

Old Paths

Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. Jeremiah 6:16

The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant. Psalm 25:14

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All over the world men and women are looking wistfully to heaven. (Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109.1)



Discipleship, Part 1

By Allen Stump

The followers of John Wycliffe became known as the Lollards. Later, the disciples of Martin Luther became known as Lutherans. After the 1840 through 1844 period, the followers of William Miller became known as the Millerites. While we may agree with a lot of the teachings of Wycliffe, Luther, and even Miller, we do not want to be Millerites, Lutherans, or Lollards. We are to be Christians because we are the disciples Christ.

Being a disciple involves something called discipleship. Discipleship for the Christian is the process of learning the teachings of Jesus Christ and then following his example in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit to live like Christians. Discipleship not only involves the process of becoming a disciple, it goes beyond it to reaching out to others and making disciples of others.

Discipleship in the Old Testament is fundamentally about learning what was required in the Torah and submitting obedience to it. There are two Hebrew terms we note concerning this. The first is *yāsār* (יָסַר), meaning “to instruct” (*Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary*). We see an example of it in Isaiah:

For his God doth instruct (*yāsār*) him to discretion, and doth teach him. (Isaiah 28:26)

The second word is *lāmad* (לָמַד), meaning “to teach” (*Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary*). *Lāmad* is used in Deuteronomy:

And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach (*lāmad*) you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it. (Deuteronomy 4:14)

Notice in this verse *lāmad* is not only a teaching process, but also something that requires action. Both *yāsār* and *lāmad* strongly imply a change in behavior as a result of the instruction.

Concerning the New Testament, we read:

In the NT, the word *μαθητής* (*mathētēs*, “disciple”) and other words related to *μανθάνω* (*manthanō*, “to learn”) express the idea of discipleship more narrowly. The root meaning of *manthanō* is “to learn,” which again ties discipleship to the concept of learning and instruction. Like the Hebrew terms, however, these words also refer not only to the transfer of information but also to the transformation of one’s lifestyle in order to be more like one’s teacher. (*Lexham Theological Wordbook*, article *Discipleship*.)

At the heart of being a disciple, a Christian disciple is to understand of whom they are to be disciples. We are not just simply disciples of Luther, of Wycliffe, or even of William Miller. We are to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

In Matthew chapter 16 we have the fundamental teaching of the identity of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. (Matthew 16:13–16)

Peter was a follower of Christ, the Son of God. Jesus had called Peter from his boat and from fishing, along with his brother, Andrew, and he had called John and James as well. “He saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). If we are going to be disciples of Jesus and lead others to Jesus, we must first be his disciple and follow him.

The question about the identity of Jesus is the great question for us, and it was the question in the great controversy over which Lucifer stumbled.

To dispute the supremacy of the Son of God, thus impeaching the wisdom and love of the Creator, had become the purpose of this prince of angels. To this object he was about to bend the energies of that master mind, which, next to Christ's, was first among the hosts of God. (Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 36.1)

In all the counsels of God, Christ was a participant, while Lucifer was not permitted thus to enter into the divine purposes. "Why," questioned this mighty angel, "should Christ have the supremacy? Why is He thus honored above Lucifer?" (Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 495.1)

Who is Christ and why should he have supremacy were the questions that every angel in heaven had to individually answer. "Who do you say that I am?" Lucifer and his angels fell from heaven because they refused to acknowledge the rightful authority of the Son of God and accept him as Lord.

Lucifer was envious of Christ, and gradually assumed command which devolved on Christ alone. (Ellen White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 13.1)

Lucifer and his sympathizers . . . rebelled against the authority of the Son.

Angels that were loyal and true sought to reconcile this mighty, rebellious angel to the will of his Creator. They justified the act of God in conferring honor upon Christ, and with forcible reasoning sought to convince Lucifer that no less honor was his now than before the Father had proclaimed the honor which He had conferred upon His Son. They clearly set forth that Christ was the Son of God, existing with Him before the angels were created; and that He had ever stood at the right hand of God, and His mild, loving authority had not heretofore been questioned . . . (Ibid., p. 15.1, 2)

Finally there was war in heaven. Before there was some kind of a physical war or altercation during which the evil angels were physically cast out, there was a spiritual war. There was a conflict going on in the mind of the angels. *Who is this individual we call Christ? What authority does he have, and why does he have that authority?* Lucifer's response is given by Isaiah:

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. (Isaiah 14:14)

You and I have to answer the same question Jesus gave to Peter and the disciples. It was a question that Lucifer and the fallen angels had to answer. Will we give the same answer as Peter? Implied in Peter's answer on the most basic level was an acknowledgement of Christ's lordship. If Jesus Christ is the Son of God, he is to be acknowledged Lord.

I want to state this so clearly, so unambiguously, that no one can misunderstand. No one will be in the kingdom of

God who does not acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. The Bible is clear that Jesus must be Lord of our lives:

But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. (1 Corinthians 8:6)

How did Jesus become Lord? How is he the Son of God? We are told by "the wisdom and love of the Creator" (White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 36.1). God has a plan that every intelligent creature will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord:

And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:11)

For Jesus to be Lord means that we have to allow him to exercise his lordship over us; in other words, we have to be in submission to him. A disciple is someone who does not simply learn at the feet of someone; the disciple has to be in obedience to the teachings of that individual, and that individual is to be Jesus Christ. In the Revelation he is said to be Lord of Lords:

And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. (Revelation 19:16)

Often in common evangelical Christianity today, salvation comes down to a sinner's prayer and to accepting Jesus as Savior, so you can have your sins forgiven, but it does not involve accepting Christ as Lord in your life. The Bible teaches that salvation is, in effect, a two-step process. Certainly one must accept Jesus Christ as one's Savior, as the one who can forgive them from sins, but Christ must also be accepted as Lord, the one who directs and empowers lives to live as he has called his followers to live.

As Savior Jesus offers forgiveness, and as Lord and King he expects trustful, loyal obedience. We must accept Christ as both and if we fail to make him Lord of our lives, we will miss him being Savior of our lives, and we will forfeit our entrance into God's Kingdom.

Let me say unequivocally again that no one will be in heaven who does not accept Christ as Lord, and Jesus himself implies this in question form:

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

We are not to call Jesus Lord unless we are willing to do the things that he says. This is the very essence of lordship. Every religion requires a willingness to recognize and submit to a higher authority. In today's modern democratic age, however, with its emphasis on the importance of the individual, having the concept of lordship has become more difficult for many people. In olden times, submission to kings and masters was the political norm. Acceptance of a higher authority and religion did not seem so difficult in

those days but after democracy became the norm, an unwillingness to submit to any authority appears to be the order of the day, and this has affected Christianity today.¹

This is true not just in the church in general but also in the one true God movement as well. Those who have been oppressed before do not want to be oppressed again. The modern believer wants independence. He or she wishes to be able to do things their own way, and that philosophy or mindset paves the way for an unwillingness then to allow Jesus to be Lord of their lives.

God's relationship with us is not a democratic process. His authority is not up for vote, compromise, or discussion. God is not one among equals. He is without equal, and this is what produces a crisis in the heart of the democratic man who has difficulty accepting and submitting to divine authority. He sees divine authority as being incompatible with his individual rights and freedoms.

Now, of course, God gives us freedom. He wants us to be able to make choices. We can serve him, or we can sin and live wickedly. We can be obedient and live righteously, or we can choose to sin. But dearly beloved, if we choose to reject Jesus as Lord of our life and live in sin, we will finally be destroyed with all sin.

Among other things, there is a lesson about authority in the story about the centurion who had a servant who was sick.

