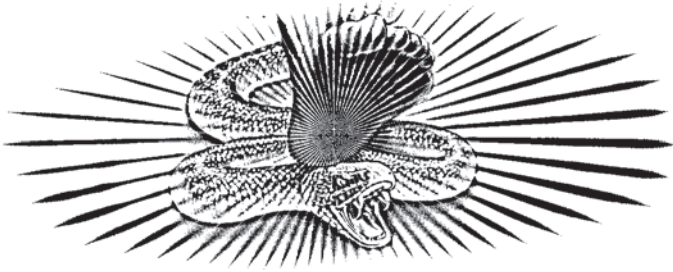


Atonement Announced



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:15, 22:1–18, Exodus 32, 34:6–10, Daniel 9.*

Memory Text: “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (*Isaiah 53:5, NIV*).

Key Thought: To show the different ways that God, centuries before the Cross, had announced His plan of salvation.

Once the Lord had provided a solution to the deadly reality and power of sin, He immediately announced the good news to fallen human beings. (The first missionary in cosmic history was not a creature but the Creator Himself!) The Lord also made sure that this promise, that of redemption, was kept fresh and alive in their minds because He wanted His people to be ready when, through the person of Jesus, the promise would become a reality. Throughout the history of His people in the Old Testament, God created institutions and laws directly tied to His plan of salvation that illustrated its workings. By means of the sacrificial system, the priesthood, and even the king (himself a symbol of the Messiah), they could anticipate the supreme sacrifice, the coming of the true High Priest, and the reign of the Messianic King through whom God's saving purpose would be realized.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 1.*

A Promise to Adam and Eve

Review Genesis 3:1–15, focusing especially on verse 15. What is being said in verse 15, and what hope can be found there for us?

Christians have correctly found in Genesis 3:15 a prophecy of the Messiah.

First, the context of Genesis 3:15 indicates that the serpent is an instrument of evil and rebellion against God (*Rev. 12:9*). In the Garden of Eden this evil power defeated Adam and Eve and extended its dominion over the descendants of the woman.

Second, Genesis 3:15 announces the destruction of the serpent by the Seed of the woman. It will “strike” the heel of the Seed, but the Seed will “crush” the head of the serpent. The Hebrew verb *šûp* (“bruise,” “strike at,” “crush”) is the same in both places, which suggests that the seriousness of the assault depends on the part of the body assaulted. The attack against the Seed (at its heel) is not fatal; the Seed, though, will crush the serpent’s head, indicating its ultimate demise.

Third, the Hebrew noun *zeraʿ* (“offspring”) usually designates “offspring, posterity, seed” in the sense of descendants as a single group. But it can also refer to a single descendant (*e.g., 2 Sam. 7:12, 13*). In Genesis 3:15 we find both usages present. We read about the descendants of both the woman (the faithful church) and the serpent/Satan (his followers) but also about a single male descendant of the woman (“He”) who will “crush” “your [singular] head”; that is, the serpent’s head. Whenever “seed” denotes a particular descendant, the pronoun that follows it is in the singular. The “Seed” of the woman is Jesus.

What Genesis 3:15 suggests is that as soon as sin entered the world, God’s eternal plan of salvation through Christ was put into effect. Adam and Eve did not experience eternal death because, from the divine perspective, Christ is the Lamb “that was slain from the creation of the world” (*Rev. 13:8, NIV*). Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, looking forward to the fulfillment of the wonderful promise of salvation.

Right from the start, God’s plan was to redeem us and to destroy Satan. What are you doing, day by day, to avail yourself of this wonderful provision so that, when all’s finished, you’re among the redeemed and not among the destroyed? (Remember, in the end, it’s one or the other.)

Abraham Saw My Day

Read Genesis 22:1–12. What was the nature of the test that Abraham was subjected to? Why would the Lord ask Abraham to do this? What deep issues were at stake here?

Genesis 22 does not inform us why the test was necessary, but the reason appears to be related to the covenant God made with Abraham. In the covenant relationship the Lord expected the patriarch to “ ‘walk before me and be blameless’ ” (*Gen. 17:1, NIV*), a standard that Abraham hadn’t always reached (*Gen. 16:1–4, 20:1–10*).

Isaac was the son of the covenant promise, the one through whom Abraham was to bless the world, and thus, without that son the promises that God had made to the patriarch could not have been fulfilled. In a sense, by asking Abraham to sacrifice him, God was telling Abraham that the covenant relationship had come to an end and that the special promises made to him were now over. Abraham was not going to be God’s instrument in blessing all the nations of the earth (*Gen. 12:3*), after all. But Abraham revealed his faith and commitment to the Lord, particularly in his willingness to return the gift of his son to God, fully trusting in His mercy and grace (*Heb. 11:19*).

What made it possible for the covenant to be renewed? *Gen. 22:13–18*.

