

The Promised Son



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 2:2, 3; Heb. 1:1–4; Exod. 24:16, 17; Isa. 44:24; Heb. 1:10; Luke 1:31, 32; Heb. 1:5.*

Memory Text: “But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (*Hebrews 1:2, 3, NIV*).

Right after Adam and Eve sinned, God promised them a “seed,” a Son who would deliver them from the enemy, recover the inheritance that had been lost, and fulfill the purpose for which they had been created (*Gen. 3:15*). This Son would both represent and redeem them by taking their place and, ultimately, by destroying the serpent.

“When Adam and Eve first heard the promise, they looked for its speedy fulfillment. They joyfully welcomed their first-born son, hoping that he might be the Deliverer. But the fulfillment of the promise tarried.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 31. The promise was later confirmed to Abraham. God swore to him that he would have a “seed,” a Son through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed (*Gen. 22:16–18, Gal. 3:16*). And God did the same with David. He promised David that his descendant would be installed by God as His own Son and would be established as a righteous ruler over all the kings of the earth (*2 Sam. 7:12–14, Ps. 89:27–29*). What neither Adam and Eve, Abraham, nor David probably ever imagined, however, was that their Redeemer Son would be God Himself.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 15.

In These Last Days

The first paragraph of Hebrews reveals that Paul believed he was living in “the last days.” Scripture employs two expressions about the future that have different meanings. The prophets used the expression “last days” or “latter days” to talk about the future in general (*e.g.*, *Deut.* 4:30, 31; *Jer.* 23:20). The prophet Daniel used a second expression, “the time of the end,” to talk more specifically about the last days of earth’s history (*Dan.* 8:17, *Dan.* 12:4).

Read Numbers 24:14–19 and Isaiah 2:2, 3. What did God promise He would do for His people in the “latter days”?

Several Old Testament prophets announced that in the “latter days” God would raise up a King who would destroy the enemies of His people (*e.g.*, *Num.* 24:14–19) and who would attract the nations to Israel (*e.g.*, *Isa.* 2:2, 3). Paul says that these promises were fulfilled in Jesus. He defeated Satan and, through the proclamation of the Gospel, is attracting all the nations to Himself (*Col.* 2:15, *John* 12:32). In this sense, then, “the last days” have begun because Jesus has fulfilled God’s promises.

Our spiritual fathers died in faith. They saw and greeted the promises from “afar,” but did not receive them. We, on the other hand, have seen their fulfillment in Jesus.

Let’s think for a moment about God’s promises and Jesus. The Father promised that He would resurrect His children (*1 Thess.* 4:15, 16). The wonderful news is that He initiated the resurrection of His children with the resurrection of Jesus (*1 Cor.* 15:20, *Matt.* 27:51–53). The Father also promised a new creation (*Isa.* 65:17). He has begun to fulfill that promise by creating a new spiritual life in us (*2 Cor.* 5:17, *Gal.* 6:15). He promised that He would establish His final kingdom (*Dan.* 2:44). He inaugurated that kingdom by delivering us from the power of Satan and installing Jesus as our Ruler (*Matt.* 12:28–30, *Luke* 10:18–20). This is only the beginning, however. What the Father began to do at Jesus’ first coming, He will bring to completion at His second.

Look at all the promises God fulfilled in the past. How should this help us to trust Him for the promises not yet fulfilled?

God Has Spoken to Us by His Son

Read Hebrews 1:1–4. What is the central idea of these verses?

In the original Greek, Hebrews 1:1–4 is only one sentence, and it has been argued that it is the most beautiful in all the New Testament from the point of view of its rhetorical artistry. Its main assertion is that God has spoken to us through His Son, Jesus.

For the Jews in the first century A.D., the Word of God had not been heard for a long time. The last revelation to be expressed in the Written Word of God had come through the prophet Malachi and the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah four centuries before. But now, through Jesus, God was speaking to them again.

God's revelation through Jesus, however, was superior to the revelation that God had made through the prophets because Jesus is a greater means of revelation. He is God Himself, who created the heaven and the earth and rules the universe. For Paul, the deity of Christ is never in question. It's all but assumed.

Also, for Paul, the Old Testament was the Word of God. The same God who spoke in the past continues to speak in the present. The Old Testament communicated a true knowledge of God's will.

However, it was possible to understand its fuller meaning only when the Son arrived on earth. In the author's mind, the Father's revelation in the Son provided the key to understanding the true breadth of the Old Testament, just as the picture on the box of a jigsaw puzzle provides the key to finding the correct place for every one of its pieces. Jesus brought so much of the Old Testament to light.

Meanwhile, Jesus came to be our Representative and our Savior. He would take our place in the fight and defeat the serpent. Similarly, in Hebrews, Jesus is the "pioneer" or "captain" and "forerunner" of believers (*Heb. 2:10, Heb. 6:20*). He fights for us and represents us. This also means that what God did for Jesus, our Representative, the Father also wants to do for us. He who exalted Jesus at His right hand also wants us to sit with Jesus on His throne (*Rev. 3:21*). God's message to us in Jesus includes not only what Jesus said but also what the Father did through Him and to Him, all for our temporal and eternal benefit.