And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. (Matthew 8:5–10)

The centurion had faith in the word of Jesus to do exactly what that word said it was going to do. A. T. Jones and

¹ While democracy is seen by many to be the political goal of the United States and all whom she can influence, it should be noted that the United States was founded as a constitutional republic. While much of the government has drifted towards a democracy, it still retains much of its original foundation. The above comments should in no wise be seen as promoting some kind of communistic or socialistic government, but the reality of the situation is that due to the push for democracy, there is a lack of willingness to be submissive to another in modern society.

E. J. Waggoner wrote eloquently about these verses. There is something involved here with authority that is important and in the parallel account in Luke, we find one word is added that is not in Matthew. Read this verse, and see if you can see the word added:

For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. (Luke 7:8)

Did you see the word? It is *also*. Jesus knew the centurion was under authority, but the centurion also understood that Jesus was under authority and under whose authority was Christ? The authority of God the Father!

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11 3)

When Jesus claims and asks for our service and for him to be Lord of our lives, it is not that he does not know anything about submission himself. He understands submission, for he is in submission to God.

We also are a people under authority, and that is Christ's authority. He is our Lord and King. He is the captain of the Lord's host and when he says *go*, we are to go. When Jesus says *come*, we are to come. When he says *do this*, we are to do that thing, and we do it because we love him and want to serve him and follow his commands. One of Christ's great commands is given in Matthew 28:19–20. We call it the great commission:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen

In verse 19 the word we translate *teach* is from μαθητεύω (*mathēteuō*), which means *to disciple* or *make disciples*. The verb is in an emphatic form in the Greek. This is something we must do! And even after making disciples and baptizing them, we are to continue to teach the disciples.

Baptism is not the graduation; it is the entrance into the church. People are made disciples, and they want to follow Christ. We baptize them, but it does not mean that they are finished or are ready for heaven. They are still to be taught to observe all things that Jesus taught. Jesus cannot be our Lord if we do not do the things he has taught.

We need to learn how to teach and we need to learn how to teach in the way that Jesus taught.

The cost of discipleship

Any time you receive something there is a cost to it. Even a gift costs the one giving it something. If you go buy a car, there is a cost to it. If you go to the grocery store, there is a

cost to the food you buy. Discipleship under Christ is going to cost you, and that cost is everything! Jesus explained it this way:

And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:25–27)

We understand that this term *hate* in verse 26 means to *love less*. We are not to put someone or anything above Jesus. He is not asking us to hate people, but he is asking us to make sure that we love him supremely and he says that if we put something else in his place, then we really cannot have him as Lord. We cannot be his disciple.

Jesus says that unless we are willing to bear the cross, we cannot be his disciple. Our cross is simply the cross of self denial. Discipleship costs everything, and it must be more valuable to us than even our families. We must be willing to deny self because fundamentally that is what bearing our cross means. It means the denial of self.

Beloved, it is not just simply the the big things. In Luke we also read:

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross *daily*, and follow me. (Luke 9:23)

Notice here Jesus speaks about taking up our cross *daily*. This is something that happens continually and is something that is a part of normal life. I would like to propose to you that this consists primarily in following Christ in the little things because opportunities for great self-denial do not come up every day. Taking up the cross of Christ is not always a great action and certainly is not done as a once-for-all matter. It consists, rather, in the continual practice of small duties. These may not be tasteful, but Jesus will help us bear them. As Spurgeon noted:

The heaviest end of the cross lies ever on his shoulders. If he bids us carry a burden, he carries it also. (Charles Spurgeon, as quoted by Justin D. Fulton, *Charles H. Spurgeon, Our Ally*, p. 414)

Let us never forget that Christ asked us to do nothing with him sitting back and just be a spectator. Christ is never a spectator, he always is there involved with us, working with us, helping us because, as he says, “without me ye can do what nothing” (John 15:5).

Continuing with the theme of the cost of discipleship, Jesus also said:

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:24–26)

Jesus asked this probing question to his listeners, and this question has to be answered in our lives today also. The answer to this question determines our destiny. No person will be in the kingdom of God who is not willing to sacrifice for God.

Has God first given you an example of sacrifice? Yes, he has sacrificed everything for you in the gift of his only begotten Son. Heaven was emptied in the gift of Christ. So if we are asked to sacrifice something to serve Christ, it is because God has already sacrificed everything for us. This does not mean that Christianity is not incompatible with an abundant life. No, Jesus said:

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

There is nothing wrong with an abundant life but, friends, if we ever lose the spirit of sacrifice, we have lost the spirit of the gospel. The spirit of sacrifice is the heart of the gospel, and it is the cost of discipleship.

Further, we are told by Jesus:

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. (Luke 14:28–30)

In other words, Jesus is saying we have to count the cost of discipleship and decide its worth.

The lowest ebb for England during World War II was the period following the evacuation of the British army at Dunkirk. The Nazis were ready and waiting the order to cross the English Channel to invade a seemingly helpless nation.

Largely armed with words alone, then prime minister Winston Churchill rallied his people. In his first speech in the House of Commons on May 13, 1940, he said in part:

“I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.”

We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I can say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage

war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival. (Winston Churchill, as quoted by International Churchill Society)

Churchill was saying, in effect: *We will give everything; we will never surrender; the only outcome we will ever accept is victory.*

Do we feel like that? If you are a Christian, your citizenship is not of this world (Philippians 3:20). Jesus said “My kingdom is not this world” (John 18:36). Are we, like Churchill and the people of England, willing to fight to the death, to the very last person? Is victory over sin and death our goal as Christians, regardless the cost?

I am not quitting no matter how many people turn back. I am not turning back no matter how many people apostatize. I am never giving up the truth no matter how difficult it gets, no matter how much privation we must suffer. I will never accept anything but victory in Christ. I will give blood, toil, tears, and sweat. I will give everything that I have, and I pray you will also.

Jesus never offered his people a bed of roses; instead, he warned them to be prepared to endure hardship, danger, suffering, and even death as they follow him and render the service to which they have been called.

Continuing in Luke 14, Jesus again challenged minds with questions:

Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. (Luke 14:31–32)

If you have studied the history, early in Churchill’s experience as prime minister there were people, even within his war cabinet, who were saying: *You know, it’s time to sue for peace. If we approach Hitler now, maybe he’ll let us be, if we do not contest Europe.* Churchill said, *No, no. We are never going to surrender; we’re not going to sue for peace.* Beloved, sometimes, as Christians, I wonder if we are suing for peace with the devil. If he will just let us have this or that pet sin, we will not contest necessary points of righteousness. That is not the way it can be. It can never be that way. We must rally around our leader who gave literal blood, toil, tears, and sweat for us.

Jesus goes on to say:

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33)

If you are not willing to put God and Christ first and foremost in everything, you cannot be their disciples. Here is the true, simple, succinct cost. The cost of discipleship is everything.

A minister has a van, but, in reality, it is not his. The van belongs to God. If it is needed for God’s cause, that is how it is used. Maybe you have some extra money. If you are a true disciple of Christ, it is not yours but God’s.

Jesus wants you to count the cost because, beloved, Jesus does not need half-hearted people in his cause. Half-hearted people only dilute the cause and make it worse. God wants people who will stand up and be accounted and say, like Isaiah, *Here am I; send me.* Isaiah could do that because he was willing to give up everything for God and according to the historical count that we have, he gave up everything.

It is not just listening to the teachings of Jesus that makes us disciples. We must obey his words, and the only thing that is strong enough to motivate us to give up everything is the love of God in giving his Son who, himself, gave up everything for us.

Love makes the difference. When my son, Hans, was diagnosed with cancer, I would have given my life. I would have given anything for the cure. I would have sold my house, given up my car, taken every stitch of clothing and given it up. Why, because I loved him so much. Do you feel that way about Jesus Christ? If you do, you can be his disciple, if you will follow Jesus even if it is in blood, toil, sweat, and tears. We will never be asked to carry the cross that Christ bore. That cross is too heavy for us, but he will help us carry our cross of self-denial, and he will help us carry it through to the soon coming of Jesus Christ.

