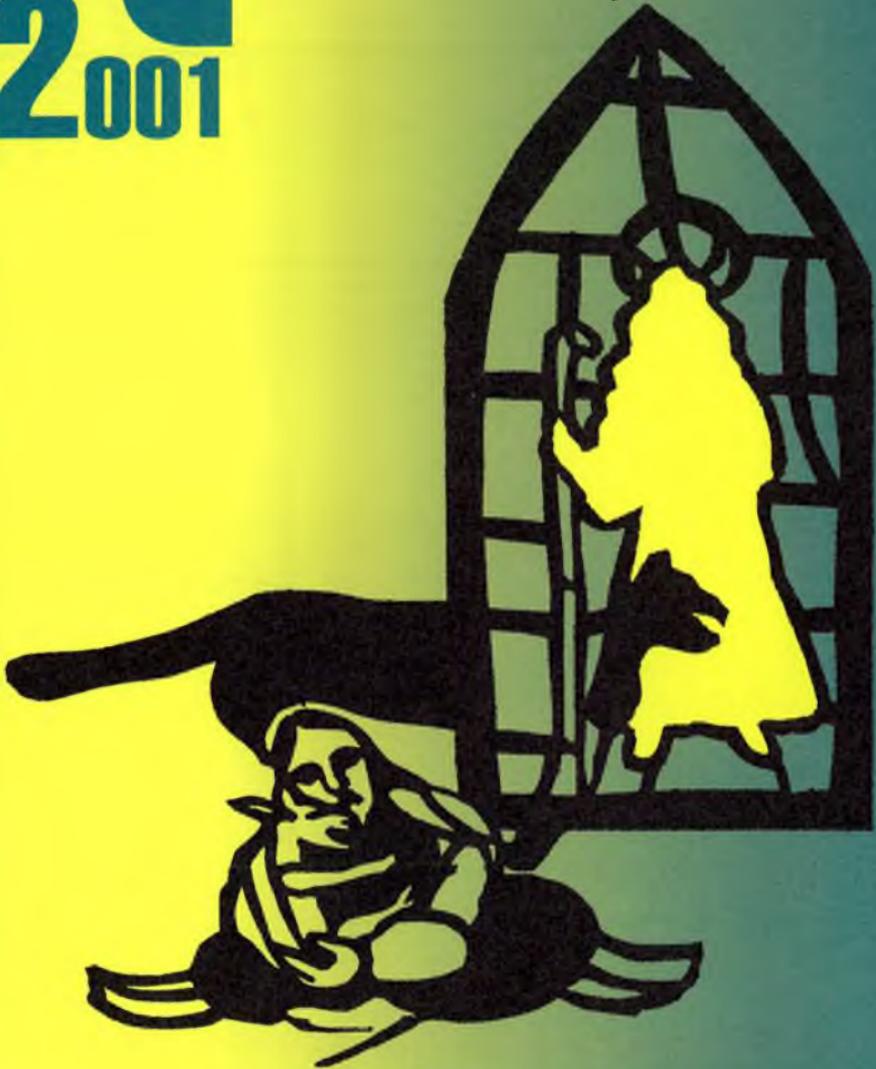


OCTOBER-DECEMBER

God's View of Social Injustice

Q
2001



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults



www.cq.youthpages.org

God's View of Social Injustice

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2001



Staff

Editor: Gary B. Swanson
Editorial Assistant: Shirlee J. Ingram

Reading Committee

Kathy Beagles	Jonathan Kuntaraf	Melissa Richards
Lisa Saveikis Burrow	Michelle Oetman	Ken Rogers
Lyndelle Chiomenti	Tim Poirier	José Rojas
Falvo Fowler	Summer Porter	Mo Walton
Pat Habada	George Reid	Jim Zackrisson

CQ is written by Seventh-day Adventist young adults and their friends around the world.

Editorial Office: Sabbath School/Personal Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, U.S.A.

Place orders with: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353, U.S.A.

Other than the King James Version, Scripture versions used in this Bible Guide are as follows:

LIVING BIBLE (TLB)

Scriptures quoted from TLB are from The Living Bible, copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Ill. Used by permission.

NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE (NASB)

Scriptures quoted from NASB are from the New American Standard Bible, copyright © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV)

Scriptures quoted from NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

NEW KING JAMES VERSION (NKJV)

Scriptures quoted from NKJV are from The New King James Version, copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982, 1983, by the Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers.

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION (NRSV)

Scriptures quoted from NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright (c) 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission.

CQ (ISSN 0744-2939), Volume 24, No. 4. Published quarterly by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1350 North Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193, U.S.A. and printed by Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1350 North Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193, U.S.A.

One-year subscription in U.S.A., \$14.99; single copy, \$6.29. One-year subscription in countries outside U.S.A., \$18.99; single copy, \$6.29. All prices at U.S.A. exchange. Periodicals postage paid at Nampa, ID 83687.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CQ, P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353, U.S.A. Send editorial inquiries to CQ, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, U.S.A. Send circulation inquiries to Pacific Press® Publishing Association, P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353, U.S.A. When a change of address is desired, please send both old and new addresses.

Copyright © 2001 by the Sabbath School/Personal Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Printed in the U.S.A.



God's View of Social Injustice

- 1. The Non-prophet** prophet..... **10**
Qurentia Chester, Nicola Connor, Flora R. Johnson, Mark Johnson,
Craig McPherson, Sandra Thomas
- 2. Sins** of the **Neighbors**..... **19**
Rodney D. Chow, Melissa McKoy, Lynn Mfuru, Hadley Vila Nova,
Douglas D. Straw, Pau Khan Thang
- 3. "Hear this Word"** **28**
Karen Clark, Kriselle Courtney, Stephen Craig, Clacy Fatnowna,
Grenville Kent, Cathy Kissener
- 4. Preparing** to meet **God** **37**
Stephanie Clark, Nielson Craig, Gregory Cumberbatch, Hugh Leighton
Fletcher, A. Opal McLean, Arlene Thompson, C. E. Ware, Sr.
- 5. Seeking the Lord** **46**
Ian M. Cort, Chris Down, Loren Latchman, Helen Lockham, Paul
Lockham, Stephanie Yamniuk
- 6. Pass Over** or pass **Through?** **55**
Jason Cole, Trudy J. Morgan-Cole, Janice Hill, Jennifer Morgan,
Donalda Murley, Mario Saric
- 7. "At Ease in Zion"** **64**
Eleazar M. Famorcan, Noelle Hadley, Beverly I. Henry, Zámbo Kocic
Larisa, Kirsten Oster-Lundqvist, Zámbo Zoltán

-
- 8. Locusts and Prayer** **73**
Gill Bahnsen, Derrill Fields, John Thomas McLarty, Ceri Myers, Tonya Rincon, Bill Roberts
- 9. Judgment by Fire** **82**
Tshenolo Boikaego, Anita Chiper, David Kelly, Shauna Kirwan, Thato Mabote, Douglas McCormac, Niall Sisson
- 10. The Plumb Line** **91**
Nathan Brown, Kenneth Brummel, Maxine Dacres, Lukwaro Gureni, Sanjo A. Jeffrey, Phillip Whidden
- 11. Summer Fruit** **100**
Sandra Covell Dombrowski, Klebert B. Feitosa, Lilian P. Weichert Feitosa, Deena Bartel-Wagner, Gary Wagner, Wilmore Webley
- 12. No Escape for the lost** **109**
Lyndon Bender, Johan A. Japp, Jacques Stephen Venter, Alexander Vilem, Nick te Water, Adrian Webster
- 13. The Truest Story of them all** **118**
Jim Feldbush, Mullah James, Andrew Moya, Jennifer Murdoch, Kaaryn Sanon, Jennifer Tyner

Welcome to CQ's World



The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in *CQ's* writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School Bible study guide, four hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 65,000. It is published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Russian, Indonesian, and Finnish.

**SABBATH SCHOOL
TEACHER PREPARATION
IN MINUTES . . .**



www.cq.youthpages.org



JUST CLICK AND SERVE!



Meeting The Challenge ...

Ride Across America

Plan now to join other young adults as they cycle for cancer research and prevention in 2002.

Watch for exciting updates by visiting www.northamerica.adventist.org/hm

Remember — a dream too big is just the right size.

“...ride forth victoriously for the cause of truth and to defend the right.” *Psalm 45:4, Revised Version*



Get Interactive

Ever think about writing for *CQ*?

Why not! Each year 400 young adults from around the world participate in the *CQ* writing program. It gives Seventh-day Adventist young people aged 18 to 35 a unique opportunity to grow spiritually, to share the benefits of their Bible study, to exchange ideas, and to contribute to the mission of the church.

You are the most important ingredient in our *CQ* formula because you can be the answer to our greatest need—the need for caring, committed, contributing authors. If you think you'd like to participate in the writing of a lesson, write us today:

CQ
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904 U.S.A.

Fax: 301-680-6155
Email: cq@gc.adventist.org



This Quarter's Illustrator



Since graduating from Andrews University with a degree in art and theology, Jennifer Morgan has taught in Adventist academies throughout North America, most recently history and drama at Mountain View (California) Academy. She has illustrated five books for small publishers in her native Newfoundland. She is presently planning to return to Canada to pursue studies in graphic arts.

Getting the Most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. CQ's purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the Adult Bible Study Guide find that because CQ deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to CQ each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of CQ is about 65,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
 - "Introduction" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
 - "Logos" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
 - "Testimony" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
 - "Evidence" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
 - "How-To" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
 - "Opinion" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
 - "Exploration" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference-approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the Church.*

The Non-prophet prophet



“Amos answered, and said to Amaziah: ‘I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me, “Go, prophesy to My people Israel” ’ ”
(Amos 7:14, 15, NKJV).

TV—Art Imitating Life

INTRODUCTION

Eccles. 3:15

His body, flagged with fatigue, maneuvered its way through the darkened space in his living room. He groped into the blackness and seized his loyal companion, the remote. The room gradually lit up from the radiating glow of the entertainment center. Phillippe didn't have much in his apartment since moving away to college, but he proudly displayed his newly acquired possession, a 55-inch, theater-style TV fully equipped with surround sound.

Flip . . . flip . . . images from a hot new video caught his eye. As he bopped his head to the beat, his fingers pulsed the channels forward. The few words he could understand were not weighty enough to keep his attention. Flip . . . flip . . . the wrinkled brow on the picture-perfect face concerned him so he paused to listen. "I have with me now, Antonio, who organized this protest going on behind me. Tell us more about the situation."

"Boo!" retorts the audience on cue.

"Yes, it's terrible we can't live. It's so unfair."

"Unfair! Unfair!" came the shouts from behind.

"Go on," she prodded.

"It's terrible the way they charge us three times the going rate for rent and they . . ."

The news reporter interrupted, "Who are they?"

Astounded by the question, he bellowed into the microphone, "Those big shot church folk! They are wicked I tell . . ."

Flip . . . flip . . . "Ladies and gentlemen, today we are talking to people who redefine the meaning of being a close family. Let's bring out our first guest. Please welcome Mark and his son David, who are both sleeping with the same woman."

"Boo!" retorts the audience on cue.

Flip . . . flip . . . Phillippe jabs the power-off button in disgust and logs onto his email account. Streaming across the screen he reads from his news ticker that the National Council of Churches just ousted their spiritual leader for condemning the administration for their unfair rent practices on the poor. The spokesperson cited inadequate training as the main reason for their decision.

At this point, Phillippe decides the best way he could spend the rest of his evening is to study God's Word. He shifts his slender frame onto his frayed couch, turns to this week's lesson, and leafs the crisp pages of his Bible to Amos. Funny how history repeats itself. "Whatever exists today and whatever will exist in the future has already existed in the past. For God calls each event back in its turn" (Eccles. 3:15, NLT).

Sunday
September 30

A Hurt and Upset Father

LOGOS

1 Kings 12:25-33; Amos 1:1; 2:7; 3:7; 7:14; 8:1

As I turned to each new chapter of the book of Amos, I waited for an encouraging word. In their 40-year journey through the wilderness, the Israelites were constantly forgetting how good their God had been to them. Yet He never sounded this angry.

Amos Who? (Amos 3:7)

The children of Israel were accustomed to being reproved, but you had to have credentials: a high priest, an appointed prophet, or even a lamenting king. But Amos himself admitted that he was not a prophet (Amos 7:14). That he was careful to point this out seems to show his reverence for that position. Yet he had to proclaim the word he was given from God. He was careful to keep reminding the Israelites that this message was sent from the Lord (1; 2:1, 4; 3:1, 11, 12).

Like her neighbors, Israel would be destroyed because of her iniquities. Imagine that the same God who had performed so many wonders for the Israelites would or could now turn against them. They knew that historically they had God's favor. He would never destroy them because He had made them the destroyer of nations. Yet this same

**God's care is often
taken for granted.**

presumption on the part of the Israelites had led them to rebellion in the wilderness. It led to failure in conquering Ai the first time. Amos, a simple shepherd, had a message for them from a hurt and upset Father: I will have to destroy my people for their sins (7:15-17).

Numbered With the Enemy (1 Kings 12:28-30; Amos 1-6)

As with that of other nations, Amos spoke of utter desolation. Like so many times before, when a kingdom was destroyed God gave all its possessions to His children, Israel. But this time there comes a twist: "From among all the families on the earth, I chose you alone. That is why I must punish you for all your sins" (Amos 3:2, NLT). Israel is numbered with her enemies that will have to be destroyed because of their sins!

"The exaltation of nature above the God of nature, the worship of the creature instead of the Creator, has always resulted in the grossest of evils. Thus when the people of Israel, in their worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, paid supreme homage to the forces of nature, they severed their connection with all that is uplifting and ennobling, and fell an easy prey to temptation. With the defenses of the soul broken

down, the misguided worshipers had no barrier against sin and yielded themselves to the evil passions of the human heart.”*

Can you blame God for being angry? He had guided the Israelites through the wilderness for 40 years, and now they claimed that these golden calves had brought them out of Egypt (12:28), an act devised solely out of the king's need to preserve his sovereignty on the throne (verses 26, 27). The children of God were so blinded that they allowed their carnal minds to lead them all the way to Dan to worship the golden calf (verse 30). Dan was 70 miles north of Shechem; Jerusalem, only 30 miles to the south.

Amos the Beggar (Amos 7)

As Abraham had begged for God's mercy for Sodom (Gen.18:22-33), and as Moses had pleaded for Israel (Exod. 32:30-33), here Amos also pleads with God not to destroy His people: “O Lord God, forgive, I pray!” (Amos 7:2, NKJV)

Israel Purified and Saved (Amos 8; 9)

Through Amos 8; 9, God lets us know that He would spare His sincere people, yet He says He will “sift the house of Israel” (9:9, KJV) and warns that “ ‘All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword’ ” (verse 10, NKJV). Although God speaks so harshly of the destruction of the sinners, He is gracious and merciful, as is often taken for granted, when He declares in the final verse of this book that He will plant Israel “ ‘in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land’ ” (verse 15, NKJV).

Summary

The story of Amos shows that God's care is often taken for granted. So many times, like our fathers before us, we presume that we can live as we like without the notice of the Great Creator. We may feel that He is too busy to recognize our sins. That He is too merciful to punish us when others have done worse. That God's love is so awesome that He could never turn on us.

But we must never forget that God has declared standards for His people to live by. For the faithful and true, He promises great things and great rewards, yet He also says that not all will receive of His greatest gifts. The end of the book of Amos reveals how God will sift from His own people those who have stayed the course and fought the good fight. God will not allow sin to continue always. He lets us know that as we give our lives to Him and honor Him, He will in return honor us, throughout eternity.

**Prophets and Kings*, p. 281.

TESTIMONY

Amos 1:1; 3:7

The Omniscient God decided there was work to be done during the days of Judah's King Uzziah and Israel's King Jeroboam. He co-opted a man who, in today's society, would be classified as a lower class person. Amos, a shepherd of Tekoa, a most unlikely candidate, was chosen to be a vessel to prophesy the Word of God.

During my high school years I sought to master another musical instrument

I knew that this would be my next challenge.

besides the piano and guitar. Unsure of which instrument to select for band class, I offered a prayer to God for a clear revelation. The answer finally arrived by post in the form of a postcard from a friend in Greece. The front of

the card displayed the most majestic picture of the French horn that I had ever seen. At this moment I knew that this would be my next challenge.

I presented my choice to the music teacher, who tried to dissuade me. Undaunted by his explanations of why this was an unwise selection (I did not fit the "profile" of a French-horn player; the mouthpiece was very hard to master; forming proper mouth positions was a difficult task at best), I insisted that this was the instrument that I was meant to learn to play.

Ellen White states that "God desires us to make use of every opportunity for securing a preparation for His work. . . . Many who are qualified to do excellent work accomplish little because they attempt little. . . . Be not satisfied with reaching a low standard. . . . None should consent to be mere machines, run by another man's mind."¹

Armed with this knowledge, I practiced continuously on evenings and weekends and was eventually moved to the first-horn seat. Throughout college this "unclassy" high school kid performed at numerous prestigious churches and concert with symphony orchestras.

"In giving light to His people anciently, God did not work exclusively through any one class."² Amos, a herdsman, was "raised up as [God's] representative,"³ and was taught important truths to be given to the world. He was the unlikely candidate for the job, yet the task was accomplished, and he fulfilled the will of God. He was, in the eyes of God, an extremely "classy" man.

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 192.

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 148.

3. *Ibid.*

Do You Get the Point?

EVIDENCE

Lev. 20:3, 11, 12; Ezek. 22:11; Amos 2:7

Martin Luther King, Jr., was an ordinary young man whose life was fashioned in a lower middle-class family, but in his short lifetime he became a great civil rights leader. God calls all believers, despite their unprofessional backgrounds, to work against injustices in society and to aid those less fortunate. Although Amos became one of God's great prophets, he was at first apprehensive to do God's will: "I'm not one of your professional prophets. I certainly never trained to be one. I'm just a shepherd, and I take care of fig trees" (Amos 7:14, NLT). It must have been difficult for Amos to seek support of his contemporaries in this task.

The Lord yearned for a servant to bring His Word to His wayward people, and He chose Amos, who became a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel from 760 B.C. to 750 B.C. He was a minor prophet with a major message that marks the beginning of a new era in religion. During this period, the wealthy and powerful people of Samaria had become prosperous, greedy, and unfair. Illegal and immoral slavery had come as the result of over-taxation and land grabbing. There was also cruelty and indifference toward the poor.

How could God's children have fallen to this level? They failed to obey the laws God had given them regarding righteous living. In Leviticus 20:3, 11, 12, the Lord outlined the consequences of having sexual intercourse outside the covenant of a husband and wife. The practices of the neighboring heathen nations had been incorporated into Israel's everyday life, when they were supposed to be an example of God's righteousness. Their minds were given to carnal temptations, and God's Word could not get through, which includes loyalty to God and a right relation to other people. The ultimate loyalty we as created beings can show to our Creator is to present our bodies as a living temple. This demonstrates a powerful force of worship.

He was a minor prophet with a major message.

Amos wasn't a professional prophet, but as God's spokesperson he gave a similar message to the bullying nations and to Israel, the victim. And Amos has lessons for us today. He reminds us to be careful in pointing judgmental fingers at others, since they could end up pointed back at us.

REACT

1. How can God use me to exhort sexual morality to a classmate or coworker?
2. What do you think Amos meant when he said he was not a professional prophet? What are some characteristics of a professional prophet?

Wednesday
October 3

How to Be God's Servant

HOW-TO

Amos 3:7; 7:14, 15

God needs a modern-day Amos.

Prosperity is a good thing, but when it becomes our main focus it can have negative effects. That is what was happening in Amos's day. Many sins came along with prosperity: pride, greed, selfishness, oppression, extravagance, moral decay, etc.

God needed a servant to speak for Him. He chose Amos. A servant is an ambassador, soldier, one who serves others, a spokesperson. Amos was a humble herdsman. He was not highly educated, nor was he trained in the schools of the prophets of his day. Why was he chosen?

God saw some characteristics in Amos that would make him a good servant. A good servant is:

1. Willing. "If there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have" (2 Cor. 8:12, NKJV). We must be willing to do God's bidding at any cost.

2. A good listener. " "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears" ' " (1 Sam. 3:9, NKJV). This was young Samuel's response to God. To be used as His servant we must listen intently for His call.

3. Not threatened by criticism. " "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6, NKJV). Despite uncooperativeness, fault finding, and danger, we must go forward in the Lord.

4. Committed. "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:5, NKJV). We must commit to the belief that God will work everything out for our own good.

5. Faithful. " 'Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life' " (Rev. 2:10, NKJV). Our faithfulness to God will enable us to have eternal life.

Note the similarities between Amos's time and now. The economy is at its best. As we look around, the world and even the church is on a path of destruction. Along with prosperity follows the same common sins as in Amos's day. God needs a modern-day Amos, someone who exhibits characteristics similar to those of Amos.

Landi, a fellow choir member of mine, registered for a college course that she needed to graduate. The days the class would meet were changed to Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday. She told her advisor and teacher that she would not come to class on her Sabbath. She was told she would fail if she missed Saturday classes. Despite the doubts of her teacher, Landi took the course, skipped every Sabbath, and received an "A." The Lord *will* work things out if we trust in Him.

In Need of a Ride

OPINION

Amos 2:7; Matt. 25:40

Christians can at times display judgmental attitudes toward those less fortunate or less educated in biblical principles. Some Christians do so unconsciously while others do so blatantly. Those attending church praise God and give tithe in one breath but find fault with fellow worshipers in the next, while disregarding the spiritual and physical plight of others. Those who demonstrate this behavior, turning a blind eye to biblical doctrine forbidding actions such as these, can be described as playing spiritual Russian roulette.

A subtle example of this can be observed in an incident I witnessed at a job site. A young woman who professed to be Christian always told about the wonderful time she had worshiping at church on the weekends. She always inquired about my worshiping habits, encouraging me to stick to the straight and narrow ways of living. I usually responded by saying that I would do my best, followed by an expression of gratitude for her concern.

One day during a terrible rainstorm, however, one of the women from the office asked this young Christian woman for a ride to the subway. The Christian woman denied the request, stating that going to the subway, which was two minutes away, would make her late for her weekly prayer meeting. My jaw dropped in utter shock at her response. Just then, an older woman stepped forward, volunteering to oblige the request. From that day on, the credibility of that young woman no longer warranted respect.

The Christian woman denied the request.

Everything you do as a professed Christian is witnessed not only by other Christians and nonbelievers, but by the Creator above (Matt. 25:40). Jesus often depended on the kindness of strangers and in this regard classified Himself as being one of the poor.

REACT

1. How poor does someone have to be before you feel obligated to help? Homeless? In need of a ride? A few dollars short for textbooks? Explain your answer.

2. How might you now approach the woman who needed a ride to the subway in an effort to revise her view of Christians? Be specific.

3. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote in his 1963 *Letter From Birmingham Jail*: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." How does this thought amplify Amos 2:7?

Expecting the Unexpected

EXPLORATION

Amos 7:14, 15; 2:1, 7, 8; James 1:27

CONCLUDE

Under Jeroboam II, Israel prospered economically, but was spiritually bankrupt. Rather than uplift those less fortunate, they utilized their assets to make their lives even more luxurious. To help urge reform, God called Amos, a humble shepherd from Judah.

Today, wealth still deafens many people to the cries of the needy and to God's pleas for reformation. Today, He still calls unlikely people to help Him plead for change. Could He be calling you?

CONSIDER

- Reading an autobiography or biography of an unlikely person God called to do a special work. As you read, reflect upon the difference this person's life made. Considering your abilities, what goals can you set for yourself to make a difference in the lives around you?
- Singing the words to some of the hymns that relate to accepting God's call. How do these songs inspire you?
- Viewing the video *Dead Man Walking*. Think about the sacrifices that Sister Helen Prejean had to make to accept the call to her ministry.
- Walking with other members from your church through some of the poorer sections of your community. Discuss what needs you observe, and how your church can best help to fulfill those needs.
- Volunteering in ways that utilize your talents. Are you a good organizer? Perhaps a local charity needs help systematizing their files. Or if you enjoy meeting people and have a well-behaved pet, visit nursing homes.
- Thinking about how you can help coworkers or classmates in little ways during an average day. Keep a journal of the things you do, the responses you received, and how you felt for having blessed others.
- Observing how the natural world in your area is interconnected. Think of ways in which the people with whom you share are interconnected. How can you use this interconnectedness to create a better world?

CONNECT

Prophets and Kings, chap. 23. *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 148-154.

Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter From Birmingham Jail." Allen Luks, *The Healing Power of Doing Good*.

Sins of the Neighbors



“ ‘Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent’ ” (Rev. 3:19, NIV).

Growing in Responsibility

INTRODUCTION

Rev. 3:19

Growing up is a quest that begins at birth when we emerge from a warm and safe place into a huge and complicated world. As if that were not enough, we cannot either see clearly or speak, and we hear a lot of weird sounds without apparent meaning. Also, we cannot walk around to go wherever we want to, we cannot even leave the spot in which we are placed. Basically: we are totally dependent on our parents for everything—except for getting diapers dirty, of course.

As time goes by, things begin to improve. Everything starts to appear clearer and then, finally, we can watch TV. We recognize the voices of the people who give

**We are asking our parents
to borrow the car keys.**

us affection and food, and soon we are listening to our Walkman. At first we say words like “bu,” “gu,” and “da” and after a few years we are able to say words like “Supercaiiifragilistic-expialidocious.” After sitting

down, crawling, and walking the first steps, we are asking our parents if we can borrow the car keys.

Some crucial moments highlight this quest: the first school day; the first tooth lost, which is soon replaced by a double-sized one; the first acne.

All these moments share something in common: every conquest is followed by a new responsibility. Therefore, in the same way that a child learns that it should not put its fingers into the socket, a teenager learns before driving around not to go through the red light.

In our journey with Jesus, also called spiritual life, we develop and acquire knowledge as we pray and study the Bible. We go through many stages in which we experience defeats and victories. As we proceed, new responsibilities to our neighbors emerge, and especially to our Father, Friend, Lawyer, and Judge.

It is because of His love and care for us that He corrects us. He wishes rational and obedient children who love His name and have no shame in being called His (Rom. 1:16; 1 John). We are to live graceful and praiseful lives that spread His light around the world, through the power of the Holy Spirit. For this He grants us all the power of heaven (Isa. 65:24).

Try it out!

Barbarians?

EVIDENCE

Amos 1:6-8; 1 Cor.10:11

When Amos delivered a warning about Gaza, he stirred up hostile feelings in his audience, the Israelites, at the time of long-standing enmity with the Philistines. Even though David and Solomon incorporated Philistia into a united kingdom, the Philistines often skirmished with Israel in later times and acted independently.

Later still the Philistines paid tribute to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (2 Chron.17:11), but relations between the two countries were reversed under Jehoram when a coalition of Arabs and Philistines made a raid on Judah. According to the chronicler, they carried away "all the possessions found in the king's house together with his sons and his wives, so that no son was left to him except Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons"(2 Chron. 21:16, 17, NASB).

