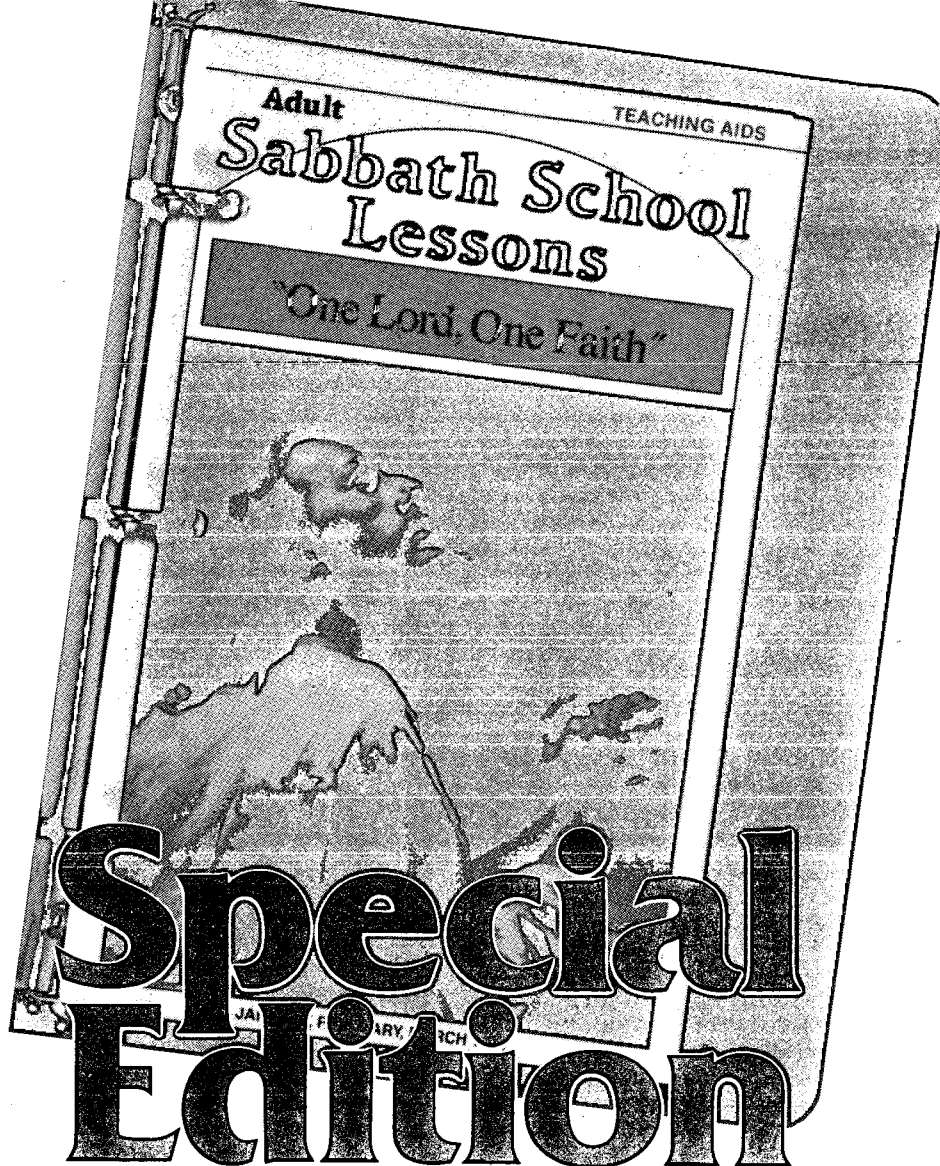


Adult
Sabbath School
Lessons

Total Commitment Now



OCTOBER NOVEMBER DECEMBER 1996



Many prefer the loose-leaf teacher's quarterly so popular a few years ago. Well, now it's back in the special punched and trimmed **Adult Teaching Aids**. Not all the quarterlies are punched and trimmed, so you will have to add "Special Punched Edition" when you order. (Binder not included.)

Priced at only US **\$4.50** each or US **\$17.00** for a full year's subscription.

Order through your church's personal ministries secretary or directly from your local Adventist Book Center.

Contents

1. What Are You Doing With Your Life?
2. A Bag Full of Holes
3. "I Am With You"
4. Our Christian Commitment Tested
5. How Real Is Your Christianity?
6. Attitudes, Actions, and Faith
7. Fire and Fruit
8. Self or Submission?
9. Presumption, Oppression, and Retribution
10. Living for the Coming of the Lord
11. How God's People Excuse Their Failures
12. How God's People Are Judged
13. How God's People Prepare for Deliverance

The Adult Sabbath School Lessons are prepared by the Department of Church Ministries of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the lessons is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Lesson Committee, the members of which serve as consulting editors. The published lesson quarterly reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the authors.

Editorial Offices: 6840 Eastern Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20012

Lesson Authors: Thomas A. Davis
Paul G. Smith
Leo R. Van Dolson

Editor: Leo R. Van Dolson
Assistant Editor: Charlotte Ishkanian
Marketing: Bob Kyte
Sales Office: Shirley Sayers
Art and Design: Pacific Press

Scripture references other than from the King James Version quoted by permission in this quarterly are as follows:

Jerusalem. From *The Jerusalem Bible*, copyright © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd., and Doubleday & Company, Inc. Used by permission.

NEB. From *The New English Bible*, copyright © by the Delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1961, 1970. Used by permission.

NIV. From *The New International Version*, copyright © 1978 by New York International Bible Society. Used by permission.

RSV. From the *Revised Standard Version*, copyright © 1946, 1952, and © 1971, 1973 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and used by permission.

TEV. From the *Good News Bible*, the Bible in Today's English Version, Old Testament, copyright © American Bible Society 1976; New Testament copyright © American Bible Society 1966, 1971, 1976. Used by permission.

Adult Sabbath School Lessons (standard edition). (USPS 702-480). Published quarterly by Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1350 North Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83653, U.S.A. One year subscription in U.S.A., \$4.10; single copy, \$1.25. One year subscription to countries outside U.S.A., \$5.85; single copy, \$1.65. All prices at U.S.A. exchange. Second-class postage paid at Nampa, ID. When a change of address is desired, please send both old and new addresses.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Adult Sabbath School Lessons (standard edition), P. O. Box 7000, Boise, ID 83707.

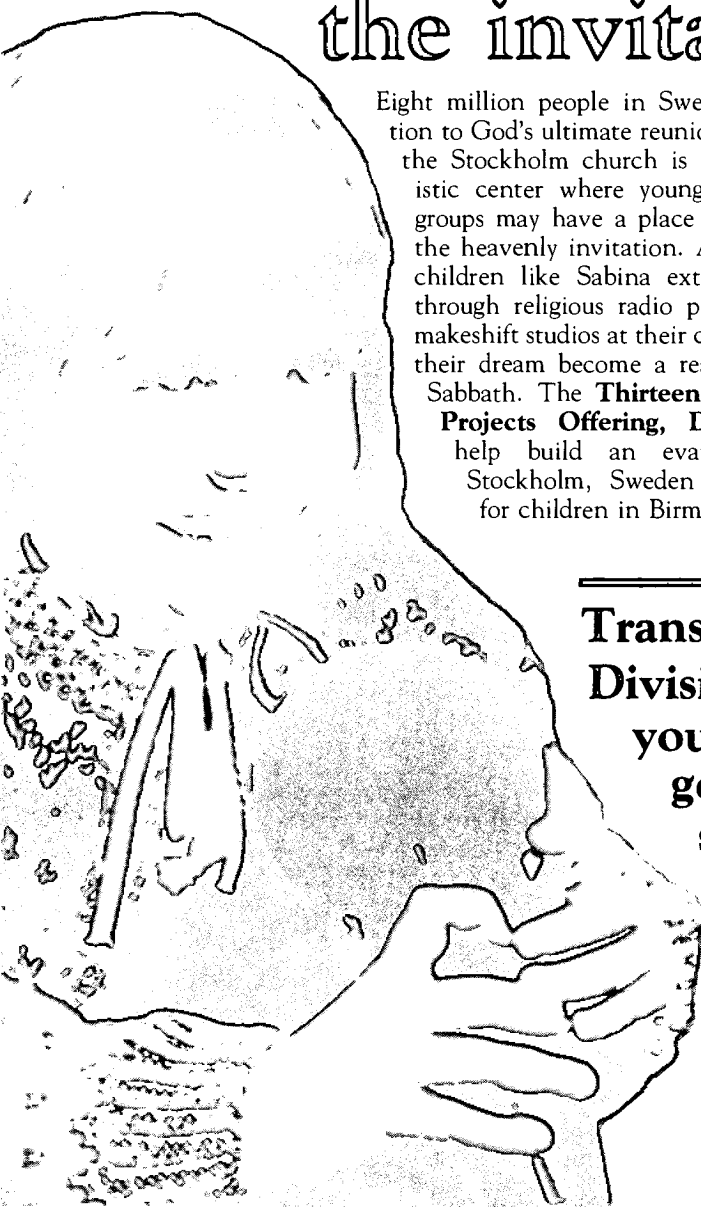
Editions in Braille available. See page 97. Easy English Edition Available.

Copyright © 1986 by Pacific Press Publishing Association

Adult Sabbath School Lessons (USPS 702-480)/No. 366 / October-December 1986

Sabina sent out nine invitations to her sixth birthday party. But when the great day arrived, only two of her guests showed up. It reminded Sabina of the party Jesus is planning for the world.

YOU may help send the invitations



Eight million people in Sweden need an invitation to God's ultimate reunion party. That is why the Stockholm church is building an evangelistic center where young people and ethnic groups may have a place to worship and hear the heavenly invitation. And that is also why children like Sabina extend God's invitation through religious radio programs produced in makeshift studios at their church. You may help their dream become a reality this Thirteenth Sabbath. The **Thirteenth Sabbath Special Projects Offering, December 20**, will help build an evangelistic center in Stockholm, Sweden and a K-12 school for children in Birmingham, England.

**Trans-European
Division thanks
you for your
generous
support.**

Foreword

Total Commitment Now

A first glance at this quarter's area of study may cause us to wonder, what do the books of Haggai, James, and Malachi have in common? They do not all come from the same Testament. They were written at different times to meet different circumstances. But there are underlying themes that bring these different books together to meet our needs for today. They teach us to lay aside selfishness in full and loving commitment to God's will for us. They also demonstrate clearly that in doing so we will enjoy the abundant life.

Such an experience is far removed from righteousness by works. It is built upon a loving, confident relationship with our Lord. If we love the Lord with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength we will want to demonstrate our love in many practical ways that honor and please Him. In turn we will discover that we gain all through giving all. Because of our love and appreciation for our Lord, we place all we have and are at His feet. By holding back nothing, we gain everything.

We begin our study this quarter with an introductory lesson on total commitment. Then we move into two lessons based on the book of Haggai. This book provides a practical demonstration of the fact that it really does pay to cooperate with God. When we do, our total commitment leads to unlimited blessings.

But what is total commitment in a practical sense? For our answer we turn to the primer of practical Christianity—the book of James. The lives of practicing Christians demonstrate that true faith always produces the rich works of love. On the other hand, those who are not committed fully to the Lord tend to rationalize their unchristian behavior and thus become blind to their true condition. Because this was true particularly of the Jewish people in Malachi's day and is a specific characteristic of the Laodicean church (see Rev. 3:17), we will conclude this quarter's study with lessons from the book of Malachi. In the first three chapters we find God's loving warnings meeting with self-righteous denials. Yet, even in the midst of those who pronounce themselves weary of religion, there are a few whose names are recorded in "God's book of remembrance" (Mal. 3:16). The last chapter of Malachi draws a clear contrast between the fate of the righteous and that of the wicked. This last book of the Old Testament concludes with a prophecy of the final great revival and reformation that will usher in the kingdom of God. This constitutes our challenge today. Nothing short of total commitment to God's will and God's purpose in our lives is worthy of this final phase of the drama of the ages.

Meet The Writers

of This Quarter's Lessons



Thomas A. Davis graduated from Canadian Union College with a degree in theology. He pastored in Ontario for seven years before he was called to Washington, D.C., to join the Review and Herald Publishing Association as an editor. In 1960 he joined the Philippine Publishing House for five years, then worked in India at the Oriental Watchman Publishing House. In 1970 the family returned to Washington, D.C., where Elder Davis served as associate editor of the *Adventist Review*, associate book editor, and acting editor of *Life and Health*. He has authored 11 books including *Was Jesus Really Like Us?* and *Of Course You Can Walk on Water* and numerous magazine articles. He and his wife, Margaret, have three children.



Leo R. Van Dolson's career has included pastoral work in the U.S. and Japan, teaching at Pacific Union College and the Loma Linda University School of Health. He holds a Ph.D. in educational administration from Claremont College. Dr. Van Dolson has served in an editorial capacity on four Adventist periodicals: *Ministry*, *Life and Health*, the *Adventist Review*, and the adult Sabbath School lessons. He has authored or co-authored 18 books and has written several adult teachers' aids. He and his wife, Bobbie Jane, have two adult children.



Paul G. Smith is associate secretary of the Department of Church Ministries at the General Conference in Washington, D.C. He received his B.A. from Atlantic Union College and has completed graduate work at Maryland University and Andrews University. He served as a pastor/evangelist for 10 years, then as departmental secretary in the Chesapeake and Ohio conferences before accepting the General Conference call to lead out in stewardship service. He and his wife, Jeanne, have two adult children.

What Are You Doing With Your Life?

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: A biblical overview of stewardship and total commitment.



MEMORY TEXT: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God gave us life to use and manage for Him. Throughout the Bible He instructs us through precept and example how to manage our lives wisely, without selfishness. A direct connection exists between our relationship with God and the way we manage our lives.

OUTLINE:

- I. The challenge of total commitment (Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 4:2; Luke 16:1-12).
- II. Wholistic* stewardship (1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 8:5).
- III. Grace and wholistic stewardship (2 Cor. 8:1-9; Eph. 3:1-21).
- IV. The place of wholistic stewardship in character development (Rom. 8:12-14; Gal. 5:19-23; 2 Cor. 9:6-8; Deut. 16:17).

*This variation of *holistic* is being used to distinguish our usage from some of the current uses of *holistic* that border on the spiritualistic. The term *wholistic* involves the total lifestyle. *Wholistic stewardship* suggests the careful management of all the talents and gifts that God has bestowed on us.

INTRODUCTION: Not only has God provided us with physical capacities to use for Him, but also He has given us such talents as time, energy, mental faculties, influence, means, and affection to manage carefully. When combined, these make life what it is. We are not made up of isolated little parts and pieces. Instead, we are whole persons created in the image of God. We have the potential of using our God-given talents in either good or bad, helpful or harmful ways.

God has given each of us the power of choice to do whatever we choose to do with that which He has entrusted to us. We are not to be just users of life. We are managers or stewards of that which God has given. The power of choice in itself is a gift of God that those who have found salvation by grace must learn to use wisely and unselfishly.

God gave us everything love could provide. What He seeks in return is total commitment to His way and will. Such commitment alone can bring us the more abundant life. We are to give ourselves back to Him because

we love Him. The gift of the power of choice insures that God will not force or coerce us. However, through the indwelling Holy Spirit He is ready to help us manage things in such a way that, even in this world, we can enter fully into the joy of salvation and into the family of God.

There is a direct connection between our spiritual relationship with God and what we are doing with His gifts. Our choices determine the outcome of our lives. We decide whether we can be trusted with eternity. Our faithfulness and persistence in studying and understanding God's guidelines for living, found in His Word, help mold our thinking and set the direction we will follow.

As we give all that we have and are back to God, we will receive the best of this life in return and will be prepared to live with Him for eternity. Not only will those who have accepted Christ's sacrifice be happy but they will take on the characteristics of the One in whose image and likeness they were created. When that happens we become successful stewards or managers of life—true children of God.

This lesson sets the stage for the study of how to get the most out of life by following God's guidelines. It will take a look at the basic biblical principles of stewardship. These principles will then be illustrated and applied in lessons 2 through 13 in a study of the books of Haggai, James, and Malachi.

Above all, we need to recognize that either we will use our gifts wisely or waste them shamefully. Every day in the normal course of events each of us stands at the crossroads. What are we doing with our lives today? What will we do with them tomorrow? They are ours to manage. We are the stewards. That fact presents each of us with an exciting challenge.



I. THE CHALLENGE TO TOTAL COMMITMENT.

What does God tell us should be our "reasonable service"? Rom. 12:1, 2.

We are to give Him everything we have in the way of body, mind, and spirit. This is wholistic giving—wholistic stewardship. Because Jesus Christ came to restore and save the whole person, it is a spiritual necessity that we give Him all that we have and are.

What characteristic constitutes proper management of our lives? 1 Cor. 4:2.

When God gave us life, He did not just give us possessions or money to manage. He provided everything necessary to physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. Beyond that He gave us the intelligence and the guidance needed to manage these assets. It remains for us to manage them faithfully. Stewardship in the fullest sense can be defined as the complete and unreserved giving of ourselves to Jesus Christ. *Everything* is to be committed to Him.

Consider the deeper implications of commitment to Christ. What is involved in "true riches"? Luke 16:1-12.

Our responsibility to God and to our fellow human beings does not depend upon the quantity or quality of our material possessions. Our stewardship is based on the fact that He has given us life. God has a prior claim upon every human being simply because He provides life.

Too often stewardship is equated only with money and material possessions. But this responsibility began long before the existence of money. Stewardship involves the wise and unselfish use of life—managing life according to God’s guidelines for living.

The effectiveness of the plan of salvation for each of us rests upon whether we recognize our dependence on and responsibility to God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of life. The ultimate result of a faithful personal relationship to the Lifegiver is eternal life.



II. WHOLISTIC STEWARDSHIP.

We cannot separate ourselves legitimately from God’s plans for carrying out His work of salvation and restoration on earth. There is a sense in which He needs us. Most certainly we need the privilege of being used by Him.

What basic principle is outlined in 1 Corinthians 10:31?

What is the origin of true liberty? How do our gifts to God reveal our love for Him? 2 Cor. 8:5.

If the church members in Macedonia had withheld their material and financial resources, that would have been proof that they had not previously given themselves fully to God. Their gifts demonstrated that they had given their lives completely “to the Lord” (verse 5).

ILLUMINATION: “Nearly all the Macedonian believers were poor in this world’s goods, but their hearts were overflowing with love for God and His truth, and they gladly gave for the support of the gospel. When general collections were taken up in the Gentile churches for the relief of the Jewish believers, the liberality of the converts in Macedonia was held up as an example to other churches. . . .

“The willingness to sacrifice on the part of the Macedonian believers came as a result of wholehearted consecration. . . . It was not necessary to urge them to give; rather, they rejoiced in the privilege of denying themselves even of necessary things in order to supply the needs of others. When the apostle would have restrained them, they importuned him to accept their offering. In their simplicity and integrity, and in their love for their brethren, they gladly denied self, and thus abounded in the fruit of benevolence.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 343, 344.

NOTES:

TUE

III. GRACE AND WHOLISTIC STEWARDSHIP.

Not only are we to be wholistic stewards of time, talents, possessions, and self, but also stewards of the “mysteries” of God. One reason that the grace of God is poured out so generously on us is that we can in turn share that which we have received with those who have not yet accepted the message of grace.

What significance is attached to the word *grace* in 2 Corinthians 8:1, 6, 9?

Paul uses one of his favorite words here. It may be understood properly as “grace-gift.” All who follow Christ will reveal the fact that God’s grace meets every need in the Christian’s life.

Words cannot describe adequately God’s gracious dealings with people on earth as exemplified in the gift and life of Jesus Christ. His gift is not limited to time, place, or recipient. It needs only to be accepted. In the process of acceptance, it is internalized. That is, the receivers take on the characteristics of the Giver. “Grace” not only describes the gift but it also is an attribute of the Giver.

The Greek word *Charis* occurs about 150 times in the New Testament. In the English Bible it is translated “grace” 130 times. In other instances, it is translated as “liberality,” “benefit,” “gracious,” “delight,” “thanks,” and “joy.” These words describe the nature of the “gifts” of God as well as the spirit in which the gifts are given.

Apparently Paul was thinking of this depth of meaning when he stated, “Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also” (2 Cor. 8:7).

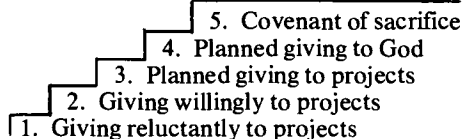
Such giving proves the sincerity of love, whether referring to God’s gift or to ours. (See 2 Cor. 8:8.)

SEARCH AND LEARN: Study Ephesians 3:1-21; then summarize below what this passage teaches us about grace in the giving of God.

What did Paul have in mind in 2 Corinthians 8:3 when he stated that the Macedonians gave “beyond their power” and “were willing of themselves”?

“The Macedonians gave beyond their ability and means. Their tendency was not to give too little, but too much. They gave spontaneously and without being urged or even reminded, as it seemed the Corinthians now needed to be. It was sufficient that the Macedonians know of the need that existed. They requested the privilege of being allowed to share in the ministry to the poor saints at Jerusalem. Their spirit exhibited complete self-dedication and self-sacrifice to the work of the Lord.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 888.

THINK IT THROUGH: Where am I on the following steps of giving?

- 
5. Covenant of sacrifice
 4. Planned giving to God
 3. Planned giving to projects
 2. Giving willingly to projects
 1. Giving reluctantly to projects

WED **IV. THE PLACE OF WHOLISTIC STEWARDSHIP IN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT.**

Ever since the inception of sin it has been part of God's plan for fallen human beings to be restored as members of His family. God calls us sons and daughters. We call Him Father. Jesus is our Elder Brother. The Holy Spirit dwells within us. How could the Godhead demonstrate a greater longing and willingness than this to have us back in the family?

Character development involves the process of developing the characteristics of God's heavenly family. His ways are to become our ways.

ILLUMINATION: "God created man for His own glory, that after test and trial the human family might become one with the heavenly family. It was God's purpose to re-populate heaven with the human family, if they would show themselves obedient to His every word. Adam was to be tested, to see whether he would be obedient, as the loyal angels, or disobedient. If he stood the test, his instruction to his children would have been only of loyalty. His mind and thoughts would have been as the mind and thoughts of God."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1082.

What contrast does Paul draw between slavery to Satan and being sons and daughters of God? Rom. 8:12-17.

Slaves have no part in inheritance. But the children of God receive a part with Christ in His kingdom. Love, not fear or wrath, awaits them.

COMPARE the "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21 with the "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22, 23.

The "works of the flesh" are the natural outworking of the human heart. The "fruit of the Spirit" is the natural fruitage of the Spirit's taking over hearts and lives committed fully to God. Wholistic stewardship consists of surrendering fully to God's will, way, and thoughts.

ILLUMINATION: "Let no one say, I cannot remedy my defects of character. If you come to this decision, you will certainly fail of obtaining everlasting life. The impossibility lies in your own will. If you will not, then you can not overcome. The real difficulty arises from the corruption of an unsanctified heart, and an unwillingness to submit to the control of God." *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 331.



What is the result of commitment to God's will and way? 2 Cor. 9:6-8.

Our giving demonstrates the extent and completeness of our commitment. It is all-inclusive, embracing all areas of our lives. The result of such giving is that grace abounds in and toward the giver. We reap what we sow. This is one of the basic laws of life.

