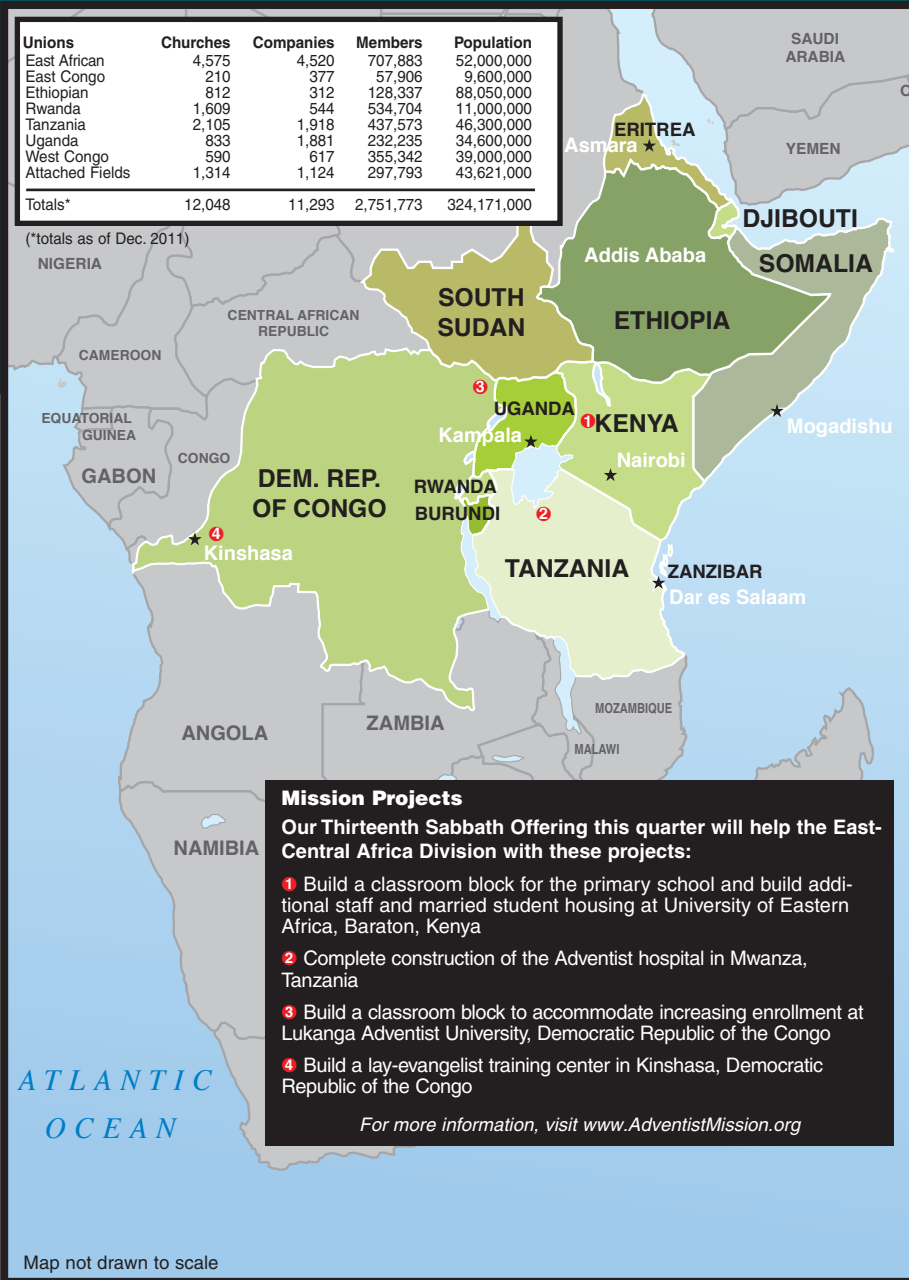


# East-Central Africa

## DIVISION

Unions	Churches	Companies	Members	Population
East African	4,575	4,520	707,883	52,000,000
East Congo	210	377	57,906	9,600,000
Ethiopian	812	312	128,337	88,050,000
Rwanda	1,609	544	534,704	11,000,000
Tanzania	2,105	1,918	437,573	46,300,000
Uganda	833	1,881	232,235	34,600,000
West Congo	590	617	355,342	39,000,000
Attached Fields	1,314	1,124	297,793	43,621,000
<b>Totals*</b>	<b>12,048</b>	<b>11,293</b>	<b>2,751,773</b>	<b>324,171,000</b>

(\*totals as of Dec. 2011)



### Mission Projects

Our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help the East-Central Africa Division with these projects:

- 1 Build a classroom block for the primary school and build additional staff and married student housing at University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya
- 2 Complete construction of the Adventist hospital in Mwanza, Tanzania
- 3 Build a classroom block to accommodate increasing enrollment at Lukanga Adventist University, Democratic Republic of the Congo
- 4 Build a lay-evangelist training center in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo

For more information, visit [www.AdventistMission.org](http://www.AdventistMission.org)

Map not drawn to scale

Map and information provided by the Office of Adventist Mission

Where legally possible, offerings will go to these projects; otherwise special arrangement will be made with the General Conference for distribution of funds based on the laws of the countries where these offerings are collected.



\*EAQ130401\*

ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

MAJOR LESSONS FROM MINOR PROPHETS

Apr • May • June 2013

Adult  
Sabbath School  
Bible Study Guide

April | May | June 2013

## "Seek the Lord and Live!"

# MAJOR LESSONS FROM MINOR PROPHETS



150  SEVENTH-DAY  
1863 - 2013 ADVENTIST CHURCH

United for Mission

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**T**he mind, someone said, is never satisfied, never. That's because it faces a cruel paradox: the mind, which can contemplate the eternal, is composed of matter that isn't eternal—and, worst of all, the mind knows that it is not eternal. Like chickens and oysters, we are going to die. The difference, however, is that chickens and oysters don't know it. We do—and that realization causes us a great deal of anguish and suffering.

How did we get into this mess? The answer is, of course, one word: *sin*. Sin leads to death. Humans sin—therefore, humans die. It doesn't get simpler than that.

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned” (*Rom. 5:12, NRSV*).

Yes, humans die. And here's the rub: we were never supposed to. We were originally created for eternal life. The plan, from the start, was that we would live forever. Death, then, is an intruder—the most unnatural of all acts. We're so used to death that we take it for granted; we just accept it as “part of life.”

*Death as part of life?* If that sounds absurd and paradoxical, it's because it is. Death is the negation of life, not some aspect of it.

In this context, we come to this quarter's lesson. Perhaps it can be best expressed by the famous quote, in which Ellen G. White writes that the great theme of the Bible is “the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man

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that which it is not in his power to do for himself.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 109.

And what is it that God does for us that we don't have the power to do for ourselves? Of course, He saves us from the most unnatural of acts, death—the eternal death that would be ours were it not for God's grace as revealed in the plan of salvation. In other words, it's the call to us, both as individuals and as a church, “to seek the Lord and live.”

That's the theme we are going to study, that of God doing for us what we can never do for ourselves, which is to give us the gift of life, eternal life in Jesus. We are, however, going to explore it in a place where we don't often go, the “Minor Prophets,” the twelve short books that end the Old Testament. These prophets have been dubbed “the Minor Prophets,” not because they are of less importance than the Major ones but only because their books are much shorter than those from the other Old Testament writers.

Indeed, whether through the marriage of Hosea to an unfaithful wife, or Jonah's attempt to flee God's prophetic call, or Zechariah's amazing vision of Joshua and the angel (and with all the others, as well)—the Minor Prophets together have a powerful message, one that comes through again and again, which is about God's grace toward undeserving sinners. The message is that God wants to save us from our sins, to save us from the devastation that sin, rebellion, and disobedience bring. Over and over in these books we see the Lord pleading with His people to repent, to put away their sins, to return unto Him, and to find life, not death, salvation, not damnation, hope, not despair.

There is nothing “minor” about that theme. It's present truth—God's message to us today is the same one He gave to those who lived in the time of these twelve writers who, though long gone, still speak.

The question is, will we listen? The answer is Yes, for it is a matter of life and death.

*The Minor Prophets together have a powerful message, one that comes through again and again, which is about God's grace toward undeserving sinners.*

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# Got Questions?

## Sabbath School University *has answers!*

*Sabbath School University* is a 28-minute discussion of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*. SSU discusses the content and strategies to enrich your Sabbath School with fellowship, outreach, Bible study, and missions. Sabbath School leaders, don't miss this weekly broadcast on Hope Channel.



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# LIFT THEM UP



The Adventist medical clinic in Mwanza, Tanzania, eastern Africa, treats up to 3,000 patients a month. People come from the city and from a hundred miles out in the bush to receive reliable, compassionate care. The clinic's 15 beds are full, and patients often prefer to wait for treatment until the clinic can accommodate them rather than be treated at another medical facility in the city.

The Adventist members in Tanzania have joined

hands to build a 160-bed, fully equipped, hospital to serve the millions who live in its treatment area. They've built half the building; now they need our help to finish. I'm glad that part of our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help make this hospital a reality and save lives—physically and spiritually—in Tanzania.

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# Spiritual Adultery (Hosea)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Hos. 1:1–3; Ezek. 4:1–6; Hos. 2:12–15, 18; 4:1–3; James 5:1–7; Rev. 14:6–12.*

**Memory Text:** “ ‘I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called “Not my loved one.” I will say to those called “Not my people,” “You are my people”; and they will say, “You are my God” ’ ” (*Hosea 2:23, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Even amid spiritual adultery and divine judgment, God's love for His people never wavers.

The prophet Hosea ministered at the close of a very prosperous period in Israel's history, just before the fall of the nation to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. At that time, God's chosen people no longer worshiped the Lord alone but also served Baal, a Canaanite god.

Placed at the head of the Minor Prophets, Hosea's book addresses the central question of the prophetic proclamation during this time of apostasy: Does God still love Israel, despite the spiritual harlotry? Does He still have a purpose for them despite their sins and the coming judgment?

Hosea's personal story and prophecy are inseparably tied into his book. Just as the prophet forgave his unfaithful wife and was willing to take her back, God is willing to do the same for His people.

What can we learn from the experience of Hosea and the Lord's way of dealing with wayward Israel?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 6.*

## A Strange Command

“When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, ‘Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD.’ So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son” (*Hos. 1:2, 3, NIV*).

For centuries, students of the Bible have debated the nature of this command, asking questions such as: Was Gomer a prostitute or just an unfaithful spouse? Was she immoral before her marriage to Hosea, or did she become unfaithful afterward?

We do not know for certain. One thing, however, is sure: when the Lord spoke to Hosea and through him, He wanted to turn people’s attention from Hosea’s story to God’s love story with Israel. Because Gomer was an Israelite, the story of her marriage to the prophet blends with the story of God’s covenant with Israel.

There are important parallels between Hosea’s story and God’s experience with Israel. On a human level, Gomer was adulterous against Hosea; on the spiritual level, Israel was unfaithful to God. Just as Gomer’s immorality hurt her husband’s heart, so Israel’s idolatry grieved the great heart of God. Hosea was called to endure a broken heart and a broken marriage. He must have suffered public indignation and disgrace. Yet, the more he experienced Gomer’s unfaithfulness, the deeper was his understanding of God’s pain and frustration with Israel.

**God** often asked other prophets to do something beyond preaching. Read the following passages and explain how the prophets’ actions symbolized God’s dealings with His people. *Isa. 20:1–6, Jer. 27:1–7, Ezek. 4:1–6.*

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**What kind of witness for the Lord are your words and your actions? What is it in your life that reveals not simply that you are a good person but that you are a follower of Jesus?**

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## Spiritual Adultery

When Hosea’s wife, Gomer, committed adultery against him, he suffered the agony of betrayal, humiliation, and shame. To the neighbors and friends who saw his pain, Hosea delivered a divine message through words and actions: Israel, God’s wife, was just like Gomer. The chosen people were committing spiritual adultery.

The prophet Jeremiah compared God’s unfaithful people to “a prostitute” who lived with many lovers despite everything that God provided for them (*Jer. 3:1, NIV*). In a similar way, the prophet Ezekiel called idolatrous Israel “an adulterous wife” who had departed from her true husband (*Ezek. 16:32, NKJV*). For this reason, idolatry in the Bible is viewed as spiritual adultery.

**Read** Hosea 2:8–13. What warning is given here? In what ways could we, as Seventh-day Adventists, be in danger of doing the same thing in principle?

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The expression “grain, new wine and oil” also is used in the book of Deuteronomy (*Deut. 7:12–14, NIV*) to describe Israel’s staple produce that people enjoyed in abundance in accordance with God’s promises as given through Moses. In Hosea’s time, the people were so ungrateful to God, so wrapped up in the world around them, that they were presenting these gifts, originally given them by God, to their false idols. What a warning this should be to all of us that the gifts we have been given should be used in the service of the Lord and not in ways that never were intended for them (*Matt. 6:24*).

“How does God regard our ingratitude and lack of appreciation for his blessings? When we see one slight or misuse our gifts, our hearts and hands are closed against him. But those who received God’s merciful gifts day after day, and year after year, misapply his bounties, and neglect the souls for whom Christ has given his life. The means which he has lent them to sustain his cause and build up his kingdom are invested in houses and lands, lavished on pride and self-indulgence, and the Giver is forgotten.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 7, 1886.

**Think about how easy it is to take the gifts given you by God and to use them selfishly, or even in an idolatrous manner. What are practical ways of preventing this sin in our lives?**

## A Promise of Restoration

**Read** Hosea 2. What is God’s basic message to His people here? How is the gospel revealed in this chapter?

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Hosea’s message presents the profound truth of God’s steadfast love for an undeserving people. Hosea 2 contains a lengthy speech by the Lord about Israel’s apostasy, which is then contrasted with God’s unfailing love for His people. After the punishment, the husband will lead the wife on a trip to the wilderness, where they will be remarried.

Thus, the chapter ends with a portrayal of a future time beyond the judgment when God will woo Israel to love Him as before (*Hos. 2:12–15*). The wild animals of the field will no longer devour the wife’s vines and fig trees but will become partners in the new covenant (*Hos. 2:18*). In addition, all the children will be renamed, revealing again God’s willingness to heal and forgive the past transgressions of His people.

**God** freely offers to pardon our sins. How much does forgiveness cost God? What was the personal cost of this lesson to Hosea? *Hos. 3:1, 2*.

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Growing up as a male in Israel, Hosea was destined to enjoy a privileged status in that patriarchal society. But this privilege came with a great responsibility. A man in ancient Israel would have had to make a tremendous effort to forgive and take back an unfaithful wife, not to mention accept as his own the children who may have been fathered by another man. To stand by his wife and her children and thus endure social rejection would have to have been one of the most difficult of life’s experiences.

Hosea, however, “bought” her back. God, in a sense, did the same thing for the human race, but the cost was the death of Jesus on the cross. Only by looking at the Cross, then, can we get a much clearer picture of what it cost God to buy us back from the ruin that sin has caused.

## The Case Against Israel

Hosea 4:1–3 presents God as one who brings a charge or a legal dispute (Hebrew *rib*) against Israel. The chosen nation stood guilty before her God because the people had failed to live up to the terms of the covenant. Truth, mercy, and the knowledge of God were to be qualities of Israel’s unique relationship with Him. According to Hosea 2:18–20, these are gifts that God bestows on His people at the renewal of the covenant.

Due to sin, however, Israel’s life was devoid of these gifts of grace. The crimes listed by Hosea had brought the nation to the brink of anarchy. The religious leaders, priest and prophet alike, shared responsibility in the current deterioration of Israel’s life and were held accountable for it. Theirs was a heavy responsibility. If they did not confront the abuses and did not condemn the acts of injustice, they themselves would be condemned by God.

In the Old Testament, idol worship was considered to be the most serious sin because it denied the role of the Lord God in the lives of the nation and the individual. Due to the dry climate, rains in the land of Israel were a matter of life and death. The Israelites came to believe that their blessings, such as life-giving rain, were coming from Baal. Thus, it was a serious problem when they built shrines to foreign gods and began mixing immorality with worship.

At the same time, social injustice was rife in the land. The rich classes in Israel exploited the peasants in order to be able to pay tribute to Assyria. Many resorted to fraud and cheating (*Hos. 12:7, 8*). It was through this injustice that the formerly peaceful and prosperous period led to a time of political and social turbulence. The country was at the brink of total chaos.

“Poor rich men, professing to serve God, are objects of pity. While they profess to know God, in works they deny Him. How great is the darkness of such! They profess faith in the truth, but their works do not correspond with their profession. The love of riches makes men selfish, exacting, and overbearing. Wealth is power; and frequently the love of it depraves and paralyzes all that is noble and godlike in man.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 682.

**Read James 5:1–7. How do these words fit in with present truth as expressed in the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12? Whatever our financial position, how can we protect ourselves from the dangers that money always presents to the followers of Christ?**

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## A Call to Repentance

“ ‘And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent’ ” (*John 17:3, NKJV*).

The name *Hosea* in Hebrew means “the Lord saves” and is related to the names *Joshua*, *Isaiah*, and even *Jesus*. The prophet calls the people to reject sin and find refuge in their Lord God because He is their Creator and Redeemer. The purpose of the divine judgment was to remind the sinners that their life and strength come from the One to whom they must return. Thus, even amid all the warnings and pronouncements of judgment, *Hosea*’s book presents the themes of both human repentance and divine forgiveness.

The prophet urges the nation, which was perishing in sin “ ‘for lack of knowledge’ ” (*Hos. 4:6, NKJV*) to press on to know God fully and live in harmony with His eternal principles. It was the people’s lack of knowledge, the knowledge of God, that led them to rebellion and eventually resulted in judgment.

In contrast, through faith and obedience the people could come to know the Lord for themselves. This knowledge can be close and intimate too. That is precisely why, time and again, marriage is a symbol of the kind of relationship that the Lord wants with us.

That is also why the Christian life consists primarily of a relationship with the living God. That is why the Lord calls people to know Him and follow His will for their entire lives.

The sin problem brought a fearful separation between God and humanity. But, through the death of Jesus on the cross, a way has been made so that each one of us can have a close walk with the Lord. We can, indeed, know Him for ourselves.

**What** is the difference between our knowing about God versus our knowing God? How is this difference reflected in our everyday living? If someone were to ask you, How can I come to know God, what would you answer? What do the following passages teach about the importance of “knowing the Lord”?

*Exod. 33:12, 13* \_\_\_\_\_

*Jer. 9:23, 24* \_\_\_\_\_

*Dan. 11:32* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 2:4* \_\_\_\_\_

**Further Study:** “As time went by, Hosea became aware of the fact that his personal fate was a mirror of the divine pathos, that his sorrow echoed the sorrow of God. In this fellow suffering as an act of sympathy with the divine pathos the prophet probably saw the meaning of the marriage which he had contracted at the divine behest. . . .

“Only by living through in his own life what the divine Consort of Israel experienced, was the prophet able to attain sympathy for the divine situation. The marriage was a lesson, an illustration, rather than a symbol or a sacrament.”—Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Mass.: Prince Press, 2001), p. 56.

“In symbolic language Hosea set before the ten tribes God’s plan of restoring to every penitent soul who would unite with His church on earth, the blessings granted Israel in the days of their loyalty to Him in the Promised Land. Referring to Israel as one to whom He longed to show mercy, the Lord declared, ‘I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 298.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ We tend to think of idolatry as the bowing down to statues. In what ways can idolatry be something that is much more subtle and deceptive than that?
- ❷ In class, further explore this idea of what it means to know God. If you say that you “know the Lord,” what do you mean by that? How is this knowledge of God acquired?
- ❸ Some ancient theologians argued that God is impassible, that is, He does not experience pain or pleasure due to the actions of other beings, such as humans. What might cause people to argue that position? Why do we, however, reject it?
- ❹ Dwell more on the fact that our redemption is so costly. What does that tell us about what our worth is to God?

## A Bible for Sharoon

Eight-year-old Sharoon [shah-ROON] leans forward in his seat as his Sabbath School teacher tells a Bible story. She asks a question, and Sharoon's hand shoots into the air. The teacher calls on him, and Sharoon answers the question.

Sharoon loves Sabbath School, especially the Bible stories his teacher tells. The church that Sharoon attends meets in a house that's been remodeled into a church. It's not big, but it's clean and bright.

Sharoon and his family live in Lahore, a large city in Pakistan. Most people in the country are Muslims. There are few Christians and even fewer Seventh-day Adventists.

Someone donated Bible story felts so that the teacher has something to show the children when she tells the Bible story. The children enjoy watching the story unfold in pictures as the teacher tells it. But when a missionary visited the church, she noticed that the children didn't bring their Bibles to church. "Next week please bring your Bibles to Sabbath School," she encouraged with a smile.

"But Teacher," one girl said. "I don't have a Bible." Other children shook their heads too. Sharoon added, "My daddy has a Bible, but I don't think he will let me bring it to church."

The missionary was surprised that the children had no Bibles. "Let's memorize some Bible texts so we take God's words wherever we go," the missionary suggested. The teacher agreed and printed Bible texts on sheets of paper. The children worked hard to learn the Bible texts. And they prayed for Bibles of their own.

Someone sent some money to the missionaries to buy Bibles for the children. The children eagerly waited for their Bibles to arrive. At last they came. The teacher opened the box and gave each child a Bible. She helped them write their name inside the cover.

Now the children eagerly read the Bible stories in their own Bibles. They have memorized the books of the Bible and can repeat many Bible texts from memory. The children are so eager to learn more about God that some of them arrive an hour early for Sabbath School so they won't miss a thing!

Sharoon treasures his Bible, but he knows that other Seventh-day Adventist children in Pakistan don't have Bibles. He's excited to learn that part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help buy Bibles for children in Pakistan, and in Israel and Sudan too.

Three years ago Seventh-day Adventist children around the world gave a special children's offering for Thirteenth Sabbath to buy Bibles for children in Pakistan, Israel, and Sudan. Today thousands of children have Bibles, and can learn for themselves that God loves them. Thank you!

# Love *and* Judgment: God’s Dilemma (Hosea)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Hos. 7:11, 12; 10:11–13; Matt. 11:28–30; Rom. 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24; Hosea 14.*

**Memory Text:** “But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always” (*Hosea 12:6, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Hosea reveals more of God’s love for His wayward people.

A common way in which biblical authors talk about God’s love relationship with His people is by using metaphors. A metaphor conveys something profound about a lesser-known subject through something that is already known or familiar. Metaphors are symbols used to explain something other than themselves.

The two most commonly used biblical metaphors regarding God’s relationship with His people are husband-wife and parent-child metaphors. Last week we looked at the husband-wife metaphor. This week we will look into a few more of Hosea’s metaphors, the most dominant of which is the parent-child one.

Hosea used metaphors for the same reasons that Jesus taught in parables: First, to explain truths about God through the familiar things of life; second, to impress on people’s minds important spiritual principles that could be applied in everyday existence.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 13.*

## Easily Deceived and Senseless

“ ‘Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless—now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria. When they go, I will throw my net over them; I will pull them down like birds of the air. When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them’ ” (*Hos. 7:11, 12, NIV*). Read these verses in context. What warning is being given here? What principle can we take from these verses for ourselves?

