

Jesus as a Real Human (Person)



SABBATH—APRIL 12

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Galatians 4:4; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:15, 16; 1 John 4:1–3.

MEMORY VERSE: “The Word became a human being [person]. He made his home with us” (John 1:14, NlrV).

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, without any explanations, Jesus Christ is presented as both God and Man. After beginning his Gospel¹ with the Word who is God (John 1:1), John makes the unusual announcement that this same Word, this same God, “became a human being” and “made his home with us” (verse 14, NlrV). Perhaps the Bible writers expected the future decline of the sinful world. So the New Testament drives home the sinless life of Jesus again and again (Hebrews 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22). The writers of the New Testament honor Jesus as a proper object of worship and respect (Acts 7:59; Romans 9:5; Hebrews 1:6). These earliest Christians were not burdened with the philosophical problems about the idea of the God-man, as later thinkers would be. “The Son of God as a human person is everything to us. . . . When we study this subject, we should listen to the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, ‘Take off your sandals. The place you are standing on is holy ground’ (Exodus 3:5, NlrV). We should come to this study as humble as a learner.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 244.

1. Gospel—one of the four books in the New Testament that tells the story of Jesus' life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

SUNDAY—APRIL 13**IN THE PRESENCE OF MYSTERY
(1 Timothy 3:16)**

Last week's lesson spoke about the mystery of Christ as God. But as we study Christ as a human, we stand also in the presence of a deep mystery. As Paul explained it: "There is no doubt that godliness is a great mystery. Jesus appeared in a body. The Holy Spirit proved that he was the Son of God. He was seen by angels. He was preached among the nations. People in the world believed in him. He was taken up to heaven in glory" (1 Timothy 3:16, NIV).

One thinker makes the point that it was not a big shock in the Roman world that the founder of Christianity was divine (of God). Roman emperors often claimed they were gods. But the claim that "the Christian God was very interested in humans, so much that He would suffer for their sake was unheard of."—Adapted from Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World's Religions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), page 219. This might be strange to the Greek-Roman world. But that is what the New Testament claims.

What do Matthew 1:18–24; Luke 1:26–35; John 1:1, 14; Galatians 4:4; and Philippians 2:5–11 teach about how God became human?

It is interesting to watch how well the New Testament writers write about

Christ as a human. They simply tell a straightforward story. They have no idea of the firestorm that would follow in future centuries. But the simplicity of the story helps make the Bible records believable. This would not be true if the earliest disciples had no quarrels about who Jesus really was. They did, as we read in the New Testament itself. But their arguments about Jesus' person were not designed to argue against "modern" thinkers or scientists. Instead, the disciples' arguments give an unspoiled freshness to their witness. It was as though they argued their case out of surprise that anyone would dare to doubt the unusual mystery that had influenced² them so much as a group and as persons.

MONDAY—APRIL 14**THEN THERE WAS DISAGREEMENT (1 John 4:1–3)**

Christianity spread through the Greek-Roman world and moved into the second generation. People began to question its basic message about Jesus' person. So they asked questions: How could God and man live in the same body? How could God become a man with a limited life? What is Jesus' relationship to the Father? And so forth . . .

Beginning in the first century, two opposing thoughts came forth. One thought would focus on Christ's human form and ignore His godly

2. influenced—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

form. The other would do just the opposite. Many people denied Christ's godly form. Some of them were the Ebionites. They were Jewish Christians who taught that Jesus became the Son of God only at His baptism. At that time He became united with the eternal Christ. They believed that He was not God and could not save man. Instead, He came to call men to obedience. The Arians³ later would take up the struggle against Christ's godly form in the late third century. Their position was strongly opposed by the Council of Nicaea, in A.D. 325.

On the other side were the Gnostics.⁴ They taught that spirit was good and matter was evil. They argued that the matter that forms our body was very evil. Therefore, the human body could not serve as a messenger for the true God.

In what way does John show concern about the Gnostic thought just described in 1 John 4:1–3?

The disagreement over who Jesus was continued for five hundred years, from the second century all the way down to the sixth. At first the disagreement was over His godly form. Was He God? If so, how was He related to God the Father? The questions then changed to the subject of His human form. The discussion was on God and man in a single person. There have been many statements and arguments going back and forth

ever since. In spite of all the arguments, the original Bible teaching about Jesus' godly and human nature still stands strong. (Read the quotation from the Creed of Chalcedon in Friday's study.)