The Philistines were cruel captors. They took silver, gold, and God's goodly things, and sold the people into slavery (Joel 3:4-8; Amos 1:6). War and prisoners of war were a fact of life in Amos's time, as they are today. The people of Gaza conducted raids on the defenseless in order to increase their royal treasure. These were atrocities, transgressions of the boundaries against behaviors that were cruel even among the Gentiles. The word "atrocious" comes from "atrocious," which means "extremely wicked, brutal, or cruel: barbaric."* Because of these atrocities, God said He would bring a judgment on Gaza that would be inescapable (Amos 1:7, 8).

Let us consider the possibility that our desires, actions, thinking, words, and love of money are transforming us into barbarians. If this is so, we must be ready for His reproof and discipline and repent before the judgment comes. Let us compare the sin of Gaza to our own experience.

Let us compare the sin
of Gaza to our own
experience.

REACT

1. What will be the difference, if any, between the judgment of Gaza and of us who know of the commandments and the testimonies of Jesus?
2. How would you make someone who thinks he was blameless to be aware of the coming judgment?
3. Particularly where economies are strong and disposable incomes growing, how can a Christian avoid "the love of money"?

*Henry Bosley Woolf, ed., *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, Indian Edition of 1981 (Calcutta, India: Scientific Book Agency, 1985).

Monday
October 8

A Warning Message

LOGOS

Amos 1:3–2:16

God had a warning message for the children of Israel. The messenger was a shepherd and fruit farmer named Amos. Two very important aspects appear in this message from God. First, He picks the messenger. Keep in mind that "God has a history of using the insignificant to accomplish the impossible."¹ Amos receives the call and delivers the message to his audience: both the children of Israel and the nations nearby. Second, the message must be offered in such a way that hearts can be reached and souls can be saved. How discreetly the message is presented will have an affect on how receptive the people will be to change their ways if they yield to the converting power of the Holy Spirit.

The Messenger

The Bible is full of stories of people who were given direct authority to speak for God. "In giving light to His people anciently, God did not work exclusively through any one class. Daniel was a prince of Judah. Isaiah also was of the royal line. David was a shepherd boy, Amos a herdsman, Zechariah a captive from Babylon, Elisha a tiller of the soil. The Lord raised up as His representatives prophets and princes, the noble and the lowly, and taught them the truths to be given to the world."²

Are you a messenger of God? To recognize the authority of God above everything is to give up one's agenda and become an instrument of God. The bottom line is that we have nothing to give. The power behind what we do or say is a reflection of the source we draw from, either good or evil.

The Message

Amos doesn't seem to have suitable qualifications to speak for God, but the people should listen. Why should they listen? Here is a common man who receives the call to deliver a message from God, and somehow his background does not seem to provide any authority to the message he is delivering. With a judicious perception of how to reach the children of Israel, Amos is able

To recognize the authority of God above everything is to give up one's agenda.

to use the examples of neighboring nations, such as Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Ammon, Moab, and even Judah to exemplify the sins of Israel (Amos 1:3–2:5).

"Jesus declares to us that there is a greater sin than that which caused the

destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is the sin of those who have had the light of truth, and are not moved to repentance.”³ Regarding Amos and his message, the judgment of Israel’s sins, although similar in many ways to that of other nations, is based on the light they had been given. Israel is aware of the sinful condition of their neighbor nations, and you can almost see them support the judgment call from Amos. But they are shocked when Amos turns to them and points out their sins as he delivers God’s message to them (Amos 2:6-16).

“Ungrateful and disobedient, the people of Israel could not tolerate those who were a living reproof to their own evil ways. . . . Those who will not endure faithful preaching will have much to answer for, and those who suppress it, much more. When men shut their ears to hearing the word of God, they well-nigh close the avenue by which His Spirit has access to the soul.”⁴ Their light is far greater than their neighboring nations, yet they are *all* judged accordingly. “Persistent sin results in cumulative guilt. God bears long with the wicked, but finally they cross the line of His forbearance.”⁵

REACT

1. What qualifications does someone need to be a messenger of God?
2. Of the sins committed by the children of Israel, which ones do you consider to be more serious than others?
3. “The good news is: I’ve judged your enemies and found them wanting. The bad news is: I’ve judged you and found *you* wanting.” How might the chosen people in Amos’s audience have reacted to his message from God?
4. If messengers of God walk among us today, how might we identify them?
5. What leads to feelings of spiritual superiority or inferiority? How are these feelings manifest, and how do they affect others?
6. What practical steps can you take to avoid being judgmental toward fellow Christians?
7. Can we be materially and spiritually rich at the same time? Explain your answer.
8. What determines whether we have a greater influence on our environment or whether our environment has a greater influence on us?
9. What protection do we have against the sins of those around us?

1. *God’s Little Devotional Book II*, p. 30.

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 148.

3. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 27, 1897, vol. 74, no. 30.

4. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 961.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 956.

Tuesday
October 9

Bear the Name; Don't Play the Game

TESTIMONY

Amos 2:6-16; Rev. 3:19

God is a God of all nations. However, Israel was God's "covenant nation" (Deut. 7:6). "They had been specially favored by Him, and they laid claim to righteousness above every other people."¹ Thus, it was expected of them to take "every opportunity and privilege [that] had been granted them, and in return He sought their sympathy and co-operation in His work of grace. He longed to see in them self-sacrifice and compassion, zeal for God, and a deep yearning of soul for the salvation of their fellow men."² Instead, "by their apostasy and rebellion those who should have been standing as light bearers among the nations were inviting the judgments of God."³

Israel's light was growing dim because of their love of the world and greed for gain. "The outlook was particularly discouraging as regards the social conditions of the people. In their desire for gain, men were adding house to house and field to field. . . . Justice was perverted, and no pity was shown the poor. . . . Even the magistrates, whose duty it was to protect the helpless, turned a deaf ear to the cries of the poor and needy, the widows and the fatherless. . . . With oppression and wealth came pride and love of display, gross drunkenness, and a spirit of revelry."⁴

Israel's light was growing dim because of their love of the world.

Even more grievous, Israel had lost their sense of devotion and contrition. Although they still practiced their religious services with "its magnificent temple, its sacred altars, its mitered priests and impressive ceremonies . . . humility, love, and benevolence were lacking."⁵ Hence, it behooved God, out of love, to rebuke and to punish them, so they could turn from their sinful ways.

Seventh-day Adventist Christians are modern Israel, and if we don't adhere to God's principles, history will be repeated. "No one can live the law of God without ministering to others."⁶ It is high time we wake from our lukewarmness and stop playing. It's time Christians live the meaning of our name, so we will not lose our rights and privileges as keepers of God's lighthouse.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 583.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 306.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 583.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 584.

A Walking Perfume

HOW-TO

2 Cor. 2:15, 16

“Jacob was a baker in a small Jewish town. He baked the best bread in town; best not only in taste but also in the wisdom it contained. One day a man said to him.

“Jacob, I want my life to make an impression on others.’

“Every life is an impression,’ said Jacob.

“What do you mean?’ asked the man.

“We are God’s fingerprints,’ Jacob answered.

“You are a walking perfume. Is yours a likeable image, a fragrant perfume? Do you transmit the fragrance of love, faith, and hope?”*

Consider these two kinds of motion:

- Centrifugal motion is developing from the center outward.
- Centripetal movement is developing inward toward the center.

We Christians are this center where everything flows to or from. So we must allow Jesus to live His perfect life in us, so that He can enable us to live the “centrifugal Christian” life that will spread a good aroma of God’s love to the world. Short of that, the reverse will happen. Like the Israelites in Amos’s time, the centripetal motion of “sins of our neighbors” will greatly affect us.

Consider these two kinds of motion.

To be on the safe side, we must:

1. Surrender our all to Him. It is only when we come to a complete dependence in Him, that He will work His good works in us and through us.

2. Maintain constant contact with heaven. Communication is integral to communion, so we must daily seek the Lord in prayer, in His holy Word, and in nature. This will change our lives into His likeness and reveal to us His will.

3. Make Jesus the center of our thoughts, words, and actions.

4. Testify of God’s love to others. We will then be an epistle of Christ (2 Cor. 3:3), the salt of the world (Matt. 5:13), and light to the world (Matt. 5:14).

We must give Jesus our lives so that He can change us and enable us to live centrifugal Christian lives, be God’s fingerprints, and be His walking perfume, spreading to the world the fragrance of love, faith, and hope.

REACT

1. Describe three characteristics of a centrifugal Christian life. Of a centripetal Christian life.

2. How would you describe the “perfume” you spread in other’s lives?

**Dialogue*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1997.

OPINION

Amos 3:7

Through the prophets, God sent message after message to His backslidden people. He gave them every opportunity to return to Him.

"In giving light to His people anciently, God did not work exclusively through any one class. Daniel was a prince of Judah. Isaiah also was of the royal line. David was a shepherd boy, Amos a herdsman, Zechariah a captive from Babylon, Elisha a tiller of the soil. The Lord raised up as His representatives prophets and princes, the noble and the lowly, and taught them the truths to be given to the world. *To every one who becomes a partaker of His grace, the Lord appoints a work for others.* . . ."

Even now, today, God is still giving messages to us. I can see the Holy Spirit working through our pastors and our young people all over the world. We must perfect holiness in the fear of God and in the sanctification of the Spirit. We must rise higher and higher above the things of this earth. The signs of the times, the very evil that is accumulating, should drive us closer and closer to the Lord. To lay hold on Christ is an incredibly wonderful experience. When the reality of the glory of this experience is ours, we will never want to let Him go. He will plant His self-sacrificing, self-renouncing, self-abnegating love deep in our hearts as He traces and etches His image upon heart and soul. The science of the Cross is the deepest science in the universe. This science will be studied and never fully understood throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.

The passion of Christ is the victory of divine love over the powers of evil, and therefore it is the only supportable basis for Christian obedience. Once again, Jesus calls those who follow Him to share His passion. How can we convince the

**The science of the
Cross is the deepest
science in the universe.**

world by our preaching of the passion when we shrink from that passion in our own lives? On the cross Jesus fulfilled the law He Himself established and thus graciously keeps His disciples in the fellowship of His suffering. The Cross is the only power

in the world that proves that suffering love can avenge and vanquish evil. But it was just this participation in the Cross that the disciples were granted when Jesus called them to Him. They are called blessed because of their visible participation in His cross.

**God's Amazing Grace*, p. 126, emphasis supplied.

Judgment Revealed

EXPLORATION

Amos 1-3

CONCLUDE

God chose an unlikely spokesman when He chose Amos, the herdsman. Could we be called to give an Amos judgment message? It is often easier for us to see the wickedness of the world while we ignore our own backsliding ways. Amos 3:7 says that the Lord always reveals His plans through His prophets. Judgment messages are the most difficult kind to deliver. How is this accomplished today?

CONSIDER

- Collecting a week's worth of headlines from your local newspaper that sound similar to the sins condemned in Amos 1; 2.
- Making a collage from magazine pictures that depict the sins of Israel (Amos 2:6-16).
- Having a debate in your Sabbath School class. The topic is, "Does the Church need a modern-day Amos?"
- Taking the judgments personally. Make a private list of the things you believe God wants revealed to you. Beside each decide what remedy God provides (1 Cor. 10:13).
- Calling three pastors and surveying them in regards to their sermons over the past year. How many would they consider to have been revealing God's judgments against the world and how many against the Church?
- Listening to a contemporary Christian music station or reviewing contemporary Christian music CDs. Do any of the songs contain judgment warnings?
- Visiting the fragrance counter or section in a department store. Sample the fragrances and think about which one best represents to you the fragrance of a Christian.

CONNECT

Revelation 14; 18.

The Great Controversy, chaps. 38, 39.

Jan Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End Times*, pp. 55-64.

“Hear this **Word**”



“Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?”
(Amos 3:3, NKJV).

The Crow Call

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 1:20-23

Have you ever listened to the crow's call? I mean really listened, not just heard it. For those of you who haven't, I'll explain it to you.

The crow's call can sound harsh. The "ark, ark, ark" has led some people to say that they are searching the world looking for Noah's ark. But what is so special about this call isn't what is said, but how it's said.

The crow begins its call quite loudly, to catch attention. The call then decreases in volume until it stops. This usually happens within six "arks."

The Church's call is sometimes like the crow's call. We begin our witnessing to others strongly but then die down until we can't be heard over the attractiveness of the world. This week's lesson is about hearing the Word, so let's spread it so that the whole world can hear.

**The Church's call is
sometimes like the
crow's call.**

How Much Sin Can God Take?

LOGOS

Amos 3:1-15; Hos. 11:8

"Hear this word the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel—against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt: 'You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.' Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so? Does a lion roar in the thicket when he has no prey? Does he growl in his den when he has caught nothing? Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground where no snare has been set? Does a trap spring up from the earth when there is nothing to catch? When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it? Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken—who can but prophesy? Proclaim to the fortresses of Ashdod and to the fortresses of Egypt: 'Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria; see the great unrest within her and the oppression among her people. They do not know how to do right,' declares the Lord, 'who hoard plunder and loot in their fortresses'" (Amos 3:1-10, NIV).

In these verses God reminds the Israelites of His past blessings that He bestowed on them while bringing them out of Egypt as His chosen people. He explains logical processes to the nation of Israel to show how they have turned from Him. He expresses Himself in this way so the Israelites have a full understanding of how far they have removed themselves from Him.

"Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'An enemy will overrun the land; he will pull down your strongholds and plunder your fortresses.' This is what

**God has been slow
to anger.**

the Lord says: 'As a shepherd saves from the lion's mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear, so will the Israelites be saved, those who sit in Samaria on the edge of their beds and in Damascus on their couches. Hear this and testify against the

house of Jacob,' declares the Lord, the Lord God Almighty. 'On the day I punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground. I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished,' declares the Lord" (Amos 3:11-15, NIV).

In these verses, God expresses His wrath toward the Israelites. He explains step by step what the consequences of their sins will be unless they repent from their disobedience.

Throughout the Israelites' history, God has been slow to anger about their sinful ways. Jeremiah, a prophet of old, warned the leaders of Israel to obey God's commands. They chose to ignore God's messenger and did the opposite of what they had been commanded, so God allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to take the Israelites captive.

On both occasions God had spoken and the probation on the Israelites had closed.

"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused'" (Hos. 11:8, NIV).

God is a God of love. It really hurts Him to see His people suffer. His own progression of law is one that "you will always reap what you sow" (Gal. 6:7, NLT).

Though God has control over all things, His ability to forgive and change circumstances shows us what a loving God we worship. This is illustrated in the book of Jonah.

God also uses Hosea to express His love for Israel. Here the story of Hosea and his prostitute wife is told as a living parable to show God's love for Israel. There is a cut-off point for us to turn from our sins, at which if genuine repentance is not forthcoming God steps aside and we suffer the consequences of our sins.

REACT

1. Are there modern prophets to whom God is revealing His plans? If so, how will we know them? If not, why not?
2. Will we always "reap what we sow"? Is that an immediate, ultimate, or as-God-chooses reaping? Explain your answer.
3. How do we reconcile a loving God, not wanting any to perish, and the "cut-off point" suggested in this article? Is God's love conditional on repentance?
4. Why would God be upset with the prosperity of His people whom He blessed?
5. Why would God prosper people and then punish them when they enjoy their prosperity?
6. Is it possible for us today to rebel to the same degree that Israel apparently did? What would we be like as a people if we did?
7. Why does God call other nations to witness His case against Israel? (See Romans 11:11.) What's the modern equivalent?
8. When we are faced with a decision, how can we know what God's will is for us?

God's Love Is Everlasting

TESTIMONY

Hos. 6:1-3; 10:13-15; 13:9, 10

Hosea was a prophet whom the Lord asked to preach to His people. He was upset with the people who were satisfied over the prosperity of the nation.

They were pleased, but they did not thank God. They had forgotten what it meant to follow God.

"Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth" (Hos. 6:1-3, NKJV).

God is a God of love. He cares for us deeply. He tried to tell the Israelites of their mistakes.

"With the severest reproofs, God sought to arouse the impenitent nation to a realization of its imminent danger of utter destruction. Through Hosea and Amos He

**God wanted the
Israelites to be
saved.**

sent the ten tribes message after message, urging full and complete repentance, and threatening disaster as the result of continued transgression."* "You have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors. . . .

Thus will it happen to you, O Bethel, because your wickedness is great. When that day dawns, the king of Israel will be completely destroyed" (Hos. 10:13, 15, NIV).

God wanted the Israelites to be saved. He did not want to punish them. All they had to do was repent and listen to God. God gave them many opportunities to repent, yet they still held back.

The transgressors were given many opportunities to repent. In their hour of deepest apostasy and greatest need, God's message to them was one of forgiveness and hope: "'O Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is from Me. I will be your King; where is any other, that he may save you?'" (Hos. 13:9, 10, NKJV).

Even in the end, God still cared for His children. He loves and cares for us always. Let's not make the same mistake today.

REACT

What can we do to be sure we have absolute faith in God?

**Prophets and Kings*, pp. 279, 280.

Dead Prophets' Society

EVIDENCE

Amos 3:2

"Hi, Amos, how was your day?"

"Well, honey, I slammed our nation for greed and indifference, pointed out that our military fortifications won't help when God sends an enemy, and told the middle class that their luxurious beds and ivory mansions would be trashed."

Who'd choose to be a prophet? How could you show people that their whole way of life is based on violence and greed? Try telling a Westerner his country fights wars to lower oil prices; or her shoes were made by sweatshop children who can't afford school—but they're only foreigners.

Even today, Amos's judgments sound harsh compared to the "sweet little lies" we're used to from entertainment or the flattery from people trying to sell us something—their product, their spin. Build my self-esteem, Amos!

No, this chapter is a warning label, a wake-up call. Yet grace balances even its heaviest judgment statements. Consider Amos 3:2.

- It tells the people that God *knew* them—an amazing compliment. The word *yada* ("know") can mean observe, notice, be acquainted with, choose, or be "specially related to" (Gen. 18:19; Jer. 2:8; 1 Sam. 2:12).^{*} God wants to know them even if they don't want to know Him!

- Hear its parental logic: I'm going to punish you because you're mine and I expect better of you. Isn't there a compliment in that? God redemptively punishes—which means they're His children! (Read Hebrews 12:7-11.) Part of His covenant was to punish Israel if they forgot Him. We do our best learning when life gives us pain.

We do our best
learning when life
gives us pain.

- It reminds them they're descended from greatness—that spiritual giant Abraham who would bless "all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3; 28:14, NIV)—a phrase Amos re-uses as a hint to Israel, like whistling 10 notes of your national anthem to remind you who you are. And yet the challenge is not to have Abraham's genes, but his memes of faith and to be a blessing—not a cursedly bad example—to other nations.

- Context. The book has more dramatic punishments but then a happy ending—for some! A remnant respond to grace, and replant, rebuild, and restore.

REACT

How are knowing God and behavior related?

^{*}Douglas Stuart, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word Books, 1987).

How to Stay in Tune With God

HOW-TO

Ps. 25:8-10; 1 Tim. 2:8; 1 Pet. 2:2

In many ways, Christians today are similar to the Israelites, in behavior, and in our relationship with God. Long before our birth, we were chosen by God to be His children (Amos 3:2; Rom. 8:29). Later, we voluntarily chose to follow Christ and accept the rewards and responsibilities of being His children.

God loves His children and desires to guide every step we take (Ps. 25:8-10) if we allow Him, as He did for Israel—yet, despite this, we also turn away from God and the lifestyle that He originally intended for us (Hos. 11:1-5). His will for us is that we “seek good and not evil, that [we] may live” (Amos 5:14, NKJV).

God always warns
His children
through the
prophets.

Our disobedience to God requires that He discipline us, as our parents have in the past (Heb. 12:5-11). He sometimes allows us, as He did the children of Israel, to experience the consequences of our actions to bring us back to Himself. However, even in our suffering we still often refuse to return to God (Amos 4:6-11), choosing instead to forget how fulfilling life can be when God is leading.

Because God is fair and loving, He always warns His children through the prophets before acting in discipline (3:7), thus giving us a chance to repent before He allows the consequences of our sins to punish us. Yet, like the Israelites, we become so engrossed in sin that we disregard the prophets and ignore their messages. Fortunately, there is yet hope.

Step One: Recognizing the problems in our lives is the first step toward improvement.

Step Two: God loves us so much that He gives us the Bible, which illustrates the difference between our lifestyle and that which God created for us, and thus shows our need for Christ in our lives. Although the Israelites turned their backs on God because they chose to forget what God had done for them, we can avoid making the same mistake by learning from their relationship with God. The Bible helps us grow spiritually (1 Pet. 2:2) by vividly depicting God’s love and guidance in the lives of common people. We become more focused on God, and we are able to see Him working in our lives.

Step Three: The relationship between God and Israel disintegrated as the Israelites neglected to communicate with God. God wishes that His children “everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer” (1 Tim. 2:8, NIV). After all, who better can guide us and support us than God? Who knows both our past and our future?

A Question of Choice

OPINION

Amos 3:1-15

Who am I? Why does the sun shine yellow? Why am I here? Who is God? All questions that plague our simple minds. How do we go about finding out answers to our questions? We ask someone, whether it be a teacher or a surf on the World Wide Web, we try to find the answers to our questions. Yet, sometimes we forget who we are and where we have come from. This appears to have been the case in Amos 3. The people of Samaria lived in the capital of what was the northern kingdom. "Samaria was . . . built from 'the blood of the poor'—with heartlessness that would rival the Egyptians and the Philistines."^{*} The area of Samaria had fallen apart; idol worship and violence became an everyday occurrence in the city.

The Lord had sent Amos as a messenger to the city of Samaria. Amos confronts the people of the city with rhetorical questions regarding the Lord's intention for the city. He warns that disaster may be coming to Samaria. It becomes apparent throughout the chapter that the Lord is becoming increasingly concerned about the violence plaguing His people. These people whom He Himself delivered from slavery in Egypt have now seemingly turned against Him. As the chapter closes, it seems almost inevitable that the Lord is planning to destroy the city as an example to His people. It seems only human nature to disobey a command, or to disrespect authority until someone tells us what we are doing is wrong. If you look back throughout the Old Testament, it seems that every couple of hundred years someone has strayed from God's Word. But why do they? And why is it still going on today? Why hasn't God destroyed any cities in the meantime?

Maybe He has. Maybe we are too blind or self-centered to notice the destruction we are placing on ourselves and the world. Really, it's simple. God has given us all the choice to "hear this word" (Amos 3:1, KJV). The saving Word is found in His book, the Bible. Yet it is our choice whether to believe it. We could be like the people of Nineveh and wait until the eleventh hour before we do anything about changing our lives, or we could lead all people and change the outcome now. Questioning the choices we make could change the outcome of our salvation. Do we need an Amos before it's too late?

It seems only human nature to disobey a command.

REACT

How should we interpret our right of choice? Whom should we be listening to?

^{*}H. H. Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1965).

Couch Potatoes, Arise!

EXPLORATION

Amos 3:12

CONCLUDE

The warnings of ancient prophets echo down through the millennia. Our spiral of destruction is even worse than in Amos's day. Twisted messages permeate our lives through media, video games, and the Internet. God is calling us to do something, to be active, to get off the couch, and to participate in His plan. To do that, we have to pursue a strong relationship with Him. It will take complete honesty (confession), constant communication (prayer), and full commitment (covenant).

CONSIDER

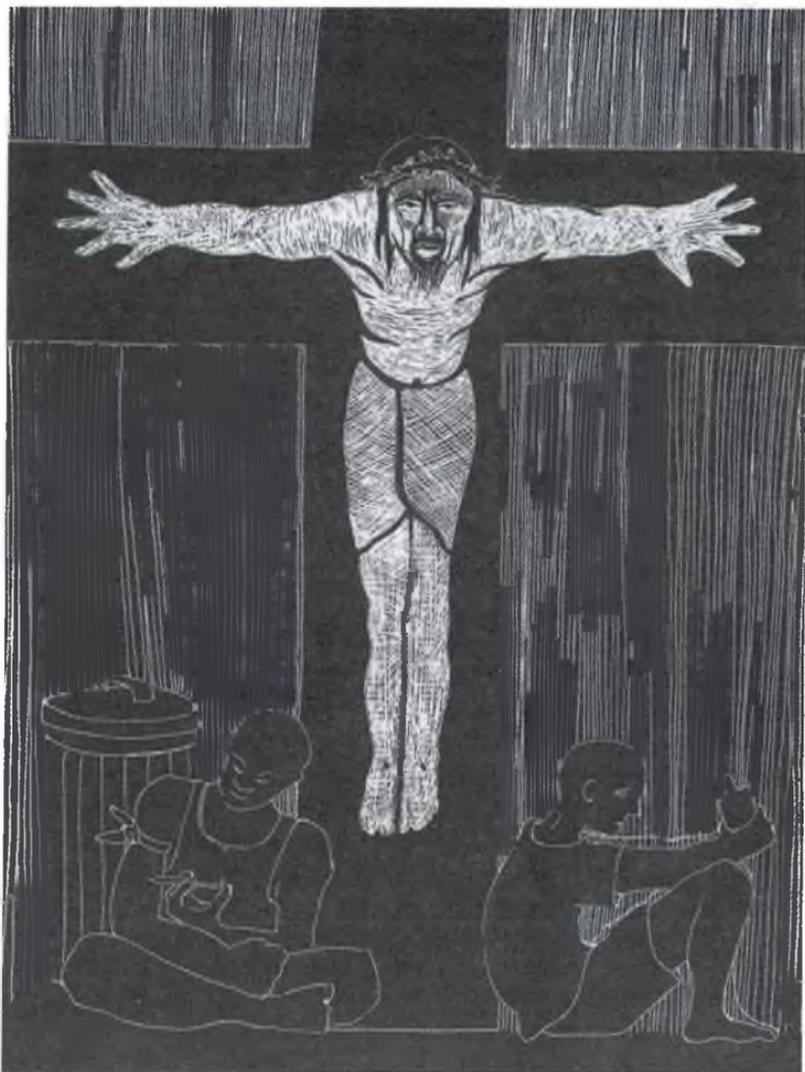
- Drawing your personal coat of arms, symbolizing your covenant with Christ. A coat of arms is typically divided in sections containing simple objects symbolizing your values and goals.
- Writing your "warning cry" to the people of earth for the twenty-first century. Send your message to as many people in your email address book as you think appropriate.
- Thinking about how animals give a "warning cry" in nature to alert others of danger. Consider what a Christian could learn from such behaviors.
- Going to a used CD store (where you can open the boxes, read the jackets, and listen to the tracks) and browse through the popular music section. Read the lyrics of popular CDs. Then browse the Christian music section. Find lyrics that carry meaning and share them with your friends.
- Choosing a cause and inviting friends to discuss it. Meet on a regular basis to form a plan of action. Begin by discussing your feelings about it, then gather information, form a mission statement, and take action.
- Exploring the archives at <www.navpress.com/praymag.asp>.
- Keeping a prayer journal. Use the left page to record issues you want to discuss with God. Use the right page to record His responses. When you feel discouraged read the right pages. You will immediately be reminded of God's presence in your life.

CONNECT

Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, book of James.