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Ephraim was the name of the younger son of Joseph. Because Ephraim was the name of the principal tribe of the northern kingdom of Israel, the name is applied to the entire kingdom, just as the name Judah was applied to the kingdom in the south. In the above verses, Israel is compared to a senseless bird (*compare Jer. 5:21*), allowing itself to be an easy prey for the fowler’s net. In this context, her reliance on other nations for help was an act of rebellion against God.

Why? Because an alliance with the mighty Assyrian Empire or ambitious Egypt would require Israel to recognize the supremacy of the gods worshiped by those two superpowers (*see also Isa. 52:4, Lam. 5:1–6*). Going to them would mean, of necessity, turning away from the Lord. What they needed to do was return to the Lord, repent, obey His commandments, and put away their false gods. That was their only hope, not political alliances with pagans.

“The very position of Palestine exposed it to invasion by these two ancient empires. . . . The much-coveted prize for which these powerful empires fought was this highway that connected the rich watersheds of the Nile and the Euphrates. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah were caught in this international counterplay and squeezed between the two rivals. In desperation, without spiritual trust in her God, Israel fatuously appealed first to the one and then to the other for a support that could only turn into a snare to her own national well-being.” —*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 908.

**It is so easy to seek human aid for our problems instead of seeking the Lord, is it not? Of course, the Lord can use human agents in answer to our prayers. How can we be sure that, in desperate situations and in need of help, we do not make the same mistake that Israel did here? How can we use human aid without, by necessity, turning away from the Lord?**



## A Trained Heifer

**Read** Hosea 10:11–13. What message is the Lord giving to His people here? How do we understand the phrase, “until he comes and showers righteousness on you?” (NIV).

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In Hosea 10, God’s child, Ephraim, is compared to a trained heifer who loves to thresh grain because she can eat as she threshes. Thus, instead of being productive, Israel’s existence has become self-centered. When God yokes Israel to work in open fields as the nation should, righteousness and kindness will grow.

In Bible times, the yoke was an instrument of service. Young beasts of burden were trained to be docile by working first on the threshing floor (*Jer. 50:11*). While yoked, they simply would tread out corn with their feet. At the next stage, they pulled a threshing sledge over the corn (*2 Sam. 24:22, NIV*). This type of work prepared them for the more disciplined task of plowing a furrow in a field (*1 Kings 19:19, Jer. 4:3*). God had a similar plan in His training of Israel. He would put a yoke on Ephraim’s fair neck to make him work hard in the plowing and breaking up of the soil.

In Hosea 10:12 the prophet presents what the Lord desires Israel to be through obedience to His word. Righteousness and steadfast love are the gifts promised by God to His wife when the covenant is renewed (*Hos. 2:19*). If people sow righteousness, they will reap kindness in return. Only by searching for the Lord and His will can Israel be delivered from the coming punishment. The door of mercy is still open for possible repentance on the part of God’s chosen people.

The admonition to sow righteousness concerns people-to-people relationships; the search for God concerns the relationship between God and His people. The breaking up of the soil represents spiritual and social reform and renewal. The Lord and His people will work together in a mutual relationship to bring blessings back to the land. The results will be a glorious blossoming that will fill the whole earth (*Hos. 14:5–7*).

**Read Christ’s invitation to take His yoke upon ourselves** (*Matt. 11:28–30*). How can learning from Christ to be “gentle and humble in heart” (NIV) help us to find rest for our souls?

## A Toddling Son

**“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. . . . I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them”** (*Hos. 11:1, 3, NKJV*).

In these verses, Hosea is saying that the Lord’s way is like the tender care of a new parent. Just as a parent tenderly and patiently teaches a child to walk, taking it up by his hands to prevent its fall, so the Lord has cared for Israel right from the beginning. God, who loves and forgives, is the heart of Hosea’s message. Even when He applies discipline, He is deeply compassionate. His anger can be terrifying, but His mercy is beyond comprehension.

**Read Deuteronomy 8:5, Proverbs 13:24, Hebrews 12:6, and Revelation 3:19. What is the one point that these verses all have in common? What comfort can we draw from these texts?**

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Through Moses, God informed the Egyptian king that Israel was His special child (*Exod. 4:22, 23*). Although all the nations of the earth, including Egypt, were God’s sons and daughters, the Hebrew nation was selected to be God’s firstborn son with special privileges. But along with those privileges came responsibilities. In the wilderness the Lord carried His people in the same way in which “a father carries his son” (*Deut. 1:31, NIV*). At times He disciplined them just like “a man disciplines his son” (*Deut. 8:5, NIV*).

“All who in this world render true service to God or man receive a preparatory training in the school of sorrow. The weightier the trust and the higher the service, the closer is the test and the more severe the discipline.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 151.

There is no question that any parent who loves his children will discipline them, and always for their own good. If flawed and fallen humans do this, how much more so can we trust in God’s love for us, even during times of trial?

**For many of us, the issue is not about trusting God’s discipline. Rather, the struggle is knowing how to interpret the trials that come our way. How do we know if what we are going through is, indeed, God teaching us in the “school of sorrow” or if it is something else? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

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## Compassion Stronger Than Anger

**“How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned over within Me, all My compassions are kindled. I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath” (Hos. 11:8, 9, NASB).**

This passage serves as a window into God’s heart: will God hand His rebellious son over to be stoned to death as required by law (*Deut. 21:18–21*; see also *Gen. 19:17–23*)? What an amazing insight into both God’s own suffering due to human sin and His desire to save us.

Even though sinful Israel deserved total destruction, the Lord in His enduring mercy continues to love His people while striving for their repentance.

In Abraham’s time there were five cities situated in the Jordan Valley southeast of the Dead Sea (*Gen. 14:8*). Known as “the cities of the plain,” they were Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar. Of these, only Zoar was not destroyed. The names of the other four became proverbial for the total destruction that came upon them due to their wicked ways and unwillingness to repent (*Deut. 29:23*). It was to some of these cities that Hosea was referring in the above verses.

Hosea 11 teaches that God’s ways transcend those of sinful humanity. He will not let bitterness govern His decisions. God’s love seeks to bring healing, health, and restoration to His people. The purpose of divine discipline is to correct, amend, and reconcile, not to destroy and avenge. Many people, even professed Christians, do not understand that aspect of God but, instead, see Him as vengeful, angry, and just looking to find fault in order to punish them for their sins. Even worse, some believe that He burns the lost in hell for eternity. That, however, is not the picture of God presented here.

**Read Romans 5:8, 1 Peter 2:24, and Galatians 3:13. How do these texts, even more than the ones we see in Hosea, reveal the extent of God’s love for humanity?**

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## Healed, Loved, and Nurtured

**Some** ancient scholars viewed the Lord, as revealed in the Old Testament, as harsh and unforgiving, in contrast to Jesus, as revealed in the New. Why is that such a wrong conclusion? How does the message of Hosea 14 help to show just how wrong that conclusion is? What does this chapter reveal about God's character and love for His people?

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The last chapter of Hosea is a fitting climax to the message proclaimed by the prophet. It reaffirms the promise that God's salvation will have the last word. The chapter opens with one more call to turn away from all iniquity. In bidding the people to return to God, the prophet supplies the actual words that they should say in worship. Their request should be that God take away the guilt that made them stumble. They should also renounce their dependence on the other nations and totally reject idolatry. In Bible times no person was supposed to appear before the Lord empty-handed (*Exod. 23:15*). So, beyond bringing an animal sacrifice, the people are told to bring words of genuine repentance as their thanksgiving offering.

Then, following a penitential confession on the people's part, God responds with a series of promises. The foremost of these is the healing of the people's maladies by the divine Physician. God's renewed relationship with Israel is likened to the dew that provides the only moisture available to flowers and trees during the long and dry summer season in Palestine. It is also linked to the olive tree, which is considered especially valuable, a sort of crown of the fruit trees. Its foliage provides shade, and freshness and its oil is used as food, skin lotion, and as fuel for lights. Additionally, the great cedars of Lebanon are considered the most useful of the large-growth trees in the lands of the Bible. Their highly prized lumber serves for the construction of temples and royal palaces (*1 Kings 6:9, 10*). The roots planted by God will produce such an abundance of fresh plants that Israel will become a garden full of blessings for the whole world.

**Read the last verse of the chapter. What conditions are required for all these promises to be fulfilled? Why is it no different for us today, in our role as Seventh-day Adventists?**

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**Further Study:** Compare the following two quotations with the messages presented in Hosea 7–14.

“Through nature, through types and symbols, through patriarchs and prophets, God had spoken to the world. Lessons must be given to humanity in the language of humanity. . . . The principles of God’s government and the plan of redemption must be clearly defined. The lessons of the Old Testament must be fully set before men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 34.

“Through long, dark years when ruler after ruler stood up in bold defiance of Heaven and led Israel deeper and still deeper into idolatry, God sent message after message to His backslidden people. Through His prophets He gave them every opportunity to stay the tide of apostasy and to return to Him. . . . Never was the kingdom of Israel to be left without noble witnesses to the mighty power of God to save from sin. Even in the darkest hours some would remain true to their divine Ruler and in the midst of idolatry would live blameless in the sight of a holy God. These faithful ones were numbered among the goodly remnant through whom the eternal purpose of Jehovah was finally to be fulfilled.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 108.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 It has been suggested that through Hosea’s life and ministry, God’s word to Israel had in a sense “become flesh.” How is this idea only a small reflection of the great truth about the humanity of Jesus? See *John 1:14*.
- 2 Ancient Israel did not depart from God overnight. Instead, its apostasy was a gradual process. Prepare to share with your class members some of the ways in which one can remain faithful to God’s eternal principles in a constantly changing world.
- 3 Some people believe that the gospel message about God’s great love and salvation is presented clearly only in the New Testament and not in the Old. What is wrong with that idea?
- 4 In class, go over your answer to Tuesday’s final question.
- 5 The Old Testament was the Bible that Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul read. Look into the New Testament quotations from Hosea that are found in Matthew 9:13 and Romans 9:25, 26. How did Jesus and Paul use the gospel message in Hosea to proclaim truth to us?

## The Secondhand Church

Pamela Obero sat beside her mud house in Kenya and listened to the preacher's sermon over the loudspeaker. She was curious about the Seventh-day Adventist meetings being held on a nearby vacant lot, even though she belonged to another church.

The messages touched Pamela's heart, and at times she felt that the speaker talked directly to her. So, on Sabbath morning she took her five children to the meetings instead of to her own church. When the pastor invited those who wanted special prayer to come forward, Pamela took her children to the front. Her husband had died, and she was the sole support of her family. Life was difficult.

Pamela had been an ardent member of the charismatic church to which she belonged. She had donated the land on which the church members built their mud-brick house of worship. So, when she did not attend church for three weeks, some church members visited and asked why she was no longer attending. "I have found truth that I never knew before," she told them simply. "And I am learning how to properly raise my family."

Pamela and her children joined the nearest Seventh-day Adventist church, which was three miles (five kilometers) from her home. Then she learned that the charismatic church to which she had belonged had abandoned the mud-brick church they had built on her land. Pamela invited the church leaders to hold small-group worship services in the abandoned building, and the church accepted her offer.

When Pamela's friends from her former church asked her questions about why she had left, she shared with them new truths she had learned and invited them to worship in the new Seventh-day Adventist church—their former building. So far three of her friends have joined the Seventh-day Adventist group that worships in the mud-brick church.

The little congregation of 25 met in the mud-brick church for a year before it deteriorated to where it was no longer safe. The church members decided to rebuild with more permanent materials.

Pamela makes and sells porridge and buns to provide for her children. She is poor, but she shares with those in need when she can. When her friends laugh at her poor house, she smiles and tells them, "My God is my husband and my provider. He is so good to my family; I cannot thank Him enough."

Your mission offerings reach searching hearts like Pamela's around the world. Thank you.

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PAMELA OBERO *shares her faith in Kendu Bay, Kenya.*

# A Holy *and* Just God (Joel)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Joel 1; 2:28, 29; Acts 2:1–21; Joel 2:31, 32; Rom. 10:13; Matt. 10:28–31.*

**Memory Text:** “The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?” (*Joel 2:11, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** God can use crises to make His people sensitive to both their dependence on Him and their need for spiritual renewal and reformation.

In the massive locust plague and severe drought that were devastating the southern kingdom of Judah, the prophet Joel—a contemporary of Amos and Hosea—sees a sign of a “great and dreadful” day of judgment (*Joel 2:31*). Confronted with a crisis of such intensity and proportion, he calls all people in Judah to renounce sin and return to God. He describes the locusts as the Lord’s army and sees in their coming God’s punishment upon unfaithful Israel.

Joel prophesies that God’s future judgments will make the locust plague pale by comparison. But that same judgment will bring unparalleled blessings to those who are faithful to the Lord and who obey His teachings; that is, no matter how severe, judgment can lead to salvation and redemption for those whose hearts are open to the leading of the Lord.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 20.*

## A National Disaster

**Read Joel 1:1–12.** What is happening to the land of Judah?

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The prophet, who lived in an agricultural society, calls upon the farmers to be dismayed at the loss of their grain and fruit harvests. The ecological destruction could cripple the nation's economy for years. In addition to the loss of food, shade, and wood, there is a threat of topsoil erosion. For example, some fruit trees in Palestine take twenty years to grow before they become productive. In fact, agricultural devastation and deforestation were typical tactics of invading armies seeking to punish those they conquered by making impossible any prospect of a short-term recovery.

**Read Deuteronomy 28:38.** How does that help us to understand what is happening to Judah?

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Joel uses four different terms for the locusts (*Joel 1:4*) in order to express the intensity and the totality of the plague. The destruction caused by the locusts was made even worse by drought. All of the crops that the farmers had expected have withered, and the farmers despair because they have nothing to eat or sell; they do not even have seed for replanting. A calamity of such proportions was unheard of by their ancestors and was something to tell future generations about. The fact that a similar disaster had never happened before heightens the importance of the situation.

The prophet also announces the destruction of the dietary staples in the land of Israel, such as grapes, grain, and oil (*Deut. 14:23, 18:4*). Wheat and barley are the most important grains in Palestine. Vines and fig trees in the Bible symbolize peaceful living with abundance of God's blessings in the Promised Land (*1 Kings 4:25, Mic. 4:4, Zech. 3:10*). The idyllic image of peace and prosperity is to be able to sit under one's own vine and fig tree. All this now is threatened by divine judgment brought about because of their sins.

Harvest was a time of rejoicing (*Ps. 4:7, Isa. 9:3*). Although the land in Israel was a gift from the Lord, it still belonged to God. Israel was expected to be a faithful steward of the land. Above all, the people were expected to worship and obey God because He was the One who had given them the land in the first place.



## Blow the Trumpet!

When natural disasters occur, they provoke many questions, such as, “Why did God allow this to happen?” “Why have some people lived while others have died?” “Is there a lesson here that we could learn?” Joel had no doubt that the locust plague could lead to a deeper insight into God’s universal plan. In chapter 1, under divine inspiration, the prophet relates the national crisis to the spiritual situation in the land. The locusts have left nothing that could be offered as sacrifice to the Lord. The grain offering and the drink offering were part of the daily offering in the temple, in accordance with the instructions recorded in Exodus 29:40 and Numbers 28:5–8. The cutting off of the sacrifices was severe, but it should have served as a warning to the people of their grave condition. The loss of opportunity even to offer the sacrifices symbolized the breaking of the covenant between God and Israel. But, unlike many of the other prophets, Joel did not spend much time making an analysis of people’s failings. He was interested far more in dwelling on the cure as prescribed by Israel’s divine Physician.

**Read Joel 1:13–20. What is Joel saying to the people? However unique the circumstances, in what ways is that which is being said here a plea that is commonly seen throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments?**

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The prophet urges the spiritual leaders to call a nationwide day of prayer and fasting so that the people can search deep within their hearts, renounce their sins, and return to their God. In this way they will come out of the experience with a renewed trust in God’s love and justice. In the end, this disaster might lead the believers into a deeper relationship with their Lord.

Throughout Scripture, God is described as the Lord of nature, the One who created it, sustains it, and also uses it for His divine purposes. In this natural disaster, instead of having them rend their garments, the prophet Joel says that the people should rend their hearts and make them open to God’s grace and compassion.

**Disasters may strike us in many forms. When they do, regardless of our understanding of them and their causes, what Bible promises can we cling to for hope and the strength to endure? What promises are especially meaningful to you?**

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## The Gift of God's Spirit

**Read** Joel 2:28, 29 along with Acts 2:1–21. How is Peter interpreting the prophecy of Joel here?

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On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter announced that the Lord had fulfilled His promise, as given through Joel, regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Accompanying the outpouring of the Spirit, and as a visible sign of God's supernatural intervention in the history of humankind, God will cause extraordinary phenomena to be seen in nature, both on earth and in the sky.

“In immediate connection with the scenes of the great day of God, the Lord by the prophet Joel has promised a special manifestation of His Spirit. Joel 2:28. This prophecy received a partial fulfillment in the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost; but it will reach its full accomplishment in the manifestation of divine grace which will attend the closing work of the gospel.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 11.

In the immediate context of Joel, repentance will be followed by a great outpouring of God's Spirit. This will bring a wonderful renewal. Instead of destruction, God's gift of blessings will follow. The Lord reassures His people that His creation will be restored and the nation delivered from oppressors.

The Spirit is poured out upon God's people, just as the anointing oil was poured upon the heads of those who were elected by God for a special ministry. The Spirit is also a gift of power bestowed on the recipients so that they might do a particular work for God (*Exod. 31:2–5, Judg. 6:34*). Only this time the Spirit's manifestation will assume wide proportions. At that great point in history, salvation will be available to all who seek God. God's Spirit will fall on all the faithful—irrespective of age, gender, or social status—in a fulfillment of Moses' wish that all the Lord's people become prophets and that the Lord put His Spirit upon them (*Num. 11:29*).

**What are things you can do in your own life that can make you more receptive to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit?**

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## Proclaiming God's Name

**“The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls”** (*Joel 2:31, 32, NKJV*).

The darkening of the sun and the changing of the moon to blood should not be understood as natural disasters, but as supernatural signs of the approaching day of the Lord. In Bible times, many pagan nations worshiped heavenly bodies as their gods, something that Moses said the Israelites should never do (*Deut. 4:19*). In this sense, Joel's prophecy is predicting that the idols of the nations will begin to fade away when the Lord comes in judgment. Joel 3:15 adds that even the starry host will lose its power and will no longer give its light because the presence of the Lord's glory will outshine everything.

**While** Christ's appearance will terrify the unrepentant, how will the righteous welcome their Lord? What is the crucial difference? See *Isa. 25:9, Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21, Rom. 10:13*.

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In the Scriptures, the expression to “call on the name of the Lord” does not only mean to call oneself a follower of the Lord and to claim His promises. It also can mean to proclaim God's name, that is, to be a witness to others about the Lord and what He has done for the world. Abraham built altars and proclaimed God's name in the land of Canaan (*Gen. 12:8*). To Moses on Mount Sinai, God proclaimed His goodness and grace (*Exod. 33:19, 34:5*). The psalmist calls on the faithful to give thanks to God and call on His name by making known to the nations what He has done (*Ps. 105:1*). The same words are found in a song of salvation composed by the prophet Isaiah (*Isa. 12:4*).

Thus, to proclaim the Lord's name means both to be messengers of the glad tidings that God still rules the world and also to call on the people of the world to view everything in the context of God's deeds and character. It also means to tell everyone about God's generous gift of salvation that is offered to every human being.

**What does it mean to you to “call on the name of the Lord”? How do you do it, and what happens when you do?**

## The Refuge in Times of Trouble (Joel 3)

Biblical prophets compare the coming judgment from God to the roaring of a lion, a sound that makes everyone tremble (*Joel 3:16, Amos 1:2, 3:8*). In the Bible, Zion designates the location of God's earthly throne in Jerusalem. From this place God will punish the enemy, but at the same time He will vindicate His people who patiently await His victory. They will share in His triumph when He renews creation.

To some people Scripture's portrayals of God's final judgment are difficult to comprehend. It is good to keep in mind that evil and sin are very real and that their forces are strong in trying to oppose God and to destroy every form of life. God is an enemy of evil. That is why Joel's words invite us to examine our lives in order to be sure that we are on God's side so that we can be sheltered on the day of judgment.

**Read** Matthew 10:28–31. How do these texts help us to understand, even during calamitous times, what we have been given in Jesus?

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The Lord sustains those persons who persevere in faith. He may bring desolation upon the earth (*Joel 3:1–15*); yet, His people should not fear His acts of sovereign judgments, because He has promised to protect them (*vs. 16*). He has given them His word of assurance. His sovereign and gracious acts demonstrate that He is a faithful, covenant God, who never again will allow the righteous to be put to shame (*Joel 2:27*).

Joel's book ends with a vision of a transformed world where a river flows in the midst of the New Jerusalem, the very presence of the eternal God among a forgiven people (*Joel 3:18–21*).

This prophetic message challenges us to walk in the Spirit, to pursue Christian living wholeheartedly, and to reach out to all who have not yet called on the name of Christ. As we do, we claim the divine promise of Christ's abiding presence through the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the hearts of His faithful people.

**“We must know our real condition, or we shall not feel our need of Christ's help. We must understand our danger, or we shall not flee to the refuge. We must feel the pain of our wounds, or we should not desire healing.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 158. What is your understanding of your own “real condition”? What pains are you suffering? How have you experienced the “refuge” promised to us in Christ?**

**Further Study:** The prophet’s name, Joel, was common in Bible times, and it means “The Lord is God.” This name is appropriate to the overall theme of the book: only God is completely holy and just, and His work is sovereign on earth. The history of His people, as well as that of the nations, is in His hands. The same holds true for the life of every human being.

“The tremendous issues of eternity demand of us something besides an imaginary religion, a religion of words and forms, where truth is kept in the outer court. God calls for a revival and a reformation. The words of the Bible, and the Bible alone, should be heard from the pulpit. But the Bible has been robbed of its power, and the result is seen in a lowering of the tone of spiritual life. In many sermons of today there is not that divine manifestation which awakens the conscience and brings life to the soul. The hearers cannot say, ‘Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?’ Luke 24:32. There are many who are crying out for the living God, longing for the divine presence. Let the word of God speak to the heart. Let those who have heard only tradition and human theories and maxims, hear the voice of Him who can renew the soul unto eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 626.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1** What are the ways in which Joel’s message is especially important to us, living as we are at the end of time when serious and sobering events undoubtedly await us?
- 2** Read the whole book of Joel in one sitting and answer the following questions: To what extent did Joel’s message apply to his generation, and to what extent did it have a future application?
- 3** Joel’s book describes various types of divine blessings poured upon God’s people. Does this prophecy make a distinction between material and spiritual blessings? If so, how?
- 4** How does our understanding of the great controversy help us to understand the terrible trials and calamities that the world faces?
- 5** The Ellen G. White statement in Friday’s study discusses an “imaginary religion.” What might that mean? How can we know whether our religion is real or imaginary?