What are some of the questions in the church today about the human nature of Christ? Why must we be careful not to let these questions divide us, as they did the early church?

TUESDAY—APRIL 15

HE TOOK OUR NATURE (Galatians 4:4)

Many of the people living in Jesus' time thought of Him as an unusual person. But they each knew Him to be a human being, a man. For example, the Samaritan woman rushed to her village to spread the word about the unusual Jew she just had met at the well. She made a straightforward announcement: "Come, see a man" (John 4:29, NIV). Hers was the common testimony⁵ of Jesus' fellow workers. One time Jesus calmed the storm. Afterward, His disciples asked: "What kind of man is this?" (Matthew 8:27, NIV).

How do Matthew 8:24; Matthew 21:18; John 4:5–7; John 19:28; and John 11:33–35 help support the fact that Jesus was a true human being of flesh and blood?

3. Arians—followers of Arius, who taught that there was only one God, who was the Father.

4. Gnostics—a group of early Christians who accepted the Greek belief in many gods. They did not accept that Jesus, as a human, was truly God.

5. testimony—what you tell to others about what God has done for you.

While on earth, Jesus voluntarily (freely) surrendered (gave up; offered) His right to use power as God. This power remained in Him, and He could have used it at any time for His own advantage (gain). But He did not. The temptation⁶ to call on this power to remove Himself from difficulty was a big one in His daily trials.

It is helpful to keep in mind that the Bible does not explain every point that interests us. For example, it does not try to explain how the human and godly parts of Jesus' nature are related. But it does explain clearly that Christ was one unified (combined) Person. It does not discuss how this union works. Instead, it just explains that such a union did happen. The Son made of a woman was really the Son of God (Galatians 4:4). "Christ did not pretend to take human nature. He did truly take it. He did really have human nature."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up*, page 74.

Why is Christ's human form so important to us? What does it mean to us to know that Jesus became a human being? How does it encourage you to know that Jesus shared our human limits?

WEDNESDAY—APRIL 16

TO FEEL OUR PAIN (Hebrews 4:15, 16)

Why did God need to come into the



Jesus became like us and lived as an ordinary person.

world in human form? This question is important. But we should forget about having good reasons for our answers to it. It is not possible we can come up with an answer that makes sense to us. There is no independent research in philosophy and science that would lead us to an answer. And we should not try to make our own answer. The safest way is to listen carefully to what the Bible itself shows us on this point. And in the book of Hebrews, we find some of the clearest answers to the issue. By the way, Hebrews also happens to focus on Jesus' present high-priestly ministry (work) in the heavenly sanctuary.⁷

Each of the following verses is about part of Jesus' coming in human form. Then each goes to answer the question: Why did He

6. temptation—anything that tries to turn us away from God and tries to get us to do, think, feel, or say what is wrong.

7. heavenly sanctuary—the place in heaven where Jesus works as our High Priest before the throne of God.

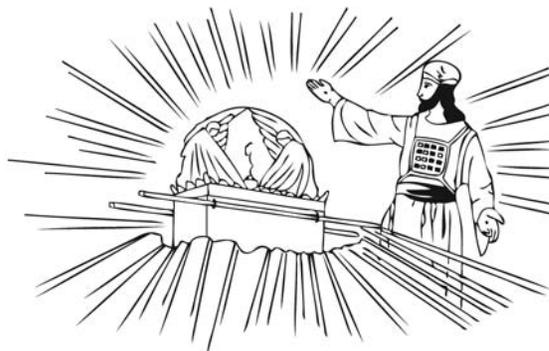
do that? Afterward, each gives a special reason for His suffering. What are those reasons in Hebrews 2:9; Hebrews 2:14–18; Hebrews 4:14–16; and Hebrews 5:8, 9?



Jesus' arms are open to us.

