

# CHRIST THE LAMB SLAIN

By Paul Penno

June 4, 2008

The Good Shepherd of chapters 10 and 11 becomes “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8, KJV) and “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) in chapters 12 and 13. The Lamb suffers greatly for the wayward sheep, giving His life for them and thereby opening a fountain filled with blood. In the previous chapter we contrasted the Good Shepherd with the evil shepherds, who disdain, abuse, and kill the sheep. But the Good Shepherd cares so much for the sheep that He becomes the Lamb who, instead of taking their lives away, gives His own life for them.

The plan of salvation through Christ’s shed blood was conceived before God created the world. The divine covenant, which assured that the Son of God would give His life for the human race, was based on the unchangeable promise of God. Therefore, Christ is regarded as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” So this divine agreement, which was reached before the world began, was confirmed at Calvary when Jesus ratified it with His own blood. “Before the foundations of the earth were laid, the Father and the Son had united in a covenant to redeem man if he should be overcome by Satan. They had clasped their hands in a solemn pledge that Christ should become the surety for the human race. This pledge Christ has fulfilled” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 834).

Several Messianic implications in chapters 12 and 13 relate to Christ’s sacrifice: (1) the pierced Messiah (12:10), (2) the fountain opened for cleansing (13:1), (3) the wounds in His hands (13:6), (4) and the sword of God against His Shepherd and Fellow (13:7).

The Piercing. Just before Christ was pierced on the cross, Judas betrayed Him for 30 shekels, the price of a common slave. The Jewish leaders’ eagerness to get rid of Christ reveals their total contempt and ingratitude. The all-worthy Christ was treated as worthless by His own ungrateful people, yet He treated the unworthy as worth everything. Even in His anguish on the cross, He looked at His tormentors and uttered these moving words, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

In connection with this “piercing,” Zechariah 12:10 introduces a new element of mourning and supplication that God will pour out on the

inhabitants of Jerusalem. Apparently a prominent servant of God had been martyred through the intrigue and spiritual blindness of the leaders. Then mourning and remorse gripped them after they fully realized what they had done.

The “piercing” of verse 10 has more than one application. Zechariah in this context is envisioning what the Jews might have done if they had prepared themselves and others for the first advent of Christ. Certainly Jesus would have died, but not at their hands. And they would have mourned Him greatly in the spirit of repentance and gratitude, realizing that He generously sacrificed Himself for their sins and the sins of the world. (See *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1113.)

Tragically, Israel as a nation rejected the gift of God’s beloved Son. “Jerusalem had been the child of His care, and as a tender father mourns over a wayward son, so Jesus wept over the beloved city. How can I give thee up? . . . One soul is of such value that, in comparison with it, worlds sink into insignificance; but here was a whole nation to be lost. When the fast westering sun should pass . . . . Jerusalem’s day of grace would be ended” (*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 577, 578).

We may find another limited application right after Pentecost, when Peter presented this “pierced” Messiah to the Jews as the one they had crucified (Acts 2:23). Just weeks after Jesus’ death, Peter directed the Jews to look upon the one they had pierced: “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). On the occasion of that first Christian sermon, we are told that God fulfilled the prophecy of the sending of his Spirit upon the house of David to bring repentance. Then in verse 37 we learn that “when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’” That day 3,000 souls, mourning for Christ, were converted and joined the early church.

The work will close with no less power in the days when the latter rain of the Holy Spirit is poured out in connection with the uplifting of the cross of Christ (Rev. 18:1). “Sorrow for sins brings revival. The prophet is here envisioning a far-reaching spiritual revival, brought about by a new glimpse of the sinfulness of sin, and characterized by an earnest search for the righteousness of Christ. Looking upon the ‘pierced’ Messiah, seeing in Him the fulfillment of all the Old Testament types, perceiving as never before the marvelous love of

God in the gift of His Son, men would deeply mourn over their past defects of character. . . . [See Acts 2:36, 37.]” *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1113.