How much of our means and of ourselves does God expect us to give? Deut. 16:17.

Individuals can only give as God enables them to give, whether it be time, talents, money, or knowledge. Sharing the gospel simply is sharing what we are able to share. Our spiritual experience and our relationship with God is what we actually have to share. We use the "gifts" of life in the process of sharing. Doing so not only blesses the recipients but benefits those who give. As we learn to love by sharing our love and faith, our characters are being molded in the image of the great Giver.

Financial gifts are important. These are needed urgently in the cause of God. However, a living experience and a personal relationship with God are our most urgent needs. Adequate funding is not and never has been the basic problem that has hindered the development of God's work through the centuries. The great need has been the development of a truly spiritual experience in the recipients of God's gift of life.

True stewards of life understand by experience the joy of Jesus that is expressed in Hebrews 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Giving brings joy as individuals enter into full, complete, and happy partnership with Jesus Christ.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read John 10:17, 18.

"Christians are stewards of the things they possess. The disposition to give to others is a divinely inspired talent, and thus a special evidence of divine grace. A liberal spirit seeks spontaneously for an outlet in acts of benevolence. It does not need urging."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 887.

SUMMARY: The best thing we can do with our lives is to commit them fully to God to do His will and way. Doing so involves wholistic stewardship—giving body, mind, and soul to God's service and for His glory. This lesson has set forth several basic principles. Specific applications of these principles will be made in the lessons that follow.

APPLICATION:

- What have I discovered about myself in studying this lesson that I need to make the subject of prayer?
- What more can I expect from God than He already has given?
- What more can God rightfully expect from me? What should I do this week in putting to practice what I have learned about sharing?

Introduction to the Book of Haggai

Biddings and Blessings

The short (just 38 verses) but practical book of Haggai is written in the form of dialogue between God and His people. It contains a unique message from God, driving home the lesson that it *does* pay to cooperate with God and to obey His commands. Total commitment leads to unlimited blessings.

Some commentators divide Haggai's book into four messages, but we have chosen to divide it into the five listed below. Most of Haggai's messages are dated, enabling us to fit them into history. We note that these dates are grouped together in the second year of the Persian ruler, Darius Hystaspes (usually called Darius the Great).

The book begins with a message of rebuke. The people to whom Haggai gave this admonition were in essence using a false excuse to justify their course of action, saying that it was "not a good time to build God's house." They had not given up the project, but were waiting for a more convenient season. There never is a good excuse or a good reason for not doing what God asks us to do. If we press forward at His command, He will open the way for us. The book of Haggai illustrates this dramatically. No matter what obstacles or road blocks Satan puts in the way, we will be able successfully to carry out God's biddings if we depend on His enablings.

In the book of Haggai we find the basis of wholistic Christian management of time, talents, and means. Here also we see a dramatic instance of what can happen when God's people decide to take His prophets seriously and consider their ways. How quickly drought and poverty turn into abundance and blessing!

HAGGAI—BIDDINGS AND BLESSINGS

Consider Your Ways (1:1-15)	Fear Ye Not (2:1-9)	Consider From This Day (2:10-19)	Future Glory From Present Obedience (2:20-23)
Message 1 Rebuke (1-12) Aug. 29, 520 B.C.	Message 3 Encouragement Oct. 19, 520 B.C.	Message 4 Consequences Dec. 18, 520 B.C.	Message 5 Reward Dec. 18, 520 B.C.
Message 2 Promise (13-15) Sept. 21, 520 B.C.			

A Bag Full of Holes



MEMORY TEXT: “Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house” (Haggai 1:9).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The remnant of the Jewish people who had returned from Babylon responded willingly and with amazing alacrity to God’s message of rebuke. They seemed to sense the truth of the prophet’s message that both temporal and spiritual prosperity depend upon faithful obedience to God’s commandments.

OVERVIEW—Haggai 1	
First Message—A Rebuke (1:1-12)	Second Message—A Promise (1:13-15)
Introduction (verse 1) False excuse (verse 2) God’s question (verses 3, 4) God’s challenge—“Consider your ways” (verses 5-11) Response—leaders obeyed (verse 12)	God’s message—“I am with you” (verse 13) Response—Began working on temple (verses 14, 15)

INTRODUCTION: If you turn the pages of your Bible too fast, you are likely to miss the little book of Haggai. Too many people seem to have done so. This precious jewel of a book often is overlooked or ignored. But it is of particular significance to God’s remnant church as it brings us a call to revival that will in turn lead to faithfulness to duty.

Haggai indicates that, after a promising start, work on the second temple gradually slowed down. During the reign of the Persian monarch, Cambyses, only slow progress was made in rebuilding the temple. Then the false Smerdis assumed the throne. He was influenced to issue a decree forbidding the Jews to proceed with their rebuilding. While this moratorium was in effect, the Jewish people put their time and emphasis into building their own homes and fortunes, striving for temporal prosperity. Doing so led to frustration because the Lord could not bless them while they neglected the needs of His house. Their negligence led to both literal and spiritual poverty.

At the time that Darius Hystaspes came to the throne, “spiritually as well as temporally, the Israelites were in a pitiable state. So long had they

murmured and doubted; so long had they chosen to make personal interest first, while viewing with apathy the Lord's temple in ruins, that many had lost sight of God's purpose in restoring them to Judea."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 573.

What good is a money bag if it is full of holes? But in Haggai 1:6 God says that the people of Haggai's day put their earned wages "into a bag with holes." The ridiculous thing is that the more you put into a money bag that is full of holes, the more you lose. In a figurative sense, that was what the Jews of old were doing and what many of those who consider themselves God's people today are doing still. Whenever we give priority to personal interests and needs, we likely will lose sight of God's purpose for us.

The prophets ordinarily were not what you might call "popular" people. The aged prophet, Haggai, however, was an exception. Perhaps one of the reasons why the writings of Haggai and most of the other minor prophets are not popular among people today is that they contain strong, penetrating messages that probe into the secrets of our hearts, pointing out our sins and specific needs.

We find an additional record about Haggai and his younger contemporary, Zechariah, in Ezra 5:1. This interesting duo of an old man and a young one were called to serve as prophets before building had resumed on the second temple. They became two of the most successful prophets to minister to Judah. Under the inspiring leadership of these two prophets along with that of the Judean civil ruler, Zerubbabel, and the high priest, Joshua, the Jews completed the rebuilding of the temple.



I. FIRST MESSAGE—A REBUKE (Haggai 1:1-12).

After the historical setting is given in verse 1, verse 2 begins the message of the book by quoting the words of "the Lord of hosts."

1. The People's Weak Excuse.

What misinterpretation of prophecy led the people to claim, as they did in verse 2, that "the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built"? (See Jer. 25:12.)

"The people advanced this false argument for their failure to accomplish the rebuilding of the Temple. They apparently misinterpreted the 70-year prophecy of Jeremiah, saying that the period of captivity had not been fully accomplished. Evidently they claimed to be waiting for the completion of 70 years from the destruction of the Temple in 587/586 B.C. . . . , a period which would end in 518/517, a time somewhat later than that of these messages (520/519 B.C.). . . . The difficulties they encountered, which hindered their rebuilding of the Temple, they declared to be in the nature of a reproof of God for their premature haste. But the very fact that Darius had set aside the prohibition of Smerdis the usurper for the building of the Temple . . . should have given the Jews every incentive to resume work on the house of the Lord."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1076.

Often today we hear the same excuse, "It's not the right time yet. Let's wait awhile." But whenever the Lord commands and opens the way for us to act, that is the time to act. We never again may have such an opportunity.

ILLUSTRATION: Our tendency to make excuses, no matter how lame they may be, was illustrated in the *Automotive Retailer* magazine. It told about the gentleman who explained the automobile accident that resulted from his obvious negligence by stating on his report: "I knocked over a man. He admitted it was his fault as he had been run over before." How silly some of our excuses must seem to God!

What was the significance of God's use of the words "this people" in verse 2?

"In the hour of their opportunity, the Israelites had not shown themselves willing. Prompt obedience is expected of those whom the Lord chooses and leads. Pleas for delay are a dishonor to God. And yet those who choose to follow their own way, often frame ingenious excuses in self-justification. Thus the Israelites declared that they had begun to rebuild, but that they were broken off in their work because of the hindrances devised by their enemies. These hindrances, they reasoned, were an indication that it was not the proper time to rebuild. They declared that the Lord had interposed difficulties to reprove their hot haste. This is why, in a communication through His prophet, He referred to them not as 'my people,' but as 'this people.'"—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1175.



2. God's Question.

How did God react to the people's excuse? Verses 3, 4.

God's attitude comes through in no uncertain terms. There was no good reason for the Israelites to give up their work on the temple. In fact, the more difficult the circumstances, the more they should have persevered and turned to the Lord who had led them back to Jerusalem. It was His work, and they should have trusted Him to provide whatever they needed.

APPLICATION TO TODAY: "This history will be repeated. There will be religious failures because men do not have faith. When they look at the things that are seen, impossibilities appear; but God can lead them step by step in the course He desires them to take. His work will advance only as His servants move forward by faith. While they may be called upon to pass through trying times, yet they should ever remember that they are contending with a weakened, beaten foe. God's people will finally triumph over every power of darkness."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1175.

What twice-given challenge did God use to get the people to reconsider their objections? How would we apply these words to our situation today? Verses 5, 7.

The first “consider your ways” challenge is developed in verses 5 and 6. It points out that even if their (and our) interest is materialistic, the way to achieve the greatest material blessing is to follow God’s will. The desire for materialistic blessing should not be our motivation, but our true self-interest involves doing what God knows is best.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Complete the following to help clarify the contrast between what the people were doing and expecting and what the results actually were:

YOU	BUT
Sow much	Bring in _____
Eat	Have not _____
Drink	Are not _____
Clothe yourselves	There is none _____
Earn wage	Put it into a _____

THINK IT THROUGH: Does it seem to you that there are more holes in your money bag lately? Could it be that way because you give priority to selfish interests?

What is the relative value of spiritual and material things? What instruction did Christ give as to proper priority? Matt. 6:24-34; 19:21, 22.

The second “consider your ways” challenge, designed to arouse the people from their apathy, is developed in verses 7 through 11. This time God leaves no doubt about their part in cooperating with Him. They are to go up into the hills and bring in the lumber needed to complete the building of His house. If they do their part, there will be no question about God’s doing His part. He will take pleasure in even their most humble efforts and will assume responsibility for seeing that the results will be much more glorious than could be expected.

NOTES:

SEARCH AND LEARN: For the second time God draws a contrast between the Jews' expectations and the actual results that will continue to follow as long as their apathetic attitude lasts. Study the first part of verse 9; then complete the following:

YOU	BUT
Looked for _____	It came to _____
Brought it home	I did _____



Why did such results happen, and what were the consequences in the heavens and upon the land? Verses 9-11.

These verses outline a universal principle. As we give and share, we gain and receive blessings for ourselves. But the opposite is true, too. Selfishness and greed naturally result in both material and spiritual loss.

In *The Desire of Ages*, pages 20 and 21, Ellen White calls this great principle "the law of life for earth and heaven." It is one of the great laws of life that cannot fail. "There is nothing, save the selfish heart of man, that lives unto itself. No bird that cleaves the air, no animal that moves upon the ground, but ministers to some other life. There is no leaf of the forest, or lowly blade of grass, but has its ministry. . . . The flowers breathe fragrance and unfold their beauty in blessing to the world. . . . The ocean, itself the source of all our springs and fountains, receives the streams from every land, but takes to give. The mists ascending from its bosom fall in showers to water the earth, that it may bring forth and bud.

"But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. . . . All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father's life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all."

In the same reference, Ellen White refers to this law of life as the great "circuit of beneficence." "Thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life."

This great law of beneficence controls and guides life in the universe. Above all it involves God upon His throne. As we give to God, He in turn is able to give more in response.

What individuals and group of people responded to God's appeal through Haggai, and what exemplary response did they make? Verse 12.

The term *remnant* refers to the small group of Jews who had returned from the exile in Babylon.

In the light of the Jews' failure to respond to most of God's previous

messages, their quick response to the message of Haggai is surprising. Both leaders and people heeded the message eagerly and promptly. Haggai can be recognized as one of the most successful of the prophets.

The people's spirit of hearty cooperation "led, within a remarkably short time, to the completion of the Lord's house. The same spirit will, in our day, lead to the completion of the spiritual house of God and to the establishment of His eternal kingdom (1 Peter 2:5; cf. Matt. 24:14)." — *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1074.



II. SECOND MESSAGE—A PROMISE (Haggai 1:13-15).

As soon as the people made the decision to obey, what comforting message did the Lord send them? Verse 13.

After Haggai's second message the people seemed to recognize that the Lord was in earnest with them. The repeated warning had been given that their prosperity and the blessing of God were dependent upon their entire obedience to the instructions given through the prophet. As soon as they decided to follow God's instruction, the Lord's messages of reproof changed to words of encouragement.

ILLUMINATION: "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth. He assured the people that if they were obedient, they would place themselves in a position where He could bless them for His own name's glory. If God's people will only rely upon Him, and believe in Him, He will bless them." —Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1176.

What can we learn from the dramatic change in attitude and actions that took place when the Lord stirred the hearts of the leaders and the people? Verses 14, 15.

According to verse 14, the inspiration received from the ministry of the prophetic team, the old man Haggai and the young man Zechariah, produced an enthusiastic response in the hearts of the leaders and the people. They immediately set about their preparations. Less than a month later, on approximately September 21, 520 B.C. (according to the *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1077) the actual work on the temple began once again. Here is an illustration that a great change can take place in a short period of time in the Lord's work today if we will pay attention to the message of reproof addressed to the Laodicean church.

NOTES:



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read Ezra 5 and 6 and *Prophets and Kings*, pages 567-574 for additional background on the work of Haggai and Zechariah.

"The Israelites had no real excuse for leaving their work on the temple. The time when the most serious objections were raised, was the time for them to persevere in building. But they were actuated by a selfish dislike to encounter danger and arousing the opposition of their enemies. . . . They hesitated to move forward by faith in the opening providences of God, because they could not see the end from the beginning. When difficulties arose, they were easily turned from the work.

"This history will be repeated. There will be religious failures because men do not have faith. When they look at the things that are seen, impossibilities appear: but God can lead them step by step in the course He desires them to take. His work will advance only as His servants move forward by faith. While they may be called upon to pass through trying times, yet they should ever remember that they are contending with a weakened, beaten foe. God's people will finally triumph over every power of darkness."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1175.

"There are many who urge that they cannot do more for God's cause than they now do; but they do not give according to their ability. The Lord sometimes opens the eyes blinded by selfishness by simply reducing their income to the amount they are willing to give. Horses are found dead in the field or stable, houses or barns are destroyed by fire, or crops fail. In many cases God tests man with blessings, and if unfaithfulness is manifested in rendering to Him tithes and offerings, His blessing is withdrawn. 'He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly.' By the mercies of Christ and the riches of His goodness, and for the honor of truth and religion, we beseech you who are followers of Christ to dedicate yourselves and your property anew to God."—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 484.

"When the heart is cleansed from sin, Christ is placed on the throne that self-indulgence and love of earthly treasure once occupied. The image of Christ is seen in the expression of the countenance. The work of sanctification is carried forward in the soul. Self-righteousness is banished. There is seen the putting on of the new man, which after Christ is created in righteousness and true holiness."—*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 28.

SUMMARY: Haggai and Zechariah were given a most difficult task. They were called to stir up apathetic wills and to open up eyes blinded by selfishness and dulled by resignation. God used them in a remarkable way to accomplish this seemingly impossible task and to arouse the "remnant" people to finish the work they had been neglecting.

APPLICATION: Apply the following to your personal circumstances:

- "True prosperity is dependent on the continuance of our covenant relationship with God."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 570.
- "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36, 37). What do we gain by serving self?

"I Am With You"

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Haggai 2.



MEMORY TEXT: "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: When God's Spirit is with us, we do not need to be afraid of or worry about anything. God never fails those who put their trust in Him and who match their faith with their actions.

OVERVIEW—HAGGAI 2

Third Message— Encouragement (1-9)	Fourth Message— Consequences (10-19)	Fifth Message— Reward (20-23)
Those grieving over contrast with former temple comforted (verses 1-5) The glory of the second temple to be greater than that of the first (verses 6-9)	Nature of acceptable service illustrated (verses 10-14) Promise of an abundant harvest as a result of obedience (verses 15-19)	Promise of overthrow of opposing nations (verses 20-22) Personal promise to Zerubbabel (verse 23)

INTRODUCTION: God's assurance, "I am with you," formed the main focus of His second message. (See Haggai 1:13.) God repeats this assurance in the third message (Haggai 2:4). The frustrating conditions that resulted from the people's apathy and disobedience (Haggai 1:6, 9) did not indicate a withdrawal of God's presence. Instead He used these bitter consequences to bring them to consider their ways. God's presence never can be casual or indifferent. Because of His interest in our ultimate well-being He often allows hardships to come to help us become aware of our apathy or indifference to Him. God's miracle-working power stands ready for our use whenever we are ready to allow Him to use us properly. But we cannot expect God's blessing upon inactivity or disobedience.

In Haggai 2:19 God promises, "From this day will I bless you." However, there are three conditions to our reception of His blessings that are implied in the book of Haggai. First, we must recognize our need through conscious consideration of our "ways" (1:5, 7). Second, we need to turn from disobedience to obedience (1:9-11). Third, there must be consecrated activity—faith must be evidenced in action (1:8). Only then can we expect the might and power of the Holy Spirit to bring us the same kind of abundant blessing that the people received who heeded the messages of Haggai and Zechariah.

Haggai's brief book lacks the grandeur, the literary beauty, and the fire of such prophetic messages as Hosea, Habakkuk, and Joel. But he leaves no doubt in the minds of his hearers that he is speaking for the Lord. And it is to the Lord that they responded. The secret of successful preaching is the hearer's clear recognition that "thus speaketh the Lord" (Haggai 1:2). Apparently the people realized the weakness of their excuses and felt guilty about their negligence in doing the work the Lord had sent them back to Jerusalem to do. But most of all they caught a vision of what could be done and moved forward energetically to complete the construction of the temple.



I. THIRD MESSAGE—ENCOURAGEMENT (Haggai 2:1-9).

The remnant who returned from Babylonian exile did not have the resources, or even the accomplished artisans, that Solomon did when he built the first temple. A few among the returned exiles had seen the former temple and, of course, the rest had heard much about it. Haggai probably was included among those who actually had seen the temple. As those who had seen the former temple compared the structure that was being built after their return with their memories of the former magnificent temple, they naturally would have been disappointed, and were.

ILLUMINATION: "It was only 50 years since the Temple of Solomon had been destroyed (586 B.C.) and 70 since the first captivity, and there were "many" [Ezra 3:12] older men in the congregation who had seen it in their youth, or childhood, and vividly remembered its grandeur and glory. They could not help crying when they thought of the modest plans for rebuilding the Temple."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 341.

Study God's message of encouragement in verses 3 through 9; then summarize this message in your own words.

NOTE that for emphasis the words "be strong" are used three times and applied to the same three categories of persons as were addressed in the second message:

1. Zerubbabel, the governor.
2. Joshua, the high priest.
3. The people of the land.

What would be the basis of their renewed strength? Verses 4, 5.



In what way would the prediction in verse 9, that the second temple would be more glorious than the first, become a fact? (See Verse 7.)

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

Concerning the "glory" of the second temple, the book *The Great Controversy*, gives us this insight: "There was no manifestation of supernatural power to mark its dedication. No cloud of glory was seen to fill the newly erected sanctuary. No fire from heaven descended to consume the sacrifice upon its altar. The Shekinah no longer abode between the cherubim in the most holy place; the ark, the mercy seat, and the tables of the testimony were not to be found therein. . . .

"For centuries the Jews had vainly endeavored to show wherein the promise of God given by Haggai had been fulfilled; yet pride and unbelief blinded their minds to the true meaning of the prophet's words. The second temple was not honored with the cloud of Jehovah's glory, but with the living presence of One in whom dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily—who was God Himself manifest in the flesh. The 'Desire of all nations' had indeed come to His temple when the Man of Nazareth taught and healed in the sacred courts. In the presence of Christ, and in this only, did the second temple exceed the first in glory."—Page 24.

What lesson applicable to us today is implied in verse 8?

It is God who gives human beings the power to gain wealth and to build and beautifully furnish buildings. In all that we do and all that we have, we need to recognize this fact. As an acknowledgment that God is the giver of all good gifts and that everything ultimately comes from His hands, He asks us to return to Him a small portion of that which He has entrusted to us. In doing so, we demonstrate that we can handle greater blessings.

"God does not ask men to give Him offerings because He needs money, but in order that they may receive a blessing from giving and develop a character like His. . . . 'Continual giving starves covetousness to death' (3T 548)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1079.



II. FOURTH MESSAGE—CONSEQUENCES (Haggai 2:10-19).

1. The Nature of Acceptable Service Illustrated (verses 10-14).

In this fourth message God first of all points to a lesson taught by the ritual law.

What illustration from the Levitical code shows that human conformity to mere ritual forms cannot impart holiness? Haggai 2:11, 12. (Compare Lev. 6:25-27; Num. 19:11.)

MULTIPLE CHOICE: (Circle what you consider to be the correct answer.)

1. The flesh of the sin offerings (was / was not) considered holy. The garment in which the priest carried that “holy flesh” (was / was not) considered holy. When something profane touched that holy garment, the profane item (did / did not) become holy.

2. When an item came in contact with that which was unclean (such as a dead body), it (became / did not become) unclean.

These ritual laws demonstrate the kind of service that is acceptable in God’s sight. What was true in the ancient ritual service can be seen to be true in our service for God today. Merely coming into contact with the symbols of worship does not make God’s people holy and pure. The fact that Israel had the temple did not make the Israelites holy. They and we can be made holy and clean only through the work of Christ in the heart.

“But the opposite is true. The holy can be defiled by the unclean. When God says, ‘Come out from among them, and be ye separate, . . . and touch not the unclean thing’ (2 Corinthians 6:17, KJV), He is not just being arbitrary or strict. He urges us to do so because of the law we are considering right now. We can be so easily defiled by the unclean thing. In this age, when we are surrounded by pornography and impurity of all kinds, we dare not come in contact with the unclean thing.”—Leo and Bobbie Jane Van Dolson, *Boost Your Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1983), pp. 111, 112.

What do you think God had in mind when, through the prophets’ words recorded in Haggai 2:13, 14, He reminded the people of their former disobedience in not building the temple? (Compare with Eze. 14:20.)

ILLUMINATION: “In order that the builders of the second temple might make no mistakes, the Lord plainly instructed them in the form of a parable, regarding the nature of service acceptable in His sight. . . . [Haggai 2:10-13 quoted.]

“A soul corrupted by sin is represented by the figure of a dead body in a state of putrefaction. All the washings and sprinklings enjoined in the ceremonial law were lessons in parables, teaching the necessity of a work of regeneration in the inward heart for the purification of the soul dead in trespasses and sins, and also the necessity of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit [Haggai 2:14 quoted].”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1176.