I want to be ready for the coming of Jesus Christ, don’t you, beloved? I want to be his disciple, and I want to help other people become disciples of Christ.

I pray it will be your desire to be a disciple of Christ and that you will count the cost and that whatever that cost is, you will be willing to pay it for Jesus Christ. He is worthy!

Jesus offers you eternal life. Sometimes difficult things on this world can seem to go on forever. Time flies so quickly when things are good and one is having a good time, but when you are under hardship things can go very slowly. I remember one night staying in a house without heat on a very cold night without even a proper blanket. I just could not wait for the morning to come. The night was long, dark, and cold, but with the love of God and Christ it does not matter how long the night is or how dark or cold it is. As Christians, we have the assurance that God will help us to endure, and he will give us the strength and the grace to endure. When you compare your current

Continued on page 20, column 2

1889 HSDA News

World Church Reorganization Begins

Things have been busy with the 1889 HSDA Church. We are at work with other English-and-French-speaking brothers and sisters from several countries in the world to form a world church, consisting of the existing conferences and future missions. The first organizational meeting was held virtually on January 8, and the next meeting will be held on January 22. The three existing conferences of the Philippines, of France and French-speaking areas, and of the United States had elected delegates for this conference.

Pastor David Sims, representing the Philippines, was asked to lead out as chairman at our first meeting and a charter and bylaws were discussed. We will be bringing you more information on this as the work progresses, but it is exciting to think of how God is bringing many believers together. There were several guest observers at the conference who are also interested in working together. Our meeting lasted nine hours, but we had to have translations between the languages. We also wanted to be sure that the delegates all had time for input and discussion, as we wanted this to be a reorganization based upon a bottom-up process rather than something given to the body already decided upon from the top.

Please keep this endeavor in prayer, and may God have mercy, and may his blessing rest upon Israel.

1889 HSDA Camp Meeting

As noted last month, the Smyrna Church has hosted a camp meeting since 2000, and many have been blessed. This year the Smyrna Church is joining efforts with the other churches to host a camp meeting May 16–20, 2023, at a great location—Fall Creek Falls State Park near Spencer, Tennessee. Please mark these dates on your calendars soon!

Specifically, we have rented the Cane Creek camping area at the park. The facilities are older and rustic but should work well for us. Twenty cabins in three loops and centered around a large meeting building are available. The cabins hold six to eight people. There are not enough cabins for smaller families to each have a dedicated cabin, so the facilities will have to be shared; however, tent and RV sites are available nearby in the park, if you wish. At Cane Creek some single brothers may wish to use a few of the cabins, and the same may work for the sisters. There are small bath houses in each loop, and two loops have smaller meeting buildings.

The large meeting building has a large kitchen with a large room that can be used for dining or for meetings. There is no Wi-Fi available, but cellular service with AT&T

is available. We are not sure about Verizon. There is enough cellular service that we will be able to broadcast meetings using hotspots, and the meetings will be recorded and posted afterward.



Aerial view of Cane Creek camp with main meeting building in the middle

There will be no cost for staying at the camp, but we would appreciate knowing how many plan to attend, so we can make our plans better. We will provide two meals a day on a donation basis. The food will be healthy, simple, and filling, and we will be glad to accept any volunteers who would like to help with the kitchen duties and with cleanup afterwards.

We hope to share a list of speakers, a specific schedule, and the theme of camp meeting with you next month.

Fall Creek Falls State Park is a beautiful place. There are several waterfalls, a large lake for boating, and many hiking trails. There is also a golf course very near the camp ground. The temperatures in mid May usually range from between 65° and 75° throughout the day. There are usually about ten days of rain at the park during the month of May, so please bring an umbrella in case we catch a few of those ten days.

The importance of camp meeting as a means of giving and receiving blessings should be considered by all:

When the grace of God reigns within, the soul will be surrounded with an atmosphere of faith and courage and Christlike love, an atmosphere invigorating to the spiritual life of all who inhale it. Then we can go to the camp meeting not merely to receive, but to impart. Everyone who is a partaker of Christ's pardoning love, everyone who has been enlightened by the Spirit of God and converted to the truth, will feel that for these precious blessings he owes a debt to every soul with whom he comes in contact. Those who are humble in heart the Lord will use to reach souls whom the ordained ministers cannot approach. They will be moved to speak

Continued on page 19, column 2

God Cares for You

By Allen Stump

The Bible tells us about a God of love and compassion. The psalmist David wrote:

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. (Psalm 103:13)

Fathers and mothers plan for their children's future. They plan their education and for trips when they are young. Later, weddings and even inheritances are considered. Their children are always on their minds. God is our heavenly Father, and we are always on his divine and caring mind. He says:

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. (Jeremiah 29:11)

Another translation states that he plans to give us "a future and a hope." David also stated:

Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered. (Psalm 40:5)

God's thoughts towards us are not just for those who are good and who have already given their hearts to him. He also thinks of the wicked and the wayward. Through the prophet Isaiah, he tells us:

Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:6-9)

God calls for the wicked and the unrighteous to forsake their ways and their thoughts and to turn to him. God assures them that he will not simply pardon them but will pardon them abundantly, and he lets them know his thoughts are much higher than their thoughts, even higher than the heavens.

God thinks of us every day. We are never far from his heart. In fact, the ancient prophet Jeremiah declares: "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

David had a true personal experience with God, and God revealed many things to him. In the 139th Psalm, David shared one of these sublime things:

Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee. (Psalm 139:16-18)

The Hebrew word translated substance is גֵּלִיגָ (golem), and it means an embryo! God saw David when he was in his mother's womb and knowing this, David stated that God's thoughts were precious and more numerous than the sand. Even more amazing, God told Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). So even before you were born, God knew you. While you were in your mother's womb, he knew you and valued your life!

Jesus, our Saviour, spoke of our worth to God when he said:

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:29-31)

You are certainly worth more than two sparrows. In fact, God loves you so much that he gave his only begotten Son for you so that you do not have to perish but can, instead, have everlasting life (John 3:16).

God's plan for you

Beloved, God not only thinks and knows all about you, but he has plans for his people. The apostle Peter wrote:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: (1 Peter 2:9)

Imagine that! God wants you to be a part of his "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, [and] a peculiar people." This is possible because he has called you from the darkness of sin into his marvellous light! The apostle Paul also wrote:

According as he [God the Father] hath chosen us in him [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, (Ephesians 1:4-5)

God has chosen you for adoption by Jesus Christ into his family. By God's grace I have had three children, one by adoption and two by birth. Also, I have a grandchild who has been adopted, and I have loved them all far more than my own soul. Adoption is a wonderful and fulfilling choice, and it is no less so in God's eyes. In fact, we belong to him firstly by re-creation and secondly by adoption through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The apostle Peter, in his second epistle, writes:

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

God has, through Jesus Christ, given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, and, by the precious promises in his word, we can become partakers of the divine nature. Not because we have become gods but because we have his character of love, mercy, and kindness. There are many precious promises in the Bible, such as those that state he will not forsake us.

God will not forsake us

God has promised through the Psalmist that he "will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance" (Psalm 94:14).

Through Moses God declared to his people: "And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31:8).

Later Joshua was called to succeed Moses, and what Christ declared to Joshua is also true for us:

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. (Joshua 1:9)

We know this is true for us because the Bible says "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). In the New Testament we have this promise: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

In fact, Paul was so sure of God's presence that he could write: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). Friends, no matter how difficult, dangerous, or challenging the situation you may find yourself in, God is there, and he wants to help you, but there is more!