## Light in the Jungle: Part 1

The teenager stepped off the bus and looked around. He had never been in a city before. But he had no time to gaze at the tall buildings and busy streets, for he was on a mission. But where should he go? He prayed, “God, direct me to the people who keep Your Sabbath.” Then he started walking.

He found himself in front of a theater and watched as people entered. He felt led to follow them inside, though he didn’t know what he would find. Someone welcomed him to the large hall filling with people. He sat down and waited.

Juan, the teenager, lives in a small village in the jungle of southeastern Ecuador. His people knew little about God. Juan had received a New Testament while attending a high school in a nearby town and read it eagerly. He’d discovered truths about God that fed a hunger in his heart. He asked God to teach him how to follow Jesus.

Then on a trip to another town to buy supplies, Juan had found a tattered book and began reading it. The book confirmed what he had been reading in his Bible and explained the meaning of keeping the Sabbath.

Juan was determined to find the people who kept the Sabbath! He set out on a three-day hike through the jungle to the nearest large town to search for Sabbath keepers. But no one knew of any Sabbath keepers there. “Go to Ambato” [ahm-BAH-toh], someone said. So Juan spent his few pesos on a bus ticket to Ambato. He arrived late in the afternoon and started walking in search of God’s people. Then he found the theater.

A man stood to speak. Juan listened with growing excitement as the man talked about the Sabbath and other truths Juan had found in his Bible. God had guided Juan’s footsteps from his jungle home to this theater so he could find the people who kept His commandments!



After the meeting Juan found a pastor and told him, “I want to be baptized!” The surprised pastor met with Juan the next day and realized that the boy knew God’s Word. He agreed to baptize him that Sabbath. Juan had never been inside a Seventh-day Adventist church until the day he was baptized. The pastor wanted Juan to stay in town, but the boy refused. He had to return to share his faith with his fellow villagers.

*(Continued next week.)*

JUAN SAANT (left) shares his faith in the jungles of southeastern Ecuador.

# Lord of All Nations (Amos)



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Amos 1–2; Isaiah 58; Luke 12:47, 48; 1 Kings 8:37–40; Amos 4:12, 13; Obadiah.*

**Memory Text:** “A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” (*Amos 3:8, NKJV*).

**Key Thought:** Acts of inhumanity are sins against God and will be judged accordingly.

A lion in Scripture often represents the king of the animal world. His appearance evokes irresistible strength and majesty as well as ferocity and destructive power. Even when not actively hunting, the lion can be heard, its roar audible for miles. Amos, a shepherd, was sent to the Israelites to warn them that he had heard a lion roar—and the lion was none other than their Lord! Moved by the Holy Spirit, the prophet Amos compared God's way of speaking to the nations, as well as to His special people, with the roaring of a lion (*see Amos 1:2*).

Amos was called to prophesy to the nations who committed crimes against humanity. He also was sent to a society where a privileged and religious people lived in peace and prosperity. Yet, this same people oppressed the poor and allowed for dishonest business and bribery in court. This week we will listen to what the Lord has to say about these despicable actions.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 27.*

## Crimes Against Humanity

**Read** Amos 1 and 2. Why does the Lord warn that punishment is coming?

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The first two chapters in Amos' book contain seven prophecies against neighboring nations, followed by a prophecy against Israel. The foreign nations are not judged because they are Israel's enemies but because of their violations of universal human principles. Two things stand out in Amos's condemnation: the absence of loyalty and the absence of pity.

For instance, Tyre was a leading merchant city located on the Mediterranean coast north of Israel. Because of its almost impregnable island fortress, the city boasted of its security. Moreover, the leaders of Tyre secured peace treaties with several surrounding nations, such as the Philistines. The city was allied with Israel by a "treaty of brotherhood" during the reigns of David and Solomon (*1 Kings 5: 1, 12*) and even of King Ahab (*1 Kings 16:30, 31*). It is not surprising to read in *1 Kings 9:13* that Hiram, the king of Tyre, called Solomon "my brother."

Yet, the people of Tyre had violated the "covenant of brothers." Tyre was not condemned for taking away the captives but for handing them over to Israel's enemies, the Edomites. Thus, the people of Tyre were responsible for the cruelties that these captives suffered at the hands of their enemies. From God's perspective, the person who assists and supports a crime is as guilty as the person who commits it.

Because God is all-sovereign, He holds the destiny of all the world in His hands. He has purposes and concerns that reach far beyond Israel's borders. The God of Israel is the Lord of all nations; all human history is His concern. He is the Creator God, who gives life to all, and all are accountable to Him.

**Who among us does not bristle in pain at the incredible injustice we see? Were there no God, what hope would we have of justice ever being done? What does the promise, found throughout the Bible, of God bringing justice and judgment to the world mean to you? How can we learn to cling to that promise amid all the injustice that we see now?**

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## Justice for the Oppressed

God’s universal judgment is one of the central teachings found in Amos. In the beginning of his book, the prophet announces God’s judgment on several of Israel’s neighbors because of their crimes against humanity. Then, however, Amos boldly declares that God also will judge Israel. The anger of the Lord is directed not only at the nations but also at the people He has chosen. The people of Judah have rejected the Word of the Lord and have not kept His instructions.

At the same time, Amos dealt with Israel much more extensively than even Judah because she had broken God’s covenant and committed so many sins. Israel’s economic prosperity and political stability led to spiritual decay. This spiritual decay displayed itself in social injustice. In Israel, the rich exploited the poor, and the powerful exploited the weak. The rich cared only for themselves and their personal gain, even when it came at the expense and suffering of the poor. (Not much has changed in a few thousand years, has it?)

In his preaching, Amos taught that there is a living God who cares about how we treat others. Justice is more than an idea or a norm. Justice is a divine concern. The prophet warned that Israel’s stone houses, ivory-inlaid furniture, top quality food and drink, as well as the best body lotions—all would be destroyed.

**Read Isaiah 58.** In what ways does this chapter capture aspects of present truth? In what ways, though, is our message to the world much more than this?

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The Bible clearly teaches that social justice should be a natural product of the gospel. As the Holy Spirit makes us more like Jesus, we learn to share God’s concerns. The books of Moses insist on the fair treatment of foreigners, widows, and orphans (*Exod. 22:21–24*). The prophets speak of God’s concern about the just and compassionate treatment of less privileged people (*Isa. 58:6, 7*). The psalmist calls the God who lives in His holy dwelling “a father of the fatherless, a defender of widows” (*Ps. 68:5, NKJV*). Christ shows great concern for those who are rejected by society (*Mark 7:24–30, John 4:7–26*). The Lord’s brother, James, calls on us to put our faith into action and help the needy (*James 2:14–26*). No follower of Christ can do anything less and really be a follower of Christ.

## The Peril of Privilege

Amos's prophetic message was not intended to be restricted to the historical situation in Israel but to expand the scope of the message beyond Israel and Judah. In the Old Testament, Israel had a unique, but not exclusive, claim on God.

Read Amos 3:1, 2. The Hebrew verb *yada*, "to know," which is used in verse 2, bears a special sense of intimacy. In Jeremiah 1:5, for example, God says that He "knew" the prophet and set him apart even before his birth. Such was the case with Israel. It was not just another nation among nations. Rather, God set it apart for a sacred divine purpose. They stood in special relationship with Him.

God Himself had chosen Israel and brought it out of slavery to freedom. The exodus from Egypt was the single most important event in the beginning of Israel's history as a nation. It set the stage for God's acts of redemption and the conquest of the land of Canaan. But Israel's strength and prosperity led to pride and complacency in regard to its privileged status as the Lord's chosen people.

**Read** Christ's statement from Luke 12:47, 48. In what ways can we understand the principle He taught there: when great privileges in life are abused, they will be replaced by great penalties?

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Under divine inspiration, the prophet warns that because the people of Israel are the Lord's elect, they particularly will be held accountable for their actions. The Lord is saying that Israel's unique relationship with God carries obligations, and punishment will result if those obligations are not fulfilled. In other words, Israel, as God's chosen people, is all the more liable to His judgments because the privilege entails responsibility. Thus, Israel's election was not just to privileged status; it was called to be witnesses to the world about the Lord who had so blessed them.

**"The professed churches of Christ in this generation are exalted to the highest privileges. The Lord has been revealed to us in ever-increasing light. Our privileges are far greater than were the privileges of God's ancient people."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 317. Think about all that we have been given as Seventh-day Adventists. Why should the responsibilities that come with these privileges make us tremble? Do they, or have we simply gotten used to them? Have we even become complacent about all that we have been given? If so, how can we change?**

## Israel's Rendezvous With God

**“Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel”** (*Amos 4:12*).

Chapter 4 of Amos begins with the description of Israel's sins, and it ends with the announcement of the day of reckoning. God makes His people especially accountable for the ways in which they live and treat others.

Amos has listed a series of natural disasters, any one of which should have been enough to turn the nation to God. The list is composed of seven disasters, the full measure of punishments for the breaking of God's covenant (in accordance with the words of Moses from Leviticus 26). Some of the disasters remind one of the plagues God sent against Egypt, while the description of the last calamity explicitly mentions the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

**According to Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, what should disasters normally lead people to do?** *1 Kings 8: 37–40.*

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The people of Israel did not behave like normal people anymore, and God found it impossible to get their attention. Moreover, God's judgments had resulted in the hardening of the people's hearts. Because the people failed to return to the Lord, Amos presented one last chance for repentance.

The final judgment is impending, but Amos does not specify what the judgment would be. The haunting uncertainty in Amos' words makes the threat of judgment even more ominous. Israel has failed to seek God; so, God goes out to meet Israel. If punishment fails, will an encounter with God save Israel?

Amos 4:12 begins with the words “‘thus will I do to you’” (*NKJV*), which echo the traditional oath formula. This solemn statement calls for a response from Israel to prepare to meet its God as it did prior to God's appearance at Sinai (*Exod. 19:11, 15*).

**Read carefully Amos 4:12, 13. If, suddenly, you were to hear the warning, “Prepare to meet your God, O [your name here]”—what would be your response? What is your only hope?** *See Rom. 3:19–28.*

## The Pride That Leads to a Fall

**Read** the book of Obadiah. What important moral and spiritual truths can we take away from this book?

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Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, and it reports on the prophetic vision of God's judgment upon the land of Edom. The message of the book focuses on three issues: Edom's arrogance (*vss. 1–4*), Edom's coming humiliation (*vss. 5–9*), and Edom's violence against Judah (*vss. 10–14*).

The Edomites were the descendants of Jacob's brother Esau. The hostility between the Israelites and the Edomites goes back to the family feud between the twin brothers, who later became the fathers of the two nations. Yet, according to Genesis 33, the two brothers were later reconciled. Thus, the Israelites were commanded by God not to " 'abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother' " (*Deut. 23:7, NKJV*).

In spite of this, the hostilities between the two nations continued for centuries. When Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and took its citizens into captivity, the Edomites not only rejoiced, but they even preyed on the fleeing Israelites and helped to plunder Jerusalem (*Ps. 137:7*). For this reason the prophet Obadiah warned that Edom would be judged by its own standard: " 'As you have done, it shall be done to you' " (*Obadiah 15, NKJV*). The Edomites did not behave as brothers toward the people of Judah in their worst hour but rather joined the enemy forces (*Lam. 4:21, 22*).

The region that was occupied by Edom is located southeast of the Dead Sea. It is a mountainous land filled with high mountain peaks, sharp crags, caves, and clefts in which armies could hide. A number of Edomite cities were located in these nearly inaccessible sites. Sela (also known as Petra) was Edom's capital city. The nation developed an arrogant confidence summed up in the question, " 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' " (*Obadiah 3, NKJV*).

God holds responsible those who take advantage of others in their time of distress. Obadiah warned the proud people of Edom that God would bring humiliation upon their heads. There is no place to escape from the Lord (*Amos 9:2, 3*). The coming day of the Lord will bring both judgment and salvation. Edom will drink God's cup of wrath, while the fortunes of God's people will be restored.

**Further Study:** Read the following quotations and discuss how they help us to understand the messages from Amos 1–4 and Obadiah in a clearer way.

“From the beginnings of Israelite religion the belief that God had chosen this particular people to carry out His mission has been both a cornerstone of Hebrew faith and a refuge in moments of distress. And yet, the prophets felt that to many of their contemporaries this cornerstone was a stumbling block; this refuge, an escape. They had to remind the people that chosenness must not be mistaken as divine favoritism or immunity from chastisement, but, on the contrary, that it meant being more seriously exposed to divine judgment and chastisement. . . .

“Does chosenness mean that God is exclusively concerned with Israel? Does the Exodus from Egypt imply that God is involved only in the history of Israel and is totally oblivious of the fate of other nations?”—Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, pp. 32, 33.

“With the defenses of the soul broken down, the misguided worshippers had no barrier against sin and yielded themselves to the evil passions of the human heart.

“Against the marked oppression, the flagrant injustice, the unwonted luxury and extravagance, the shameless feasting and drunkenness, the gross licentiousness and debauchery, of their age, the prophets lifted their voices; but in vain were their protests, in vain their denunciation of sin. ‘Him that rebuketh in the gate,’ declared Amos, ‘they hate, . . . and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.’ ‘They afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right.’ Amos 5:10, 12.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 282.

## Discussion Questions:

**1** It is easy to be friendly with someone who has something to offer you. What about those who are in distress and have nothing to offer you but, in fact, have need of what you can give to them? What kind of attitude must we show toward such people? What kind of attitude do you show toward them?

**2** Think about that which we have been given as Seventh-day Adventists. Most Christians have no idea of the blessings of the Sabbath (much less its end-time importance); most think that the dead go either immediately to heaven or to the torments of hell. Many do not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus, nor do they believe in a literal Second Coming. What other great truths have we been given that most other people do not know about? What responsibilities come with having these truths?

## Light in the Jungle: Part 2

Juan had found Christ and discovered the Sabbath while reading the Bible in his jungle home in southeastern Ecuador. God then led him on a quest to a city several days' journey away, where he met Seventh-day Adventists and asked to be baptized. But when the pastor asked him to stay in the city, Juan refused.

"I must return home and tell my family and fellow villagers," he said. The pastor gave him bus fare to return home.

"We have a God who loves us and wants us to meet with Him on His Sabbath," he told his family and friends. "He has many things to teach us." At first few people listened to Juan's message. But little by little some began to accept what Juan said.

Juan realized that he needed help to teach his people. He made the long journey back to the city of Ambato to invite the pastor to visit his village and help teach the people. The pastor agreed to go, and the two men flew to an airport in the rain forest. From there they met villagers who helped carry their equipment through the mosquito-infested jungles and across several rivers in oppressive heat.

The pastor taught them Bible truths and led seminars in health, marriage, and family life. Juan had prepared the people well, and by the end of the week 15 people were ready to be baptized.

After the pastor returned to Ambato, Juan continued sharing God's Word in surrounding villages. Five months later the pastor returned for another week of seminars and baptized 18 more people.

The villagers had built a large church of thatch and wood that was filled with worshipers on Sabbath. ADRA sponsored a literacy program to teach the people to read so they could read the Bible for themselves. Members of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Ambato conducted a large health ministry and Vacation Bible School program. And more people were baptized.

Four years later more than 135 people in Juan's jungle home have given their lives to God and been baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Some of the new believers help Juan spread God's message to those in other villages who are waiting to hear. Today simple chapels stand in several of these villages.

Juan thanks God for leading him to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and helping him share the gospel message with others. Your mission offerings help support Juan as he works among the indigenous people of southeastern Ecuador. A recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped expand the Adventist radio network in Ecuador, making God's message available to thousands who might not otherwise hear it.

# Seek *the* Lord *and* Live! (Amos)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Amos 5:1–15, Heb. 5:14, Isa. 5:20, Amos 7:10–17, 9:11–15, Acts 15:13–18.*

**Memory Text:** “Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and thus may the LORD God of hosts be with you, just as you have said!” (*Amos 5:14, NASB*).

**Key Thought:** Amos reminds us that only in seeking the Lord is there life.

Had Israel been true to God, He could have accomplished His purpose through their honor and exaltation. If they had walked in the ways of obedience, He would have made them ‘high above all nations which He hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honor.’ ‘All people of the earth,’ said Moses, ‘shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee.’ ‘The nations which shall hear all these statutes’ shall say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ Deut. 26:19; 28:10; 4:6. But because of their unfaithfulness, God’s purpose could be wrought out only through continued adversity and humiliation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 28.

This week, as we continue to study the book of Amos, we will see even more of the ways in which the Lord pled with His people to put away their sins and return unto Him, the only true Source of life. In the end, we all have only one of two choices: life or death. There is no middle ground. Amos shows us a little more about the stark differences between these choices.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 4.*

## Hate Evil, Love Good

Things had become very bad in Israel; the corruption, the oppression, the sin. The point was reached where the very survival of the nation was at stake. For this reason, Amos composed a lament to mourn the coming death of Israel (*Amos 5:1–15*). Often in the prophetic books, no distinction is made between the word of the prophet and the word of the Lord. Thus, Amos' lament is also God's lament over Israel.

The purpose of the funeral song in Amos 5:1–15 was to shock the people into facing reality. If they persisted in their sins, they surely would die. If, on the other hand, they rejected evil and returned to God, they would live. The Lord's character is such that He expects conformity to the divine will.

**Read Amos 5:14, 15. How does one learn to “hate the evil and love the good”?** See also Heb. 5:14, Rom. 12:9, Prov. 8:36.

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Amos invites the people not just to stop seeking evil but also to hate evil and love good. The commands in this section are progressive. The verbs *to love* (Heb. 'ahav) and *to hate* (sane') in the Bible often refer to decisions and actions, not simply to feelings and attitudes. In other words, a change in the people's attitudes will lead to change in their actions.

**In this context, what warning is found in Isaiah 5:20?**

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“All who in that evil day would fearlessly serve God according to the dictates of conscience, will need courage, firmness, and a knowledge of God and His word; for those who are true to God will be persecuted, their motives will be impugned, their best efforts misinterpreted, and their names cast out as evil. Satan will work with all his deceptive power to influence the heart and becloud the understanding, to make evil appear good, and good evil.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 431.

**How can we learn to love the good and hate the evil if we can be deceived into calling evil good and good evil? What is our only protection against this deception?**



## Religion as Usual

**Read** Amos 5:23, 24; Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; Psalm 51:17. What are these texts saying? More important, how can the principle here be applied directly to our own spiritual life today, as Seventh-day Adventists? That is, in what ways might we be guilty of doing exactly what is warned about here? (Remember, too, that it is very easy to be self-deceived in this area).

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More than most other books of the Bible, Amos focuses on injustice, cruelty, and inhumanity. It also offers the divine perspective on such practices. Amos preached that God despised the empty rituals of the people's dead formalism, and He called upon them to reform. The Lord was not pleased by outward and empty forms of worship offered to Him by those who at the same time were oppressing others for the sake of personal gain. Their lives revealed that they missed the whole point of what it means to be followers of Yahweh; they also totally misunderstood the deeper meaning of His law.

Indeed, God rejected their religious rituals because they did not flow from lives of faith. The climactic words in Amos 5:14, 15 are the command to seek the Lord and live. Seeking the Lord is contrasted with making pilgrimages to the famous religious centers in Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba (*Amos 5:5*), three cities with sanctuaries that were destined for destruction.

What God really wanted was justice and righteousness in the land. The command to "seek the Lord" parallels the one to "seek good." The Lord called on the remnant to distance themselves from evil practices and religious formalism and, instead, to let justice flow like a river and righteousness flow like a never-failing stream. While justice concerns the establishment of what is right before God, righteousness is the quality of life in relationship to God and others in the community. The picture presented here is that of a religious people whose religion had degraded into nothing but forms and rites without the change of heart that must accompany true faith. (*See Deut. 10:16.*)

How careful we must be.

## Called to Be a Prophet

Amos' home was Tekoa, in Judah, but God sent him to prophesy in Israel. He had gone to the northern kingdom and preached with such power that the land was not "able to bear all his words" (*Amos 7:10, NKJV*). Certainly many Israelites looked at Amos with suspicion and rejected him as God's messenger. In spite of that rejection, he faithfully performed his prophetic ministry.

**Read** *Amos 7:10–17*. What familiar pattern is seen here? What other examples can you find in the Bible of the same thing happening? What should we learn from all these examples?

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Among those who did not like Amos' preaching was Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, who accused Amos of conspiracy against Israel's king. Bethel was one of the two royal sanctuaries, the very centers of apostate worship. Amos had predicted in public that if Israel did not repent, its king would die by the sword and the people would be led away captive. Amaziah ordered Amos to go back to the land of Judah, where his messages against Israel would be more popular.

In his response to the priest, Amos affirmed that his prophetic call came from God. He claimed that he was not a professional prophet who could be hired for services. Amos distanced himself from professional prophets who prophesied for gain.

However, speaking the truth by no means guarantees acceptance, because the truth can at times be uncomfortable and—if it disturbs those in power—it can produce serious opposition. God's call compelled Amos to preach so openly and so boldly against the sins of the king and the nobility from the northern kingdom that he was accused of treason.

**What is our attitude when told that our actions and/or lifestyles are sinful and will bring punishment upon us? What does our answer tell us about ourselves and about, perhaps, the need for a change of heart and attitude?**

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## The Worst Type of Famine

“ ‘The days are coming,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it’ ” (*Amos 8:11, 12, NIV*). How are we to understand the meaning of these verses?

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In Amos 8, the prophet describes devastating effects of God’s judgment on unrepentant Israel. God will punish the people for their sins by sending famine upon the land. But in verses 11 and 12, the prophet speaks of hunger and thirst for God’s Word. The tragedy that will stand out above all others is a famine of God’s Word because God will be silent, and no other famine could be worse.

Often when the people of Israel experienced great distress, they would turn to the Lord for a prophetic word in hope of guidance. This time God’s answer will consist of silence. A part of God’s judgment on His people will be the Lord’s withdrawal of His Word through His prophets.

If God’s people continue to be disobedient, the prophet says, the time would come when they will be eager to hear the message, but it will be too late to turn to God’s Word in hope of escaping the judgment. This is the result of Israel’s persistent refusal to hear God’s message through Amos. Like Saul before his last battle (*1 Sam. 28:6*), the people will one day come to realize how much they need God’s Word.

An entire population will frantically search for God’s Word, the same word that they chose to ignore in the prophet’s time. Those especially affected will be the young. While the former generations heard God’s Word and rejected it, the young people never will have the opportunity to hear the prophetic proclamation.

**What** do the following passages teach about the dire effects of the silence of God? *1 Sam. 14:37, Ps. 74:9, Prov. 1:28, Lam. 2:9, Hos. 5:6, Mic. 3:5–7.*

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**In what ways is it possible to silence the voice of God in our lives? However scary that thought, dwell on the implications. How can we make sure that never happens to us?**

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## Judah's Ruins Restored

The prophet turns from the dark picture of the people's sinfulness and the resulting judgments to the glorious promises of the future restoration (*Amos 9:11–15*). The day of the Lord, previously described as the day of punishment (*Amos 5:18*), is now a day of salvation because salvation, not punishment, is God's last word to His people. However, salvation will come after punishment, not instead of it.