Laurie Beth Jones, *The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and for Life*.

Preparing to meet God



“ ‘Thus will I do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!’ ”

(Amos 4:12, NKJV).

Heed the Word of the Lord

INTRODUCTION

Ps. 1:1, 2; Amos 4:11, 12

A few years ago I had a friend whom I loved dearly. We did everything together. We walked to school together in the mornings, rode bikes in the afternoons, went camping in the evenings, and played dress-up at night. We did all the things that young girls do with best friends.

As we grew older, I noticed that our lives were going in different directions. Sarah's focus had gradually moved away from church, school, and family, and was

**I noticed that our lives
were going in different
directions.**

now on clothes, make-up, and members of the opposite sex. I wasn't the only one who noticed the changes in her behavior. Our parents did also. One afternoon we were sitting in my living room watching television and talking about what to do over the weekend.

Sarah had heard of a party she wanted to go to. I knew this party was not a place where either of us should be.

"Sarah," I said, "I think we should skip this one. You know my parents won't let me go, and I know your mother won't either."

"Aw, Opal, you never want to have fun! Well, I'm going. I'll tell you all about it on Monday." With that, she left my house and went to the party. About a year later I moved away and did not see Sarah for a while. When I returned to our hometown and looked for Sarah, she was nowhere to be found. I asked a few of our old friends what had happened. None of them had anything favorable to say.

They told me about her life after I had gone. After a long party streak, she finally managed to graduate from high school. She had been suspended twice, was almost arrested (she had influential parents who helped work the system), and could usually be seen around popular pubs with her fiancé, whom she had known about six months. Many times her parents tried to reform her, but each time she would run back to her life in the fast lane with her friends—sex, drugs, and alcohol.

Recently, I returned to our hometown to try to find her. This time her parents told me that about a year and a half previous, she had left home, and they'd heard that she was in North Carolina. Six months later, they received a phone call saying that their oldest daughter had been killed in a drunk-driving accident in Raleigh.

"All That Glisters Is Not Gold"

EVIDENCE

Genesis 19; Matt. 16:24-28

What in this world is worth losing your life for? What is worth being lost for? These seemingly simple questions are two of the most salvation-determining queries every Christian must face at one time or another. The modern world is full of glitter, glamour, and appeal. If we allow ourselves to be slowly corrupted by the luster, we give Satan an avenue by which to rob us of our inheritance and our salvation.

Satan will slyly seduce us into apathy toward our iniquities. He cleverly gives us rationalizations and justifications for our actions in our attempts to pacify those who reproach us. In actuality, we are pacifying only ourselves. Pacification is a hazardous state for any Christian. We, who have answered the call to be the chosen servants of God must live up to the name and the standards we claim.

Israel was not the only nation in its time that was sunk in immorality. Many other nations were committing acts similar to, and possibly worse than, those that the Israelites were committing. The difference was that the Israelites were God's chosen people. God had delivered them from bondage, saved them from destruction, and helped them in battle. Yet they had the audacity to turn away from God. They did not even heed His numerous warnings (Amos 4:6-12). What was wrong with those Israelites? How could they be so foolish? Are we any different? God will return to make His judgment on this sinful world. He wants to save those who truly desire to be saved and are willing to live accordingly. For us to profess salvation is not enough. We have to extricate ourselves from the things that lead to destruction. Otherwise we will meet the same fate as Lot's wife. As she fled the fire of Sodom and Gomorrah, she became nostalgic of the world she was leaving behind. In her mind she wanted to be saved, but that desire was not in her heart. So she was turned into a pillar of salt.

She became nostalgic of the world she was leaving behind.

Our world is a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah. Immorality has not only become acceptable, but seemingly the norm. If we accept God as our Lord and Jesus as our personal Savior, we cannot yearn for the licentiousness of our society. If we have decided to follow Jesus, we cannot look back. Even if we are willing to die for Christ, what He really wants is people who are willing to live for Him.

REACT

If you are one of God's chosen people, what are your responsibilities to Him and to fellow humanity while you are on this earth? Be specific.

Monday
October 22

A Lesson Not Learned

LOGOS

Amos 4:1-12

A Warning Against Transgression (Amos 4:1-5)

At this time in the northern kingdom of Israel, the depravity of worship in religious services had reached its zenith. Self-interest in social affairs made for self-indulgence in matters of religion. The northern sanctuaries were crowded with worshipers who, in the mainstream, were rejoicing in the prosperity of the time and found an expression for their desires in the erotic religious rites that accompanied the pagan Canaanite Baal worship. Prophets and priests associated with the sanctuaries profited from the lavish gifts of the worshipers and naturally condoned these exercises in the name of religion, appearing completely oblivious to the conditions of rapid decay that lay immediately beneath the surface of social life.

"Men have become bold in transgression. The wickedness of the inhabitants of the world has almost filled up the measure of their iniquity. This earth has almost reached the place where God will permit the destroyer to work his will upon it."¹ We can see and feel the effects of men and women who are so bold in their anti-Christian behavior that it is shocking. But the most shocking reality comes when we see the "abomination of desolation" at work among the *ekklesia*, the called-out ones. This gives us a small inkling of what Amos felt in his day.

Punishment: An Attention-Getter (Exod. 34:6, 7; Ezek. 33:11; Amos 4:6-11)

As a result of their transgression, God had only one gift that He could bestow, only one out of His storehouse of mercies, since all others had been set aside and abused. That one gift was none other than punishment. He sent the palmer worm to devour their fig trees, gardens, and vineyards after a huge increase in production. He slew them with the sword of their enemies and destroyed them with an earthquake. The result was that they refused to believe their afflictions were actually punishment. They felt that what they were going through was the result of an accident, bad management, natural causes, or the malice of others. They in no way attributed their misfortune to their idolatrous evil.

**That one gift was
none other than
punishment.**

"To our merciful God the act of punishment is a strange act. 'As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.' Ezekiel 33:11. The Lord is 'merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, . . . forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.'"²

Yet "while He does not delight in vengeance, He will execute judgment upon

the transgressors of His law.”³ This execution of judgment is for our own good. His strong hand is there to guide and correct us, “to preserve the inhabitants of the earth from utter depravity and ruin.”⁴

Preparing to Meet God (Amos 4:12)

Warnings have been ignored, mercy has been spat upon, grace has been trampled underfoot, the cup of indignation is full, transgression has reached its zenith, sin must be dealt with, and God’s name must be vindicated. Prepare a case, prepare a lawyer, prepare a character—prepare to meet the Lord and prepare at once. There is a time for preparation after which comes the time for reckoning and rewards. This is not a meeting where one can set a tone through deception and charisma. It is a meeting with God, the Searcher of the heart and all the motives. Reckoning will come.

Amos is asking the people for a turning away from sin and idolatry to a life of repentance and faith. This is a message to God’s children today, to turn away from lives of sin and focus on Him. The only way out of this doomed state of being is to remember that we all will meet the Lord one day and stand before Him as Judge of all. Knowing that the inevitable is coming one day, let us today determine to “do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8, NKJV).

REACT

1. In what ways is Amos’s message relevant to us today?
2. What elements of worship might make it an unacceptable experience to God as He receives it from us?
3. Do you agree, as the author suggests, that “this earth has about reached the place where God will permit the destroyer to work his will upon it”? Why or why not?
4. Is it the world’s wickedness or the church’s wickedness that brings the wrath of God? Explain.
5. How can punishment be a gift? If we were to send a Thank-you note for such a gift, what form would it take?
6. Is the only way out of our “doomed state of being” to remember the judgment? Can you suggest other ways out?
7. What is the danger of using the presence of good or bad things in our lives as evidence of God’s blessings or punishments? What happens when we try to apply those same evidences to the lives of others?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 141.

2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 627.

3. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 628.

4. *Ibid.*

Tuesday
October 23

Learn the Lessons — Beware the Messages

TESTIMONY

Josh. 23:14-16

How many lessons of correction must we learn before we change our behavior? How many self-inflicted disasters must we succumb to before we mend our ways? How often must God, in His tender mercy, point out our deficiencies in numerous ways before we finally grasp the messages He wants us to learn?

Joshua reminds us that God grants us good things and that He also permits harmful things to occur to us based upon our transgressions of His covenant relationship (Josh. 23:14-16). "Satan deceives many with the plausible theory that God's love for His people is so great that He will excuse sin in them; he represents that while the threatenings of God's word are to serve a certain purpose . . . they are never to be literally fulfilled. But . . . God has maintained the principles of righteousness by revealing sin in its true character—by demonstrating that its sure result is misery and death."¹ Therefore, Jesus lovingly beckons us to beware the messages and learn the lessons.

"The True Witness says, 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.' Rev. 3:20. Every warning, reproof, and entreaty in the word of God or through His messengers

is a knock at the door of the heart. It is the voice of Jesus asking for entrance. With every knock unheeded, the disposition to open becomes weaker. The impressions of the Holy Spirit if disregarded today, will not be as strong tomorrow. The heart

"The heart . . . lapses into a perilous unconsciousness of the shortness of life."

becomes less impressible, and lapses into a perilous unconsciousness of the shortness of life, and of the great eternity beyond. Our condemnation in the judgment will not result from the fact that we have been in error, but from the fact that we have neglected heaven-sent opportunities for learning what is truth."²

REACT

1. What are some reasons we give to discount prophetic pronouncements?
2. Considering the closing sentence in this article, what is the difference between living a life "in error" and living a life of "neglected heaven-sent opportunities"?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 522.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 489, 490.

Not Wanting the Right Thing

HOW-TO

Exod. 20:3-5; Luke 16:15

Once I wanted the new CD of one of my favorite artists. I saved my allowance and read every article and review about the CD for weeks. Even in church, I anxiously anticipated going to buy the CD on Sunday. I played the CD as soon as I came home from Best Buy. It was defective. My anticipation and waiting were in vain.

Looking back to that event, I realize that my obsession for the CD was idolatrous. Idolatry is not necessarily worshiping something directly, such as praying to a golden calf. It is putting anything in your life before God and God's law.

In our society, many things are put ahead of God: sporting events, music, education, work, food, and luxuries. The most important thing we have to do on this earth is worship Christ our Lord and Savior. We should place all earthly things that we enjoy far below our main priority.

I played the CD as soon
as I came home from
Best Buy.

We should always remember to want the right thing: Christ the Lord our God. Some steps to recognize and stop idolatry are:

1. Be aware of one's actions and thoughts. It is important for us to know ourselves. A given activity may or may not be impeding our relationship with God. We need to know in our hearts what we place in high esteem. If those things hinder us from having a better relationship with God, then they need to be taken out of our lives.

2. Reduce or stop the behavior. When we feel that a given activity may be an impediment in our relationship with Christ, we need to stop or reduce the time we spend on it. This may be difficult at first, but if we slowly separate ourselves from it, we will find that it is no longer necessary in our lives.

3. Strengthen one's relationship with Christ. "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exod. 20:3, NKJV). God does not want His people to put anything before Him. As Christians we can read our Bibles and pray more to build a closer relationship with Christ. There is only one Creator God, and He is worthy of our total praise.

REACT

1. What is the difference between a positive role model and an idol?
2. What draws the line between idolatry and something you admire?

OPINION

Hos. 1:2; Amos 4:11

The Lord told Hosea to marry Gomer, a prostitute, to demonstrate Israel's attitude toward God. She would leave Hosea and be with other men, the same way Israel would leave God to worship other gods. Hosea would go out and find Gomer, bring her home, and restore her to her rightful place. She then would leave again and the cycle continued.

In the same way God allowed Israel's failures, restored the Israelites to their rightful place, only for them to leave again. Finally, in desperation, God began to deprive them of their daily needs.

How many times have we read this story and thought how incredibly ignorant can a people be? They were God's chosen. They were delivered from Egypt to the Promised Land. They were delivered from the fiery furnace and from the lions' den and still they leave the God of love to follow the desires of the flesh. The deliberate rejection of God expressed by the children of Israel seems obvious to us in the year 2001, yet we fail to acknowledge the denial of God in our own lives.

A brand new license, a brand new attitude. You feel that nothing can stop you. Then the police stop you the first time just as a warning. No problem! Two weeks later—a speeding ticket. It is only fifty dollars and a four-hour class. OK, you can handle this. Life is good, and you are feeling fine. You keep on speeding without a care in the world. Wait! The light is yellow, but you can make it. Boom! Your car

**We fail to acknowledge
the denial of God in our
own lives.**

is a total wreck and you think, *Why is God doing this to me?* The warning signs were all there.

Are we any different from the Israel of Amos's day? "‘You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me,’ declares the Lord" (Amos 4:11, NIV). How long will it take for us to turn from our own ways and turn to God? He is patiently waiting for us, but He can't wait forever.

REACT

1. Though God's illustration through the lives of Hosea and Gomer was powerful, how comfortable are you suggesting that this type of illustration might be an effective tool today? What if Hosea were your son and he asked you to bless his new marriage because God told him to marry someone like Gomer?

2. How would you feel if God had asked Ellen White to choose her husband based on the same criteria given to Hosea so we might be helped? How about our General Conference president if he came with this type of message from the Lord?

Open the Door!

EXPLORATION

Rev. 3:15-20

CONCLUDE

The world has gone so far away from God in immorality that soon He could call people back only through punishment, the approach He prefers least. This path away from God has reached us Christians too. Often we are passive in our faith, fooled by Satan's lies into continuing immoral lives. If we go on like this, we will not hear God's voice calling us, His knocking to come in. *Now* is the time to be aware of ourselves, to stop or reduce any behavior that turns us away from God, and to focus on our relationship with Jesus.

CONSIDER

- Analyzing your defense mechanisms. When do I protect my favorite sins? What am I trying to hide from God and myself?
- Getting an accountability partner, someone you can be open and vulnerable with, and help each other confess when you fall, and pray together for strength on your faith journey.
- Finding a Bible text that talks about Christian moral life, and make a simple melody to go with it. If it's good, teach it to your Sabbath School class.
- Visiting the web page at <http://www.heartlight.org/dynimation/an_fatherslove.html>. Think about the ways in which this animation depicts God's infinite love for us. Share the URL with someone you know who is struggling to maintain faith and trust in God.
- Making and performing a short skit or pantomime in Sabbath School that illustrates in a modern way how God is knocking on our hearts.
- Writing down every day this week in a journal, or on a simple pad, the times you have been involved in something that keeps you from God. At the end of the week, review the list and try to see the patterns in your life that draw you away from God.
- Videotaping the responses from people on the street to the question: How would you define immorality? Edit the tape and present it to your Sabbath School class for discussion.

CONNECT

The book of Romans.

Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 88.

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, chap. 5.

Seeking the Lord



**“Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is”
(Amos 5:14, NIV).**

A Recipe for Crushed Tomatoes

INTRODUCTION

Hosea 10:12, 13

My nephew Evan is three-and-a-half-years old and full of curiosity. I found him the other day in my garden, a few days after a bad rain storm. Everything was muddy and so was Evan, from head to toe. As I looked closer, it seemed as if he was digging up my tomatoes! This was my first garden and I felt quite possessive of it, as if I were guarding my own children. "Evan," I said, "What are you doing?"

He looked up at me with pure joy and accomplishment on his face. "I'm planting berries, Auntie Stef," he said with glee. I looked at his hands, red with crushed cherry tomatoes, dripping down his hands and onto his shirt. *I know his mother will be pleased*, I thought. After getting over the shock of losing a few tomatoes, I asked him, "Evan, why are you planting berries?" He thought for a moment, and said, "So I can give them to you to eat."

In his innocence, he thought that he could take the crushed, muddy tomatoes and plant them in the ground to create new tomatoes. As adults, we know that the

"I'm planting berries, Auntie Stef," he said with glee.

miracle of growth doesn't work that way, but in his childlike faith, he thought he had the knowledge to grow tomatoes, just like his auntie. He had seen me digging in the garden and planting seeds, or little berries, as he called them. So now it was his turn to grow tomatoes. Or so he had hoped.

Hosea reminds us: "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground" (10:12, NKJV). Instead, in our ignorance, we have done just the opposite. "You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies, because you trusted in your own way, in the multitude of your mighty men" (verse 13, NKJV).

If my nephew had asked me to help him, if he would have looked for me, I would have gladly helped him to plant some seeds. When we as childlike Christians try to grow things on our own, without seeking our wise and loving Father, we end up like Evan, with crushed tomatoes—or more serious, crushed hearts.

Thank You, Jesus, for showing us the right way to plant our gardens.

LOGOS

Amos 5:1-4, 8-15; Hos. 10:12, 13

What's their problem? (Amos 5:10-13).

Amos and Hosea preached to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel in the eighth century B.C. Their messages were to call the people back to God because they were not living right. The people of Israel claimed to be worshiping God, but their lives did not live up to their words: "How you hate honest judges! How you despise people who tell the truth! . . . For many and great are your sins. I know them all so well. You are the enemies of everything good; you take bribes; you refuse justice to the poor" (Amos 5:10, 12, TLB). They thought they could do all this and God wouldn't notice. They thought they could claim to be His and do what they liked.

The Israelites did not care whom they oppressed among their own people as long as they gained personally. If they were bigger or more influential, that was what mattered. "Might is right" was their motto. They did not realize they were sowing their own downfall. They were invaded by the Assyrians, and their armies that they thought they could depend upon were defeated. As a nation, Israel went into exile and was lost.

What's our problem? (Rom. 3:10-12, 23; Gal. 6:7, 8).

That was years ago, before Jesus came to this earth. We are not like Israel, are we? We go to church, study the Sabbath School lesson, live a fairly decent sort of life. We accept Jesus as our Savior. We're not like the Israelites of Amos and Hosea's day, are we? The apostle Paul had felt pretty good about himself, until he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. After that meeting he had a different perspective. He realized that no matter how good you think yourself to be, you don't really understand or seek after God. He went on to conclude, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, NKJV).

So, isn't it time to stop and take another look? What is your problem? Where is your life headed? What is your aim in life?

Let's begin by asking another question. What do you spend your time doing? After all, "A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:7, 8, NIV). Paul is not threatening us here. He is just stating a fact: all action has a consequence. What we spend our lives focused upon will determine the outcome of our lives.

**"Might is right" was
their motto.**

What's the solution? (Hos. 10:12; Amos 5:4, 14, 15).

If Israel had turned from their idolatry and returned to wholehearted trust in God, things would have been different. If they had listened to Hosea and Amos and lived right, God would have protected them from the Assyrians. God pled with them, " 'Seek Me and live' " (Amos 5:4, NKJV). "It is time to seek the Lord" (Hos. 10:12, NKJV). It would have required a change in outlook—a change in priorities, no longer self, but God first. They needed the God of Creation rather than the gods they created. They needed a higher set of values than the ones they made for themselves. "If it feels OK, do it" led them to ruin.

The same is true for us. Computers, TV, careers, academic attainment, sports, social life—all have their place in our lives, but how much focus should they take? There may be nothing wrong in spending time in each of these activities. It really depends on what we are using them for. After all, we can rise no higher than what our lives focus on. So if we spend all our time playing computer games that involve killing the opponent, what does it do to our sense of the value of life? If we watch Hollywood's typical productions, what does it do to our values on committed relationships and the sanctity of sex within marriage? What is the purpose of a career? Is it to enslave you or provide you with an enjoyable way of paying the expenses? Do you live for sport or watch sports to live? And what is the focus of your social life—yourself and looking good or building relationships with others and God? "Make it your aim to do what is right," says God. "Come to Me and you will live."

REACT

1. What can we do to change a wrong focus so that our aim is to do what is right?
2. If the ideal presented to us today in the media seems to be one of material success and personal power, can we point to periods in recent human history or other places in our world today when or where people seemed to be more committed to spiritual matters or helping those in need than here and now? If so, what circumstances seem to inspire people to be focused on spiritual rather than material or worldly things? How do wars, economic depressions, or changes in political power affect people's choices about how to spend their time and energy?
3. What are some concrete and practical ways we can "sow to please the Spirit"? What are the worldly pursuits we could turn off, put away, or say No to? What spiritual sowing could we do instead?
4. This article invites us each to "stop and take another look" at our problem and where we are headed. What are the times, places, and people that most motivate us to take that long, hard look at ourselves? Why do we seem to save this kind of self-reflection for only New Year's, or on a significant birthday, or at a church retreat? What can we do each day to stay focused on our spiritual goal?

Open Your Eyes— Through Prayer

TESTIMONY

Ps. 119:18

“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Ps. 119:18, NKJV).

“We cannot obtain wisdom without earnest attention and prayerful study. Some portions of Scripture are indeed too plain to be misunderstood; but there are others whose meaning does not lie on the surface, to be seen at a glance. Scripture must be compared with scripture. There must be careful research and prayerful reflection. And such study will be richly repaid.”¹

When we have lost an item of great importance to ourselves, we work long and hard to find it. But it would be virtually impossible to do so without our eyes, as it is our sense of sight that enables us to explore. It is the same when we are seeking the Lord. Without our spiritual eyes, it would be virtually impossible to find the answer we are looking for in God’s Word. So how do we open our eyes?

Just as Elisha asked God to open the eyes of his servant so he could see the Lord’s power (2 Kings 6:17), so the Lord can open our eyes. The key to the revelation of God’s glory was prayer. “Prayer,—oh, how is this precious privilege neglected. . . . Prayer is the strength of the Christian.”² It is through the power of prayer that our eyes can be opened to the true nature of God’s Word. “Never should the Bible be studied without prayer. Before opening its pages, we should

How do we open our eyes?

ask for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and it will be given.”³

To seek the Lord we need to be open and receptive to His Word. This can be accomplished only through the power of prayer. Are you underestimating the power of prayer in your life?

REACT

1. If to seek the Lord we need to open our eyes to God’s Word, how would this change our perspective toward ourselves and how we live?

2. When the eyes of many biblical characters were opened, the Holy Spirit empowered them to preach the gospel. But not all of us are public speakers. How can you use your talents for God?

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 62.

2. *Messages to Young People*, p. 383.

3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 62.

Removing the Blinders of Today

EVIDENCE

Amos 5:1-4

Amos was a prophet (760 B.C.) from the southern kingdom (Judah) but worked in the north (Israel). The name Amos means “carrier of burden.” His burden became the message to take to the people for them to repent against what they had done. By his time, Israel had fallen away from God, and despite the reminders God had given them, the people of Israel had not realized the level to which they had fallen.

In Amos 5:1-4 the prophet tries to get the Israelites to open their eyes to what has happened to them: “This lament I take up concerning you” (verse 1, NIV). A lament is an expression of grief or moaning.

They were worshiping golden calves, sun gods, Baal, etc., an activity that continues today in cults and sects. It is thought that recently one group has even abducted a young girl for part of their worshiping ritual. The symbols used today are subtler though. The “eye god,” relating to the god of ail, and the sun god were common symbols in cultures such as the Aztecs and Egyptians. Is it wrong to presume that

**Could we be blind to
the situation we are in?**

the Millennium dome on the bank of the Thames in London is shaped like the sun, or the London “Eye,” the big wheel, further downstream is called that just for the sake of it? Look around. Take the blinders off your eyes and see these things. Like the Israelites in 750 B.C., could we be blind to the situation we are in?

We may think we are in control of the situation, but are we? Do we say, “I have it all under control”? We also need to be careful not to get pious; otherwise the same situation will arise as with John and the Laodiceans. We *can't* think that it doesn't apply to us.

The Israelites were blind to what was happening in their civilization. Amos had an unenviable task, just as Jesus did after him: a single person in a huge crowd standing up, giving an ultimatum, warning the people of what would happen if they carried on. There is evil every way we turn in this world. We need to open our eyes to it and our hearts to God, so He can help us.

Just as Amos stood up before crowds, with only the remnant listening, we need to be doing the same thing. We need to take the burden, to open our eyes and see what is happening in the world before it is too late.

How to Seek the Lord

HOW-TO

Deut. 4:29; Amos 5:4, 14, 15; Matt. 6:33; Heb. 11:6

Do you remember playing hide and seek? Cast your mind back to what the seeker has to do. They wait while all the others hide; then they walk, or run, to many locations, trying to find their friends. They are actively involved in the game.

What does the word “seek” mean to you?

Think about when you enter a room and you are looking for someone special. Do you sit down and wait until they happen to see you? Do you walk around and talk to anyone you happen to meet? Do you look carefully round the room until you see a certain person then straightaway go and join them?

Seek is a verb, so action is implied.

Just look at the promises that accompany the command to seek the Lord:

“You will find Him” (Deut 4:29, NKJV). “You may live” (Amos 5:14, NKJV). “All these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33, NKJV). “He rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb. 11:6, NIV).

How can you seek the Lord?

Focus on whom you are seeking. Get to know God as a real person, someone to rely on and trust. Look for evidence of His character in nature, the Bible, the lives of those around you. Make notes to re-read later. Listen to His voice. Communicate with the Lord in prayer. Then take time to listen to His reply. Share your findings with someone else. When you have made a new discovery,

**What does the word
“seek” mean to you?**

you need to share it. When you share an experience with friends, God will become more real to them too.

Thank the Lord for His many rewards. Recognize the blessings that the Lord sends you each week. Thank Him in prayer, song, or music.

REACT

1. When we're first getting to know a new friend, perhaps we go a bit out of our way to find out about their interests and habits; or we might visit more often a place where we think we will see them. How can we use some of that same natural curiosity and attentiveness that we extend to new human friends to our seeking the Lord? How can we know Him better? Where are we most likely to find Him?

2. Why does God tell us that we must seek Him? Why doesn't He just come to us or give us life and gifts and rewards automatically?

Learn the Lesson

OPINION

Rom. 3:23

If the first page of the Bible represented 4000 B.C. (or the beginning of time), and the last page represented 60 A.D. (the end of the New Testament), then the Jewish story would take up no more than 30 pages or so. Instead, a large portion of the Old Testament is set aside for describing the roller-coaster ride of the children of Israel.

God knew human nature at every level, and knew that what happened to the Jews then would happen to us today. Not only is the analogy relevant to the individual, but also to local communities and nations. It is said that wisdom learns from others' mistakes, but foolishness learns by experience.

Paul tells us in Romans 3:23 that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Whenever we try to attain righteousness on our own, we never make it. The first time that the Jews left God and tried to make it on their own, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. This was because they had been too slack in their behavior and beliefs. The second time the Jews tried to work without God Jerusalem was destroyed, by the Romans. The problem? They were too strict in their legalism. On both occasions the Jews followed the letter but not the spirit of God's law.

God, through the Holy Spirit, is our only hope of salvation. No matter where we are in our spiritual journey, we can be saved by His grace. No matter where we are in our walk with Him—God came to save both the Jew and the Gentile.

A prayer: Lord, we thank You for the abundance of guidance that You have set out in Your Word. Teach us to learn from it, Lord, and let Your Holy Spirit bless us and guide us as we study it. Holy Father, remind us each day that we are unable to save ourselves by our own efforts. All our works are useless, and our righteousness is as filthy rags. Save us by Your grace, dear God. Amen.

REACT

1. We've all learned things both from others and from our own experiences. Which lessons have we learned best? Have we been wise enough to learn from other people's mistakes? Or are we too often arrogant or naive enough to think "it can't happen to me" or "I'd never do that"? What lessons have "sunk in" best? Why?