An eternal home

God is looking forward to spending eternity with you. That is why he sent his only begotten Son to die for you. He offers you water from the wells of salvation so that you can spend eternity with him. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well:

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (John 4:14)

People sometimes prepare for years for a home on this earth, but right now Jesus is preparing an eternal home for you in heaven. He said:

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (John 14:2-3)

Jesus wants to receive you into his home with the Father. The Father also wants you to be there, and he wants to dwell with you.

Today we have lots of sorrows and griefs in this world, but it will not be so in the world to come!

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:3-4)

Beloved, you can be in God's heavenly home. If you have not accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, you can do so right now. You can come to Jesus, though sinful and wicked, and he will forgive you of your sins and change you into a saint. He has promised that he "that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37) and "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

My friends, I pray that you will be ready for the second coming of Jesus and for the home he has prepared for you. God, through the prophet Amos, has commanded us, "Prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12).



The Heavenly Dome and the Earth Beneath

By Onycha Holt

The Sumerians were people like most people today. They appreciated art and science. They were intelligent and inventive. For example, they studied metallurgy and made bronze. They made the first wheeled vehicles and built dams, irrigation canals, and boats. They were the first to cultivate wheat, barley, and other grains. They kept business accounts and created a system of telling time, using sixty-second minutes and sixty-minute hours which we continue to use today. They divided the circle into 360 degrees and developed a wide range of mathematical applications, such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, quadratic and cubic equations, fractions, and formulas for determining the circumference and area for different geometric shapes. The Sumerians established the first schools, built the first aquarium, and were the first to use legal precedents in deciding court cases.

Importantly, the Sumerians also developed the first known written language. It started in the third millennium BC with pictorial signs and developed into a complex writing system of cuneiform. Two large cylinders of cuneiform, the Gudea cylinders, were discovered in 1877 in Iraq and are now on display in the Louvre Museum. They are about two feet high with cuneiform written around the cylinders. One cylinder tells the story of a temple the king of Lagash built, and the other continues the story of Lagash after the temple was completed.

The Sumerians lived in Mesopotamia, which is a geographical area and not a political entity or nation. It is often referred to as the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers. Iraq currently lies in the area of Mesopotamia, and Sumer, Babylon, Akkad, and Ur were all in Mesopotamia. Abram lived there, and Alexander the Great invaded it, and when we hear or read that the Mesopotamians believed the earth to be flat, unless a nation or a group of people is specified, we cannot know when or by whom this was believed. For example, George Roux has stated that “the Mesopotamians imagined the earth as a flat disc surrounded with a rim of mountains and floating on an ocean of sweet waters, the *abzu* or *apsû*” (Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, p. 93), but enough information is not given to know if the Sumerians believed this, if the Babylonians, or if perhaps another other group. Dr. Roux did state later in his book it was both the Sumerians and the Babylonians who believed this.

Other authors have also reported the Sumerians believed in a flat earth:

The earth, they thought, was a flat disk; heaven, a hollow space enclosed at top and bottom by a solid surface in the shape of a vault. . . . Between heaven and earth they recognized a substance which they called *lil*, a word whose approximate meaning is “wind” (air, breath, spirit); its most significant characteristics seem to be movement and expansion, and it therefore corresponds roughly to our “atmosphere.” (Samuel Noah Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, p. 76)

The earth of course overlaid the Apsû. This the Sumerians took to be a roughly flat disc, since it was self-evidently flat, and the movements of the heavenly bodies, and especially the sun, showed that it was limited in extent. The sun went down over the western horizon each night and rose over the eastern horizon the following morning. Clearly it went down under the earth during the night. Similarly the moon was conceived to go beneath the earth at certain times. This flat earth was the domain of Enlil, city god of Nippur, and the most powerful individual god of the Sumerian pantheon. (W. G. Lambert, *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion and Mythology*, p. 111)

Lambert did not agree with Kramer concerning the beliefs about the shape of heaven and wrote that the Babylonians and their predecessors did not believe it was in the shape of a vault:

In conclusion, it may be well to indicate the lack of sound evidence for two ideas commonly attributed to the Babylonians and their forerunners. First, the allegation that the Babylonian universe was conceived as a kind of ziggurat going up to a peak, and secondly the idea that the sky was thought to be in the shape of a dome. The only surviving Babylonian world map presents a flat world in general with one very small area marked “mountain” on the northern edge of the circular disc adjacent to the surrounding water . . .

The idea of a vault of heaven is not based on any piece of evidence. (Ibid., p. 120; all emphasis in this article supplied unless otherwise noted)

Ancient Egyptians also believed the earth to be flat:

The Egyptian conceived of the earth as a flat platter with a corrugated rim. The inside bottom of this platter was the flat alluvial plain of Egypt, and the corrugated rim was the rim of mountain countries which were the foreign lands. This platter floated in water. There were the abysmal waters below, on which the platter rested, called by the Egyptian “Nūn.” . . . the sun was reborn ev-

ery day out of Nūn, and the Nile came pouring forth from caverns which were fed from Nūn. . . . Thus it was clear that the sun, after its nightly journey under the world, must be reborn beyond the eastern horizon out of those encircling waters, just as all the gods had originally come forth out of Nūn. (Henri Frankfort et al., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, p. 45)

A flat-earth belief continued to be common until the observations of Aristotle in Greece and the calculations of Eratosthenes in Libya, but what did God's people believe? Moses wrote the book of Job and then wrote the Pentateuch, and he lived his early years in the sophisticated civilization of a late Egyptian dynasty, but the Sumerians preceded Moses by more than a thousand years, and prior to the Sumerians were the the first people on earth. What did they believe about the shape of the earth and about its position in the heavens? Only what God would have revealed to them, and we have no record of what that might have been other than what Moses wrote centuries later under the inspiration of God. What he wrote at that time was not based upon, or influenced by, the cosmological teachings of the ancient civilizations of Sumer, Babylon, or Egypt, as many people in the late 1800s and early 1900s believed. Drs. Younker and Davidson state:

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, critical scholars commonly suggested that the ancient Hebrews borrowed many of their ideas, including the notion that heaven was a solid hemisphere, from the Babylonians, probably while the former people were exiled there. The idea that the Hebrews borrowed from the Babylonians was especially common during the pan-Babylonian craze that gripped biblical scholarship for a brief period during the early twentieth century. Closer comparative analysis between Babylonian and Hebrew thought has, however, found so many significant differences between the two that the idea of direct borrowing has been virtually abandoned by subsequent scholarship. (Randall W. Younker, Richard M. Davidson, "The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome: Another Look at the Hebrew עִירָא; (Rāqīa')," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, No. 1, pp. 126–127)

The earliest records we have of a flat-earth belief are from the Sumerians, then later from the Babylonians, and still later from the Egyptians. All three of these civilizations were pagan in belief, and the idea that the ancient Hebrews borrowed many ideas from the Babylonians has been "virtually abandoned" by scholars. The concept that the earth was flat was taught by these three pagan civilizations, and it should be remembered that God specifically called his people out of each of them—Abram from Ur, a city of Sumer; God's people from literal and then from spiritual Babylon; and the descendants of Jacob from the land of

Egypt. As noted in the quotation above, there is no evidence that the Old Testament Scriptures incorporated the pagan concepts of the shape of the earth and of the shape of the heavens in its pages, and neither is there evidence that the early Christian church ascribed to these pagan ideas. The literal understanding of the four corners of the earth, for example, versus a symbolic understanding, as well as other similarly explained Scriptures, have been addressed by other writers, including Danny Faulkner in *Falling Flat: A Refutation of Flat Earth Claims* (2019) and Andrew D. White in *The Warfare of Science with Theology* (1896), available online; and there is no need to do so now, but it should be noted that there is an obligation to know where the literal corners or edges of a flat earth are and to know if they are peopled because Jesus cannot return until the gospel is preached in *all* the earth, including these far reaches.