Amid all the gloom and doom, Amos does close his book with a message of hope. Facing the prospect of an immediate exile, David's dynasty has fallen so low that it can no longer be called a house but a hut. But David's kingdom will be renewed and united under one ruler. Beyond Israel's borders, other nations will call on God's name and enjoy His blessings along with Israel. The book concludes on this happy and hopeful note.

Biblical prophets did not teach that God's punishment is for punishment's sake itself. Behind almost all the warnings is the call of redemption. Though the threat of exile was imminent, the Lord encouraged the remnant with the promise of restoration to the land. The remnant would enjoy the renewal of the covenant. Those who experience the judgment would see God acting to save and restore.

**What** is the ultimate fulfillment of Amos' promises about the restoration of God's people? See *Luke 1:32, 33; Acts 15:13–18*.

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Many Jewish teachers regarded Amos 9:11 as a messianic promise given to Abram, reaffirmed to David, and expressed throughout the Old Testament. The new king from David's line will reign over many nations in fulfillment of God's promise to Abram (*Gen. 12:1–3*). The Messiah will reign even over enemies such as Edom. The restored ruins of God's people never again will be destroyed.

Through the coming of Jesus Christ, David's greater Son, God upheld His gracious promise. James quoted this passage from Amos to show that the door of salvation is open to Gentiles to enjoy a full share of covenant privileges entrusted to the church. God would offer His redemptive blessings to Jews and Gentiles in the promised Messiah, the offspring of both Abram and David.

**The ultimate fulfillment of these promises to everyone who accepts them, Jew or Gentile, will be seen only at the Second Coming. How can we keep that hope and promise alive and not let it fade amid the stresses of life?**

**Further Study:** “Our standing before God depends, not upon the amount of light we have received, but upon the use we make of what we have. Thus even the heathen who choose the right as far as they can distinguish it are in a more favorable condition than are those who have had great light, and profess to serve God, but who disregard the light, and by their daily life contradict their profession.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 239.

### Discussion Questions:

**1** As a class, go over your answers to Sunday’s question about learning to hate evil and love the good, as well as the danger of calling evil good and good evil. Why is this danger especially prevalent when culture and society start to change their values in ways that accept certain behaviors, lifestyles, and attitudes that clearly are condemned in the Bible? As individuals, and even as a church as a whole, we are not immune to the cultural and societal trends in which we are immersed, are we? Dwell on the changes that have happened in your own culture and society over the years. For example, what things that were once considered shameful and taboo now openly are expressed and practiced, even deemed good or, at least, not wrong? How have these changes impacted the church’s attitudes toward these acts? What can we do in order to protect ourselves and our church from falling into the dangerous trap of calling evil good? At the same time, what cultural changes for the good have impacted the church in a good way, a way that more closely reflects the principles of love and acceptance revealed by Jesus’ life?

**2** Dwell more on this idea of “a famine” for the Word of God. What is the likely way that could come about? Does the Lord purposely hide truth from people, or is it that people’s attitudes make them totally unreceptive to the Word of the Lord? Or could it be both? Or something else entirely? Discuss.

**3** As Seventh-day Adventists who live with so much light and have so many reasons to believe in the truths that we have been given, are we not in danger of thinking that our knowledge of these wonderful truths alone is all that we need? How should the truths with which we have been blessed impact the way in which we live and interact with others, not only in the church but in our community? In other words, how can we live out the truths with which we have been entrusted? Why is it so important that we do?

## One More Door

Anatoly [ah-nah-TOH-lee] was tired. He had been working for hours to share pamphlets and Bible study cards in his assigned territory with little success. He wanted to go home, but he had promised God that he would visit every home he could, so he continued to work.

Anatoly, 13, lives in Moldova, a small country west of Russia. His shoulders slumped as he approached the last house on the road. He whispered a prayer and knocked at the door. He heard voices inside and thought the family had guests. But before he could leave, the door swung open and a woman invited him in.

She removed some papers from a chair and invited Anatoly to sit down. She offered him some tea and introduced him to her 12 children. Anatoly shook off his surprise and offered the family a book and a Bible enrollment card. The woman seemed pleased to have the booklet. They visited for a few minutes before Anatoly stood to leave. The woman invited him to come again.

As Anatoly walked home, he was glad he had gone to that last house. He decided to visit the family again.

When Anatoly returned to see the family, they seemed cautious. He invited them to attend evangelistic meetings at the church, and Natasha, the eldest daughter, wanted to go. But the parents gently refused his invitation. So when Anatoly saw Natasha, her brother, Vania, and sister, Lena, at the meetings, he was surprised. "Did your parents change their mind and let you come?"

"Not exactly," Natasha said. "We told Mother that we were going for a walk. But I've learned so much tonight! I want to come back, but I don't know whether my parents will allow us." Anatoly promised to pray that they could attend the meetings.

Natasha, Vania, and Lena attended the meetings, but their parents refused to allow them to attend church on Sabbath. Yet, the three had learned about the importance of the Sabbath and were determined to keep God's holy day. Natasha told her parents simply, "God is God. He wants our worship all the time, not just once or twice a year. What He commands, we must do."

The children worked hard to finish their chores by Friday so they could worship on Sabbath. Natasha asked to be baptized, and Vania and Lena joined Pathfinders. The children were such good examples at home that their parents agreed they could attend church. They even took their younger brothers and sisters.

Anatoly is glad that he did not ignore that last house on the road. Because he was faithful, another family met the Savior. Our mission offerings help provide funds for evangelism at home and around the world. Thank you for giving.

# Eager to Forgive (Jonah)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** Jonah 1–4, Ps. 139:1–12, Isa. 42:5, Rev. 10:6, Matt. 12:39–41, 2 Chron. 36:15–17.

**Memory Text:** “ ‘But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD’ ” (*Jonah 2:9, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** The book of Jonah reveals, among other things, that God is more willing to forgive others than we often are.

The story of Jonah, this rather unusual messenger of God, is one of the best known in the Bible. The prophet had been sent by God to warn Nineveh of coming destruction. He suspected that these non-Hebrew people might repent of their sins and that God would forgive them. Being a true prophet, Jonah knew that God's plan was to save Nineveh, not to destroy it. Maybe that is why he, at first, tried to run away. Due to forces beyond his control, however, Jonah changed his mind and obeyed God's command.

In response to Jonah's preaching, the entire city believed the message and repented in a way in which, unfortunately, Israel and Judah did not. Jonah, meanwhile, had a number of important lessons to learn. The story shows how God patiently was teaching His narrow and stubborn prophet what grace, mercy, and forgiveness are all about.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 11.*

## The Disobedient Prophet (Jonah 1)

Not much is known about Jonah or his family background. Second Kings 14:25 tells that he lived in the northern part of Israel and ministered during the eighth century B.C. The same text reveals that Jonah predicted a territorial expansion of Israel's kingdom.

Nineveh was historically one of the three great cities of Assyria, an important country situated by the Tigris River. Because God is the Lord of all nations and all peoples are accountable to Him (*Amos 1–2*), He sent His servant Jonah to warn the Ninevites of impending destruction. God's command recorded in Jonah 1:2 to "preach against it" (*NIV*) also can be translated as "preach to it."

Assyrian cruelty was notorious. About a century later, the prophet Nahum called Nineveh a "bloody city . . . full of lies and robbery" (*Nah. 3:1*). Jonah was sent to deliver God's message to such people. Perhaps it was fear of the hated Assyrians, among other things, that prompted Jonah's attitude. When told by God to make a trip east to Nineveh, the prophet refused and tried to flee west by ship to Tarshish.

At first, all things appeared to work well for Jonah, but then the Lord sent a great storm against the ship in order to teach His servant the lesson that no one can hide from God.

Jonah ran from God because he did not want to do God's will. Even now people have many reasons to try to run away from God. Some do it because they do not know Him personally. Others reject even the idea of God and His Word; while their motives vary, in many cases they do so in order to not feel guilty about the way in which they live. After all, if there is no higher power to answer to, why not do whatever you want? There are even some Christians who avoid God when He calls them to do something that they do not want to do, something that goes against their inherently selfish and sinful nature.

**Read Psalm 139:1–12. What's the basic message there for us? What kind of feelings does this fundamental truth evoke in you? Or look at it this way: we believe that God not only sees all that we do but knows even our thoughts. Do we live with that constant realization, or do we tend to try and blot it out of our minds? Or, perhaps, are we just so used to the idea that we just do not pay it much attention? Whatever the reasons, how differently would you act if, at all times, you were keenly sensitive to the fact that God does know your every thought?**



## Reluctant Witness

In Jonah 1, the Lord wants to halt Jonah's escape, so He stirs up such a severe storm that it threatens to wreck the ship. The seamen call on their gods for help. Due to the severity of the storm, they feel that someone must have provoked the anger of the gods. They cast lots to decide who will be first to volunteer information about himself that might expose such an offense. For the casting of lots, each individual brings an identifiable stone or wooden marker. The markers are placed in a container that is shaken until one of the markers comes out. The lot falls on Jonah, who now confesses his sins and urges the seamen to throw him into the sea.

This story is remarkable because in it the non-Hebrew seamen act positively while Jonah is presented in a negative light. Although they worship many gods, the seamen show a great respect for the Lord to whom they pray. They are also tenderhearted toward the Lord's servant Jonah, which is why they go out of their way to try to row back to the land. Finally, they agree with Jonah that he should be thrown overboard. With this done, the storm stops and the seamen sacrifice to the Lord and praise Him.

**In** verse 9, how does Jonah describe the Lord whom he said he feared? What is significant about the way in which he described the Lord? See also Rev 14:7, Isa. 42:5, Rev. 10:6.

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Jonah's confession of faith in God as Creator of the sea and land underscores the futility of his attempts to escape from God's presence. The immediate cessation of the storm after the men throw Jonah into the sea shows them that the Lord, as Creator, has control of the sea. Because of this, the seamen worship the Lord all the more. How long their newfound fear and reverence for the Creator was to last, we are not told. There is no doubt, however, that they do learn something about Him from this experience.

**We can barely comprehend many of the wonders of the world around us, much less all that is beyond the reach of our senses and even our imagination. How does the Creator speak to you through that which He has made?**

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## Jonah's Psalm

When Jonah was thrown into the sea, a big fish swallowed him at God's bidding. Jonah must have thought that death indeed was going to be the only way to escape the mission to Nineveh. But the big fish (not called a whale in the book) was an instrument of salvation for the prophet. Unlike Jonah, this creature responded promptly and obediently to God's commands (*Jon. 1:17, 2:10*).

God's providence worked in an amazing way here. However, even though some people scoff at the story, Jesus testified to its veracity (*Matt. 12:40*) and even used it in reference to His own death and bodily resurrection.

**Read** Jonah 2, often called Jonah's psalm. What is he saying there? What has he learned? What spiritual principles can we take away from this chapter?

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Jonah's psalm celebrates God's deliverance from the perilous depths of the sea. It is the only poetic part of the book. In it Jonah recalls his prayer for help as he was sinking deep into the waters and facing certain death. Becoming fully aware of his salvation, he thanked God for it. The hymn indicates that Jonah was familiar with biblical psalms of praise and thanksgiving.

Jonah's vow likely consisted of a sacrifice of thanksgiving. He was grateful that, though he deserved to die, God had shown him extraordinary mercy. In spite of his disobedience, Jonah still considered himself loyal to God because he had not succumbed to idol worship. Whatever his many character flaws, he was determined to try to be faithful to his calling.

**Sometimes it takes a terrible experience to open our heart to the Lord, and to realize that He is our only hope, our only salvation. Dwell on an experience you have had where you clearly saw the hand of the Lord working in your own life. Why is it so easy to forget the ways in which the Lord has led you, even miraculously, especially when new trials arise?**

## A Successful Mission

After such a miraculous deliverance, when commanded by God the second time to go to preach in Nineveh, Jonah obeyed immediately. In his proclamation, Jonah (3:1–4) used language reminiscent of God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (*Genesis 19*). But in the original Hebrew, the word for “overthrown” (see *Gen. 19:21, 29; Jon. 3:4*) from Jonah’s proclamation can also have the meaning “turned around” or “transformed” (*Exod. 7:17, 20; 1 Sam. 10:6*). Jonah’s preaching of the divine message was not in vain.

The greatest achievement of Jonah’s prophetic career was the repentance of the city. After the seamen, the Ninevites were the second group of non-Hebrews in the book to turn to God, and all because of interactions with God’s flawed messenger. The results were astounding. To humble themselves before God, the people of Nineveh wore sackcloth, put ashes on their heads, and fasted. All these were external signs of sorrow and repentance.

**Read Matthew 12:39–41 and 2 Chronicles 36:15–17. What do these verses teach us about the importance of repentance?**

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The remarkable picture of a strong Assyrian monarch humbling himself in ashes before God is a sharp rebuke to many of Israel’s proud rulers and people, at least those who persistently rejected the prophetic calls to repentance. Because of the book of Jonah’s emphasis on God’s grace and forgiveness, the Jewish people read it every year at the climactic point of the Day of Atonement, which celebrates God’s forgiveness for their sins.

“Our God is a God of compassion. With long-sufferance and tender mercy he deals with the transgressors of his law. And yet, in this our day, when men and women have so many opportunities for becoming familiar with the divine law as revealed in Holy Writ, the great Ruler of the universe can not behold with any satisfaction the wicked cities, where reign violence and crime. If the people in these cities would repent, as did the inhabitants of Nineveh, many more such messages as Jonah’s would be given.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 18, 1906.

**Read Jonah 3:5–10. What do these verses reveal about the nature of true repentance? How can we apply these same principles to ourselves?**

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## Forgiven, Yet Unforgiving

**Read** Jonah 4. What important lessons did Jonah need to learn? How is his own hypocrisy revealed here?

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Jonah 4 reveals some startling things about the prophet. He seems to prefer to die rather than to witness about God's grace and forgiveness. Whereas before Jonah had rejoiced in his deliverance from death (*Jon. 2:7–9*), now that Nineveh lives, he prefers to die (*Jon. 4:2, 3*).

In contrast to Jonah, God is pictured in the Bible as someone who takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (*Ezek. 33:11, NKJV*). Jonah and many of his compatriots rejoiced in God's special mercies to Israel but wished only His wrath on their enemies. Such hardness of heart is rebuked sternly by the book's message.

**What** are some of the lessons we can learn from Jonah's mistakes? How does prejudice compromise our Christian testimony?

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It rightly has been observed that Jonah's book is a handbook on how not to be a prophet. Jonah was a prophet of rebellious spirit and mistaken priorities. He could not control his desire for vengeance. He was small-minded and ill-tempered. Instead of rejoicing in the grace that God also showed to the Ninevites, Jonah allowed his selfish and sinful pride to make him resentful.

Jonah's last word is a wish for death (*Jon. 4:8, 9*) while God's last word is an affirmation of His immeasurable grace, an affirmation for life.

Jonah's book is left open-ended. Its closing verses confront the readers with one important question that remains unanswered by the author: Did the miraculous change of hearts in Nineveh eventually result in a radical change of Jonah's heart?

**There is a lot in the story of Jonah that is hard to understand, particularly about Jonah himself. Perhaps, though, the clearest lesson is that God's grace and forgiveness extend way beyond ours. How can we learn to be more graceful and forgiving to those who do not deserve it as we see God doing here with Jonah and with the Ninevites?**

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**Further Study:** Read the following quotations and discuss how they help us to understand the messages from the book of Jonah more clearly.

“Whenever they are in need the children of God have the precious privilege of appealing to Him for help. It matters not how unsuitable the place may be, God’s ear of mercy is open to their cry. However desolate and dark the place may be, it can be turned into a veritable temple by the praying child of God.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1,003.

“Confused, humiliated, and unable to understand God’s purpose in sparing Nineveh, Jonah nevertheless had fulfilled the commission given him to warn that great city; and though the event predicted did not come to pass, yet the message of warning was nonetheless from God. And it accomplished the purpose God designed it should. The glory of His grace was revealed among the heathen.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 272, 273.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ The book of Jonah teaches that God is in full control of nature. Imagine that one of your friends has lost a family member because of a natural disaster. How would you explain to him or her that God is still in charge despite the presence of natural disasters that devastate parts of our world and take away many human lives?
- ❷ Read the last verse of Jonah. What does it teach us about our responsibility for mission outreach to all corners of the world?
- ❸ In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (*Matt. 18:21–35*), Jesus compared God to an angry king who revoked his forgiveness and threw the once-forgiven slave into jail. Does God really revoke His forgiveness? Some Christians argue adamantly that He does not. As a church, what position do we take on this topic, and why?
- ❹ For many people steeped in secularism, the idea of a man being swallowed alive and living inside a “big fish” is not something to be taken seriously. As we saw earlier, however, Jesus clearly testified to the truthfulness of the story. How does the story of Jonah help us to realize just how narrow and confining an anti-supernaturalist view of reality really is?

## One Single Book

I was a troublemaker. I disobeyed my parents and teachers and questioned every authority. My parents weren't religious, but they had strict standards. But I refused to follow their rules.

One day as my mother traveled by bus to another city, a man stood up and talked about a book he was selling. The book was *The Great Controversy*. He said that this book had changed thousands of lives. Mother was desperate and sacrificed to buy that book for me.

I love reading, and when Mother gave me the book, I went to my room and started reading. The book's ideas were new to me, and some things were hard to understand. But I kept reading. I looked up references to the Bible and realized that this book taught straight from the Bible.

The book mentioned the Sabbath. I'd never heard of the Sabbath before, but I knew it must be important. I asked a boy at school who worshiped on Sabbath to let me go to church with him. He took me to a charismatic church that worshiped on Sabbath. I joined that church. My parents might have objected, but they saw changes in my life, so they said nothing.

I kept reading the Bible and asking lots of questions. The church elders didn't answer some of my questions, and one elder accused me of being a Seventh-day Adventist. I didn't know about Seventh-day Adventists, but I started looking for one.

I met a Seventh-day Adventist man and peppered him with questions. He answered them all from the Bible. We had some long and heated discussions. I wasn't interested in a church; I just wanted to understand the Bible.

I finished high school and took a job teaching elementary school in a small village to save money for college. I discovered that the school was Seventh-day Adventist! I began attending the Seventh-day Adventist church in the village, and soon all doubt was gone. I wanted to be baptized.

I shudder when I think of where I would be if my mother hadn't given me that book. God used that book to turn my life around. Before I read the book, I was a nuisance to my family. After I discovered the truth in this book, I became so excited about my faith that I became a different kind of "nuisance." It's my mission to tell my family—and everyone—about God's great plan of salvation.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a huge publishing work around the world. Our mission offerings help support the publishing work so that people such as I can experience God's love. Thank you for your offerings. Thank God for His salvation!

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OLIVER ESHUN, *the author of this story, lives in Ghana, West Africa.*

# JESUS 101

ELIZABETH VIERA TALBOT



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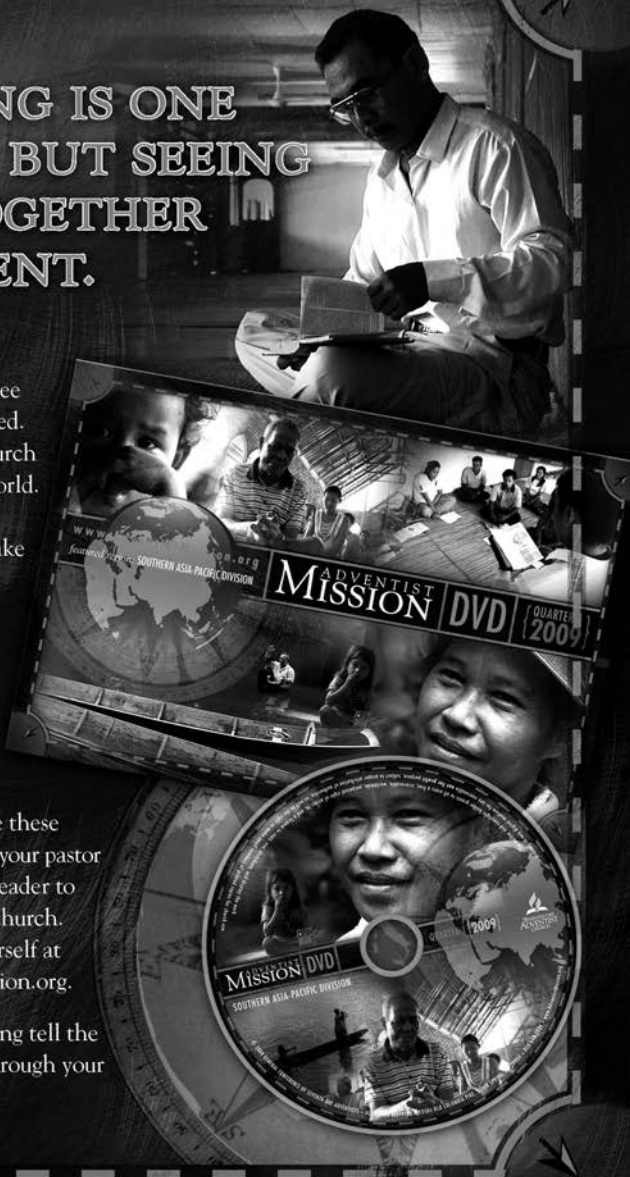
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# God’s Special People (Micah)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Mic. 1:1–9, 2 Cor. 11:23–27, Mic. 2:1–11, 5:2, 6:1–8, 7:18–20.*

**Memory Text:** “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (*Micah 6:8*).

**Key Thought:** Even amid the worst apostasy, the Lord was willing to forgive and heal His people.

The prophet Micah ministered in one of the darkest periods of Israel’s history. The country long had been divided into two kingdoms. Finally, Assyria put an end to the northern kingdom, and Micah could see evil and violence creeping into Judah in the south. He preached against the fatal sins of dishonesty, injustice, bribery, and mistrust. Micah also was the first biblical prophet to predict the destruction of Jerusalem (*Mic. 3:12*).

Yet, through divine inspiration, the prophet saw light in this dark time. With the help of God’s perspective, he looked beyond the coming punishment. Micah offered encouraging words and said that the Lord’s anointed Leader would come from Bethlehem. The Messiah would be the leader who would save Israel and speak peace to the nations by teaching them to “beat their swords into plowshares” (*Mic. 4:3*). God’s rebuke would be the channel of restoration and ultimate blessings.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 18.*

## Agony of the Prophet's Heart

In Micah 1:1–9, the prophet invites the whole earth to witness God's judgment against sinful people. The capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem are singled out because their leaders failed to be role models of what it means to follow God with undivided hearts. These two cities would be the first to suffer destruction.