2. The Promise of an Abundant Harvest That Will Result From Obedience (verses 15-19).

In chapter 1 God twice challenged the Jews, “Consider your ways.” In verses 15 and 18 of chapter 2 God once again calls for careful consideration of how things stand. Now, however, there is a difference. Having heeded God’s previous challenge and reconsidered their ways, their expectations were to be more than fulfilled.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Complete the following diagram that helps clarify the contrast between the two "consider from this day" sections of the fourth message:

"Consider From This Day" (verses 15-17)		"Consider Now From This Day" (verses 18, 19)	
Before a stone was laid in the building of the temple	Expected grain harvest cut in _____ Expected oil yield cut by _____ Instruments used— blasting, _____, and _____	Now that the foundation has been laid and building is under way	Even though the harvest has not yet been gathered, you can be sure that I _____ you.

Because the Jews already had reconsidered their ways and started following God's will, they could be just as sure of a good harvest as if it had already come. This holds true today. We may only see the early sprouts of the promised harvest, but the great, abundant, final harvest soon to come is just as sure as are the promises of God.



III. FIFTH MESSAGE—REWARD (Haggai 2:20-23).

This message apparently came to Haggai on the same day that he received the fourth message. It focuses on rewards. Zerubbabel, the leader who had guided the returned exiles through troublous times since their return from Babylon, was given a comforting message. There still would be much opposition on the part of surrounding nations—particularly the Samaritans. But, if the people continued to follow God's leading as faithfully as they were at the time this fifth message was given, God would bless and protect them in a marked manner.

There are Messianic implications in these verses that go well beyond the scope of a personal promise to Zerubbabel. God's plans for His people look forward to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. The ultimate fulfillment of Haggai's prophecy found here and in Haggai 2:6, 7 will take place when the voice of God shakes the heavens and the earth. (See Heb. 12:26; Rev. 16:17, 18; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 636, 637.)

What promise made to Zerubbabel can be applied to our own experience? Haggai 2:23.

"This personal word to Zerubbabel has been left on record for the encouragement of God's children in every age. God has a purpose in sending trial to His children. He never leads them otherwise than they would

choose to be led if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose that they are fulfilling. All that He brings upon them in test and trial comes that they may be strong to do and to suffer for Him.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 578.

What is the signet or seal of God’s pleasure and blessing? Verse 23.

“Signet” refers to the seal or sealing ring that was engraved and used for imprinting a seal on official documents. (See 1 Kings 21:8.) Often it was attached to a cord worn around the neck. Because it bore the owner’s or official’s personal mark, it was regarded as an object of great importance. Notice that it was not the temple that was to be the sign or seal. It was the obedient servant of God that was to be the signet. God is revealed through happy, obedient people whom He blesses abundantly and uses to testify to the glory of His character and His love.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read Zechariah 4 and *Prophets and Kings*, pages 577-581; 593-597.

“Christians are Christ’s jewels. They are to shine brightly for Him, shedding forth the light of His loveliness. Their luster depends on the polishing they receive. They may choose to be polished or to remain unpolished. But every one who is pronounced worthy of a place in the Lord’s temple must submit to the polishing process. . . .

“The divine Worker spends little time on worthless material. Only the precious jewels does He polish after the similitude of a palace, cutting away all the rough edges. This process is severe and trying; it hurts human pride. Christ cuts deep into the experience that man in his self-sufficiency has regarded as complete, and takes away self-uplifting from the character. He cuts away the surplus surface, and putting the stone to the polishing wheel, presses it close, that all roughness may be worn away. Then, holding the jewel up to the light, the Master sees in it a reflection of Himself, and He pronounces it worthy of a place in His casket.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1177.

SUMMARY: In the small but important book of Haggai we find the basis of Christian stewardship and total commitment. We find the principle that governs it—the law of life for the universe. And as we come down to these last verses, we find God’s people becoming His signet ring—His seal. The seal of God is not something that He merely places externally upon His people. God’s seal is impressed in the character of His people where the entire universe will see it. Those reflecting the character of Christ become God’s answer to Satan’s charge that, since the Fall, human beings cannot keep God’s law.

APPLICATION:

- What have you learned about the principle of stewardship and total commitment to God? How do you intend to apply what you have learned during the week to come?
- What promises have you found in this lesson that give you strength for today and hope for tomorrow? This coming week plan to share these with someone who seems to need them.

Introduction to the Book of James

Faith at Work

Our total commitment to and love for Christ leads us to seek His will in all things—holding back nothing as we follow His leading in everyday, practical matters. One New Testament book stands out as the primer of practical Christianity—the book of James.

This candid book contains a special revelation for those who would divide faith from works. James points out that there are two kinds of Christians—professing Christians and practicing Christians. The difference is vital. Not only do practicing Christians profess to follow Christ but they also demonstrate their profession by daily practicing the principles that Christ taught. In that way, the lives of practicing Christians become laboratories in which it is demonstrated that true faith always produces rich works of love.

It is probable that the James who wrote this epistle was the stepbrother of Jesus. (See Gal. 1:19.) James served as the leader of the church at Jerusalem. (See Gal. 2:9.) In practical, down-to-earth terms, he spells out in his letter the results of living faith, illustrating them in striking and interesting ways. James evidently was influenced greatly by Christ's Sermon on the Mount, building on its teachings many times throughout his epistle. Not much is known about when or to whom he wrote. The consensus of New Testament scholars is that his letter was written in the early period of the development of the Christian church.

JAMES—FAITH AT WORK		
Commitment Tested (1:1-27)	Commitment Demonstrated (2:1 - 5:6)	Commitment Rewarded (5:7-20)
By the trying of our faith (1-15) By our active response to the word of truth (16-25) By measuring up to the hallmarks of Christianity (26, 27)	<i>In the way we—</i> treat the poor and bereaved (2:1-13) put faith to work (2:14-26) use our tongues (3:1-18) overcome selfishness (4:1-7) acquire and use material blessings (5:1-6)	In patience (7-12) In answered prayer (13-20)

Our Christian Commitment Tested

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: James 1:1-15.



MEMORY TEXT: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The many difficulties and temptations that Christians encounter are used by God as a means of perfecting characters for eternity. These trials also serve as a test of our Christian commitment.

OVERVIEW: James 1:1-15			
Verse 1	Verses 1-8, 12	Verses 9-11	Verses 13-15
Salutation	Steadfastness and wisdom needed in trials	The power of a common faith to bring rich and poor to the same level	God does not entice us into sin; our own desires do

INTRODUCTION: The identity of the author of this epistle is uncertain, although the weight of evidence points to James, the brother of Jesus, rather than to any other man by the name of James referred to in the New Testament.

The major focus of James' epistle is not on doctrine but on the Christian way of life. James emphasizes how Christians should live and act. He portrays God as deserving service on a more practical level than merely that of formal worship. God is interested in clean hands as well as a pure heart.

In the main, James writes for the converted rather than for the unconverted. His main thrust is not how to get rid of guilt and receive forgiveness for sin, but rather how the committed Christian should perform *after* conversion. Of course he is aware that, not infrequently, his readers fall short of the ideal.

In this setting we may note that this epistle, perhaps more than any other letter in the New Testament, reflects the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. Christ's teachings on the mount can be practiced fully only by peo-

ple in whom the Spirit of God dwells. So the “oughts” that James writes about can be carried out only by the empowering of the indwelling Spirit. This idea is encompassed in the writer’s reference to “the implanted word which is able to save your souls” (1:21, RSV) and in the statement that “he chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created” (1:18, NIV).

James starts his epistle positively by encouraging his readers to regard “temptations” (KJV) or “trials” (RSV), as beneficial. This trial theme continues as a binding thread throughout the epistle. Probably he uses this approach because his readers were undergoing trials and persecutions at the time. He wanted them to understand that God could help them develop characters for eternity better during times of trial than during periods of tranquility.

This week we shall look at why this is so, and how we are to relate to and be equipped for tests, trials, and temptation.



I. SALUTATION (James 1:1).

What does the term signify that James uses to describe himself? James 1:1.

The Greek word translated “servant” in the KJV, by which James characterized himself, is frequently used in the New Testament to refer to followers of Christ. (See Acts 16:17; 1 Cor. 7:21; 2 Tim. 2:24.) Other Bible writers applied the same term to themselves. (See Rom. 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1.) The translation “servant” does not adequately convey the sense of the Greek word. It more precisely meant “slave.” When this last term is used of disciples of Christ, it signifies total, loving commitment to their Master.

Who were the “twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” to whom James addressed his letter?

Some Bible scholars hold that James is addressing Jewish Christians. Others believe that he is using the term figuratively, as meaning all Christians. Whoever his intended audience may have been, his letter has a message for all followers of Jesus. It deserves to occupy a place of honor in the hearts of Christ’s followers today.

II. TRIALS (James 1:2-8, 12).

In the practical sense, is it reasonable or unreasonable for James to exhort his readers to consider it “pure joy” (James 1:2, NIV) when they encounter trials and temptations? Why?

Study carefully these points regarding James’ exhortations in verse 2:

1. Earthly joy generally springs from pleasant circumstances. Christian joy will be experienced regardless of circumstances. It grows from the conviction that whatever happens is meant by God for our ultimate good.

2. James refers to “fall[ing] into” (KJV), or “meeting” (RSV), trials. He does not suggest that the people experiencing the trials walked into them. The situations will not be of their own making.

3. Neither does he suggest that trials and difficulties themselves are joyful, but that the results will be something in which to rejoice. Or we might put it this way: the flesh will not enjoy the trials, but the spirit will rejoice.

When James exhorts his readers to “count,” or consider, trials as joyful, he does not mean to suggest that it is easier to put up with a bad situation if we regard it as a blessing, although it really is not. What he is saying is that, because of the end result, it is a joyful situation, so we should view it as such.

“All the way up the steep road leading to eternal life are well-springs of joy to refresh the weary. Those who walk in wisdom’s ways are, even in tribulation, exceeding joyful; for He whom their soul loveth, walks, invisible, beside them. At each upward step they discern more distinctly the touch of His hand; at every step brighter gleamings of glory from the Unseen fall upon their path; and their songs of praise, reaching ever a higher note, ascend to join the songs of angels before the throne.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 140.



What reasons does James give for the necessity of testing our faith? James 1:3.

God allows trials to come to the Christian for a purpose. They are necessary. Faith, like gold, needs to be placed in the crucible and purified of dross. Looking at it another way, the same thing that is true of muscle development is true of faith development. To become stronger, faith needs to be exerted against trials and difficulties. This was illustrated in our study of Haggai. The trials that came to the Jews at the time of the rebuilding of the Temple were designed to develop their faith. What happened when they responded in faith demonstrates that through testing, genuine faith develops staying power, an elastic spirit which bears up against trials until it conquers.

Because James probably was writing to Christians who were suffering persecution, their faith was being tested. Most of us are not experiencing such conditions now. But, in some respects, easy times may bring greater tests of our faith than difficult times bring. Easy times encourage the natural tendency to depend on self, or on material things, rather than on God. This in turn requires that we remind ourselves continually of our actual helplessness under these circumstances to develop a steadfast faith in God. Because easy times appear to make few demands, faith tends to become flabby. But in the same way that it takes constant exercise to keep in shape for greater future demands upon our strength, it takes constant exercise of faith in small matters of life, matters we may think we can handle ourselves, to be prepared for the greater trials to come.

What must we do in order for patience, or steadfastness, to contribute toward making us “mature and complete, not lacking anything”? James 1:4, (NIV).

Faith has a goal, which is full Christian growth, or maturity. "We are in the school of Christ in this life, where we are to learn to be meek and lowly of heart; and in the day of final accounts we shall see that all the obstacles we meet, all the hardships and annoyances that we are called to bear, are practical lessons in the application of principles of Christian life. If well endured, they develop the Christlike in the character and distinguish the Christian from the worldling."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 344.

Why does James 1:5 suddenly bring wisdom into the picture when James has been focusing on trials and temptations?

James is writing of "the wisdom that is from above" (James 3:17), which is not involved with the wisdom of men, but is a gift, a revelation. In context, it is an understanding of what is required to develop the fruits of spiritual growth and completeness that God requires in the Christian. He is talking about a spiritual insight that will guard the Christian from falling back into the ways of the unregenerate.

THINK IT THROUGH: What are some of the reasons why the doubter will not "receive any thing of the Lord" (James 1:7)?



III. EXALTATION AND HUMILIATION (James 1:9-11).

THINK IT THROUGH: In James 1:9 the writer does not explain how the "brother of low degree" is exalted. What reason or reasons would you give?

Judging by the amount of space given in verses 9-11, on which group does James concentrate his attention—the rich or the poor? What would you suggest his reason might be for doing this?

The apostle is not discussing here the exaltation that comes with worldly wealth or the humiliation that may accompany the lack of it. Rather, he discusses the attitude that the Christian in either category should take because he is in Christ. The poor individual, James implies, is rich in Jesus, and therefore should rejoice in that high spiritual status. Conversely, the affluent Christian, who may have been proud of his wealth, should be glad that his possessions no longer take pride of place in his heart, but that in Christ such things no longer are relevant. He realizes that he himself, as well as his wealth, is transient, and that his experience in Christ is alone important and enduring.

The Bible, of course, does not condemn wealth. But, in referring to the rich when writing to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:17), Paul cautions against two perils: arrogance (it is difficult for the rich to be "poor in spirit," Matt. 5:3), and dependence on wealth. This danger is illustrated by a note handed to George Whitefield as he was about to begin a sermon in London. It read: "The prayers of the congregation are desired for a young man who has become heir to an immense fortune and who feels much need of grace to keep him humble in the midst of his riches."



IV. TEMPTATION (James 1:13-15).

SEARCH AND LEARN: Compare James 1:13 with Hebrews 11:17 and Genesis 22:1. How do you harmonize the last two texts with what James says?

James cannot be denying that God tests individuals. The Bible clearly teaches that He does. (See 2 Chron. 32:31; Jer. 9:7; Zech. 13:9.) The point the apostle is making is that God does not tempt *so as to entice to sin*. God *tests* us in an attempt to bring out the best; Satan *tempts* us in an effort to bring out the worst.

“James shows that it is inconceivable that God would tempt men to sin. He cannot be tempted with the desire to tempt men to do evil. Though God grants to every man the power of free choice, He must not be charged with the evil deeds this freedom makes it possible for man to commit. James categorically absolves God from being the source of any man’s enticements to sin.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 510.

James identifies “lust” (“evil desire,” NIV), as the point of contact by which temptation makes such strong appeal to us (James 1:14). What is it that enables the contact with sin to take place?

“Satan finds in human hearts some point where he can gain a foothold; some sinful desire is cherished, by means of which his temptations assert their power.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 623.

In his discussion on temptation (verses 13-15) James shows that sin primarily is internal rather than external. We are inclined to blame the devil or someone else when we fail. James does not even mention the devil in this discussion. That does not mean that the apostle denies the part that Satan plays in sinning. Instead, it indicates his concern to make it plain that sin is, first of all, our own responsibility. We alone make the choice to sin.

“It is not safe for us to linger to contemplate the advantages to be reaped through yielding to Satan’s suggestions. Sin means dishonor and disaster to every soul that indulges in it; but it is blinding and deceiving in its nature, and it will entice us with flattering presentations. If we venture on Satan’s ground we have no assurance of protection from his power. So far as in us lies, we should close every avenue by which the tempter may find access to us.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 118.

What in the life of Jesus shows that temptation is not sin? Heb. 4:15.

Some people become discouraged because they are beset vigorously by temptation. No one can be tempted as severely as Jesus was, yet He knew no sin. No matter how compelling or pervasive temptation may seem to be, it is not sin. It is when we yield to temptation that we sin.

“No man can be forced to transgress. His own consent must be first gained; the soul must purpose the sinful act before passion can dominate over reason or iniquity triumph over conscience. Temptation, however strong, is never an excuse for sin.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 177.



What is it about the “sinful nature” (Gal. 5:17, NIV, or “flesh,” KJV) that must be constantly repudiated?

“The flesh of itself cannot act contrary to the will of God. We are commanded to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts. How shall we do it? Shall we inflict pain on the body? No; but put to death the temptation to sin. The corrupt thought is to be expelled. Every thought is to be brought into captivity to Jesus Christ. All animal propensities are to be subjected to the higher powers of the soul. The love of Christ must reign supreme; Christ must occupy an undivided throne.”—*The Adventist Home*, pp. 127, 128.

The power of Christ is given to all who truly know Him, so that they may have all that is necessary for life and holy living. (See 2 Peter 1:4.)

SEARCH AND LEARN: In James 1:15 four steps are implied in the development of sin that parallel events in the human experience. List them:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

NOTE that sin is the result of the union of the will with lust (“evil desire,” TEV). Not until this union takes place is sin born.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read *The Great Controversy*, page 623; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pages 116-119; *The Ministry of Healing*, pages 174-176; *Testimonies*, volume 8, pages 123-132.

Meditate on the following:

“An impure thought tolerated, an unholy desire cherished, and the soul is contaminated, its integrity compromised. . . . If we would not commit sin, we must shun its very beginnings. Every emotion and desire must be held in subjection to reason and conscience. Every unholy thought must be instantly repelled. . . . Satan is watching to ensnare your feet. You must have help from above if you would escape his devices.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 177.

SUMMARY: Spiritual and moral muscle are both tested and strengthened by trials and temptations, and God gives the wisdom to deal with them. But as human beings we are peculiarly susceptible to temptation, so we must be constantly alert and constantly resist its blandishments.

APPLICATION:

- As I honestly examine my own attitude toward the tests and trials that come to me, how do I find that I meet them?
- Have I trained myself to repudiate an evil temptation as soon as I recognize it, or do I allow myself to toy with it sometimes?

How Real Is Your Christianity?

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: James 1:16-27.



MEMORY TEXT: "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: A professed Christian's true religion is witnessed to by his words, his reactions to life situations, and by the way he responds to the needs of others.

OVERVIEW: James 1:16-27.

- I. All good gifts come from God (1:16-18).
 1. To think otherwise is to be deceived.
 2. God, unchanging, always does good.
 3. God gives believers new life.
- II. The importance of Christian self-control (1:19-21).
 1. In hearing, speaking, doing.
 2. Wrong reactions misrepresent God.
 3. Put away sin and receive the implanted word.
- III. The importance of doing (1:22-25).
 1. Hearing without doing is self-deceptive.
 2. The doer is blessed.
- IV. Tests of religious experience (1:26, 27).
 1. The tongue reveals the depth of religion.
 2. Some hallmarks of Christianity.

INTRODUCTION: Following an assurance that every good gift comes from God, James moves into the laboratory of day-to-day living. There he focuses his readers' attention on their problems, urging them to take the Christian approach in solving them. The problems he mentions are those of human nature, the kind that many Christians must face up to and solve in their own lives. In this lesson we shall look at the problems James touches upon as they relate to our own experience.

The relationship of this week's passage to the overall theme of the epistle of James is obvious. Last week we learned that the thrust of the epistle is the way the Christian should live. This week's study brings to our attention key and highly-visible areas that need to be guarded continually—hearing, speaking, reacting. In order to cooperate with God in obtaining victory over sin and to witness to the character of the Lord we profess to follow, we must be on guard against a wrong spirit.



I. ALL GOOD GIFTS COME FROM GOD (James 1:16-18).

Against what misapprehension does James warn the Christians to whom he is writing? James 1:16.

The words, "Do not be deceived [in this matter of temptation], my beloved brethren" (James 1:16, RSV), provide a bridge from the thought expressed in verses 14 and 15 to verse 17. Although temptations to sin arise from within, such temptations do not come from God.

What characterizes God's gifts? James 1:17.

This text does *not* indicate that everything that happens to the Christian is pleasant. James already has dealt with that matter. What he is saying is that every gift that comes from God—and God gives innumerable gifts—is good and faultless, no matter what the channel may be.

Just as medicine given by a physician may taste bitter, but nevertheless heals, some good things God sends may not seem pleasant initially. God's gifts always are good for us and are adapted perfectly to our individual needs.

In view of the first part of James 1:17, which tells us that God's gifts are always good, what reassurance can be found in the last part of the verse?

Nothing within the range of human knowledge can illustrate adequately the unchangableness of the nature, character, and attributes of God. Even the stars, which appear so unchanging, do change. But God Himself never varies. His very nature prohibits His giving anything but good gifts, and assures us that His generosity never will dry up.

What does James say is the instrumentality by which we are "brought forth" spiritually? James 1:18.

The apostle seems to be thinking back to verse 15, drawing a contrast between two offspring—sin's offspring and God's offspring. The natural offspring brought forth as a result of allowing ourselves to be seduced by sin is a person subject to the second death. God's offspring, a regenerated person, is brought forth by accepting the "word of truth"—God's Word, applied by the Holy Spirit. (See 1 Peter 1:23-25; Col. 1:5.)

The phrase "of his own will he brought us forth" (RSV) reminds us of the words recorded in John 1:13. Referring to those who accepted Jesus as Saviour, John says, they "were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (RSV).

NOTE how God uses the "engrafted word" of truth to regenerate us. James 1:21. An intellectual knowledge of the Bible does not save an individual. The Word must be implanted in the soul by the Holy Spirit as a

principle (Ps. 40:8; 119:10, 11). It is not found there naturally. That Word is to be received meekly, without parleying or questioning. Kept there continuously, it transforms the life and saves the soul.



II. THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN SELF-CONTROL (James 1:19-21).

What is meant by the exhortation, “be swift to hear,” in James 1:19?

It is clear that James means much more than allowing words to register understandably in our minds. A great deal of trouble may be generated because, while we may hear the words of others, we do not try seriously enough to understand what they are saying, or to properly respond to what they are trying to convey.

We might illustrate James' meaning this way: A father asks his son who is sitting nearby to do a certain chore for him, but the son continues what he is doing. After a time the father asks, “Did you hear me, John?” He knows full well that John did hear. But John was not “swift to hear” in that he was tardy in responding to what he heard.

On the much more important level of responding to God, the Christian must act promptly upon the voice of conscience or upon the clear instruction of the Word.

Describe the attitude of the psalmist toward the commandments of the Lord? Ps. 119:60.

“Our only safe course is to render obedience to all His requirements, at whatever cost. All are founded in infinite love and wisdom.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 365.

What is meant by the advice, “be . . . slow to speak,” in James 1:19?

James has a more profound concern than that we should speak slowly when we talk. Much has been written by both secular and religious writers about the great potential of words for good or evil. Often destiny hangs on the understanding of words. Words come readily to most of us. Even the most devout and committed Christians sometimes speak words that they afterward regret. James advises us to think before we speak.

What does James 1:20 suggest about “the wrath of man”?

The expression “the wrath of man” suggests anger that is ill-tempered, resentful, vengeful, hateful—in a word, un-Christlike.

James' caution, “be . . . slow to wrath,” when considered with verse 20, seems to suggest that we should “not become angry at all” so far as sinful anger is concerned. For whether one becomes the victim of sudden anger, or anger that is slow in arising, it still “does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (verse 20, NIV). This is so because as soon as we become angry we lose objectivity and become subjective.

When tempted to allow anger to arise, we can become “slow to wrath” by looking to Jesus for strength not to express it in any way until we have considered carefully the implications of doing so. If we turn to Jesus for strength we will seldom express anger. There sometimes may be a place for righteous anger, but too often the term is used to justify what is, in reality, anger springing from some form of selfishness.

