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Editorial Office 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904
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Principal Contributor
Jon Paulien

Editor
Clifford R. Goldstein

Associate Editor
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Publication Manager
Lea Alexander Greve

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Sharon Thomas-Crews

Pacific Press® Coordinator
Wendy Marcum

Art Director and Illustrator
Lars Justinen

Concept Design
Dever Designs



**Sabbath
School
Personal
Ministries**

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WHEN THE LORD DESCENDS FROM HEAVEN

In the 1940s, Nobel Prize-winning Irish author Samuel Beckett wrote a drama called *Waiting for Godot* about two hapless, homeless men waiting on the side of the road for someone named Godot, who was supposed to come and save them from the meaningless and pathetic absurdity of life.

“His name is Godot?” Estragon asks.

“I think so,” Vladimir answers.

As Vladimir and Estragon stand, suckled by the dehydrated hope that Godot will come, a procession of human suffering, missteps, goose steps, limps, and hobbles stomps past them. Bored, not so much by all the pain of life but by its uselessness, they seek diversion in doing good, such as lifting a blind man who has stumbled.

“Come, let us get to work!” Vladimir says. “In an instant all will vanish, and we’ll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness!” But as Vladimir reaches, he falls and can’t get up.

Despite more promises that Godot will come, life seems so miserable in the meantime that they decide to hang themselves. But having no rope, Estragon takes off the cord that holds up his pants, which collapse around his ankles. To test the cord’s strength, the two men pull it; it breaks, and they almost fall. They decide to find a better rope and try again later.

“We’ll hang ourselves tomorrow,” Vladimir says. “Unless Godot comes.”

“And if he comes?” Estragon asks.

“We’ll be saved.”

This mysterious Godot never comes, which means they’re not saved. They weren’t, of course, supposed to be. Beckett’s whole point with the drama is to show the absurdity and hopelessness of life.

What a contrast to the view of life presented in the Bible. In particular, what a contrast to the view presented in this quarter’s lessons, that deals with the apostle Paul’s two letters to the Thessalonians.

Like Beckett’s two characters, the Thessalonians faced stresses, strains, struggles, even outright persecution. In other words, life for them, as for all of us, had its hard moments.

How easy and understandable it would have been for them to fall into the futility, nihilism, and pessimism that Beckett expressed in his drama. Instead, the Thessalonians had a sure hope, a hope based on what Christ had done for them, a hope that pointed to the greatest promise of all—the Second Coming (which Beckett was mocking, as well). Though Paul had chided the Thessalonians, as they had behavioral, as well as theological issues in the church (sound familiar?), it was to them, and to us, that Paul wrote some of the most incredible, uplifting, and hopeful words in all inspiration.

The Thessalonians had a sure hope, a hope based on what Christ had done for them, a hope that pointed to the greatest promise of all—the Second Coming.

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:16–18).

It doesn’t get any more hopeful or glorious than that, does it?

This quarter, through Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians, we’ll get a glimpse into the life of an early Christian church—an urban church, really—and see some of the struggles and challenges that it faced, including the difficulties that arose from the fact that Christ had not yet returned. Fascinating, too, is that however different the Thessalonians’ circumstances were from our own, so often the principles reflected in Paul’s words to the Thessalonians deal with the issues and challenges that we, too, confront as we await, not some mysterious Godot, but the Lord Jesus, whose death on the cross at the first coming guarantees His return in glory at the Second.

Jon Paulien is dean of the School of Religion at Loma Linda University in Loma Linda, California.

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