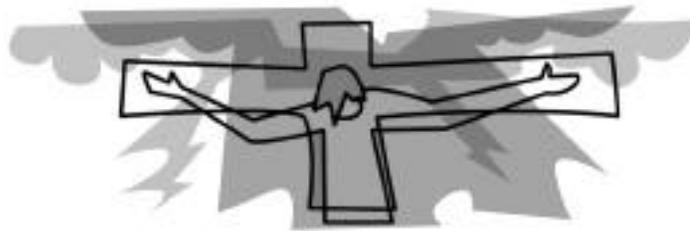


Darkness at Noon



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 12

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matthew 27:42, 45; Mark 15:31; Mark 5:33; Luke 23:44.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘My God, my God, why have you deserted [left] me?’ ” (Matthew 27:46, NlrV).

FOR PEOPLE WHO WILL LISTEN, NATURE TEACHES US A LOT about God's character. Nature fills our senses with beautiful messages about the One (Jesus) who created it all. Nature's messages are beautiful, but they are often “hidden,” because people often misread and misunderstand these messages.

But the Cross is a perfect example of God's character for all to see. When we fully understand that the Man hanging on the cross was also God and Creator, we can begin to understand truths about this God that the most beautiful sunset or plant could never show. We need to understand, too, what kind of death He died as a man, and why He agreed to die this way. When we do, we learn lessons about our God that go beyond anything nature could ever teach us.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: What great truth is found in the leaders' cruel comments against Jesus? What caused the darkness that surrounded Jesus? What was the meaning of His cry, “Why have you deserted me?” What does the Cross teach us about sin?

Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 19.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 13

**“HE SAVED OTHERS!”
(Matthew 27:42).**

After the false trials, Jesus was led down the *Via Dolorosa* (“the Way of Pain”) to a hill named Golgotha. *Golgotha* means “the place of the skull.” Jesus was crucified on this hill. His murderers did not know what they were really doing. No doubt, Jesus knew that they did not know what they were doing. This is why Jesus cried out, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). But their lack of knowledge will not excuse them on the day of judgment. This is because they had so many opportunities to know the truth. Many people who have never seen Jesus will be punished for not believing in Him (John 3:18). But imagine what the future will be for those people who rejected Him while He lived among them.



As Jesus hung on the cross, He faced many cruel comments such as those shown in Matthew 27:42, Mark 15:31, and Luke 23:35. These comments were insults, but what great truth were these men saying even though they lacked knowledge?

Jesus saved other people, but He couldn’t save Himself. That is true! He could not save others and Himself at the same time. If He saved Himself, He could not save others.

Jesus could have chosen not to offer Himself as a Sacrifice for the sins of the world (John 10:17, 18; Matthew 26:39; Hebrews 7:27; Galatians 2:20). But then the world would have been lost. Only by offering Himself could Jesus save others.

Those words were spoken in hate. But they captured the greatest truth of all time: If Jesus wanted to save the world, He could do it only at the Cross.

What did Jesus ask for in Matthew 26:39? It was not possible for Him to be saved if the world were to be saved. What do Mark 8:31, Luke 24:7, and John 3:14 tell us about why Jesus’ death was necessary?



So must Jesus be lifted up on the cross.

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 14

DARKNESS AT NOON (Matthew 27:45).

Read Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33, and Luke 23:44. What do all three say happened? What is the spiritual meaning of this event?¹



In the Bible, darkness is a symbol of evil and of separation from God. God is Light (1 John 1:5). Jesus talked of “outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12; Matthew 22:13) as meaning “hell.” In a sense, Jesus at the Cross went to hell for us. He suffered the penalty of sin that those in hell will have to face themselves.

What do the following verses say happened at the Cross that could help explain the meaning of the darkness? Isaiah 59:2; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13.

¹event—thing that happens.

The darkness is a symbol of the spiritual darkness that was around Jesus as He accepted God’s punishment against sin. As Jesus hung on the cross, all the sins of the world fell upon Him. The Father, who is Light, was hiding His presence from Him. Then it is not hard to see why the darkness would sweep over the land as a powerful example to the world and to the universe of what was happening at the Cross. Jesus was taking the great punishment upon Himself in order to save people from sin. “The thick darkness was an example of the great suffering of the soul that surrounded Jesus.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 164.

We have all felt this spiritual darkness. What caused it? How did it go away? What advice would you give to someone who says that spiritual darkness is around him or her?

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 15

THE FATHER HIDDEN (Matthew 27:46).

Jesus had said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30) and, “Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me” (John 16:32). But He also cried, “ ‘My God, my God, why have you deserted [left] me?’ ” (Matthew

27:46, NIV). What could He mean by those words? Was not this the same Jesus who stood on the banks of the Jordan when the Father said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17)? Was not this the same Jesus who had prayed, “That all of them will be one, just as you [God] are in me [Jesus] and I [Jesus] am in you’ ” (John 17:21, NIV)? Was not this the same Jesus who had prayed to the Father, “You loved me before the world was created,” (John 17:24, NIV)?

Yes. It was the same Jesus. So what could Jesus mean by that cry?