“When you feel an angry spirit arising, take firm hold of Jesus Christ by faith. Utter no word. Danger lies in the utterance of a single word when you are angry, for a volley of passionate utterances will follow.”—*Our High Calling*, p. 235.



Why does James suggest the necessity of meekness in surrendering to and in accepting the Word of God? James 1:21.

The unregenerate person is likely to be willfully independent, going his own way. Meekness comes through accepting the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

When we commit our lives to Jesus we will put away “every filthy habit and all wicked conduct” (TEV). (The words *filthy* and *wicked* might cause some people to almost unconsciously think that James means only the grosser sins. Not so. All sin is “filthy” and “wicked” with God, although some sins might be considered worse than others.) As old habits and practices seek to reassert themselves, Christians are to repudiate them in the strength of Christ as decidedly as they did when they initially turned away from them.

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF DOING (James 1:22-25).

What is the difference between the hearers and the doers referred to in James 1:22?

“The word translated *hearers* . . . was used especially of those who were regular in listening to lectures, but who never became real disciples. So it is possible to hear God’s word constantly proclaimed in lessons from Scripture and in sermons, and to regard such hearing as an end in itself, so that the message heard never becomes translated into deeds accomplished.” —R.V.G. Tasker, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), vol. 16, p. 52.

Compare the responses of those described in James 1:23, 24 with those described in verse 25. What are the important differences in the response?

Continuing the hearers-and-not-doers theme, James seems to be describing people who listen again and again to the Word, and even evaluate themselves while listening, but who do not act on what they hear. (Compare 2-Tim. 3:7.) Because of this the impact soon wears off, just as the memory of what we see of ourselves in the mirror soon becomes vague. The truth has no opportunity to take root. Therefore the benefits received are short-lived.

On the other hand there are those who go to the "perfect law" to check themselves and to discover how they ought to live. Because God's requirements are given first place in their thinking, sinful things do not draw them. Throughout the day they measure their thoughts, motives, attitudes, and actions by the law. Their evaluation has not merely to do with good works but with living faith.

It is important to notice that it is "the law of liberty" by which they measure themselves. They do not go to the law slavishly, cringingly, or legalistically.



IV. TESTS OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE (James 1:26, 27).

What do the words "seem to be religious," or "thinks he is religious" (RSV) in James 1:26 mean to you?

The Revised Standard Version rendering, "thinks he is religious," is closer to the original language. James is describing those who see themselves as religious because they attend to certain religious necessities. They may at one time have been gripped by the power of the Word, but because they did not continue to respond to it in their hearts, they sank to being outwardly religious without realizing that God's Spirit was absent.

It is easier than many imagine for us to be caught up in religious observances and to carry out such religious duties as attending religious services faithfully, giving generously, praying, and filling church offices. We perceive ourselves as being fully religious because of these activities. Such a perception was the trap into which many Jewish leaders fell. (Compare Matt. 6:1, 2, 5, 16.) It is easy for men and women who work for the church in any capacity to fall into a similar trap—busyness with the work of God may be regarded wrongly as having a close relationship with God.

What is said about the person who "deceiveth his own heart" in James 1:26?

How can our religion be "worthless" (NIV) simply because we do not control our tongues? James 1:26.

James is aware of the tongue as an indicator of a person's religion. In this connection he alludes to it in James 1:19 and 5:9, and in our present text. He discusses it at length in chapter three.

Figuratively speaking, there is a fast-reflex nerve running from the heart to the tongue of most of us. So whatever is in our hearts has a way of betraying itself by means of our tongues. For that reason Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matt. 12:34, 35).

The type of people James describes nourish sinfulness in their hearts, and do not perceive the evil of their tongues in expressing it. Their kind of

religion allows them to let loose their tongues like an unbridled horse, to wander where it will. They express their own unsanctified opinions freely, hurt other people, and cause others to scorn their religion. Yet they still consider themselves Christians.



Having insisted that, under certain conditions, religious acts and observances are worthless and deceptive, James now states that pure religion has to do with works. James 1:27. What would make works acceptable to God?

"James is a man of profound faith. He has been beside the still waters. He trusts God supremely. Without reservation, he accepts Christendom's consummate creed: Jesus Christ is Lord. Nothing is further from his mind than the belittling of faith in God through Jesus Christ. He harbors no notion that a man can be saved without faith. . . .

"James is a practical man, however, and his chief concern . . . is for faith's expression through works of righteousness. Indeed, James is the Apostle of good works, and this passage is the Christian's Magna Charta of good works."—Foy Valentine, *Where the Action Is* (Waco, Texas: Word Books), pp. 114, 115.

"God does not accept the most splendid service unless self is laid upon the altar, a living, consuming sacrifice. The root must be holy, else there can be no sound, healthy fruit, which alone is acceptable to God. The heart must be converted and consecrated. The motives must be right."—*Testimonies*, vol. 7, pp. 248, 249.

In describing what pure religion is, why do you think James states that it consists in helping orphans and widows? James 1:27.

James "is not giving a definition or a complete description of religion; he is telling what religion is, but he is not telling all that it is."—J. Gresham Machen, *What Is Faith?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1965), p. 229.

We do not know the circumstances that prompted James to define religion in this way. However, the New Testament emphasizes the Christian's social obligations to the fatherless, widows, and other needy persons. (See Matt. 25:35, 36; Mark 12:40; Acts 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:3, 9; Heb. 13:2; 1 John 3:17, 18.)

In a society in which the government and other organizations care for the material needs of the unfortunate, often in an impersonal way, it is easy for church members to forget that there always are other, more important, social and religious needs to be satisfied as well as material needs.

THINK IT THROUGH: Can you think of some ways that you can minister to the needs of widows, orphans, and the homeless? Are there other groups in your church that need special attention? What about the youth or singles?

The words *unspotted or unstained* (RSV) in James 1:27 suggest visual images. What spiritual or moral picture do you see in them?

It is hard, when walking through mud, to keep it from splashing on us. And it is not easy for the Christian, obliged to walk in the world, to keep from being stained by what is in the world. Mud dries and can easily be brushed off; the stain of the world tends to be tenacious and to penetrate. Even though mud is not attractive, the world often seems to be.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: “Every Christian will be assailed by the allurements of the world, the clamors of the carnal nature, and the direct temptations of Satan. No one is safe. No matter what our experience has been, no matter how high our station, we need to watch and pray continually. We must be daily controlled by the Spirit of God or we are controlled by Satan.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 102.

“What if we were to go out into the streets and soil our clothes with mud, and then come into the house and, beholding our filthy garments as we stand before the glass, we should say to the mirror, ‘Cleanse me from my filth’; would it cleanse us from our filth? That is not the office of the looking glass. All that it can do is to reveal that our garments are defiled; it cannot take the defilement away.

“So it is with the law of God. It points out the defects of character. It condemns us as sinners, but it offers no pardon to the transgressor. It cannot save him from his sins. But God has made a provision. Says John, ‘If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.’ So we come to Him and there we find the character of Jesus, and the righteousness of His character saves the transgressor—if we have done on our part all that we could.

“And yet while He saves the transgressor, He does not do away with the law of God, but He exalts the law. He exalts the law because it is the detector of sin. And it is Christ’s cleansing blood that takes away our sins, when we come to Him with contrition of soul seeking His pardon. He imputes His righteousness. He takes the guilt upon Himself.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 935.

SUMMARY: Christians are people “born of the spirit” (John 3:6) by the Word. Consequently, they should allow that “implanted word” to bear fruit in a readiness to obey God, a control of the tongue (which is the litmus test of their religion), and in service to the needy.

APPLICATION:

- Do I sometimes allow myself to get discouraged when troubles come, forgetting that God allows only that which is for my good?
- Have I arrived at the place where, knowing God’s will for me, I respond without complaint?
- What experiences can I think of that show I failed to be “slow to speak” or that I succeeded? What lessons do they have for me?
- Am I sensitive to the needs of people around me?

Attitudes, Actions, and Faith

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: James 2:1-26.



MEMORY TEXT: "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well" (James 2:8).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Showing deference to the rich while ignoring the poor is a breach of the Christian law of love. It suggests that true faith, which can only be shown by the works of love, is lacking.

OVERVIEW: James 2:1-26

Prejudice Condemned (2:1-7)	Prejudice Is Sin (2:8-13)	Works Demonstrate Faith (2:14-26)
Favoritism to rich reproved God has chosen the poor who are rich in faith	Prejudice is breach of "royal law" Live in the light of judgment	Words no substitute for action Challenge to demonstrate faith apart from works

INTRODUCTION: The theme of James 2:1-13 is introduced with an unqualified admonition, "Show no partiality." Regardless of appearances, treat rich and poor alike. It is the poor who are rich in faith, not the rich who are poor in faith, who are honored in God's sight. Favoritism is sin because it breaches the law, "love your neighbour as yourself," which law requires us to be blind to financial status or to any other differences. The apostle then turns to another topic, in verse 14—faith and works—in which he demonstrates that it is not possible to show that we have faith by any other means than by good works.



I. PREJUDICE CONDEMNED (James 2:1-7).

The admonition with which James begins the section we are studying this week may be understood something like this: You have accepted "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ." Therefore, do not cast a reflection on that faith, or its Source, by showing favoritism or prejudice. The "Lord of glory" veiled His glory and lived on earth as one of the poor. He demonstrated no prejudice during His incarnation. Follow His example.

According to James 2:4, what was wrong with the attitude and actions of those who are described in verses 2 and 3?

In context, the words “judges of evil thoughts” (verse 4) would seem to suggest evaluating or judging things on the basis of standards and values that were un-Christlike, and of being motivated by the desire to make a favorable impression on a rich person while scarcely deigning to acknowledge the presence of the poor person.

“If you have the spirit of Christ, you will love as brethren; you will honor the humble disciple in his poor home, because God loves him as much He loves you, and it may be more. He recognizes no caste. He places His own signet upon men, not by their rank, not by their wealth, not by intellectual greatness, but by their oneness with Christ.”—*Our High Calling*, p. 180.

Compare James 2:4 with Leviticus 19:15. What difference, if any, do you see between the two exhortations?

Leviticus 19:15 cuts both ways in that it forbids partiality to the poor or deference to the rich. The same thrust is actually implicit in the book of James. But the author comes down forcefully in one direction against showing favoritism to the rich.

A number of ideas are implicit in James’ statement. For example, it suggests that those guilty of prejudice in favor of the rich are seeking at the same time to serve God and Mammon.

It may be noted that while James’ comparison has to do with the rich and poor, favoritism and prejudice may be shown in many other ways outside and within the church—in social activities, in church office, in work situations, and in church institutions.

Why does James assert that God has “chosen the poor of this world” as “heirs of the kingdom”? James 2:5. Does this exclude the rich?

The twentieth century Westerner, in general, is inclined to think in more literal terms than did people of Bible times. Some today might think that James categorically excludes the rich from heaven. But God does not limit Himself to a certain class of people—the materially poor—in selecting candidates for His kingdom. Actually, the people He chooses are “the poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3) who are rich in faith. James describes this group as “them that love” God. But the fact is that a large number of these are found among those who are not rich in this world’s goods or prominent in other ways. (Compare 1 Cor. 1:26.) The rich—and the wise and powerful—are often too self-sufficient to recognize their spiritual poverty or their need of God. (Compare Luke 18:25.)

What attitudes and actions of the rich does James specify in order to drive home to his readers the shameful of “insulting” (NEB) poorer brethren by favoring the rich above them? James 2:6, 7.

It is probable that the rich referred to are not Christians, although some commentators think that they are. However, the attitudes of those described would seem to preclude their being Christians. They are perhaps, Romans, or, more likely, Jewish visitors. "The early persecution of the Christian church was instigated by the politically powerful Jews, notably the Sadducees . . . , the traditional oppressors of the poor."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 518.

II. PREJUDICE IS SIN (James 2:8-13).

THINK IT THROUGH: How inclusive is the "royal law" in commanding Christians to "love thy neighbour as thyself"? James 2:8.

The kind of partiality that James condemns is a distortion of the "royal law," the law of Christ, the law of love. When we inquire, What is the opposite of love? the answer usually is hate. But the opposite of godly love is not hate, but selfishness. This kind of partiality is selfish because, whether those engaged in it recognize it or not, partiality is practiced with a view to personal profit of some sort.

James sometimes comes across as being opposed to the wealthy. But James 2:8 contradicts this. "Love thy neighbour as thyself" encompasses both rich *and* poor, not just rich *or* poor. His problem is with attitudes and actions, not with class.

"It is not possible for the heart in which Christ abides to be destitute of love. If we love God because He first loved us, we shall love all for whom Christ died. We cannot come in touch with divinity without coming in touch with humanity; for in Him who sits upon the throne of the universe, divinity and humanity are combined. Connected with Christ, we are connected with our fellow men by the golden links of the chain of love."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 384, 385.

Realizing that James is referring to God's law of love, what attitude does he imply that the Christian is to have toward every jot and tittle of that law? James 2:10, 11.

There is a human tendency to modulate God's law until there is hardly any strength left in it, and to find reasons why our particular actions or attitudes, while seemingly condemned by God, are not really wrong.

"The transgression of His [God's] law in a single instance, in the smallest particular, is sin. God can not dispense with his law, He can not do away with its smallest item, in order to pardon sin."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Nov. 15, 1898.

What solemn event should make James' readers want the Lord to give them the grace to speak and act correctly toward both poor and rich? James 2:12.

The original language suggests, Make it a habit of life to speak and act in the light of the judgment.

With what contrasting pictures of judgment does James end his discussion of favoritism and prejudice? James 2:13.

In the judgment those who have not shown mercy—love, kindness, and compassion—will stand under the condemnation of the law. If we show no mercy, we will receive no mercy.

It needs to be repeated that James is not thinking in terms of outward action that might pass as merciful acts. He is talking about something that springs to action from the soul's depths. It comes as an impulse from the heart in which the Holy Spirit dwells. Those who, in that Spirit, show that their faith works or produces deeds of mercy need have no fear of the judgment.



III. WORKS DEMONSTRATE FAITH (James 2:14-26).

What does James 2:14 say about the possibility of having faith without works?

There are two kinds of what might be termed *faith*. One is that which is mere intellectual assent. The other is a living, fruit-producing principle. In the passage we are studying, James insists that the first, without the second, is not really faith at all; it is a mere pretext. Pure faith in Jesus, by its very nature, will bear fruit.

In this passage the apostle emphasizes a certain aspect of faith—that one of its main characteristics is action. Thus James' emphasis is not on the same aspects of faith that Paul emphasizes in the books of Romans and Galatians. James deals mostly with the fruitage of faith.

What is the value of a faith that would respond to the needs of a Christian brother or sister in the way the writer describes in James 2:15, 16?

The words "Depart in peace" make up a formal Hebrew phrase. The entire sentence, "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled," would therefore mean, "May God grant you your needs." In essence James is asking, Suppose a needy brother or sister comes to a Christian who claims to have faith, and is treated as described, what kind of faith or religion is manifested? What has his faith done for him? Has it made him a better man? A kinder neighbor? A more representative Christian?

STUDY Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) to find examples of the kind of faith that is not true faith. List them below:

“In the parable, Christ exalts the Samaritan above the priest and the Levite, who were great sticklers for the letter of the law of Ten Commandments. The one obeyed the spirit of these commandments, while the others were content to profess an exalted faith in them; but what is faith without works?”—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 58.

WED How can there be a faith that is “dead, being alone,” as James expresses it in verse 17 of chapter 2?

James uses the term *faith* here to mean that which was not faith in the Christian sense. In the same way that so-called gods are no gods at all (1 Cor. 8:4, 5), the faith that James refers to is not faith at all, even though it may go by that name. Besides being a mental assent to truth, faith in the Lord and His righteousness must have accompanying ingredients to be genuine, one of which is works of mercy. Although James does not imply that works in any way constitute faith, he insists that works are an unfailing fruitage of faith.

ILLUMINATION: “Rightly understood, faith is not a substitute for moral conduct but a means toward it. The tree does not serve in lieu of the fruit but as an agent by which fruit is secured. Fruit, not trees, is the end God has in mind in yonder orchard; so Christ-like conduct is the end of Christian faith. To oppose faith to works is to make the fruit the enemy to the tree; yet that is exactly what we have managed to do. And the consequences have been disastrous.

“A miscalculation in laying the foundation of a building will throw the whole superstructure out of plumb, and the error that gave us faith as a substitute for action instead of faith in action has raised up in our day unsymmetrical and ugly temples of which we may well be ashamed and for which we shall surely give a strict account in the day when Christ judges the secrets of our hearts.

“In practice we may detect the subtle (and often unconscious) substitution when we hear a Christian assure someone that he will ‘pray over’ his problem, knowing full well that he intends to use prayer as a substitute for service. It is much easier to pray that a poor friend’s needs be supplied than to supply them.”—*A Treasury of A. W. Tozer* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 156, 157.

The apostle has nailed down his assertion that “faith without works is dead” with the challenge, “Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith” (James 2:18, RSV). He now clinches his argument by reminding his readers that even “Abraham our father” demonstrated his faith by his works.

SEARCH AND LEARN: List several incidents connected with Abraham’s offering of Isaac that demonstrated the patriarch’s works that “perfected” his faith. (See Gen. 22:1-13; James 2:21, 22.)

Paul states that justification comes as a free gift (Rom. 5:18), and that "by the deeds [works] of the law there shall no flesh be justified" (Rom. 3:20). Explain your understanding of this apparent clash between James and Paul in view of the fact that James states that Abraham was "justified by works" (James 2:21-24).

In the texts referred to, Paul and James are looking at faith and works from two different points of emphasis. "The works to which the one [Paul] refers are works done with a view to salvation, that God's favour may be won by them; the works to which the other [James] refers are works springing out of salvation, because God's favour has been so freely and graciously bestowed."—*The Pulpit Commentary*, comments on James 2:14-16.

James takes the position that we are justified by a working faith, and Paul would not disagree. (See Romans 12 and 13.)



In the account of Rahab protecting the spies, what indicates that faith was the source of her actions? James 2:25; Joshua 2:1-21.

What does the writer of Hebrews tell us was the reason for Rahab's actions and her subsequent preservation? Heb. 11:31.

Rahab's preservation from destruction when Jericho was destroyed cannot be attributed to either her works alone or to her faith alone. Her faith that "the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth" (Joshua 2:11) and that He had given the land to the Israelites (verse 9) was the stimulus for her action in protecting the spies.

"The *object* of her [Rahab's] faith was the God of Israel Himself, and His purpose to procure Canaan for the chosen people. The *ground* of it was the miraculous passage of the Red Sea, and the overthrow of the Amorites. Its *fruit* was seen in her determination at whatever risk to befriend the two scouts, as being Jehovah's servants. And the *reward* of Rahab's faith lay in her preservation amid the general destruction, and the honor which she received in becoming an ancestress of the Messiah."—*The Pulpit Commentary*, comments on Hebrews 10:30-38.

How should James' parallel of faith without works to a body without spirit be explained? (See James 2:26.)

"The apostle's view seems . . . to be this: Faith is the body, the sum and substance, of the Christian life; works (obedience), the moving and quickening of that body; just as the spirit is the moving and quickening principle of the natural body. So that as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead."—Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Guardian Press, 1976), vol. 4, p. 302.

ILLUSTRATION: A tourist, going into a building, noticed a man sitting in a chair near a desk. About an hour later, when he was leaving, he saw the man still sitting in the chair in exactly the same position. Then he realized that the man was “dead.” He was in a wax museum, and the “man” was a wax figure. He looked very much alive, but he was not.

People may assume that their faith is alive and well. But if it does not prompt them into doing the work God would have them do, their faith is dead. It only gives the impression of being alive, just as the man made of wax gave the impression that he was alive.

“Man cannot be saved without obedience, but his works should not be of himself; Christ should work in him to will and to do of His good pleasure.”—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 364.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read Matthew 7:21-24; Luke 6:46-49 and *The Desire of Ages*, page 505.

“God has given us specific directions so that no one need err. ‘Man shall not live by bread alone,’ He says, ‘but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.’ The truth given by inspiration ‘is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.’ Not by one word, not by many words, but by *every word* that God has spoken, shall man live. You cannot disregard one word, a single injunction that He has given, however trifling it may seem to you, and be safe. ‘Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.’ Whosoever will willfully break one command cannot in spirit and in truth keep any of them. He may claim that, with the exception of what he may regard as slight deviations, he keeps them all; yet if he willingly offends in one point he is guilty of all.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 434.

SUMMARY: God, who is “rich unto all that call upon him” (Rom. 10:12), expects that we who claim Him as Father shall show a similar impartiality. Moreover, the faith we profess in Him must be not only vertical, reaching up to Him, but horizontal, reaching out in love to others.

APPLICATION:

- Candidly examining my attitude toward others, can I think of anyone I have treated with prejudice? What do I intend to do about it?
- God desires to use His people as a medium for expressing His love to others. Am I allowing Him to use me?
- Am I inclined to “pick and choose” what I shall obey of God’s will, or do I seek His grace to obey in all respects?
- Does my faith combine belief and obedience as genuine faith should?

Fire and Fruit

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: James 3:1-18.



MEMORY TEXT: "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Teaching involves the use of the tongue, an organ hard to control, and prone to cause trouble. But Christians have an advantage—heavenly wisdom is given to help us regulate our words.

OVERVIEW: James 3:1-18

The Teacher's Responsibility (3:1-4)	Trouble With the Tongue (3:5-12)	Two Kinds of Wisdom (3:13-18)
Teacher strictly scrutinized in judgment Necessity of controlling words	The tongue, a fire The tongue, an evil The tongue that both blesses and curses	Earthly wisdom Heavenly wisdom

INTRODUCTION: Being a teacher of Christianity, whether it be from the pulpit, before a Sabbath School class, in a schoolroom, or in the home, is not a responsibility to be assumed lightly. The responsibility is twofold. It involves good works and good words.

The teacher's works form a constant backdrop to what the teacher is saying. The lifestyle of the teacher is subtle but persistent, influencing the thoughts and feelings of the listeners as the teacher speaks. It prompts conclusions that they might not have arrived at were it not for that backdrop.

An interesting insight into who could serve as a teacher in James' day is supplied by *The Expositor's Greek Testament*: "There was very little restriction in the matter of teachers; almost anyone would be listened to who desired to be heard." (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1970. Vol. 4, p. 449.)

James has been discussing works. Now he moves into the area of words. But, as the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* points out, "Words are also works. Indeed, much of the work of the world is accomplished through the medium of words."—Volume 16, p. 72.

The influence of the tongue is out of all proportion to its shape and size. It has a tremendous potential for good or evil that must be reckoned with in any discussion of the social aspects of human life.

SUN

I. THE TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITY (James 3:1-4).

In view of James' solemn caution that "not many of you should presume to be teachers" (James 3:1, NIV), how should those aspiring to teach sacred things react?

Perhaps some might react to the apostle's admonition by deciding, "I'm not good enough to teach." But that must not be the response. Often we find challenging statements of this kind in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. They are not intended to discourage. They are intended to lead us, prayerfully and candidly, to examine our lives and, in this particular case, to lead teachers to take stock of their attitudes and their habits of speaking in order to correct anything that may need correction.

