

Atonement¹ and Peace Everywhere



SABBATH—DECEMBER 20

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Daniel 8:13, 14; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 15:51–54; Hebrews 9:23; Revelation 20:1–4; Revelation 20:11–15; Revelation 22:3–6.

MEMORY VERSE: “I heard a loud voice from the throne. It said, ‘Now God makes his home with people. He will live with them. They will be his people. And God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sadness. There will be no more crying or pain. Things are no longer the way they used to be’ ” (Revelation 21:3, 4, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: God will finish His work of salvation² in Christ and restore (bring back) peace to the universe.³

CHRIST'S WORK OF SALVATION for our good will reach its greatest goal. This is when the earth will be fully restored to the unity,⁴ peace, and safety of the universe-wide kingdom of God. The Lord is now changing sinners into saints who will one day live in this kingdom. His plan of salvation includes changing people and the natural world through an act of re-creation. This re-creation will also end the great war between Christ and Satan. Then the Lord alone will establish that perfect society. This society will be ruled by the love and justice of a God who sent His Son to die for sinful people. He did it all to make it possible for these sinners to be part of His universe-wide and eternal (forever; without end) kingdom one day. This plan, before being fulfilled, will include the full removal of all evil.

1. atonement—the forgiveness and cleansing we receive by faith through Jesus' sacrifice (death) on the cross.

2. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death.

3. universe—all the matter (things), light, and energy (forces in nature that do work) that have been discovered (found) or that we know of.

4. unity—when two or more people or things are joined together as one; when two or more people are in agreement in ideas, feelings, and so on.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 21**THE CLEANSING (TO MAKE CLEAN) OF THE UNIVERSE
(Daniel 8:13, 14)**

How does Daniel describe the final victory of God over the forces of evil in Daniel 8:13, 14?

Daniel uses the Day of Atonement as a symbol (word-picture) to describe the successful end of God's work of saving people through Christ. The heavenly temple is where God has been dealing with the sin problem through Christ as High Priest. Christ's work as High Priest will come to an end through the final cleansing of the universe from sin and rebellious⁵ sinners. This has been going on since the end of the 2,300 "days." This cleansing is connected with God's end-time judgment. In Daniel 7 this work of judgment takes place in a court setting. God's angels are there (Daniel 7:9, 10, 22). This court setting shows that the sinners' final destruction (end) has a legal (lawful) foundation (basis).

According to Hebrews 9:23, how does the work of high priest in the

earthly sanctuary⁶ in the Old Testament find its fulfillment in Christ's work as High Priest for sinners?

The cleansing power of the sacrifice of Christ is symbolized⁷ by the cleansing service done by the Levitical⁸ high priest during the Day of Atonement service⁹ in the earthly sanctuary. This points to the successful end of Christ's work as High Priest in the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary.¹⁰ This really means His work of judgment. In Hebrews the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary points back to the cleansing done by the sacrifice¹¹ of Christ. It also points forward to its final completion in the experience of His faithful people at the Second Coming (Hebrews 9:28). And this cleansing points forward to the coming and setting up of the kingdom of God (Hebrews 12:28). This takes place when all the enemies of Christ, who have already been defeated (Hebrews 2:14), will "be put under his [Jesus'] control" (Hebrews 10:13, NIV). This cleansing will lead to God's executive judgment (punishment) that "will burn up his enemies" (verse 27, NIV). This act will be the final cleansing of the universe from sin and evil.

5. rebellious—fighting or struggling against authority (laws or rules) or any kind of control (power).

6. earthly sanctuary—the home of God on earth in early Bible times, where the high priest offered prayers and the blood of animals to God for the sins of the people of Israel.

7. symbolized—represented; shown to mean the same as.

8. Levitical—having to do with the priests of Israel from the tribe of Levi who served in the temple of God.

9. Day of Atonement service—an event that took place once a year in which the Jewish sanctuary (house of God on earth) was cleansed (made clean) of sin. Day of Atonement services represented a final removal of sin and a completely restored relationship with God.

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

11. sacrifice—the act of giving up something of value, such as a life, to help save someone or something.