The thought of destructive judgment produced a real tension in Micah's life. Because his prophetic call united him with God's purpose, he had no choice but to announce what was coming in the near future. But the prophet also loved the people to whom he belonged, and the idea of their captivity drove him to personal lament. Oftentimes bad news had the most devastating effect on the mind and the body of the prophet.

**What** do the following texts teach about the hard lot of the prophets? *Num. 11:10–15, 1 Kings 19:1–4, Jer. 8:21–9:2, Ezek. 24:15–18, 2 Cor. 11:23–27.*

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God's prophets were involved very much in the messages that they proclaimed. They did not enjoy speaking about the terrible things that would happen. They often used laments to express their reactions to the coming disasters. Their pain was real. To their listeners, the message was contained both in the prophetic words and also in the external signs, which often betrayed a deep pain stemming from within. Micah's reaction to divine judgment reminds one of Isaiah, who for three years walked half-naked and barefoot as a visible sign of the shame that captivity would bring. For those who have the resources, you can read about the great suffering that Ellen G. White endured in her ministry as well; this will help us to better understand what these servants of God had to go through.

**Read 1 Peter 4:14–16 and then look at yourself and whatever trials you are going through. How much suffering has come to you because of your faithfulness to God? How much has come due to your unfaithfulness?**

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## Those Who Devise Iniquity

**Read** Micah 2:1–11 and Micah 3. What are the sins that threaten to bring judgment upon these people?

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“The accession of Ahaz to the throne brought Isaiah and his associates face to face with conditions more appalling than any that had hitherto existed in the realm of Judah. Many who had formerly withstood the seductive influence of idolatrous practices were now being persuaded to take part in the worship of heathen deities. Princes in Israel were proving untrue to their trust; false prophets were arising with messages to lead astray; even some of the priests were teaching for hire. Yet the leaders in apostasy still kept up the forms of divine worship and claimed to be numbered among the people of God.

“The prophet Micah, who bore his testimony during those troublous times, declared that sinners in Zion, while claiming to ‘lean upon the Lord,’ and blasphemously boasting, ‘Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us,’ continued to ‘build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity.’ Micah 3:11, 10.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 322.

One of the constant problems that the Hebrew nation faced was the deception that their special status as God’s people—their knowledge of the true God, as opposed to the silliness of the pagan idolatry (see *Ps. 115:4–9*)—made them somehow immune to divine retribution. The terrible truth, however, was that it was precisely because they had special status before God that they would be deemed that much more guilty for their sins. Time and again, such as in the book of Deuteronomy, the Lord warned them that all the blessings, protection, and prosperity that would be theirs were dependent upon obedience to His commands, such as seen in this caution: “Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons” (*Deut. 4:9*).

**However much we might try to fool ourselves, in what ways are we, as Seventh-day Adventists with so much light, in danger of making this same error?**

## A New Ruler From Bethlehem

In Micah's book the mood often drastically changes from gloom to sublime hope. This hope is seen in one of the most famous of all the Messianic prophecies.

**Read Micah 5:2. Who is being spoken about here, and what does this teach us about Him?** See also *John 1:1–3; 8:58; Col. 1:16, 17.*

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Out of a little Judean town would come Someone from eternity to be a ruler in Israel. Micah 5:2 is one of the most precious biblical verses written in order to strengthen the hope of the people, who eagerly awaited the ideal Leader promised by the prophets. His rule would usher a time of strength, justice, and peace (*Mic. 5:4–6*).

David was a native of Bethlehem, a town also called Ephrath (*Gen. 35:19*). The mention of this town stresses the humble origin of both David and His future successor, who would be the True Shepherd of this people (*Mic. 5:4*). In the humble town of Bethlehem, the prophet Samuel anointed Jesse's youngest son, David, who was to be king over Israel (*1 Sam. 16:1–13, 17:12*). When the wise men came looking for the newly born "king of the Jews," King Herod asked the Bible experts where to search (*Matt. 2:4–6*). They referred him to this passage, which foretold that the Messiah would come from the small town of Bethlehem.

As incomprehensible as it is to our finite and fallen minds, that baby born was the eternal God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. "From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 19. However incredible the idea, it is one of the most foundational truths in Christianity: the Creator God took upon Himself humanity and in that humanity offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. If you take the time to dwell upon what this teaches us about both the value of our lives and what we as individuals mean to God, you can have a life-changing experience. While so many people struggle to find purpose and meaning to their existence, we have the foundation of the Cross, which not only anchors us in what our lives mean but also gives us the hope of something greater than that which this world ever could offer.

## What Is Good

In the beginning of Micah 6, God dialogues with His people, listing all the things that He has done on their behalf. In response, the worshiper who comes into the temple asks what he might do to please God. What is it that constitutes an acceptable offering: year-old calves, a multitude of rams, rivers of oil, or even the worshiper's firstborn child? There is a steady progression of the size and value of the offerings listed in this text.

**Read** Micah 6:1–8. What crucial truth is being taught here? Why is this especially important for us as Seventh-day Adventists? What does this tell us about how truth is more than just correct doctrine and detailed understanding of prophecy? See *Matt. 23:23*.

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The prophet declares that God already has revealed what He wants. Through the teachings of Moses, the people know what God has graciously done for them (*Deut. 10:12, 13*). So, Micah's answer is not a new revelation that signals a change in God's requirements. Sacrifices and priestly services are not God's first concern. God's supreme wish is to have a people who act in justice toward their neighbors, with consistent devotion and love toward the Lord. The most extravagant offering that people can give to God is obedience.

Micah 6:8 is the most succinct statement of God's will for His people. It summarizes all prophetic teachings on true religion: a life displaying justice, mercy, and a close walk with God. Justice is something that people do when prompted by God's Spirit. It has to do with fairness and equality for all, especially the weak and powerless who are exploited by others. Kindness means to freely and willingly show love, loyalty, and faithfulness to others. Walking with God means to put God first and to live in conformity with His will.

**Why is it easier to keep the Sabbath strictly than it is to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God?**

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## Into the Depths of the Sea

Micah's book begins with a description of judgments, but it ends with words of hope. There are people who try to explain away or deny the reality of God's judgments. To do so is to fall into the trap that Micah's contemporaries did, those who believed that God never would send judgments on the chosen nation.

God's justice is the other side of His love and concern. The good news presented by Micah is that punishment is never God's last word. God's action in Scripture consistently moves from judgment to forgiveness, from punishment to grace, and from suffering to hope.

**Read** Micah 7:18–20. How is the gospel revealed in these verses? What hope is seen here for all of us? Why do we need it so desperately?

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Micah's closing verses present his praise filled with hope. The question "Who is like God?" matches Micah's name, which means "Who is like the Lord?" It serves as a reminder of the uniqueness of God and affirms the truth that there is no one like Him. How could there be? After all, He alone is the Creator. Everything else is created. Even more important, our Creator is a God of grace, of forgiveness, a God who went to the most unimaginable extremes possible in order to save us from the destruction that is rightly ours. He did it for the Hebrew nation, and He will do it for us as well.

It is possible that we today are surrounded by difficult circumstances and painful experiences that leave us to wonder why God allows all this to happen. Sometimes it is just so hard to make sense of things. In such times, our hope rests only with the Lord, who promises to hurl our sins into the depths of the sea. There is hope for the future in remembering what God has done in the past.

**Take a good, hard look at yourself. Why is your only hope found in the promise that God will cast your sins "into the depths of the sea"?**

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**Further Study:** “If Jerusalem had known what it was her privilege to know, and had heeded the light which Heaven had sent her, she might have stood forth in the pride of prosperity, the queen of kingdoms, free in the strength of her God-given power. There would have been no armed soldiers standing at her gates. . . . The glorious destiny that might have blessed Jerusalem had she accepted her Redeemer rose before the Son of God. He saw that she might through Him have been healed of her grievous malady, liberated from bondage, and established as the mighty metropolis of the earth. From her walls the dove of peace would have gone forth to all nations. She would have been the world’s diadem of glory.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 577.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 If you want to understand in a more modern context the suffering that God’s prophets often endured, read from the book *Life Sketches*, by Ellen G. White. What does this book teach about the toils and trials that God’s faithful messengers can face?
- 2 It is so easy to get caught up in religious forms, traditions, and rituals, all of which may be fine. At the same time, though, what happens when these forms and rituals become ends in themselves instead of pointing us toward what it truly means to be a follower of the God whom we worship with those forms?
- 3 Dwell more on the whole idea of the Incarnation, the idea that the Creator God took upon Himself our human flesh. As one medieval theologian wrote, “Retaining all that He was, Christ took upon Himself what He wasn’t”—and that is our humanity. Think about what this amazing truth reveals about God’s love for us. Why should this truth fill us with hope, gratitude, and praise, regardless of our circumstances?

## Mysterious Television Truth

Mandela Hector lives in Trinidad. He had no special interest in religion. Then his cousin invited him to attend his church, and Mandela realized that God wanted to be part of his life. He bought a Bible and began reading it. Questions arose in his mind that his cousin's pastor couldn't answer, so Mandela searched elsewhere for answers.

He discovered a religious television station and began watching it. A sermon on prophecy caught his interest. He was impressed that the speaker's message was based on the Bible. Mandela read each Bible text for himself and was convinced that the words were from God.

One evening the speaker talked about how the Sabbath had been changed to Sunday long after Jesus had died and rose again. Mandela realized that the Sabbath wasn't Sunday but Saturday. He told his boss that he would no longer work on Saturdays. But because he knew of no church that worshiped on the Sabbath, he rested at home that day and worshiped with his cousin on Sundays.

When Mandela realized that the station was affiliated with Seventh-day Adventists, he found a church in town. On Sabbath morning he got up early, eager to celebrate the Sabbath in God's house. When one member learned that a television program had brought Mandela to the church, he was amazed because Adventist television wasn't generally available in Trinidad at that time. Only then did Mandela realize that God had provided the television signal in one small neighborhood where he lived so that he could learn God's truths.

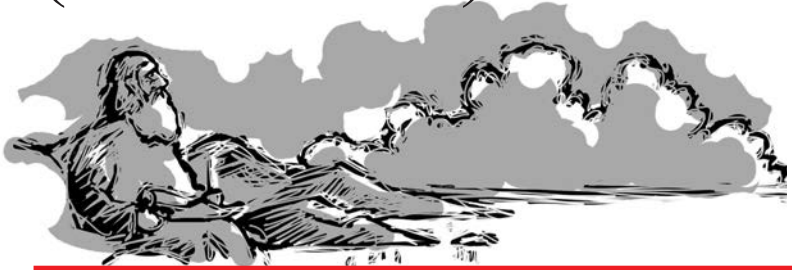
A few months later Mandela cemented his relationship with Christ through baptism. He wanted to share his new faith with others. He discovered Seventh-day Adventist books and began reading. When he learned about literature evangelists, he knew he had found his calling. He quit his job to work for God.

Although not everyone wanted his books, Mandela saw God leading him. He met people who told him they had dreamed that a man would come with a book or magazine to answer their questions just before Mandela arrived. "This is truly God's ordained work," Mandela says. "When I think of how God led me to His truth, I'm amazed that He could care so much for one person. I want to share that with others."

Our mission offerings bring God's message to people in many different ways. Mandela and millions of others thank you for sharing God's truths with them through your mission offerings.



# Trusting God’s Goodness (Habakkuk)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Hab. 1:1–17, 2:2–4, Gal. 3:11, Heb. 11:1–13, Habakkuk 3, Phil. 4:11.*

**Memory Text:** “ ‘For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea’ ” (*Habakkuk 2:14, NASB*).

**Key Thought:** We may not understand always why tragedy happens, but we can trust God, no matter what.

After preaching about God’s abiding presence amid life’s adversities, a pastor was confronted by a woman who tearfully asked: “Pastor, where was God on the day when my only son died?” Reading a deep sorrow on her face the pastor was silent for a moment and then replied: “God was in the same place where He was on the day His only Son died to save us from the eternal death.”

Like us, Habakkuk witnessed injustice, violence, and evil. Even worse, God appeared to be silent amid it all, though He did ask Habakkuk to trust in His promises.

The prophet did not live to see the fulfillment of those promises; yet, he learned to trust in them anyway. His book begins with a complaint to God but ends with one of the most beautiful songs in the Bible. Like Habakkuk, we must wait in faith until the time when the world will be “filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 25.*

## Perplexed Prophet

**Read** Habakkuk 1. What are the questions that the prophet asks of God? Though his situation is, of course, different from ours, how often do we find ourselves asking these types of questions?

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Habakkuk is unique among prophets because he does not speak for God to the people but rather he speaks to God about the people. The prophet begins his struggle to understand God's purposes with a cry of bewilderment: "How long, O LORD?" In the Bible, this question is typical of a lament (*Ps. 13:1, Jer. 12:4*). It implies a situation of crisis from which the speaker seeks deliverance.

The crisis about which Habakkuk calls for help is the violence that permeated his society. The original Hebrew word for "violence" is *hamas*, and it is used six times in Habakkuk's book. The term implies acts of injury, both physical and moral, inflicted on others (*Gen. 6:11*).

Being a prophet, Habakkuk knows well how much God loves justice and hates oppression; so, he wants to know why God allows injustice to continue. All around he notices violence and law-breaking, and it seems that the wicked triumph over the righteous. Justice is being perverted by the powerful as it was in the time of Amos (*Amos 2:6–8*) and as it so often is today.

God's answer reveals His future plans. The Lord will use the army of Babylon to punish the people. This announcement surprises the prophet. He did not anticipate that God would use such a ruthless army to discipline Judah. In verse 8 the Babylonian cavalry are compared to a leopard, wolf, and eagle—three predators whose speed and power bring violent death to their prey.

Babylon's ruthless arrogance acknowledges no accountability, seeks no repentance, offers no reparations. It violates the most fundamental order of created life. God had said that Babylon's army will be used as a "rod of My [God's] anger" (*Isa. 10:5, NKJV*). The punishment will take place during Habakkuk's lifetime (*Hab. 1:5*). This whole situation raises even more difficult questions about divine justice.

**How can we learn to trust in God's goodness and justice when the world seems so full of badness and injustice? What is our only recourse?**

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## Living by Faith

In Habakkuk 1:12–17, God’s answer to Habakkuk’s questions poses an even more vexing question: can a righteous God use the wicked to punish those who are more righteous than they? Habakkuk’s question in verse 17 has to do with divine justice.

Habakkuk was puzzled, not only by the degeneration of his own people but also by the certainty that his country would be judged by another nation, one worse than his own. The prophet was well aware of Judah’s sins, but by any standards, his people, particularly the righteous among them, were not as wicked as the pagan Babylonians.

**Read Habakkuk 2:2–4. What hope is presented there?**

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Habakkuk 2:2–4 is one of the most important passages in the Bible. Verse 4, in particular, expresses the essence of the gospel, the foundation of the verse that arguably started the Protestant Reformation. Through faith in Jesus Christ we receive God’s righteousness; we are credited with the righteousness of God Himself. His righteousness becomes ours. It is what is known as justification by faith.

**Verse 4 is a summary statement of the way of salvation and of the biblical teaching about justification by faith. How did the New Testament writers use this verse? *Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11, Heb. 10:38.***

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In the midst of all this turmoil and questions about evil, justice, and salvation, Habakkuk 2:4 presents a sharp contrast between the faithful and the proud. The conduct of each group determines its fate: the arrogant will fail while the righteous will live by faith. The original Hebrew word for *faith* (*emuna*) is best rendered as “faithfulness,” “constancy,” and “dependability.” While the one who lives by faith is not saved by his works, his works show that he lives by faith. His faith is revealed in his works, and thus he is promised life eternal.

## For the Earth Shall Be Filled (Habakkuk 2)

God's answer to Habakkuk's question in Habakkuk 1:17, as recorded in chapter 2, continues in the form of a song that mocks the proud oppressor. No less than five woes (*Hab. 2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19*) affirm the message that Babylon's doom is sealed. The punishment on the enemy will be in accordance with the "measure for measure" principle.

What the wicked do to their victims will, in the end, be done to them. They will reap what they sow, because God cannot be mocked by proud human beings (*Gal. 6:7*).

In contrast to the oppressor, who is in the end judged by God, the righteous have the promise of eternal life in Christ, regardless of what happens to them here in this life. In describing the faithful remnant at the time of the end, the book of Revelation presents the expression "the patience of the saints" (*Rev. 14:12*). Indeed, the righteous are persistent in their wait for divine intervention, even if they see it only at the Second Coming.

**Read** Hebrews 11:1–13. How do these verses help us as we wrestle, in our own context, with the same questions with which Habakkuk struggled?

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God's ultimate answer to Habakkuk's questions was the affirmation of His abiding presence. Trust in God's presence and have confidence in His judgment in spite of the appearances to the contrary; that is the message of Habakkuk's book, as well as the message of all biblical revelation. Prophetic faith is trust in the Lord and His unchanging character.

"The faith that strengthened Habakkuk and all the holy and the just in those days of deep trial was the same faith that sustains God's people today. In the darkest hours, under circumstances the most forbidding, the Christian believer may keep his soul stayed upon the source of all light and power. Day by day, through faith in God, his hope and courage may be renewed."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 386, 387.

## Remembering God's Fame

**Read** Habakkuk 3. What is Habakkuk doing there, and why is that so important, especially given the tough circumstances and difficult questions he is facing?

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Habakkuk expresses his acceptance of God's ways in a prayer set to music (*Hab. 3:19*). Being fully aware of God's power, he asks the Lord to remember His mercy when the judgment begins. The prophet reverently recalls reports of God's great acts in the past and is praying to Him to bring redemption now. He seems to stand between the times. With one eye he looks back to the Exodus event while with the other he looks ahead to the day of the Lord. He longs for a display of God's power in his present situation.

The hymn from chapter 3 poetically describes God's deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian bondage. What has happened at the time of the Exodus is a foreshadowing of the great judgment day. The godly should not be anxious about the day of the Lord, but they must wait, persevere, and rejoice in the hope that is theirs.

The hymn is also a celebration of the power, glory, and victorious nature of God. The Lord is described as sovereign over the whole earth. The revelation of His glory is comparable to the splendor of the sunrise (*Hab. 3:4*).

God judges the oppressive nations; yet, at the same time He brings about the redemption of His people in His "chariots of salvation" (*Hab. 3:8*). On the surface God's power is not always visible, but the person of faith knows that God is there, no matter what.

Habakkuk calls us to look expectantly for the Lord's salvation, when He will establish His righteousness on earth and fill the world with His glory. By singing praises to the Lord, the people of God encourage one another (*Eph. 5:19, 20; Col. 3:16*) to meditate on God's past acts and to hope for the glorious future. Habakkuk's own example demonstrates how one can persevere by living with a vision.

**Dwell upon God's past leading in your life. How does this past leading help you to learn to trust Him and His goodness, no matter what the immediate future brings? Why is it always so important to look to the ultimate and eternal future that awaits us?**

## God Is Our Strength

“Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food. . . . Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength; he will make my feet like deer’s feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills” (*Hab. 3:17–19, NKJV*).

**What** is so good about the prophet’s attitude here? How can we cultivate such an attitude for ourselves? See also *Phil. 4:11*.

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The closing words in Habakkuk’s book (*Hab. 3:16–19*) express the prophet’s response to the revelation of God’s power and goodness. A fresh look at God’s saving acts sparks Habakkuk’s courage as he awaits the enemy’s attack. His fear stirs his innermost being as he waits for divine judgment to fall upon his nation. Invasion may result in the devastation of the fig and olive trees, so highly prized in Palestine, along with the equally needed vines, grain, and cattle. But the prophet’s staunch faith remains untouched because he has had a vision of the living Lord.

Based on his past experiences, Habakkuk knows of God’s absolute faithfulness. That is why he resigns himself to God’s present purposes (*Hab. 3:16–19*). In spite of all the unfavorable circumstances, the prophet is determined to place his trust in the Lord and in His goodness no matter how hopeless his situation appears.

So, Habakkuk waits in faithful trust, even though there are no immediate signs of salvation. He is a prophet who, through dialogue, taunts, and a hymn of praise, has instructed the faithful over the ages to develop a deeper living faith in the Redeemer. By his own example, he encourages the godly to dialogue with God, to test their loyalty to Him in harsh times, to develop hope in the Lord, and to praise Him.

Habakkuk closes his book with a beautifully expressed attitude of faith: regardless of how hard life may become, one can find joy and strength in God. The underlying message of his book points to the need to wait patiently for God’s salvation in a period of oppression that has no visible end. The theme of “waiting on the Lord” dominates Habakkuk’s book. How especially relevant that theme should be for us, as Seventh-day Adventists—we whose very name expresses our faith in the coming of Jesus.

**Further Study:** Read the following comments and discuss how they help us to understand better Habakkuk’s messages.

“There is an answer to Habakkuk’s question. It is an answer, not in terms of thought, but in terms of events. God’s answer will happen, but it cannot be spelled out in words. The answer will surely come; ‘if it seem[s] slow, wait for it.’ True, the interim is hard to bear; the righteous one is horrified by what he sees. To this the great answer is given: ‘The righteous shall live by his faith.’ It is an answer, again not in terms of thought, but in terms of existence. Prophetic faith is trust in Him, in Whose presence stillness is a form of understanding.”  
—Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, p. 143.

“We must cherish and cultivate the faith of which prophets and apostles have testified—the faith that lays hold on the promises of God and waits for deliverance in His appointed time and way. The sure word of prophecy will meet its final fulfillment in the glorious advent of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as King of kings and Lord of lords. The time of waiting may seem long, the soul may be oppressed by discouraging circumstances, many in whom confidence has been placed may fall by the way; but with the prophet who endeavored to encourage Judah in a time of unparalleled apostasy, let us confidently declare, ‘The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 387, 388.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Summarize Habakkuk’s dialogue with God. What was his basic complaint? How did he respond to God’s answers?
- ❷ Could it be that, in God’s eyes, having honest questions and even doubts are a more acceptable religious attitude than a mere superficial belief? Justify your answer.
- ❸ Seventh-day Adventists of past generations all believed that Christ would have been back by now, and that they would have seen the ultimate fulfillment of all these wonderful promises. How do we learn to maintain faith as we, another generation, await His return?

## It's Fun Sharing Jesus

Joshua Wade lives in the United States. He loves to share God's love with others and has found many ways to do it.

Recently Joshua's family moved from their country home into a new home in town. Joshua wondered how he could tell the children in his new neighborhood about his friend Jesus. When he heard that some children would be going from house to house collecting treats to celebrate Halloween, he wondered what he could do to turn this holiday that didn't honor God into a chance to share God's love. Then he had an idea.

"My brother, Stephen, and I decided that we could make cookies and put a Bible verse with each cookie," Joshua said. The boys knew that Halloween can be scary with its emphasis on witches and ghosts. So, the boys chose Bible verses that talked about peace. They printed the Bible verses on the family computer and tied one to each cookie bag.

As darkness fell on October 31, children began arriving at the family's door dressed as princesses, witches, dinosaurs, and super heroes. Joshua and Stephen greeted each child and dropped a bagged cookie into the waiting sacks. "There's something special for you with your cookie," they told each child. The children seemed happy to receive the home-baked cookies.