Read the following verses with Jesus’ suffering in mind. How do the following verses help explain why Jesus thought God had left Him? Isaiah 59:2; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13.

Jesus now felt the complete separation from God caused by sin. God’s punishment should have fallen on us. Instead, God’s punishment fell on Jesus so that none of us would ever have to face that punishment ourselves.

“It was necessary for the awful darkness to cover Jesus’ soul. The Father withdrew His love and favor, because Jesus was standing in the sinner’s place. He must go through

the darkness every sinner must experience. Jesus must suffer the full punishment of God, not as revenge,² because God grieved for His Son while Jesus suffered the penalty of sin. This separation between God and Jesus will never happen again.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 924.

Have you ever met someone who felt deserted by God? Perhaps you have felt that way yourself. What happened to Jesus on the cross that can help you not to feel deserted by God?

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 16

“IT IS FINISHED!” (John 19:30).

Jesus died as a Conqueror over sin. His death was a spotless sacrifice of perfect innocence and purity, eternal³ in moral⁴ power and love. Jesus’ words, “It is finished,” did not show the end of Jesus’ human life. Instead, these words showed the success of His sacrifice. Nothing could take away the completeness of His sacrifice. His sacrifice had been prophesied for a long time. Now it was a fact of history. From now on, Jesus’ main job would be to use the saving benefits of His sacrifice for sinful people until the close of probation.⁵

²revenge—doing something bad to someone who has hurt you.

³eternal—forever; without beginning or end.

⁴moral—having to do with knowing what is right or wrong.

⁵probation—the time people have to accept Jesus; when probation is closed, people will not change; wicked people will stay wicked, and righteous (holy) people will stay righteous.

Jesus' words, "It is finished," echoed throughout the universe. They made sure that the moral order of God's government is forever established.

How does Jesus' cry, "It is finished," help us understand what happened to the veil of the temple at His death? (Matthew 27:51).



Every animal sacrifice in the temple pointed to Jesus' death. The tearing of the temple veil followed Jesus' death. The tearing of the veil symbolized the end of the Hebrew sacrifices and pointed to the beginning of a new and living way to reach God through His torn body (Hebrews 10:19-21; Hebrews 9:26).

What do the following verses say that relate to the tearing of the veil? Psalm 49:7, 15; Psalm 51:16-19; Hebrews 10:1-5.

No animal could ever provide for the forgiveness of sin. Just look at the mess that sin has done to our world. Think about all the suffering, the loss, the disappointment, the

death. Would the death of a thousand goats pay for all that? Only Jesus' sacrifice could.

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 17

**"GOD WAS IN CHRIST [JESUS]"
(2 Corinthians 5:19).**

We can see all around us the cost of sin. Every one of us faces the sad results of sin.

How has sin influenced your life and brought you sorrow?

Only at the Cross can we see just how terrible sin really is. The effects of sin are so great that God in the form of Jesus had to die. If someone had to do five hours of community service as a punishment for a crime, you could guess that the crime was not too bad. But if that person had to die for the crime, you would guess that the crime was very serious. Nothing equals the horror and seriousness of sin like the Cross. This is where God, "in Christ," accepted and suffered the full punishment of sin so we do not have to.

Read 1 Peter 2:24 and 2 Corinthians 5:19, with Philippians 2:6 in mind. How do these verses help us understand how bad sin is?

The separation caused by sin between people and God was so

serious that God accepted the full punishment of sin upon Himself in order to save us and bring us back to Him. The Godhead is a mystery to us. But we must never forget that “God was in Christ” on the cross and took upon Himself the penalty of sin. Sin is so bad that it took the Cross to save us. The world owed God a debt so great that only God Himself could pay it.

How have you had the experience of being brought back to God through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19)? What did this experience mean to you personally?

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 18

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 741–764; *Early Writings*, pp. 177, 180, 209, 253; *The Great Controversy [War]*, pp. 348, 503; *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 304.

“Our Savior took the cup of suffering in order to save sinners. By dying for us, He paid for our debt. Because Jesus is one with the Father, He says, ‘My suffering and death make it possible for Me to pay the penalty of sin. By My death . . . God’s grace can work without limit.’”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 69.

“Jesus felt what sinners will feel when God’s full punishment shall be

poured out upon them. Terrible depression, the same as death, will fall upon their guilty souls. Then they will fully understand how terrible sin is. The Son of God has purchased their salvation by His suffering and death. That salvation might be theirs, if they would accept it willingly and gladly. But none are ‘forced’ to obey the law of God. If they refuse the heavenly blessing and choose the pleasures of sin, they have made their choice. And at the end, they receive their wages, which is the punishment of God and eternal death. They will be forever separated from the presence of Jesus, whose sacrifice they had refused to accept. They will have lost a life of happiness and sacrificed eternal glory for the pleasures of sin that last just for a short while.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 210.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In our place, Jesus experienced His Father’s punishment for sin. Explain how God’s punishment for sin agrees with God’s character of love. If God had no punishment for sin, what would happen to sin? John 3:16-21, 36; Romans 1:16-19; Ephesians 5:1-8.
2. Why is the idea that we can somehow earn our salvation an insult to the Cross? How does the Cross prove that trying to save ourselves through good works is useless?