We know an analogy to this focus on the heart in a relationship between a man and woman, especially between a husband and wife. What is it that we most long to discover when anger or sin has broken down the bond of love? Certainly, a conflict in marriage calls for action—for words to be said and remedies to be made. But what truly heals the breach and restores what has been damaged in the relationship is sorrow from the heart. How often, when long arguments have failed to reconcile two people, or have even made things worse, genuine tears of remorse quickly restore the union.

So it is in our relationship with God. In this case, it is only we who have sinned. If accusations are made, he is the only one who has a just case. But God’s loving heart desires not merely to win the argument but to win our hearts back to himself. Jesus taught this in his parable of the prodigal son, who had taken his portion of his father’s inheritance and squandered it in sinful living. Finally, he came to his senses, and resolved to return in remorse to seek his father’s grace. He said, “I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants’” (Luke 15:18-19). The father, seeing him return in sorrow, gladly received him back in love. Jesus described it this way: “While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). This is a picture of God’s loving heart for us, and the sorrow for sin he desires as the heart of our repentance.

Zechariah offers two pictures of the intensity of the sorrow God envisions. First are parents who mourn the loss of a child: “They shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn” (Zech. 12:10). This is a deep and bitter sorrow, one that is not gotten over quickly or easily, if in fact at all. Charles Spurgeon speaks of such an occasion as perhaps the most painful errand on which a Christian minister can be called. How much more painful when, as our passage says, it is an only child who has died, an only son who would have borne the family name. This was proverbial in Israel for a great magnitude of grief, as Amos 8:10 shows, speaking of the coming of the Lord to judge: “I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.”

(a) First, we must understand what kind of death Jesus died: here is where Seventh-day Adventists have a great contribution to make to the spiritual life of professed Sunday-keeping Christians everywhere. “Babylon” does not, cannot, understand what happened on that cross of Jesus. And it is not their fault primarily, for they have inherited a pagan misconception about the death that Jesus died.

(b) As He hung on the cross, the kind Ladies Aid Society women of Jerusalem offered Him a sponge filled with a deadening narcotic. (They probably did this for all victims of the horrible Roman–invented death by crucifixion; it was just an expression of their womanly kindness and sympathy with human suffering; thank God that He created woman!)

(c) Being human as well as being divine, Jesus would have loved to bite down hard on that sponge and drink down the narcotic and simply go to sleep, as the two thieves who were crucified with Him doubtless did. The believing thief died happily, trusting the promise of Jesus that he would be with Him in Paradise (Luke 23:43; put the comma in the right place, because neither Jesus nor the believing thief were in “paradise” *that day!*). That one believing thief will simply wake up in the resurrection. Then is when he will eternally be thankful that he was privileged to be literally “crucified with Christ”—the only human on earth so privileged!

(d) Moses had long ago declared that any criminal who is sentenced to die on a tree is automatically “accursed of God” (Deut. 21:22, 23). Everyone believed what Moses had said—even of Jesus; and we can be sure that the hate-driven scribes and Pharisees who cried “crucify Him” slapped each other on the back in triumph when they saw Jesus was hanged on His cross. “See? We’ve been right all along to reject Him,—He cannot be the Messiah, look, He’s hanged on a tree!”

(e) But they had not thought about what Isaiah says of Christ’s crucifixion: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. . . . We esteemed Him not” (53:3).

(f) Doubtless Isaiah’s message brought great comfort to believing, repentant victims of Rome’s cruelty. As Jesus had “compassion” on suffering people of His day, so God has all along had compassion on Rome’s many victims of crucifixion.

(g) The death of Jesus was not like the death of any other person in all time. The only death that any humans have ever suffered is the “first” death—the common lot of all descendants of fallen Adam.

(h) Not one person, no matter how wicked, has ever as yet endured what the Bible calls “the second death” (cf. Rev. 2:11; 20:14); with the sole exception of Jesus.