By asking Abraham to sacrifice his son, God was pronouncing a sentence against him and bringing to an end His special purpose for him. All this, however, changed in a radical way when a ram was offered in place of Isaac. God provided what Abraham desperately needed, a sacrificial animal that could take the place of his son, making it possible for the Lord to renew the covenant with him. The human sacrifice (i.e., the death of a sinner) was substituted by the sacrificial victim provided by the Lord, not by Abraham. Thus, Abraham saw the mystery of the gospel, of substitutionary atonement, because through Jesus, “ ‘it [the sacrificial offering] will be provided’ ” (*Gen. 22:14, NIV*).

Our minds tremble at the faith of Abraham. What things are you being called to sacrifice, *by faith*, before the Lord? What things, if any, might you need to surrender in order for the covenant blessings to remain yours?

Moses and the Revelation of Salvation

What was God’s reaction to the act of idolatry of the people of Israel on Mount Sinai? Why was it so strong? *Exod. 32:7–10.*

This act of idolatry was an act of rebellion against God, a breaking of the covenant that God had just made with them. Like Adam and Eve, the Israelites were left in a state of alienation—and they would have been left to perish had it not been for Moses’ intercession in their behalf (*Exod. 32:11–14*).

What did Moses say to God after this incident? *Exod. 32:30–32.* How is the promise of the gospel seen here?

Moses did not excuse the people; he made it clear to them that they had sinned against God. But he also told them that he was going to approach the Lord to ask Him to forgive them. Moses knew that forgiveness is very costly and that it should not be confused with indifference to sin. (The Lord’s reaction to their idolatry more than proved that!) Moses himself became the mediator of the people, their intercessor before the Lord, seeking to obtain for them redemption from their sin. He then did the inconceivable: He offered himself to the Lord as a means of atonement! He was willing to have his name deleted from the book of life (*Exod. 32:32; see also Ps. 69:28, Phil. 4:3*) if that would make it possible for the people to be restored to harmony with the Lord.

Obviously, the Lord could not accept that unselfish offer. Moses’ life could not atone for sin.

How would the Lord finally solve the problem? *Exod. 34:6–10.*

The Lord revealed Himself to Moses as a forgiving God. This forgiveness is all-inclusive: “‘forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin’” (*vs. 7, NIV*). The Hebrew word translated “forgiving” literally means “bearing.” The way God deals with our sin is by removing it from us and bearing it Himself. Moses could not do that; God had already decided that He would do it through His Servant. What Moses and the children of Israel needed was provided by God.

God was ready to wipe them out for their idolatry! What should this reaction tell us about how God views sin? What should this tell us about how we must get sin out of our own lives?

The Servant of the Lord

Read Isaiah 52:13–53:12. What great hope and promise are found here for us?

These verses present one of the most majestic passages of the Old Testament. This section establishes, without explicitly stating it, the limits and ineffectiveness of the Israelite sacrificial system as a means of expiation (the removal of the barrier between humanity and God). The problem of sin was so serious that only the Servant of the Lord could solve it. The passage describes the experiences of both the people and the Servant.

The People: The people went through two experiences, one of disbelief and misjudgment, the other of confession and contrition. Initially, the Servant was perceived as unattractive, almost like a leper (*Isa. 52:14*) and as someone “stricken by God, smitten by him” (*Isa. 53:4, NIV*). Because God appeared to have rejected Him, they, too, despised and rejected Him (*vs. 3*). Then they realized that there was a divine purpose in the experience of the Servant; that He was taking their sorrows and infirmities (*vs. 4*) on Himself. He was bearing their sins, and as their Substitute, He was dying for them. In the light of the sacrifice of the Servant, they saw themselves as they truly were: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (*vs. 6, NIV*). Only by looking at the Cross can we perceive the distortions of sin in our lives.

The Servant: The experience of the Servant was extremely painful. He was lonely, rejected by all (*vs. 3*), loaded with sorrows and suffering, oppressed and afflicted (*vs. 7*), and even “cut off from the land of the living” (*vs. 8, NIV*). Yet, there was no justification for this treatment because “he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth” (*vs. 9, NIV*). Why was this innocent Person suffering? It was because the Lord was presenting the Servant’s life as a “guilt offering” (*vs. 10, NIV*). He was bearing the iniquities of the people, dying in their place in order to declare them righteous and innocent (*vss. 11, 12*). But after that sacrificial death, He was to see light again (*vs. 11*) and to be highly exalted (*Isa. 52:13*).

This prophetic depiction of the sacrificial death of Christ was offered by Isaiah as the only effective way of expiation from sin. Christ became what we are in order for us to be restored to fellowship with God.

Read again Isaiah 52:13–53:12, paying special attention to all that Jesus has done for us on the cross. What hope do you see in there for yourself?

