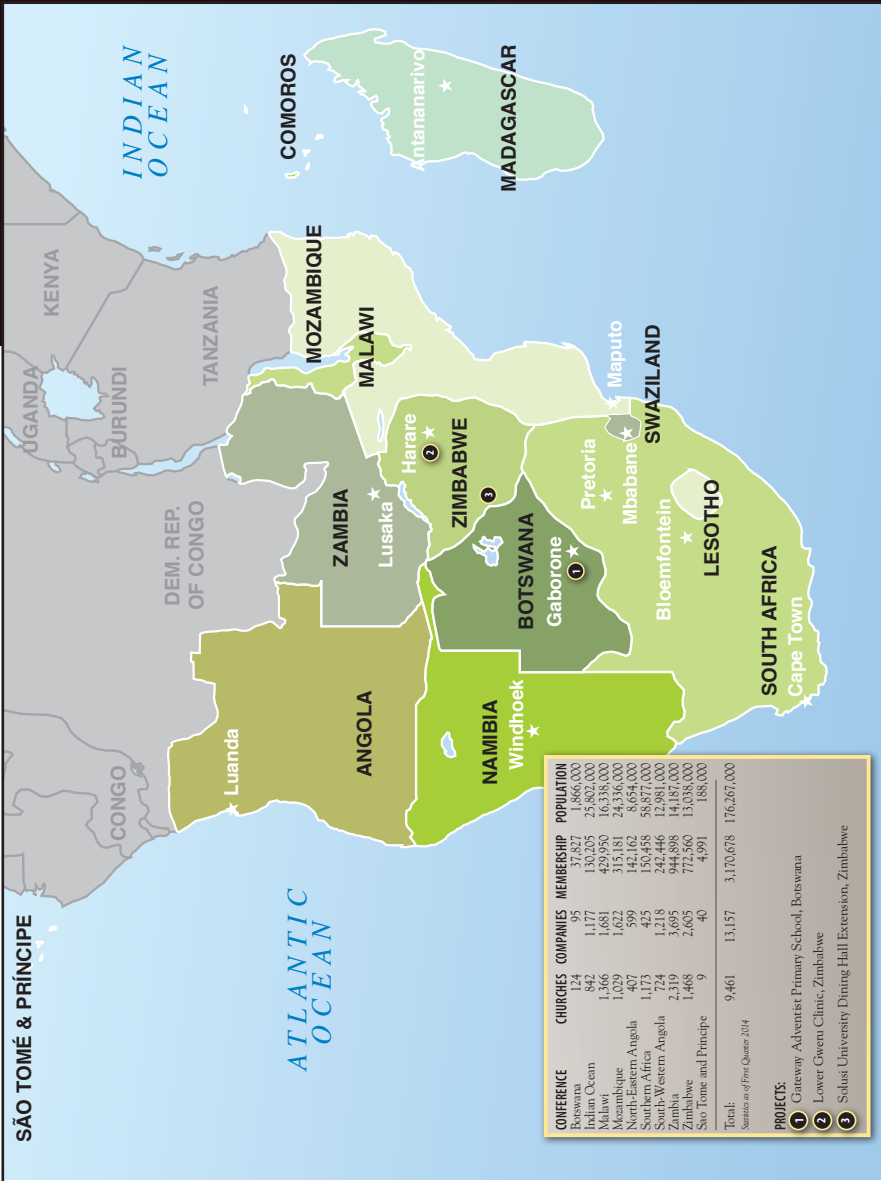


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ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

JEREMIAH

Oct • Nov • Dec 2015

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide

Oct | Nov | Dec 2015

JEREMIAH



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Mi-Yittan

Biblical Hebrew, like most languages, is sprinkled with idioms, words, or phrases that mean something different from what they immediately say. An example is *mi-yittan*, which is composed of two Hebrew words: *mi*, which is the interrogative “who?”; and *yittan*, which means “will give.” Thus, we have “who will give?”

In the Hebrew Bible, this phrase expresses the idea of a wish, of a desire, of someone wanting something badly. For instance, after their escape from Egypt, the children of Israel, facing challenges in the wilderness, exclaimed, “‘If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt!’” (*Exod. 16:3, NIV*). The phrase “if only” came from *mi-yittan*. In Psalm 14:7, David utters, “Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!” The Hebrew doesn’t say, “Oh”; it says, *mi-yittan*. In Job 6:8, when Job exclaims, “‘Oh, that I might have my request’” (*NIV*), “Oh” is from *mi-yittan*.

Another occurrence appears, this time in Deuteronomy 5:29. Going over the history of God’s providences, Moses reminds the children of Israel about their request that he, Moses, talk to the Lord for them, lest they die. According to Moses, the Lord, pleased with their request, then said: “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would hear Me and always keep all My commandments” (*NKJV*).