(i) The second death will come only at the end of the thousand years (“millennium”). When it happens at last, there will be “silence in heaven” for a “space” of time (cf. Rev. 8:1), God and the holy angels grieving for the death of all who have chosen to end their existence by the second death. Yes, they have *chosen* it!

(j) Ellen White declares that at the end, the lost will welcome their death by the Lake of Fire—so the common picture of the lost being cast screaming and yelling in protest while being thrown in is incorrect. Let us look:

(k) “A life of rebellion against God has unfitted them for heaven. Its purity, holiness, and peace would be torture to them; the glory of God would be a consuming fire. They would long to flee from that holy place. *They would welcome destruction*, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them. The destiny of the wicked is fixed by their own choice. Their exclusion from heaven is voluntary with themselves, and just and merciful on the part of God” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 543; emphasis supplied).

(l) The Lord Jesus Christ has done something for every man, woman, and child in the earth:

He has died the second death of everyone! “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9).

(m) That “death” that Jesus “tasted” cannot be the first death, which is only a dreamless sleep. Therefore, it can mean only the “second death.”

(n) That’s why the Samaritans said that Jesus is already “the Saviour of the world,” and Paul says that He “is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe” (1 Tim. 4:10). That’s two ways that Jesus is “the Saviour of all men”—He is practically, literally, the Saviour of those “that believe.” But in a judicial sense, He is also “the Saviour of the world” in that He has died the second death of every man.

(o) This is made clear in Romans 5:15-18: “God’s act of grace is out of all proportion to the wrongdoing of that one man [the fallen Adam]. For if the wrongdoing of that one man brought death upon so many [everyone], its effect is vastly exceeded by the grace of God and the

gift that came to so many by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ. . . . The judicial action, following on the one offence [of Adam], resulted in a verdict of condemnation, but the act of grace [of Jesus], following on so many misdeeds, resulted in a verdict of acquittal. ... It follows, then, that as the result of one misdeed [of Adam] was condemnation for all people, so the result of one righteous act is acquittal and life for all” (NEB).

(p) There can be only one response from us if we have honest hearts that can appreciate the *agape* of Christ: “henceforth” we are totally dedicated to Jesus, His love (*agape*) ever constraining us to bear our cross with Jesus, the cross whereon self is crucified with Him!

Furthermore, this Messianic prophecy of grieving for the pierced Jesus will meet a larger fulfillment at His glorious second coming. It is evident from the language John uses in Revelation 1:7, associating the “piercing” of the Messiah with the “mourning” over Him, that he has in mind the context of Zechariah 12:10. Therefore, this regret and mourning for the pierced Messiah will be experienced at the Second Advent by those who despised and pierced Christ during His crucifixion. John also quotes directly Zechariah 12:10 in John 19:37 when he described the piercing of Christ. (See also Matt. 24:30.) “All who have died in the faith of the third angel’s message come forth from the tomb glorified. . . . ‘They also which pierced Him’ (Rev. 1:7), those that mocked and derided Christ’s dying agonies, and the most violent opposers of His truth and His people, are raised to behold Him in His glory” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 637).

“The very men who thrust the spear into the side of the Lord of life will behold the print of the spear and will lament with deep anguish the part which they acted in marring His body” (*Early Writings*, p. 179).

The Fountain. The phrase “on that day” there shall be a fountain opened for cleansing (Zech. 13:1) hearkens back to “in one day” (Zech. 3:9, KJV), when the iniquity of the land would be removed. It is the same day also when Jesus was pierced (Zech. 12:10). In a sense, there had always been a fountain open for forgiveness and cleansing in the Lamb slain before the world. Before the cross, by faith people looked to that fountain—something we must always do even after the cross. The force of the Hebrew words indicates that the fountain not only shall be opened, but shall remain open. This continual flow has been available freely and efficaciously to all

humanity throughout history.