Joshua and Stephen decided to expand their cookie giving to other times of the year. As Valentine's Day approached, the boys baked more cookies and gave them to people in a nursing home and to shut-ins and neighbors who lived alone. "It was great to see the smiles on people's faces when we stopped to visit them," Joshua said.

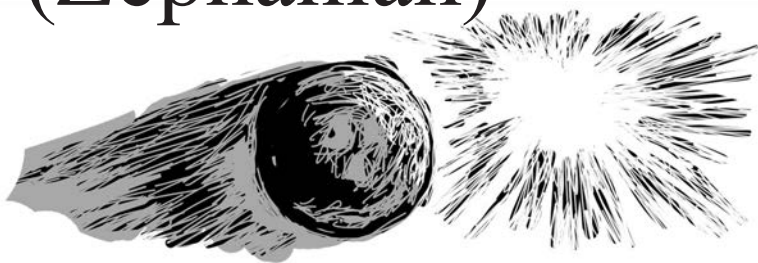
But Joshua doesn't limit his sharing of God's love to cookie making. He helps people with their yard work, picks up trash, and rakes leaves. "We go to the nursing home to visit people who don't get visitors," he says. "That can be very lonely."

Joshua has found many ways to tell others about Jesus. "Sharing God's love is more than quoting Bible verses to people," he says. "Others should see Jesus in our kind acts and words. I want to be sure that others see Jesus in me."

Sharing God's love and supporting world mission with our offerings are important ways to spread God's message to a love-starved world.



# The Day of *the* Lord (Zephaniah)



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SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Zeph. 1:14–18, Joel 2:1–11, Zeph. 2:1–3, Isa. 11:4, Zeph. 3:1–5, Isa. 62:5, Nahum 1–3.*

**Memory Text:** “The LORD will be awesome to them, for He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth; people shall worship Him, each one from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations” (*Zephaniah 2:11, NKJV*).

**Key Thought:** Judgment is coming, but grace and mercy are still available for those who earnestly seek for it.

If the books of the prophets were placed in chronological order, Zephaniah's would fit between Isaiah and Jeremiah. Zephaniah's preaching condemned the hopeless corruption found in Judean society. He pointed to the need for repentance based on the fact that God's love still was calling His people to humility and faithfulness. His message was twofold: there is a threat of an imminent and universal judgment, which will include even God's own people; yet, there is also a promise that the saved from all nations will join the remnant of Israel in serving God and enjoying His blessings. This week's study will show that Zephaniah's message still matters to those who proclaim God's message of hope to a fallen world.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 1.*

## A Day of Darkness

The focal point of Zephaniah's message is the "day of the LORD" (*Zeph. 1:7*). For biblical prophets, the day of the Lord refers to a specific period of time in which God intervenes in human affairs in order both to save and to judge. Most people in ancient Israel believed that on this day the Lord would save and exalt Israel while the enemy nations would be destroyed forever. To the great surprise of those who listened, the prophet declared that the day of the Lord would be a day of doom, even for God's people (*see Zeph. 1:1–5*), because they had sinned against Him (*Zeph. 1:17*).

**Compare** Zephaniah 1:14–18 with Joel 2:1–11 and Amos 5:18–20. When read together, what picture do they present about "the day of the Lord"?

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Zephaniah likens the coming judgment to the sweeping away of all life in the days of the great Flood (*Genesis 6–8*). The catalog of death in Zephaniah 1:2, 3 is arranged somewhat in reverse order of God's original Creation: humanity, land beasts, the creatures of the air, and those of the sea (*compare with Gen. 1:20–27*).

The prophet warned the people that they would not be able to buy their way out of judgment (*Zeph. 1:18*). Neither silver nor gold would protect them from the Lord's anger. However, the complacent people in Jerusalem claimed that God would do neither good nor harm. They simply did not expect the Lord to do anything (*Zeph. 1:12*). But divine judgments reveal how much God actively works to ensure that there will be a future for His faithful people.

Zephaniah makes it clear that God's judgment is not only punitive but corrective. The Lord holds out a promise of shelter for those who seek Him (*Zeph. 2:3*). Thus, the day of the Lord is more than the end of the world. It is the beginning of the future establishment of God's rule, which will last forever.

**Read Zephaniah 1:18.** In what ways do we even now experience the truth of the principle expressed here? That is, what kind of situations have we faced in which all the money in the world could not save us?

## The Humble of the Land

In Zephaniah 2:1–3, we see the prophet’s call to repentance. Even though the destruction is imminent, there is still time to be sheltered from calamity, but only if the nation will repent. The wicked who refuse to repent will be consumed like chaff on the day of judgment. In Psalm 1:4 the wicked are also likened to chaff and, in the end, they perish.

With the words “Seek the Lord,” Zephaniah is encouraging those who humble themselves before God to hold firm in their faith. The prophet teaches that to seek the Lord is the same as seeking righteousness and humility. This attitude of repentance is essential in order to escape the coming judgment.

**Zephaniah** calls the repentant people the “humble of the land” (*Zeph. 2:3, NIV*). **How do the following passages shed light on this expression, which is also translated as the “poor of the land”?** *Matt. 5:3, Ps. 76:9, Isa. 11:4, Amos 8:4.*

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The humble are those people who remain faithful to God and who are led and taught by Him. The psalmist says: “Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way” (*Ps. 25:8, 9, NIV*). The humble are urged to prepare for the coming judgment by seeking God, righteousness, and humility.

The possibility of survival for the humble who are faithful is expressed through the word *perhaps*. It means that survival depends solely on divine grace, and grace is something that never should be taken for granted. In the face of impending doom, there is hope for the future from God, who is merciful. The Lord has promised to shelter all those who trust in Him (*Joel 3:16, Nah. 1:7*). This type of trust casts out self-reliance, guile, and deception.

**“Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour. By prayer, by the study of His word, by faith in His abiding presence, the weakest of human beings may live in contact with the living Christ, and He will hold them by a hand that will never let go.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 182. What has been your own experience with these incredible promises? How can you learn to have that kind of close walk with the Lord?**

## A Corrupt City

A Chinese proverb says that the darkest spot in the room is located right under the candle. This proverb could be applied to the moral state of Jerusalem in Zephaniah's time. The prophet just has completed the pronouncement of divine judgments on Judah's neighboring countries (see *Zephaniah 2*) such as Philistia in the west, Moab and Ammon in the east, Cush in the south, and Assyria in the east. Yet, he does not stop there. He proceeds to expose the sins of those who dwell in God's own city on earth, Jerusalem itself.

**Read** Zephaniah 3:1–5. Who is being condemned, and why? Ask yourself, How could God's people, those who have been given so much light and truth, end up so corrupted? How can we protect ourselves from having the same thing happen to us?

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The capital city of Judah lies at the heart of Zephaniah's concern. He indicts its leaders concerning the city's moral degradation. The corruption stems directly from the failure of its leaders to live up to their designated roles and responsibilities (*compare with Jer. 18:18, Ezek. 22:23–30*). The corrupt court officials are likened to "roaring lions," and the judges are characterized as "evening wolves." And the temple fares no better because the priests do not teach God's Word, nor do the prophets speak the truth.

"During the reign of Josiah the word of the Lord came to Zephaniah, specifying plainly the results of continued apostasy, and calling the attention of the true church to the glorious prospect beyond. His prophecies of impending judgment upon Judah apply with equal force to the judgments that are to fall upon an impenitent world at the time of the second advent of Christ."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 389.

**Look around. However alluring, the world is doomed to ultimate destruction. One does not even need to believe in the Bible to see how easily this destruction could happen. Why is the Lord our only hope? How can we learn to lean on Him more and more and not trust in the vain and empty things of this world?**

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## God's Greatest Delight

**“The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”** (*Zeph. 3:17, NIV*).

In the closing section of his book (*Zeph. 3:9–20*), Zephaniah turns from a theme of anger to one of restoration. Beyond the judgment, we come to God's ultimate goals. When the nations have been disciplined, they will together call on the Lord and serve Him cordially. The lips of the people will be purified so that all may worship and praise the Lord by serving Him. A small, yet humble and faithful remnant will survive in Judah and will take the place of the proud leaders.

Most important, God will dwell among His people, and He will make past wrongs right. No longer will His people need to live in fear, because the Lord will be with them, dwelling in their midst. He will be their Deliverer and Savior. “They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid” (*Zeph. 3:13, NIV*).

Such blessings would normally cause God's people to rejoice over Him, but the prophet declares that God will rejoice over them. His love and joy for His people will be so great that He will shout over them with jubilation.

**How** did the prophet Isaiah describe God's joy over His redeemed people? *Isa. 62:5, 65:19*.

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The great King, the divine Warrior, will protect and vindicate His people. He will grant them all the benefits of His victory, the one that He won for us at the cross. He will exalt the humble and turn disgrace, suffering, and alienation into an experience of honor, blessings, and His own presence. Prominence will be given to the lame and the outcast, a theme that lies at the heart of the message proclaimed by Jesus Christ.

**Even amid such dire warnings, the Lord offered His people hope. How can we, as Seventh-day Adventists, trusting in the promise of the Second Coming, learn to live day by day with that hope? How can we learn to keep that hope alive, especially in times of trouble when the world offers us nothing but sorrow?**

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## God's Answer to Injustice

**Read** Nahum 1–3. What verses especially teach us about the character of God? How can we apply what is seen here to our understanding of last-day events?

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The prophecy of Nahum is God's Word against the kingdoms of this world as represented by Nineveh. As the prophet looked at his world, he saw the hand of God moving against the Assyrian Empire. He announced that its capital city, Nineveh, would soon fall, never to rise again. Nahum spoke with absolute confidence because he knew God's character, and, through the gift of prophecy (*Nah. 1:1*), he had been shown by the Lord what would happen. The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished (*Nah. 1:3; Exod. 34:6, 7*).

The Assyrians had plundered many nations and had an insatiable lust for power. Their cruelty was notorious. As God's "razor" (*Isa. 7:20*), they eagerly had shorn their neighbors. Now it was time for the razor to be broken. Instruments of God's judgment are not exempt from judgment. Nineveh exists no more, but the prophetic testimony lives on. It reminds us that though God's justice seems slow, nothing ultimately can stop it.

As we have seen in an earlier lesson, years before Nahum's time, the Ninevites, having heard Jonah's preaching, had repented, and God had spared their city. But the repentance had not lasted; the people returned to their old ways. Many countries that had suffered under Nineveh's oppressive yoke would greet the news of its fall with thunderous applause. A messenger will come to bring good news (*Isa. 52:7*) that the power of Assyria is broken, with its gods. God's people will again be able to worship in peace (*Nah. 1:15*).

As great as the Lord's anger is, more tender is His mercy. He protects those who await the fullness of His goodness. Nahum teaches that God cares for those who trust in Him, but that with an overwhelming flood He will pursue His enemies into darkness (*Nah. 1:8*). He teaches also that God is behind it all, for He has determined that Nineveh's day of judgment has come.

The prophet shows that God has awesome power. All creation trembles before Him. He does not tolerate sin forever. At the same time, He is the Savior of those who trust in Him. There is no middle ground. We are on one side or the other. " 'He who is not with Me,' " Jesus said, " 'is against Me' " (*Matt. 12:30, NKJV*).

**Further Study:** “With unerring accuracy the Infinite One still keeps account with the nations. While His mercy is tendered, with calls to repentance, this account remains open; but when the figures reach a certain amount which God has fixed, the ministry of His wrath begins. The account is closed. Divine patience ceases. Mercy no longer pleads in their behalf.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 364.

“Before the worlds unfallen and the heavenly universe, the world will have to give an account to the Judge of the whole earth, the very One they condemned and crucified. What a reckoning day that will be! It is the great day of God’s vengeance. Christ does not then stand at Pilate’s bar. Pilate and Herod, and all that mocked, scourged, rejected, and crucified Him will then understand what it means to feel the wrath of the Lamb. Their deeds will appear before them in their true character.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 132.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Some of the people in Zephaniah’s time did terrible things against both the Lord and their fellow countrymen while others were just complacent as such evils unfolded. Which of these two sins do you think is worse in God’s eyes? Justify your answer.
- 2 Go back over the final question at the end of Monday’s lesson, where these words were quoted: “Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour.” What does it mean to rely “wholly on the merits of the Saviour”? How do these words reveal to us the great truth of salvation by faith in Christ alone, and why is that truth so central to all that we believe? If we do not rely on His merits, on whose merits can we rely?
- 3 Why is it so easy, especially for those who live in wealth and comfort, to forget just how utterly dependent we are upon God for everything that we have? How can we protect ourselves from this fatal delusion?
- 4 Dwell more upon this idea of the Lord singing and rejoicing over His people. We tend to think of ourselves singing and rejoicing over God and what He has done for us. What does it mean that He sings and rejoices over us? How could that be, considering the rather pathetic state in which we all find ourselves?

## Standing Up for Jesus: Part 1

The ropes bit into Bien's [bee-YEN] wrists as she struggled to free herself. Her brothers had tied her to the small boat before they left to get gas for the boat's engine. They planned to take her to the small offshore island where their grandmother lived so she couldn't attend the heretics' church she had been visiting. She knew she had little time. She saw some friends passing nearby and called them to help her. They quickly untied the rough ropes and helped her from the boat before her brothers returned.

As 14-year-old Bien and her friends hurried through the streets of the small town, she explained that her family was angry because she had been attending the Seventh-day Adventist church, and her brothers were trying to keep her from going.

"Why don't you just give up the church?" one of her friends asked. "Is church worth all this trouble?"

"It's not just going to church," Bien explained. "I've learned that God loves me, that Jesus died for me, and that He wants me to follow Him. I want to be His daughter, even if it means losing my own family."

"Where can you go to be safe?" another girl asked.

"The pastor's house," Bien said and led the way. When they arrived, Bien thanked her friends and begged them not to tell her parents where she was. Safely inside, Bien told the pastor and his wife what had happened, and they agreed to let her stay with them for a while. But three days later Bien's mother knocked on the door. Bien fought her fear and bravely followed the pastor to the door.

When the pastor opened the door, Bien's mother lunged at her daughter, grabbing her by the hair. She tried to drag Bien from the house.

"Stop!" the pastor's wife said. Bien's mother let go and faced the pastor's wife. "We're concerned about her," the pastor's wife said. "Can we talk?" Bien's mother finally agreed to leave without her daughter, but the pastor promised to bring Bien to see her later that day.

Bien whispered, "I'm afraid."

"We'll go with you and stay with you while we try to sort this out," the pastor said. Bien nodded. She knew she couldn't stay with the pastor forever.

The pastor took Bien to her parents' house and agreed to let them speak in private. But when he left, Bien's parents unleashed their anger.

"You are useless to us and a problem," her father began. "We don't want you around here, and we don't want you near those Seventh-day Adventists. You're going to go live with your grandmother where you won't find any Seventh-day Adventists."

*(Continued next week.)*



# First Things First! (Haggai)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Haggai 1, John 2:19, Ezra 3:1–6, Matt. 1:23, 12:6, Haggai 2, Luke 24:13–27.*

**Memory Text:** “The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the LORD Almighty” (*Haggai 2:8, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Haggai's message is simple: What are our priorities, and why is it so important to get them right?

Haggai's book, one of the shortest in the Bible, was written at a critical time in the life of Judah. The exiles had returned from their captivity in Babylon almost twenty years before; yet, they seemed to have forgotten the reason for their return. They let God's temple sit in ruins while they devoted their energy to building their own houses.

Thus, the prophet urged the returned exiles to give careful thought to their situation. His message was simple and logical. The people had worked hard but did not earn much. This happened because they had mistaken their priorities. They needed to put God first in all that they did. As Jesus Himself said, “Seek first his [God's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (*Matt. 6:33, NIV*).

Today, too, it is so easy to get caught up in the struggle for existence that we forget what our first priority needs to be, which, of course, is always doing the Lord's will.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 8.*

## Planting Much, Harvesting Little

**Read** Haggai 1:1–11. What was happening here and, more important, why was this happening? Even more important, how might this same principle apply to us today? How might we be guilty of doing the same thing?

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“For over a year the temple was neglected and well-nigh forsaken. The people dwelt in their homes and strove to attain temporal prosperity, but their situation was deplorable. Work as they might they did not prosper. The very elements of nature seemed to conspire against them. Because they had let the temple lie waste, the Lord sent upon their substance a wasting drought. God had bestowed upon them the fruits of field and garden, the corn and the wine and the oil, as a token of His favor; but because they had used these bountiful gifts so selfishly, the blessings were removed.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 573.

Haggai confronted the people with their current situation. Futility of labor was one of the curses that resulted from them breaking God’s covenant (*Lev. 26:16, 20*). Until the people turned their attention to this priority, there would be no prosperity for them.

Haggai possessed great zeal for the Lord’s temple and wanted the people to complete its reconstruction right away. His ambition ran contrary to the complacency of those who did not care about the temple as much as they cared about their own comfort. While Haggai’s great concern was for the temple, the people were interested more in their own houses.

The Lord used Haggai to stir the people’s hearts toward God’s concerns. God could not be honored properly as long as His house sat in ruins. The temple in Jerusalem symbolized the divine presence among fallen humanity. It was a visible reminder to the whole world that the Sovereign Lord is God of heaven and earth. How could the children of Israel witness to the true God when the very symbol of that God (*see John 2:19, Matt. 26:61*) and the entire plan of salvation was in ruins? In many ways, their attitude toward the temple revealed a deeper spiritual problem: their loss of the sense of their divine mission as the remnant people of the Lord.

Do you see any warning here for us?

## God's Greatest Promise

**Read** Haggai 1:12–14. Notice the sense of unity of purpose here. Why was that unity so important in order for them to do that which they were called to do?

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This time the message instantly is obeyed by the leaders and the remnant people. They make preparations, gather materials, and resume work on the temple three weeks later. Within another week they erect an altar and restore the sacrificial worship (*Ezra 3:1–6*). In less than five years the temple is completed.

While the kingdom of God cannot be identified with a material building, the book of Haggai is a reminder that God sometimes uses material things, such as buildings, for spiritual ends.

If immediate compliance with the prophetic message is considered to be the measure of a prophet's success, then Haggai stands out as one of the most successful prophets. His preaching moved the people to action. Within the month, work on the temple resumed, with God's prophets assuring the people that the Lord would help them.

Haggai 1:12–14 reports the response of the leaders and the people to Haggai's message. All obeyed the Lord because they recognized that he had sent Haggai. They "feared the Lord" (*vs. 12, NIV*), and showed this by worshiping Him and giving Him due attention. So, Haggai now could deliver a new word from the Lord: " 'I am with you' " (*vs. 13*). As soon as the people decided to obey the Lord, the messages of reproof were replaced by words of encouragement. The assurance of God's presence gave them the promise of all other blessings. After all, the statement " 'I am with you' " goes back to the covenantal promises that God made during the time of the patriarchs and Moses (*Gen. 26:3, Exod. 3:12, Num. 14:9*).

**Of course, the greatest manifestation of God being "with us" is Jesus (see Isa. 7:14, Matt. 1:23, 28:20). Dwell on the idea that Jesus, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, lived among us. What does that tell us about our importance in a universe that is so big that we easily can see ourselves as insignificant nothings? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

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## Do Not Fear!

Haggai 2:1–5 presents an interesting development in the great revival taking place among God’s people. About a month after the temple work began, God sent an encouraging word through Haggai to the remnant who had determined, without adequate resources, to rebuild God’s house as directed by the prophets. Haggai asked the elders how the temple’s current state compared to its appearance before the exile. Clearly, the present appearance did not match the former glory. So, people may have been discouraged because they had no chance of duplicating the splendor of Solomon’s temple that once stood in the same place.

The prophet encouraged the people to keep working because God’s Spirit was with them. He called on all members of the remnant community to be strong and to work hard because of the presence of God Almighty in their midst. Haggai’s words to the leaders, “Be strong! Do not fear!” sound like the Lord’s words to Joshua after the death of Moses (*Josh. 1:5–9*). The smaller and weaker were Israel’s own resources, the greater the people’s need for faith in God. The prophet declared that, in the end, the Lord would make the temple’s latter glory greater than its former glory. That became true, however, only because One greater than the temple had come (*see Matt. 12:6*).

The presence of the Spirit confirmed the continuity of God’s kingdom in Israel. The Spirit of God, who had guided Moses and the elders and who had sent forth the prophets with inspired messages, was in the midst of the remnant. The godly response of the leaders and the people testified to the spiritual reformation that had taken place. The Spirit was present in renewing them and in bringing them closer to their God. The presence of the Spirit also guaranteed an abundance of blessings. The prophet encouraged the community members to work out the divine promises to their fulfillments.

Haggai ministered God’s Word to people who knew the harshness of life and the disappointment of unfulfilled hope. He turned their attention to God, who is faithful and who counts on the new community to be responsible citizens of His kingdom, by persevering in doing good, and thus finding true meaning and purpose in their lives.

**A 35-year-old man who had given up on belief in God wrote a 1,900 page suicide note before killing himself. In his note, he wrote: “Every word, every thought, and every emotion comes back to one core problem: life is meaningless.” How does not only our belief in God, but our willingness to obey Him, give our life meaning?**

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## The Desire of All Nations

**Read** Haggai 2:6–9. What is being promised here, and how are we to understand its fulfillment?

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Through Haggai, God announced a great earthshaking of nations on the day of the Lord when the temple will be filled with Divine presence. The prophet called on his contemporaries to look beyond the present adversities and poverty to the future glory of God’s kingdom toward which the temple pointed.

The main reason for the splendor built into the temple of Jerusalem was to make it worthy of God’s presence. Yet, according to this text, the Lord was willing to inhabit the less-than-glorious house and subsequently bring splendor to it. The people did not need to be overly concerned with the ways in which they could finance the temple’s rebuilding. All treasures belong to God, who had promised to dwell in this new temple. The Lord Himself was the provider of the temple’s splendor.

“As the people endeavored to do their part, and sought for a renewal of God’s grace in heart and life, message after message was given them through Haggai and Zechariah, with assurances that their faith would be richly rewarded and that the word of God concerning the future glory of the temple whose walls they were rearing would not fail. In this very building would appear, in the fullness of time, the Desire of all nations as the Teacher and Saviour of mankind.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 577.

God promised that the splendor of the present temple would be greater than the glory of the former temple. It would be a different type of glory because this temple would be honored by the presence of Jesus, in the flesh. Indeed, Christ’s presence made the glory of the new temple greater than that of Solomon’s temple.

**Read Hebrews 8:1–5. Whatever the glory of the earthly temple, we never must forget that it was only a shadow, a symbol of the plan of salvation. Think about what it means that, right now, Jesus is ministering in our behalf in the “true tabernacle,” the one made by God, not man. How can we learn to better appreciate the importance of the sanctuary message in the plan of salvation?**

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## The Lord's Signet Ring

**“ ‘On that day,” declares the LORD Almighty, “I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,” declares the LORD, “and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,” declares the LORD Almighty’ ”** (*Hag. 2:23, NIV*).