Think through what it means that Jesus—God—came to this earth. Why should this truth bring us so much hope?

“He Is the Radiance of the Glory of God”

Read Hebrews 1:2–4. What are some of the things that this passage teaches us about Jesus?

In this section, we will focus on the portion that says, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (*Heb. 1:3, ESV*).

Read Exodus 24:16, 17; Psalm 4:6; Psalm 36:9; and Psalm 89:15. How do these texts help us understand what the glory of God is?

In the Old Testament, the glory of God refers to His visible presence among His people (*Exod. 16:7; Exod. 24:16, 17; Lev. 9:23; Num. 14:10*). This presence is often associated with light or radiance.

Scripture informs us that Jesus is the Light who came to this world to reveal the glory of God (*Heb. 1:3; John 1:6–9, 14–18; 2 Cor. 4:6*). Think, for instance, of how Jesus appeared in the Transfiguration. “And He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light” (*Matt. 17:2, NKJV*).

Just as the sun cannot be perceived except by the radiance of its light, God is known through Jesus. From our perspective, the two are one. Because God’s glory is light itself, there is no difference, in actual being and character, between God and Jesus, just as there is no difference between light and its radiance.

Hebrews also says that Jesus is the “exact representation” of the Father’s substance (*Heb. 1:3, NASB*). The point of the metaphor is that there is a perfect correspondence in being—or essence—between the Father and the Son. Note that human beings carry God’s image but not His essence (*Gen. 1:26*). The Son, however, shares the same essence with the Father. No wonder that Jesus said, “‘He who has seen Me has seen the Father’ ” (*John 14:9, NKJV*).

Why is it such great news that Jesus reveals the character and the glory of the Father to us? What does Jesus tell us about what the Father is like?

Through Whom He Made the Universe

Hebrews affirms that God created the world “through” or “by” Jesus and that Jesus sustains the world with His powerful Word.

Read Isaiah 44:24, Isaiah 45:18, and Nehemiah 9:6. Because in the Old Testament the Lord affirmed that He created the world “alone” and that He is the “only God,” how can we reconcile this affirmation with the affirmations in the New Testament that God created the universe “through” Jesus (*Heb. 1:2, 3*)?

Some think that Jesus was merely the instrument through whom God created. This is not possible. First, for Paul, Jesus is the Lord who created the world; He was not a helper. Hebrews 1:10 says that Jesus is the Lord who created the earth and the heavens, and Paul also applies to Him what Psalm 102:25–27 says about the Lord (*Yahweh*) as Creator. Second, Hebrews 2:10 says that the universe was created “by” or “through” the Father (exactly the same expressions that are applied to Jesus in Hebrews 1:2). The Father created and Jesus created (*Heb. 1:2, 10; Heb. 2:10*). There is a perfect agreement between Father and Son in purpose and activity. This is part of the mystery of the Trinity. Jesus created and God created, but there is only One Creator, God—which implies that Jesus is God.

Meanwhile, Hebrews 4:13 shows that Jesus also is Judge. His authority to rule and judge derives from the fact that God created all things and sustains the universe (*Isa. 44:24–28*).

Hebrews 1:3 and Colossians 1:17 affirm that Jesus also sustains the universe. This sustaining action probably includes the idea of guidance or governance. The Greek word *phero* (sustaining, carrying) is used to describe the wind driving a boat (*Acts 27:15, 17*) or God leading the prophets (*2 Pet. 1:21*). Thus, in a real sense, Jesus not only created us but also sustains us. Every breath, every heartbeat, and every moment of our existence is found in Him, Jesus, the foundation of all created existence.

Look up Acts 17:28. What does it say to us about Jesus and His power? Then think about the implications of this same Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. What does this truth teach us about the self-denying character of our Lord?

“Today I Have Begotten You”

Hebrews 1:5 reports the following words of the Father to Jesus: “‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You’ ” (*NKJV*). What does it mean that Jesus was “begotten,” and when did this happen? Does not this show that Jesus was somehow created by God sometime way in the past, as many believe?

Read Hebrews 1:5; 2 Samuel 7:12–14; Psalm 2:7; and Luke 1:31, 32. What promise to David did Paul in Hebrews apply to Jesus?

Jesus was begotten in the sense that He was installed, or “adopted,” by God as the promised Ruler, the Son of David. The concept of the divine adoption of the ruler was common in the Greco-Roman world and the East. It gave the ruler legitimacy and power over the land.

God promised to David, however, that his Son would be the true, legitimate ruler of the nations. He would “adopt” David’s Son as His own Son. Through this process the Davidic King would become God’s Protégé and His Heir. The covenant is fulfilled in Jesus as the Son of David. God would defeat His enemies and give Him the nations as His inheritance (*Ps. 89:27; Ps. 2:7, 8*).