The background of this figurative term, “a fountain opened,” is rooted in the Levitical ritual. The water of expiation was used to purify and consecrate the Levites (Num. 8:7). Also Ezekiel mentions the purifying effect of sprinkling water on the children of Israel. “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses” (Eze. 36:25). However, in Zechariah 13:1 there is no sprinkling, but complete washing from the opened fountain. A fountain suggests an abundant and ever-flowing supply for the cleansing of sin. It is more than sufficient to clean the most defiled. It is not a cleansing from ceremonial defilement, but the purification from spiritual defilement of the inward being. “That flowing stream was a symbol of the ever-flowing, ever-cleansing efficacy of the blood of Christ . . . the fountain that was open for Judah and Jerusalem, wherein they may wash and be clean from every stain of sin. We are to have free access to the atoning blood of Christ” (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 1, p. 1111). The cleansing fountain. “When the soldier pierced the side of Jesus as He hung upon the cross, there came out two distinct streams, one of blood, the other of water. The blood was to wash away the sins of those who should believe in His name, and the water was to represent that living water which is obtained from Jesus to give life to the believer.”—*Early Writings*, p. 209.

The Jewish leaders were so particular in “keeping” the Sabbath that they asked Pilate to send his soldiers so that they might break the legs of the crucified men, including Jesus. That way they could be sure that the victims would die so they could take their bodies away before the Sabbath began. Ironically, the Jewish leaders were “keeping” the Sabbath while murdering the Lord of the Sabbath and wanting to break His bones! John tells us that when the soldiers came to Jesus, they found Him already dead, so there was no need to break His legs. Surprised that Jesus had died so quickly, one soldier, to be doubly certain, pierced His side with a spear. At once a stream of blood and water gushed forth (John 19:31-37; see also Ps. 34:20), “The, priests and rulers were amazed to find that Christ was dead. Death by the cross was a lingering process; it was difficult to determine when life had ceased. It was an unheard-of thing for one to die within six hours of crucifixion. The priests wished to make sure of the death of Jesus, and at their suggestion a soldier thrust a spear into the Saviour’s side” (*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 771, 772).

But why did our Saviour die much sooner than expected? Was it because of His tremendous physical suffering? No. "It was not the spear thrust, it was not the pain of the cross, that caused the death of Jesus. That cry, uttered 'with a loud voice,' at the moment of death, the stream of blood and water that flowed from His side, declared that He died of a broken heart. His heart was broken by mental anguish. He was slain by the sin of the world" (*ibid.*, p. 772; italics supplied).

That precious stream of blood and water mentioned in John 19:34 seems to merge the "piercing" of Zechariah 12:10 with the "fountain opened" in Zechariah 13:1. In commenting on this stream, Ellen White writes, "There came out two distinct streams, one of blood, the other of water. The blood was to wash away the sins of those who should believe in His name, and the water was to represent that living water which is obtained from Jesus to give life to the believer" (*Early Writings*, p. 209).

The Wounds in His Hands. Zechariah 12:10, 13:1, and 13:6, 7 have something significant in common. They show three interrelated events relating to Christ's suffering and death. These important events are respectively (1) the piercing of Christ, (2) the opening of the fountain for cleansing, and (3) the wounded hands of the smitten Good Shepherd. There is no doubt that the first two verses above refer to the same person, namely the Messiah, but who is Zechariah 13:6 alluding to?

Bible students raise the question as to the identity of this person. There seems to be some ambiguity regarding who this individual was who was asked, "What are these wounds in your hands?" Careful study of the four verses that precede this question has indicated to a number of students that the context deals with an act of sanctification introduced and made possible by the fountain opened for cleansing from sin (verse 1). The two specific sins alluded to are idolatry and false prophecy, which were widespread at that time.

At first glance the context of verses 2-6 seems to point to a supposedly converted false prophet who got wounded in connection with idolatrous worship and who was trying to conceal that fact by dismissing his wounds as resulting from a squabble with his friends. But when I consider carefully the context of the piercing of Christ in Zechariah 12:10, the fountain opened in Zechariah 13:1, and the smitten Shepherd in verse 7, I conclude that consistency leads me to deduce that the person with wounds in his hands is the suffering Messiah. Also verse 6 seems to go together with verse 7, for it



commences a new thought about the wounds and leads logically to and reinforces verse 7 about the smitten Shepherd. So the one pierced in the side, the one wounded in the hands, and the one smitten by God is the Christ Who in His person became a fountain opened for cleansing and redemption.

