

Atonement *and* Universal Harmony



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Dan. 8:13, 14; 1 Cor. 4:5; 15:51–54; Heb. 9:23; Rev. 20:1–4, 11–15; 22:3–6.*

Memory Text: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away’” (*Revelation 21:3, 4, NIV*).

Key Thought: To look at how God will consummate our salvation in Christ and restore harmony to the universe.

Christ's work of salvation in our behalf will reach its ultimate goal when the earth will be fully reintegrated into the loving harmony and safety of the universal kingdom of God. The Lord is, even now, transforming sinners into saints who will one day populate this kingdom. His redemptive plan includes the transformation of society and nature through an act of re-creation that will also bring the cosmic conflict to an end. The Lord alone will establish that ideal society, one ruled by the love and justice of a God who sent His Son to die for sinful creatures, and He did it all in order to make it possible for these sinful creatures to be part of His universal and eternal kingdom one day. This process, before being fulfilled, will include the ultimate eradication of all evil.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 27.*

Universal Cleansing

The restoration of God's creation to its original condition, once free from sin and uncleanness, was represented in the Day of Atonement ritual. On that day the high priest came closer to the presence of God than on any other day of the year. The daily cleansing of the people that day reached its consummation and therefore pointed to the time when the whole universe will be free from sin.

How does Daniel describe the final triumph of God over the forces of evil? *Dan. 8:13, 14.*

Daniel uses Day of Atonement symbolism to describe the consummation of God's redemptive work in Christ. The heavenly temple is where God has been—through the mediation of Christ—dealing with the sin problem. This work of mediation will come to an end through the final cosmic cleansing from sin and rebellious sinners—a process that began at the end of the 2,300 “days.” This cleansing is associated with God's end-time judgment. In Daniel 7 this work of judgment takes place before His angelic host (*Dan. 7:9, 10, 22*) in the context of a court of law, showing that their final destruction has a legal foundation.

How does the high-priestly work of mediation and judgment in the Old Testament find its fulfillment in Christ's mediation? *Heb. 9:23.*

The cleansing power of the sacrifice of Christ has also a future expression, represented in the cleansing ritual performed by the Levitical high priest during the Day of Atonement in the earthly sanctuary. In fact, Christ's work of mediation reaches its climax in the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, which is His work of judgment. By referring to the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, Hebrews points back to the cleansing effectiveness of the sacrifice of Christ while pointing forward to its ultimate completion in the experience of His faithful people at the Second Coming (*Heb. 9:28*). This cleansing also looks forward to the establishment of the kingdom of God (*Heb. 12:28*), when all the enemies of Christ, who have already been defeated (*Heb. 2:14*), will “be made his footstool” (*Heb. 10:13, NIV*). This cleansing will result in an executive judgment “that will consume the enemies of God” (*vs. 27, NIV*), an act that will be the final cleansing of the universe from the presence of sin and evil.

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Revelation 21:3, 4*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: God’s plan will ultimately wipe out sin.

Feel: Assured that Satan will lose the war, and peace will be restored permanently to the universe.

Do: Live daily with the hope of Christ’s return.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. God Cleans House (*Dan. 8:13, 14; Heb. 9:23–28*)

A When Lucifer fell, sin became a problem for both heaven and—after Adam’s fall—earth. Using the four-step process mentioned in the lesson, tell how, using these ideas, you would bring someone to Christ. Why would it be important for a non-Christian to understand how God is going to cleanse the sin problem from the universe?

B A Thousand Years to Judge:

God will allow the redeemed all the time they need to see the choices of the lost. Why is this important to the entire universe? What does the process of sacrifice, mediation, and judgment tell you about the patience and long-suffering of God? How can you use this to tell someone about Jesus?

II. The Blessed Hope

When Christ returns, His followers will rejoice. Historically we, as Adventists, have clung to this as the blessed hope. Why don’t we talk about this more today? What are things that may have dimmed our hope? How do we restore the hope and maintain it daily, even if Christ doesn’t return for another 50 years?

▶ **Summary:** God’s plan is still in motion to wipe out sin. Our blessed hope will be realized.

Vindication of God's People

Read 1 Corinthians 15:51–54 and Hebrews 9:27, 28. What is being described here, and what hope does it offer us?