2. In what ways do we try to attain righteousness on our own? Have we made some of the same mistakes the Jews did in the Old Testament? In what ways are we too slack? Are we legalistic about some things? How can we better understand the spirit of God's law?

Chris Down, Cambridge, England

EXPLORATION

Phil. 4:13

God has high expectations for His people. And shouldn't He, since we are His representatives here on earth? But remember, never does He set down a requirement without enabling us to meet it. Through His power, by His Spirit, and because of the sacrifice of His Son, God makes a way for us to live up to His expectations. The problem comes when we try to meet them on our own as the ancient Israelites did (and some modern ones too). By getting our priorities straight, seeking Him through prayer and Bible study, and ultimately letting His Holy Spirit power work in our lives, we're sure to stay on the right track.

CONSIDER

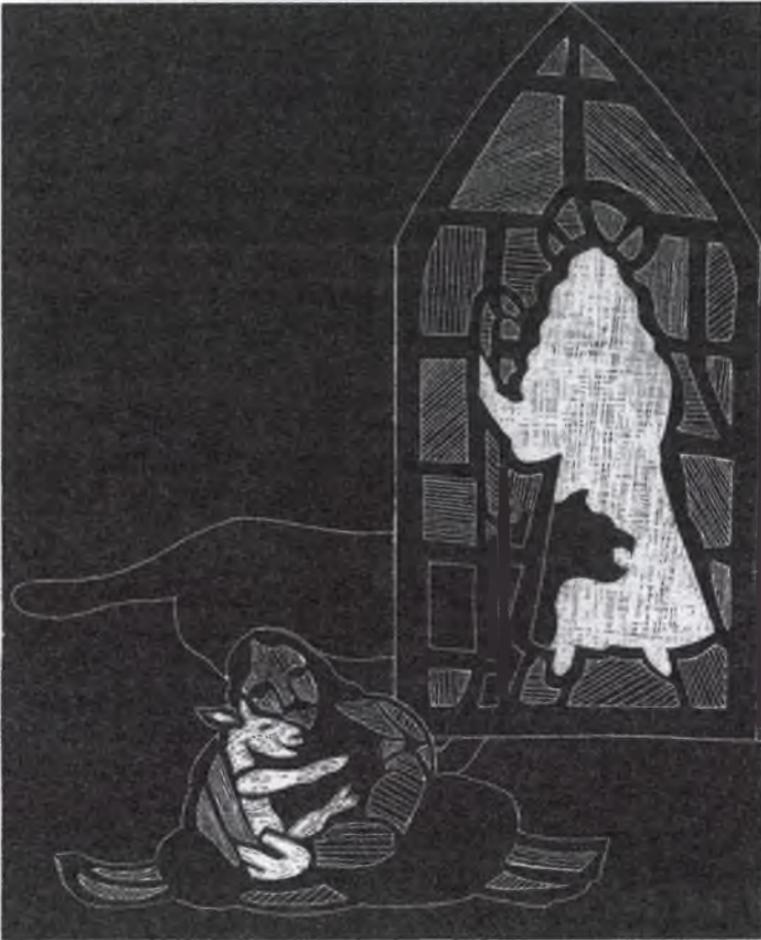
- Interviewing a random group of people (including an equal number of churchgoers and nonchurchgoers), asking them what their top priority in life is. When you've completed the interviews, analyze the responses to see if there are any differences between the two groups. Write a short summary of your findings.
- Beginning a journal in which you log prayer requests and answers along with discoveries you've made through your search of the Scriptures, listing texts that speak directly to a need, question, or problem.
- Agreeing with a friend to go for a week without watching TV, listening to the radio, using the computer, or playing video games. At the end of the week, share your experience with your friend and compare notes. Discuss with one another the impact of the media on your lives and on your values.
- Studying the online sermon outline that appears at <www.hawthornegospel.com/html/god_s_expectations_of_you.htm>. Consider whether this outline fulfills your understanding of God's expectations of a Christian.
- Writing a song or a poem expressing your appreciation for God's grace.
- Getting together with a group of friends on a regular basis for prayer and Bible study.
- Jotting down a list of your personal priorities in life (e.g., God, family, school, friends, career, etc.), ranking them in order from most to least important. Then pray and ask God if any item on the list needs to be rearranged. Ask Him to help you make any necessary changes.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, chap. 7.

Tim Crosby, Ruthie Jacobsen, and Lonnie Melashenko, *A Passion for Prayer*.
Stephen Mosley, *Your Religion Is Too Small*.

Pass **Over** or pass **Through**?



“That day will be darkness, not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him”
(Amos 5:18, 19, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

Amos 5:22-24

You sent Me an invitation to your celebration in My honor. I was pleased to be able to attend.

I looked forward to spending time with you, to celebrating the bond we share together.

But on My way to the celebration, I passed through your streets. I saw beggars pleading for a crust of bread, while you swept past, ignoring them.

I saw orphaned children in rags, looking for a place to sleep.

I saw mothers dying of starvation, giving up their last bowl of rice to feed their little ones. They begged for help, but you were blind and deaf. You saw nothing, heard nothing, did nothing.

They were My children, My own beloved ones, and My heart was torn with their suffering. I had given them to you to care for, and they lay dying from your neglect.

As I passed through your streets I saw you outside your mansion, sitting by the fountain, enjoying the fruits of your hard work. In the fields, I saw your foreman whipping your slaves under the blinding sun.

On My way to your house of worship, where we were supposed to celebrate together, I passed other houses of worship, other shrines. I had never been invited there; they were not intended for Me. Inside one, dispirited, penniless girls painted themselves up to serve as temple prostitutes. In another, a human baby was sacrificed to appease an angry deity. My precious children were fed to your imaginary gods, and you turned a blind eye.

**One flake of gold
from the altar
would have fed a
street full of
hungry people.**

Finally I reached the steps of your temple. Yours—not Mine.

Inside I heard music and voices raised in celebration. The music was almost loud enough to drown out the cries of the dying beggars out on the street.

Inside, I saw gold and jewels, rich cloth and beautiful art, all a tribute, you said, to Me. I was unmoved. One flake of gold from the altar would have fed a street full of hungry people.

Inside, I smelled the rich scent of the offerings you brought. You called them sacrifices, but there was no sacrifice; you had plenty to share, and you never let yourself go short.

I looked around your temple. I saw only a blur of light and color, heard a cacophonous noise. You called it worship, but it meant nothing to Me.

I turned and went back outside, back to My people.

The Difference Between Night and Day?

EVIDENCE

Exod. 12:12, 13; Amos 5:17, 18

There are marked similarities and differences between the first Passover described in Exodus and the day of the Lord as prophesied in Amos 5.

“‘On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down . . . and I will bring judgment . . . and when I see the blood, I will pass over you’” (Exod. 12:12, 13, NIV).

“‘There will be wailing . . . for I will pass through your midst. . . . Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light’” (Amos 5:17, 18, NIV).

Both events depict a fulfilling of God’s judgment, a quick and thorough execution of a death sentence. The difference lies in who is on the receiving end.

God’s people are to be spared during the Passover; the sign of blood on a doorpost tells the destroyer not to enter that house but rather to pass over and strike elsewhere. Conversely, during the day of the Lord, it is the people of Israel who are the targets of God’s wrath. Amos 5:17 says that the Lord will not pass over Israel this time but will instead “pass through” (NIV).

There is a reason for this difference. At the time of the first Passover, Israel was oppressed, and they were seeking after God for justice and deliverance. When Moses instructed the people on how to observe that first Passover, they “bowed down and worshiped . . . [and] did just what the Lord commanded” (Exod. 12:27, 28, NIV). The spiritual state of the Israelites during Amos’s prophecy was a completely different matter. Israel was outwardly upholding the feasts and ceremonies required, but they were spiritually mired down with self-centered pride and idol worship. The Lord hated their feasts, couldn’t stand their religious assemblies, and likened Israel’s worship songs to so much noise! Israel’s true worship was focused on their king and on their idols instead of on God.

We have to be careful of our loyalties and our priorities. Sometimes things happen that can keep us from quality time with God, but we must always keep making time, keep searching for Him, keep setting our minds on things above. If we don’t, we may find ourselves looking forward to the day of the Lord and in for a rude awakening when it happens.

**We have to be
careful of our
loyalties and our
priorities.**

REACT

1. What do you think would have happened if an unbelieving Egyptian family had smeared blood on their doorposts?
2. How can we be sure that we will survive the day of the Lord?

The Heart of the Matter

LOGOS

Exod. 12:12; Amos 5:17-26

He was a bully, and he deserved to be punished. It wasn't just me. Every boy and girl in my third-grade class was ready to see him squirm.

We'd all been victims. Pushed off swings and see-saws, tripped in the halls, taunted on the playground and in the school bus, we all had our reasons for wanting justice. With an uncanny ability to limit his anti-social actions to the precise moment that no adult was watching, he'd managed to elude punishment. Until now.

Our cherub-faced persecutor had finally committed an outrage in clear view of our teacher, who'd just marched him into the principal's office, twisting his ear all the way and disregarding his squeals of pain and protest.

This was it. He was going to pay. Or was he?

It was the principal's judgment. He could decide among a variety of punishments. He could also decide that this time around a stern warning would be enough. We all waited anxiously for his judgment.

Evidence and Judgment (Exod. 12:12)

God is aware of our every action *and* the motives behind each action. With this evidence, He is able to make a perfect judgment for each individual case. And only He is able to execute that judgment.

In the example of Egypt just prior to the Exodus, God executes His judgment in a manner that seems cruel and unfair. The God of life, killing every first-born, of both man and beast? This appears contrary to the principles of love and respect we claim to derive from the very character of God!

Reading the verse again, however, we may notice that God says He will execute judgment "on all the gods of Egypt" (NIV).

Many plagues were brought upon the land of Egypt. Their purpose was to impress upon the nation that God was God. The people continued to plead for intervention from their gods of stone and metal, but all to no effect. Despite the evidence that the God of Moses was active and powerful, they continued to serve their idols.

**For no scientific or
logical reason, lives
would suddenly cease.**

When frogs, lice, flies, bloody water, hail, horrible darkness, and disease were not enough to make the Egyptians question their gods, it was time to execute God's judgment. He pronounced that the lives of Egypt's first-born would be taken. For no scientific or logical reason, lives would suddenly cease, as His word declared.

All the prayers to all the gods of Egypt would not halt this execution.

Meanwhile, in the Hebrew township, the people carefully followed the command of the Lord. Lambs without blemish were sacrificed. Blood was daubed onto door frames. The roasted meat was eaten with bitter herbs, while the people were dressed and ready for a journey they had been told would soon begin. No first-born died there. The Lord passed over these homes when He saw the sign of faith.

A lesson is learned the hard way: false gods cannot save, no matter how devoutly their worshipers believe in them. In His wisdom and power, God brings humans face-to-face with the uselessness of their substitutes for a faith relationship with Him.

Unholy Service (Amos 5:17-26)

God saves. The redeemed then serve Him. More than a duty, the service is a privilege. Head, heart, and hands are harmoniously engaged to exalt the Lord.

But what if service is perverted, twisted so that holy symbolism covers a sinful, self-centered system? What does this mean to the God who can read the thoughts of humankind? Such worship does not exalt God. It misrepresents Him and what His loving power can accomplish in the human life.

Amos warns Israel that the day of the Lord—an event they all claimed to look forward to—would not be one of gladness for them. Their self-serving and sin-cherishing ways would seal their doom instead. Whatever their claims to be chosen and righteous, they had substituted humanmade gods for the great I AM. Amos 5:26 says, “You also carried Sikkuth your king and Chiun, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves” (NKJV).

In the time of Amos, the nation of Israel resembled her former oppressor, Egypt. The Israelites made sacrifices and offerings. They held assemblies and feasts and sang songs, claiming it was for the Lord who had brought them out of Egypt, the God who, for their faith and obedience, had passed over them on a night that held death for the Egyptian first-born.

God penetrates to the core of every action, word, and thought. He knows the people are not truly serving Him. Therefore, their worship is detestable to Him. Because they have set up other gods, He cannot bless and protect them. In a sense, they have chosen to have trouble and heartache pass through their midst. Like Moses and Aaron, Amos is sent to warn the idolaters that God has ruled, and He will execute His judgment.

REACT

1. Are faith and obedience separate from each other? Why or why not?
2. How can people claim to belong to God and yet have idols in their lives?
3. By what means can we test our worship and service, to be confident it is pleasing to God?

Tuesday
November 6

He Took Up the Burden

TESTIMONY

Amos 7:14, 15

Who was Amos? Where did he receive the authority to chastise Israel? The Hebrews must have felt justified in pointing out that he was not qualified for his work. Amos was a farmer, without a family tradition of prophetic gifts. But he was called by God to carry a message to Israel (Amos 7:14, 15).

The name *Amos* comes from the Hebrew root *amas*, which means “to lift a burden, to carry.” Amos responded to the command of God. He took up the burden of alerting the nation of Israel to their approaching doom. He reveals the sins that are sapping the spiritual strength from God’s chosen people, causing them to bring God’s judgment upon them.

“The iniquity in Israel during the last half century before the Assyrian captivity was like that of the days of Noah, and of every other age when men have rejected God and

“The worship of the creature instead of the Creator, has always resulted in the grossest of evils.”

have given themselves wholly to evil-doing. The exaltation of nature above the God of nature, the worship of the creature instead of the Creator, has always resulted in the grossest of evils. Thus when the people of Israel, in their worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, paid supreme homage to the forces of nature, they severed their connection with all that is uplifting and ennobling,

and fell an easy prey to temptation. With the defenses of the soul broken down, the misguided worshipers 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.”*

Along with the prophet’s cry to awake from the death-sleep of sin, was the promise that God would bless those who seek Him (Amos 5:4, 5, 14, 15). Though some of the people responded, the majority continued to live immersed in sin, confident that extremists like Amos would be quieted, and the good life could continue.

**Prophets and Kings*, pp. 281, 282.

How to Avoid the Weeping and Wailing

HOW-TO

Amos 5:17; Mic. 6:8

In the end time judgment there will be much sorrow and wailing, for many who call for Christ's quick return have not yet made their hearts ready. Amos 5:17 says, "there shall be wailing, for I will pass through you," says the Lord" (NKJV). There will be darkness and sorrow. The wicked will be silenced and the lofty and proud will receive their reward (Isa. 2:12).

So how can we elude the wailing that will ensue? God has given His chosen people rules to live by. And though in this specific text He is talking to Israel, His message still applies to us today.

1. Repent, don't repeat. When our life choices cause displeasure to the Lord, we are to ask forgiveness and mean it. We can't just say a quick prayer asking for forgiveness and turn around only to repeat the act. If we are genuine in asking forgiveness, we must make the effort to change.

2. Remember your deeds will be returned to you. Obadiah 1:15 tells us that "As you have done, it shall be done to you; your reprisal shall return upon your own head" (NKJV). In our daily lives we are to be kind, loving, gentle, and forgiving. Evil deeds reap bad rewards. But if we act with love, we can expect God's help in the time of trouble.

3. Give up idol worship and idle worship. The first part of Amos 5:21 alludes to idol worship. This is a breach of the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:3, 4, tells us to have no other gods before God and not to make for ourselves any idol. But Amos 5:21 also applies to worship that has become meaningless and idle—when we just go through the motions of worship without having a humbled, worshipful heart. Worship is for praising, exalting, glorifying our Creator and restoring a new heart.

Worship is for
praising, exalting,
glorifying our
Creator.

4. Going left and right. What we must do is be sure that all our wrong doing is *left* behind and we learn what is just and *right*. Isaiah 1:16 tells us to "wash yourselves, make yourselves clean" (NKJV). We are to encourage one another in the Lord, as we are to love one another.

In conclusion, Micah 6:8 tells us how to avoid weeping and wailing. "He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (NKJV).

Thursday
November 8

Who Is My Neighbor?

OPINION

Amos 5:17-27

August 10, 1976, a Belfast housewife runs out of her house to witness a car crush her neighbor's three children and wound her neighbor, Anne Maguire. The car was an Irish Republican Army getaway vehicle, its dying driver shot by British troops. Knocking on the doors of her street, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, the victim's sister, started the Peace People Movement. Presenting them the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize, Egil Aarvik, described that August day: "The cup of horrors had now run over: the time had come when the ordinary man and woman must rise in protest against this senseless use of violence."

Today Betty Williams works for children who are victims of war worldwide. In the winter of 1999 Williams spoke on a National Public Radio lecture. A passing comment about Nike sweatshops in Indonesia echoed Amos 2:6. "Children killing other children over a pair of sneakers," she said. "They sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals," wrote Amos (NKJV).

I'd better not look forward to the liberation unless I'm working with the Liberator.

July 5, 2000, *The San Jose Mercury News*, my local newspaper, reports the improved working conditions of Nike's Indonesian plants. A company spokeswoman, Tammy Rodriguez, credits public pressure with the change in employee treatment.

In his famous "I Have A Dream" speech, Martin Luther King, Jr., quoted from Amos 5:24: "We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. . . . We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until 'justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.'"

Amos 5 describes a people who are satisfied. A people who think the death of a neighbor's three children is that neighbor's problem: Praise God my children are alive! A people who think Nike runners are cool: Who cares how they're made? A people who praise God for living in a land of freedom—while police officers pull their minority neighbors over for "Driving While Black or Brown." Amos 5 says that the oppression of my fellow men is my problem. I'd better not look forward to the liberation of the Second Coming unless I'm working with the Liberator.

* <<http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/speechesaddress-at-march-on-washington.html>>

Be Sure Your Sins . . .

EXPLORATION

Eccles. 12:14

CONCLUDE

During the time of the prophets, Israel assumed that by observing the required festivals and attending worship services, they could harbor other motives and practice other indulgences that were in opposition to God's order of things. The people showed that they were not loyal to God because they kept idols and paid homage to them. Worst of all, they no longer had the mind or spirit of God in them, so they became oppressors of the poor and disadvantaged. They had the audacity to assume that they should look forward to the day of the Lord.

As the day of the Lord approaches, we have to examine our situation and discover whether we have allowed the righteousness of God to flow through us, so that His final punishment will pass over us.

CONSIDER

- Creating a certificate of achievement containing the words that you imagine Jesus will say to you on judgment day. Consider whether Jesus will be able to cover your sins with His robe of righteousness or whether you might not be covered because of hidden motives or sins.
- Sending an email to everyone in your address list. Ask them to tell you one practical way in which we Christians promote justice in this unjust world. Make a list of the suggestions and share it with your Sabbath School group.
- Looking for your oldest pair of shoes. Go to the shoe store and buy a new pair. Give the *new* pair to your church's community services agency.
- Drawing a picture of your heart as God sees it.
- Finding the song "Create in Me a Clean Heart" in a praise song book. Read the words out loud until they become a prayer in your own mind.
- Taking a Sabbath afternoon walk alone in a quiet place. As you walk along, pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal anything that you have hidden from God and to show you any harmful assumptions you have held on to.
- Picturing some contemporary examples of the analogies God spoke through His prophet in Amos 5:18-20. Create two or three word pictures that people in the twenty-first century could relate to.

CONNECT

Exodus 5; Amos 12.

The Great Controversy, chap. 17.

Morris Venden, *God Says, But I Think*. Keaven Hayden, *The Shaking Among God's People*.

“At Ease in Zion”



“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.
So be earnest, and repent” (Rev. 3:19, NIV).

Proclaiming the Judgment?

INTRODUCTION

1 Cor. 10:11, 12; Heb. 12:6-11

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall," says the proverb (16:18, NIV), and since this is a general rule, Paul repeats this in a warning: "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Cor. 10:12, NIV). Not only a warning is given but the whole history of Israel was "written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (verse 11, NIV). Yet we seem to learn only from our own falls!

Amos was proclaiming the message of warning and repentance some forty years before the final Assyrian destruction came upon the tribes of Israel in 722 B.C. They could have avoided it if only they would have listened to the voice of the prophet; but instead they were "at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1, KJV) trusting in their own strength and righteousness. Only he who is satisfied could be at ease, but there was nothing worth satisfaction in Israel right then. There were plenty of reasons to be "grieved for the affliction of Joseph" (verse 6, KJV) but those who have lost their upward look could see only "clean" ways (Prov. 16:2, KJV) to be proud of.

The name *Laodicea* means "judging of the people."* God's last church, its people, are commissioned to proclaim His last warning to the perishing world, the nearness of the day of judgment, yet as we read the Laodicean message it is the people themselves who are judged. They are judged because they are lukewarm, satisfied as those who are "'rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'" (Rev. 3:17, NKJV), whereas the reality is that they "are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (verse 17, NKJV). This is unpleasant news, and we are quite ready to suppress the facts and forget that this can be done only by facing the destruction instead. Let's be wise and learn from other's mistakes. Why should we go on repeating the sad story of a stubborn people?

Let's face those things in our lives that the Lord hates because the only reason He declares them is His saving love toward us, the sign of our adoption as the sons and daughters of God. "The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son" (Heb. 12:6, NIV). "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John. 3:1, NIV). This should be kept in our minds during this weekly study!

Let's be wise and
learn from other's
mistakes.

LOGOS

Amos 6:1, 7-14; Rev. 3:14-20

"No worries here," could have been a motto for Israel in this time of their history. Easily. Nothing could have been further from the truth. This week's lesson focuses on Israel's situation, in which God used capital letters to spell out His words.

Amos 6 begins with a warning to the leaders and the trend setters of Israel, then proceeds to describe their well-lived life rolling in material wealth during this time period. In verse 7 Amos turns to see matters from God's viewpoint. Using irony Amos describes that they will keep their prominent position during their defeat, but first they would face deportation!

The Lord then makes His threat even more serious (verse 8); He swears by His own holiness. The Lord has nothing more serious to swear by, and Amos brings forth a serious prophecy from God. He describes God's disgust with the pride of Israel. The real problem here is not the buildings, but the pride that Israel had in their self-sufficiency. Pride and self-sufficiency had come between Israel and God.

Verses 9-11 describe what is thought to be a plague that God brings over Israel. At this time everyone will know that it came from the Lord and will dare not say His name (verse 10). In normal circumstances the Lord's name is connected

**"No worries here,"
could have been a
motto for Israel.**

with joy, peace, and blessings. Here, however, the people are afraid to call the Lord's name, in strong contrast to Joel 2:32, " "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" ' " (NIV). It appears that in Amos the Israelites have finally understood that both salvation and judgment are in the Lord.

Amos 6:12 is meant to show the absurdity in which Israel finds themselves. Horses don't run on rocky crags, but Israel thinks they can replace justice with poison, convinced that this can be done without the slightest objection from the laws of nature, which in this case is God's will and justice. They got rid of justice but want to keep God. That, Amos says, would be as easy as oxen plowing the sea.

Because Israel rejoiced in its own accomplishments and boasted of its own strength, the Lord declares that He will " 'stir up a nation' " (verse 14, NIV) against Israel. Amos has in this prophecy declared the intent of the Lord in powerful terms and a look down history lane tells us that Samaria fell in 722 B.C. All that was left were the crushed remains of a once proud nation.

Whatever does that have to do with me? In 2001! Nothing and everything. Revelation 3:14-20 describes Laodicea, the last of the seven churches described in Revelation, a church that so often is compared to our time, but why and what does that have to do with Amos?

The Laodicean church also had a motto of “no worries,” everything is fine, we are all right here. In many ways they did a lot of good, but they too thought everything was fine with no trouble on the horizon; in reality they were not as rich in spiritual matters as in gold coins. When the Laodicean church looked itself in the mirror, they saw a fattening, well-functioning church; in reality they were on the edge of dying from starvation and dysfunction. Just as in Amos’s days, their self-image was distorted by outer wealth to the extent that their inner spiritual wealth was in shreds. Sound familiar?

Many places in this world are experiencing peace and overflowing tables. Professional and personal success should not fool us into a state of lukewarmness in our spiritual life. Disaster might not be around the corner as it was for Israel. You may not be taken captive, but then maybe You might be taken captive by the dark side, Satan, because you have been proud of going to church regularly, doing all the right things. Being lukewarm, you might be in the front of the deportation line when judgment days come around.

But thank God for Jesus. By the grace of God and the crucifixion of Christ, you and I can be at ease in Zion. When we set our inner record straight with God and let Him take complete control over all our doings in this life, then and only then can we have *no worries* about being at ease in Zion.

REACT

1. How would you define “at ease in Zion”? Be specific.
2. Can a person believe in grace and not worry about salvation? Explain your answer.
3. Think about this quotation from *Time* magazine (10 July 2000): “\$146 billion. The combined incomes of the 582 million people living in the 43 least-developed countries of the world during 1999. \$1 trillion. The combined wealth of the 200 richest people in the world last year.” What other similarities do you see between our contemporary world and Amos’s Israel?
4. From the past experiences each of us has had, when would we say we are in the greatest danger of spiritual lukewarmness? Have we ever been taken by surprise by a spiritual or other personal crisis when we had thought everything was going great? Do we rely too much on the good feelings of being professionally successful or meeting financial goals or having loving human relationships?
5. The lesson article points out that God had to put His message to Israel in capital letters in order to get through to them. What would God need to do to get through to us? How can we find the right balance without being gloomy and depressed about our own spiritual weakness? How can we have confidence in God’s grace and joy in the life He’s given us, while still remaining attentive enough to hear His voice?

Do We Believe the Message?

TESTIMONY

Amos 6:1, 3-5; Rev. 3:14-20

"The Laodicean message is applicable to the church at this time. Do you believe this message? Have you hearts that feel? Or are you constantly saying, We are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing? Is it in vain that the declaration of eternal truth has been given to this nation to be carried to all the nations of the world?"¹

"Love of self excludes the love of Christ. Those who live for self are ranged under the head of the Laodicean church who are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot.

**"Love of self excludes
the love of Christ."**

The ardor of the first love has lapsed into a selfish egotism. The love of Christ in the heart is expressed in the actions. If love for Christ is dull, the love for those for whom Christ has died will degenerate. There may be

a wonderful appearance for zeal and ceremonies, but this is the substance of their self-inflated religion. Christ represents them as nauseating to His taste."²

"God calls for those who are at ease in Zion to be up and doing. Will they not listen to the Master's voice? He wants prayerful, faithful workers who will sow beside all waters. Those who labor thus will be surprised to find how trials, resolutely borne in the name and strength of Jesus, will give firmness to the faith and renew the courage."³

REACT

1. "The love of Christ in the heart is expressed in actions," but good actions can express love of self as well. How can one tell the difference?

2. Do you consider the Laodicean message as a message of rebuke or of encouragement? Explain your answer.

3. If God took your spiritual temperature today, what would the thermometer read? Explain your answer.

1. *Selected Messages*, Bk. 1, p. 92.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 962.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 76.

The Dangers of Affluence

EVIDENCE

Amos 6:1, 7-14

The notable men in Zion faced a judgment of doom. But why would they be condemned to such fate? What were they guilty of?