Another point is that some are anxious to teach who are not qualified. They do not have the spiritual experience or the background of knowledge or teaching experience necessary for the task.

THINK IT THROUGH: From what this section of James teaches, what position of priority do you think you should give to the control of speech in your Christian development?

ILLUMINATION: "The member of the body that is hardest to control is the tongue. The man who is able to control his tongue is able to bridle and keep in control also the whole body and its desires."—R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), p. 601.

"In his own strength man cannot rule his spirit. But through Christ he may gain self-control. In His strength he may bring his thoughts and words into subjection to the will of God."—*Messages to Young People*, p. 136.

James used the illustrations of a bit that controls a horse and a rudder that controls a ship (James 3:3, 4). Applying these figures to the control of the tongue, which human faculty do you think that these instruments represent?

"The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can *choose* to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him"—*Steps to Christ*, p. 47.

MON

II. TROUBLE WITH THE TONGUE (James 3:5-11).

THINK IT THROUGH: In what way does James' illustration in verses 5 and 6 of the tongue being like a fire apply to what we experience today? Have I, at times, been guilty of this kind of "arson"?

It is possible to strike a match and in a brief time turn a building or a forest into an inferno from that small flame. History and our own experience offer many examples of the great matters "a little fire [a word] can kindle." Most of us have witnessed how a word, spoken by a husband, a wife, a father or mother, a son or daughter, ignites a family conflict and brings bitterness, heartache, unhappiness, alienation, and remorse.

"The largest share of the annoyances of life, its daily corroding cares, its heartaches, its irritation, is the result of a temper uncontrolled. The harmony of the domestic circle is often broken by a hasty word and abusive language. How much better were it left unsaid. One smile of pleasure, one peaceful, approving word spoken in the spirit of meekness, would be a power to soothe, to comfort, and to bless."—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 348.

MATCHING: In order to better understand what James means in verse 6 by the tongue (1) defiling the body, (2) setting on fire the "course of nature," (3) being "set on fire of hell," insert the correct number from the choices given above before the statements that follow:

- _____ The tongue is under the control of Satan.
- _____ People's lives are often set aflame by anger.
- _____ Causes loss of control of the whole body.

Through James the Lord expresses strong feelings about the evils of the tongue. James' language here is vigorous and positive, springing from intense convictions. However, it is somewhat difficult to know precisely what he means, although the thrust of his words is fairly obvious.

The tongue, he seems to say, is the "spokesperson" for the evil characteristics of a fallen world, which characteristics are found in each unregenerate person: idolatry, covetousness, lust, envy, and scores of others. Then, switching his thinking somewhat, he says that the tongue, because it is an instrument to speak for sin, defiles the total body. Returning to his "fire" theme, he suggests that all of life's experiences are affected for evil by the tongue. He climaxes his statement by insisting that the tongue was ignited by hell (the symbol of Satan's control). By this he doubtless means that Satan inflames the passions and directs the thoughts expressed by an unconsecrated or unguarded tongue.



Does James 3:8 mean that the human tongue cannot be controlled? Give reasons for your answer.

James is thinking of a particular type of tongue, one that is "a world of iniquity," that "setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell" (verse 6). It is that kind of tongue that cannot be tamed.

In reality, the tongue becomes, for James, the representative of the whole unregenerate person. Of itself, the tongue is perfectly neutral. It is an organ used by the mind and emotions to express thoughts and feelings, which may be either good or evil. As fire can be used to warm a cold man, or burn down his house, so the tongue can be used to bless or to curse. It expresses only what is in the heart. (Compare Matt. 12:34.)

No person is capable of consistently controlling his or her tongue. We desperately need God's help in order to do so. Our prayer needs to be, "Set thou a seal upon my lips, just for today."

"My brethren and sisters, how are you employing the gift of speech? Have you learned so to control the tongue that it shall ever obey the dictates of the enlightened conscience and holy affections. . . . Words exert a telling power. Satan will, if possible, keep the tongue active in his service. Of ourselves we cannot control the unruly member. Divine grace is our only hope."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 175.

Next, James introduces a series of questions designed to emphasize the strange phenomenon mentioned in verse 10: can a fountain pour out both fresh and brackish water? can a fig tree not only produce figs, but olives also? and can human tongues both bless and curse?

How would you feel were you to find a Christian manifesting the kind of inconsistent speech described in James 3:9, 10?

James' implication is that his illustration from nature pictures an impossibility. You do not get fresh and salt water from the same source, or figs and olives from the same tree. It suggests a totally unnatural concept. (See Matt. 7:16.)

The conclusion we are meant to draw is that it is unnatural to have the same lips blessing God on the one hand, and cursing a fellow being on the other hand, and that we might legitimately suspect the source of both. Yet, James says, some of the people to whom he was writing did talk that way.

One commentator states that the illustration of the blessing and cursing "implies that not the verbal blessing of God but the cursing of men is a true index to what lies within."—Quoted by R.V.G. Tasker, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980), vol. 16, p. 79.

Can you imagine a Seventh-day Adventist couple on an automobile trip together late on a Friday afternoon. They become involved in a rather heated quarrel. While still quarreling, they realize that the sun is going down and that Sabbath is almost upon them. Stopping by the side of the road, they have sundown worship. Then they resume their journey—and their quarrel.

"These things ought not so to be," James states earnestly (James 3:10). It is a serious inconsistency for a Christian to speak "out of the same mouth . . . blessing and cursing." It is incongruous with the very fitness of things, to say nothing of its moral and spiritual inappropriateness.



III. TWO KINDS OF WISDOM (James 3:13-18).

How will the person who is truly wise live? James 3:13.

Possibly James is still thinking of the teachers he addressed in verse 1 of our chapter. If so, he is telling them: If you claim to be Christian teachers, having sufficient knowledge and wisdom for that awesome responsi-

bility, demonstrate that you are genuine by your “conversation” (the original meaning is “conduct” or “manner of life”).

The Christian teacher needs a wisdom above the kind that the world knows. Teachers need spiritual insight that will keep them humble and preserve them from slipping into the follies practiced by unregenerate persons. At which point we may remind ourselves of James 1:5: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

Especially note the phrase, “meekness of wisdom” in verse 13. Someone has remarked, “Knowledge is proud that she has learned so much, wisdom is humble that she knows no more.”

What caution does Proverbs offer that applies to all who tend to rely on their own knowledge and wisdom? Prov. 28:26.

Even the best human minds, affected as they are by sin, are often unreliable. We tend to be biased in our thinking; to place our own interpretation on facts; and to be influenced by moods, by our attitude toward other people, by our physical condition, by other people’s ideas, and by many other influences.

It may be unfortunate if we depend on human wisdom and are wrong in temporal things; it will be tragic if we depend on human wisdom and miss the mark in eternal things.

How deeply does James probe in leading his readers to examine themselves? James 3:14.

The Revised Standard Version expresses what James is saying this way: “If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.”

It is easy to agree that showing envy and jealousy and being involved in strife is wrong. But James goes deeper. He is thinking not of external acts but of internal attitudes. Outward deportment may be impeccable, but “bitter jealousy and selfish ambition”—self-interest—may be hidden.

“There are in human nature elements of destruction, which, under certain conditions, break forth to consume. . . . [God’s] Spirit can quell man’s rebellious temper. But unless men possess the love of Christ, the qualifications that otherwise would be of value in God’s work will be controlled by the selfishness of the human heart. In order to be true Christians we must surrender ourselves unreservedly to Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Jan. 14, 1904.



No matter how attractive it may appear, what is the source of the wisdom that is mingled with jealousies and selfishness? James 3:15.

It is human to be impressed with human wisdom. Men hang upon the apparent depth of thought and are charmed when the thought is clothed in beautiful phrases, expressed by imposing or attractive people. But human

wisdom always must be distrusted. Combined with the divine, it will be worthwhile; separated, it contains seeds of destruction.

James uses eight words or phrases to portray the characteristics of “the wisdom that is from above” (James 3:17). Pick out two that interest you most, analyze what is intended, and be prepared to share the results of your study with your class on Sabbath.

1. Pure (James 1:27).
2. Peaceable (Prov. 3:17; Matt. 5:9).
3. Gentle (Ps. 18:35).
4. Easy to be entreated (“open to reason,” RSV).
5. Full of mercy (Luke 6:36).
6. Good fruits (James 1:27; Gal. 5:22, 23).
7. Without partiality (“without uncertainty,” RSV; see James 2:4).
8. Without hypocrisy (“without . . . insincerity,” RSV; see Rom. 12:9).

James closes his remarks on wisdom by stressing one of its components—peace (James 3:18). His statement may not be immediately clear. That is because the subject of his sentence is a harvest—“the harvest of righteousness” (RSV)—but he describes this harvest as having been “sown.” What he did was to look back to the time of sowing and then say that the seed was sown in a spirit and manner of peace by those “that make peace.” The result of the sowing is “righteousness,” the development of a Christlike character.

Describing the “wisdom that descendeth not from above” (James 3:15), the apostle suggests that it is accompanied by “bitter envying and strife” in the heart (2:14), and “confusion and every evil work” (3:16). Certainly no peace can be experienced by people whose souls are in turmoil because of such a spirit and such actions. The human heart longs for peace, but it is possible to gain it only through a living relationship with Jesus. James ends his discussion on wisdom by pointing to peace as the result of true wisdom.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 345, 349; vol. 5, pp. 94-98, 176, 177. “The Lord does not propose to do the work He has given man powers to do. Man’s part must be done. He must be a laborer together with God, yoking up with Christ, learning His meekness, His lowliness. God is the all-controlling power. He bestows the gifts; man receives them and acts with the power of the grace of Christ as a living agent.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 26.

SUMMARY: The tongue is potentially a troublesome agent, often being used for both good and evil. Consequently, the Christian needs divine wisdom in using the talent of speech.

APPLICATION:

- Does my life as a Christian back up my verbal witness to Christ?
- Do I find myself sometimes tempering my words while I know that underneath my attitudes and feelings are wrong?
- Do I find the fruitage of the “wisdom that is from above” maturing in my life?

Self or Submission?

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: James 4:1-12.



MEMORY TEXT: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

CENTRAL THEME: Even in the church discord arises because of selfishness. Only genuine submission to God can solve the problem.

OVERVIEW: James 4:1-12.

- I. The source of strife (4:1-3).
 1. Strife springs from lusts.
 2. Selfish prayers are not answered.
- II. The results of worldly compromise (4:4, 5).
 1. You cannot be God's friend and the world's.
 2. The spirit of envy.
- III. Pride versus humility (4:6-10).
 1. God's dealings with the proud and with the submissive.
 2. Mourning instead of mirth.
 3. Be humble and God shall lift you up.
- IV. Evil speaking (4:11, 12).
 1. Warning against backbiting.
 2. The law and the backbiter.
 3. Who are we to judge others?

INTRODUCTION: Chapter 4 of the Epistle of James begins with what some see as a general observation about humankind and war. If it is, the apostle very soon narrows his comments to the concept that peace in the heart is a hallmark of true religion, contributing to the development of Christian character (James 3:17, 18). Yet, historically, the most prominent aspect of human experience is not peace, but strife. After alluding to some deplorable conditions and happenings in the church, James unleashes the strongest language used in the epistle.



I. THE SOURCE OF STRIFE (James 4:1-3).

James insists that "wars and fightings" among Christians come because of "lusts that war in your members" (James 4:1). What does this last phrase mean?

The term translated "lusts" actually means "pleasures." (See TEV; Luke 8:14; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 2:11.) In James 4:1 it is used in the sense of evil pleasures—lusts that arise from the selfish nature, the envyings and strife alluded to in James 3:14. It refers to selfish desires, the impulse to please self, to get one's own way, regardless of others.

Every human being has a nature that was invaded and occupied by sin and is, of itself, committed to evil. This alien army of selfish pleasures is ever alert to manipulate the members of our bodies—especially our minds—and to express itself through them. James has taken some time to describe how sin uses the tongue. Now he turns his attention to other ways that sin expresses itself.

It is difficult to recognize those to whom James is writing these words as Christians in anything more than profession. Apparently they had degenerated frightfully in character. They had descended virtually to the level of the heathen among whom they lived. As Lenski observes, "Somebody has to apply a stern hand in order to bring them to their senses, somebody to whom they would listen."—*The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James*, p. 621. The burden fell on James.

What reason does James give for his readers' failure to have their prayers answered? James 4:2, 3.

A great deal is implied in the phrases "because ye ask not" and "ye ask, and receive not." In the second of these two rather sweeping statements the apostle perhaps modifies the first. He apparently means: "I'm not saying that you actually do not pray for certain things. What I mean is, you do not pray for them with the right motives and in the right spirit, so you do not get answers."

The apostle has been chastising professed Christians for covetousness, hatred, and fighting with each other. Because of these things, they could not expect God to give them what they asked of Him.

James is saying: "You want the wrong things—that which is of the flesh and of the world rather than the things of God. Your hearts are wrong, your desires are wrong, your attitudes are wrong. You must be God-centered, not self-centered. In other words, you must be converted. When that is your experience, your hearts will be in tune with God and your desires will be in harmony with His. When that happens you will want the right things and will ask for the right things. Then you will get them."



II. THE RESULTS OF WORLDLY COMPROMISE (James 4:4, 5).

What do the words "the friendship of the world" mean in James 4:4?

James uses the word *world* to mean that aspect of human activity, atmosphere, and environment that provides stimuli for the expression of our selfish desires and impulses.

Even when we have been born again and determine to keep a wall between ourselves and those stimuli, they still appeal to the carnal nature. Having "friendly" communion with the world shows that the heart tends toward worldly things. Worldly things cater to a desire for the wrong kind of pleasure (4:1) rather than to a desire for God. (See Matt. 6:24; John 15:19.)

SEARCH AND LEARN: Study Matthew 6:24 and John 15:19. Summarize below what these passages contribute to our understanding of how Christians should relate to the “world.”

“We cannot follow Jesus and retain the friendship of the world. There must be on the part of the Christian an entire surrender, a forsaking of the things of this earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, July 23, 1901.

This does not mean that we should cut ourselves off from the world, but that instead we should reject the spirit and the practices of the world. While difficult to understand, James 4:5 appears to underscore what the apostle has just stated in verse 4. When people who profess to be devoted to God enjoy the world and its pleasures, the Spirit who dwells in them “yearns jealously” (RSV) for them. God’s “jealousy” does not have any element of the resentment found in human jealousy. His jealousy is a longing, loving indignation that the object of that emotion is hurting himself or herself by turning from God and His ways.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Study Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 32:16; and Zechariah 8:2. Summarize what these scriptures contribute to our understanding of God’s “jealousy”:



III. PRIDE VERSUS HUMILITY (James 4:6-10).

What is James’ purpose in inserting at this point the observation, “But he [God] giveth more grace”? James 4:6.

Having written in unambiguous, sometimes lacerating language about the sins among his readers, James now administers some healing to the wounds.

“He giveth more grace.” More grace than what?

To answer this question we must first recall what grace is. In this context—and James is using the term as Paul does—grace is God’s love and power in operation to aid people who are beset by strong temptations and faith-sapping weaknesses. So we may answer our question with another text: “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20).

Another important fact to think about is that the grace of God, if welcomed into the heart, will dissolve worldly ambition and change the heart in such a way that it will desire only God’s will and ways.

Having made the broad statement that God “giveth more grace,” how does the apostle explain and qualify the statement? James 4:6.

God desires to generously bestow the blessings that accompany His grace on all, but He cannot because many refuse to respond to His grace. James here specifies proud people, those who are not satisfied with the

unpretentious things of genuine Christianity, but who turn to the world to satisfy their ambitious desires (verses 1-4). James says that God takes a stand against them. What a fearful thought, to have the might and majesty of heaven set against an individual! What a contrast it presents to the experience we studied earlier in Haggai when God could tell His people "I am with you" (Haggai 1:13)!

James next begins a series of eleven imperatives that bring a note of urgency and a call to decisiveness to verses 7-11.

COMPLETE THE LIST THAT FOLLOWS:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. _____ yourselves to God. | 6. _____ and _____ . |
| 2. _____ the devil. | 7. Let your _____ be turned
to _____ . |
| 3. _____ nigh to God. | 8. And your _____ to
heaviness. |
| 4. _____ your hands. | 9. _____ yourselves. |
| 5. _____ your hearts. | 10. _____ not evil one
of another. |

When we learn the lesson that total submission to God must come before it is possible to resist Satan and sin successfully, we have become acquainted with a fundamental fact in Christian living. Two Spirit of Prophecy statements that underscore reasons why this is so, follow:

"Jesus gained the victory through submission and faith in God, and by the apostle He says to us, 'Submit yourselves therefore to God, Resist the devil, and he will flee from you' (James 4:7). We cannot save ourselves from the tempter's power; he has conquered humanity, and when we try to stand in our own strength, we shall become a prey to his devices."—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 256.





How should we respond to the exhortation “draw nigh to God” given in James 4:8?

“ ‘Draw nigh to God.’ How? By secret, earnest examination of your own heart, by childlike, heartfelt, humble dependence upon God, making known all your weakness to Jesus, and by confessing your sins.”—*Our High Calling*, p. 96.

Every good potential we have is a gift of God. Even when we draw nigh to God, the impulse to do so, the faculty by which we choose to do so, and the energy to do so are gifts from Him. The thought expressed in Psalm 10:17 applies to this point: “Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.” God both moves upon us to draw nigh to Him and responds when we do.

Define the meaning of the words *hands* and *hearts* as they are used in James 4:8.

James may have had Psalm 24:4 in mind when he referred to cleansing the hands and purifying the heart. Both James and the the writer of the Psalm emphasize moral, not ceremonial, significance.

Biblically, hands are, among other things, symbolic of a person's activities and dealings; one's way of life that is evident to, and influences, other people. So James is saying, “Wherein your life and dealings are un-Christlike, make all necessary reforms.”

The second exhortation, if followed, will assure that the first is not merely cosmetic: “Purify your hearts.” Symbolically, the term *heart* is used of the whole person—the impulses, desires, inclinations, motives, imagination, and attitudes. What the apostle is saying is, “You need a reconversion. You have gone the way of the world. You must find a new experience in Jesus.”

Describe what seems to be the attitude of the recipients of James' letter as opposed to what the apostle says it should be in James 4:9.

It is apparent that a spiritual blindness has fallen on James' readers that keeps them from being aware of their true condition. While they were committing such grievous sins as slander, strife, pride, self-indulgence, lust, murder, and covetousness, a spirit of gaiety and hilarity prevailed among them. They sought after things that brought cheap, worldly enjoyment.

The pursuit of human happiness often entails self-indulgence, levity, and a transient earthly joy. The pursuit of holiness sometimes involves mourning and heaviness. But the path of holiness leads, both here and in God's kingdom to “fulness of joy” and “pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:11).

Having endeavored to convince his readers of their waywardness, to what does James then call them? James 4:10.

The summons to humility is a call to look at and acknowledge one's sinfulness and to seek that repentance which leads to conversion.

"What gives the proper level to the human mind? It is the cross of Calvary. . . .

"When we follow Jesus in the path of self denial and the cross, we shall find that we do not have to strive for humility. As we walk in Christ's footsteps, we shall learn His meekness and lowliness of heart. . . .

"God's faithful, humble, believing people will cut the idolatry of self out of their hearts, and Christ will become all in all."—*Our High Calling*, p. 114.

III. EVIL SPEAKING (James 4:11, 12).

James has called the receivers of his letter "adulterers and adulteresses" (verse 4), "sinners" and "double minded" (verse 8). In view of his admonition, "Speak not evil of one another, brethren" (James 4:11), what reasons can you offer to demonstrate that he was, or was not, inconsistent, if not worse?

In our text the term *law* is not limited to the Ten Commandments, but refers to the entire body of divine, recorded teaching—the Torah. To the early church that would be the Old Testament. To us it is the entire Bible.

"James, as Jesus [Matt. 5:22; 7:1-5] and Paul [Romans 14], was not prohibiting the moral appraisal which is necessary in human relationships. He was concerned with that hypercritical, condemnatory attitude which is taken toward other people on the basis of an assumed superiority to them; that malicious and ungenerous criticism which is not really directed toward their welfare or improvement, but is rather a means of self-justification and self-aggrandizement."—George A. Buttrick, editor, *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York, NY: The Abingdon Press, 1857), vol. 12, pp. 58, 59.

Which of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3-17) implies that speaking evil of a brother (James 4:11) is one of the primary sins of humanity?

The commandment "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Ex. 20:16) becomes one of the "exceeding broad" precepts (Ps. 119:96) that forbids speaking evil of those about us. The commandment may be violated by exaggerating the flaws and faults of another or by pointing them out to others, when the kind Christian approach would be to overlook them. This commandment may be broken by misrepresenting the words or motives of another or by putting that person in a false light.

In James 4:12 the apostle intimates that the person who takes a condemning stand toward another person in essence takes the place of God. Explain how this is so.

"Intolerant persons often claim that they are representing God in the strictures they pass upon their fellows, but actually they are usurping his throne. . . . Intolerance not infrequently reaches its most acrimonious stage in the person of those who profess to be followers of Christ."—*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 12, p. 59.

Any person who critically and arrogantly sits in judgment on the intentions and motives of another so as to, in effect, judge his fitness for salvation, presumes to do what God alone has the wisdom and authority to do. As it is God's prerogative, and only His, to establish moral laws, so it is His prerogative, and only His, to decide what the true relationship of each individual is to those laws. However, God does delegate the responsibility of loving discipline for overt violations of His law to His church (Matt. 18:15-18).

Also, in the teaching and preaching of the Word, sins are to be condemned. "Preach the word," Paul urged Timothy. "Convince, rebuke, exhort" (2 Tim. 4:12, RSV).



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: "The unaided human will has no real power to resist and overcome evil. The defenses of the soul are broken down. Man has no barrier against sin."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 292.

"As a result of Adam's disobedience every human being is a transgressor of the law, sold under sin. Unless he repents and is converted, he is under bondage to the law, serving Satan, fallen into the deceptions of the enemy, and bearing witness against the precepts of Jehovah."—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 146.

"When we submit ourselves to Christ the heart is united with His heart; the will is merged in His will; the mind becomes one with His mind; the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312.

SUMMARY: Fallen human nature is the spring of our individual sins. Deliberate contact with the world that is designed to lead to acceptance of what it offers indicates a drifting away from God. But, by the grace of God, there can and must be continual submission to God and repudiation of evil. Only that kind of commitment will enable us to maintain our Christian experience.

APPLICATION:

- Do I always look to my Saviour for grace to subdue the rising of self?
- Are the blessings for which I pray for God's glory or to fulfill my own desires?
- Am I nurturing "the friendship of the world"?
- Do I daily examine my heart and motives so that I might draw ever nearer to God?
- Have I learned that the highest level to which I can attain is that found at the foot of the cross?
- What have I learned this week that will improve my witness to those about me?

Presumption, Oppression, and Retribution

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: James 4:13 through 5:6.



MEMORY TEXT: "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: *Avarice* (an extreme desire to amass wealth) is the key word in this week's lesson, an avarice that leads to presumption, to a forgetfulness of God, to the oppression of others, and, finally, ends in judgment. It seems to be poetic justice that in the judgment the riches that avarice has accumulated consume the flesh "as it were fire" (5:3). Avarice anticipates an ingathering of riches, but eventually reaps a harvest of anguish.