The final message from the Lord to Haggai was given on the same day as the previous one in order to complement it (*see Hag. 2:22, 23*). The Lord warned of a coming destruction of kingdoms and nations during the day of God's judgment. But on that same day, the prophet said, the servant of the Lord will accomplish God's appointed task of salvation. This we can best understand as being fulfilled, ultimately and fully, only at the Second Coming and during all that follows it.

The nation's political leader is associated here with the glorious reign of Israel's King David, from whom he was a descendant. Zerubbabel was a grandson of King Jehoiachin and the legitimate heir to David's throne after the Babylonian exile. He served as governor of Judah under the Persian king Darius the Great, and was a leading force behind the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Joshua was the high priest who also helped to rebuild the temple.

The prophet said that Zerubbabel would be the Lord's signet ring, an object that provides evidence of royal authority and ownership. Like a king sealing legal documents with a ring, the Lord would impress the entire world through the work of His servant. Although Zerubbabel's key role in the rebuilding of the temple never should be underestimated, he did not fulfill all of the promises given to him by God through Haggai. The inspired Gospel writers point to the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, son of both David and Zerubbabel, as the final fulfillment of all the Messianic promises found in the Bible.

**Read Luke 24:13–27, focusing especially on Christ's words to the two men. What important message is He giving to them, and how do His words show us the importance of understanding Old Testament prophecy, and why is it so relevant for Christians even today?**

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**Further Study:** “But even this dark hour was not without hope for those whose trust was in God. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were raised up to meet the crisis. In stirring testimonies these appointed messengers revealed to the people the cause of their troubles. The lack of temporal prosperity was the result of a neglect to put God’s interests first, the prophets declared. Had the Israelites honored God, had they shown Him due respect and courtesy, by making the building of His house their first work, they would have invited His presence and blessing.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 573, 574.

“The second temple was not honored with the cloud of Jehovah’s glory, but with the living presence of One in whom dwelt the fullness of the Godhead Bodily—who was God Himself manifest in the flesh. The ‘Desire of all nations’ had indeed come to His temple when the Man of Nazareth taught and healed in the sacred courts. In the presence of Christ, and in this only, did the second temple exceed the first in glory.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 24.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, discuss your answer to Monday’s question regarding the presence of Jesus on earth. Think through the implications of not just His presence but His self-sacrifice for the sins of the world. Think through what these things mean about our value as individuals. Think through, too, just how different a view this presents of humanity in contrast to the atheistic evolutionary views so common in certain parts of the world.
- 2 Isaiah talks about the proud king of Babylon who, at the height of his power, made “nations shake and the earth tremble” (Isa. 14:16, 17). How different is that shaking from the Lord’s intervention as described by Haggai in chapter 2 of his book?
- 3 Ancient Israelites often were disobedient to the messages proclaimed by God’s prophets. Prepare to share with your class members some of the ways in which God’s people today are resisting the messages that the Lord is sending to His people.
- 4 The Bible is very clear: the ancient temple and its sacrificial system lost all value, once and for all, after the death of Jesus. What do Hebrews 8 and 9 tell about the things that Christ has done and is doing for us that the early sanctuary never could?

## Standing Up for Jesus: Part 2

Bien's family refused to allow her to attend the Seventh-day Adventist church. When she insisted, they tried to force her to live with her grandmother on a small island. Bien tried to hide her fear. She wanted to continue her schooling, but the island had no school.

She refused to be separated from the people at the church, people who were praying for her, who encouraged her, and who had shown her what true love was. When her parents realized that Bien would resist their efforts, they took her clothes, her personal items, and her schoolbooks to her grandmother's house, leaving Bien with nothing.

Bien returned to the pastor's house. She borrowed clothes from a friend so she could go to school, but then she realized that she didn't have her textbooks and couldn't attend without them. So, she looked for work with someone in her church. She was sad that she couldn't complete her studies.

Bien continued attending church and studying her Bible. And following evangelistic meetings, she asked to be baptized.

Then a family learned about Bien's situation and visited her parents. They offered to take Bien to the Seventh-day Adventist academy on the island of Palawan [pah-LAO-wan] and pay for her studies. Imagine Bien's joy when she learned that her parents had agreed to let her go.

Bien had never been so far from home, and the thought frightened her. But the pastor assured her that she would love studying at the Seventh-day Adventist school. She reminded herself that her prayer to continue her studies was being answered. Bravely she set off for the Seventh-Adventist school.

The principal took Bien into her own home and provided work for her so she could earn money for her necessities. "I am blessed to have so many people looking out for me," Bien said. "It's so good to be back in school! The academy has become my refuge and my haven. When I finish high school, I want to help others who have problems, just as I was helped. I want to defend what is right and stand for the truth."

Palawan Adventist Academy, where Bien studies, received part of a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering to help the school expand its academic program. Let's continue to give faithfully to missions so that others in the Philippines and throughout the world can know that Jesus is not only their Savior but their Friend and Brother, as well.



# Visions of Hope (Zechariah)



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Zechariah 1, 2, Rom. 15:9–18, Eph. 3:1–8, Zechariah 3, 4, Exod. 25:31–40, Zechariah 7.*

**Memory Text:** “ “In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree,” declares the LORD Almighty’ ” (*Zechariah 3:10, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Though Israel had been punished for its sins, it was time for its people to live again in relationship with God according to His promises.

On the wall of an old castle in central Europe a short Latin inscription reads: “*Dum spiro, spero!*” It means, “As long as I breathe, I have hope!” This saying can summarize the message of Zechariah to God’s people. Nearly twenty years after their return from the Babylonian captivity, some began to wonder if God was still present among His people. They started to feel discouragement replace their earlier enthusiasm.

Zechariah, whose name means “the Lord remembers,” began his prophetic ministry a few months after Haggai began his ministry (*Hag. 1:1, Zech. 1:1*). Through a series of prophetic visions, Zechariah learned God’s plans for the present and the future. God’s eternal kingdom was coming soon, but the prophet called those who lived in his time to serve the Lord now. A good portion of the book is centered on how they were to do just that. This week, and the next, we will look at what the Lord has revealed to us through Zechariah.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 15.*

## Comforting Words of Life

**Read** Zechariah 1. What is the essential message here? Focus especially on Zechariah 1:3. What is the Lord saying to the people?

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The return from the exile in Babylon sparked joy in the hearts of the remnant people. But the return also caused anxiety. Would they be safe and secure in their land, or would enemies come again to harass them? Had God forgiven their past unfaithfulness, or would He continue their punishment? What did the future hold for God's chosen people and for the nations?

In his vision, Zechariah saw the angel of the Lord move to intercede for Judah. He began with the question, "How long?" In the Bible, this question often is used as an expression of people's distress and appeal to the Lord for help (*Ps. 74:10, Isa. 6:11, Dan. 8:13*). The answer to the question came directly through the interpreting angel, who then passed it on to the prophet. It contained words that promised God's kindness and comfort.

Zechariah was told to proclaim that their Lord was very jealous for Jerusalem (*Zech. 1:14*). Jealousy can have negative connotations, but in the Bible it also can be an expression of God's love. God loved His people and expected them to be faithful. In contrast to His love toward Jerusalem, the angel said that the Lord was angry with the nations that had treated His people so harshly. The full charge against the nations was that they had added to the calamity of the divine discipline by going too far in their harsh treatment of captives.

Zechariah 1:15–17 acknowledges God as having been angry, but shows also that He promised to repay the people with comfort. His purpose, which the prophet was commissioned to proclaim, was to return to Jerusalem with compassion. The Lord would comfort Zion (*see Isa. 40:1*) while His anger would be directed to His enemies. Jerusalem was going to be restored, and it would again be the dwelling place of the Lord.

**Look again at Zechariah 1:3. How does one "return" (NIV) unto the Lord? In what ways is this a call for a restored personal relationship between God and His people? How do we (or do we?) "return" unto the Lord every day?**

## The Lord Is Coming

Read Zechariah 2. It records a vision in which the prophet is shown a renewed Jerusalem, so full of people that it overspreads its walls. It will attract countless Gentiles as well, which must have sounded very strange to the people. Verse 10 begins with a call to joy, followed by the reason for such jubilation: the personal coming of the Lord to live among His people.

The Lord's dramatic return to dwell in His rebuilt house is cause for praise for those who have returned from exile. Zion, the dwelling place of the great King, is called "Daughter of Zion," a prophetic term of endearment. In view of its glorious prospect, Zion is invited to rejoice because the Lord Himself will take care of its people. Anyone who touches God's people touches the pupil of His own eye (*vs. 8*).

The prophet said that in the day of the Lord, many non-Hebrew nations will come and join themselves to the Lord's covenant. God's original plan was that the people of the surrounding nations would see how Israel's service to the true God results in blessings and prosperity; thus, they would be led to join themselves to the Lord. In this way the remnant of Israel and the believing Gentiles would together become one people, in whose midst the Lord Himself would dwell. This event would fulfill God's promise to Abram and Sarai that through their posterity, all the nations of the world would be blessed (*Gen. 12:1-3*).

**How** was this prophecy to be fulfilled? (*Rom. 15:9-18, Eph. 3:1-8*).

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Through Zechariah's prophecy, God promises not the destruction of the nations but their inclusion among God's covenant people. The promised future is the result of God's own initiative and was the longing of many biblical prophets. Jesus Christ commissioned His church to preach the good news to the whole world of the salvation that is to be found for everyone in Jesus, if they accept it for themselves. The apostle Paul called this plan of the Lord "the mystery hidden for long ages past" (*Rom. 16:25, NIV*).

**How should our understanding of the universality of the gospel message, and the idea that it is for all humanity, impact how we live; that is, how much of our lives, our time, and our thoughts should be focused on reaching the world with the wonderful truths that we have been given?**

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## God's Readiness to Forgive

**Read** Zechariah 3. How is the gospel portrayed here?

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With perhaps the exception of Isaiah 53, no portion of the Old Testament better reveals the wonderful truth of salvation by faith alone than does Zechariah 3. In this vision, the high priest Joshua is being tried on accusations brought forth by the official accuser, Satan. The accusations against the high priest also apply to the nation which he represented. The name *Joshua* (also spelled as *Jeshua*) means “the Lord saves” (see *Matt. 1:21*) and can also be spelled *Jesus*.

In the Bible, the position of standing on the right side is one of defense and protection. The psalmist says, “I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken” (*Ps. 16:8, NIV; see also Ps. 44:3*). In this case, the accuser is doing just the opposite (*Ps. 109:6*). While Joshua is interceding before God for the people, Satan is bringing accusations against them based on their sinfulness.

The Lord rejects the accusations, reminding the accuser that in His mercy He already has chosen Joshua. Moreover, His people already have suffered the full measure of divine punishment. Joshua and the remnant people have been snatched as a burning stick from the destructive fire (*Amos 4:11*) of long captivity in Babylon.

At the command of the angel of the Lord, Joshua’s clothes, which represent people’s sins, are removed. He is cleansed and then given the new festive garments of salvation and righteousness.

Finally, Joshua is commissioned to do God’s will and to walk in His ways, an attitude that will result in God’s manifold blessings.

“The high priest cannot defend himself or his people from Satan’s accusations. He does not claim that Israel is free from fault. In filthy garments, symbolizing the sins of the people, which he bears as their representative, he stands before the Angel, confessing their guilt, yet pointing to their repentance and humiliation, and relying upon the mercy of a sin-pardoning Redeemer. In faith he claims the promises of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 583, 584. Those promises, of course, include the covering of Christ’s righteousness.

**Imagine having to stand before God in your own “filthy garments.” What great hope is presented here, and how can you not only claim that hope for yourself but reveal the reality of that hope through a holy and sanctified life?**

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## Not by Human Power

**Read** Zechariah 4. What hope is being presented to the people?

In this vision, Zechariah sees a lampstand fed by two olive trees, which refers back to the candlestick located in the Holy Place of the wilderness tabernacle (*Exod. 25:31–40*). The seven lamps are arranged around a large bowl that serves as a reservoir of oil.

The bowl, with its bountiful supply of oil, symbolizes the fullness of God’s power through His Spirit. The seven lamps shine with abundant light, a symbol of God’s abiding presence, which dispels all darkness. Just as the olive oil is conducted directly from the trees to the bowl of oil at the top of the lampstand without any human agency, so the power which comes from God is constant and sufficient and also needs no human agency.

The message of the vision given to the prophet is that the temple in Jerusalem will soon be rebuilt. God’s Spirit, not just human efforts, guarantees the completion of the work. This bold message is given in spite of the fact that the obstacles faced by the builders appear to be as great as a “mountain” (*vs. 7*).

The prophet is not told who is represented by the lampstand, but we can be sure that the two olive trees represent the two leaders of Judah, Joshua and Zerubbabel. In worldly terms, Zerubbabel’s position never could match the royal power and might of his ancestors David and Solomon. From a human point of view, all efforts and resources available to the builders were inadequate. Yet, God’s Word promises that a king is not saved by the size of his army, nor a warrior by his great strength (*Ps. 33:16*). In this way the leaders are told that it is only when the Spirit leads that every detail of service can glorify God.

In this prophetic passage, Christians are given an important principle to remember: God may call us to difficult tasks, but through the work of His Spirit, He can accomplish His purpose (*see Phil. 2:13, 4:13*). By the Spirit, God provides the power for us to do His work now as He did then. Therefore, the work is accomplished not by human might or force but by the Lord working through those who are open to be used by Him.

**Read carefully Zechariah 4:6. Why is it so important always to keep in mind our utter dependence upon God? What can happen when we forget that all that we have, or can do, comes only from the Lord and His power working in us?**

## Beyond Fasting

During Zechariah's third year of ministry, a delegation from Bethel came to Jerusalem to ask the priests and the prophets a question (*see Zech. 7:1–3*). When they were in exile in Babylon, the people fasted during the fifth month to mourn the destruction of the temple (*2 Kings 25:8, 9*). This was in addition to the fasts held in the fourth, seventh, and the tenth months (*Zech. 8:19*). In the fourth month, the breaching of the wall of Jerusalem was remembered (*Jer. 39:2*). The fast in the seventh month, the Day of Atonement, was the only fasting day commanded by God through Moses (*see Leviticus 16*). Finally, in the tenth month, the people mourned the siege against Jerusalem (*Jer. 39:1*). Because the exile was now over and the temple reconstruction almost was complete, the people wondered if it still was necessary to fast in the fifth month.

**Read** the Lord's answer to them (*Zech. 7:8–14*). In what ways can the words here be applied to ourselves?

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God's answer through Zechariah is twofold: first, it is necessary that God's people remember the past so that they do not repeat it. The Lord had warned the ancestors that He expected them to live in trust and obedience. The exile was punishment for their persistent rebellion. So, the people are summoned to learn from their past mistakes. Second, the Lord does not take delight in people's hunger. When they fast and humble themselves before God, repentance and humility need to be reflected in what they do. To fast in order to feel sorry for oneself is a waste of time and effort. Fasting, among other things, should represent the kind of death to self needed in order to be able to put self aside and reach out and minister to the needs of others. "The spirit of true fasting and prayer is the spirit which yields mind, heart, and will to God."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 189.

**What are ways in which we can make valid religious practices, such as fasting and even prayer, become substitutes for what true Christian faith should be about? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

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**Further Study:** “Satan knows that those who ask God for pardon and grace will obtain it; therefore he presents their sins before them to discourage them. Against those who are trying to obey God, he is constantly seeking occasion for complaint. Even their best and most acceptable service he seeks to make appear corrupt. By countless devices, the most subtle and the most cruel, he endeavors to secure their condemnation.

“In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges of the enemy. In sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus, our Advocate, presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause, and by the mighty arguments of Calvary, vanquishes their accuser. His perfect obedience to God’s law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims from His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man. To the accuser of His people He declares: ‘The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. These are the purchase of My blood, brands plucked from the burning.’ And to those who rely on Him in faith, He gives the assurance, ‘Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.’ Zechariah 3:4.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 586, 587.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read the Ellen G. White statements above. How does this help us to understand the great truth, which is salvation by grace alone? In moments of great personal discouragement about our own faults and shortcomings, how can we draw comfort and hope from these words? How can we learn to make this wonderful truth a source of strength that helps us not to turn away from the Lord in utter despair over our own sense of unworthiness? Instead, how can we make this wonderful truth the source of our determination to continue to love God and to keep all of His commandments?
- 2 As a class, go over the final question in Thursday’s study. Why is that such an easy trap to fall into? At the same time, what potential dangers are there when we make our religion into nothing but a kind of social service? How do we strike the right balance?
- 3 However difficult some parts of the book of Zechariah may be (and some parts are difficult), what practical lessons about Christian living can you take from it?

## Nothing to Lose

*What's happened to me?* Solomoni [sohl-oh-MOH-nee] asked himself. He was still a teenager, but he knew that he had messed up his life. He had disobeyed his parents and joined a gang of teenagers who stole and used drugs. *God has condemned me for what I've done*, he thought. *I'm lost. There's no hope for me; I have nothing to lose.* With this attitude, he continued living a life of crime. In time he was arrested and sent to prison. But prison didn't change him.

Solomoni had several dreams that haunted him. He recognized a woman in his dreams as a Seventh-day Adventist. He decided to visit the Seventh-day Adventist church to learn why God had sent the dreams. The members welcomed him warmly, unmindful of his torn shirt and dirty jeans. He sat down and focused on the sermon. He was sobered by the pastor's words and determined to leave his former life behind.

Some of Solomoni's old friends warned him about what would happen if he left his former life. "Do whatever you want to me," he told them. "I've found a better life in God." Solomoni realized that he had been given a second chance in life. God had never let him go, and he had nothing to lose by taking hold of God.

Solomoni's family and friends saw the changes in his life. Some wanted to know what had happened. Solomoni answered by inviting them to church, and several went. They knew that it would take a powerful God to change Solomoni, and they wanted to know God too. Three of Solomoni's former gang member friends were baptized with him.

The pastor saw potential in Solomoni and urged him to consider preparing for the ministry. But Solomoni hesitated. "God has done so much for me, and I want to work for Him," he said. "But with my past, I'm not worthy to be a pastor." He resisted as church members tried to encourage him to consider studying at Adventist-owned Fulton College. But eventually Solomoni recognized God's leading and enrolled to study theology.

He had no financial support, but he trusted God to provide. "I now know that God is calling me to serve Him, and I won't turn back," he says.

Hundreds of students are making a difference in the South Pacific islands thanks to Fulton College in Fiji. Part of a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping to establish a new campus for the college where many more students can prepare to serve their Master. Thank you for your part in making this happen.



# Heaven's Best Gift (Zechariah)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Zechariah 8, Zech. 9:9, Matt. 21:9, Zech. 12:1–10, John 19:37, Zech. 13:7–9, Zechariah 14.*

**Memory Text:** “The LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown” (*Zechariah 9:16, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Zechariah has some wonderful Messianic prophecies that point to Jesus and affirm our faith in Him.

At the heart of the biblical message lies the most beautiful story ever told, that of the Creator God, who, in the person of His Son, left the glory of heaven to save humanity from sin and death. In the second half of Zechariah there are several Messianic prophecies—Old Testament prophetic promises about Jesus—the One who did all this for us.

These specific promises first were given to God's people who lived in Zechariah's perilous times in order to keep them focused on the promise of redemption. Although the original context of these prophecies never should be ignored, their importance never should be confined to the past fulfillments either. Instead, we will look at the ways in which they were fulfilled in Jesus, fulfillments that are universal, not local, because they affect the ultimate destiny of the world and not just ancient Israel and Judah.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 22.*

## “The Robe of a Jew”

Beginning with chapter 8, the book of Zechariah takes a radical turn. A series of messages sent from the Lord tells the future of the world and the role of God’s people in it. Some of the passages from these chapters are not easy to understand, but the ultimate future is clearly positive.

**Read Zechariah 8. What principles can you learn from there that have relevance for us, as Seventh-day Adventists, and for the calling from God that we have been given?**

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God’s plan was that Jerusalem would again be a safe place in which old people would sit in streets filled with playful boys and girls (*Zech. 8:4, 5*). To those who inhabited a city overrun by conquerors, the promise of streets that were safe for young and old sounded like a dream.

Instead of remaining forever a small subordinate nation, God’s people were to be a magnet to which nations would be drawn in order to worship the Lord, King of the whole earth (*Zech. 14:9*). The use of the expression “all languages” (*NIV*) in Zechariah 8:23 indicates that the prophecy envisioned a universal movement.

Like Isaiah (*Isaiah 2*) and Isaiah’s contemporary Micah (*Micah 4*), Zechariah was shown by God that the day would come when a multitude of people from many cities and nations would go up to Jerusalem to pray and seek the Lord. God’s presence in Zion generally will be recognized, as will His blessings on those who worship Him.

The gospel accounts tell that these Messianic promises began to be fulfilled through the ministry of Jesus Christ. On one occasion, for example, Jesus said that when He is lifted up from the earth, He “will draw all peoples” to Himself (*John 12:32, NKJV*).

The church of Christ, also called the “Israel of God” (*Gal. 6:16*), is privileged in our time to have a part in this mission. We are to carry the light of salvation to the ends of the earth. In this way the people of God can be a great blessing to the world.

**Read especially Zechariah 8:16, 17. At a time when our church is seeking revival and reformation, how can we learn to avoid these things, which God says He hates?**

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## The King of Peace

**Read** Zechariah 9:9. How does the New Testament apply this to Jesus? See Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9, 10; Luke 19:38; John 12:13–15.

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Jesus' triumphal entry consisted of the future King riding on a donkey into Jerusalem. In the Bible, rejoicing and shouting for joy especially is associated with the celebration of God as King (*Psalms* 47, 96, 98). This gentle Ruler will bring righteousness, salvation, and lasting peace, and His dominion will stretch to the ends of the earth.

When Jesus triumphantly rode a donkey into Jerusalem only days before His death, a great number of people cheered His coming. Some rejoiced, hoping that Christ would overthrow Rome's power and establish God's kingdom in Jerusalem. But instead of allowing Himself to be Israel's king, Jesus died on the cross and then rose from His grave. There is no question that He disappointed many of His followers, those who sought a more militaristic leader. Little did they know, however, that what they wanted was nothing in comparison to what they were going to get through the death of Jesus instead.

"Christ was following the Jewish custom for a royal entry. The animal on which He rode was that ridden by the kings of Israel, and prophecy had foretold that thus the Messiah should come to His kingdom. No sooner was He seated upon the colt than a loud shout of triumph rent the air. The multitude hailed Him as Messiah, their King. Jesus now accepted the homage which He had never before permitted, and the disciples received this as proof that their glad hopes were to be realized by seeing Him established on the throne. The multitude were convinced that the hour of their emancipation was at hand."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 570.