Quite clearly the culprit is not affluence, which those men possessed. In rebuking the upper classes of Israel, Amos took issue with some things that go with affluence: (1) What they did to become affluent. What's wrong with affluence is not simply in having it, but in acquiring it at the expense of justice and piety. (2) What affluence did to them. There were several things:

- *It made them disregard God.* Those notable men were guilty of sacrilege (verse 6a). "The luxury-loving, sacrilegious princes used these ["bowls" = Heb. *mizraqim*] in their feasts, thus attesting their lack of piety."¹ They had anointed themselves using chief ointments, "perhaps those that were supposed to be used in divine service only."²

- *It made them disregard their fellow humankind.* Worse than wasting money on pretentious buildings (verse 8) was securing luxury and splendor through injustice to the poor (verses 3, 12, cf. 2:6, 7; 3:10; 4:1). With senses numbed for justice, they had little concern for the affliction within the northern kingdom, the "ruin of Joseph" (6:6). Their luxuries had become symbols of the oppression by which they aggrandized themselves.

- *It made them regard themselves.* And they did so to the extent that they became self-satisfied and complacent. "The Northern Kingdom about that time had come victorious out of war [2 Kings 14:25], and had reached its culmination of wealth and power, with the attendant results of luxury and excess, while the Southern Kingdom had been enjoying a period of outward tranquility and domestic content."³

Quite clearly the
culprit is not
affluence.

The people felt safe in their riches, in their national security and power. Yet the ones who are at ease (*hashaananim*, verse 1) did not necessarily have peace. They lacked a sense of wholeness, or completeness, which can be found only in the Lord, the source of true security. On the whole, it was Israel's pride that caused the Lord to swear by Himself and declare a judgment of doom (verse 8), which is vividly illustrated in the next two verses (verses 9, 10).

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 974.

2. *Ibid.*

3. James Robertson, "Amos," in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, p. 121.

Couch Potato Christians

HOW-TO

Rev. 3:19

Amos was a burden bearer, and his name reflected the weighty and solemn message he delivered. He had been chosen to do a great work for God which he did with simple, plain eloquence. Christianity is simply living by every word that proceeds from God's mouth and should reflect the imminent return of Christ. We are special to Him and should let others know by our words and actions that we are "enthusiastic about the things of God" (Rev. 3:19, TLB).

Because we need help in our Christian living, we should:

1. Allow God to open our eyes for the removal of spiritual blindness.

Today's life is paradoxical, at one point full of hurry and bustle, at another, leisure and relaxation. Wealth and prosperity, apathy and spiritual complacency characterized the Laodiceans' as it does our own lives. Just as it is for our generation, Laodicean Christians preserved enough of the formality and content of the gospel to dull their perceptive powers. It was almost impossible to convince them of their great need for salvation and the effort necessary for a victorious life. "The sin that is most nearly hopeless and incurable is pride of opinion, self-conceit. This stands in the way of all growth."*

2. Repent—confess our sins and ask for forgiveness. Be sorrowful for past sins and show a zeal for future involvement. In Bible times judgment came swiftly:

fire from heaven (Sodom and Gomorrah); people struck dead for lying (Ananias and Sapphira); the ground swallowing the erring (Achan). A quick response to sins! Today it may seem that God is more lenient and relaxed, allowing time to read and understand, listen and make up our minds.

Today it may seem
that God is more
lenient and relaxed.

But the rules are still the same: "I am the Lord, I do not change" (Mal. 3:6, NKJV).

3. Open our hearts to God. He is our only hope and has promised to be with us (Matt. 28:20). He has given us time to repent but that time is running out. Do not limit God. He has ways of saving people you never thought possible. If you let Him, God will give you a higher view of things, and you will not be lost for being a couch potato Christian.

* *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, pp. 199, 200.

When Wrath Is a Comfort

OPINION

2 Chron. 36:11-21

If you were going to line up love and hate on an emotional continuum, you would be tempted to put them at opposite ends, but they are a lot closer than most people realize. *Apathy*—not hate—is the opposite of love. In fact, love without hate is an anemic kind of love.

I always struggled with the picture of God that I saw in the Old Testament. He seemed somewhat vindictive and angry, and I could not relate that with the New Testament God of love and grace. I didn't understand how a loving God could hate. Then something brought me to an understanding of God's hatred and wrath.

I have a friend who struggles with lust and pornography. I have known this since the beginning of our relationship, but didn't really realize what a struggle it was for him. What was happening to him was somewhat like a Christian becoming "at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1, KJV). The guilt he felt slowly created a wall between us and other friends and began to destroy his relationship with and his witness for God.

Over this period I felt sadness at the corrosion I saw in our relationship, then anger, and finally an outright hatred of what he was doing. I loved him, but I absolutely hated what he was doing, and for me the line was not always distinct as to whether I hated what he was doing or I hated *him*. As a child I had been taught that Christians love at all times.

At this time in my study of the Old Testament, the picture of a God who hated, who felt wrath, became a great comfort. He gave Israel everything, yet they turned away like a harlot (Ezek. 16:15). His love for them was intense, yet they wouldn't come back. I understood that. He was wanting to woo and love them back and was ready to destroy whatever came between.

In this context I began to see the warrior side of God, the One who loves me with a passion that I can only glimpse (John 3:16; Rom. 8:39). In that love there is anger over anything that comes between us.

Satan has a long list of substitutes for a relationship with God: lust, greed, self-involvement, and even concern for others can be twisted until we no longer spend time with God. I see now that God's wrath comes out because He is not willing to let any of us go. He fights for us with a holy wrath.

Love has no choice but to feel anger at the things that hurt the object of its affection. Today that fills my heart with a peace and a joy, knowing that God loves me enough to fight for me and for my friend.

**The picture of a God
who hated became a
great comfort.**

EXPLORATION

Rom. 13:11, 12

CONCLUDE

God has one main desire for His people: that they should be sealed for eternity as His own. His dealings with people may be harsh or tender, depending on the circumstances. But what remains constant is that God *always* acts out of love. History has shown that whenever God's people become lukewarm, He administers wake-up calls. The God of heaven is no wimp. He doesn't sing a lullaby to His sleeping children, but rather sounds the bugle of reveille!

CONSIDER

- Making a mural showing various things that keep us spiritually lukewarm. Sketch, paint, or glue magazine pictures on the mural that show examples of how we are kept at a distance from God.
- Taking a survey of Adventists, asking this question: "Are you saved?" Record their answers as "Yes," "No," "Not sure," "Hope so." Be sure to ask Adventists of all ages (including children) and then compile their answers. Are you surprised with the results? Were there differences in the answers according to age or other factors?
- Emailing a missionary and asking him or her to tell you what daily life is like. Ask what they are learning there and how it differs from being at home. Does the missionary seem lukewarm spiritually? If not, why?
- Writing a page in God's journal after He has watched another day of His people's complacency. This may seem like a stretch, but consider giving it a try.
- Observing nature and thinking about what the natural world would be like if it became lukewarm. What if trees were always dormant? What if nature became distant from its Creator and didn't respond to His awakening touch?
- Viewing the video "The Money Pit." Think about how this story could apply to God's way of waking us from our lukewarmness by allowing our lives to be affected by suffering. For a Christian, in what ways is lukewarmness caused by a lack of trust in God?
- Composing a song based on Wednesday's portion of the lesson, which has three verses. Verse 1: Remove spiritual blindness. Verse 2: Repent, confess, and ask forgiveness. Verse 3: Open our hearts to God.

CONNECT

Revelation 2:4; 3:2, 15, 16.

Messages to Young People, pp. 133, 196.

Randy Maxwell, *Bring Back the Glory*.

Locusts and Prayer



“Alas for that day! For the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty” (Joel 1:15, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

In Dr. Oliver Sacks's book, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, there is an interesting story about how subjective reality can be. Jimmie was a genial, gray-haired man when Sacks met him in 1975. Jimmie spoke of going to college on the GI bill and about his brother's engagement, as if 1945 were the present. When Sacks asked him point-blank what year it was, Jimmie voiced disbelief at the inane question, stating that it was "Forty-five, man. What do you mean?" He went on, "We've won the war, FDR's dead, Truman's at the helm. There are great times ahead."

Sacks thrust a mirror toward him and asked if the reflection looked like that of a 19-year-old, as Jimmie insisted he was. He became agitated and frantic as he questioned whether the mirror or he himself was crazy.

Jimmie didn't miss his memory because he didn't remember that he was constantly forgetting. He didn't know that he had forgotten the last 30 years of his life because his reality was lost in a unique time warp. Outwardly, Jimmie seemed like an average member of society with his good looks and geniality. His unique view of reality didn't surface unless asked pointed questions.

In Amos chapter 3, God asks pointed questions to get the Israelites to see the bigger picture and realize that the reality they were living in was very narrow and

**His reality was lost
in a unique time
warp.**

confining. Unlike Jimmie, deprived of memory by Korsakov's syndrome, the Israelites did not want to see reality. They preferred their stilted view and didn't want to see the bigger picture. The Israelites were like the Laodiceans who said, "'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a

thing" ' (Rev. 3:17, NIV). But God answered, "'You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see'" (verses 17, 18, NIV).

When people are blind, whether willing or not, they need an intercessor. Like Dr. Sacks trying to help Jimmie understand reality, God used Amos and other prophets to break through the Israelites' blindness. He is still trying to get us to grasp that what He wants for us is far better than our limited vision. We can take courage knowing that not only is Jesus our Intercessor, but He is willing and able to grant a clearer, deeper picture of reality.

Sending a Swarm

EVIDENCE

Amos 7:1, 2

The light of the sun is blocked by a dense cloud of thousands of winged insects. This swarm of ravenous locusts has already stripped countless acres of farmland but continues to look for more vegetation to satiate its boundless appetite.

It is hard to believe that the brightly colored, aggressive insects that compose this flying cloud are the same that under different circumstances are camouflaged to blend into their environment. In fact, the species can exist in two forms, “solitary” and “gregarious,” which differ so much that they were once thought to be different species. In the solitary phase, the grasshoppers are dull green or brown, reclusive, and “restrained eaters.” In the gregarious phase, however, they begin to “actively seek each other’s company,” develop brightly colored markings, and eat voraciously. This transformation that turns harmless grasshoppers into a plague is extremely complex and not fully understood.

**Swarms are
sometimes as dense
as 200 million insects
per square mile.**

Whatever causes this change in phase from solitary to gregarious, a swarm of locusts is certainly an attention-drawing sight! In fact, swarms are sometimes as dense as 200 million insects per square mile, and may cover an area of up to 2,000 square miles, making one pretty difficult to miss! The “swarms of locusts” (Amos 7:1, NIV) the Lord showed Amos, which “stripped the land clean” (verse 2, NIV), was not exactly a subtle hint.

A swarm of locusts is a dramatic attention-getter, especially to a region so directly dependent on agriculture. Although a thick cloud of insects may still be a fear-inspiring sight today, modern technology has better enabled society to track and deal with these destructive pests, lessening their threat of total devastation. A plague of locusts may not be the most effective way for God to communicate with us today. Yet what other signs has He been sending us daily—signs as clear as that dark swarm on the horizon—that we have been ignoring? The huge band of locusts that blocks the sun and strips crops bare began as harmless grasshoppers. How is God trying to get your attention today?

REACT

1. What sign could God send you personally or to our society that would be as unmistakable as a swarm of locusts was to the Israelites?
2. What signs can you think of that at first might not be noticeable, like harmless grasshoppers, but could develop into a swarm of locusts under certain conditions?

Disaster to Salvation: Finding the Bridge

LOGOS

Joel 1:4-15; Amos 7:1-3; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25

The Meaning of Disaster (Joel 1:1-15)

What is the meaning of all the disaster described in the first chapter of Joel? What is God's involvement with it? What can Israel do about it? The messages of the prophets are significant because of their answers to these kinds of questions. The mere prediction of locusts, war, or drought would hardly be worth talking about. In that time and place it would be a no-brainer to predict that locusts would swarm, armies would invade, drought and severe famine would occur. It happened frequently.

The significance of Joel's and Amos's messages was not their predictions that catastrophic events would happen, but their insistence that these events meant something. These ancient prophets linked Israel's future with her moral behavior—or misbehavior. Israel was not a victim of a capricious or malevolent natural order. Nor did trouble come because their God was tricked or defeated by the gods of other nations. No. Yahweh, the God of Israel, was the Creator. The natural events that impacted Israel were shaped by the power and will of their God.

The prophets assured Israel that the world they lived in was moral and personal. Doing right or wrong would have appropriate consequences. A good, compassionate, merciful, righteous God was the personal Guarantor that good would be rewarded and evil would be punished.

Because God was active in this world, the only sensible response to the news of impending doom was fasting and mourning, which were viewed as the most effective disciplines of repentance. Trouble was an invitation, an exhortation, to repent.

God's Reluctance to Punish (Amos 7:1-3)

If God's people repented, what assurance did they have that He would notice? If they had angered God, why should they hope He would change His mind just because they said I'm sorry and turned their lives in a new direction?

Both Joel and Amos describe fearsome calamities that will come on Israel and other nations because of God's response to evildoing. Amos details the sins that provoke God's wrath, and those sins are the hardest to avoid: oppression of the poor and powerless. Joel and Amos are emphatic about God's stern determination to bring retribution on abusers and oppressors. So how can I escape?

**It would be a no-brainer
to predict that locusts
would swarm.**

Does God take pleasure in dispensing retributive justice? In Amos 7:1-3 we are given a peek into God's mind. The passage suggests that God is looking for an excuse *not* to punish. God is looking for an intercessor.

In the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, before destroying the cities, God divulged His plan to Abraham, provoking him to intercede for the city (Genesis 18). In the wilderness, God told Moses of His plan to destroy the stubborn Israelites and build a new nation. Moses interceded for the nation and later is referred to as God's "chosen one, [who] stood in the breach before him to keep his wrath from destroying them" (Ps. 106:23, NIV).

Judgment is real. God will not casually disregard harm done to His sons and daughters. God will act in clear-sighted, unbending justice against everyone who uses a position of power to hurt others, whether that position is an ecclesiastical office, a family role, economic power, or political status. The prophets are thunderingly clear about the certainty and intensity of God's reaction against oppression and injustice. But Amos reminds us judgment is not God's preferred response to sin. He prefers repentance, reconciliation, and restoration.

The Bridge (Matt. 20:28; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25)

In the ministry of Jesus we see the clearest possible demonstration of God's reluctance to dish out the full measure of justice against sinners. Jesus gave His life as a ransom so that sinners could be freed from the just consequences of their sin (Matt. 20:28). All who repent are freely offered pardon from their sins and release from their moral debt. Paul writes that condemnation (which might be expected) is counterbalanced by the resurrected Jesus who is at the right hand of God (an allusion to judgment) to intercede for us (Rom. 8:34). And Hebrews adds to the verb "intercede" the adverb "always" (Heb. 7:25, NKJV).

None of us is completely innocent of involvement in oppression. All of us have earned condemnation in our interaction with someone else. But if we confess our wrongdoing and turn to God, the heavenly Judge (John 5:22) will turn out to be our highly effective Intercessor. We will find ourselves secure.

REACT

1. If a prophet were to give you a personal message of impending judgment, on which of your sins would he or she most likely focus?
2. What would your reaction be to a natural disaster that killed someone you liked very well and thought was a thoroughly good person?
3. How might strangers react if the Adventist Church proclaimed that a natural disaster was a punishment from God?
4. Why would a natural disaster be better for turning people to God than would be a great blessing?
5. How could people today be encouraged to see disasters as a sign from God?

"Our Greatest Advocate"

TESTIMONY

Heb. 7:25

"While Jesus is pleading for the subjects of his grace, Satan accuses them before God as transgressors. The great deceiver has sought to lead them into skepticism, to cause them to lose confidence in God, to separate themselves from His love, and to break His law. Now he points to the record of their lives, to the defects of character, the unlikeness to Christ, which has dishonored their Redeemer, to all the sins that he has tempted them to commit, and because of these he claims them as his subjects.

"Jesus does not excuse their sins, but shows their penitence and faith, and, claiming for them forgiveness, he lifts his wounded hands before the Father and the holy angels, saying: 'I know them by name. I have graven them on the palms of My hands'. . . . Christ will clothe his faithful ones with his own righteousness, that he may present them to his Father."¹

"Christ was crucified for our sins, and was raised from the rent sepulcher for our justification; and he proclaims in triumph, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'

" 'I have graven them on the palms of My hands.' "

Jesus lives as our intercessor to plead before the Father. He has carried the sins of the whole world, and has not made one mortal man a sin-bearer for others. No man can bear the

weight of his own sins. The crucified One bore them all, and every soul who believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. The disciple of Christ will be fitted by his grace for every trial and test as he strives for perfection of character. By looking away from Jesus to some other one, or to something else, he may sometimes make mistakes; but as soon as he is warned of his danger, he again fastens his eyes upon Jesus, in whom his hope of eternal life is centered, and he plants his feet in the footprints of his Lord, and travels on securely. He rejoices, saying, 'He is my living intercessor before God. He prays in my behalf. He is my advocate, and clothes me with the perfection of his own righteousness. This is all I require to enable me to bear shame and reproach for his dear name's sake. If he permits me to endure persecution, he will give me grace and the comfort of his presence, so that his name shall be thereby glorified.' "²

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 484.

2. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 5/12/1896.

How to Protect Your Friends Spiritually

HOW-TO

Joel 1:4-15; Amos 7:1-3

Lt. Colonel Iceal Hambleton's plane was shot down in a Vietnam jungle firefight, landing along one of the enemy's main supply routes. Heavy antiaircraft fire made it impossible to rescue him by helicopter. To prevent his capture, the Air Force sent in A-1E airplanes to drop "gravel," landmines the size of lemons. They dropped a protective circle of the deadly mines around him, enabling him to avoid capture until he could escape to a river.*

As we see others in spiritual danger, we can call in protection from above through intercessory prayer. In the Bible we find instructions to do so and numerous examples of some notable people "wrestling in prayer" for others (Col. 4:12, NIV). We also have anecdotal evidence of the power of intercessory prayer: stories of people impressed to pray for a friend and later to find they were in danger. Here are some biblical principles on intercessory prayer.

1. Intercessory prayer is for salvation and spiritual growth. We hear a lot about prayer for salvation of a loved one. We don't emphasize continual prayer for growth and discipleship. We are more concerned with having babies than caring for them. Paul prayed for the salvation of the Jews (Rom. 10:1). And he prayed even more specifically for the spiritual growth of new believers (Eph. 1:16; 3:16; Col. 1:3, 9).

2. At times we should *not* pray for some people. God gave Jeremiah a command that sounds strange to our ears: "Do not pray for the well-being of this people" (14:11, NIV). It would have been appropriate to pray for their repentance and salvation. But Jeremiah's people actually needed the discipline of the consequences of a life apart from God. If I have a loved one who is a prodigal, this tells me to focus my prayers on his spiritual life more than on his comfort or success.

We are more concerned
with having babies than
caring for them.

3. Intercessory prayer is powerful. We can't explain why our prayers can help others. It has been argued that prayer doesn't change God, it changes us. But the Bible says that prayer is "powerful and effective" (James 5:16, NIV).

4. Pray for spiritual healing. One of the descriptions of Jesus is that He loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Heb. 1:9). We struggle at times with the opposite. Sometimes we love sin. God calls on us to share our struggles with friends and pray for each other. This spiritual accountability is an important strength.

*William C. Anderson, *Bat-21* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980), p. 20.

OPINION

Joel 1:15; Rev. 11:18

"All right, God, You say total destruction is coming. Great! Bring it on! Just pull Your friends off the planet first, please, OK? One question, though. How soon?"

"Well, Gill, I've already given you a number of clues in the Book I had written for you."

"I've read it a couple times, God, some portions many times. I remember something about 'no one knows the day or the hour,' so what do You mean?"

"Look for a pattern throughout the history recorded in the Bible. Look at the times when near-total or total destruction occurred. What triggered those events?"

As it was in the days of Noah, folks were marrying and giving in marriage, and living so rebelliously on their own that only Noah and his family trusted in God enough to board the ark and sail into the future (Gen. 6:5-8; Matt. 24:37-39).

With Sodom and Gomorrah Abraham bargained God down to saving those cities for just 10 righteous people. Lot barely escaped with his daughters. Their husbands weren't going to give up their lifestyle on some rumor from their father-in-law. And Lot's wife probably got along fairly well with her sons-in-law; her heart was obviously still there as she left the city (Gen. 18:20-33; Luke 17:28, 29; Jude 7).

The heathen nations in Canaan had the Israelites perched on the other side of the Jordan. Those peoples weren't to be destroyed because the Israelites were so righteous and needed a place to live.

The Canaanites earned every bit of the destruction they received, and the Israelites were far from deserving (Deut. 9:4-7). By the way, Ellen White says that "we are repeating the history of that people."¹ Think about that for a moment.

**"Just pull your friends
off the planet first,
please, OK?"**

We are sitting, stiff-necked, across the river from Paradise as the nations around us fill up their cups of iniquity. Can "that great day" be far off?

"You see, Gill, I've known the day and the hour of My Son's return, and the final destruction of sin, for eons, literally. When evil reaches My pre-determined limit, when all have 'develop[ed] their character and reveal[ed] their principles,'² I will step in and bring an end to time" (Rom. 9:28; Rev. 11:18).

REACT

If we cannot "hasten the day" that is already established, what should we be doing instead?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 160.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 764.

Let's Get Praying!

EXPLORATION

Amos 7:1-3; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2

CONCLUDE

In Amos 7:1-3, God shows His prophet that He will allow swarms of locusts to decimate Israel's crops because they refuse to repent from oppressing the poor. However, because God does not rejoice in punishment, but in confession and repentance, He acquiesces after Amos prays for his people. Today, God still calls us not only to give His message of salvation and judgment to the world, but to exhibit the power of intercessory prayer. For whom do you need to pray?

CONSIDER

- Making a collage from headlines and/or pictures of the types of calamities God might allow His people to endure today because of their sins. Consider how you will portray the hope of salvation in your collage.
- Calculating the worth of intercessory prayer by reading Genesis 18; Luke 15. What do these texts teach us about God's math when it comes to the value of praying for others?
- Reading the following intercessory prayers: Daniel 9:19; Exodus 8:9-13; Job 42:10; John 17:20-26. What principles about intercessory prayer do these prayers teach us? How could you pray in a similar fashion?
- Singing "For You I Am Praying" (No. 284 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*) after you pray daily for a loved one. What changes do you see in that person's life that you believe are a result of your prayers? Or ask someone to pray for you about a special need for a certain period of time.
- Praying for specific people or situations within the church while you do your daily exercises.
- Keeping a prayer journal of the answers you receive to your intercessory prayers. Also use this journal to record your actual prayers and to refresh your memory when you are discouraged.
- Observing how different aspects of your natural environment provide support for other aspects of the environment. Think about how this is similar to intercessory prayer.

CONNECT

Daniel 9:19; Exodus 8:9-13; Job 42:10; John 17:20-26.

The Sanctified Life, pp. 46-52.

Joe Engelkemier, *30 Days to a More Powerful Prayer Life*, pp. 50-56, 70-73;

Carrol Johnson Shewmake, *Sanctuary Secrets to Personal Prayer*, pp. 51-59.

Judgment by Fire



“Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat”

(2 Pet. 3:11, 12, NIV).

Can I Trust?

INTRODUCTION

Jer. 29:11

Stoop-shouldered
foot-dragging,
sighing
resigning is not trust.

Real trust
bounces on eager toes of
anticipation—
laughs with the pure
delight of knowing
in whom it believes—
rests easy
knowing on whom it waits.

Lord,
So wrap me in the
knowing of You
that my trust is no longer
in You, but is You.

Trust . . . in a God that I cannot see. Lord, sometimes I wonder if You are really paying attention to me at all!

Patience is not a virtue that I have been blessed with, I must admit. I wrestle with God occasionally as to why He takes such a long time to reveal His plans for my life. I mean, if He is so powerful, why does He take so long to reveal Himself to me?

Picture yourself at the bottom of a mountain. Take a look around you. You have a very limited view toward the horizon. Look up to the sky above. You cannot see beyond the clouds. If only you could climb to the top, you could get a better view. It takes a higher view of things to see things in a better perspective. Somewhere up there is your unseen God. He has the perfect view! When it seems as if there is no possible way for redemption for any of us, the plan takes action. His one and only Son is sent to bear our sins. We are saved!

A good friend of mine once shared this verse when I was distressed with God for not heeding me: "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11, NIV).

Lord, I know You have it all taken care of and You have it all planned out. You have it all in perspective. You have the best view after all!

Sunday
November 25

What's Wrong With This Picture?

LOGOS

Isa. 46:10, 11; Amos 7:4-6; Mal. 4:1, 3; 2 Cor. 5:21

Having grown up with many Baptist friends in Belfast, I was never left without a doubt regarding the nature of judgment and its resulting consequences: i.e., we are all sinners, we will all face the judgment, and we will all burn in hell forever and ever if we were not good. It was a picture often painted, and more times than not God's grace, mercy, and love seemed sadly missing from the whole equation.

A study of Scripture, however, soon sorts out the truth from fiction regarding God's judgment in the light of His love, and especially in the light of Christ's death on the cross. The passages that we are studying this week give us a glimpse of God's nature and His love for His people.

The Judgment

In Amos 7:4-6 we have the second of five visions given to this itinerant farmer. These were five pronouncements of judgment. Now I imagine that for Amos these five visions were particularly hard to take. God is telling him that his country, his people, are going to face judgment. And He tells him how this is all going to pan out.

The first vision speaks of a plague of locusts. Being a farmer, no doubt Amos would have experienced firsthand the destructive nature of locusts. But, as if things couldn't get any worse, he is given a second vision. In the first the damage is somewhat superficial, but the second is far more destructive. This second vision is a judgment of fire. Unlike Sodom and Gomorrah, which had a literal burning up with fire, here we have a picture of famine. Slowly but surely

**God's grace, mercy,
and love seemed
sadly missing.**

the hot desert sun dries up all the water, extending into the very substrata of the earth's core. Whatever might have been left by the locusts would have been burned up by the searing heat of the sun.

Intercession

I have already shared a distorted picture of what many believe judgment to be all about. Judgment is not something that we have to fear. Amos cries out to God. I can picture him, lying almost prostrate before God, begging for mercy. Such is the intensity of this scene. Coming from an agricultural background, Amos finds nothing more painful than these first two judgments.

He intercedes on behalf of these people before God. He cries out, "How can

Jacob survive? He is so small!" Here we see the consequences of sin. This once powerful nation, these people who had once been slaves in Egypt, had risen to prominence in the Middle East, becoming one of the most prosperous nations. They had given themselves over to their own greedy and selfish desires and were now a weak and insignificant country relying on the generosity of their neighbors.

I wonder how much intercession plays a part in our own prayer lives? When we see friends in trouble, or maybe we see the trouble coming because of the way they live their lives, do we fall before God and beg for mercy on their behalf? Or do we stand idly by, thinking that this is the life they have chosen?

Mercy

In Amos 7:6 we read God's response to Amos's intercession: the NIV tells us that "the Lord relented." The NASB reads, "The Lord changed His mind about this. 'This too shall not be,' said the Lord God." God changed His mind! Do you suppose that God enjoys dishing out the judgments? I think not! God was just waiting for an excuse to cancel, to give His children a second chance.

