

Contents

1	The Provocation and Provision—December 25-31	5
2	His Glorious Purpose Foreshadowed in Types —January 1-7	17
3	Jesus and the Sanctuary—January 8-14	29
4	A Body You Have Prepared for Me—January 15-21	41
5	In the Shadow of Calvary—January 22-28	53
6	The Passion Week—January 29–February 4	65
7	Passage to Calvary—February 5-11	77
8	Darkness at Noon—February 12-18	89
9	He Is Risen—February 19-25	101
10	The Heart of the Cross—February 26–March 4	113
11	The Cross and Justification—March 5-11	125
12	The Cross and Sanctification—March 12-18	137
13	The Cross and the Great Controversy—March 19-25	149

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The Answer From Above

“Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels’
hierarchies?”

With that pained utterance, the German poet Rilke asked what modern humanity—whose outlines have been sketched by Darwin and then colored in with the soulless hues of science—has long asked.

Why not, considering the dismal picture evolution paints of human origins? According to this scenario, about fifteen billion years ago a tremendous explosion created matter, energy, time, and space at once. Atoms condensed into gaseous clouds, stars coalesced from whirling strands of fire and light, and, from those stars, molten globules hardened into planets, including our own. Shallow water fermented, simple life forms emerged by chance, and millions of years later, human beings. If the temperatures had been warmer or colder, or if gravity had been slightly off, none of us would be here.

No wonder Rilke asked, Is anyone above listening? Is there anyone above us? Is there even an *above* us—something besides what we, with all our sophisticated gadgetry, could ever see? Are we here only by design of cold forces that operate with no purpose and yet gave us hearts and minds that cry out for purpose? (How cruel to be creatures who want answers in a world that offers none.)

Worse than no purposeful creator would be one with evil designs on us. The fact that a god exists doesn’t automatically mean good news. Ancient mythologies crowd the heavens with cruel deities. Better to take a chance with the cold, lifeless forces of the cosmos than with an evil god who takes pleasure in our sorry lot.

Fortunately, the Bible teaches that there is a Creator God, Jesus, who loves the human race. Far from taking pleasure in our sorry lot, He has shared it, suffering worse than we ever could. His sufferings climaxed at the Cross, the topic for this quarter.

Years ago, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote about a madman who shouted, “What were we doing when we unchained this earth from the sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?”

His point was that all moral and spiritual foundations have been shattered, leaving humans to plunge aimlessly in all directions through a purposeless and *infinite nothingness*.

Scripture says the opposite. The spikes in His hands, in His feet, not only nailed Jesus to the cross but nailed the earth to heaven in ways that nothing could sever. The Cross shows this tiny planet that we are not alone and that our Creator has linked Himself to us through our pain.

All through the Bible, from Creation through the birth of Jesus, God reveals to us that He is

intimately involved in humanity. The incarnation of Christ, where the Creator dwelt among His creation in human form, was amazing enough.

***The spikes in His hands
not only nailed Jesus to
the cross but nailed the
earth to heaven.***

But that God should, in

this Incarnation, substitute Himself for us *and bear the full brunt of His own divine wrath against sin, all in order to save us from that wrath?* Who even can begin to grasp what this sacrifice means? We'll need eternity to fathom it (in the meantime, we'll cover what we can in the next three months).

Though we follow the plan of redemption down through the ages, we will focus on the final week of Christ's life, His death, and resurrection. From here we will reflect on the meaning of the Cross and what it offers to us—who claim it as the foundation of our salvation.

Who, if we cried out, would hear us from above?

The Cross not only answers who has heard us from above; it is the answer from above.

Our principal contributor, Pastor Brian Jones, recently served as coordinator and materials developer for a multilanguage Bible information ministry, sponsored by the Upper Columbia Conference, in Spokane, Washington. Brian, the author of two previous quarterlies of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, has a Ph.D. in Christian counseling; he and his wife have a young daughter and currently reside in West Virginia.

How to Use This Teachers Edition

The teachers comments demonstrate different methods of teaching the adult standard edition Bible study guide. Five parts make up the teachers comments:

- ▶ **Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline:** The key text is taken from the standard edition guide. The lesson aim is designed to (a) help class participants understand and know about the lesson material, (b) evoke an appropriate feeling about the lesson material that complements the lesson content and helps to internalize it, and (c) help class participants apply the lesson material to their daily lives. The lesson outline may not always follow exactly the material that appears in the standard guide. It may reflect additional perspectives as it attempts to stimulate class discussion.
- ▶ **The Commentary** follows the traditional teaching methods of Sabbath School. It explains Bible passages and provides appropriate information leading to spiritual applications.
- ▶ **The Inductive Bible-Study Method** emphasizes careful, methodical discovery of the meaning in a text. The teacher encourages and supports the learner's investigation and discovery, using distinctive approaches: (a) Study a text thoroughly and systematically before drawing a conclusion. (b) Look for textual meaning carefully and thoroughly, understand the passage in context, avoid misquoting the author. We must not develop opinions without biblical proof. (c) Share insights through group discussion as students examine a Bible passage together. (d) Apply the text to life today. (e) Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to class members during Bible study.
- ▶ **The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach** should be used in conjunction with other methods of Bible study to demonstrate how particular passages of Scripture can be used to encourage people to commit their lives to Christ and to nurture spiritual life once it has been awakened.
- ▶ **The Life-Application Approach** demonstrates how issues that grow out of Bible study can be shared in a small-group setting. This section uses an approach suitable for discussion in a small group in which interpersonal sharing and dialogue are key elements.

Use a combination of teaching methods. Within one class period it often is possible to draw from all five methods demonstrated in the teachers comments. Some teachers will prefer to focus on one method of teaching, drawing heavily on the material in the teachers comments.