The word translated “Oh”? Yes, it is *mi-yittan*.

Incredible! Here is the Lord—the Creator God, the One who made space, time, and matter, the One who spoke our world into existence, the One who breathed into

Adam the breath of life—uttering a phrase generally associated with the weaknesses and limitations of humanity.

Talk about the reality of free will. Talk about the limits of what God can do in the midst of the great controversy. This use of *mi-yittan* reveals that even God won't trample on free will (because the moment He did, it would no longer be free).

Now, if ever one book of the Old Testament revealed the reality of God's desire for humans to obey Him, and the human tendency not to, it would be the book of Jeremiah, the topic of this quarter. Set against the background of great geopolitical changes in the ancient Near East, the book of Jeremiah recounts the ministry and message of the prophet as he, with passion and faithfulness, preached God's message to a people who, for the most part, didn't want to hear it.

Starting with the prophet's call, the book takes us through decades of biblical history as the Lord used this young (and then old) man to proclaim the basic truths that have been the foundation of the biblical message from the beginning. And of all the spiritual truths taught in the book, these words catch the essence of so much of what the Lord seeks from His people: "Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD'" (*Jer. 9:23, 24, ESV*).

To read the book of Jeremiah is to take a journey, a spiritual journey that goes back and forth from the lowest depths of human depravity to the heights and grandeur and majesty of the Lord—the Lord who, from those heights, cries out to all of us: *Mi-yittan that such a heart would be in you!*

The book of Jeremiah recounts the ministry and message of the prophet as he, with passion and faithfulness, preached God's message to a people who, for the most part, didn't want to hear it.

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The Prophetic Calling of Jeremiah



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 1:19, Jer. 7:5–7, 1 Kings 2:26, Jer. 1:1–5, Isa. 6:5, Jer. 1:6–19, Matt. 28:20.*

Memory Text: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations” (*Jeremiah 1:5, NKJV*).

We know more about the life of Jeremiah than we do about any other Old Testament prophet. The biographical facts in his book help us understand better his work as a prophet. Jeremiah had such an effect on history that, even at the time of Jesus, he was a revered prophetic figure.

At the same time, the prophet's work, judged by human standards, shows only slight success. Despite decades of fervent warning and pleadings, the people for the most part didn't listen to the messages he gave them from the Lord.

Nevertheless, despite the opposition, Jeremiah could not be bought or sold; he stood as “a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall” (*Jer. 1:18, NIV*), not in his own strength but in the Lord's.

Jeremiah's lot in life wasn't a happy one in many ways. His calling brought him suffering, woe, rejection, even imprisonment. Worse still was the fact that so many of these troubles came from the very ones whom he was seeking to help, seeking to point in the right direction. Thus, in his own way, Jeremiah prefigured what Jesus Himself would face hundreds of years later in the same land.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 3.

The Prophets

The prophets, according to their calling, were determined protectors of God's law. They stood on the ground of the covenant and the Ten Commandments (*Jer. 11:2–6*). Micah 3:8 gives one summary of the prophets' work, which was "to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin." And the concept of sin, of course, is meaningless apart from the law (*see Rom. 7:7*).

What was the prophets' message to the people? In what ways is that message the same to us today? *Isa. 1:19, Jer. 7:5–7, Ezek. 18:23. (See also Matt. 3:7–11.)*

God's judgment was not inevitable, but it would come if the people did not turn from their evil ways. Change, however, is not so easy, especially when people get accustomed to doing evil. Who hasn't seen how people get used to the evil that, at one time, had appalled them? The message of the prophets was to let people see just how bad their evil was and what the consequences were of not turning away from it. This message, of course, wasn't the prophets'; it was the Lord's.

The prophets do not mention how God's Word was revealed to them or how they heard it. At times God spoke to them directly; other times the Holy Spirit touched them in dreams or visions or, perhaps, through a "still small voice" (*1 Kings 19:12*). However their messages came to them, the prophets had a mission, not only to transmit God's will to the common people but also, if need be, to deliver it before kings, emperors, and generals.

This task involved great responsibility: if they told the truth, these powerful people could kill them; but if they did not represent the truth, God's judgment could also come upon them. To be a prophet is a heavy calling, and from what we can tell from the Bible, those given that call took it seriously.

We can be glad they did, for their messages have come down to us in the Bible. In that sense, their words still speak, even today. The question now, as in Jeremiah's time, is the same: Will we listen?

What are the prophets, even after all this time, still telling us? At the core, what is their basic message to God's people?

Jeremiah's Family Background

Read 1 Kings 1 and 1 Kings 2:26. What was the background that led to the exile of Abiathar to his home in Anathoth?