Other scriptural references seem to disagree: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8, NIV). Isaiah reminds us that God says He "will do all that I please" (Isa. 46:10, NIV). So how does this all fit into the grand scheme of things? Is there a contradiction?

It all depends on how you look at it. The bottom line is that the children of Israel did not deserve a reprieve, just as none of us deserves the love that Christ has given us. But Amos, seeing all that was about to happen, interceded on Israel's behalf, and God listened. This is the power of prayer: Amos prayed and God acted. So it is with each of us. We are all guilty; we will all be judged. But just as Amos interceded for Israel and won a short reprieve, Christ has bridged the abyss between us and God. This is not a short reprieve or a postponement, but rather, this will last for eternity. Through Christ's victory over death on the cross we have become the righteousness of God. The judgment will not be something to fear, but rather, we will be able to rejoice because our Defense Attorney has paid the price for our lives.

REACT

1. What part does intercessory prayer play in your personal prayer life? Be specific.
2. What would you say to someone who said asking for contributions to church programs and projects is unfair to poor people who have less disposable income?
3. If God intercedes and knows our heart, why do we need to confess to each other?
4. Why aren't people willing to admit that they don't always know why God acts as He does instead of using mental gymnastics to prove their point?
5. How could people be encouraged to see the judgment as a beneficial event in their lives?

Through Grace and Diligence

TESTIMONY

Revelation 14

"He that ruleth in the heavens is the one who sees the end from the beginning—the one before whom the mysteries of the past and the future are alike outspread, and who, beyond the woe and darkness and ruin that sin has wrought, beholds the accomplishment of His own purposes of love and blessing. Though 'clouds and darkness are round about Him: righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne.' Psalm 97:2, R.V. And this the inhabitants of the universe, both loyal and disloyal, will one day understand. 'His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.' Deuteronomy 32:4."¹

"The whole work of the father of lies is recorded in the statute books of heaven, and those who lend themselves to the service of Satan, to put forth and present to men the lies of Satan by precept and practice, will receive according to their deeds. Root and branch will be destroyed by the fires of the last days. Satan, the great general of apostasy, is the root, and all his workers, who teach his lies in regard to the law of God, are the branches."²

"In this time of well-nigh universal apostasy, God calls upon His messengers to proclaim His law in the spirit and power of Elias. . . . We are to give, with no uncertain sound, the message: 'Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come.'³

"Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin

**"Through the grace of
God and their own
diligent effort they
must be conquerors."**

by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort, they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative Judgment is going forward in Heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of

purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon earth. This work is more clearly presented in the messages of Revelation 14."⁴

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 43.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1184.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *The Great Controversy*, p. 425.

A Lifestyle of Lukewarmness?

EVIDENCE

Mal. 4:1-3

A story is told of a young man who lived a life of debauchery in the early 1930s. One day while crossing a busy street, a runaway carriage came hurtling out of control toward him. Within seconds of being crushed to death, a stranger reached out and miraculously pulled him to safety. While shaken, yet grateful, he faced the stranger who merely said, "May your life be a life worth saving."

However, the young man continued in his old ways and one night while out on one of his many drinking sprees, he was involved in a brawl, which led to the tragic death of his opponent. He was arrested and taken to the court for his trial proceedings, and as the judge entered, he raised his eyes to meet those same eyes of the stranger who rescued him from the carriage. The judge said, "The last time we met I was your savior, today I am your judge!"

"May your life be a life worth saving."

So it is with us today that the grace of God is extended unto all for salvation with Jehovah our Savior. But the day is soon coming when the time of God's judgment will be known in all the earth, and Jehovah will be our Judge. Are you ready?

Malachi 4:1 says, "That day that is coming will set them on fire" (NIV). This may sound cruel from a loving God, but our lifestyle brings consequences as can be seen in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.19:24).

To this day you can go to the plains along the Dead Sea in Israel and see the results of a thriving sophisticated society that lived wickedly. Great mounds of ash and sulphur balls can still be dug out of the ruins.

We as believers should be aware of the errors of the past and should take heed from the instructions of Romans 1:18. We are all weighed in the balance and found wanting. What will it be? A lifestyle of lukewarmness that will end in death and destruction? Or will it be a life of obedience and trust that will end in blessing and reward?

REACT

1. What can be done to prevent a lifestyle of lukewarmness to creep into one's life? Explain your answer.
2. If there is something you can *do* to prevent lukewarmness, in what way is this different from righteousness by works?
3. Does the fact that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has different concerns than it did years ago indicate that it is getting lukewarm? Explain your answer.
4. What in society could be contributing to a lifestyle of lukewarmness?

HOW-TO

Amos 7:4-6

Have you included God in your plans? Have you ever thought about the judgment day? God has a plan that from the beginning of the world has been running its course and He will follow it through. He is giving everyone a fair chance. And you ask yourself the question: "How?" All the warnings: earthquakes, wars, floods, fires, and epidemics. Are we ignoring the signs? Are we turning away from them as we may well turn from the coming of God? Don't get caught asleep. Be ready, for the judgment day is very near.

God has a perfect plan!

Have you asked: Why isn't God coming to take away all the pain and suffering? Who is delaying the Second Coming? Is it God or is it us? By holding on to these mortal belongings such as money, work, hobbies, and all other time-consuming earthly things, are they the cause of the delay? We are God's witnesses and should tell people the good news that He wants us all to spend eternity with Him. The sooner

Witnessing is much more than talking to friends or colleagues.

we begin doing our share, the sooner God will do His. Witnessing is not just about talking to friends or colleagues. It is much more. Every movement and action as a Christian is being evaluated by our non-Christian friends, and is seen as witnessing. So be very careful and watch your tone and temper.

God has perfect timing!

Are you ready for the judgment day—now, at this very moment? We do not have to be scared, for it is a day we have been longing for. It is our duty to make sure that as many people as possible will not perish but will enjoy eternal life. Don't become discouraged. Only on judgment day will we know how many lives we have touched.

God is a God of grace!

REACT

1. What specific things can people do to include God's plans in their lives?
2. How should a Christian react when he or she disagrees with someone who says that his idea is God's plan?
3. How could you answer a person who asks what God's plan might be for a person who seems bent on doing evil, like dealing drugs?
4. What indications of a lifestyle of lukewarmness can be seen in Christians today?

My Trial

OPINION

Dan. 7:21; 1 John 2:1

This is going to be an unusual trial.

Already, I have been told that the case is going to be decided in my favor (Dan. 7:21). Despite the fact that the devil will prosecute me, Jesus has agreed to be my Defense Attorney (1 John 2:1). Even better, Jesus' Father will sit as the presiding Judge to hear my case. It's pretty comforting that Jesus will represent me, because He knows me as no other, and He understands exactly what I've gone through. He's been pleading my case to the Judge ever since I first met Him.

I've also discovered that the Judge no longer makes any judgments Himself. He has long since delegated this task to none other than my Attorney, Jesus! (John 5:22). The problem is that I know that I'm guilty and that the evidence will show this clearly. However, Jesus has a plan mapped out for me; He's told me that if I hear His Word and believe in Him, I will not be condemned (1 John 4:17; John 3:16). If I do this, then my innocence will not be my own, but that which is through faith in Jesus. Like Joshua, in Zechariah's vision, my filthy clothes of guilt will be replaced by the rich, clean garments of innocence (Zechariah 3) and that's a foolproof defense because Jesus was completely sinless.

The case is going to
be decided in my
favor.

We *will* have confidence on judgment day (1 John 4:17) because God has promised to forget all about our pasts and write our names in the book of life when we acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God. Easy, huh?

REACT

1. What experiences have you had when you touched someone's life and you didn't realize it at the time?
2. What can we do to help assure that our influence on others is positive?
3. What might happen if parents set up trials for their children to strengthen them?

Confidence on Judgment Day

EXPLORATION

Amos 7:6

CONCLUDE

Judgment is often depicted in frightening terms. Statements such as, “standing before God without a Mediator” or “Their robes must be spotless” cause anxiety in many believers. What further revelation about the judgment eases our anxiety? Is it possible that we can face the judgment day with confidence? I believe we can, because of Jesus!

CONSIDER

- Interviewing several small children about what frightens them and what makes them feel safe. What can you extrapolate from the children that could help adults relate to the judgment?
- Making a simple drawing of the judgment day scene. In what location or position in your scene are the following characters: God the Father, you, Jesus, and Satan.
- Recalling the greatest crisis or scare you or your family have endured. How was God present?
- Leafing through the hymnal to find hymns that speak of peace in the storm. How does the hymn writer find peace? What does the melody do for you?
- Viewing a video with an apocalyptic theme. Think about the effect that this genre of film has on how society views end times.
- Writing a short skit about the last days. What scares you and what gives you peace?
- Reading Jeremiah 29:11, in which God states that He has plans for us. Make a list of the plans God has shown you. Then list three things He has planned for you as if Jesus were coming back within six months. How do the two lists relate?

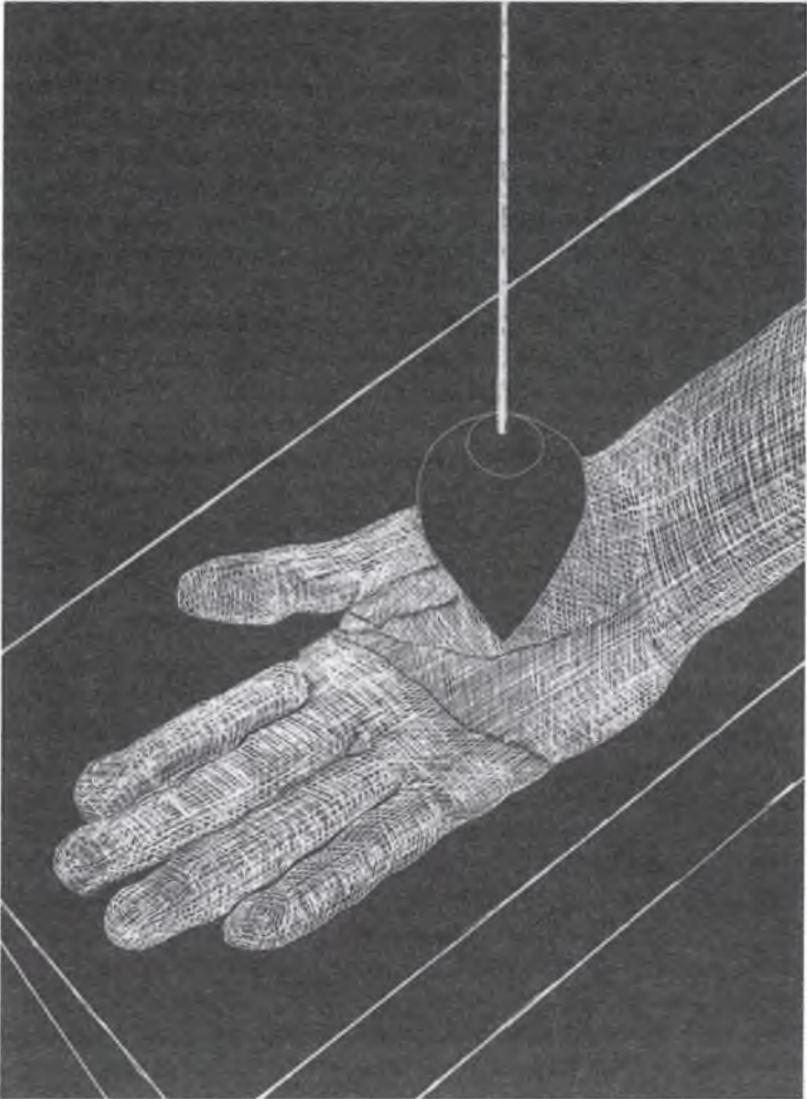
CONNECT

Matthew 12; 13.

The Desire of Ages, chaps. 35, 73, 74.

Morris L. Venden, *Never Without an Intercessor*, pp. 57-69.

The Plumb Line



“He said to me, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.’ Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, ‘Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there’ ” (Rev. 10:11; 11:1, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

Amos 7:7-10

Over my years as a university student, I have had the privilege of being a tenant in twelve flats and houses in four towns and cities. It is exciting to choose a new place to live—even if only a couple of suburbs away from the previous residence—and to set up a new household.

However, amid the adventures of moving to a new house or flat, there is also the problem of moving out of the previous place. Having done that eleven times (I'm still living in the twelfth place), I have come to dislike landlords and renting agents a little more than I probably should.

The problem is the days of cleaning of the recently vacated premises followed by the most stringent of inspections. The theory is that the premises are to be returned to their alleged pristine condition of when we first moved in. To ensure this happens, the landlord collects the equivalent of four weeks' rent by way of a bond at the beginning of the lease. Thus, usually hundreds of dollars are dependent upon the care taken of the premises, the thoroughness of the cleaning, and ultimately the satisfaction of the landlord or agent.

The cleaning process includes scrubbing tiles, washing walls, scouring ovens, cleaning bathrooms, polishing windows, carpet cleaning, gardening, mowing, and anything else the particular premises may require. This regime is repeated with each moving out and with occasional mid-lease inspections. But despite the stringent

The premises are to be returned to their alleged pristine condition.

inspections, somehow the places I move into are always far less clean than the place I have just left.

It can be a frustrating process. I have had to return to recently vacated places to complete minor cleaning with which the agent was not satisfied. On one occasion, I used so much shower cleanser—trying to clean away the mold of an agent's imagination—that the rubber soles of my shoes began to melt from the chemicals. Unfortunately, the process of being judged in this way is simply part of renting a place to live.

Similarly, a recurring theme throughout the Bible is the certainty of judgment. Though we may not see writing on the wall reminding us we are being weighed in the balances (see Daniel 5), we can be sure the lives we build will be measured against God's plumb line (Amos 7:7, 8). It is simply a part of being human.

The good news is that if we build a relationship with God, with God as the foundational Rock (Matt.7:24) and with Jesus as the Capstone (21:42), we have nothing to fear from the judgment of God. To put it another way, He will clean our old house for us to the satisfaction of the Landlord.

What Will Be Your Measure?

EVIDENCE

Rom. 11:33; Rev. 11:1

As we were having a family devotion one beautiful evening, a question arose: What would be the church attendance if the bulletin announced that an angel from heaven would be the preacher on the coming Sabbath?

We all gave some good responses: The church would be packed. People would come very early. Everyone would want to sit on the front row—all kinds of positive answers. Toward the end of the discussion, a guest who was worshiping with us, gave an opposite response.

"I think very few people would come," he said.

"Why do you think so?" we all asked.

"People would have different views of that event. Some would be afraid of the angel. Others would be ashamed of their lives. Some would think that he will come to condemn their secret lives. Others would think that he would come with lists of true and false Christians. These, plus many other suppositions, would prevent a lot of people from coming. Only genuine Christians would show up, and they would be very few."

After a short discussion, we all agreed with him.

My sister Margareth once sent me an email:

"The 2,000-member Adventist church was filled to overflowing one Sabbath morning. The preacher was ready to begin the sermon when two men, dressed in long black coats and black hats, entered through the rear of the church. One of the two men walked to the middle of the church as the other stayed at the back of the church. They both then reached under their coats and withdrew automatic weapons. The one in the middle announced, 'Everyone willing to take a bullet for Jesus stay in your seat!'

"Naturally, the pews emptied, followed by the choir. The deacons ran out the door, followed by the choir director and the assistant pastor. After a few moments, only 20 people were left sitting in the church. The preacher was holding steady in the pulpit. The men put their weapons away and said, gently, to the preacher, 'All right, pastor, the hypocrites are gone now. You may begin the service.'"

**" 'Everyone willing to
take a bullet for Jesus
stay in your seat!' "**

When it is time to be measured, what will be your measure? Will you be found wanting like King Belshazzar? (Dan. 5:27). Or will you be a victor like all the heroes of faith? (Hebrews 11).

Monday
December 3

The Plumb Line

LOGOS

Ps. 5:8; Amos 7:7-10; Mic. 1:6

Plumb lines are used to measure the straightness of a wall. As each row of stones is added, the strength of the wall is greater than that of the individual stones only if the stones line up. If the wall is not straight, it will not hold up under stress. Every stone needs to be shaped to fit. Each stone is chiseled and struck with hammers until it is of the right shape and can take its place.

Amos compared the wall to Israel. The wall was finished and now God, the Owner, is checking to see how well it has been built. With plumb line in hand, God measures the wall. As God measured Israel in Amos's day, the plumb line stated that they were a crooked people. The problem was so great that the only way to fix it was to take down the wall. No intercession could stop the coming destruction.

Twice previously Amos had interceded on behalf of the people, and God had relented, not bringing the destruction shown Amos in the visions. This time Amos could not intercede for the people; destruction was coming and all Amos could do was point it out.

Micah 1:6 states: "Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the field, places for planting a vineyard; I will pour down her stones into the valley, and I will uncover her foundations'" (NKJV). This description was of a city with each building leveled to the foundation. Worse than that, this city would have its stone foundations so broken up that vineyards would be planted where it once had been. It is difficult to picture a nation so corrupt that God could not fix it. The only option was to destroy it.

The wall represents the people. The owner judging the quality of the work represents God. But what does the plumb line represent? Isaiah, a contemporary

of Amos, connects the plumb line with the cornerstone (Isa. 28:16, 17). Bible students see the cornerstone as a prophetic symbol of Jesus. The plumb line is described as being comprised of justice and righteousness. The way

that we are to pass the plumb line test is to be connected to the Cornerstone, Christ, and to reflect His justice and righteousness in our lives.

It is not enough to theorize and discuss what we should do. God wants a people who act on the principles of justice and righteousness, a people who take the principles of Scripture and apply them to every aspect of their lives.

Peter takes this image from Isaiah and in 1 Peter 2:1-5 describes what God is doing with His church. God is building a "spiritual house" where we as "living stones" are the building material (verse 5, NKJV). Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone. In order to pass the plumb-line test, these living stones will need to reflect righteousness and justice.

**Foundations were not
made of concrete.**

Buildings were constructed differently in Amos's and Peter's days. Foundations were not made of concrete, but were made of various stones, usually larger and stronger than stones used in other parts of the building. Peter calls Jesus the Cornerstone of this building. Paul states that the foundation is the "apostles and prophets," with Jesus being the "chief corner stone" (Eph. 2: 20, NKJV).

The apostles and prophets are the foundation of our church. It is their writings that we have as our Bible. As Christians, we adjust our lives based on these writings. This also helps us to understand Jesus' statement to Peter: "I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18, NKJV). Though Peter is a part of the foundation, he is not the only foundation stone.

In Revelation 10:11; 11:1, John is given a measuring stick and ordered to measure the temple. Like the plumb line, the measuring stick is used to measure "the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there" (11:1, NKJV). Like Israel, we also will be examined to see if we measure up. A significant question for us remains: Will the result of this measuring be different from the result of the plumb line of Amos' day?

REACT

1. If Jesus came to your church today, how would your church measure up? How would you measure up? On what basis do you make your judgment?

2. How are justice and righteousness lived out in the life of a Christian today? Be specific.

3. What stories can you think of to illustrate justice and righteousness being played out in real life?

4. Chisels, hammers, and saws are used to shape a real stone. What does God use to shape "living stones"? (1 Pet. 2:5, NKJV).

5. What kind of stone are you being shaped into? (a) a lower wall stone that gives support to other stones in the wall; (b) an upper wall stone that gives some support but may be more fragile than other stones in the building; (c) a connecting stone used to connect two walls of the building together; (d) a decorative façade stone that bears no weight but looks pretty; (e) other (specify)? Explain your answer.

6. Is it possible to have personal plumb lines? Could we call a wall (people) crooked, when it is really we who are? Explain your answer.

7. If we are called today to give the Amos message, how can we guard against legalistic judging?

8. What is the significance of the One who sets the plumb line (Amos 7:8)?

9. Would you say that in order for destruction to come upon anyone they would have had to commit the unpardonable sin? Explain your answer.

10. Explain how the heart becomes hardened. Is it a fast or slow process?

TESTIMONY

Gen. 6:3

"In every age, transgression of God's law has been followed by the same result. In the days of Noah, when every principle of rightdoing was violated, and iniquity

**"In every age,
transgression of God's
law has been followed by
the same result."**

became so deep and widespread that God could no longer bear with it, the decree went forth, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth.' Genesis 6:7. In Abraham's day the people of Sodom openly defied God and His law; and there followed the same wickedness,

the same corruption, the same unbridled indulgence, that had marked the antediluvian world. The inhabitants of Sodom passed the limits of divine forbearance, and there was kindled against them the fire of God's vengeance."¹

"The heart that does not respond to divine agencies becomes hardened until it is no longer susceptible to the influence of the Holy Spirit."²

"He who deliberately stifles his convictions of duty because it interferes with his inclinations, will finally lose the power to distinguish between truth and error. The understanding becomes darkened, the conscience callous, the heart hardened, and the soul is separated from God."³

"The message which God had sent for the testing and purification of the church, revealed all too surely how great was the number who had set their affections on this world rather than upon Christ."⁴

"In the terrible judgments brought upon the ten tribes the Lord had a wise and merciful purpose. That which He could no longer do through them in the land of their fathers He would seek to accomplish by scattering them among the heathen."⁵

"Take time to be holy, Speak oft with thy Lord; Abide with Him always, And feed upon His word; Make friends of God's children, Help those who are weak, Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek"⁶ so that today's generation will not repeat Israel's errors.

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 297.

2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 218.

3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 378.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 380.

5. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 292.

6. *SDA Hymnal*, no. 500.

Trust and Obey

HOW-TO

Ps. 5:8

Like the children of Israel, the modern-day world is doubtful and unheeding of God's Word. Just as there were righteous believers among the skeptics in that time, however, so it is in our time. We are the believers, and the skeptics are those who have yet truly to understand and accept God's gift of salvation. Probation is defined as "a critical testing." The key term here is "critical," implying that this time is not only important but also difficult. God's purpose for allowing probation testifies to His longsuffering character and His love for us. Trusting in that love will carry us through. It is up to us, as it was for the children of Israel, to decide what we choose to do with this time.

At times it is difficult for us to see why God allows certain obstacles to block our path. "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28, NKJV). Knowing that everything is working out requires faith and trust. Probation will soon close, sealing the destiny of all on God's side—and on Satan's side (Rev. 22:11). Trusting and obeying in God and having the faith that will carry us through is what we need right now. Here are some tips for developing faith, trust, and obedience:

**Probation is defined as
"a critical testing."**

1. Study God's Word. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17, NKJV). We know that studying God's Word will increase our faith and allow us to hear and better understand God's will in our lives through life's trials.

2. Pray. Include Psalm 5:8 in your prayers and earnestly ask the Lord to lead you in all things, for we believe that everything is working itself out for the best. In addition, ask Him for the faith you need to stand.

3. Trust and obey. Studying God's Word and praying for His will in your life are pointless if you don't heed and apply them to your life. Use the faith you have prayed for to put His Word into action.

REACT

1. The term "probation" is used in many ways. Whether it be academic probation or probation following or replacing a jail sentence. What is the difference (if any) between these definitions of probation and the one we are living in right now?

2. The children of Israel faced obstacles, as do we. How would you explain to an unbeliever when bad things happen to righteous believers?

*Webster's Dictionary (International Edition, Publishers Guild Group, 1989).

Thursday
December 6

Our Vision: Consumerism

OPINION Luke 16:19-25

A BBC television documentary about the opening of the first McDonald's restaurant in Russia rubbed my face in it.

Young men and women of that most elegant of cities, St. Petersburg, were being turned into American burger servers. They were being extruded from the McDonald's control-freak training process just as manically as the sandwiches had to meet the multinational's quality-control standards. Everything and everyone had to be fanatically converted to being utterly "McDonald's."

How dare they!

This was the crudest example I had ever seen of the evangelization of the world by consumerism. And the Russians were eating it up.

A line several blocks long had formed outside the new restaurant on the big day.

**The main denomination
of this end-time religion is
American consumerism.**

As a sop to the poor people of St. Petersburg, McDonald's allowed each of their young employees to nominate one person to get a free Big Mac meal that day. The father of one of them was asked why he had eaten only half of his Big Mac

before wrapping it up carefully. He said that he was taking the rest of this sacred gift home for his wife. I wanted to howl and kick the television screen in.

Forget the question of relations between Seventh-day Adventists and the Russian Orthodox Church. This is totally insignificant when compared with the clash between Christianity and consumerism, which as far as I can tell is the dominant religion now in most of the world.

The main denomination of this end-time religion is American consumerism. This is the beast the world is bowing down to. Its evangelistic outreach tools are advertising, television, multinational corporations (McDonald's, Philip Morris, Coca Cola, *ad nauseum*, and the Internet with its porn sites and almost unlimited smorgasbord of buy-anything-you-want.)

In the developing world over 5,000 children die each day because they don't have access to clean water. And what are their parents doing? Slurping Coke and sucking on Marlboros.

How will God's plumb line judge us? What Jesus says about adherents to the religion of consumerism is found in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-25). I dare you to read it!

Nerves of Steel

EXPLORATION

Eph. 1:7

CONCLUDE

"The doors of probation are closing." "Flee to the mountains." "Prepare for the judgment." The concept of the last days terrified me when I was a child. Would I be good enough? Would I be listed in the book of life, or would I be cast in the lake of fire? Thankfully, a college professor introduced me to grace. We have no need to fear judgment at all if we've wrapped ourselves in Christ. As stones in a crumbling wall, we can't measure up without the steel of His grace enveloping us. That is the glorious gospel of Christ—it's that simple!

CONSIDER

- Using a Bible concordance (or searching an online Bible), and counting the number of times that the words "judgment" and "grace" appear in the Bible. Compare the Old Testament to the New Testament. Also compare different versions.
- Writing a chorus about judgment and grace for children to sing in Sabbath School. Use a familiar tune, if you wish, but change the words.
- Building a wall. Collect pebbles and stones, glue them in a small circle or square to a piece of cardboard or plywood, then build upon them to form a wall. Keep your construction on your dresser or bathroom counter to remind you daily of your need for Christ's fortification in your life.
- Arranging with a group of friends to read Philip Yancey's book *What's So Amazing About Grace* then invite them over to discuss it. You may need more than one meeting to get through it. This could be a beginning to the formation of a Christian book club.
- Listening to Susan Ashton's song "Beyond Justice to Mercy" from her *Wakened by the Wind* album. Reflect on ways that you can "pay forward" the grace God has shown you.
- Writing a drama in which a life-size cutout of Jesus is used in the final judgment court scene for the righteous to stand behind. Gather friends to perform it during divine service at church.

CONNECT

Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, book of Ephesians.
Philip Yancey, *What's so Amazing About Grace?*

Summer Fruit



“ ‘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’ ” (Amos 8:11, NIV).

Will You Survive the Famine?

INTRODUCTION

Amos 8

Famine from drought is not a pretty sight. At first the countryside looks a little dry, but there is still enough green to keep up the hope that rain will come.