**Much has been written about how, when things looked good, the crowd was enthusiastic about Jesus; when things did not go right, however, many in that same crowd turned away from Him (some even openly against Him). What can we learn from this event about the danger of false expectations? You claim a promise for healing, for instance, or for victory over a sin, and you do not see it as you expected. How can we develop a faith that will not fail, even when things do not go as hoped, expected, or even prayed for?**

## The One Pierced

Zechariah 12–14 reveal several things that could have happened had Israel been faithful to God. First, the Lord would have brought total victory over the powers of evil and the hostile nations that had tried to oppose His plan of salvation (*Zech. 12:1–9*). Although Jerusalem was to be God’s instrument toward this triumph, the victory itself would have come from the Lord’s intervention. In the end, the enemy utterly would have been defeated and destroyed.

Zechariah 12:10 marks the transition of the movement from physical deliverance, from what would have happened had Israel been faithful, to spiritual deliverance of God’s faithful people. Following the victory, God’s people would embrace their Lord. God’s Spirit of grace and supplication would be poured on the leaders and the people. This convicting work of the Spirit would result in far-reaching repentance and spiritual revival, something that our church itself is seeking.

As God pours out His Spirit, His people look upon the One whom they have pierced and mourn for Him as one mourns the death of an only son. The original Hebrew word for “pierced” always describes some type of physical violence, usually resulting in death (*Num. 25:8, 1 Sam. 31:4*). The poignancy of the people’s grief is heightened by the realization that their own sins caused Jesus Christ’s death.

**Read** Zechariah 12:10. How did the apostle John connect this passage with Christ’s crucifixion and His second coming? See *John 19:37, Rev. 1:7*.

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Interestingly enough, one traditional Jewish interpretation holds that this verse points to the experience of the Messiah. It is, of course, right: it is talking about Jesus and His death on the cross (*compare with Isaiah 53*).

**“The scenes of Calvary call for the deepest emotion. Upon this subject you will be excusable if you manifest enthusiasm. That Christ, so excellent, so innocent, should suffer such a painful death, bearing the weight of the sins of the world, our thoughts and imaginations can never fully comprehend.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 213. How can you grow in your appreciation of what His death means to you and what it offers you?**

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## The Good Shepherd

For centuries both Jewish and Christian readers of the Bible have found in Zechariah's book numerous references to the Messiah and messianic times. Christians, of course, have understood that these passages apply to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ: the triumphant yet peaceful King (*Zech. 9:9*), the One who was pierced (*Zech. 12:10*), the Shepherd who was struck down (*Zech. 13:7*).

In Zechariah 13:7–9 the prophet is shown a scene in which the sword of the Lord's judgment goes out against the Good Shepherd. On a previous occasion the prophet saw the sword being raised against a "worthless shepherd" (*Zech. 11:17, NIV*). But here in this passage the Good Shepherd is struck, and the flock becomes scattered. His death results in a great trial and testing of God's people, during which some perish; yet, all of the faithful are refined.

**Read** Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27. How did Jesus apply this prophecy to that which was going to happen that night? More important, what should that whole incident, that of the disciples fleeing in the face of adversity (see *Matt. 26:56* and *Mark 14:50*), teach us about the faithfulness of God in contrast to human unfaithfulness?

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The image of God as a shepherd is found in many places in the Bible. It begins with the book of Genesis (*Gen. 48:15, NIV*) and ends with Revelation (*Rev. 7:17*). Through Ezekiel, God rebuked the irresponsible shepherds of His people and promised to search for the lost sheep and take care of them. Applying these words to Himself, Jesus declared that He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (*John 10:11*).

**Think of times in which you have been unfaithful to the Lord. Despite that, how does He continue to show you mercy and grace? What must your response be to that mercy and grace?**

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## King of the Whole World

**Read** Zechariah 14. How are we to understand that which is being said there?

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In the last chapter of his book, Zechariah describes a day when all unrepentant nations will gather themselves against Jerusalem. At the last moment, the Lord will intervene by liberating His people and establishing His eternal kingdom on earth. After all who oppose Him are destroyed, all nations will worship the one true God. The Lord will be king over the whole world. He will be one Lord, and His name will be exalted above all names. The great “I AM” expresses all God is and always will be. Though these things were to have happened had Israel remained faithful, they still will be fulfilled but on a grander scale, during the final redemption of God’s people everywhere.

When Zechariah announced the coming of the Messiah, he did not draw a line of separation between His first and second comings. As was the case with other prophets, he saw the coming kingdom of the Messiah as one glorious future. Only in the light of Christ’s first coming can we now distinguish between the two comings. We also can feel gratitude for everything He accomplished for our salvation on Calvary. We can look forward with joy in anticipation of God’s eternal kingdom (*see Dan. 7:14*).

The closing section of this prophetic book describes Jerusalem in its glory, exalted, filled with people, and secure. The saved from all nations will participate in the worship of the eternal King. The entire city of Jerusalem will be filled with the holiness of the temple.

When these glorious promises are studied together with the overall teaching of the Bible, we come to the conclusion that the ultimate fulfillment of these predictions will take place in the New Jerusalem, where God’s people will come together from everywhere and worship Him forever. This all will happen only after the second coming of Jesus. The themes of the people’s perpetual praises will be God’s salvation as well as His goodness and power, just as the famous Song of the Sea concludes: “‘The Lord shall reign forever and ever’” (*Exod. 15:18, NKJV*). Ancient prophets and faithful people from the past all looked with eager anticipation toward this climactic event.

**Dwell on the ultimate redemption that is promised to us—a new heaven and a new earth with no sin, death, suffering, or loss. What are all the reasons you have for this hope, and how can you keep them before you daily, especially in times of trouble, fear, and pain?**

**Further Study:** “In the darkest days of her long conflict with evil, the church of God has been given revelations of the eternal purpose of Jehovah. His people have been permitted to look beyond the trials of the present to the triumphs of the future, when, the warfare having been accomplished, the redeemed will enter into possession of the promised land. These visions of future glory, scenes pictured by the hand of God, should be dear to His church today, when the controversy of the ages is rapidly closing and the promised blessings are soon to be realized in all their fullness. . . .

“The nations of the saved will know no other law than the law of heaven. All will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving. Over the scene the morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite in proclaiming, ‘There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 722, 732, 733.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ However much humans have strived to make things better in our world, the world continues to get worse. According to the Bible, only when Christ returns and remakes this world will it be the paradise that we so long for. Though we know this truth, why are we still called to bring as much comfort, healing, and solace to this world as we possibly can?
- ❷ Thursday’s study pointed out the important fact that many Old Testament prophecies about the coming of Jesus talk about it in ways that seem to refer to one event, not two. What does that tell us about how closely related the First and Second Comings are, in terms of the plan of salvation? Why is that so? Why is it that without the First Coming there could be no Second, and why—without the Second Coming—would the First be of no avail?
- ❸ As we seek for revival and reformation among us, what can we learn from the study of Zechariah that can help us, both individually and as a church, to be prepared for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which is vital to the revival and reformation we so earnestly need?

## Facing the Challenge

Sandy and Yolande love working as Global Mission pioneers in the western highlands of Madagascar.

The couple learned their new dialect while working in the fields with the villagers among whom they live. Sandy helped the people plant and harvest their crops, and Yolande braided the women's hair. Then the couple invited their new friends to learn about Christ.

They started a literacy center to teach the villagers to read and write better. Yolande now teaches the younger children and youth while Sandy teaches the adults. They hope that soon the people will be able to read the Bible for themselves. They include worship as part of their literacy program, and the villagers found great interest in getting to know Jesus.

Recently Sandy and Yolande held evangelistic meetings in a village known for its rough gangs. One night they were startled to see a group of gang members who were carrying guns enter the meeting. Sandy knew that the gang would make trouble if they felt that he was imposing on their territory.

Haja, the gang leader, was tough, and it was obvious that the other gang members respected him. But Sandy and Yolande weren't afraid. "I talked to Haja and asked him to make sure his gang members were there every night," Sandy said.

And Haja and his 20 gang members did come to the meetings every night. In fact, Haja was one of the 31 people who was baptized at the end of the meetings. He's no longer the gang leader. Instead, he's preparing to become a Sabbath School leader. He's still influential among his gang friends and encourages them to come to church.

Sandy and Yolande face many challenges in their work. Dirty water often makes the people sick. Many of the villagers want nothing to do with Christianity. Some believe in witchcraft and fear a woman who is the local witch doctor. Alcohol use is prevalent.

But this Global Mission couple isn't discouraged. "We love the people God has sent us to minister to," says Sandy. "We praise Him for the 60 people who have joined God's family and the two churches we've been able to start here. But there's much more to be done. Please pray that we can overcome these difficulties to bring God's Word to the people here."

Your mission offerings help support the work of Global Mission in Madagascar and around the world.

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*SANDY and YOLANDE Andriatahina share their faith in Madagascar, an island nation off the eastern coast of Africa.*



# Lest We Forget! (Malachi)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Malachi 1, Lev. 1:1–3, Malachi 2, Eph. 5:21–33, Malachi 3, Exod. 32:32, Malachi 4.*

**Memory Text:** “ ‘My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations,’ says the LORD Almighty’ ” (*Malachi 1:11, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Malachi teaches us the extent of God's commitment to His people but also points to their sacred responsibilities.

Malachi's name means “my messenger.” We know nothing about him except that which we can glean from his short book, which brings the section of the Old Testament called the Minor Prophets (or The Book of the Twelve) to an end. His is also the last book of the Old Testament.

The central message of Malachi is that while God revealed His love for His people throughout their history, that love also made His people accountable to Him. The Lord expected the chosen nation and its leaders to obey His commands. Though open idolatry apparently had vanished (the book appears to have been written for Jews who had returned from Babylonian captivity), the people were not living up to the expectations of the covenant. Though they were going through the motions of religious observance, it was a dry formalism without heartfelt conviction.

May we as a church take heed!

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 29.*

## Great Is the Lord

**Read** Malachi 1. What problem is the prophet addressing? How, today, might we be guilty of the same attitude that led to this rebuke?

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Malachi contrasts God's love for His people with the attitude of the priests, whom he charges with the sin of contempt for God's holy name. When performing their duties in the temple, these descendants of Aaron accepted lame, blind, and sick animals for sacrifices to the Lord. In this way the people had been led astray into thinking that sacrifices were not important. Yet, God instructed Aaron and his sons in the wilderness that sacrificial animals should be physically perfect, without blemish (*see Lev. 1:1–3, 22:19*).

The prophet then lists three important reasons why God deserved to be honored and respected by the people of Israel. First, God is their Father. Just as children should honor their parents, so the people must respect their Father in heaven. Second, God is their Master and Lord. Just as servants obey their masters, so God's people should treat Him in the same way. Third, the Lord is a great King, and an earthly king would not accept a defective or sickly animal as a gift from one of His subjects. So, the prophet asks why the people would present such an animal to the King of kings, the One who rules over the whole world.

What, of course, makes their actions even more heinous in the sight of God is that these sacrifices were all pointing to Jesus, the spotless Son of God (*John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19*). The animals were to be without blemish because Jesus had to be without blemish in order to be our perfect sacrifice.

“To the honor and glory of God, His beloved Son—the Surety, the Substitute—was delivered up and descended into the prisonhouse of the grave. The new tomb enclosed Him in its rocky chambers. If one single sin had tainted His character the stone would never have been rolled away from the door of His rocky chamber, and the world with its burden of guilt would have perished.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 10, p. 385. Is there any wonder, then, that the sacrifices which pointed to Jesus had to be perfect?

## Loving and Respecting Others

God's voice, which dominates Malachi's book, is the voice of a loving father who pleads with His children. When the people raise questions and make complaints, He is ready to dialogue with them. Most of the issues discussed by God and His people have to do with a few basic attitudes.

**Read Malachi 2.** Though a number of issues are dealt with, for what practice is the Lord especially condemning them? See *Mal. 2:13–16*.

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While all the Jews recognized God as Father and Creator in their worship, not all of them were living as if God was the Lord of their lives. Malachi takes marriage as an example to illustrate the people's lack of faithfulness and commitment to one another. According to the Bible, marriage is a sacred institution established by God. The people of Israel were warned against marrying outside the faith because by doing so they would compromise their commitments with the Lord and fall into idolatry. (*See Josh. 23:12, 13.*)

God had intended that marriage should be a commitment for life. In Malachi's time, however, many men were breaking the vows that they had made early in life with, as the prophet said, the "wife of your youth." Seeing their wives grow older, the husbands would divorce them and marry younger and more attractive women. For this reason, God says, He hates divorce (*Mal. 2:16*). This strong statement reveals how serious God is about marriage commitments, which so often people take very lightly. The strict rules in the Bible about divorce show just how sacred marriage is.

Because divorce was legal in Israel (*Deut. 24:1–4*), some men did not hesitate to break their marriage vows. Toward the end of the Old Testament period, divorce appears to have become common, somewhat like in many countries today. Yet, in the Bible marriage is consistently presented as a holy covenant before God (*Gen. 2:24, Eph. 5:21–33*).

**Read Malachi 2:17.** What warning should be taken from these words, especially in the context of the day's lesson? Or even in general? How could we be in danger of harboring that same attitude, even subconsciously?

## Tithe in the Storehouse

**Read** Malachi 3:1–10. What is God saying to His people here? What specific elements are found in these verses, and why would they all be tied together? That is, in what ways are these things all related to each other?

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With these verses, God restates the basic message of the Minor Prophets: His love remains constant and unwavering. In verse 7 God’s call is heard once more: “ ‘Return to me, and I will return to you’ ” (*NIV*). The people then ask: “ ‘How shall we return?’ ” (*RSV*). This question is similar to the one in Micah 6:6 about the bringing of sacrifices to God. In the case of Malachi, however, a specific answer is given, and, surprisingly enough, it has to do with the question of the people’s tithing, or lack thereof.

In fact, they are accused of stealing from what belongs to God. This happened because they were not faithful in the returning of their tithes and offerings.

The custom of tithing, or giving 10 percent of one’s income, is presented in the Bible as a reminder that God owns everything and all that people have comes from Him. The tithe was used in Israel to support the Levites, who ministered in the temple. To neglect the returning of one’s tithe is, according to Malachi, the same as robbing God.

Malachi 3:10 is one of the rare Scriptures in which God challenges people to put Him to the test. At the waters of Meribah in the wilderness, the children of Israel repeatedly “tested” God’s patience, which is what He was angry about (*Ps. 95:8–11*). Here, however, God is inviting Israel to put Him to the test. He wants the people to see that they can trust Him in this matter, which, according to the texts, is something of great spiritual significance.

**How does the act of tithing (and of giving offerings, for that matter) strengthen you spiritually? In other words, when you cheat on tithe, why are you cheating yourself, not just God?**

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## A Scroll of Remembrance

In Malachi 3:13–18, the people complain that the Lord did not care about the nation’s sins. Those who practiced evil and injustice appeared to escape unnoticed; and thus, many wondered why they should serve the Lord and live righteously when evil seemed to go unpunished.

**Read** Malachi 3:14, 15. Why is it easy to understand that complaint?

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**How** does the Lord respond? *Mal. 3:16–18.*

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It is easy in this world, where so much injustice exists, to wonder if justice ever will be done. The message here, however, is that God knows of all these things, and He will reward those who are faithful to Him.

**The expression** “a scroll [book] of remembrance” is found only here in Scripture. What do the following passages teach about God’s books in which are recorded people’s names and deeds? *Exod. 32:32, Ps. 139:16, Isa. 4:3, 65:6, Rev. 20:11–15.*

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The bottom line is that the Lord knows all things. He knows those who are His (*2 Tim. 2:19*) and those who are not. All we can do is, as sinners, claim His righteousness, claim His promises of forgiveness and power, and then—relying on Christ’s merits—die to self and live for Him and others, knowing that in the end our only hope is in His grace. If we place our hope in ourselves, we are sure to be disappointed, one way or another.

## The Sun of Righteousness

On a previous occasion the people asked, “Where is the God of justice?” (Mal. 2:17, NKJV). In the beginning of chapter 4, a solemn assurance is given that one day God will execute His judgment on the world. As a result, the proud will be destroyed along with the wicked, just as stubble is consumed in fire. Stubble is the unusable part of the grain, and is consumed in only seconds when thrown into a blazing furnace. On the Day of the Lord, fire will be the agent of destruction, just as water was in Noah’s day.

**Read Malachi 4.** What great contrast is presented here between the saved and the lost? See also Deut. 30:19, John 3:16.

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While the fate of the wicked is described in verse 1, verse 2 focuses on future blessings of the righteous. The question “Where is the God of justice?” is answered again, but this time by the assurance of a coming day when the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in its wings (NIV). The rising of the “Sun of Righteousness” is a metaphor for the dawn of a new day, one that marks a new era in the history of salvation. At this time, once and for all, evil will be destroyed forever, the saved will enjoy the ultimate fruit of what Christ has accomplished for them, and the universe will be rendered eternally secure.

Malachi closes his book with two admonitions that characterize biblical faith. The first is a call to remember God’s revelation through Moses, who wrote the first five books of the Bible and the foundation of the Old Testament.

The second admonition speaks of the prophetic role of Elijah. Filled with the Holy Spirit, this prophet called people to repent and return to God. Although Jesus Himself saw John the Baptist as a fulfillment of that prophecy (Matt. 11:13, 14), we also believe it has a fulfillment at the end of time, when God will have a people who fearlessly will proclaim His message to the world. “Those who are to prepare the way for the second coming of Christ, are represented by faithful Elijah, as John came in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way for Christ’s first advent.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, pp. 72, 73.

**How are we to fulfill this sacred role? How well are we doing in this task?**

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**Further Study:** “God blesses the work of men’s hands, that they may return to Him His portion. He gives them the sunshine and the rain; He causes vegetation to flourish; He gives health and ability to acquire means. Every blessing comes from His bountiful hand, and He desires men and women to show their gratitude by returning Him a portion in tithes and offerings—in thank offerings, in freewill offerings, in trespass offerings. They are to devote their means to His service, that His vineyard may not remain a barren waste. They are to study what the Lord would do were He in their place. . . . They are to take all difficult matters to Him in prayer. They are to reveal an unselfish interest in the building up of His work in all parts of the world.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 707, 708.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the Bible and marriage. Because marriage itself is so sacred, something created by God Himself, it comes with some very strict guidelines about what is biblically permitted to dissolve it. After all, how sacred, how important would marriage be were it easily ended? If you could get out of it for the most trivial of reasons, then marriage itself would be trivial. How do the strict rules against ending a marriage prove just how special it is?
- 2 As a class, carefully go over Malachi 2:17. What do we, as Seventh-day Adventists, with our understanding of the pre-Advent judgment, have to say to those who might be uttering the same sentiments expressed in this verse?
- 3 Malachi 4 talks about the ultimate destruction of the lost. Nothing remains. How does this teaching contrast with the idea of an eternally burning hell-fire? Why is the contrast between these two views a good example of the ways in which false doctrine can lead to a false understanding about the character of God?
- 4 In his classic work “The Grand Inquisitor,” Russian writer Dostoevsky depicted the institution of the church in his time as having things so well under control that it did not need Christ anymore. Are we facing that same danger today? If so, how so? How might this danger be more subtle than we realize?

## Usha's Hope

Usha returned home after a long day selling garlic on the streets of Mumbai, India, where she lives. She placed her basket on the dirt floor inside the family's one-room home. The box where she kept the family's few clothes was open, its contents strewn about. She knew that her husband had searched it for something to sell to buy alcohol. He had already sold everything else the family had owned—a chair, a blanket, her cooking pot. She folded the remaining clothes and replaced the box top.

Usha worked hard to feed her growing family. Her husband's meager earnings went to buy alcohol. And when that wasn't enough, he took Usha's earnings, as well. If she resisted, he beat her. Her hope for a better life spiraled into desperation.

One day she heard singing from a neighbor's home. She heard singing the next day, too, but she was too shy to ask what was happening. So she listened from her doorway.

When Usha heard singing again, she walked to her neighbor's home and sat down on the packed earth to listen as the women sang about someone called Jesus. *Who is this Jesus?* Usha wondered.

A man stood to talk. As he spoke, Usha felt peace wash over her.

She returned the next day to hear more. She found hope and faith amid the despair of her life as she learned about the Savior who loves her. She accepted Jesus as her Redeemer. Life was still difficult, but her heart was at peace.

Usha's husband became sick from an alcohol-related disease and died, leaving Usha and her three young children. The pastor visited her and urged her to send her children to school. But Usha could hardly feed them. How could she pay their school fees?

"There's a way," the pastor said. "If you can pay half of your children's tuition, a sponsor can pay the rest. They can study at Lasalgaon Adventist School." Usha allowed herself to hope that her children might have a decent future after all. With no one taking her money to buy alcohol, perhaps she could earn enough to send her children to school.

Usha misses her children, but she knows they are safe and will have a better life. Often she sacrifices her own food to pay the children's tuition, but she knows that God is caring for her.

A recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping to build a new classroom block at Lasalgaon Adventist School, where Usha's children study. Thank you for helping to make it possible for children in northwestern India to prepare for a brighter future and find hope in Jesus.



Ellen G. White described the importance of revival in these words: “A revival of true godliness is the greatest and most urgent of all of our needs.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 121. Heaven places priority on revival. What could be more important? The third quarter lesson study entitled *Revival and Reformation* by Mark Finley will explore such topics as prayer and revival, the Word and revival, witnessing and revival, a finished work and revival, and other related subjects.

Throughout history, God’s Spirit has moved mightily in revival. His Spirit creates longings within us. His Spirit convicts us of our need. His Spirit reveals Jesus’ goodness and grace.

God’s heart longing was for Israel to meet the conditions of revival, experience the power of revival, and reveal the light of His love to the entire world.

When God’s people responded to His appeals for revival, He worked mightily in their behalf. This was true for the New Testament Christian Church, the Reformation, and the Advent Movement. It will also be true for God’s end-time people. His Holy Spirit will be poured out in its fullness.

Let us pray that God will powerfully speak to our hearts and draw us closer to Him as a world church during this study.

## Lesson 1—Revival: Our Great Need

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Hope for Lukewarm Laodiceans** (*Rev. 3:14*)

MONDAY: **A Loving Rebuke** (*Rev. 3:15, 16*)

TUESDAY: **Perception and Reality** (*Rev. 3:17, Matt. 25:1–13*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Divine Remedy** (*Rev. 3:18, 19*)

THURSDAY: **A Relentless Love** (*Rev. 3:20, 21*)

**Memory Text**—*Revelation 3:20*

**Sabbath Gem:** The Laodicean message is filled with hope. Christ speaks to His people in love, offering to meet their heart needs and revive their deepest spiritual longings.

## Lesson 2—The Heartbeat of Revival

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Prayer and Revival in Acts** (*Acts 2:41, Acts 6:7*)

MONDAY: **Jesus’ Prayer Life** (*Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16*)

TUESDAY: **Praying Together** (*Acts 12:1–16*)

WEDNESDAY: **Our Freedom** (*Ps. 78:41, 42*)

THURSDAY: **Effective Prayer** (*Ps. 34:1, 50:23, 67:3, 71:6*)

**Memory Text**—*Matthew 7:11*

**Sabbath Gem:** God moves powerfully as His people pray.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired** The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.