OVERVIEW: James 4:13 through 5:6

Foolish Presumption (4:13-17)	Gain Through Oppression (5:4-6)	Retribution on the Oppressors (5:1-3)
Planning without God Keeping God's will uppermost	Man's inhumanity to man High living through fraudulent gain	A judgment warning Retribution to come

INTRODUCTION: A parallel can be found in the subject matter of James 4:13-17 and that of 5:1-6. While the first passage does not primarily deal with the topic of getting riches but rather with the matter of presumption and forgetting or ignoring God, it does so in the framework of getting gain (verse 13). In other words, in the eagerness of professed Christians to accumulate riches, they have relegated God to the background. Because of this basic similarity in the two passages, we will study James 5:4-6 before turning to James 5:1-3 in order to bring into sharper focus the judgment warning of the latter passage.

As noted in Lesson 1, wealth, of itself, is not evil. (See also 1 Tim. 6:17-19.) Sin comes from the wrong attitude toward, or the improper use of wealth. An additional wrong is introduced in this week's lesson—the accumulation of wealth by oppression or taking unfair advantage of others.



I. FOOLISH PRESUMPTION (James 4:13-17).

How does James warn businessmen of the hazards of planning for future profits without considering God and the frailty of life? James 4:13, 14.

"James would be the last man to condemn a reasonable foresight. He well knew that we must look forward, must provide, must lay plans for the future. It is not this that he condemns. But the thing which he visits with the severity of his denunciation is the practical leaving of God out of His own world and the practical taking of the management of affairs into our own hands, which is implied in all confident reckoning of the continuance of life."—*Colossians to James, The Sermon Bible* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1900), p. 367.

The world has a strange and dangerous way of engrossing the thoughts and absorbing the attention so that all else becomes secondary and unimportant. People plan their lives as though they have full control. They refuse to consider that sickness, death, robbery, crop failure, or any number of other adverse circumstances could nullify their plans and ambitions.

Life always is precarious, uncertain, and complicated by many uncontrollable, unforeseeable circumstances. An impenetrable curtain hangs between our vision and the future. To us, tomorrow is a land of darkness. Therefore, we can speak with certainty of nothing that we plan for the future. The truth of the familiar saying, "Don't count your chickens before they are hatched," needs to be understood clearly. "Man proposes, but God disposes."

In what words did Solomon sound a similar caution to that of James? Prov. 27:1.

We can see the future only in imagination, based often on wishful thinking, and through so-called facts that are elusive and statistically treasonable. Standing, as it were, in the narrow, windowless room that is the present, it is foolish to show an excess of confidence about the future.

Life is uncertain. It is woven of the brittlest of threads. Yet it seems that this unanimously recognized fact carries little weight with most people when it comes to their conduct and their building of character.

What sobering conclusion did Jesus draw in His story of the foolish rich man (Luke 12:16-21) that affirms James' observation? Luke 12:20, 21.

Those whose intense interest becomes the accumulation of riches, as well as those who pursue other worldly interests, may go confidently about their activities. But to trust to those conditions is the essence of folly. Life is finite. And it is as uncertain as it is finite. Those who put anything but God at the center will face, sooner than they realize, the terrible result of their folly. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:12).



Suggest reasons why, in all our planning, we should always have the attitude, "If the Lord will" (James 4:15).

Christians of a previous generation added the initials D.V. to letters if they were writing of future plans. D. V. stood for *Deo volente*, the Latin for "God willing." Whether it was merely a pious gesture or not, it did show their awareness of the uncertainty of human devisings.

True Christians always desire to have God's will done in every aspect of their lives. Therefore they take the attitude, "If the Lord will." (See 1 Cor. 4:19; 16:7; Acts 18:21.) Furthermore, they believe that God's will is always best and safest, even though their own aspirations may be nullified.

Having a constant attitude of "If the Lord will" does not mean that we are to do no planning for the future. Planning ahead is essential. The proper balance between these concepts is expressed in Proverbs 16:9, RSV: "A man's mind plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." Christians will make their plans as wisely as they can. Then, if they defer to God's will, if they seek divine guidance, as they endeavor to fulfill those plans, God will work things out in the best way.

"When you have sought to know His will, your part in the operation with God is to believe that you will be led and guided and blessed in the doing of His will. We may mistrust ourselves lest we misinterpret His teachings, but make even this a subject of prayer, and trust Him, still trust Him to the uttermost, that His Holy Spirit will lead you to interpret aright His plans and the working of His providence."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1156.

THINK IT THROUGH: In James 4:17 the apostle pulls together his observations regarding knowing and doing God's will. What does his observation mean to you?

James has been writing specifically to men who aspire to "get gain" (verse 13). In verse 17 he focuses his assertions in a statement of principle: There may have been some ignorance on your part of the Christian necessity for always moving within God's will. Now, however, you understand this, so if you do not henceforth seek His will in your transactions and follow it, you will be sinning.

But the principle enunciated by James has a much wider application than merely to the amassing of money and property. This broad principle of knowledge and responsibility encompasses the entire spectrum of living: "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (James 4:17, RSV).

"The condemning power of the law of God extends, not only to the things we do, but to the things we do not do. We are not to justify ourselves in omitting to do the things God requires. We must not only cease to do evil, but we must learn to do well. God has given us powers to be exercised in good works; and if these powers are not put to use, we shall certainly be set down as wicked and slothful servants."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 220.



II. GAIN THROUGH OPPRESSION (James 5:4-6).

We move from our study of the tendency of some to ignore God because of their eagerness to accumulate money and possessions to that of the flagrant sin of exploiting our fellow beings for the same purpose. Previously we studied that James made reference to rich people oppressing the poor (James 2:6, 7). Now he deals with the subject more fully.

What civil law, given through Moses, implies an age-long tendency for the rich to exploit the poor? Deut. 24:14, 15.

Note Deuteronomy 24:10, 11. Here we see a delicacy of feeling, a sense of justice, that shows God's concern that the dignity and rights of all persons be honored. In this precept Heaven has shown that we must treat the poor with the same respect that we show to people in more advantageous positions.

Describe the labor situation James refers to (James 5:4) that occasioned his denunciations found in verses 1-3.

The scenario is reminiscent of the situation Jesus describes in Matthew 20, in which laborers in a vineyard were paid for their work at the end of each day. But in the situation James describes, the employers callously and permanently withholding part of what is justly owed. In biblical times the laborer was often dependent on the day's wage to get the necessities of life for the next day, or even the same day. To deprive workers of their earnings was to place a great hardship on the worker and the worker's family.

No matter where or at what time in history a person looks, that person will find examples of exploitation of the less fortunate by more affluent and influential people. Even laws to prevent this do not solve the problem entirely. Often those who "use" others refuse to entertain the concept that they really do so. They seal their minds against such ideas and, if the thought is forced upon their attention, they find some rationale for explaining or justifying their actions.

It is extremely difficult to break through the barriers to understanding erected by such people. In verse 4 James tries to do so by clearly warning them that they will have to answer, not to some earthly judge whom they may bribe, but to the "Lord of Sabaoth" (the Lord of hosts), the eminently Just, Omnipotent One who governs the entire universe, and has all the hosts of heaven at His command. It is He, the Just One, who hears the cries of the wronged, and to whom their oppressors will have to give an account.

That the cries of the exploited laborers reach God does not necessarily mean that they are serving Him. God will punish all who oppress others, regardless of the religious experience of the oppressed.



How does James describe the lifestyle of the rich that is made possible by their robbing of the poor? James 5:5.

Extravagance, luxury, and waste is often characteristic of the lifestyle of the rich oppressors. The phrase “Ye have lived in pleasure” probably means “an enervating life of luxury, effeminacy and self-indulgence.”—R.V.G. Tasker, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), vol. 16, p. 114. (See Luke 16:19.)

According to James 5:5, for what is such self-indulgent lifestyle preparing those involved?

“Just as beasts continue to fatten themselves, unconscious that they are really being made ready for slaughter, so the sinful rich are pictured as *nourishing their hearts*, filling their lives with every conceivable form of pleasure, while still *on the earth*, so as to be ‘ready,’ though they are wholly unaware of it, for the ‘day of slaughter,’ when the doom that inevitably awaits them will descend upon them, as the Lord comes in judgment.”—R.V.G. Tasker, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 16, p. 115.

Besides accusing the self-indulgent of robbery of the poor, what other serious indictment does James bring against them? James 5:6.

In ancient times the rich and powerful often controlled the courts. As a result they could frequently do as they wished with seeming impunity. (See 1 Kings 21:1-14; John 19:6-16.) Such a situation is not unknown today.



III. RETRIBUTION ON THE OPPRESSORS (James 5:1-3).

What is the tone of the words with which James addresses the rich oppressors in James 5:1-3?

Some Bible scholars are of the opinion that these texts do not apply to church members. But Ellen White makes a modern application of this passage: “I saw that these fearful words [James 5:1-3] apply particularly to the wealthy who profess to believe the present truth. The Lord calls them to use their means to advance His cause.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 174.

James seems almost to visualize the appalling retribution that is coming on the ungodly rich who have filled their coffers at the expense of the defenseless poor. So his language is vivid, powerful, and condemnatory.

Isaiah condemned the exploiters of the poor in his day this way: “The Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof: for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is

in your houses. What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of hosts" (Isa. 3:14, 15).

Jeremiah writes of the wicked who "set a trap," whose "houses are full of treachery; therefore they have become great and rich" (Jer. 5:16, 27, RSV). Micah speaks bitingly of "treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked" and "rich men [who] are full of violence" (Micah 6:10, 12, RSV). And Jesus denounced those leaders of His day who "devour[ed] widows' houses" (Luke 20:47).

Does James mean to be literal when he describes the possessions of the ungodly rich as "rotted" and "moth-eaten," and their gold and silver as being "ruined" in James 5:2, 3, or is he speaking metaphorically?

The fact that James is speaking metaphorically here may be deduced from the fact that gold and silver do not rust. The precious metals he refers to, heaped up by greedy people, will be as useless in the last days as though they had rusted away, and will become a torment to their owners as they are convicted of the unjust way they were gained. The power, satisfaction, and position that they could buy no longer is meaningful. Doubtless this is one of the "miseries" (verse 1) that they will experience when they realize that that around which their lives revolved has become useless—even worse than useless. They had trusted in it and now it has betrayed them.

Considering the uselessness of the riches of the ungodly in the last days, we are reminded of Ezekiel 7:19, in which the prophet, writing of "the day of the wrath of the Lord," states that the ungodly "shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them."

Jesus observed that it is hard for a rich man to gain heaven (Matt. 19:23-25); nevertheless, it is possible. What, among other things, makes this salvation possible, according to Ezekiel 18:21, 22?



How did the rich man, Zacchaeus, who also cheated the poor, find salvation? Luke 19:1-10.

"Among the publicans there was a confederacy, so that they could oppress the people, and sustain one another in their fraudulent practices."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 555. There is little doubt but that Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, had been involved in the confederacy. But he genuinely repented and made restitution.

"If we have injured others through any unjust business transaction, if we have overreached in trade, or defrauded any man, even though it be within the pale of the law, we should confess our wrong, and make restitution as far as lies in our power. It is right for us to restore not only that which we have taken, but all that it would have accumulated if put to a right and wise use during the time it has been in our possession."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 555, 556.

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read *Testimonies*, vol. 1, pages 174-177, 347-353.

"The customs of the world are no criterion for the Christian. He is not to imitate its sharp practices, its overreaching, its extortion. Every unjust act toward a fellow being is a violation of the golden rule. Every wrong done to the children of God is done to Christ Himself in the person of His saints. Every attempt to take advantage of the ignorance, weakness, or misfortune of another is registered as fraud in the ledger of heaven. He who truly fears God, would rather toil day and night, and eat the bread of poverty, than to indulge the passion for gain that oppresses the widow and fatherless or turns the stranger from his right.

"The slightest departure from rectitude breaks down the barriers and prepares the heart to do greater injustice. Just to that extent that a man would gain advantage for himself at the disadvantage of another, will his soul become insensible to the influence of the Spirit of God. Gain obtained at such a cost is a fearful loss."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 651, 652.

SUMMARY: Greed for riches tends to focus people's attention on gain and to push from their minds everything else, including God and the uncertainty of life in all its facets. Avarice leads to the exploitation of others and a prostitution of justice, that will bring God's retribution. If we have in any way defrauded another, we have an obligation to make full restitution.

APPLICATION:

- Is it possible that I am concerned with making money to the extent that God is not as real to me as He should be?
- Do I take God into account in every aspect of my life?
- When, after I prayerfully plan a project as wisely as I know how, my plans do not work, do I uncomplainingly leave the matter in God's hands?
- If I trust God with my plans and desires, can I be sure that He always will work things out in the best way?

Living for the Coming of the Lord

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: James 5:7-20



MEMORY TEXT: "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James 5:8).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The apostle James urges his readers to show Christian restraint under exploitation and persecution, inasmuch as they will be delivered and vindicated at Christ's return (5:7-12). He then offers counsel of several matters in the area of Christian living and Christian obligations (5:13-20).

OVERVIEW: James 5:7-20		
Waiting Patiently for the Lord's Coming (5:7, 8)	Lifestyle During the Waiting Period (5:9-12)	Prayer Under Various Circumstances (5:13-20)
Waiting for the former and latter rain Be courageous in the Lord.	Do not complain against the brethren Example of Old Testament characters Warning against oaths	Prayer in distress, joy, and sickness Fervency in prayer Reclaiming the backslider

INTRODUCTION: In last week's lesson we considered James' description of the rich who cheated the laborers who harvested their crops. Some of the landowners obviously were Christians. "The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, . . . you kept back by fraud" (5:4, RSV), James wrote to the rich members, pointing out that they lived luxuriously at the expense of those who had no way to gain their rights or to defend themselves.

In this week's lesson we find James assuring oppressed Christians that God will balance the account. "You will receive your due," he writes in essence. "A harvest, the richness of which you cannot imagine, is ripening for you. You will reap bountifully at the coming of the Lord. Meanwhile, your part is to wait patiently and to live godly lives in Christ Jesus."

While the oppressed Christians are reaping their reward, the wicked will be reaping the rewards of quite another kind of harvest, as last week's lesson made plain.



I. WAITING PATIENTLY FOR THE LORD'S COMING (James 5:7, 8).

Based on your study of James 5:7, explain why you think that a Christian should, or should not meekly and unprotestingly accept injustice.

What lesson may we draw from Paul's reaction when he was unlawfully abused and imprisoned at Philippi? (See Acts 16:35-39; compare Acts 22:24-29.)

Paul "declined, being innocent and wronged, to be treated as if he were guilty and as if he had nothing of which righteously to complain. It is often our Christian duty to act in the same way. In this matter there are: . . . two laws to which we may make our appeal: either the *law of man*, which the magistrates of Philippi had now broken, and which Paul claimed they should have regarded; or the *law of God*, the law which makes its demands on every human conscience, requiring truth, equity, respect, etc. When this is palpably violated, we may make our appeal to it against the iniquity and ill usage of our fellows."—*The Pulpit Commentary*, comments on Acts 16:35-40.

The term *patience* does not necessarily mean submitting to oppression and injustice and doing nothing about it, although there may be circumstances when even this is called for. Certainly, it is contrary to Christian principles to resort to violence to gain our "rights."

Continuing his illustration of the harvest, how does James relate patience under persecution to the farmer's patience in waiting for the reaping? James 5:7.

Not infrequently the farmer has troubles and trials in raising crops. However, the farmer's attention is not focused on these but on the harvest that will be reaped. So the farmer endures the inconveniences, the worries, the difficulties, knowing that, in spite of them all, the season rolls on and, according to the course of nature, the grain will ripen and be ready for the harvest. (Of course there are times when the farmer loses his crop. But this is not James' point. In his illustration, the harvest never fails.)

Similarly, Christians, knowing that God has His season when the harvest of earth is ripe, wait in confident expectation for the harvest when they shall unfailingly receive their reward.

In view of the expected reward, James exhorts his readers to "stablish" their hearts. What does he mean?

Luke tells us (Luke 9:51) that on one occasion Jesus "steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem," meaning that even though confronted by great obstacles He determined with an unshakable resolution to go to the city. This He did in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 50:7) that the Messiah would set His face "like a flint" to carry out His mission.

James is encouraging his readers to determine that absolutely nothing shall tear from them their resolution to remain firm in their hope and faith in the return of the Lord.



II. LIFESTYLE DURING THE WAITING PERIOD (James 5:9-12).

What admonition does James give regarding Christians' relationships with one another? James 5:9.

Writing to people who were undergoing trials and persecution, James encouraged them to show self-restraint and fortitude. But he realized that, while it need not and should not be, faith sometimes falters and patience wears thin. In prolonged, trying situations, when stress wears down equanimity, it is easy to begin to place blame on associates and to indulge in recriminations.

ILLUMINATION: "When . . . the enemy works to make you grumble and murmur, look unto Jesus, trust in your Saviour. This is the only cure for this spiritual malaria."—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 298.

Of what event does James remind his readers in order to restrain them from finding fault with one another? James 5:9.

James is making a word play on the idea of judging which does not come through clearly in the King James Version. It is more evident in the Revised Standard Version. "Do not grumble. . . that you may not be judged; behold the Judge is standing at the doors." In other words, do not judge others condemnably because the One who is to judge you as well as them is on the point of making His appearance.

The implication is this: if you have a faultfinding, grumbling, complaining attitude toward your brethren, it will suggest that all is not right with you. The Great Judge may find you wanting. So correct your heart and your attitude. If you do not condemn your brethren the Judge will not have to condemn you.

SEARCH AND LEARN: James holds up the prophets as examples of the way that we should respond under affliction (James 5:10). What instances of suffering of the prophets can you recall? What were their reactions under suffering?

The prophets were seen as being particularly blessed by God, especially by the Jews. Yet James reminds his readers that those same prophets were persecuted. In fact, virtually every one of them suffered at one time or another for his fidelity to God. Stephen demanded of his Jewish murderers, "Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?" (Acts 7:52, RSV).

"Christ is acquainted with all that is misunderstood and misrepresented by men. His children can afford to wait in calm patience and trust,

no matter how much maligned and despised.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 32.



James refers to Job as an example of those counted “happy which endure” (James 5:11). How do you relate James’ observation to Job’s experience?

It is thought by some that Christians must always be bubbling with happiness. Not necessarily. For while we should not doubt God’s love, we may not always be brimming over with joy. We certainly cannot claim that Job was.

We recognize that Job does not seem to have shown what we usually think of as patience—calm self-restraint. What he did show was “steadfastness” (RSV), a dogged resolution to hold on no matter what, as seen in his statement: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job. 13:15).

An important lesson Christians must learn is that happiness may not come *with* the endurance but as a *result* of it. Meanwhile, an indefinite period of time may be involved.

What message may be found for us in James’ admonition to his readers regarding their language? James 5:12.

James’ counsel may be understood as a comprehensive warning against any kind of loose language, whether it be profanity or the careless, sometimes frivolous, appeal to higher witnesses to attest to a person’s truthfulness or integrity. (In James’ day many such witnesses were appealed to by the Jews such as: God, heaven, Jerusalem, the temple, one’s children, and one’s place in paradise.) The necessity of making such appeals suggests that, by itself, a person’s word is not dependable.

James is but echoing the words of Christ (Matt. 5:33-37) when he says that simplicity and straightforwardness (blended with love and thoughtfulness) are to be the principles of every Christian in conversation and way of living. Say what you mean; mean what you say. Honest people’s word is their bond; there should be no need for anything else.

This admonition is not to be taken as forbidding a solemn oath such as that asked for in a court of law. Jesus Himself took such an oath before the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:63-65). Paul appealed to God to witness to the truth of matters of which he was writing. (See 2 Cor. 1:23; 11:31; Gal. 1:20.)



III. PRAYER UNDER VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES (James 5:13-20).

Why might James need to urge his readers to pray in suffering and to sing praises when feeling cheerful? James 5:13.

The Greek word translated “afflicted” (“suffering,” RSV), could mean any kind of trouble, including suffering brought on by others.

There is a human tendency to become fretful, impatient, and faithless in times of trouble and calamity. The eyes are inclined to turn downward and inward rather than outward and upward. Furthermore, troubles may cause us to reason that somehow we have wandered from God and that there is not much use to pray.

In any case, Satan is most successful at undermining the faith of those who fail to persist in prayer in times of trouble. This is why Jesus stated that “men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1).

Conversely, as we are inclined to lose our hold on God because of trouble, we also are inclined to do so when there is no trouble. When the sky is cloudless we feel no need of shelter from a storm. And when life is trouble-free, we may forget that it is so because of the goodness of God.

Why is it necessary to call the church elders to anoint and pray for a sick individual as instructed in James 5:14?

The oil referred to in our text cannot be understood as being used as a medicine. If so, it would be a universal remedy, for James' reference to sickness seems to be quite general—any sickness. The oil must be understood as being symbolic. In other places in the Bible it represents the Holy Spirit and the grace of God. (See Lev. 8:10, 12; 1 Sam. 16:13; Matt. 25:1-12; Rev. 3:18-20; cf. E. G. White Comments, *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1179; vol. 7, p. 966.)

“In the case of serious illness . . . when the body may be racked with pain and the mind considerably disturbed, it is not easy for the sufferer unaided to turn his thoughts in any articulate or concentrated manner to prayer, and he needs the consolation of other Christians in what may be for him a period of much spiritual distress. James, accordingly, bids any of his readers who may find himself in such a condition *call for the elders of the church*, men it may be assumed specially blessed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. . . . [By] praying within-sight and hearing of the sufferer himself, not only is their prayer likely to be more heart-felt and fervid, but the stricken man may well become more conscious of the effective power of prayer uttered in faith, by which, even in moments of the most acute physical weakness, communion with God can be maintained.”—R.V.G. Tasker, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), vol. 16, p. 129.

Does James 5:15 indicate categorically that each time a sick person is prayed for he must be healed?

James is assuming a number of things in his statement such as: the prayer must be according to God's will (compare 4:15) and the sick person's sins must have been fully and sincerely repented of and confessed. (See *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 228, 229.) The healing may be gradual rather than immediate.

NOTES:



SEARCH AND LEARN: Study Matthew 5:23, 24; Mark 2:7; and 1 Timothy 2:5. What background do these passages give as to what James 5:16 means when it exhorts confession to one another?

The observation “that ye may be healed” in verse 16 may refer to the physically sick of verse 15, or it could mean a spiritual healing of the sin that was confessed to the wronged brother.

What makes “the prayer of a righteous man . . . powerful and effective”? James 5:16 (NIV).

The truly righteous man “prays for divine light, and loves to walk in that light. It is his meat and drink to do the will of his heavenly Father. His life is hid with Christ in God; yet he does not boast of this, nor seem conscious of it.”—*The Sanctified Life*, p. 13.

Reviewing the experience of Elijah alluded to in James 5:17, 18 (see 1 Kings 17:1-7; 18:1, 41-45), what qualities of the prophet made the events described possible?

The term “passions” (KJV) is better translated “nature” (RSV) or “human frailties” (NEB). The term should not be equated with sinning.