MONDAY—DECEMBER 22**VINDICATION¹² OF GOD'S PEOPLE (Hebrews 9:27, 28)**

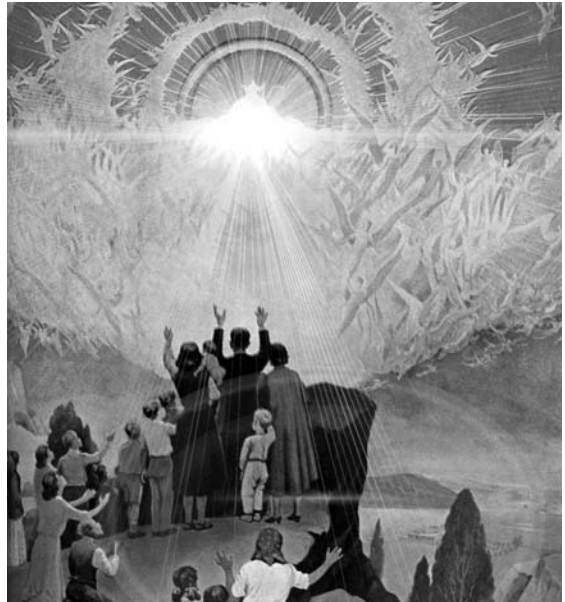
What do Hebrews 9:27, 28 and 1 Corinthians 15:51–54 describe? And what hope do they offer us?

Our full hope in Christ rests, first, in the complete change of human nature¹³ (1 Corinthians 15:53). This takes place when we go from our sinful self to our true self. The new self is no longer twisted by sin. We will get rid of death too.

Second, our hope at the Second Coming will be gained when all kinds of evil are removed. This will lead to a new style of life, one without the influence¹⁴ of sin. Free of the sin that controls all societies and cultures,¹⁵ we will be restored to the way of life originally created by God for humans.

Third, the Christian hope at the return of Christ will mean that we can meet and fellowship with our Savior forever. Believers look forward to a time when they will live in the presence of the Savior, never to be separated again (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This permanent (lasting forever; without change) union¹⁶ with our Lord and Savior will improve our lifestyle so much in ways we cannot even begin to imagine now.

Finally, the Seventh-day Adventist hope at the Second Coming also will include a peaceful fellowship. This is our final renewal and restoration¹⁷ that will not be threatened by sin.



The return of Christ means that we will live with Jesus forever.

Why are all these promises described above so important to us? What would our faith be without them? Why must our hope rest on things beyond what this present world offers?

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 23**JUDGING THE EVIL POWERS AND THE WICKED (1 Corinthians 4:5)**

12. vindication—proving that God's people are not guilty because of the righteousness (holiness) of Jesus that they received in place of their sins. This vindication will show they are worthy to enter heaven.

13. human nature—any of the qualities or aspects of humans (men, women, and children) that make us who we are. Without God, our natures are sinful, fallen, selfish, proud, unkind, and so on.

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

15. cultures—the ways that people live, dress, think, eat, and socialize with one another.

16. union—the act of joining together as one.

17. restoration—the act of returning to God. Sin takes us away from God, but God brings us back to Him. He puts His love and law in us and changes our hearts so that we love to obey Him.

According to 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 6:3; and Revelation 20:1–4, when and how will God deal with the problem of sin among the people who rebel (war) against God?

The answer to the sin problem does not take place all at one time because this problem is so difficult to solve quickly. And God is interested in showing the universe how fair He is. First of all, in the Bible the millennium (1,000 years) is an important event that will lead to a universe-wide example of God's justice. It will lead to the full restoration of all the things on earth and in heaven (Colossians 1:20).

The millennium (1,000 years) shows that at the Second Coming the universe is not yet ready for unrepentant¹⁸ sinners, Satan, and his fallen angels to be destroyed. These rebellious people must be destroyed at the right time. When this happens, it will lead to the healing of the universe and the restoration of perfect peace.

Second, the millennium is a time of deep study. Time will be spent, both by the saved and Satan, studying the results of the great war. Satan and his angels, imprisoned on a desolated¹⁹ planet, will have plenty of time to think about what they have done. Together Satan and his angels will think about the results of their rebellion (war) against the loving government of God. This time will help bring peace

to the universe.

Third, the study in heaven takes place in the setting of the judgment of the wicked (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3; Revelation 20:4). The saved will join the heavenly court and will take part in studying and examining the lives of those who were stubborn in their rebellion against God. The saved will rule with Christ for 1,000 years, in such a way that they will work with Him as Judge. They can witness in the throne room of the universe the fact that God did all He could do to save repentant sinners. And they will know that the lost should now accept responsibility for their decisions (choices). In short, we will all believe that God's final actions toward the lost will be right.



The saved will work with Jesus as judges in the heavenly court.

What does it tell us about the character of God²⁰ that He will

18. unrepentant—not being sorry for your sins.

19. desolated—something that has been destroyed.