We know the Sumerians were highly advanced and intelligent, as were the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and the Greeks, and as are people today, but towering above them and above us are the antediluvians.

The antediluvians

The only accurate history we have of the antediluvian world is found in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen White, and the Bible tells us the antediluvians were mighty men of renown:

There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare *children* to them, the same *became* mighty men which *were* of old, men of renown. (Genesis 6:4)

They were also wicked and violent:

And God saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. . . . The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. (Genesis 6:5, 11)

And intellectual and artistic:

In the antediluvian world there were many wonderful works of art and science. These descendants of Adam, fresh from the hand of God, *possessed capabilities and powers that we never now look upon*. (Ellen White, *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 13, Ms 16, 1898, par. 3; all emphasis supplied unless otherwise noted)

There perished in the flood *greater inventions of art and human skill* than the world knows of today. The arts destroyed were more than the boasted arts of today. The great gifts with which God had endowed man were perfected. There was gold and silver in abundance, and men were constantly seeking to exceed their fellow men in

devices. The result was that violence was upon the earth. The Lord was forgotten. (Ellen White, *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 13, Lt 65, 1898, par. 6)

And their unprecedented goal was to make war with the universe of heaven in order to gain possession of the Garden of Eden:

This long lived race were constantly devising how they might institute a war with the universe of heaven and gain possession of Eden. (Ibid.)

The Garden of Eden was still on earth at this time, the entrance guarded by cherubim, and to its gate Adam and his sons came to worship God:

The Garden of Eden remained upon the earth long after man had become an outcast from its pleasant paths. The fallen race were long permitted to gaze upon the home of innocence, their entrance barred only by the watching angels. At the cherubim-guarded gate of Paradise the divine glory was revealed. Hither came Adam and his sons to worship God. Here they renewed their vows of obedience to that law the transgression of which had banished them from Eden. When the tide of iniquity overspread the world, and the wickedness of men determined their destruction by a flood of waters, the hand that had planted Eden withdrew it from the earth. But in the final restitution, when there shall be “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1), it is to be restored more gloriously adorned than at the beginning. (Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 62.2)

It is hard to believe any human being would think they could war against God and win, but so the antediluvians thought. They were magnificent in stature and in intellect and were very self-sufficient. Ellen White tells us they were “only a few steps from God,” yet they were giants of evil. One day they will achieve their desire to make war with heaven. They will storm the walls and gates of the New Jerusalem with power, ruthlessness, and steely determination in the last battle ever fought, but they will lose.

When John saw the Son of man in vision, he saw eyes as flames of fire, feet as fine brass burned in a furnace, and a countenance as bright as the sun shining in its strength. He also heard a voice as the sound of many waters, and he fell as one dead (Revelation 1:14–17). John later saw him crowned with many crowns, clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and with a sharp sword going forth from his mouth (Revelation 19:13, 15). What do you think these strong giants will do when they finally face him?

Unbelievably, before the flood they were *only a few steps from God*, created in his image and with a large intellect, but they used their gifts and talents to do battle against all good:

Those who lived before the flood were *only a few steps from God*, the Creator of the world and its inhabitants. The *long life and large intellect* given to these men might have been used in God’s service. But their intellectual strength, that mighty power, was perverted to dishonor God. God looked upon them as they disregarded the law given when the foundations of the earth were laid. He saw that they were being used by the great apostate to do battle against good. (Ellen White, *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 13, Ms 31a, 1898, par. 23)

After the flood God decided people could no longer be trusted with the knowledge, ideas, and wisdom he had given the antediluvians, so God shared his wisdom with men and women more sparingly:

God had given these men *knowledge*. He had given them *valuable ideas*, that they might *carry out His plan*. But the Lord saw that those whom He designed should possess wisdom, tact, and judgment, were using every quality of the mind to glorify self. By the waters of the Flood, He blotted this long-lived race from the earth, and with them perished the knowledge they had used only for evil. When the earth was repopled, the Lord trusted His wisdom *more sparingly to men*, giving them only the ability they would need in carrying out His great plan. (Ellen White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 34.3)

What he gives us today is only what is needed to carry out his great plan and nothing more, and the great truths he has given us are to be guarded carefully.

The old landmarks

Men and women will arise professing to have some *new light or some new revelation, whose tendency is to unsettle faith in the old landmarks*. (Ellen White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 49.3)

What are some of the old landmarks? Several are listed in the following quotation, but they are not the only ones:

The passing of the time in 1844 was a period of great events, opening to our astonished eyes *the cleansing of the sanctuary transpiring in heaven*, and having decided relation to God’s people upon the earth, [also] *the first and second angels’ messages and the third*, unfurling the banner on which was inscribed, “The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” One of the landmarks under this message was *the temple of God, seen by His truth-loving people in heaven, and the ark containing the law of God*. The light of *the Sabbath* of the fourth commandment flashed its strong rays in the pathway of the transgressors of God’s law. The *nonimmortality of the wicked* is an old landmark. I can call to mind nothing more that can come under the head of the old landmarks. (White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 30.2)

We can measure any new teaching by how it affects the old landmarks of truth. Does the teaching of the flat earth, for example, have a tendency to unsettle faith in any of the landmarks mentioned above, such as the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, the three angels' messages, the law of God, the Sabbath, or the non-immortality of the wicked? The concept of a flat earth shakes and undermines everything *secular* society has believed concerning gravity; heliocentricity; the rotation of the earth on its axis; the dependability of NASA; the genuineness and reliability of pictures of a roundish earth; and the genuineness and reliability of deep space, of eclipses, of astronomy, of mathematics, of physics, and of science in general. It turns what people have been taught upside down, but more importantly the concept of a flat earth affects one of the old landmarks—the seventh-day Sabbath itself.

In the creation account in Genesis 1, every day is marked by an evening and a morning. On day one, *light* was created—'ôr in the Hebrew—and 'ôr is the opposite of *darkness*—*hōšek* in the Hebrew. In Genesis 1:5, we read: “and God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.” So day is equal to light, and night is equal to darkness, but we also have an evening and a morning. Evening and morning in the creation account are different from darkness and light. They are twilight and dawn—that time when the evening gradually becomes full darkness and when the morning gradually becomes fully lit. This is often equated to sunset and sunrise. The sun sets, and we enter a twilight period until full darkness, or night, is reached. The sun begins to rise, and we enter the dawn, a period that increasingly becomes more filled with light until day occurs. From the first day of creation there was darkness and light, and there was also evening and morning. We celebrate the Sabbath when the sun sets and twilight begins, and we end the Sabbath the next time the sun sets and twilight begins, that is unless the earth is flat.

Theoretically with a flat earth there would be no twilight or dawn, for the sun supposedly moves in a circle above the earth and shines down in a straight beam upon the earth. If it is shining where you are, it is day. If not, it is night, but there would be no twilight or dawn in either case except possibly, it is thought, at the extreme edges. We know on the equator, dawn and twilight are nonexistent or are very short in duration if any latitude is involved, so that darkness falls quickly and full daylight arrives equally as quickly, but this is not true for the rest of the earth. There are varying lengths of dusk and dawn depending on where one is on the earth, and this variation is due to the curvature of the earth. So in the flat-earth model there is no evening and morning on the Sabbath day or on any other day, thus changing when the Sabbath begins and ends. It does not begin and end at evening, as the Bible states, but

at darkness, i.e., at night. Sabbath, however, is not from darkness to darkness, as we would expect to see on a flat earth, but from evening to evening, as occurs on a spherical earth. The flat-earth model changes how the beginning and the ending of the Sabbath hours are determined. It thus alters this important waymark of Adventism and does not conform to the biblical account of creation.