After he strengthened his throne, Solomon, in a conflict with Adonijah over succession, removed Abiathar the priest from his office and sent him into exile back to his hometown, Anathoth, believed to be about three miles northeast of Jerusalem. Hilkiyah, Jeremiah's father, was a member of a priestly family that lived at Anathoth. Some have speculated that Jeremiah's family may have descended from Abiathar. Either way, we know from Jeremiah 1:1 that the prophet had an exalted lineage. Thus, we can see here that all through prophetic history the Lord has called all types of people—shepherds, rabbis, fishermen, priests—to the prophetic office.

“A member of the Levitical priesthood, Jeremiah had been trained from childhood for holy service. In those happy years of preparation he little realized that he had been ordained from birth to be ‘a prophet unto the nations;’ and when the divine call came, he was overwhelmed with a sense of his unworthiness. ‘Ah, Lord God!’ he exclaimed, ‘behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.’ Jeremiah 1:5, 6.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 407.

The priests were to be the moral and spiritual leaders of the nation; they had been given important roles that impacted most every area of the nation's spiritual life. Some had been faithful to that task; others abused and violated it in ways that we can't imagine. As we will soon read in the book of Jeremiah, the prophet had very strong words to speak against these unfaithful priests, who had proved unworthy of the responsibilities and calling that they had been entrusted with.

What are your spiritual responsibilities, whether at home or in the church or both or anywhere else? If a prophet were to speak to you now about those responsibilities, what might he or she say?

The Prophetic Calling of Jeremiah

Read Jeremiah 1:1–5. What does this tell us about Jeremiah’s calling?

Just like other prophets in the Old Testament (and like Paul in the New; see *Gal. 1:1, Rom. 1:1*), Jeremiah didn’t waffle in regard to who called him. He was very clear in these verses and, in fact, all through the book of Jeremiah, that what he was speaking was “the word of the LORD,” which had come to him. No doubt this fervent conviction is what enabled him to press on ahead despite vehement opposition and toil, suffering, and trials.

Jeremiah’s calling happened in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah, dated to about 627 or 626 B.C. We do not know the exact year the prophet was born, or the exact age he began his ministry. In his mind, though, as we will see, he deemed himself a child, someone too young for the task given him.

Read Jeremiah 1:4, 5. What assurance and comfort should he have gotten from those words?

God chose Jeremiah to be a prophet before his birth. God set him aside from the moment of his conception for this prophetic role. The words translated “I sanctified you” (*vs. 5, NKJV*) come from a verb that means “to be hallowed,” “to be holy,” and to “sanctify,” among other things. It definitely has a sacred and religious connotation to it, one tied also with the sanctuary service itself. Indeed, the word for “sanctuary” comes from the same root word. The idea contained in it is that something or someone is “set apart for a holy purpose.” This is what God had planned for Jeremiah, even before his birth. These texts don’t teach pre-existence or predestination; they teach, instead, God’s foreknowledge.

God knows the end from the beginning. What comfort can we draw from this amid the trials that we inevitably face?

Reluctant Prophets

Despite the Lord's assurance that Jeremiah had been divinely chosen for this task, the young man was frightened and didn't feel up to it. Perhaps knowing the spiritual state of people at the time, which wasn't good, and knowing what needed to be done, Jeremiah didn't want the job.

Compare Jeremiah 1:6 with Isaiah 6:5 and Exodus 4:10–15. What common points do all these incidents have?

None of those men, for whatever reasons, felt up to the task. Perhaps that was a crucial prerequisite for the job of a prophet: a sense of one's own unworthiness and inability for such a crucial and important task. *A spokesman for the Creator?* No wonder they all shrank from the task, at least at first.

Notice Jeremiah's first response after being called. He immediately talked about his inability to speak well, as did Moses. Isaiah, too, in his response, made mention of his mouth, his lips. In all cases, they knew that, whatever else their calling involved, it would involve speaking and communication. They were going to get messages from God and, as such, would be responsible for proclaiming those messages to others. Unlike today, where they could build a Web site or send a text message, this communication would so often have to be face to face. Imagine having to stand before hostile leaders or unruly people and give them sharp words of rebuke and warning. The reluctance of these soon-to-be prophets is understandable.

Read Jeremiah 1:7–10. What is God's response to Jeremiah? Why should that response hold some hope and promise for us in whatever we believe we have been called by God to do?

The Almond Branch

The prophet is God's witness; his job is to speak not for himself but for God alone. Jeremiah wasn't called to find solutions to the problems of the nation or to become a great personality or charismatic leader whom the people would follow. Jeremiah had the singular mission to transmit the words of God to the people and their leaders. The emphasis here is not on the human or on human potential; it is on God's sovereignty and power alone. The prophet was to point the people to the Lord, in whom alone was the solution to all their problems. It is, of course, no different for us today.