The realization of our ultimate hope in Christ consists, first, in the radical transformation of human nature (*1 Cor. 15:53*), when we go from our corrupted and disfigured self to our true self, one no longer distorted and perverted by sin. We will be rid, too, of our wretched mortality.

Second, the realization of our hope at the Second Coming will consist in our being removed from the presence of evil in all its forms. This will lead to a new mode of existence, one permanently detached from the sphere of sin. Removed from the sinful social conditions that predominate all societies and cultures, we will be restored to the conditions originally created by God for the human race.

Third, the realization of the Christian hope at the return of Christ will consist of a permanent, unhindered, and visible access to our Savior. Believers look forward to a time when they will exist in the immediate presence of the Savior, never to be separated again (*1 Thess. 4:17*). This permanent union with our Lord and Redeemer will enrich the quality of human life in dimensions that we cannot even begin to anticipate now.

Finally, the consummation of the Adventist hope at the Second Coming will also consist of a harmonious social interaction. That will be a moment of reunion, a reencounter. The separation from loved ones occasioned by the power of death comes to an end through the re-creative power of the Savior (*1 Cor. 15:54–57*). The individual hope merges here with the collective hope of those who, throughout the ages, died in Christ while embracing the promises of God. This is the consummation of our reconciliation and will not be threatened by the presence of sin.

Why are all of the promises described above so important to us? What would our faith be without them? Why must our hope be “other-worldly”; that is, beyond anything that this present world offers, no matter how much good we seek to do here and now?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Harmony. What came to mind when you heard that word? Did you think of a specific musical piece? Did a picture flash itself on your mind; a lion and a lamb lying down together, a picnic by a beautiful lake? Or was it a memory of some time in your family life that was special and joyful?

Have class members share their thoughts about what the idea of *harmony* brings to mind. What different things did they present? Was there anything specific in common that the various images had? Invite them to imagine themselves in the picture of Jesus with a child asleep on His lap. Ask them to share what heavenly harmony will be like.

How can we experience “heavenly harmony” while we await Christ’s return to take us home? Is it even possible in this world?

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Universal Cleansing: Barriers to Harmony

Daniel 8:14 presents a time line for hope: “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” It also describes a world gone completely awry from God’s original plan, a world in need of divine intervention. Discuss the fall of humanity. What choices put us in such a desperate situation? How does our rebellion impact how we relate to God? Which words would you use to describe your relationship with God right now? What daily choices are you making? What do they reveal about your relationship to God? What changes might you need to make?

CONTINUED 

Judging the Evil Powers and the Wicked

When and how will God deal with the phenomenon of sin in His rebellious creatures? *1 Cor. 4:5, 6:3, Rev. 20:1–4.*

The resolution of the sin problem takes place in stages because of the complexity of the problem of sin and God's interest in revealing to the universe His justice. First of all, in the Bible the millennium is an indispensable event that will lead to a cosmic revelation of God's justice, and it will result in the full reconciliation of all the things on earth and in heaven (*Col. 1:20*).

The millennium indicates that at the Second Coming the cosmos is not yet ready for the annihilation of unrepentant sinners, of Satan, and of his fallen angels. The extinction of a fragment of God's intelligent creation must take place at the appropriate moment, when it will result in the healing of the universe and the restoration of perfect harmony. Otherwise, the result could be a fragmentation deeper than the one that Satan first caused. The millennium provides the needed time to create universal support for God's solution to the great controversy.

Second, the millennium is a time of cosmic reflection and analysis. Time will be spent, by both the redeemed and Satan, reviewing the results of the great controversy. Satan and his angels, imprisoned on a desolated planet, will have plenty of time to think about what they have done. Together Satan and his angels will reflect on the results of their rebellion against the loving government of God. This introspection will contribute to the reconciliation of the universe.

Third, the reflection in heaven takes place in the setting of the judgment of the wicked (*1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Rev. 20:4*). The redeemed ones will join the heavenly court and will participate in the examination of the lives of those who persisted in their rebellion against God. They will reign with Christ for one thousand years, in the sense that they will participate with Him in His judicial capacity. They can witness in the throne room of the universe the fact that God did all He could do to save repentant sinners and that the lost should now assume responsibility for their decisions. In short, we will all be convinced of the rightness of God's final actions toward the lost.