Only the gospel sanctifies

Believing the earth to be flat or to be spherical will not fit a person for heaven any more than an understanding of the water cycle or the Krebs cycle does, yet many flat-earth believers consume time and energy attempting to prove its biblical authenticity, time and energy that should be devoted to understanding and sharing the truths of the gospel.

In 1887 Charles Spurgeon and his congregation faced compromise in the Baptist Union by the union's gradual acceptance of higher criticism of the Bible as well as a lessening of the trust placed in the concept of *sola scriptura*. Spurgeon's response? “Assuredly the New Theology can do no good towards God or man; it has no adaptation for it. If it were preached for a thousand years by all the most earnest men of the school, it would never renew a soul, nor overcome pride in a single human heart” (Charles Spurgeon, https://web.archive.org/web/20141104134851/http://www.spurgeon.org/s_and_t/dg00.htm), and it is the same today. Understanding the great pillars of our faith is essential for strengthening our faith and for providing help in overcoming pride in our hearts. We may think we know these topics well, and we may, but are we sharing these truths with others so that they, too, can be ready for the soon return of Jesus Christ, or are we sharing the new, so-called truth of a flat earth, which will do nothing to prepare a person for the most momentous event of all time. Even if we are sharing both bodies of information, the time spent sharing about a flat earth is taking time away from the old landmarks and by so doing is diminishing the continuing importance of them.

Joseph Bates

Another matter to consider is the witness of Joseph Bates. He was a stalwart pioneer of Seventh-day Adventism and devoted the last half of his life to proclaiming the truths of Adventism. He spent the first part of his working life, however, sailing the oceans of the world, first as a cabin boy and finally as the captain of his own vessel. He could be gone for months and even years at a time on ocean voyages, but he eventually turned his deep love for the ocean and its ways into a deep love for God and his ways, sold his ship, and began to write and preach.

When at sea he often crossed into the southern hemisphere and would see corresponding changes in the constellations above:

Passing from the northern into the southern hemisphere, one is struck with the remarkable change in the starry heavens. Before reaching the equator, the well-known north star is apparently setting in the northern horizon, and a great portion of the well-known stars in the northern hemisphere are receding from the mariner's view. But this loss is supplied by the splendid, new, and varied scenery in the southern heavens, as he sails onward toward the southern polar regions. (Joseph Bates, *The Early Life and Later Experiences and Labors of Elder Joseph Bates*, p. 155.2)

Joseph Bates used a compass, a sextant, and a chronometer in navigation, but these instruments only work on a spherically shaped or round earth, never on a flat one. He was guided by the sun and other stars and saw different constellations come into view over the course of the year, saw them change position during the course of a night, and saw them change completely when he crossed the equator. You would not be able to believe Joseph Bates was an honest man if you believed the earth were flat. As a Seventh-day Adventist believer in a flat earth you would have to reject Joseph Bates because of the supposed falsehoods he wrote concerning the southern hemisphere and the starry heavens, and if he lied about physical things, how would you be able to trust him in spiritual matters? But that is not all. You would also have to reject Ellen White, for she also wrote of the southern hemisphere:

At first, when the news came to us that the change of sailing of the boat on which we had expected to go from Auckland to Napier, would delay us a week, we felt much disappointed; for we were anxious to be on the ground, and to do all we could to encourage and help our brethren to prepare for the first Seventh-day Adventist camp-meeting ever held in the southern hemisphere. (Ellen White, *The Review & Herald*, June 6, 1893, par. 1)

Creation and salvation

God calls us to reason with him concerning the plan of salvation (Isaiah 1:18), and one matter to consider is whether the account of creation is important to the plan of salvation. The creation account gives important facts, but are these facts necessary to salvation? Would it make any difference if the Bible started with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the fall, with nothing being stated about the process of creation? Yes, it would make an inestimable difference. The creation account is inextricably linked to the plan of salvation. The two cannot be separated. Why?

First of all, creation introduces a creative, caring, tender, powerful, and giving God. Creation is all about God. In the creation account we see God presented in a way that is found nowhere else in Scripture. We even see God including Adam in the creative process, and after the fall, we see a mercy and grace that is beyond comprehension. In addition to all this, we are told that we are made in the image of God, a God beyond words. He cannot be described. As Job hinted in Job 42:3, we can only say God is too wonderful to understand.

Creation is also inextricably linked to salvation because we are to be re-created in the image of God:

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:2)

The conversion of the soul is, as it were, a resurrection from the dead. It is like a re-creation to those, who, through the transforming power of the grace of God, have passed from death unto life. (Ellen White, *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, January 15, 1889, par. 3)

Through the plan of salvation, power was to operate in the re-creation of man. (Ellen White, *The Signs of the Times*, July 2, 1896, par. 4)

Evidence of science

Before we go any further, we should consider the need the world has for scientific evidence that the earth is flat, evidence that is the result of replicable research. Please do not be swayed by self-made videos or by someone's claim of experimental data. Look for an hypothesis that has been tested under controlled circumstances. There is plenty of solid research that proves the earth is a sphere. What is needed in the secular world is the same type of research that proves the earth is flat, i.e., flat-earth equivalents of Albert Einstein, Johannes Kepler, Inge Lehmann, Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton, and Louis Agassiz. Then the two sets of information could be compared side-by-side. We suggest this sincerely but realize the research will be hard to produce, for scientists can work for decades to gain evidence in any chosen field. This is the reason many flat-earth adherents turn to Scripture for evidentiary support, but, as we will see, God's people are not to be so involved.

Evidence of Scripture

The following is an example of the reasoning of one of the authors in the flat-earth community and of his subsequent reference to Scripture for vindication of the theory:

In the end, the population may come to understand that NASA did not go to the moon. NASA did not go to the moon because NASA could not go to the moon. NASA could not go to the moon because the moon is

not in outer space. The moon is not in outer space because there is no outer space. There is no outer space because God created a flat earth with a firmament over it. Above the firmament is heaven. God's throne is in heaven. Isaiah 66:1, Psalms 33:14, Matthew 5:34. (Edward Hendrie, *The Greatest Lie on Earth*, p. 391)

Three different heavens are referred to in the Bible—the area where the birds fly, or the atmosphere; the area where the sun, moon, and stars are; and the area known as the dwelling place of God. The creation account of Genesis 1, to which Hendrie refers, states that the firmament *is* heaven (Genesis 1:8). The context of Genesis 1 does not teach that heaven is *above* the firmament (although there are heavens above the firmament); instead, it teaches that the firmament is heaven. Hendrie also states:

Nowhere in the Bible does God state that the earth is a globe. In fact, God expressly states that the face of the earth is a circle. **“It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:”** (Isaiah 40:22). A circle is two-dimensional and flat. That does not mean that the earth is two dimensional, as the earth certainly has depth. Rather, it means that the earth has a face that is a flat circle. Amos 9:6. It is “the circle of the earth.” A globe, on the other hand, is a three dimensional ball. Isaiah knew the difference between a ball and a circle. (Ibid., pp. 523, 524; emphasis in original)

If Isaiah 40:22 is stating that the earth is a flat circle, then it is also stating that God is sitting on it. Should we understand this verse to teach that the earth is flat and that God is sitting on the earth? No more so than are we to believe that the earth is the shape of a footstool and that God's feet are literally resting on it and thus on us (Acts 7:49). Brothers and sisters, God calls on us to use reason (Isaiah 1:18).