Notice that in each case, the focus is on Jesus. And in each case, it is for our good. This is why we should be very serious about Jesus' human form and suffering. It should bring us great joy to know that Jesus meets us in our need. His arms are open wide for us. He knows our suffering because He has been here. *He has felt our pain.* Can we imagine a more merciful Savior and a more understanding High Priest? Our souls are filled with great joy and heartfelt thanks to know that Jesus suffered all for us. As we receive encouragement, we "approach [come to] the throne of grace⁸ with confidence [faith]" (Hebrews 4:16, NIV). We also give ourselves to Him in full surrender (the act of giving oneself completely).

8. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.



With Jesus as our High Priest, we may come with our needs before the throne of grace.

What trials (troubles) are you having now? How does it help you to know that Jesus feels and understands your pain?

THURSDAY—APRIL 17

UNITED (JOINED AS ONE) WITH US FOREVER (1 Timothy 2:5)

We know of the big difference between God and ourselves. But it surprises us to think that God would reach out to us by taking on human flesh. After Jesus was done, most of us would think that He would break off His connection with us and return fully to what He was before. But it is very surprising to learn that Jesus will forever remain united with us by keeping our nature!

Study Luke 24:36–43; Acts 1:10, 11; Acts 17:31; and 1 Timothy 2:5 to consider what it means for Jesus to remain united with us!

“By His life and His death, Christ has gained even more than what was destroyed through sin. It was Satan’s purpose to bring about an eternal [forever] separation between God and man. But in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen. In taking our nature, the Saviour has joined Himself with humanity [all people] by a tie that will never be broken. For the rest of eternity [life without end] Jesus is connected to us. ‘God so loved the world. . . .’ God gave Jesus to accept our sins and to die as our sacrifice.⁹ He gave Him to the fallen race. To promise us His continuing peace, God gave His only-begotten Son to become one of the human family. He was to forever keep His human nature. . . . God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son. And He has carried the same into the highest heaven. It is the ‘Son of man’ who shares the throne of the universe.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 25. “Christ went to heaven, bringing with Him a righteous, holy human form. He took this human form with Him into the heavenly courts. And throughout eternity He will have it. This is because He is the One who has saved every human person in the city of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, page 1054.



In Jesus we become closer to God than if we had never fallen.

A friend of yours has heard about Jesus’ eternal connection with us. He says, “That is going too far. It is too much!” What would you say to that person? And how do you feel knowing that Jesus will be like (the same as) us for eternity? What does it tell us about God’s love for all people?

FRIDAY—APRIL 18

ADDITIONAL STUDY: In the old controversy (argument) over the person of Jesus, the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) made a very historic decision. It agreed and announced that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully

9. sacrifice—Jesus’ death for us on the cross.

man: “. . . We all with one voice teach that . . . our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same God, the Same perfect in Godhead, the Same perfect in manhood. He is truly God and truly man. . . . [He is one] with the Father as to His Godhead. And . . . [He is one] with us as to His manhood. In all things He is like unto us. The only exception is that He is without sin. . . .”—Cited in Justo L. Gonzalez (adapted), *A History of Christian Thought*, volume 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), page 390. For an overview of what the Chalcedon statement means from an Adventist viewpoint, read Roy Adams, *The Nature of Christ* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1994), pages 57–72.

“In thinking about Christ in human form, we stand puzzled by a difficult-to-understand mystery. . . . If we try to think more about this subject, we will be more amazed [surprised] by it. How wide is the difference between Christ as God and Christ as a helpless baby in Bethlehem’s manger [cradle]! How can we bridge the distance between the mighty God and the helpless child? The Creator of worlds, fully God in human form, was shown to be the helpless babe in the manger. He was far higher than any

of the angels. He was equal with the Father in honor and glory. But He was clothed in human form! God and man were mysteriously combined. And man and God became one. It is in this union that we find the hope of our fallen [sinful] human race [a group].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, July 30, 1896.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ What for you are the big issues about Christ in human form? Why are they important to you? At the same time, why must we be careful not to be too strict or stubborn about the finer points of Christ as a human?
- ❷ Ellen G. White says that Christ in human form is everything to us (read *Selected Messages*, volume 1, page 244). What did she mean? In what useful ways does the idea of Christ as a human influence¹⁰ you in your Christian walk?
- ❸ How might we use what we have studied in this week’s lesson in our personal witness? How does Christ as a human become real to people today and change their lives?

10. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.