CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS

DECEMBER312022

Scripture Story: Isaiah 65; Isaiah 66; Malachi 3; Malachi 4.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 60.

eternal liberation



Photo by Terrill Thomas

flashlight

"The darkest hour of the church's struggle with the powers of evil is that which immediately precedes the day of her final deliverance. But none who trust in God need fear; for 'when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall,' God will be to His church 'a refuge from the storm.' Isaiah 25:4" (*Prophets and Kings,* p. 725).

keytext

"I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

(Matthew 26:29, NIV)

what do you think?

As Christians we look forward to the day Christ will come and take the righteous elect to their heavenly home. While we are still battling with sin, pain, and suffering in this world, which voice of the Lord appeals to you most in times of distress?

"I am here."

"I hear you."

"I understand."

"I care."

Think of the saddest moment you have experienced in your life; does the issue of God's grace through Christ give you some hope to overcome? How can you encourage your friends in similar situations to accept that God cares?

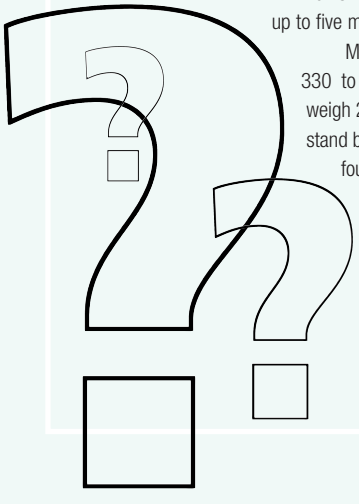
did you know?

The lion, particularly the face of the male, is one of the most widely recognized animal symbols in human culture.

Lions live for approximately 10 to 14 years in the wild, while in captivity they can live up to 25 years.

A lion's roar can be heard up to five miles away.

Male lions weigh from 330 to 530 pounds; females weigh 270 to 300 pounds. Lions stand between three and a half and four feet tall at the shoulder.



INTO THE STORY

"See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit."

"'The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,' says the Lord."

"For this is what the Lord says: 'I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.' When you see this, your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass; the hand of the Lord will be made known to his servants, but his fury will be shown to his foes."

"'As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,' declares the Lord, 'so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,' says the Lord."

"'So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,' says the Lord Almighty. 'I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.'"

"Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

(Isaiah 65:17-21, 25; Isaiah 66:12-14, 22, 23; Malachi 3:5, 6; Malachi 4:4-6, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Place *brackets* around the major sections of the Bible passages as though they were scenes in a play. How many different themes do you see emerging from this story?

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What do you as an individual understand by God saying that "I will create new heavens and a new earth"?

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Isaiah 65:25 says that "the wolf and the lamb will feed together" (NIV). How is this possible in God's "new earth" in light of the current situation in which wolves and lambs are enemies?

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The Lord promised the people of Israel a lasting prosperity and comfort. What were they supposed to do on their part to qualify for this offer?

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As you read these selected Bible passages, is there:
A warning to heed?
A prayer to pray?
A truth to proclaim?

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How do the teachings of the prophets and the law prepare us for Christ's second coming?

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Why is preparation of the way for the Lord needed before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord? (Malachi 4:5, NIV)

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punch lines

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words" **(1 Thessalonians 4:14-18, NKJV).**

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" **(Acts 4:12, NIV).**

"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" **(1 Corinthians 15:51-54, NKJV).**

"For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" **(Matthew 24:38, 39, NIV).**

further insight

"Today the church of God is free to carry forward to completion the divine plan for the salvation of a lost race."

—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 714

"Soon we shall see Him in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 732

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read John 14:1-3.

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Savior's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is near. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times" (Fundamental Belief 25, The Second Coming of Christ).

Although we live in a time and age characterized with pain and suffering, the loving voice of our Savior constantly appeals to us not to harden our hearts but to make a noble choice to accept Him as our Savior. This week, think about how you can humbly take steps to respond to the four voices of Christ in the *What Do You Think?* section.

Sunday

Read Isaiah 65:17.

The excerpt from Isaiah 65:17 talks of God making a new earth and new heavens. In view of your own situation in the present earth, would God be just in His decision to destroy the current earth and replace it with a new one? What about those who believe in the joy and happiness of this world and its luring incentives? Do you think they will inherit the new earth? What must you do to be part of the eternal liberation that will come by Christ's second coming?

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Monday

Read Matthew 26:29.

The *Key Text* reminds us of Christ's commitment toward our salvation. Reflect on the circumstances in which you have shown the virtue of commitment. To whom were you most committed? Your parents? Your nation? Your teacher? God? Rank them from the most to the least and give a reason for your ranking.

The *Key Text* also projects into the future, after the end of sin. How does this testimony of Jesus give you hope? How can you improve your scope of hope in relation to your faith? Consider teaming up with your friends and identify opportunities to feed your faith as a heaven-bound child of God.

Tuesday

Read Revelation 1:7.

Take a look at the powerful statement of Ellen White in the *Flashlight* section of the lesson. The ability and power of Christ to redeem a fallen world revealed the profound grace and mercy, and complete liberation, which are deeply entrenched in God's master plan of salvation. Are there situations in your life in which you have borne the consequences of other person's mistakes? How did you feel? As you consider these situations, think about what Christ experienced on your behalf at Calvary.

Situation(s):

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Consequence(s):

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Wednesday

Read Hebrews 12:2-4.

After reading the selected verses in the *Punch Lines* section of the lesson, choose two verses which you think are most relevant to your life as you wait for the second coming of Christ. Do you have friends or relatives with similar experiences? In what way can you encourage them to remain strong in their faith amid pain, suffering, and boredom, which continue to suppress us in this world? Paraphrase the verses you chose and recite them to a friend during a dinner invitation this week.

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Thursday

Read Isaiah 66:23.

Take time to read *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 60. An overview of the new earth is provided: "There every power will be developed, every capability increased. The grandest enterprises will be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations will be reached, the highest ambitions realized. And still there will appear new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects of study to call forth the powers of body and mind and soul" (p. 731). In view of the powerful insight that Ellen White gives on the state of the new earth, what do you look forward to the most?

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Friday

Read Revelation 22:12-21.

Have you ever thought of what life will be like in the new earth? Think of a time you moved from one home to another—a better one. How did you feel in your new home? As you reflect on the promised new earth, consider making this your prayer:

"Dear God, I admit that I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead so that I might have eternal life. Please forgive me of my sins. I accept Your gift of eternal life and choose to follow You, confessing Jesus as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for making Your home in my heart. In Jesus' name I pray, amen."

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings (or *Royalty and Ruin*), chapter 60.

**Royalty and Ruin* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.