Let us also address the claim that to believe the earth is a sphere is to believe pagan thinking. The classical definition of paganism involves religion. A pagan is:

A person holding religious beliefs other than those of the main or recognized religions . . . [or is] a non-Christian . . . [or paganism is] holding or constituting religious beliefs other than those of the main or recognized religions . . . (*New Oxford American Dictionary*)

We have seen that a flat-earth belief was part of Sumerian, Babylonian, and Egyptian thinking, but this thinking was closely connected to each group's religious beliefs. For example, the Sumerians worshipped An, the god of the heavens; Enki, the god of water; Enlil, the god of the earth; and Uti, the god of the sun. The Babylonians had similar gods, such as Marduk and Shamash, as did the Egyptians, who worshipped gods of the sun, the air, the earth, and

more. Later, Aristotle and other Greek philosophers and scientists challenged the flat-earth belief, but not on a religious basis. They challenged it because of their observations and because of the scientific understanding acquired by then. For example, Eratosthenes, the chief librarian at the Library of Alexandria, calculated the circumference of the earth, showing him and others the earth was not flat. He also calculated the earth's axial tilt. To say that the belief in a round or in a spherically-shaped earth is pagan thinking is not correct, for this belief was not, and had no connection to, religious beliefs. The concept of a flat earth did have a connection to religious beliefs, but a spherically shaped earth did not. The Sumerian, Babylonian, and Egyptian beliefs of cosmology and of the shape of the earth were pagan because they sprang from their religious beliefs and because these beliefs constituted religious beliefs other than most of the people of their time or of the people who predated them—God's people—and this brings us back to God's people and their beliefs in cosmology and in the shape of the earth.

Genesis 1:2 tells us that the earth was without form and void, and the establishing of a form to the earth is explained in the rest of the chapter; however, nothing is ever said about the shape of the earth. We are not told if it was round, spherical, or flat. The only form we can ascertain in the creation account is the form given to the earth when the void was filled under the creative hand of God, and there we should let the matter rest. Anything else is speculation, and the speculation of Edward Hendrie quoted above speaks for itself. Speculation, however, does not end with Scripture. It invades the gift of the spirit of prophecy for the last days also. Others have addressed this issue, so there is no need to dwell on it except to review a few quotations and to consider their dates of publication:

It is not because of inherent power that year by year the earth produces her bounties and continues her motion *around the sun*. The hand of God guides the *planets* and keeps them in position in their orderly march through the heavens. (Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 115.1, published 1890)

God is the superintendent, as well as the Creator, of all things. The divine Being is engaged in upholding the things that he has created. The same hand that holds the mountains and balances them in position, guides the *worlds in their mysterious march around the sun*. (Ellen White, *The Review & Herald*, November 8, 1898, par. 10)

The hand of God is continually *guiding the globe* in its continuous march around the sun. (Ellen White, *Christian Educator* April 1, 1899, par. 5)

Not by its own inherent energy does the earth produce its bounties, and year by year continue its *motion around the sun*. An unseen hand guides the *planets* in

“It is not because of inherent power that year by year the earth produces her bounties and continues her motion around the sun. The hand of God guides the planets and keeps them in position in their orderly march through the heavens.”

their circuit of the heavens. (Ellen White, *Education*, p. 99.1; published 1903)

The hand of infinite power is perpetually at work guiding this planet. It is God’s power momentarily exercised that keeps it in position *in its rotation*. (Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 259.4; published 1904)

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, a resurgence of the flat-earth theory occurred. Books were written during this time both for and against the theory, but the teaching diminished in credibility over the years until recent times, and its increased popularity today has caught the eye of many Seventh-day Adventists looking for *new light* and of many who do not put trust in government and in governmentally funded or promoted projects. Here the flat-earth model fits right in, for many acceptors of this model also have a deep-seated distrust in things governmentally backed, such as NASA. NASA is not considered dependable because those who believe in a flat earth also believe there is no space; therefore, space photos, Apollo missions, and telescopes in space cannot be true. Gravity, satellites, GPS, and the International Space Station are also highly questionable. As it is hard to find rigorous science that proves a flat earth, Adventist adherents often turn to Scripture for evidence, as noted earlier, and here they are stepping on quicksand, for Adventists are fundamentalists at heart. They believe what the Bible says just as it says it, unless symbolism is involved, and this is where problems arise because symbolism abounds in Scripture. The beasts of Daniel and Revelation are examples, as are the four corners of the earth. Flat-earth beliefs took hold in the late 1800s among Christians by applying literal interpretations to biblical symbols, and this is how it is taking hold of Christians today. The advice given in 1904, when flat-earth beliefs were at their peak, still holds true:

My mind is deeply exercised this morning. I have had matters presented to me to give to our people. An urgent request came to me from a man who desired to discuss with me in regard to the round world, to him a very important matter. My answer was, I have a message to this

people in regard to the life they must live in this world, to prepare them for future life which measures with the life of God. **We have nought to do with the question whether this world is round or flat.** [The important thing] is to serve God with full purpose of a renewed heart, sanctified and made holy by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. (Ellen White, *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 19, Ms 145, 1904, par. 3; brackets in original)

And this is where we should leave the matter. We are not to spend time trying to prove the earth to be flat or to be round; instead, we are to focus on the life-saving transformation of character needed to be fitted for heaven, which is offered to us by the grace and power of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. We have time for little else. May God keep us all safely grounded in truth.



What Love!

By Vera Antisdal

What can I do to show my love
For all that you have done for me?
I cannot comprehend the love
That was displayed on Calvary!

That Father’s love, so true and strong,
Could give poor sinners such as I
“Firstborn of every creature.” Son,*
To hang on cruel cross and die
That from sin’s chains I might be free!

And what a love that Son must have
To trust in His Father so,
That He was eager thus to come
Just so His love we all might know.

In contemplation of such love
I fall upon my face and plead
That You impart Your love to me
For it’s my very greatest need
To live that love, that You bestow.

*Colossians 1:15 KJV

(Taken from *From the Heart*, p. 57; used with permission)

Youth's Corner – Kidnapped in Ecuador!

A Story of Faith, Surrender, Forgiveness, and Trust in God, Part 3

By Sheri Yohe

God was with me in the storage room

I lay in the silence, praying, singing spiritual songs to myself, reciting scripture verses, and remembering every Bible story of victory I could think of. I thought of Daniel in the lion's den and asked God to work out the miracle that I needed to close the mouths of the lions (kidnappers) and free me.

I thought of the three Hebrews and the fiery furnace and asked God to take me through this trial and refine the dross out of me, to give me courage to die for Him or live for Him, to do whatever was His will and whatever would bring Him glory.

I remembered the story of Moses and the parting of the Red Sea, and I asked God to part the Red Sea for me.

I remembered a song about Paul and Silas, sung by the musical group *Selah*. The words ran through my head over and over.

In prison chains with bleeding stripes,
Paul and Silas prayed that night,
And in their pain began to sing,
Their chains were loosed, and they were freed.

Chorus: I bless Your name; I bless Your name.

I give You honor, give You praise.
You are the Life, the Truth, the Way.
I bless Your name; I bless Your name.

Some midnight hour, if you should find |you're in a prison
in your mind,
Reach out and praise Him for those chains,
and they will fall in Jesus' name.



I identified with Paul and Silas in stocks, bound in prison and in pain, yet they sang. I prayed for the earthquake that would set me free.

I also sang Scripture songs:

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy path. Be not wise in thine own eyes. Fear the Lord and depart from evil. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy path. My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of His correction. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy path. (Proverbs 3:5-8)

Fear thou not for I am with thee, be not afraid for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee by the right hand of my righteousness. (Isaiah 41:10)

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never comes to an end. They are new every morning, new every morning, great is thy faithfulness, O Lord. Great is thy faithfulness!" (Lamentations 3:22, 23)

I remembered a favorite quote from one of my favorite authors, Ellen White. The book *The Ministry of Healing* says:

Above the distractions of the earth He sits enthroned; all things are open to His divine survey; and from His great and calm eternity He orders that which His providence sees best. (Ellen White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 417.3)

I also recalled another one from the book *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*:

The Father's presence encircled Christ, and nothing befell Him but that which infinite love permitted for the blessing of the world. Here was His source of comfort, and it is for us. He who is imbued with the Spirit of Christ abides in Christ. The blow that is aimed at him falls upon the Saviour, who surrounds him with His presence. Whatever comes to him comes from Christ. He has no need to resist evil, for Christ is his defense. Nothing can touch him except by our Lord's permission, and "all things" that are permitted "work together for good to them that love God." Romans 8:28. (Ellen White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 71.2)

I surrendered to God's will for my life.