As we can read in Romans 1:3, 4 and Acts 13:32, 33, Jesus was publicly revealed as God’s Son. Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration were moments when God identified and announced Jesus as His Son (*Matt. 3:17, Matt. 17:5*).

Yet, according to the New Testament, Jesus became the “Son of God with power” when He was resurrected and seated at the right hand of God. It was at that moment that God fulfilled His promise to David that his Son would be adopted as God’s own Son and His throne over the nations would be established forever (*2 Sam. 7:12–14*).

Thus, Caesar (symbol of Rome) was not the legitimate “son of god,” ruler of the nations. Instead, Jesus Christ was. The “begetting” of Jesus refers to the beginning of Jesus’ rule over the nations, and not to the beginning of His existence, because Jesus had always existed. There was never a time when Jesus did not exist, because He is God.

In fact, Hebrews 7:3 says that Jesus has “neither beginning of days nor end of life” (*compare Heb. 13:8*) because He is eternal. Thus, the idea of Jesus as God’s “only begotten son” is not dealing with the nature of Christ as deity but with His role in the plan of salvation. Through the incarnation, Christ fulfilled all the covenant promises.

Further Thought: The coming of Jesus to this earth as the Son of God fulfilled several functions at the same time. In the first place, as the Divine Son of God, Jesus came to reveal the Father to us. Through His actions and words, Jesus showed us what the Father really is like and why we can trust and obey Him.

Jesus also came as the promised Son of David, Abraham, and Adam, through whom God had promised He would defeat the enemy and rule the world. Thus, Jesus came to take the place of Adam at the head of humanity and fulfill the original purpose God had for them (*Gen. 1:26–28, Ps. 8:3–8*). Jesus came to be the righteous ruler God always wanted this world to have.

“The word that was spoken to Jesus at the Jordan, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,’ embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our representative. With all our sins and weaknesses, we are not cast aside as worthless. ‘He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.’ Ephesians 1:6. The glory that rested upon Christ is a pledge of the love of God for us. . . . The light which fell from the open portals upon the head of our Saviour will fall upon us as we pray for help to resist temptation. The voice which spoke to Jesus says to every believing soul, This is My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 113.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 We have learned that a better understanding of Jesus’ words and actions helps us understand God, the Father, better. In what practical ways should a better understanding of Jesus enrich your relationship with God, the Father?
- 2 We learned that the way God spoke to and treated Jesus is the way He wants to speak to and treat us. What should that tell us about how we should treat others?
- 3 Dwell on the importance of the eternal deity of Christ. What is lost if we believe that Jesus were somehow, in some way, a created being, like us, who went to the cross? Contrast that thought with the reality that Christ was the Eternal God, and He Himself went to the cross. What is the big difference between the two ideas?
- 4 In class, talk about giving glory to God. Read Revelation 14:7. How is giving glory to God part of present truth and the three angels’ messages?

Drinking With Villagers

By KOO MINGJI

The villagers in rural northern Taiwan didn't seem interested in Bible studies. Many worshiped at one of the two Christian churches in the village, while others spent their time drinking alcohol. The churchgoers shunned the drinkers.

What could I do?

I resolved to follow Jesus' example and befriend the drinkers. "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me'" (Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

I decided to drink with the villagers. After all, Paul declared, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (*NKJV*) in his powerful description of how to be an effective missionary in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23.

The drinkers didn't have a problem drinking together. They wanted to drink with me. But I gave them tea instead of alcohol. After drinking copious amounts of tea, they didn't have any room left for alcohol. Gradually, they stopped drinking alcohol and began to study the Bible with me. A few months passed, and two former drinkers gave their hearts to Jesus and were baptized in August 2019.

Tragedy struck six months later. One of the newly baptized Seventh-day Adventists, a young man, fell ill and died. His death hit me hard, and I cried out to God, "Why?"

Shortly after the funeral, the mother and brother of the deceased young man unexpectedly came to me and asked for Bible studies. Then other villagers followed their lead. In late 2020, they and other villagers flocked to a one-day health fair organized by the health ministries department of the Adventist Church in Taiwan. The day after the fair, five villagers were baptized.

God has infinite mercy and compassion, and He has prepared a way of salvation for every person on earth. The Lord says, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways" (*Isaiah 55:8, NKJV*). All glory belongs to Jehovah God!



This mission story illustrates the following components of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: Mission Objective Number 1, "To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors, but every church member, young and old, in the joy of witnessing for Christ and making disciples" through "increased number of church members participating in both personal and public evangelistic outreach initiatives with a goal of Total Member Involvement (TMI)" (KPI 1.1); and Spiritual Growth Objective Number 5, "To disciple individuals and families into Spirit-filled lives." Learn more about the strategic plan at IWillGo2020.org.