The SDA Bible Commentary explains that some interpreters have applied this text to Christ as predictive of His scouring wounds of those who should have been His friends. . . . This must be done by secondary application or by making a break after Zechariah 13:5 and by connecting verse 6 with verse 7, which is clearly predictive of Christ (Matt. 26:31)” (vol. 4, p. 1115).

It is clear, however, from *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 226, that Ellen White understood Zechariah 13:6 to refer to Christ. She writes, “Even the manner of His death had been shadowed forth. . . . One shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then He shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.”

It is astounding that Christ calls these whose hands were stained with His blood, “My friends!” This innocent blood of Christ does not cry out in vengeance over those who spilled it. His blood flows as a continuous stream of forgiveness and love. The wounded hands are not clenched defiantly, but are stretched forth to embrace us in reconciliation. We ourselves deserved to be pierced, wounded, and smitten, but He took the initiative to die in our place. We did not have to appease Him with our wounds as the heathen do for their gods, for “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities” (Isa. 53:5).

The Sword of God Against His Shepherd. Like a captain of an army stands ready to unsheath his mighty sword to exact retribution against his enemies, so also does God the Lord of hosts unsheath His sword of divine justice against our Substitute. God declares in Zechariah 13:7, “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, against the Man who is My Companion” (NOV). What implications may we glean relating to the nature of the Shepherd from the use of the terms man and companion?

The Shepherd Messiah is fully divine and fully human, the perfect mediator between God and man. Yes, the Shepherd is a “Man,” but He is also God’s “Companion.” The word companion in Hebrew refers to fellowship, friendship, and closeness in communion and vocation. He is the closest to the Father, for They are one (John 10:30). He is

Man, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), but He is also the mighty God and the everlasting Father (Isa. 9:6).

Jesus applied this prophecy to Himself (Matt. 26:31) when He was ready to offer Himself on the cross and the disciples were to be scattered. “Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.” (See also Matt. 26:56; John 16:32; Isa. 53:10.)

“Of the suffering Saviour Jehovah Himself declared through Zechariah, ‘Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow.’ Zechariah 13:7. As the substitute and surety for sinful man, Christ was to suffer under divine justice. . . . He was to know what it means for sinners to stand before God without an intercessor” (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 691). Also, after quoting 13:7, Ellen White writes, “Hitherto He had been an intercessor for others; now He longed to have an intercessor for Himself” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 686).

In 1 John 1:9 we read, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

This is wonderfully dramatized in John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. The pilgrim, named Christian, had fled the coming wrath of God, seeking safety in the Celestial City. But his progress was hindered by a burden on his back, representing the weight of sin upon our souls. On the way he was met by Mr. Worldly Wiseman, who gave him worldly counsel on the removal of this burden of guilt, advising Christian to indulge himself in worldly comforts, adding a strong dose of morality, so that he could simply forget the burden. Christian found, however, that neither the pleasures of the world nor the pursuit of moral virtue removed the burden of this guilt of sin. On he journeyed, wearied by his load. Finally, Bunyan writes,

He ran until he came to a peak where a cross stood; a little below, in the bottom was a tomb. When Christian reached the cross, his burden became loose, fell from his back, and tumbled into the tomb. I never saw the burden again. . . . As he stood looking and weeping, three Shining Ones approached and greeted him. “Peace,” the first said, “Your sins are forgiven.” The second removed his filthy rags and dressed him in rich clothing. The third put a mark on his forehead and gave him a sealed roll. He told Christian . . . to leave it at the celestial gate [to enter the Celestial City].

Christ’s cleansing fountain is given to speak peace and joy to

mournful hearts.