I accepted that this trial had crossed God's heavenly desk and was stamped with approval. I also remembered, "All experiences and circumstances are God's workmen whereby good is brought to us" (White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 488.4)

I had worked on memorizing these quotes for several years and now they were my lifeline to surrender and trust. Yes, God agreed to allow this to happen to us to develop us in faith and bring good to us.

I was earnestly praying for Don. I didn't know what they had done to him and knew that he would be very anxious for my safety. His recent heart attack had me so concerned. I didn't know how much more stress he could handle.

After a while, I struggled and sat up. I rocked back and forth for a long time trying to stay warm. I was shivering. My teeth were chattering from the deep cold I felt. I had bare feet and was wearing only light cotton pajamas. The zip ties were now embedded in my wrists. I kept opening and closing my hands to keep the blood circulation to my hands moving, I was so concerned that I would lose the use of my hands. I wondered what long-term damage would result from a lack of circulation in my hands. I couldn't keep the blanket over me as I moved around. It was cold and I pulled at the blanket with my teeth trying to cover myself, but that didn't work well.

What seemed to me like many hours later I heard the noise of construction work beginning outside the room where I was captive.

I could see a little more light under the door by tipping my head back and looking under the tape. I was sure it was now daytime and certain that I was somewhere in Cuenca.

The sounds of construction were very clear. I heard men's voices shouting orders, what sounded to me like trucks coming and going, a very loud machine that sounded like a conveyor belt lifting rocks up, and then a loud sound followed by water rushing down. I heard hammering.

Still concerned about the "scary-looking man" who would rape me if I screamed, I'd been quiet, but I began reasoning that it would be better to be raped than murdered.

I pictured a man standing outside, as Allen had said, listening for any sounds from me. Then I thought about how suspicious it would be for a man to be standing outside the door while others were working at the construction site. The noise was so loud that I knew I must be in a building near where the work was being done.

With great effort I stood up and circled the room feeling everything with my hands behind my back. There were only suitcases and boxes in the room; nothing I could use to cut the zip ties from my wrists.

In the cold, dark storage room, I started having clear, logical thoughts and overcame the gripping fear of being

raped. I thought, "Touch the door with your foot." When I did it made a noise, the first noise I had dared to make.

Even that small sound made my heart jump, and I had to fight back fears. I quieted, holding my breath, waiting to see if the scary man would open the door. After a few minutes, I was relieved. No one opened the door to harm me.

I also thought, "Ask God to carry your voice to the right ears." I found the courage to make more noise, first singing a little louder and then quoting scripture out loud. I felt strength enter my body so I could hit the door with the heel of my foot and yell through the crack of the doorframe. Each time I prayed, "God, carry my weak voice to the right ears, not the wrong ears!"

I kicked harder and yelled, "¡Ayudame, por favor! ¡Abra la puerta, por favor!" ("Help me, please! Open the door, please!")

I continued to pray fervently that God would carry my voice over the noise of the construction and to the right person. I shouted and banged on the door for a long time.

Prayers came in abundance

As I later calculated the timing, I began to feel courage at about the same time prayers for my release were coming in after Don made some phone calls to our family in the United States between 8:30 and 9:00 a.m.

I found out later that Don had called three people—his daughter, our Michigan office manager, and my daughter. My daughter called my son, my mother, and the Knoxville Tennessee pastor, who called several prayer chains. She also called our Maryville pastor, who notified our church family in Tennessee, who happened to be at that very moment at the worldwide Pathfinder Camporee in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. More than 48,000 young people between the ages of ten and seventeen were there, as well as the many leaders, staff, parents, and pastors.

The large international television station, 3ABN, was also at the event. My name was put on their prayer request page, which is seen by several thousand people around the world, and put on many other prayer chains across the United States.

My daughter told me later that she was sure I was dead and that she would never see me again. Of course, she prayed earnestly that she was wrong, but she cried and suffered greatly that day.

My son told me that it was the worst day of his life. He went to work for a distraction but continued to pray for my deliverance. He kept remembering a miracle God had worked for me long ago when I was singing in a twelve-voice ensemble called *The Sounds of Hope* before I became an Adventist. Let me share that miracle.

I was practicing with the group on a Saturday afternoon. We would be singing Sunday morning. At the end of rehearsal, around 3:00 p.m., the group decided that we'd wear red and white for the next day's performance. I had two dresses in my closet but nothing red, and I had very little money for clothes. I'd committed to help a church friend who was moving and told her that I would be over right after practice that day.

So I had a dilemma. I could go to the mall, hope to find a red dress for the next day and spend money we didn't have, or trust God and go help my friend. I had visions of being embarrassed when I walked up on the platform in front of three thousand people dressed in the wrong color. I prayed and decided to help my friend and see what God would do.

I showed up at her house, and they were almost done moving. She was excited to see me and said she had something she'd come across while packing and thought of me. I followed her down to her basement where there was a small box of clothes.

The first thing she pulled out was a red two-piece dress. My heart stopped. I was a good ten inches taller than my friend. Surely this wouldn't fit me! I tried it on and cried. It was perfect! I liked the style, and it was just what I needed. She told me she had kept it for years. Someone had given her the clothes, and she'd left them in the box in the basement.

My son said he kept remembering the red-dress story. I don't remember the last time I told him that story, but it was many years ago. God had brought it to his mind at just the right time. It continued to come into his head, and he thought, *If God cares about a red dress when mom needs it, then He can get her through this!*

Many friends stopped what they were doing to pray and call prayer chains. My mother called her church prayer chain, as well as my sisters and brother. Then she left her work in the church office and went to her back deck to cry out to God for her daughter's life.

My brother, the pastor of a church in Michigan called The House of Prayer immediately left his office and walked into the woods behind the church to pray for my safety and deliverance.

My sister Becky heard the news and understood the significance of her strange experience the night before. Her husband had been awakened to Becky yelling, "No, no, no!" This was exactly what I yelled as the kidnappers were forcing me out the door of my house.

Next month: Rescued!

"1889 HSDA News" continued from page 7

words which reveal the saving grace of Christ. (Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 43.3)

Go to the camp meeting, even though you have to make a sacrifice to do so. . . . And make every effort to induce your friends to go, not in your place, but to go with you, to stand on the Lord's side and obey His commandments. (Ibid., p. 40.3)

So plan to attend to both receive and share a blessing!



Building with kitchen and meeting area



Meeting/dining area



Cane Creek



Cabins on one of the loops



One of the smaller meeting buildings



Cabin on A loop



Inside a smaller meeting building



Inside a cabin

“Go to the camp meeting, even though you have to make a sacrifice to do so.”

“Discipleship Part 1 continued from page 6
sacrifices someday in future glory, those sacrifices are going to appear so small and so insignificant compared to the sacrifice of God in Christ for you.

May God give you a willing heart to do what is right and to serve him with all of your heart and be his disciple.

(In the next two installments of this series, we are going to learn more about how we can become and can maintain being disciples of Christ and then how we help other to be disciples of Christ.)

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Editor Allen Stump—editor@smyrna.org
Associate Editor Onycha Holt—onycha@smyrna.org