Announced in Daniel

Read Daniel 9:7–11. In his prayer, how did Daniel describe the condition of the people?

In order to experience divine healing and freedom from sin, we must first recognize our condition as sinners and as violators of God's revealed will. A fundamental human problem is our unwillingness to acknowledge that there is something seriously wrong with us, that we are in desperate need of forgiveness and reconciliation with our Creator. Even forgiven sinners constantly must recognize, as Daniel did, that we are in daily need of God's forgiving grace.

What is Daniel's specific request to the Lord? On what basis is Daniel making this request? *Dan. 9:16–19.*

Once we realize our condition as sinners, one of the most important discoveries we can make concerning our relationship with God is that the only thing we have to do to receive forgiveness is to ask for it. Daniel was totally relying on God's mercy, on His wonderful grace, as the only way out of His status as sinner.

In this chapter we also find a prophecy in which God revealed not only *how* He was planning to address the problem of sin but also the time frame within which this would happen, the *when* (see *Dan. 9:24–27*). The *how* was through His Anointed One, the Messiah, the King to which all the other kings of Israel pointed and represented. The *time* for His sacrificial death and the initiation of His priestly work (the anointing of the sanctuary) is given in terms of 70 weeks (490 years). The prophetic period runs from 457 B.C. to A.D. 34. God expected His people to be ready for the coming of the Messiah. What this incredible prophecy shows, in a very clear way, is not only that God is in absolute control of every aspect of His work of salvation but that He will make sure it accomplishes its eternally intended purpose.

How important is it for you to remain aware that, although you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, you are in constant need of His forgiving grace? Is that a threat to your assurance of salvation or a way of affirming that assurance? Give reasons for your answer.

Further Study: Instant Substitute: “The instant man accepted the temptations of Satan, and did the very things God had said he should not do, Christ, the Son of God, stood between the living and the dead, saying, ‘Let the punishment fall on Me. I will stand in man’s place. He shall have another chance.’ ”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1085.

Sacrifice of Isaac: “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 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.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 154, 155.

Importance of Isaiah 53: “This chapter should be studied. It presents Christ as the Lamb of God. Those who are lifted up with pride, whose souls are filled with vanity, should look upon this picture of their Redeemer, and humble themselves in the dust. The entire chapter should be committed to memory. Its influence will subdue and humble the soul defiled by sin and uplifted by self-exaltation.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1147.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Go back through the week’s lesson. Take everything that’s taught each day and write a summary of all that we can learn about the plan of salvation from what God has revealed in these Old Testament accounts. Bring what you’ve learned and share it with the class.
- 2 Read the first Ellen White quote listed above. What does that tell us about the character of God? What does it mean to have “another chance”?
- 3 As a class, go over the story of Abraham on Mount Moriah. What other lessons can we take from it about what it means to live by faith?

Summary: Centuries before Christ was on this earth the Lord gave us promises of salvation. Those promises were fulfilled in a very precise way. The question remains, How should we respond to the reliability and trustworthiness of the Lord as revealed in the fulfillment of those promises?

The Radiant Light

Hidemi Sugawara stopped halfway down the aisle of her church and blinked in stunned silence. Her seat was taken. In fact, the front half of the church was full. Where could she sit? How would she hear?

Hidemi was a faithful Adventist Christian. She had lived in rural Japan for years, but as she grew older and had more trouble getting around, she decided to move to the city. She found an Adventist church near a subway stop and began attending. She missed her old friends from her country church and found it difficult to make new friends in the large city.

She sat in the front of the church to hear better. But this Sabbath the front pews of the church were full. She found a seat toward the back. But she couldn't hear the service. She watched as people stood and knelt, but she heard only mumbled noises. *What's the use of coming if I can't hear?* She asked herself. *I may as well stay home and pray and sing alone.*

As the pastor prayed the benediction his face suddenly shone with a radiant light. Then as the worshipers walked down the aisle toward the door, she saw that everyone wore that same radiant light. *Am I dreaming?* she wondered. *Or are my eyes going bad too?*

She walked out of the church and started toward the subway. She examined the faces of the people who passed by. They looked normal enough. But when she turned and looked at the church, she saw that same radiant light on it. *What is happening?* she wondered. She saw some church members at the subway station and noticed that they still wore the radiant light.

Then she understood. God wanted her to continue attending church, and He wanted her to know that He had a special blessing for His people and His church. If she continued attending church, surely God would bless her as well.

Hidemi realized that as she fretted over her inability to hear, she had missed the blessing God had for her by simply being with believers in His church. It was not so important to hear everything that was said; just being there was enough. She continued attending church and brought her friends as well. In time she made many friends in the church, young and old.



Mission begins in our homes and our churches and spreads like beams of light around the world. Tell a neighbor; tell the world that Jesus loves them.

HIDEMI SUGAWARA (left) lives near Chiba, Japan.