how* He did that? Or, is the greater mystery *why* He did it? See [www.theox.org](http://www.theox.org) > Source/Author > Ellen White > “The Plan of Salvation in the Setting of the Great Controversy” > #18.
7. It seems logically evident that if God could have saved human beings without His Son coming down and living and dying as a human being, He certainly would have done so. What prevents God from saving us apart from the incarnation? Was that truly the only way that God could accomplish our salvation?
8. Could the essence of the Godhead be reduced to a set of DNA? How did God become a human being? Was Mary’s DNA dominated by the perfect DNA from God?
9. Do you have questions about the idea that Jesus was fully God and fully man at the same time? Is that truly possible within your concept of God and of human beings? Could the omnipotent God be “condensed down” into the body of a baby boy? How did it work? As you understand things, what was the role of divinity in the life of Christ while He was on this earth? Could Jesus have created a world or moved a mountain while living here as a human being? Did He still have that Divine power? He did raise Himself from the grave!
10. Why do so many scientists—and even many theologians—basically deny the reality of the incarnation? What did Paul mean when he suggested:

<sup>9</sup>For the full content of divine nature lives in Christ, in his humanity, <sup>10</sup>and you have been given full life in union with him. He is supreme over every spiritual ruler and authority. (Colossians 2:9,10, *GNB*)

He reflects the brightness of God’s glory and is the exact likeness of God’s own being, sustaining the universe with his powerful word. After achieving forgiveness for human sins, he sat down in heaven at the right-hand side of God, the Supreme Power. (Hebrews 1:3, *GNB*)

Roman Catholics believe that they have resolved a portion of this problem by their doctrine of the immaculate conception. The ancient Greeks believed that anything that is “tangible” or “touchable” is evil. This belief was somewhat adopted by Catholicism. So in order for God to be born of a human mother, she needed to be sinless. So they believe that Mary was “immaculately conceived” so that her body was sinless and holy and thus could contain or hold the baby Jesus.

If you need to speak with unitarians (such as Jehovah’s Witnesses), look at Romans 1:25 where it is suggested that it is a sin to worship a creature instead of the Creator. They will agree with you on that. Then turn to Hebrews 1:6 where God tells all the angels to worship His “firstborn son,” Jesus. Therefore, Jesus must be God. The root meaning of the Greek word here translated “firstborn” means “to exist before” or “superior.” There is nothing in the word about being “born.”

11. Jesus is the only Person who has had the opportunity to choose His parents! Would you have chosen the particular line of ancestors that He did? Why do you suppose all those “colorful” women are mentioned in Matthew 1? Why were their sins mentioned in the Old Testament? Was Jesus proud of His sinful ancestors? His ancestors were real people!
12. Did Jesus grow up just like every other child? (Luke 2:40,52) He was the son of a human mother. (Galatians 4:4) We live a life separated from God. From the time Adam and Eve sinned, we have not been able to communicate with God face-to-face. How was the experience of Jesus different from ours?
13. There are a number of things that we believe in—particularly in science—which we have never actually seen. Think about neutrons, protons, and electrons as simple examples. However, we see enough evidence of their presence to believe that they exist. Should we, therefore, be able to believe in things within Christianity which we cannot fully understand and which we have not seen physically with our own eyes?
14. Why did Jesus need to be born as a human baby and live an entire life of 30 years in Nazareth before anyone had heard virtually anything about Him? Why couldn’t God have just appeared at age 30 and

performed the necessary activities during His ministry?

15. To begin His public ministry, Jesus decided to go to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. Why was that really necessary? Jesus did not need any of His sins “to be taken care of” since He did not have any! So, why was he baptized?
16. What are we supposed to learn from the experience of Jesus’ baptism? There are certain things that seem fairly obvious:
  - 1) Jesus wanted to give us a good example, and thus, He identified with us.
  - 2) Jesus chose to begin His ministry at that time. God also made it clear by His manifestation at the Jordan that He accepted everything Jesus had done up to that point.
  - 3) The entire Godhead—Father, Holy Spirit, and Jesus—were involved and present at the baptism of Jesus.
17. Ellen White adds:

Christ was baptized by John in Jordan, and as He came up out of the water after His baptism, the heavens were opened, and the glory of God, symbolized by a dove of burnished gold, encircled Him, and from the highest heaven were heard the words, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” This was an assurance to John that Christ was the Son of God. And what do these words say to us, to every member of the human family, whatever our country or position? To every one of us they are words of hope and mercy. **Through faith in the provision God has made in the behalf of man, you are accepted in the Beloved,—accepted through the merits of Jesus.** {*Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, November 12, 1894 par. 7}

What are the “merits of Jesus”? Can they be transferred to us? Roman Catholics believe that Jesus lived such a perfect life that He built up a huge bank of “merits” which He can now share with us to overcome our sinfulness.

18. A new channel was being opened between heaven and earth. God had come down as a human being so that we could see Him as He really is. God came and did that because He considers the life of one of His creatures to be more valuable than the whole world. What does the incarnation tell us about our worth in the eyes of God?

The value of all the world sinks into insignificance in comparison to the value of one human soul.--*Manuscript 1*, 1875. {*CW* 126.2; *WM* 83.1; *RH*, January 4, 1898 par. 2; *ST*, February 27, 1896 par. 6}

**The soul that has given himself to Christ is more precious in His sight than the whole world. The Saviour would have passed through the agony of Calvary that one might be saved in His kingdom.** He will never abandon one for whom He has died. Unless His followers choose to leave Him, He will hold them fast. {*DA* 480.5; *Ev* 489.4; *LHU* 204.6}

19. Consider some of the mysteries and miracles of the atonement:
  - 1) God is willing and able to keep us alive “in our sins” long enough for us to learn about Him and long enough for us to choose to become like Him. (Romans 3:23; 6:23) Did God have to change the rules in order to save human beings?
  - 2) What about the miraculous transformation that God can make in human lives if we “allow the Holy Spirit in” and develop a trusting faith relationship with Him?
  - 3) What about the miraculous opportunity to become sons and daughters of God? (John 1:12,13; 1 John 3:1-3)
20. What actually happened in those 40 days while Jesus was in the wilderness after His baptism? (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12,13)
21. Compare the temptations of Adam and Eve with that of Jesus:
  - 1) Adam and Eve lived in a perfect environment; Jesus certainly did not.

- 2) Adam and Eve had access to the tree of life and all the food their hearts could desire; Jesus had been starving for 40 days.
  - 3) They were tempted to depart from God's will. Adam and Eve did; Jesus did not.
  - 4) Each was tempted to stop trusting God. Adam and Eve did; Jesus did not.
  - 5) Adam and Eve joined Satan's rebellion; Jesus did not.
22. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. God managed to remove us from our hopeless condemnation to death through sin and He invites us to become His friends. How was it possible for the "Sinless One" to "become sin" for us? How do we accept and receive His righteousness?
  23. What very important additional things were accomplished through the atonement?

By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels. . . But not alone for His earthborn children was this revelation given. **Our little world is the lesson book of the universe. God's wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which "angels desire to look," and it will be their study throughout endless ages.** Both the redeemed [20] and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song. {DA 19.2}

God revealed to these prophets that their work was not for their own benefit, but for yours, as they spoke about those things which you have now heard from the messengers who announced the Good News by the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. **These are things which even the angels would like to understand.** (1 Peter 1:12, GNB)

24. What did/do the angels learn by studying the plan of salvation? Is there anything about sin they do not already know?
25. Jesus spent more time healing the sick than He did preaching. What does that tell us about His mission? What do we learn about God from the resurrection stories that are recorded for us? (Mark 5:35-43; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:38-44)
26. What percentage of Jesus's followers believed in Him because of the miracles He performed? He seemed to convince a lot of people through His miracles. Why doesn't He give us miraculous powers to convince people in our day? Would Satan demand that he be allowed to perform miracles also? Has God given miraculous powers to some people in our day? Could miracles occur through the power of the Devil?
27. Jesus went out of His way to reach other social, educational, and ethnic groups. Is that part of our challenge today?
28. What questions do you have about the incarnation? Do the angels still have any questions about the incarnation? Will we be studying the incarnation throughout endless ages?

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