As the months pass, the rains don't come. The sun beats down without mercy. Walk through the land of famine as the dust swirls around your feet. You see the bloating of the children's stomachs, the stare of death and defeat in the eyes of the mothers who hold those children. A sense of doom pervades every conversation. Any semblance of hope seems wrested from the grasp of those who are dying from the lack of nourishment they so badly need.

Physical famine is easy to detect. Often other nations will come to the aid of those who are suffering. They will transport food and supplies. Sometimes the aid arrives in time and sometimes it doesn't. Death and dusty graves are often the result of physical famine.

Spiritual famine is no less pernicious but often more difficult to detect. Many of us have become very good at hiding the fact that we are spiritually starving. Our bellies show no signs of bloating. Our faces and limbs aren't emaciated. But look closely. You might see that same stare of death and defeat in the eyes of those who are in the midst of their own spiritual famine. The results are an eternal grave.

For many of us, now is a time of plenty. We are comfortable in our present state. Yet, have we been doing what God has commanded us to do for the famine that is coming? God spoke to Joseph thousands of years ago. He instructed him to store away the grains and foodstuffs necessary to save millions of people. God has also spoken to us about preparing for the famine that will soon be upon us. "None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict. . . . The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God's immutable word?"

Our preparation for the famine shouldn't stop there, however. Who among your acquaintances need to hear the story of Jesus before the famine is upon us? What are you waiting for? When the famine arrives, there won't be any time left to plant the seeds of the gospel.

As you study this week, ask yourself how you are preparing to meet the challenges of Amos 8. Who are you attempting to rescue from their own famine? Are you starving and don't even know it?

**You see the bloating
of the children's
stomachs.**

**The Great Controversy*, pp. 593, 594.

LOGOS

Amos 8:1-12

The message (Amos 8:1-3)

Images from everyday life are the best tools to teach realities not yet seen. God once again shows to Amos a familiar picture, a basket of summer fruit to describe the spiritual condition of the nation and its march for the coming destruction. "The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer" (Amos 8:2, NIV). The image of a basket of ripe fruit is appropriate to illustrate how God deals with sin. He patiently waits until the result of transgression has been fully manifest before taking action. By then, it will be evident that mercy is no longer effective in reversing the evil inclinations of the heart (Eccles. 8:11). This course of action will leave no doubt about the justice of His dealings with sinners.

The fruit (Amos 8:4-7)

A close investigation of the people's business reveals what sort of religion they were practicing. The exploitation of the poor and needy is alone a reason to turn their actions abhorrent to the Lord of justice (Prov. 11:1). But their sin turned out to be even more abominable, considering that they tried to hide their dishonest practices with an appearance of piety.

"Here is a striking example of a formal observance of sacred institutions, with no true spirit of devotion. In their selfishness these apostates begrudged the time

their religious formalism demanded of them.

Such worship becomes a curse instead of a blessing."¹ Stephen Harris's comment on the text highlights the social implications of the prophet's message: "Amos saw that behind the national prosperity and private luxury was a callous indifference to human rights, which was no less a sin than

"Social justice is as vital to religion as worshiping one God alone."

sacrificing to idols. He was the first prophet to argue that social justice is as vital to religion as worshiping one God alone."²

Whenever we try to earn salvation by means of our own efforts, the inevitable result will be a desperate struggle to keep the appearance of religion to cover up for the sins we don't want or are unable to give up. Paul warned Timothy about the men living in the last days describing them as "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Tim. 3:5, NIV). Justly, God does not tolerate such practices forever, as He made clear in His message to the prophet. Justice requires Him to remember all dissolute work to vindicate the cause of the oppressed.

The day of the Lord (Amos 8:8-14; Matt. 25:10-12; Rev. 6:12)

God gave Amos some clues about the time in which justice would be done. An earthquake and subsequent darkening of the sun would indicate the time. Interestingly enough these same natural phenomena are also predicted to happen just before the second coming of Jesus (Rev. 6:12). This makes Amos's message extremely relevant to us who live in the end times.

God also revealed to Amos the dramatic experience of those who were negligent with the Word during the time of opportunity. Their distress would turn every word of their mouths in mourning and lamentation with a taste like a "bitter day" (Amos 8:10, KJV). The scene gains dramatic contours with the predicted spiritual famine to come upon the earth. People staggering to the corners of the earth will desperately seek the Word of the Lord, but in vain.

Those scenes have an eschatological parallel with the end of probation. The guest found without the wedding garment in the parable of the wedding feast was cast out from the wedding hall into the outer darkness where " "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" " (Matt. 22:13, NIV). The foolish virgins of Matthew 25 were not ready by the time the bridegroom came, and they ended up left outside when the door was shut. All those characters from the parables represent the people in the time of the end to whom the realization came too late that the time of opportunity had passed. Like the people in the time of Amos, they neglected the loving calls for repentance and the chance to nourish their spiritual lives with " "every word that comes from the mouth of God" " (4:4, NIV). For them the tragic reality is that there is no hope anymore.

What Amos saw (Eph. 4:20-24)

How different would have been the message if the fruit seen by the prophet represented the fruit of the Spirit born from a character transformed by the love of God! Instead of receiving a vision of desolation, the people would have received a vision of reconciliation. In dealing with the problem of sin, God waits not only for the full manifestation of the fruit of transgression but also for the full manifestation of the fruit of love in the character of His people. "Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."³ Only the truth that is in Jesus can produce such fruit (Eph. 4:21-24).

REACT

What role, if any, should the social gospel play as one prepares for Jesus' second coming?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 980.

2. Stephen L. Harris, 5th edition, *Understanding the Bible*, p. 197.

3. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69.

Isn't Fruit Supposed to Be Good?

TESTIMONY

Amos 8:2, 5, 11

In Amos's vision, three food-related images are used to describe the situation of the people of Israel. First, ripe fruit is used to represent their ripeness for punishment. Second, this ripeness has to do with food, since they have been selling wheat to the poor with dishonest scales. Third, a central part of the punishment predicted will be famine, not of actual food, "but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11, NiV).

Fruit is healthful because it contains vitamins and antioxidants that nourish and protect the body. However, fruit ripens quickly and once ripe, spoils in a matter of days and has to be thrown away. Thus, one can argue that the book of Amos compares sin to ripe fruit because the people of Israel are becoming rotten and will have to be destroyed soon. The only fruit that won't decay and that we should aim at producing should be the fruit of the Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.' Gal. 5:22, 23. This fruit can never perish, but will produce after its kind a harvest unto eternal life."¹

One of the most eloquently attacked sins of the Israelites in Amos is their oppression of the poor. Chapter 8 condemns specifically the Israelites' eagerness to sell food in a dishonest way, exploiting the hungry population and incurring God's judgment.

Ancient Israel's failure to alleviate hunger among the poor was punished with spiritual famine. Likewise, the apostate Israel of the end times will suffer from the same hunger. The people who reject God will eventually feel the need for Him; however, when the time of judgment comes, it will be too late. "The pleading blood of Christ has shielded the sinner from receiving the full measure of his guilt; but in the final

**A central part of the
punishment predicted
will be famine.**

Judgment, wrath is poured out unmixed with mercy. In that day, multitudes will desire the shelter of God's mercy which they have so long despised. 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.' Amos 8:11, 12."²

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 68, 69.

2. *The Great Controversy*, pp. 628, 629.

“Then the Word of the Lord Came”

EVIDENCE

Amos 7:14-16; 1 Kings 8:1-12; 12; 13

Amos is one of the more obscure books of the Bible. The northern kingdom, Israel, and the southern kingdom, Judah, were at the height of their prosperity. At the division of the 12 tribes into two kingdoms, the northern tribes were effectively cut off from Jerusalem. It had become the possession of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Jeroboam worried that if the people were allowed to journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts, they would defect and his kingdom would be weakened.

Seeking to prevent this, Jeroboam chose to make his own path. He ordained his own priests and established his own feasts. Effectively, Jeroboam was declaring that the people could worship

**Peace and prosperity
were everywhere.**

wherever they wanted to and in whatever manner they chose. If they couldn't travel to Bethel, they had the option of worshiping in Gilgal or Dan. To make things even simpler, “they could present their thank offerings with leaven, proclaim their freewill offerings and even worship other gods.”*

Life was good. Peace and prosperity were everywhere. Wealth, an easy life, material goods, and the pursuit of happiness had lulled these kingdoms into complacency. They decided to worship God in their own way, throwing aside the specific instructions He had given them.

Suddenly, in their midst was a shepherd and gatherer of sycamore figs. He was from the small city of Tekoa, located just 10 miles south of Jerusalem. Amos openly told people he wasn't a prophet by profession, nor the son of a prophet. He hadn't even studied in the schools of the prophets. Yet God gave him words for the people of Israel—God's people.

Amos most likely spent much of his time in Bethel, where the temple and the residence of the king were located. As with most prophets, Amos's message wasn't appreciated. Amaziah, the idolatrous high priest, accused him of treason.

Disregarding the threats made against him, Amos continued to tell others what God had shown him. His work was difficult and probably discouraging at times. We don't know how long Amos labored among the people or where he went after he finished in Israel. Even so, the words of the Lord that he shared are as powerful and relevant for spiritual Israel as they were when first uttered.

* *The International Inductive Study Bible*, (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), p. 1564.

How to Prepare for Famine

HOW-TO

Ps. 112:5; Amos 8:11

God says, “The days are coming . . . 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” (Amos 8:11, NIV).

How will you prepare? Stock up on God's Word? While this is a good idea, it won't prepare you for a famine of hearing God's Word. Here's why. In this verse, hearing God's Word means obeying. When a mother asks her child, “Do you hear me?” she isn't asking if the child's auditory sense is

**Hearing God's Word
means obeying.**

functioning. She's asking if the child intends to obey.

Both the Israelites in Amos's time and the end-time church (that's us) are found greedy and self-centered (Amos 8:4-6; Rev. 3:17-20). They have God's Word and the trappings of religion, but they trample on His law and Christ's example of love. Although they are financially secure and appear to be spiritually well-fed, there is a famine. God's safeguard?

1. Give from your hands, that is, your material resources. The next time you visit a big city (or take a walk down the street if you live there), bring a bag of oranges and give them out to the less fortunate. Instead of mindlessly tossing spare change into the offering plate, plan your budget to give larger amounts to special offerings and weekly collections from time to time. When you give regularly, generously, cheerfully, without looking for a pat on the back, you cannot be selfish. It keeps you in tune with the needs of others, naturally shifting your focus from yourself to those around you.

2. Give from your heart. Share with others what Jesus has done for you. You don't need a thrilling from-gangs-to-God experience or a miraculous cancer cure to share. Tell people how God landed you a great new job, healed you from the lingering pain of a broken relationship, or freed you from the nagging guilt of your past. Give the glory to God for your successes—even the small ones—and self will never crowd the picture.

3. Give from your head. Share what you know from God's Word. But share in the context of giving from your hands and heart; don't sermonize. As you give away the Bible truths that you know, their meaning and power will become real to you. If you keep them bottled up inside, they'll stagnate and die.

Famine in a Land of Plenty

OPINION

1 Sam. 3:1; Ps. 33:18, 19; Amos 8:11,12

Captain Howard Rutledge tells how he discovered the importance of the Bible in a North Vietnamese prisoner-of-war camp, where he spent seven years. "It took prison to show me how empty life is without God. I tried desperately to recall snatches of Scripture, sermons, the gospel choruses from childhood, and the hymns we sang in church. How I struggled to recall those scriptures and hymns! Regrettably I had not seen the importance of memorizing verses from the Bible or learning gospel songs. I never dreamed that I would spend seven years in a prison in North Vietnam or that thinking about one memorized verse could have made a whole day bearable."*

The Lord told Amos to warn Israel that a famine was coming in the land, not one of bread or a thirst for water, but for the words of the Lord (Amos 8:11). Isn't it ironic that the same people, who were counting down the very seconds to end the Sabbath day so they could go and rob the poor, would now be searching for that which they had so easily rejected? The time is coming, and is even at the door, when such a famine will come upon spiritual Israel. Men will look in vain, in their distress for divine counsel, but will not find it. The Word of the Lord shall be precious and scarce (1 Sam. 3:1). Many will have the written Word to read, but no one to explain its application to them. Indeed there will be water in the well but nothing with which to draw it!

What will be the effect of this famine? Men and women will wander from sea to sea, searching for a prophet (Amos 8:12). At that time it is likely that in deep despair some will buy fool's gold, thinking that they have found the truth when all they have is just the appearance thereof. We should be asking for the Holy Spirit to give us a deeper knowledge of the Word each day. Verses that mean a lot to us should be committed to memory. Some churches have abandoned the Adventist Youth programs on Sabbath evenings where texts were committed to memory during the course of the week and recited. Other churches have never seen or heard of such a program. The memory verses in the Sabbath School lessons are no longer memorized and recited but read! We need to live in such a way that our testimony will be "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Ps.119:11, NIV).

**Memory verses in
the Sabbath School
lessons are no
longer memorized.**

*Donald E. and Vesta W. Mansell, *Sure as the Dawn* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1993), p. 341.

Fresh Fruit From the Word

EXPLORATION

Matt. 25:31-46

CONCLUDE

There are many parallels between the people of Amos's day and ours. Many of us are living in contentment, worshiping God only on the surface, while we ignore the suffering of so many around us. Our society has become greedy and self-centered. We might be starving spiritually and not realize it. One day, all will hunger for God but for some it will be too late. While there is still time, prepare yourself with reading and memorizing the Bible, telling others about it and of your experiences with Jesus, and sharing generously of what you have with others in need.

CONSIDER

- Looking through your Bible, finding texts you have underlined, and learning two by heart this week (and review to see if you remember them in a month).
- Making a chart of Bible texts you want to memorize in the next six months and write them on little cue cards, that you can carry with you to help with the memorizing.
- Surveying your community, finding any low-income areas, and researching what is being done to help people who are suffering around you.
- Talking to your local church welfare department to see if you can help pack boxes of food, sort clothing, or some other participatory task.
- Exploring some of the Web sites in the directory at <http://dir.yahoo.com/Society_and_Culture/Issues_and_Causes/Poverty>. See what you can do to participate in the work of one of the organizations listed there.
- Offering to help elderly people in your neighborhood with heavy jobs in their yards or gardens.
- Engaging people from different cultures to help you cook some special international foods and organize an international evening at your church, where you invite people in the area to sample the foods, hear about a project overseas (check with ADRA for ideas) that you have chosen, and let everyone coming pay an entrance fee to support the project/or pay for the food they choose.

CONNECT

1 John.

Steps to Christ.

C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain.*

No Escape for the lost



**“Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord!
Why do you long for the day of the Lord?
(Amos 5:18, NIV).**

Will God's Judgment Be Fair?

INTRODUCTION

Ps. 98:9

On March 8, 1985, Kirk Bloodsworth was convicted of rape and murder. A Baltimore (Maryland) County judge sentenced Bloodsworth to death. He pleaded his innocence, but was convicted of the strangulation of a 9-year-old girl. The prosecutor's evidence at trial was persuading enough to put him on death row. After nine years imprisonment, of which two were spent on death row, he was finally released because of a DNA report. Unfortunately, Kirk Bloodsworth is not the only one who spent years on death row; others even died innocent.*

Wise men try to set up rules and standards to keep our countries, cities, and districts running. A law is a guideline for a judge to say what is right or wrong. Innocent or not, just or unjust—a judge can never know the whole truth. He or she can decide only from a personal subjective view, and therefore he or she can fail.

We might ask ourselves after hearing a story like Kirk Bloodsworth's, isn't it unfair? This innocent man spent nine years of his life in prison. Where is justice? However, we can take it even further.

Earthquakes, droughts, and starvation, and we ask, Where is God? Is this His answer to our sinful world, His judgment? As Adventists we believe that God will judge everyone living on this earth. Is He going to be fair in His judgment?

This week we are going to take a closer look into the divine judgment. Some people get scared and look ahead fearfully for they know we can't hide anything from God, not even the smallest lie. He is going to sift all people on earth, divide all people into two groups—those who loved Him and those who rejected Him.

**This innocent man
spent nine years
of his life in
prison.**

Are we going to ask God if His judgment is fair or not? He who knows everything, from

the beginning to the end, He who never failed us, He who sent His only begotten Son that those who believe shall live.

When we talk about God's judgment, we shouldn't think about innocent people on death row. We are not subject to an earthly judge. Our God is a righteous God, and He will be fair in His judgment.

*Edward Connors, Thomas Lundregan, Neal Miller, and Tom McEwen, *Convicted by Juries, Exonerated by Science: Case Studies in the Use of DNA Evidence to Establish Innocence After Trial* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice, 1996).

God's Judgment Mural

EVIDENCE

Amos 9:1-9

Amos was just an average, ordinary Israelite prior to God's call to become a prophet (Amos 7:14). He was to bear God's message to the apostate nation of northern Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.). Amos 9:1-9 reports Amos's vision concerning the impending judgment about to befall God's apostate people.

What called for this judgment? During the reign of Jeroboam (northern Israel) and Uzziah (Judah), the combined territory occupied by these two nations was almost the same as that occupied under Kings David and Solomon. This fostered national pride in Yahweh's favor of Israel over other nations.

Two classes had developed: the super rich and the super poor. Justice was a commodity that could be bought, and religion had become almost mechanical, a process that alienated people from Yahweh's presence. Moreover, gross idolatry was in the land (Amos 8:14). When we look around us at our world, do we not see these same conditions? But what made this situation all the worse in Amos's time is the fact that it was God's very own people who were living this lifestyle. God's election brought added responsibility (3:2). As God's people they knew God and His character; they knew His expectations.

**God's people are
not exempt from
judgment.**

In a similar manner today, we as God's remnant people have clear and bright light concerning God's will and character. Just as Israel was called to account for their actions in light of their knowledge of God, so we will be called to accountability. Amos 9:1-9 is significant in that it shows that God's people are not exempt from judgment.

In the context of Israel's history as well as the narrower context of the book of Amos, however, we must understand that only those who persist in sinning presumptuously will not escape God's judgment (verse 10). In the final judgment sin must be destroyed forever. Those who by their life choices have chosen not to separate from sin but remain identified with it, must of necessity also be destroyed. The story ends on a note of hope, for God promises to restore those who remain faithful (verse 14). God is impartial; He has no favorites. His own people will be examined and judged like the other nations.

REACT

1. With reference to Amos 9:10, what is the difference between faith and presumption?
2. What is the difference between fearing and respecting the judgment?

Monday
December 17

The Good News in Reverse

LOGOS

Ps. 34:15; Amos 9:1-9

In this fifth and final vision of threatenings against Israel, the prophet sees the Lord standing by the altar. Since the oracles of Amos focus on the northern kingdom with its main cultic center at Bethel, the altar and temple of this vision signifies the corrupt religion of Israel. Not only was their center of worship in opposition to the temple of God in Jerusalem, but it was corrupted by Canaanite Baalism and

**They can no longer
appeal to their
glorious past.**

especially by presumptuously claiming the blessings of their covenant status without fulfilling the duties and responsibilities upon which the covenant was conditioned. The evil of Israel did not so much lay in material idols as in the popularized delusion that God could be

kept favorably inclined toward them by means of sacrificial offerings or ritual procedures.

Now Yahweh, the true ruler of Israel, stands like an officiating priest next to the altar, not to atone for the sins of Israel, but to judge the counterfeit cultus of Israel. Reminiscent of Samson's destruction of the temple of Dagon over the heads of Philistines, God gives the command to strike the apostate religion.

Like the divine tearing of the veil in front of the Most Holy from top to bottom at the death of Christ, God now sends an earthquake that will destroy the entire edifice of empty Israelite religion, so that none will escape. Even the survivors will be hunted down by God in the most remote corners of human reality (Amos 9:2-4). Even punishment by the invading Assyrians carrying them into captivity and death itself will offer no escape from God's vengeance. The reassuring omnipresence of God caring for His faithful followers in Psalm 139 has now become ominous.

The Last Stanza (Rev. 19:1, 2)

For the third time Amos sings the praises of the creative and sustaining power of God within the context of His judgments on the sin of Israel. It is as if God reminds them here for the last time in the prophecy of Amos that the convulsions of nature are reminders of the sovereignty of a righteous God. In a time of political strength, commercial power (for at least the upper classes), vibrant religious activities, and apparent peace, the "mind of the prophet was the seismograph of providence, vibrating to the first faint tremors that heralded the coming earthquake."² The words of Amos are therefore "to shock his people into self-understanding and a commitment to amelioration."³ But for those who do not recognize these warnings

as God's restitutive covenant curses, they will in the end intensify into a devastating invasion by the Assyrians (Isa. 8:6-8).

Rewriting the Exodus (John 5:45)

On the banks of the Jordan Moses gave Israel a choice between life as the consequence of obedience from the heart, or death as the consequence of apostasy to the gods of Canaan. When Amos compares the Exodus of Israel with the migrations of the Philistines, God is not depreciating the redemptive uniqueness of the Exodus or the special status of Israel as the elect people of God. He is saying that their sins are rewriting the significance of the Exodus for them. In their unfaithfulness, they can no longer appeal to their glorious past.

In their self-centered self-righteousness, the New Testament Jews boasted in a similar fashion because they were descendants of Abraham and consequently children of God (John 8:39, 41). But Jesus, like Amos, denied them any claim to either Abraham or God as their Father. Rather, they were the children of him whose characteristics they reflected (verses 42-44).

Separating Israel from Jacob (Luke 22:31)

Throughout his book Amos sustained a gloomy and radical note of judgment on all of Israel. That is why it comes as an unexpected turn for some readers to hear God say that while He will destroy "the sinful kingdom," "yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob" (9:8, NIV). In verse 9 He elaborates on this hopeful note.

But how does this separation harmonize with the apparent total rejection of Israel, and how should one understand the statement that "not a pebble will reach the ground"? The answers lie in the nature of the prophetic ministry and the semantics of the word *tseror* (pebble). While 2 Samuel 17:13 indicates *tseror* as a "pebble" (NRSV) and Proverbs 26:8 as a "stone" (NRSV), it is never specifically a grain of wheat or barley. After most of the chaff had been winnowed out on the threshing floor, the grain is sifted through a sieve, of which the holes are just big enough for the grain to fall through to the ground. Verse 9 therefore emphasizes the fact that not a single "pebble" of the "sinful kingdom" will escape the devastating judgment of Assyrian exile. This implies, however, that there is a faithful remnant for whom there is hope. The sinful kingdom consequently refers to those in Israel who not only commit the serious socio-ethical sins against which Amos preached, but are already hardened in their sins. However, the faithful in Israel implied by Amos 9:8, 9 are among those who were oppressed by the ruling classes.

1. J. Skinner, as quoted in R. K. Harrison, *Ibid.*, p. 888.

2. Bruce E. Willoughby, "Amos," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, et. al., 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 1, p. 207.

Too Busy to Go to Heaven

TESTIMONY

Amos 9:9

"The prevailing spirit of our time is one of infidelity and apostasy—a spirit of avowed illumination because of a knowledge of truth, but in reality of the blindest presumption. Human theories are exalted and placed where God and His law should be. Satan tempts men and women to disobey, with the promise that in disobedience they will find liberty and freedom that will make them as gods. There is seen a spirit of opposition to the plain word of God, of idolatrous exaltation of human wisdom above divine revelation. Men have allowed their minds to become so darkened and confused by conformity to worldly customs and influences that they seem to have lost all power to discriminate between light and darkness, truth and error. So far have they departed from the right way that they hold the opinions of a few philosophers, so-called, to be more trustworthy than the truths of the Bible."¹

**"Everything that
can be shaken
will be shaken."**

"There is danger of entering into commercialism and becoming so engrossed in worldly business that the truths of the word of God in their purity and power will not be brought into the life. The love of trade and gain is becoming more and more prevalent. My brethren, let your souls be truly converted. If ever there was a time when we needed to understand our responsibilities, it is now, when truth is fallen in the streets and equity cannot enter. Satan has come down with great power to work with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; and everything that can be shaken will be shaken, and those things that cannot be shaken will remain."²

"Religion, pure, undefiled religion, is intensely practical. Nothing but earnest, wholehearted labor will avail in the saving of souls. We are to make our everyday duties acts of devotion, constantly increasing in usefulness, because we see our work in the light of eternity."³

REACT

1. Why do you think God refers to His law as a "perfect law of liberty"?
2. In what ways can God's requirements serve as doors to freedom and liberty for you?
3. What risks do you think you might run in asking God to renew your thought life? What benefits could you anticipate?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 178.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 62.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 150.

Do I Really Believe?

HOW-TO

Amos 3:2; 5:21-27

Amos 9:1-9 is directly related to Amos 3:2; 5:21-27. These are three very sad but sobering texts. God has to judge this nation that He has loved and cherished for so long. The questions that should come to mind when reading these three texts are What have the Israelites done to deserve such a harsh judgment? and What lessons can I learn from their mistakes? The answers are of utmost importance to us as God's final remnant.

God had chosen Israel as a medium through which He could make Himself known to all the other nations of the world (Gen. 12:1-3). He had exalted the Israelite nation as a remnant people and had revealed to her many truths that surrounding nations did not possess. It was Israel's mission—as God's chosen remnant—to make these truths known throughout the world. Unfortunately, however, the Israelites believed that they were the only ones worthy of possessing them. The message of the book of Amos is about the extent to which the

**They continued to
live out the ritual
of religion.**

spiritual condition of this blessed nation had declined. They continued to live out the ritual of religion without experiencing the power of religion. The danger for us, as members of the remnant church, is that we can become so caught up in upholding the principles of truth that we forget where that truth came from. We can be so engrossed in the rituals and rites of our religion that we forget why we believe what we believe. Here are two important questions that we need to ask ourselves on a daily basis to ensure that we do not experience the same fate as that of the Israelites:

1. Why am I in church? Am I here merely because it is my routine? Am I here because my parents expect me to be here? Am I here because I want to socialize with friends? The fact that we go to church every Sabbath and are part of the body of believers is not going to count one bit on the day of judgment. We need to ask ourselves if we truly want to know God and meet with Him. We need to evaluate whether we are accomplishing this in our church experience.

2. Do I really believe? Knowing the 27 fundamental beliefs is not going to mean a thing when we are judged. Knowing is not good enough; we need to believe! It is only when we can take what we know and really believe it, as our own, that it will have any impact on our lives. Human beings have the tendency to believe only in what registers on their five senses. It is difficult for us to believe, really believe, in things like God and heaven that we cannot see. This is where we can assess whether we have a real faith or a facade. "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Heb. 11:1, NIV).

To Give or Not to Give?

OPINION

2 Cor. 8:7-9

Amos strongly condemned the rich and privileged people who were guilty of exploiting the poor and needy (Amos 2:6-8; 4:1; 5:7, 10-12; 8:5, 6). As Christians, we don't believe that exploiting the poor is good. In general, we believe that sharing and giving is good and that one should give in abundance. Or do we?

I remember times when beggars would on a Sabbath after church mingle with the crowd and ask for money. Most members would avoid eye contact or possibly call the pastor/elder and let them deal with it. There are so many charities around, yet many of us seldom give more than a few leftover cents. Even though giving is considered more blessed than receiving, we are often still reluctant to give. We still seem to find it easier to say that the other person

**We give because
we have so much
to give!**

will give. Why? Maybe we don't have enough money? But, wait a moment, is it money that as Christians we are supposed to give so abundantly? The answer is "maybe." But then if all people ever had to give was money, it would be a very sad world indeed. Real Christian giving is when we give of ourselves—our time, care, and love for people.