We may be inclined to think of worthies who did great spiritual exploits, such as Elijah, as having, through some spiritual metamorphosis, escaped all the weaknesses and shortcomings of humanity. The fact is that such people *transcended* their human weaknesses through faith and by the grace of God. Elijah still had a nature and constitution like ours. He was subject to the same emotions and had the same human frailties.

What primary concern of James, and the purpose of the gospel, comes through in the apostle’s final exhortation? James 5:19, 20.

Ever the concerned shepherd, James closes his epistle on a pastoral note.

“*Err from the truth*” apparently implies a doctrinal deviation of some kind. But more than mere intellectual belief is involved. A moral problem is connected with it because the wanderer needs to be saved from death, and God does not condemn a person to death because of what may be an honest intellectual problem. The wanderer needs to be brought back to Christ, the original truth (John 14:6), as well as to doctrinal truth.

The Revised Standard Version translation of James 5:20, “will save his soul from death,” has led some to wonder whether we may find salvation for ourselves by saving others. Were this so, of course, it would be salvation by works, which cannot be. The allusion is to the saving of the soul of the one rescued from error.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read *Testimonies*, vol. 1, pages 147, 148; *Steps to Christ*, page 59.

“Much is involved in the matter of judging. Remember that soon your life record will pass in review before God. Remember, too, that He has said: ‘Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?’ Romans 2:1-3.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 85.

“If you have given offense to your friend or neighbor, you are to acknowledge your wrong, and it is his duty freely to forgive you. Then you are to seek the forgiveness of God, because the brother you have wounded is the property of God, and in injuring him you sinned against his Creator and Redeemer.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 37.

SUMMARY: Christians, waiting for the Lord’s return, will be characterized by: (1) a positive attitude—patience, courage, resolution; (2) a freedom from complaining and faultfinding; (3) a simplicity and straightforwardness in language; and (4) a looking to God in prayer during suffering. Of course, the Christian also offers praise to God in joyful times.

APPLICATION:

- In all the experiences of daily life, am I steadfast in my loyalty to my Lord?
- How strong is my resolution to be firm in my hope in Christ no matter what happens?
- Realizing that it is easy to judge others wrongly, do I guard myself from condemning them, even in my mind, recognizing that only God has all the facts, the wisdom, and the love to evaluate fairly?
- Have I learned to turn a cheerful face to the world even when things are not going well? What is my influence and witness?
- Do I live so close to God day by day that my prayers may have power and effectiveness in times of need?

Introduction to the Book of Malachi

“Who May Abide the Day?”

In contrast to the great revival brought about as a result of the prophetic messages given by Haggai and Zechariah, Malachi's message given nearly one hundred years later fell on deaf ears. After the brief introduction found in chapter one, most of the first three chapters are taken up with a dialogue between God and the Jewish people. God's loving warnings are met with the people's self-righteous denials. They deny that God has His facts correct. Eight of these warnings and denials run through the first three chapters. In the King James Version six of the eight self-righteous responses begin with the word *wherein*.

However, a few remained faithful stewards in God's service—holding back nothing. Their names are recorded in God's “book of remembrance.” They will be included among the “jewels” that will be preserved in His eternal diadem.

The last four verses of the last chapter conclude with a promise of a great and final reformation to take place just before the coming of the “great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

MALACHI—“WHO MAY ABIDE THE DAY?” (3:2)	
Priests and People Deny God's Warnings (Mal. 1:1 through 3:15)	Preparation for the Day of the Lord (Mal. 3:16 through 4:6)
Introduction (1:1) Wherein hast thou loved us? (1:2-5) Wherein have we despised Thy name? (1:6) Wherein have we polluted Thee? (1:7 through 2:9) Wherefore does the Lord not regard our offering? (2:10-16) Wherein have we wearied Thee? (2:17 through 3:6) Wherein shall we return? (3:7) Wherein have we robbed Thee? (3:8-12) How have we spoken against Thee? (3:13-15)	Book of Remembrance distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked (3:16-18) The Day of the Lord for the wicked (4:1) The Day of the Lord for the righteous (4:2, 3) Preparation—man's part and God's part (4:4-6)

How God's People Excuse Their Failures

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Malachi 1:1 through 2:17.



MEMORY TEXT: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God's warnings of love were met by the Jews' self-righteous denials. In particular, the religious leaders, the priests, refused to recognize their failures. They seemed to think that God should overlook their wickedness as long as they faithfully performed religious rituals.

OVERVIEW: Malachi 1:1 through 2:17	
Lack of Appreciation for God's Love (1:1-5)	The Failure of the Priests (1:6 through 2:17)
Introduction (verse 1) Failure to recognize God's love (verses 2-5)	Failure to honor God (1:6) Failure to distinguish between the common and the sacred (1:7-10) Failure in their mission (1:11, 12) Failure to keep the covenant and to provide spiritual leadership (1:13 through 2:9) Failure to be true to God (2:10-12) Failure in marital relationships (2:13-16) Failure to recognize the limit of divine patience (2:17)

INTRODUCTION: The selfishness of both priests and people and their general neglect of the temple and religious responsibilities brought the Jews to a new low in their relationship to God. Their failure in fulfilling the divine purpose is apparent in the stern messages of warning that came from the pen of the prophet we call Malachi.

Little is known about Malachi. It may be that even the name given to the book is not the name of the person who delivered the messages. The Hebrew name Anglicized to *Malachi* literally means "my messenger." Some commentaries suggest that rather than being a proper name, the

term *Malachi* may be regarded as an abbreviation of *Malakiyah*, or “messenger of Jehovah,” and thus more of a title or description of the bearer’s office.

The people of Malachi’s nation and day had sunk to such a spiritual low that they claimed that they were weary of their religion. What could God do with people like that? But He made a last attempt. In His mercy He sent one more prophet—the last prophet whose voice would be heard among the Jewish people for more than 400 years. The next prophet to be sent to the nation was to be the “Elijah” messenger, John the Baptist. (See Luke 1:17.)

The three lessons that follow on the book of Malachi will consider:

- How God’s people excuse their failures.
- How God’s people are judged.
- How God’s people prepare for deliverance.

“The message of Malachi is particularly appropriate for the church to-day, and is comparable to the Laodicean message of Rev. 3:14-22. Like the Laodiceans, the Jews of Malachi’s day were utterly insensitive to their true spiritual condition and felt their ‘need of nothing’ (Rev. 3:17). They were ‘poor’ in heavenly treasure, ‘blind’ to their errors, and ‘naked,’ or not clothed with the perfect character of Jesus Christ (v. 17). Like the man in the parable without a wedding garment . . . , they stood before the King of the universe, despising the garment of His righteousness and fully content with their own moral rags.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1123.



I. LACK OF APPRECIATION FOR GOD’S LOVE (Mal. 1:1-5).

After the brief introduction found in the first verse of the book of Malachi, most of what follows consists of a dialogue between God and the people. In this dialogue God pointed out their shortcomings, and the people responded by denying that what God said about them was fact.

On what significant note did God begin the dialogue? Verse 2.

Immediately the pattern of response that characterized this dialogue becomes evident. The people sullenly challenged, “Wherein hast thou loved us?” How quickly they had forgotten the miracle of God’s deliverance of the Jews from their Babylonian exile and the remarkable way that He had helped the little group overcome their opposition and rebuild the temple and the walls about Jerusalem.

NOTES:

SEARCH AND LEARN: Complete the following chart that outlines the dialogue between God and the people in order to visualize how arrogant the attitude of the Jews was at that point of time.

Verses	GOD SAID	PEOPLE RESPONDED
1:2	"I have loved you."	"_____ hast thou loved us?"
1:6	"Where is mine honour ... O priests, that despise my name?"	"_____ have we despised thy name?"
1:7	"Ye offer polluted bread upon my altar."	"_____ have we polluted thee?"
1:12, 13	"My name shall be great among the heathen. . . . But ye have profaned it."	"Behold, what a _____ is it!"
2:13, 14	"He regardeth not the offering any more."	"_____ "
2:17	"Ye have wearied the Lord with your words."	"_____ have we wearied him?"
3:7	"Return unto me and I will return unto you."	"_____ shall we return?"
3:8	"Ye have robbed me."	"_____ have we robbed thee?"
3:13	"Your words have been stout against me."	"_____ have we _____ so much against thee?"
3:14		"It is _____ to serve God."



What evidence did God use to answer their rude charge that He did not love them? Mal. 1:2-5.

"In spite of their arrogant response, God in His love for them continued to press His case. Probably the greatest evidence of His love for them was that He did not turn them off and say, 'All right if that's the way you feel about it, good-bye forever!' He continued to press His case. As evidence of His love, He pointed to the contrasting fortunes of the descendants of Esau and Jacob. In a special way His concern was seen in the fact that the punishment Jacob underwent was the punishment of love. It was temporary—for a purpose. But as . . . [can be found] in the writings of the prophet Obadiah, Esau suffered from

the consequences of his defiance against God. His punishment also had a purpose—but a different purpose. The purpose in that case was to destroy Esau's descendants from the face of the earth. The purpose of punishing Jacob's descendants, the Jews, was to lead them to a greater knowledge of God."—Leo and Bobbie Jane Van Dolson, *Boost Your Prophets*, p. 134.

What would have to take place before the people would be able to sense the reality of God's love? Verse 5.

The Laodicean message makes the same point, "Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (Rev. 3:18).

II. THE FAILURE OF THE PRIESTS (Mal. 1:6 through 2:17).

1. Failure to Honor God (Mal. 1:6).

In delivering the message God gave him, Malachi began where the most blame could be placed—with the priests. (See verse 6.) God declared that instead of demonstrating the honor that the servant owes his master, or a son his father, the priests and the people were despising His name. Of course, they were so spiritually blind, and their hearts had turned so far away from tenderness toward God, that they were unable to recognize their attitude.



2. Failure to Distinguish Between the Common and the Sacred (Verses 7-10).

What was the next charge that the priests arrogantly denied? What does this say about their priorities? Verse 7.

By their deeds, if not by their words, they pointed to the table of the Lord as contemptible. They offered blind, lame, and sick animals for sacrifice. In verse 8 God makes the point that they would not dare offer such a gift to a provincial governor.

THINK IT THROUGH: Do I give the Lord the best I have, or do I keep the best of everything for myself and offer the Master mere crumbs from my table?

3. Failure in Their Mission (verses 11, 12).

To what extent were the Jews to spread the knowledge of God among the nations? What had they done instead? Verses 11, 12.

Israel had been chosen by God to be the depository of priceless treasures of truth for all nations. He had given them His law as the standard of the character they were to develop "before the world, before angels, and before the unfallen

worlds. They were to reveal to the world the laws of the government of heaven. By precept and example they were to bear a decided testimony for the truth. The glory of God, His majesty and power, were to be revealed in all their prosperity. They were to be a kingdom of priests and princes. God furnished them with every facility for becoming the greatest nation on the earth.

"Through disloyalty, God's chosen people developed a character exactly the opposite of the character He desired them to develop. They placed their own mold and superscription upon the truth. They forgot God, and lost sight of their high privilege as His representatives. The blessings they had received brought no blessing to the world. All their advantages were appropriated for their own glorification. They robbed God of the service He required of them, and they robbed their fellow men of religious guidance and a holy example. Like the inhabitants of the antediluvian world, they followed out every imagination of their evil hearts. Thus they made sacred things appear a farce, saying, 'The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these,' while at the same time they were misrepresenting God's character, dishonoring His name, and polluting His sanctuary."—Ellen G. White *Comments, SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 1180, 1181.



4. Failure to Keep the Covenant and to Provide Spiritual Leadership (Mal. 1:13 through 2:9).

These verses indicate how completely the priests and the people had lost their sense of sacredness, their sense of beauty, and their sense of the significance of the sanctuary service. In verse 13 they sneer, "What a weariness this is!" They were weary with religious services and duties because, for them, the services had become nothing but form and ritual. They failed to appreciate their deep spiritual significance.

In chapter 2 we find God accusing the priests of failing to keep the terms of the covenant that He made with them through Levi.

In what way had the priests failed to keep the covenant made with Levi? Mal. 2:7-9.

ILLUMINATION: "Today the enemy of all truth is working as never before to make of no effect the binding precepts of God's law. His theories and suggestions are presented so ingeniously, so plausibly, that the so-called Christian world have taken their stand under his banner. By pen and voice they are endeavoring to tear down the standard of God's government, and in its place to erect a human, theoretical standard.

"To false teachers in our day, as well as to those living in Malachi's time, are spoken the words: 'Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept My ways, but have been partial in the law. Malachi 2:9.'—Ellen G. White, *The Southern Watchman*, Jan. 17, 1905.

5. Failure to Be True to God (verses 10-12).

Although Malachi has been speaking particularly to the priests, God's messages become more inclusive of the Jewish people here in verse 10 and in the verses that follow. The example of the priests cannot help but be reflected in the conduct of the people. The prophet sharply reproves the priest, and the people for their idolatry, their adultery, their infidelity, their rebellion, and their sacrilege. Theirs is a religion without power because they follow mechanically and formally the symbols of religion without perceiving what it means.

What sin in particular marks the extent of Judah's apostasy? Verse 11.

The last part of this verse reads this way in the Septuagint version: "has gone after other gods." All who engage in this drastic departure from the will of God are to be "cut off" (verse 12).

**6. Failure in Marital Relationships (verses 13-16).**

The priests and, apparently, the people who followed their example, divorced their faithful companions, rejecting the covenant or vows made in their youth (verse 14). Their sin was aggravated by their hypocritical sorrow (verse 13). When, as a consequence, God refused to accept their offerings, they challenged Him with an impertinent "Wherefore?" They seemed to expect God to accept whatever service they rendered Him, no matter how meaningless and mechanical their performance of the ritual might be.

What principle referred to in verse 15 strongly condemns the violation of marriage vows? (See Gen. 2:24.)

"The Lord emphasizes what He has been saying by an emphatic declaration, 'For I hate putting away.' From the dawn of creation and the beginning of man's existence, Jehovah has intended that there should be but one woman for one man; He intended that these should be one, divisible only by death (Gen. 2:24). He also hates 'him that covereth his garment with violence'; the man who puts away his wife, willfully ignoring her tears and her deeply wounded feelings, covers his garment, himself, his character, with the violence of iniquity. The Lord closes [verse 16] with the same exhortation of verse 15, 'Therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.' Such a vigorous warning and exhortation from the Lord in a former decadent and permissive age should not be silenced; its principle should be heralded to the ends of the earth in our own time."—Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1972), p. 417. Used by permission.

7. Failure to Recognize the Limit of Divine Patience (verse 17).

In verse 17 God informs the priests and the people that they have wearied Him with their words. Even this desperate condemnation makes no impression on them, and they reply in injured tones, "Wherein have

we wearied thee?" In other words, "Why? What have we done? What is the matter with You?"

God answers, "You do not even know the difference between evil and good. You do not seem to realize that I am a God of justice and judgment."

God had borne their complaining and apostasy for a long time. But here He attempted to make it plain to the Jews that divine forbearance would not last forever. They would face a day of reckoning.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Notice the parallels between the attitude of the people of Malachi's day and that of the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:14-22.

"The Lord requires of all who profess to be His people, far more than they give Him. He expects believers in Christ Jesus to reveal to the world, in word and deed, the Christianity that was exemplified in the life and character of the Redeemer. If the Word of God is enshrined in their hearts, they will give a practical demonstration of the power and purity of the gospel. The testimony thus borne to the world is of much more value than sermons, or professions of godliness that do not reveal good works. Let those who name the name of Christ remember that individually they are making an impression favorable or unfavorable to Bible religion, on the minds of all with whom they come in contact."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1181.

SUMMARY: Not only did the Jews of Malachi's day for the most part disbelieve God's assurances of love but they also, rudely and arrogantly, refused to listen to His bill of particulars that rebuked them for rebellion and apostasy. But we cannot condemn them any less than we condemn ourselves, for many of us who claim to be Christ's followers today too often demonstrate the same insensitivity and lack of willingness to accept God's loving reproof.

APPLICATION:

- Review the list of mistakes the Jews made and ask yourself if you are repeating some of these mistakes today.
- Restudy Malachi, chapters 1 and 2 for evidences of God's love, interest, and concern. Does He have the same loving interest in us today? How will we respond?
- Notice again God's desire that His people demonstrate to the world their appreciation for His love through genuine loving service (Mal. 1:11). What does this say to us about our privilege of being faithful stewards in every aspect of life and witness?

NOTES:

How God's People Are Judged

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Malachi 3.



MEMORY TEXT: "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Mal. 3:17).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God's biggest problem is not with the out-and-out sinner but with the Laodicean Christian who refuses to recognize that anything is wrong. However, out of the Laodicean church will come those who make up God's jewels. They will allow the eyesalve of the Holy Spirit to be applied to their spiritual eyes by the Great Physician. Then, recognizing their need, they will ask Christ to live out His life within them.

OVERVIEW—Malachi 3

Warning and Appeal (1-7)	Indictments (8-12)	Contrasting Reactions (13-18)
Christ is to come in judgment and righteousness (1-3) Christ will not wink at evil. God's holiness is constant and consistent (4-6) Plea to return to God so that He can return to them (verse 7)	One area of departure is their withholding of tithes and offerings (8, 9) God promises to provide faithfully if His people will be faithful (10-12)	Wicked complainers find it vain to serve the Lord (13-15) Those who fear and serve the Lord will be God's on the day He makes up His jewels (16-18)

INTRODUCTION: The last book of the Old Testament and the last book of the New Testament contain sections that deal with the judgment of God's people. In particular, the Laodicean message applies to the judging of God's last-day church. With this in mind, we can compare the book of Malachi with the Laodicean message. Both teach that when we fail to recognize our true spiritual condition our Christian experience is in trouble.

We react with a shudder to the way God's people responded in Malachi's

time. But, as we review the “whereins” of the book of Malachi, we can see in their unwarranted responses something of what we may be doing.

First there is “Wherein hast thou loved us?” We might say, “God, You can’t really love us, in spite of what You are saying. Why, look at the evil things You allow to happen to us.”

The second Wherein was “Wherein have we despised thy name?” In some circles it is considered old-fashioned to talk about the Ten Commandments. Those who believe that, do not want to be so “out-of-date” and “out-of-touch” as to suggest that people today have to obey the Lord! So they might ask, “God, why are You so upset when we do some things we want to do rather than what You tell us to do? Can’t we just have a little bit of independence and freedom of action?”

Number three in our list is “Wherein have we polluted thee?” “Just bless us, Lord, as we bring ourselves and our offerings,” we may be saying. “Accept what we give and be thankful for what we are doing. Even if it is just giving the change left in our pockets at the end of the week or using for Your service whatever time we don’t really need to use for ourselves. What makes You think, Lord, that we have lost our sense of sacredness and worship? After all, we are giving You something.” Then we might add, as did the Jews of old, “What a weariness this is. We will do what we can and leave it at that.”

As we review the next retort, “Wherein have we wearied thee?” we may find ourselves challenging: “Why do You say we have worn You out? As long as we are coming to church and paying our tithe—at least 50 percent of us are paying our tithe—we are following the forms of religion. What more can You expect? This is an especially busy age, and we have so much to do, Lord.”

The next query was “Wherein shall we return?” Today we might put it this way: “What is all this talk about revival and reformation? We’re good people just the way we are, aren’t we? Why, look what we are doing. We have missionaries all around the world. We attend church, except when it is inconvenient to do so. Why, Lord, how can we return to You? We are already here.”

Then follows “Wherein have we robbed thee?” A modern comparison might be: “All we ever hear in church is appeals to give. Give to this and give to that. We go to camp meeting, and they really try to drag the money out of us. We are tired of all these calls for offerings, Lord. This tithe business is completely unrealistic in the kind of world in which we live. We can hardly make ends meet these days. Our paychecks can’t possibly cover all we want and need. We aren’t robbing you, God; we are just trying to keep life and limb together.”

Do some of those excuses sound vaguely familiar to you? Here in Malachi we find one of the best descriptions of Laodiceanism to be found in the Bible. Studying Malachi helps us understand why Jesus says so disappointedly, “Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:15, 16, RSV). But all is not hopeless for modern Laodicea. There will be those who heed this strong reproof and turn to the Lord, asking Him to prepare them to stand as overcomers in the final judgment.



I. WARNING AND APPEAL (Mal. 3:1-7).

The closing question in the dialogue between God and His people in chapter 2 was the people's skeptical query, "Where is the God of judgment?" God responds in chapter 3 with a vivid description of judgment to come. "To the people of Malachi's day this message was a warning that God would deal with their sins. However, in addition to its warning message for the Jews of Malachi's day, this prophecy also had a Messianic import (. . . see DA 161). John the Baptist was the 'messenger' who prepared 'the way before' the Lord by preaching repentance."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1130.

Who is the second "messenger," the "messenger of the covenant" and what implications can be drawn concerning His coming? Verse 1.

The messenger of the covenant is Christ. We should make a clear distinction between this second Messenger and the previously mentioned "messenger" of this verse. This prophecy applies not only to Christ's coming to His temple during His first advent but also to His coming to His temple at the time when earth's history is about to close. (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 161; *The Great Controversy*, p. 424; and *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 339.)

To what is the judgment likened in Malachi 3:2, 3?

Christ is to come in judgment and righteousness and will deal with people's sins. Malachi describes Him as suddenly coming to His temple. When He came to this world the first time He did appear suddenly in His temple. There He gave clear evidence that He was the Messiah. What did His people do? Some of the leaders plotted to put Him to death. It was in character for them to do so, because for 400 years so many had been making decisions to follow their own inclinations rather than God's expressed will.



In studying this prophecy how can we distinguish between what Christ was to do at His first coming and what was to be accomplished in the final judgment?

The prophet makes no distinction here between Christ's first and second coming. Many Old Testament prophecies are conditional on how the people will respond. If the people had accepted Christ when He came the first time, He would have gone on to establish a kingdom then. Because the prophets had to allow for such a possibility, we need to turn to the New Testament to learn the distinction between what took place at the first coming and what will take place at the second coming. The New Testament teaches that God turned away from using the Jews to serve as His chosen people to the Gentiles. All who receive the gospel are to help carry it to all the world as a witness to all people before Jesus comes.

"Christ literally came to the temple during His first advent, but

Malachi points forward to an even greater fulfillment, describing Christ's coming to His temple in final judgment. The term *refiner's fire* and *fuller's soap* point forward to the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary during the investigative judgment."—Leo and Bobble Jane Van Dolson, *Boost Your Prophets*, p. 137.

What would have been accomplished in Judah if the priests and people had allowed God to refine them and purge their sins? Verse 4.

In verses five and six God makes it clear that He will not wink at evil. Because God does not change, His eternal purpose toward His people will stand. God will have to discipline them in order to "refine" them. But what He does is for the purpose of "purging their sins" and "saving them."

Throughout the writings of the Old Testament prophets God's stern warnings and reproofs are counterbalanced with loving appeals to turn to Him and experience mercy rather than judgment.

How did God promise to respond if His people would return to Him? What strange reply did He receive? Verse 7.

Compare God's appeal to return in verse 7 with Zechariah 1:3.



II. INDICTMENTS (Mal. 3:8-12).

When the people insolently responded, "Wherein shall we return?" God replied with specifics. He asked, "Can you imagine such a thing as a man robbing God? Yet you are robbing Me."

From your study of this book, how would you expect the people to respond to this specific charge? (See verse 8.)