What does it tell us about the character of God given that He will have this whole process unfold before the final destruction of the lost? How can you take this knowledge of God's character and apply it to your life today, in that you can learn to trust Him in all things, no matter how bad they are now?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 6:12, NKJV*). Also see Revelation 12:7–12. How does reading these texts give us understanding of the origins of the turmoil and terror in our world? What insights does the great controversy theme give us about evil and suffering, insights that those who don’t understand the controversy might not be able to appreciate? Why is our obligation to tell others so important?

II. God’s People, His Government Vindicated

In Daniel 9:4–19, Daniel prays a prayer of confession and total submission to God. Then in boldness he calls on God to act according to His will, “ ‘because your city and your people bear your Name’ ” (*vs. 19, NIV*). God’s response found in verses 20–24 indicates that He is attentive to our prayers of total surrender.

Compare and Contrast: How does Daniel’s attitude in prayer compare with the violent scenes in Revelation 12:7–12 or with our attitudes when we come before the God of the universe? How does Daniel’s life fit into the great controversy between Christ and Satan?

Consider This: Revelation 20 (*vss. 1–4 and 11–15*) allows us to step into the throne room of heaven to see the divine courtroom in session. The final verdict is announced in favor of God and His children. How does God’s disclosure of the details of the plan of salvation and its victorious conclusion impact your worldview? Your trust of your Savior? Your hope of the future?

Cosmic Reconciliation

How does the Bible describe the final resolution of the problem of sin in the universe? *Rev. 20:11–15, 22:3–6.*

Biblical hope embraces the universe, and it anticipates the moment when the reconciliation obtained through the blood of the Lamb will reach universal dimensions. This will happen at the end of the millennium, when the wicked are restored to life and Satan prepares to fight against God and His people in a last-ditch effort to gain the supremacy he's always wanted. But it will be precisely after the millennium, when all the questions have been answered to the satisfaction of the redeemed, that the enemies of God will be confronted with the record of their sin and rebellion. At this time the conclusion reached by the heavenly family during their reflections in the millennial kingdom will coincide with the conclusion reached by the forces of evil on earth. There, before the throne of God, God's justice and love will be publicly acknowledged by all the parties involved, including Satan, his angels, and the lost, who will publicly and voluntarily recognize that they were fighting for the wrong cause. They all will confess the righteousness of God, acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, and accept the divine sentence pronounced against them by the righteous One (*Phil. 2:9–11*), thus admitting that they deserve to die. This is the verdict reached by the people of God during the millennial judgment. The whole universe is finally in perfect agreement: The forces of evil must be eradicated. At that time the universe will be cleansed from any doubts there may have been concerning the justice and love of God, and every intelligent creature will be united in praising God's love and justice.

The evidence against the lost will be so overwhelming that even “Satan sees that his voluntary rebellion has unfitted him for heaven. He has trained his powers to war against God; the purity, peace, and harmony of heaven would be to him supreme torture. His accusations against the mercy and justice of God are now silenced. The reproach which he has endeavored to cast upon Jehovah rests wholly upon himself. And now Satan bows down and confesses the justice of his sentence. . . . With all the facts of the great controversy in view, the whole universe, both loyal and rebellious, with one accord declare: ‘Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 670, 671.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:5. How can you learn to trust the promise found there?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

III. “In a Little While We’re Going Home”

Has anyone ever told you to “take a breather” and come back and look at a problem that had stymied you? When we are deeply wrapped up in the turmoil of a situation, it is hard to have any objectivity. God invites us to see harmony renewed through the gift of atonement and His activity in the universe. He shows us this parable of divine possibility through the sanctuary services and through the lives of real human beings recorded as stories in the biblical narrative. We begin to understand God’s principles as we see those people make both positive and negative choices.

Consider This: Have someone read the memory text aloud (*Rev. 21:3, 4*). Then have someone else read Revelation 22:3–6 aloud. As a class, sing the Doxology or the chorus of “The Wonder of It All.” God’s re-creation plans, His triumph over sin, are as real as His authority to accomplish His purposes. See Hebrews 6:13–19. Discuss how God’s hope anchors your soul.