Jesus didn't just give us a present that we could open and use until it wears out. The truth is that He gave Himself.

In 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, Paul says that the Macedonians were generous givers, even though they were poor by worldly standards and were being persecuted. Paul connects their generosity to God's grace that inspires generous giving. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9, NIV).

We give, not out of duty, or to show that we have great faith. We give because we have so much to give! We are as rich as the gift we have been given, and who dares to put a limit on the gift of Jesus Christ! Christ didn't give because He had to and neither should we.

REACT

1. In what way do you think it troubles God that your generosity may be taken advantage of by someone? Why?
2. What do you think are the deepest needs people have? What do you think is the best way to address such needs?

Owning Up

EXPLORATION

Gen. 3:12

CONCLUDE

We often have a hard time admitting when we are wrong. It's so much easier to place the blame on someone else rather than owning up to what we've done. As far back as the Garden of Eden, Adam said of Eve, "She made me do it." During the 1960s, a popular television personality made this line famous: "The devil made me do it." But that kind of reasoning isn't acceptable to God. The day is coming when humans will no longer be able to live in denial or attempt to fool themselves or others about their true condition. Ultimately, each individual will have to give an account for their actions and become subject to the litmus test of God's judgment.

CONSIDER

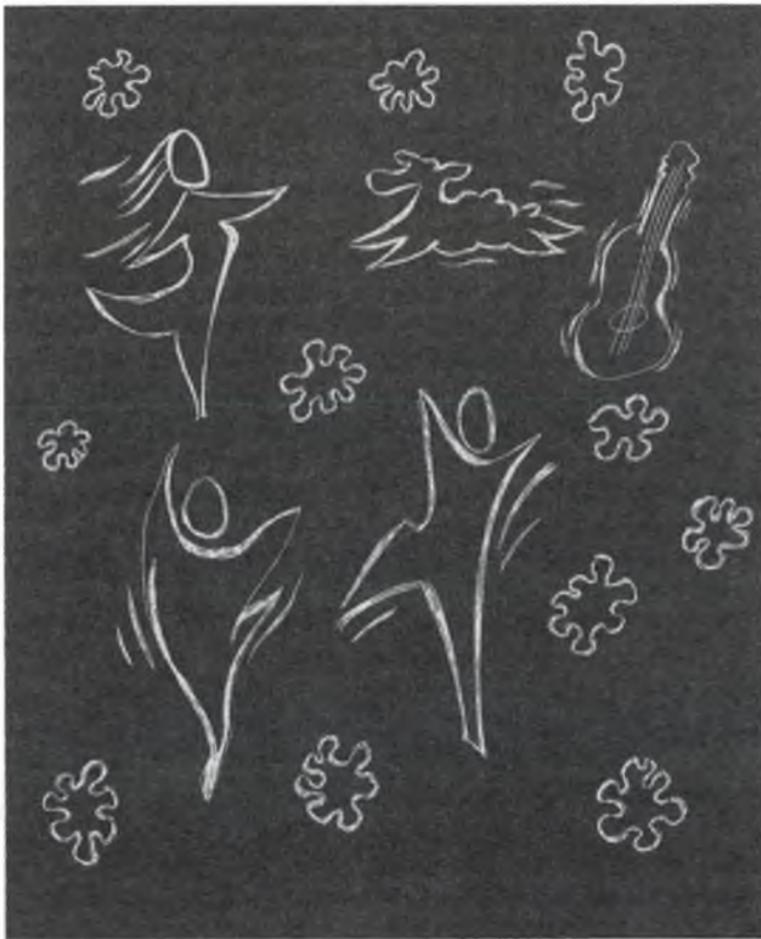
- Keeping a record of the number of times in one week you make a statement like "That's not fair," or "It wasn't my fault." Consider each circumstance and decide whether or not your view of the situation was accurate.
- Role-playing the trial of Jesus with a group of friends. Afterward, hold a discussion about the difference between Satan's method of justice and God's way of doing justice.
- Talking to five of your friends about why they go to church. Decide whether or not they are good reasons.
- Looking around in nature for evidence in God's creation that tells you personally about His character. List each item and explain why you resonate with it specifically.
- Reading through the book of Amos, noting the specific sins that God was angry with Israel about. As if you were writing a letter to God, compose a psalm, asking God's forgiveness for His people and for strength to overcome sin.
- Choosing someone in your community to share your time and talents with. Commit to spending at least two hours a week enriching this person's life.

CONNECT

Prophets and Kings, chap. 24.

Tony Campolo, *Ideas for Social Action*.

The **Truest** Story of them all



“The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isa. 35:10, NKJV).

Restoration

INTRODUCTION

Isa. 35:10

It's an old story. Due to some reason, many faced cruel death and destruction to property. No one around could stop the villain. The enemy, and his army, violated and crushed everything that came their way.

As the story continued, your yearning for a hero grew in larger proportions as the villain seemed to be winning. You almost gave up reading when evil seemed to be overcoming good.

Then finally the moment of reckoning! The chapter when you went behind the scenes: far away from the battlefield, to a place where you saw the hero preparing for the final encounter. Your excitement grew, knowing victory was possible yet unknown.

Then the moment. In precise timing, he comes within radar of the enemy. The enemy doesn't really see him, but the very feel of his presence sends shivers of fear into the heart of the enemy and his army. They stand shocked and then do the stupidest things to prove their might.

**In precise timing, he
comes within radar
of the enemy.**

Without a word, the hero, reliving each of the merciless acts of the villain, recaptures the innocence strewn across the time. In the midst of burning houses and the shrieks of wounded soldiers, the hero looks back once at the past, sheds a tear, shakes his head at the present, and destroys the enemy—once and for all!

Silence. Peace wraps around those who were hurting. The faithful, the victims, with newfound energy and healing come around their hero. No more wailing. No more sorrow. Victory is theirs! No one seems to remember what was lost.

They sing songs of victory. Everyone rejoices in the restored peace. The multitudes burst into jubilation when the hero declares, "I will never leave you again." Thus ends the story and you close the book with a smile knowing goodness will always prevail.

Amos 9:11-15 has a twofold application. The first is already past. God gave Amos a glimpse of what is to come when Israel is to be restored after long years of captivity and suffering under the hands of heathens.

The second, the most vital for us today, points us to the close of the ages when the cosmic battle that has been going on since time immemorial will come to an end. Our obligation today is to obey His teachings so that, on that day we shall be able to say, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us" (Isa. 25:9, NKJV).

LOGOS

Amos 9:11-15; Acts 15:16

I am not a huge golf fan. For me, nothing could be more boring. However, I am married to one. Every Sunday my husband is either out on the green improving his drives or parked in front of the television watching Tiger Woods win another tournament.

But because of my husband's love of the sport, I am trying to learn more about the game. During a recent tournament, I became acquainted with the concept of a

**God is willing and able
to make victorious
success a part of
our lives.**

"mulligan." Golfers know that a mulligan is a free stroke, a second-chance stroke. Before a round, golfers can agree to give themselves a certain number of mulligans for the round. Then, if a golfer makes a particularly errant shot, he or she can elect to use one of the mulligans and take the shot

again. The declaration of mulligans is not part of the official rules of the game of golf. A mulligan is simply a free gift, an unmerited and undeserved opportunity for a second chance.

We are reminded in Ephesians 2:8 that we, too, have received an unmerited mulligan from God: "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (NKJV).

And now, as we reach the end of the quarter and our study of the book of Amos, we are amazed to find the prophet closing with the theme of second chances. For eight and a half chapters, our attention has been riveted upon a nation racing toward judgment in its moral and spiritual decline. Their only hope is that a small remnant of faithful people will be spared.

But that is the best part: hope remains! At the very end of this dark picture, we read words from the prophet's mouth that are encouraging and inspiring. Could it actually be that God would provide a second chance for Israel? And, could it be that God could make restoration possible for us, even though we have all fallen far short of His glory as a result of sin? (Rom. 3:23).

A Second Chance (Amos 9:11; Acts 15:16)

God promises Israel (and us) a second chance in Amos 9:11; Acts 15:15. Despite all her rebellion, apathy, and sinfulness, God is willing to "raise up" Israel again—raising her up even to the heights of David's kingdom.

In Amos 9:11, the prophet describes how God will improve the nation. His restorative process—" 'raise up . . . repair . . . raise up . . . rebuild' " (NKJV)—suggests wholeness or completeness. God is able and willing to grant Israel a

mulligan. Not only do these verses have an immediate component (i.e., Israel will be restored); they also have a timeless component (all God's people, in every era, can experience His restoration). The words that Amos spoke about Israel are also true of you and me today.

Success (Amos 9:12)

In Amos 9:12 we read that Israel will “possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name” (NKJV). Throughout Israel's history, Edom was a particularly bitter and constant foe. Here, the additional reference to “all the nations” tells us that Edom is representative of all the enemies of God's people. Because of their rebellion, the people of Israel will be forced to endure exile and oppression. However, God promises them that, when He reconstructs the nation, He will allow them to enjoy success and victory again. We, too, can know that God is willing and able to make victorious success a part of our lives.

Satisfaction (Amos 9:13,14)

Here is another promise literally of abundant plenty, which God will give to His people at the time of reconstruction. The words in these verses describe a great bounty and reverse the warning of famine in Amos 4:6. Thanks to God's second chance, we will be able to live with justice, abundance, and beauty. When God reconstructs human lives, He is able to extract our insatiable longing and replace it with a sense of satisfaction and wholeness. God makes it possible, but we must choose whether we will be satisfied with the bountiful provisions God has made for us.

Security (Amos 9:15)

Doesn't this promise sound strangely similar to Jesus' words in John 10:27, 28? “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (NKJV). What a great miracle! God is willing to give us complete, eternal security through His reconstructive work. That security is made possible through Jesus.

Amos reminds us that we must enjoy the security God has granted us and lift up praise and gratitude to Him for being willing to provide second chances.

REACT

1. Does all judgment seek to penalize and hurt? Explain your answer.
2. “Take a mulligan.” In what ways does this metaphor add or subtract from your idea of grace?
3. Can we know how many chances we get before we are given up on? Explain your answer.

TESTIMONY

Amos 9:11-15

"As the ransomed ones are welcomed to the City of God, there rings out upon the air an exultant cry of adoration. The two Adams are about to meet. The Son of God is standing with outstretched arms to receive the father of our race—the being whom He created, who sinned against his Maker, and for whose sin the marks of the crucifixion are borne upon the Saviour's form. As Adam discerns the prints of the cruel nails, he does not fall upon the bosom of his Lord, but in humiliation casts himself at His feet, crying: 'Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain!' Tenderly the Saviour lifts him up and bids him look once more upon the Eden home from which he has so long been exiled."*

You and I will watch the raw emotion of that scene with a passion never before experienced. Trembling, Adam approaches his Savior. Jesus is filled with emotion. It's been thousands of years since He's seen, touched, and talked to His friend, Adam.

I'm filled with emotion, too, as I think about a reunion with my grandparents. The first died when I was 25 years old. At 41 I lost my last one—my grandma, the closest one of all. What a reunion that will be!

How will it be for you? After casting your crown at Jesus' feet and looking around for familiar faces, whom will you run to with wildly beating heart? To whom will you say through tears of joy, "Finally, we're back together again"?

Often we think of restoration as bringing an old car back to its original beauty or rebuilding a house after a fire. But, true restoration is all about relationships. It's all about forgiveness and making things right and being together again.

The book of Amos finds Israel growing fat and prosperous. The rich abused the poor, and many worshiped idols that led them into lustful practices. God warned Israel through Amos that they would be destroyed, but then ended His message in the last chapter of the book with a promise of restoration. What a God—never without hope! Always desiring restoration.

Today, God is anxious to restore *us* to Himself. He begs us to put away our idols and give ourselves to Him. He's awaiting His return with wildly beating heart. He knows the thrill that awaits. Do you? Are you looking forward to embracing lost family members and friends? Is your heart racing to see the face of your Savior—to throw your crown at His feet and thank Him for the grace that you and I could never in a billion years repay? *Restoration*—the word is really too weak to describe the thrill of that day. I guess we'll just have to be there.

**What a God—
never without
hope!**

* *The Great Controversy*, p. 647.

Evidence of a Restoration?

EVIDENCE

Amos 9:11-15

A new heaven? A new earth? Jerusalem restored? Doesn't particularly seem right, much less possible. Yet this is what is promised in the Bible. This—an earth made new and whole again—is what Amos, as well as John, promised.

And we the humans, yes, we the created, demand evidence for almost everything. We'll believe and teach that evolution is true, though we lack any clear or hard facts to support it, and we'll believe—by faith, nonetheless—that gravity exists, only because we can see and feel its effects. Yet for things biblical and things of the spiritual realm, we'll demand hard evidence. Though faith is required for science, some require science to have faith. What evidence can we present? What hard facts are appropriate to convince one that Christ is coming again and that restoration is imminent?

None. For those who will not accept Christ, no evidence will be enough to convince them of His soon return, much less of a world restored anew. But to those of humble heart, to those who place their lives and faith in the Creator of all, there is more than enough to convince them that all that is promised is a fact. Our only stronghold, our only hope, is to look back on our own lives, to see that those things which the Bible promised—those very things that seemed impossible to an unbelieving world—came true. Over and over again, those precious promises, those promises of peace, trial, temptation, and victory, were completed more times than we ever thought possible. This fact, and this fact alone, will be the evidence we need to believe that the biggest promise of all—the promise of Christ's return and an earth restored to perfection—will, like all the others, one day soon be true. And all that is promised with it, will come to pass as well.

**Though faith is
required for science,
some require science
to have faith.**

Bible prophecy can be proven as fact to some. But in truth, it's not the unbelievers who need this evidence, but instead us—those who call upon the name of Christ and claim to have higher knowledge—who need this evidence more than ever. For though it may be impossible to convince the world that Jesus is coming again, it is becoming ever easier for the world to convince us that He isn't. But this, too, has been promised. So, we must hold to our faith. We must look back at all that He has done, and know that one day very soon He will do what He has promised. Jesus is coming again—to heal, to destroy, and to restore.

Handing Out Hope

HOW-TO

Matt. 5:13-16; Phil. 1:27

OK, I admit I'm young. I'm 21 years old. I have my whole life ahead of me. I will get married and have kids. I will work, retire and go on one of those cruises and play shuffleboard. Then, after a long, full life, I will die. At least, that is the way I have always pictured it. However, in the past few years it has been brought to my attention that things don't always go the way we plan.

Tammy was beautiful, full of life and energy. She didn't live a wild life, but she suffered a freak accident, and within a matter of seconds the life that bubbled over was extinguished. I miss Tammy and still think about her though a year has passed. But thankfully, as a Christian, I can believe that isn't the end of her story.

**You may never know
who is watching.**

I know that she loved God and that when He returns, He will call her to Him.

As Christians we have hope that there is Someone beyond what we can see. But what about the friends who don't know God? We must let them know of the God that loves them and died for them. But how?

1. Live a Christian life. This should make a difference even if it is just the way you smile or your work ethic—perhaps the music you listen to. You may never know who is watching.

2. Pray for strength. The devil will work his hardest at discouraging you. He doesn't want anyone turning to our Lord. But the Lord will give you strength.

3. Pray for your friends. Pray that the Holy Spirit will soften hearts and make others willing to listen.

4. Pray for the opportunity to show them God. Pray every day that God will give you someone you can share with. It is not surprising that the more often you do it, the easier it becomes.

5. Invite them to worship with you. Ask them to church, a Bible study, a Christian concert or meeting. Not only does this help you get involved, but it can be an excellent tool.

6. Support others who are spreading God's Word. Form prayer groups, talk to each other, and affirm each other.

7. Don't get discouraged. You may only plant the seed that God can grow. Imagine what a reunion heaven will be. Imagine the joy when Christ comes up to you and says, "Well done My good and faithful servant."

REACT

Some say that it is hardest to let your light shine with those closest to you. Explain why you agree or disagree.

Present Restoration

OPINION

Job 42:10

As Adventists, we often look forward to Christ's return, yet Amos 5:18-20 warns against longing for the day of the Lord, as that day will be darkness, not light.

Throughout the Bible, even in the midst of the fall from grace, there is always the promise of future hope. Unfortunately, by the time of the prophets, many Israelites hoped for the day of the Lord as only a time of judgment upon their enemies.

The opening chapters of Amos, however, show that beyond not being a respecter of persons, God holds His chosen people to a higher standard than those who have not entered into a covenant relationship with Him. Further, all the crimes for which the nations are judged in these opening chapters are social crimes, those injustices committed against fellow human beings.

Rather than spending our time simply longing for the day of the Lord, then, we should be taking advantage of each moment to work out our own salvation and seeking to reconcile those around us to God. Though salvation is by grace alone, as children of God, we will be judged by a higher standard; we will be held accountable for the way we have lived our lives and how we have treated others.

The Lord is not arbitrary in His judgments, but He has set a plumb line, or standard, by which we are to be judged (Amos 7:7-9). We serve a wonderful God in that, while He has no obligation to do so, He does nothing without first revealing His plan to His servants (3:7).

"The lion has roared—who will not fear?" (3:8, NIV). As we know that we are at the end of time, do we respond to God's revelation with the same urgency as we would the roar of a lion warning of his soon coming? Will we be like the burning stick snatched from the fire of God's wrath (4:11), barely retaining the gift of salvation, or will we enter into the full restoration promised by our Lord to His people?

In order to obtain the future hope, we must have a present relationship with the Lord, being restored unto Him daily. Amos 5:14, 15, tells us to "seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph" (NIV).

Just as everything was restored to Job when he prayed for his friends, so will we experience present restoration when we seek good, live justly, pray for our friend and enemy, alike, and do as the Lord commanded at Peter's restoration: feed His sheep (John 21:15-17).

**We will be held
accountable for how
we have treated others.**

EXPLORATION

Ps. 100:4, 5

CONCLUDE

The last great day of judgment has come and gone. For the remnant, the faithful few, the day of release and restoration has come. Almighty God begins to re-create the world with sweet, fresh perfection. "The plowman overtakes the reaper" plowing under the old and preparing the new. God's human family has arrived home forever, never to be "rooted out" again.

CONSIDER

- Using a concordance to look up words related to the final restoration, such as heaven, new earth, forever, restore, and New Jerusalem. Assemble and type out the Bible verses to create a booklet of restoration promises.
- Creating a cover for the booklet using pencils, paint, or a graphics program, depicting the hope of restoration as you visualize it.
- Collecting small houseplants, rocks, small pieces of rough wood, and potting soil to create a two-sided garden in a rectangular container as a conversation starter. On the left half of the container, plant rocks, wood pieces, and a thin-leaved plant. On the right half, plant several profuse plants such as ivy. Think about the ways that the world will be different after it is restored to perfection.
- Exploring the concept of the restoration of art, historical sites, or automobiles in library books or Web sites. As you do this, consider how these processes of restoration add to or subtract from the idea of restoration as you've studied it this week.
- Memorizing Revelation 21:1-5. Recite it to your family or roommate at dinner. Share it with your class.
- Interviewing friends or fellow students with a video camera. Instruct them beforehand to imagine that they are being released after a year as kidnap victims. What have they missed? What are they grateful for? How do they feel about the person who rescued them?
- Keeping a journal of blessings for the next three months. Write down at least one blessing each day. At the end of three months share with your class all the clues God gives us concerning the coming bliss of heaven.

CONNECT

Acts 3:21; Revelation 21:1-5.

The Desire of Ages, pp. 824, 825; *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 17.

Clifford Goldstein, *The Day Evil Dies*; Randy Maxwell, *Bring Back the Glory*.

THE COSMIC CONFLICT BETWEEN CHRIST AND SATAN

If you have not received a copy of CQ for first quarter 2002, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: War in Heaven

Logos: Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:12-17; Revelation 12

Key Questions: Where did the great controversy begin? Whom and what did it involve? What were the initial consequences?

Lesson 2: Issues in the Great Controversy

Logos: John 8:42-46; 14:9-11; Rev. 12:17

Key Questions: The great controversy is a cosmic battle involving God and Satan. What are the root issues of this conflict, and how have they been manifested?

To order your personal copy of CQ, contact your Adventist Book Center or write:

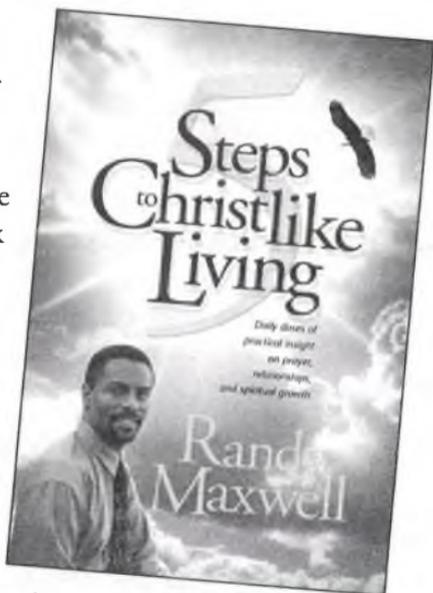
Pacific Press Publishing Association
P. O. Box 5353
Nampa, ID 83653-5353
U.S.A.

Prices: U.S.A.:	One-year subscription—\$14.99
	Single copy—\$6.29
Outside U.S.A.	One-year subscription—US \$18.99
	Single copy—US \$6.29

Tired of theoretical Christianity?

Get REAL.

Randy Maxwell provides practical, hands-on advice for spiritual growth that you can use right away in *5 Steps to Christlike Living*. Used alone or in a small group, this book will prove to be a treasure-trove of ideas on connecting with God despite a busy schedule, restoring your spiritual passion, dealing with guilt, romancing your spouse, getting more out of church, getting along with your teenager, knowing God's will in your life, and much, much more. 0-8163-1816-6. Paperback. US\$9.99, Cdn\$14.99.

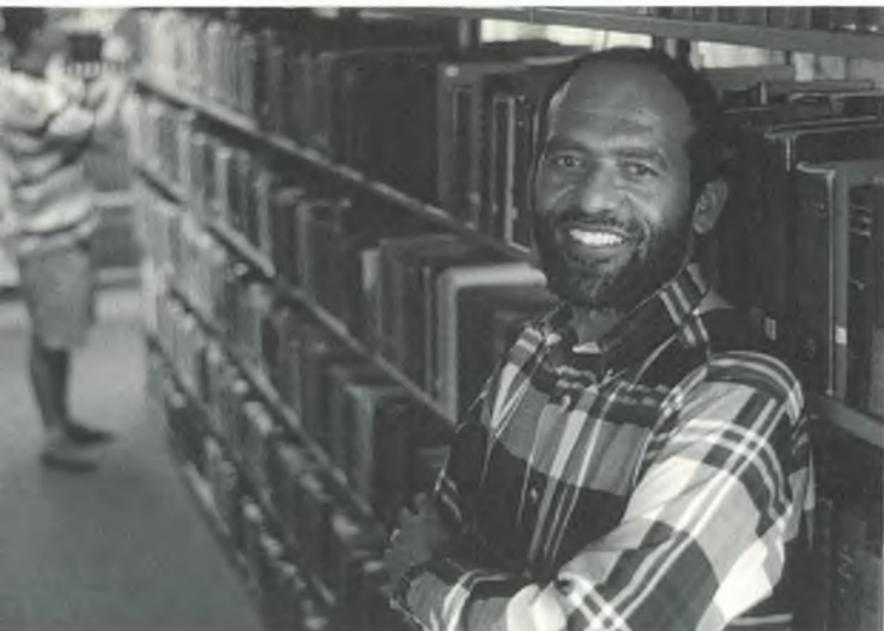


Available at your local ABC, 1-800-765-6955.
Or read a sample chapter first and order online:
www.AdventistBookCenter.com



Pacific Press®

© 2001 • Prices subject to change • 354/15590



Adu Worku: Head Librarian of the Nelson Memorial Library

“We fit the whole world into our library, and, well, now we’re looking for bigger challenges.”

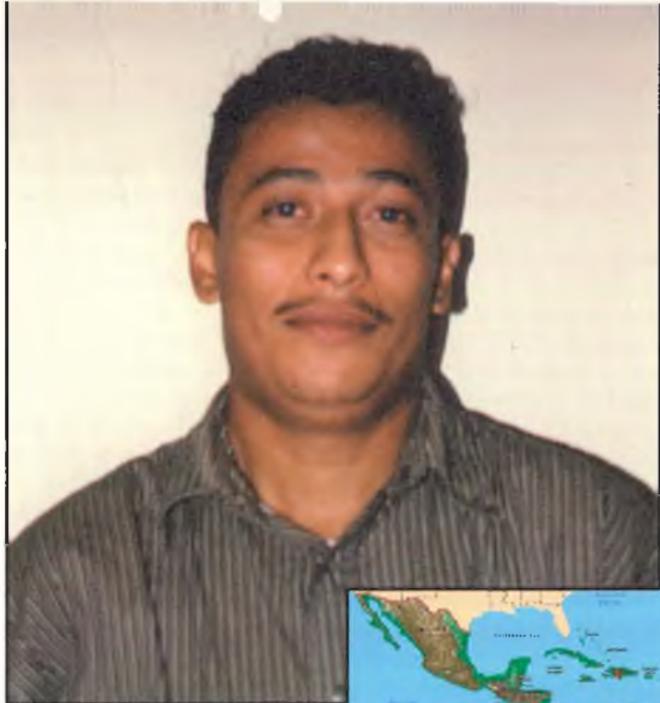
Libraries are big buildings with a lot of books, right? Not if you have a little vision. You see, thanks to technology, PUC’s library has broken the stereotype, building a bridge to the whole world! Of course, the library still holds a lot of books, but Adu Worku and his competent colleagues continue to ask how technology can make education even more accessible and powerful. So whether you’re researching Biblical Hebrew on the web, visiting the Louvre via satellite, previewing your zoology professor’s online lecture notes, or reading a book, there’s no time like now.



1-800-862-7080; WWW.PUC.EDU; ENROLL@PUC.EDU

No time like now.

M I S S I O N



NAME:
Joel Sandoval,
northern Honduras

Inter-American Division

BACKGROUND:

Joel grew up in an Adventist home, but he resented the church and the restrictions he felt it imposed on him. Rebelling, he joined a teenage gang, started taking drugs, and had the gang's satanic symbols tattooed on his body.

He shunned his parents' religion and made fun of Christians. He hated his family and their God, but the church members never stopped praying for him.

As he sank deeper into sin, he became depressed and convinced that no one loved him. Then, when his best friend was killed in a gang war, he realized that God had protected him. But why? He thought he had gone too far for forgiveness.

He decided to flee to Mexico with friends. But when they crossed the border, they were captured by locals who accused them of robbing a nearby village and threatened to kill them.

What miraculous turn of events saved the lives of Joel and his unbelieving friends?
Read his story in *Teen Mission*.



FC0011001

P R O F I L E