20. character of God—who God is; having and understanding the character of God is the same as being kind, loving, honest, and so on. God's law (Ten Commandments) shows us His character.

show His judgment to the universe before He destroys the lost? How can you take this knowledge of God's character and use it in your life today, in such a way that you can learn to trust Him in all things, no matter how bad they are now?

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 24

RESTORATION AND PEACE IN THE UNIVERSE (Revelation 20:11–15)

How does the Bible describe the final answer to the problem of sin in the universe in Revelation 20:11–15 and Revelation 22:3–6?

Bible hope surrounds the universe. And it expects the moment when the restoration made possible through the blood of the Lamb will fill the whole universe. This will happen at the end of the millennium (1,000 years). At that time the wicked are restored to life, and Satan prepares to fight against God and His people in his last battle to gain full control of the world that he has always wanted. But it takes place after the millennium, after all the questions have been answered to the satisfaction of the saved. Then the enemies of God will face the record of their sin and rebellion. At this time the heavenly family will have judged the lives of the wicked at the same time the forces of evil on earth will have made theirs. There, before the throne of God,

God's justice and love publicly will be accepted by all the people involved. Even Satan, his angels, and the lost publicly will admit that they were fighting for the wrong cause. They all will confess the righteousness (holiness) of God, admit the Lordship of Christ, and accept God's sentence pronounced against them by the righteous (holy) One (Philippians 2:9–11). In other words, the wicked will admit that they deserve to die. This is the sentence of "guilty" reached by the people of God. The whole universe is finally in perfect agreement: The forces of evil must be removed. At that time the universe will be cleansed from any doubts about the justice and love of God. Every intelligent person will be united (joined together as one) in praising God's love and justice.



At the end of the 1,000 years, the wicked are brought back to life and join Satan's fight against God and His angels.



Satan bows down before Jesus and confesses the fairness of the sentence against him.

How can you learn to trust the promise found in 1 Corinthians 4:5?

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 25

THE VICTORY²¹ OF GOD'S LOVE (1 Corinthians 13:9–13)

We may imagine much about what our new life will be like in heaven. But for now, we know only of a world of sin and death. We find it hard to imagine what a world without sin would be like.

What is Paul saying to us from 1 Corinthians 13:9–13?

“It is the Christian hope to live forever in the heavenly home where

there are no dark examples of sin and the curse, and to bear [have] the perfect likeness of our Creator. We hope to continue growing in wisdom, knowledge, and holiness and to explore new fields of thought throughout eternity.²² We hope to find new wonders, continuing to know and grow in love, knowing that there will be more joy, love, and wisdom to come.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Healthful Living*, page 299. We eagerly wait for the time in heaven when “every mind will have a chance to grow and develop. Acquiring [getting] knowledge will never tire people from wanting to learn more. There the greatest ambitions [goals] will be reached. But still there will be more goals to be reached, projects to be done, new wonders to be admired, new truths to be understood—all of which will require the powers of mind and soul and body.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 677.

Just imagine humans (people) traveling “from world to world” and using much of their time “in searching out the mysteries of salvation. And throughout eternity, this subject continually will be opening to their minds.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 7, page 990. Nothing will bring more joy to the saved ones than studying the mystery of their salvation and the true meaning of the cross of Christ. The glorious

21. victory—the act of winning the battle over, or winning the struggle against, something.

22. eternity—life without end; forever.

subject of the atonement will keep on challenging our deepest mental and spiritual abilities throughout eternity. At the same time we will try to gain a more complete understanding of the love of God shown on the cross.

How much time do you spend thinking about the Cross? What useless thing could you do without? Try to use more valuable time thinking about what we have been given in Jesus through the Cross.

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 26

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The plan of salvation²³ makes clear the justice [fairness] and love of God. It also gives an eternal safeguard against backsliding in unfallen worlds, and among those who shall be saved by the blood of the Lamb. Our only hope is perfect trust in the blood of Jesus who can give us the best chance of being saved by God through 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 understand

the value of the atonement! If we did, we would talk more about it. The gift of God in his beloved Son was the example of the love that we can never fully understand. It was the best way that God could save the honor of his law, and still save the sinner.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, December 30, 1889.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Think about the deep meaning of Ellen G. White’s words. What should they tell us about how important the Cross should be to our daily lives and walk with the Lord now?
- ❷ Our greatest hope is going home to heaven. But how should this hope influence how we live here? How can we try to live better for others?
- ❸ Think about what God offers us. How foolish it would be for us to put that hope on anything that this life offers us. How can you learn to pull yourself away from the things of this world that could endanger your hope of a new life in God’s eternal (forever; without end) kingdom?

²³ plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.