► **STEP 3—Practice****Thought Questions:**

- ❶ Using a dictionary, look up the word *vindication*. Now study how the Scriptures deal with the concept of vindication. See Psalm 43:1. How do these two sources compare or contrast? What does God’s vindication of His children mean to you?
- ❷ How would you explain Jesus’ high priestly ministry to a twelve-year-old child or to a non-Christian? In what ways does your understanding of Christ’s ministry on your behalf color how you treat those who have sinned against you?
- ❸ One author has encouraged, “It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially

CONTINUED ►

The Triumph of God's Love

However much we anticipate our new existence, we for now, knowing only a world of sin and death, find it hard to imagine what one without those things would be like.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:9–13. What is Paul saying to us here?

“To dwell forever in this home of the blest, to bear in soul, body, and spirit, not the dark traces of sin and the curse, but the perfect likeness of our Creator, and through ceaseless ages to advance in wisdom, in knowledge and holiness, ever exploring new fields of thought, ever finding new wonders and new glories, ever increasing in capacity to know and to enjoy and to love, and knowing that there is still beyond us joy and love, and wisdom infinite—such is the object to which the Christian hope is pointing.”—Ellen G. White, *Healthful Living*, p. 299. We eagerly wait for the moment when “every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 677.

Such hope only can imagine the human race ranging “from world to world” and employing much of their time “in searching out the mysteries of redemption. And throughout the whole stretch of eternity, this subject will be continually opening to their minds.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 990. Nothing will bring more joy to the redeemed ones than exploring the mystery of their salvation, the significance of the cross of Christ. The glorious subject of the atonement will keep on challenging our deepest intellectual and spiritual capacities throughout eternity as we attempt to gain a more complete understanding of the love of God revealed on the cross.

How much time do you spend dwelling on the Cross? What useless thing could you do without, using that time instead to contemplate what we have been given in Jesus through the Cross?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83. Why is understanding the principle of infinite love so critical to our trust of our Savior?

Life Application:

God invites us to claim His promises and anticipate His answers (*Luke 21:36, 37*). Consider your life situation, whether good or bad, in light of God’s promises. Make a daily agenda that includes steps or activities that match your desire to live out your assurance and trust in God.

Witnessing

Read 1 Corinthians 4:5. God invites us to wait for His purposes to be revealed. Some of our friends, family members, and neighbors seem to be living in total rebellion against God’s purposes for their lives. Plan to live in light of Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians. Pray for the people in your life who have seemed to turn their backs on God. As the Holy Spirit impresses you with actions to take to win them back to a saving relationship with God, respond in His grace and gentle winsomeness.

► STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: Hebrews 9:23 allows us to pull back the curtain of the universe and see that heaven has been affected by humanity’s sin problem. In response, the Godhead sent a Savior. Read this passage in the context of Philippians 2:1–5 with a journal or notebook and pen at hand. What does it mean that Jesus came to serve you and that He invites you to serve others in the same way? Write a letter of response and commitment to God. Include practical ways you can live out the life of servanthood that Jesus modeled. Make a covenant with God to act on His call to serve others.

Further Study: “Shall we not then exalt the cross of Christ? The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden, the paradise of bliss. All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God. The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Our only hope is perfect trust in the blood of Him who can save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. The death of Christ on the cross of Calvary is our only hope in this world, and it will be our theme in the world to come. Oh, we do not comprehend the value of the atonement! If we did, we would talk more about it. The gift of God in his beloved Son was the expression of an incomprehensible love. It was the utmost that God could do to preserve the honor of his law, and still save the transgressor.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, December 30, 1889.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell on the implications of Ellen White’s words that even the angels are not secure except by looking at the Cross. What does that mean? What should that tell us about how central the Cross should be to our daily lives and walk with the Lord now?
- 2 Though our ultimate hope is other-worldly, how should this hope impact how we live here; that is, in how we seek to better live for others here?
- 3 Think about what God offers us. How foolish, how incredibly short-sighted, to squander that hope on anything that this life offers us. How can you learn to wean yourself away from the things of this world that could jeopardize your hope of a new life in God’s eternal kingdom?

Summary: The Day of Atonement pointed to the consummation of Christ’s work of salvation. It will result in the cleansing of the universe from sin and evil. That consummation begins with the vindication of the people of God and their removal from the presence of sin and Satan. The cosmic impact of the problem of sin will be dealt with through the millennial judgment and will result in the extermination of the forces of evil. After that, there will be a permanent union with God and the heavenly family, all made possible only through the atoning death of Christ. God’s love will be triumphant.