We almost can hear God breathe a sigh of disappointment at their unbelievable incapacity to recognize their wrongdoing. Yet He patiently explains, "In your tithes and offerings." The greedy "robbers" were not limited to the priests (who may have considered themselves exempt as recipients of the tithe) but "even this whole nation."

Verse 10 implies that the people *were* bringing some tithes, but they were not bringing *all* the tithes into the storehouse—they did not return to God a full, honest tithe.

In what way does "robbery" of God involve more than withholding tithes and offerings?

"Those who refuse to place themselves on the Lord's side are robbing Him of the service He claims. What rent are they paying Him for living in His house, this world? They act as though they had created the world, as though they had a right to use what they possess as they please. God

marks their misuse of His talents.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1182.

Does it seem that God “bribes” us to pay tithes by promising to open “the windows of heaven” (verse 10) if we do so faithfully? Why should God reward us for doing our duty?

“Duty is duty, and should be performed for its own sake. But the Lord has compassion upon us in our fallen condition, and accompanies His commands with promises. He calls upon His people to prove Him, declaring that He will reward obedience with the richest blessings.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 1182, 1183.

Verse 12 indicates that it is God's desire that the material prosperity of His people should be an object lesson to the world of the blessings of obedience. But in order to accomplish this, He must be able to trust His people to be unselfish and generous with that which He provides and not be carried away with wealth and blessings.



III. CONTRASTING REACTIONS (Mal. 3:13-18).

For what did God reprove the people of Judah in the final dialogue in Malachi? Mal. 3:13.

Their boldness and rebelliousness are evident in God's statement of fact: “Your words have been stout against me.” By now we would be surprised if they had not answered, “How have we spoken against thee?”

In the former encounters, God has been dealing with their deeds. But this time, He is talking to them about their words. Yet their response remains the same. They blame God for their troubles, complaining, “It is vain to serve God. What is the good of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts?” (verse 14, RSV). In the light of their answer what more can the Lord do for them?

There were no more prophets after Malachi for about 400 years—the longest period in Israel's history when they were without a prophetic witness. Why? There were other periods in Israel's history when the people were far more immoral. There were other times when they did not pretend to serve God and went after idols. There were times when they were much more open in their rebellion; yet, through it all, God kept sending prophet after prophet to them—even during the Babylonian exile. From Moses to Malachi we find an almost continuous line of prophets. But for about four centuries after this there was no prophetic gift evident.

THINK IT THROUGH: What does this gap in the prophetic gift indicate about Laodiceanism?

SEARCH AND LEARN: Use the following chart to sharpen your understanding of the contrasting reactions of the people to the strong messages God sent them through Malachi. State what these reactions were:

Reactions of the Wicked Complainers (verses 13-15)	Reactions of Those That Feared the Lord (verse 16)



In every age there are those who serve the Lord in spite of the rejection of God's messages by most of those around them. What indication does verse 16 give us that God appreciates and notes their attitude?

What does God call the faithful and what promise does He make them? Verse 17.

With satisfaction God points to His people and says, "Look at them. They are Mine. They are My special possession." "On the day when I act, . . . I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him" (verse 17, RSV). God drives the lesson home with these words: "Then once more you shall distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him" (verse 18). This verse provides the key to the book of Malachi. As long as we allow wickedness and pride to blind us, we cannot discern what is right or wrong—what is good or evil. We cannot tell the difference between the righteous and the wicked. We will continually question God's fairness in His dealings with us. We will keep repeating and echoing, "What's the matter with this?" and "What's the matter with that?" But when we turn to the Lord, He will give us the eyesalve of the Holy Spirit that enables us to recognize what we are doing that is not right.

The eyesalve of the Holy Spirit works as a miracle drug on our eyes, so that instead of seeing outwardly, we see inwardly. Instead of seeing what is wrong with the minister and what is wrong with the church and what is wrong with the church officers and what is wrong with everybody about us, suddenly we cannot see outside of ourselves at all because we are looking only inside. And when we look inside we see that there are some things that need to be taken care of.

ILLUMINATION: "The closing words of this scripture outline the experience that the people of God are yet to have. We have a wonderful future before us as a people. The promises of the third chapter of Malachi will be verified to the letter."—Ellen G. White *Comments, SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1184.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: "Says the prophet: 'Who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and He shall sit as a

refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.' Malachi 3:2, 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 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 the earth. This work is more clearly presented in the messages of Revelation 14. When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing."—Ellen G. White, *The Southern Watchman*, Jan. 24, 1905.

"In the third chapter of Malachi two parties are brought to view. Here the Lord denounces against His professed people who are not faithful sentinels. The charge and challenge of God against this people is marked and decided. [Mal. 3:5-12 quoted.] Man's duty to be faithful in giving the Lord the portion which He claims in tithes and offerings, that there may be a supply to carry forward the work without embarrassment or hindrance is plainly specified.

"A people is brought to view who are not filled with the Holy Spirit, because they have not walked humbly with God and been faithful and clean and pure and holy in His sight. God says. . . 'Your words have been stout against me. . . . Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we accept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; . . . yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.'

"Who required them to walk mournfully? Not Christ. Their mournfulness is the fruit of their own will and unsanctified spirit. They complain of one another and of God, putting on an outside show as disappointed men, leaving the impression on the world that it does not pay to be Christians. To be envious and jealous of the brethren means to be envious and jealous of God."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1183.

SUMMARY: Malachi 3 has special meaning to God's people living in the time of the investigative (pre-advent) judgment. God pleads with us as He did with His people in ancient times to return in full commitment to Christ so that Christ can return soon to claim us as His own.

APPLICATION:

- Am I tempted sometimes to think that God will overlook some of the things I am doing which I do not consider very wrong as I compare my actions with others?
- Will I be among God's possessions on the day that He makes up His jewels? Will others be there too as a result of my influence and witness?

How God's People Prepare for Deliverance

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Malachi 4.



MEMORY TEXT: "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall" (Mal. 4:3).

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Fortunately, Malachi does not end with a picture of God's church entrapped in hopeless Laodiceanism. This last book of the Old Testament concludes with a picture of God's people drawn closer to Him than ever before, revealing the glory of the Sun of Righteousness to a world darkened by sin.

OVERVIEW—Malachi 4		
Day of the Lord for the Wicked (verse 1)	Day of the Lord for the Righteous (2, 3)	Preparation for the Day of the Lord (4-6)
It totally destroys the wicked. Neither root nor branch is left	It brings healing, growth, and victory over wickedness	<i>Our part</i> —Remember God's commandments (verse 4) <i>God's part</i> —He will send a special messenger to turn people to Him (verses 5, 6)

INTRODUCTION: The fourth chapter of Malachi presents a particularly appropriate conclusion to the Old Testament prophetic books of which Malachi is the last. The emphasis in this chapter on the Day of the Lord points to the contrasting fates of the righteous and the wicked. But, beyond that, it points to the glorious consummation of the great controversy—to the greatest period of closeness to God and victory over sin that ever has existed in the history of God's people.

Seventh-day Adventists today are convinced that the time of fulfillment is immediately before us. That which God attempted to do with Israel from the time of Moses to the time of Malachi will be accomplished finally in the days just ahead through His last-day people. The Lord's answer to the question raised in Malachi 3:2—"Who may abide the day of

his coming?"—is found in Malachi 4:2. Those who may fear His name and on whom (as well as in whom) the Sun of Righteousness has arisen "with healing in his wings."



I. THE DAY OF THE LORD FOR THE WICKED (MAL. 4:1).

The "day" referred to in verse 1 is that which is called the "day of the Lord" in verse 5—the "day" of final judgment. The closing words of Malachi are a prophecy of events yet to come. The "day" of judgment pictured here will be a fiery one—a time when the wicked will be destroyed by fire. (See 2 Thess. 1:8; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 20:9, 10.)

What sin is singled out in verse 1 in a particular way as being characteristic of the wicked? Why is this sin especially offensive to God? (See Isa. 14:12-15 for a clue.)

SEARCH AND LEARN: What three phrases used in verse 1 make it as clear as it can be that the fire of judgment will destroy sin and sinners completely?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



II. THE DAY OF THE LORD FOR THE RIGHTEOUS (Mal. 4:2, 3).

Verse 1 portrays the fate of "all that do wickedly" when the Day of the Lord comes. Verse 2 shifts to the contrasting picture of what happens to "you that fear my name" on the Day of the Lord. The permanent *loss* of the wicked is contrasted with the permanent *gain* of the righteous. Throughout eternity God's redeemed will "grow" and improve.

What exciting prophecy promises that the light of the gospel will shine as never before in spite of the darkness that characterizes the world before the second coming of Jesus? Verse 2. (Compare with Isa. 60:1-3.)

"Christ is ever ready to bring spiritual light to His people in times of need. In this sense it may be said that the 'Sun of righteousness' arose at the first advent of Christ (see DA 261), and will 'arise' in a special way in the time of great moral darkness just preceding His second advent (see PK 716, 717)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1133. The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy will take place when sin has been destroyed forever.

Why is the word *healing* used in connection with the rays of the Sun of Righteousness?

The word used for *healing* here is the masculine noun form of the Hebrew verb *to heal*. As is true with most Hebrew words, this word has a broad meaning. It can mean “to cure,” “to restore to prosperity,” “to restore in spiritual sense,” “to pardon, forgive,” “to comfort, console,” “to be repaired,” “to render waters wholesome.” In the noun form, it can refer to refreshment, recreation, relief from calamity, calmness, and tranquility, as well as of healing from illness.

This same word is used in Hosea 14:4 where God says: “I will heal their backsliding.” This illustrates how the Hebrew term applies to the healing of the whole person. It does not deal with physical restoration alone.

Four hundred years after Malachi’s prophecy was given, Jesus came and began His work of healing. He was the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings. He brought total healing—physical, mental, social, and spiritual. He came to make people whole again. As we study the Bible words for health, safety, peace, salvation, healing, and restoration, we find that these concepts often are interchangeable. In the Bible sin and sickness are equated in many instances, as are healing and salvation. The redemptive ministry of Jesus includes every aspect of restoring people to the likeness of God. God purposes to restore us to His image in the totality in which we were created originally. People today turn to the Christian faith not alone as a source of spiritual health, but in order to find health and healing in every aspect of life.

What, beside preaching, is included in Christ’s commission to His church? Luke 9:2.

The Greek word for “being saved” or “attaining salvation” (*sozo*) is used also in several references to indicate saving, freeing from disease, or bringing healing. Because of the language used in the Bible for this healing, saving concept, it really is not strange that Jesus could say to the man who had great faith, “Man, your sins are forgiven you” (Luke 5:20, RSV).

The transgression of God’s laws is not limited, as some think, to the spiritual realm. God’s laws involve all physical, mental, social, and spiritual relationships. Therefore, transgression in any of these dimensions of life is rebellion against His dominion, His rule. When we knowingly enter into such rebellious activity, whatever the realm or dimension involved, we sin. Healing must cover the same wide spectrum that transgression covers if salvation from sin is to be complete.

THINK IT THROUGH: What is the implication of Jesus’ question in Luke 5:23?

The scribes and Pharisees to whom Jesus addressed the question apparently could do neither. But those whom Jesus has commissioned to

follow His footsteps in their ministry to others are to bring physical, mental, social, and spiritual healing to people everywhere.



What does Genesis 1:27 mean when it speaks of God making human beings in His image?

The term *image* can only refer to the likeness of God as a totality, not to a copy of some of the parts. This means that physically, mentally, and spiritually we were made in the likeness of God. "When Adam came from the Creator's hand, he bore, in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker."—*Education*, p. 15. To be made in the image of God includes much more than physical resemblance to God and sharing the breath of life which all living creatures share.

To be separated from God would mean the end of health, happiness, stability, and our personal relationship with God. Yet God does not force Himself on us. He gave us the power of choice. That splendid power also is part of what it means to have the image of God. When the two people God originally created abused this power, they not only lost their true humanity but also lost much of the physical, mental, social, and spiritual image of God that was theirs before the Fall.

The healing that Christ will bring as Sun of Righteousness includes the total restoration of the whole person in every dimension and aspect of life. Not only are we to be forgiven and spiritually restored, but every aspect of our broken relationship with God and our disobedience to all of the laws of life are to be changed.

What is the one great object of our health ministry and of our doctrinal emphasis on health?

It is restoration to the wholeness that can be ours in Christ. Too often the impression is given that Christ's righteousness consists only of covered up unrighteousness. That is not a complete picture. Christ's righteousness is not just something He puts *on* us to cover our sinfulness. It is the divine power He gives us or puts *in* us to overcome our sinfulness. The Sun of Righteousness treats more than our symptoms. His healing rays penetrate our being, destroying the cancerous growth of sin inside our souls.

NOTE that some of the modern Bible versions reflect the Hebrew better than does the King James Version in translating the last part of verse 2:

"You will go out and leap like calves released from the stall" (NIV).

"You shall go forth leaping like calves from the stall" (RSV).

How does verse 3 once again draw the sharp contrast between the fate of the righteous and that of the wicked, and what reinforcement does it give to the picture found in verse 1 of the complete annihilation of the wicked?



III. PREPARATION FOR THE DAY OF THE LORD (Mal. 4:4-6).

God does not force His people to play their expected role and to cooperate with Him in preparing for the coming of His eternal kingdom. This fact strikes us with great impact as we study the Jew's refusal to respond to the pleas of Malachi. Ours is to be a loving, willing commitment.

What does God ask us to do in order to cooperate with His plan of complete restoration of the earth and its inhabitants? Verse 4.

In an age when many teach that God's laws no longer are binding it is significant that this last-day prophecy points to obedience preceding the divine blessing.

ILLUMINATION: "Malachi, the prophet with whom Jehovah closed His Old Covenant, affirms the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. My servant indicates that Moses simply served as Jehovah's minister who wrote it; the source of the law was Jehovah Himself. Liberal theologians have divided the origin of the law among many sources and authors, but Malachi stamps the lie on all such intellectual nonsense—it is of Jehovah through Moses! Horeb is another name for Sinai, where among scenes of awe, terror, and wonder, Jehovah made known His law."—Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, p. 425.

Verse 4 outlines what we can do. "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant." Our part involves remembering Jesus and the law that He gave through Moses. Christ's law is to be so plainly written on the tables of our hearts that in our every act and word we demonstrate that we remember the law of Moses. Our part is to remember. That means that we are to study and to pay attention to what we study. We must let the Holy Spirit lead and teach us.

What is God's part in finishing His work on earth? Verses 5, 6.

In finishing His work God will send Elijah the prophet. The ultimate and greatest fulfillment of this prophecy will yet be seen in the ministry of those who prepare the way for the second coming. Those whose lives demonstrate the full outworking of Christ in the heart are modern-day Elijahs. They will be used by God to finish His work in the midst of a world that has abandoned biblical morality and has been characterized by a severe generation gap.

Concerning that gap between the generations, we are told that, through full commitment and total love for Jesus, the people of God will find that the hearts of the fathers will turn to their children and the hearts of the children will turn to their fathers.



What is encompassed in the promise in verse 5 to send "Elijah the prophet"?

Many of the Jews interpreted this prophecy to mean a literal return of the prophet Elijah. (See John 1:21.) But the angel that spoke to Zacharias told him that his son, John, was to prepare the way for Christ "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Luke 1:17).

ILLUMINATION: "The work of John the Baptist, and the work of those who in the last days go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah to arouse the people from their apathy, are in many respects the same. His work is a type of the work that must be done in this age. Christ is to come the second time to judge the world in righteousness. The messengers of God who bear the last message of warning to be given to the world, are to prepare the way for Christ's second advent, as John prepared the way for His first advent. In this preparatory work 'every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain;' for history is to be repeated, and once again 'the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.' "—Ellen G. White, *The Southern Watchman*, Mar. 21, 1905.

On what encouraging note does Malachi end? Mal. 4:6.

The original application is to the literal children of Israel returning to the true faith of their fathers. The warning to repent presents a promise of thrilling hope to those who heed it and turn to the Lord in total commitment.

THINK IT THROUGH: What must I do to have a part in fulfilling the commission envisioned in the last-day Elijah message outlined above—the giving of the three angel's messages to the world?



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read Matthew 17:12, 13; Luke 1:16, 17; Revelation 14:6-12.

"In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord. Just such a work as that which John did, is to be carried on in these last days. The Lord is giving messages to His people, through the instruments He has chosen, and He would have all heed the admonitions and warnings He sends. The message preceding the public ministry of Christ was, Repent, publicans and sinners; repent, Pharisees and Sadducees; 'for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Our message is not to be one of peace and safety. As a people who believe in Christ's soon appearing, we have a definite message to bear,—'Prepare to meet thy God.'

"Our message must be as direct as was that of John. He rebuked kings

for their iniquity. Notwithstanding the peril his life was in, he never allowed truth to languish on his lips. Our work in this age must be as faithfully done. . . .

"In this time of well-nigh universal apostasy, God calls upon His messengers to proclaim His law in the spirit and power of Elias. As John the Baptist, in preparing a people for Christ's first advent, called their attention to the Ten Commandments, so 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.' With the earnestness that characterized Elijah the prophet and John the Baptist, we are to strive to prepare the way for Christ's second advent."—Ellen G. White *Comments, SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1184.

"Those who commune with God walk in the light of the Sun of Righteousness. They do not dishonor their Redeemer by corrupting their way before God. Heavenly light shines upon them. As they near the close of this earth's history, their knowledge of Christ, and of the prophecies relating to Him, greatly increases. They are of infinite worth in God's sight; for they are in unity with His Son. To them the word of God is of surpassing beauty and loveliness. They see its importance. Truth is unfolded to them. The doctrine of the incarnation is invested with a soft radiance. They see that the Scriptures is the key that unlocks all mysteries and solves all difficulties."—Ellen G. White, *The Southern Watchman*, April 11, 1905.

SUMMARY: The book of Malachi presents a vivid contrast between those who choose not to remember the Lord and those who remember Him and whom He remembers in His book of remembrance; between those who are merely religious and those who are righteous; between formalism and faith. It calls those who fear the Lord to let the fire of the Sun of Righteousness blaze out from lives totally committed to Him. Their witness is intended to reach those in danger of being destroyed in the fire that will leave neither root nor branch.

As we conclude this quarter's study we must respond to God's call given through the Bible writers and reemphasized in these last days to yield to Him complete control of all that we have and all that we are. As a church we need a new commitment to His expressed will. As individual church members we must dedicate ourselves anew to let the beauty of the character of Christ shine out from our lives to a world darkened by sin.

NOTES:

Lessons for First Quarter, 1987

Sabbath School members who have not received a copy of the Adult Lessons for the first quarter of 1987 will be helped by the following outline in studying the first two lessons. The title of this series is "Insights from the Book of Daniel."

First Lesson:

"HOW TO UNDERSTAND PROPHECY"

MEMORY TEXT: 2 Chron. 20:20.

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: An overview of Bible prophecy.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God has not left the world or His people without warning and guidance. He has sent His prophets to warn of danger and to point out the true way. From the Bible we learn that God has been active in history. Indeed, He has been active in the life of every individual. We need to be grateful for His protection and His showers of blessing. But in a special sense in these last days, we can be grateful for the words and the writings of the prophets that warn of danger and point the way to eternal safety.

OUTLINE:

- I. The Principle of Prophecy: God Keeps in Touch.
- II. The Prophetic Ministry: A Gift of the Spirit.
- III. Keys to Recognizing Bible Prophecy.

Second Lesson:

"JUDGMENT AND MERCY"

MEMORY TEXT: Micah 7:18.

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Daniel 1.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: We see the judgment of God in sending the people of Jerusalem into exile, but we also see the mercy of God in caring for those who are faithful to Him.

OUTLINE:

Overview—God's Justice and Mercy.

Lessons in Braille:

The regular Adult Sabbath School Lessons are available free each month in Braille and 16 ⅔ rpm records to blind and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact the Christian Record Braille Foundation. Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506.

COMBINED
PROGRAM HELPS
FOR THE SMALL CHURCH
**CRADLE ROLL,
KINDERGARTEN,
AND
PRIMARY
Series
A**



SABBATH SCHOOL DEPT.
GENERAL CONFERENCE

**COMBINED
PROGRAM
HELPS
FOR THE
SMALL
CHURCH**

If your church is small and must combine cradle roll, kindergarten, and primary Sabbath School divisions, you'll be glad to know that now there's a special edition of *Program Helps* designed just for this situation.

Covering one full year of the three-year cycle, *Combined Program Helps for the Small Church* offers more than just programs. You'll find information on how to work with cradle roll, kindergarten, and primary age groups in the same Sabbath School. There's a Materials List for each quarter, sections on do-it-yourself visual aids, offering devices and illustrations, a Nature Facts section, mission stories, and more.

Order now through your Sabbath School secretary or from your Adventist Book Center. *Combined Program Helps for the Small Church, Series A* (for 1985) \$3.95.



The Bible Study Seminar You Can Attend at Home

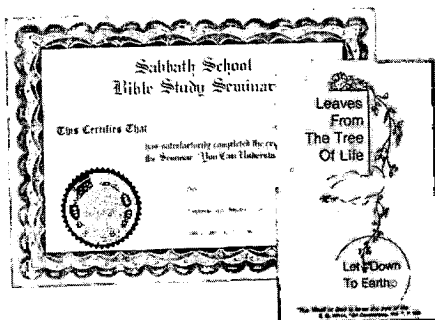
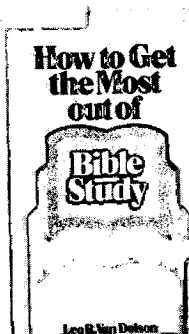
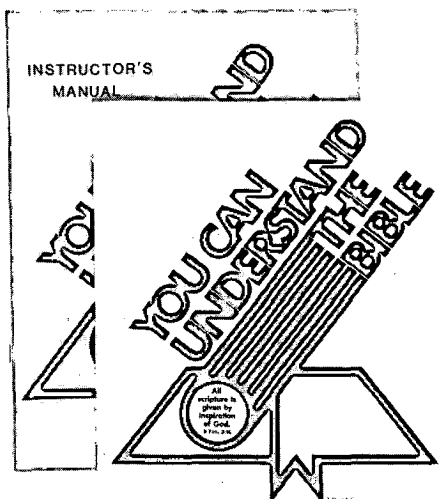
After years of study and experimentation, Fernon Retzer and Leo Van Dolson have produced a Bible Study Seminar you can use in your own home. Proving itself successful all across North America, this superior Bible-study plan can work for you.

The key ingredients are two inexpensive books—**How to Get the Most out of Bible Study** and **You Can Understand the Bible**. When used together, these two valuable guides will provide you with the key to unlocking the Bible's storehouse. In addition, the other materials pictured here can help. The **Greatest of These**, containing thirty different biblical versions of 1 Corinthians 13, is just one.

This valuable Bible-study method is great for study groups and Sabbath School classes, as well as for your personal study.

Now that we are studying the various books of the Bible in Sabbath School, this seminar material is even more important.

This valuable information is also available on cassette tape. To secure your own Bible Study Seminar materials, see your ABC today or your conference Sabbath School director.





TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION

SPECIAL PROJECTS

- 1 Evangelistic center,
Stockholm, Sweden
- 2 Day School, Birmingham,
North British Conference