What was Jeremiah's first vision about? (See Jer. 1:11–19.)

Most Bible translations translate the Hebrew expression in verse 11 as “the branch of an almond tree.” These translations, however, miss the Hebrew play on words here. The word translated “almond tree” has the same root as the verb “to keep watch,” which appears in verse 12, when the Lord says that He is going to “keep watch” over His word to fulfill it.

One could argue that the central message of the entire book of Jeremiah is found in verses 11 and 12. God's word will be fulfilled. One day everyone will see events happen just as God said they would. God wants His people to turn away from their sins. He has offered grace and forgiveness, but He does not force anyone to obey and be healed. If His people will not respond to Him, His words of judgment and punishment will certainly be fulfilled as His words against Israel were fulfilled in the book of Jeremiah.

As we can see, too, God's words here were not just for the people. The Lord was speaking directly to Jeremiah himself, warning him to be prepared for the opposition that he would face. No matter what happened, Jeremiah could have the assurance from God that “I am with you.” He would, as we will see, need it.

Don't we all?

Read Matthew 28:20. What assurance can we find for ourselves in these words to us, living in the time that we do?

Further Thought: Martin Luther wrote about the prophet in the introduction of his commentary to the book of Jeremiah: “Jeremiah was a sad prophet, who lived in a deplorable and difficult period and, what is more, his prophetic service was extremely difficult as he was struggling and fighting with a bad-tempered and stubborn people. Apparently he did not achieve much success because he experienced how his enemies became more and more evil. They tried to kill the prophet several times. They pressed hard against him, whipping him several times. Yet, he would live to see with his own eyes how his country was devastated and his people taken into exile.”

“For forty years Jeremiah was to stand before the nation as a witness for truth and righteousness. In a time of unparalleled apostasy he was to exemplify in life and character the worship of the only true God. During the terrible sieges of Jerusalem he was to be the mouthpiece of Jehovah. He was to predict the downfall of the house of David and the destruction of the beautiful temple built by Solomon. And when imprisoned because of his fearless utterances, he was still to speak plainly against sin in high places. Despised, hated, rejected of men, he was finally to witness the literal fulfillment of his own prophecies of impending doom, and share in the sorrow and woe that should follow the destruction of the fated city.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 408.

Discussion Question:

1 One of the saddest things, and yet something that should give us all, today, as Seventh-day Adventists, something to think about, is the fact that God had warned Jeremiah that he would face great opposition *from his own people*. Read Jeremiah 1:17–19 again. Who would be the ones fighting against him? What fearful lesson should we take away from this for ourselves? That is, what is our attitude toward the prophetic word to us, especially when we hear things that we don’t like? How does the Ellen G. White quote above help express the fearful truth that the very ones who should have been revealing the true God to the world were the ones who were, by reviling and attacking His spokesman, fighting against Him? (See also *Eccles. 1:9*.)

A Most Satisfying Career: Part 1

Harry and Alex* worked as security guards in Malawi. One night Alex told Harry that he had an idea of how they could earn some extra money.

“What’s that?” Harry asked, interested.

“We could use our rifles in a little side business,” Alex said, lifting his gun. “Rich people have more than they need, and we need more than we get. We could take a little from them so we can have enough for ourselves.”

Harry wasn’t sure; but eventually, he was convinced. The two broke into the home of a wealthy family and stole cash and anything they could carry. A few days later, they robbed more homes. But one night they were caught. Sitting in jail, Harry realized the seriousness of his crimes. The two men were sentenced to eight years of hard labor in separate maximum security prisons.

Harry arrived at the prison determined to escape. His prison shirt was imprinted with the length of his prison term. One day Harry bribed another prisoner to trade shirts.

When he wore his new shirt with a sooner release date, he was assigned to a low-security job in the prison garden. Harry noticed that the armed guard watching them grew sleepy every afternoon. One day when the guard was yawning, Harry dropped his hoe and ran. Other prisoners started running too.

The guards caught all the prisoners except Harry, who had hidden among some large stones. When it was dark, the guards gave up their search and returned to the prison. Harry crawled out and escaped.

Harry found a job; for 18 months, he worked hard and stayed out of trouble. Then one day when he came into the bus station, the police were waiting to take him back to prison. He now had to serve ten years.

When Harry was escorted to his cell, he was surprised to find that his cell mate was Alex, his former partner in crime.

“Hey, I have an idea,” Alex said after Harry settled in.

“What’s your idea?” Harry asked. And suddenly it was just like old times.

The prison walls were made of mud bricks with a thick coating of cement over them. Harry and Alex decided to dig a small tunnel to the outside. It took them only three days to dig through the wall. The two waited until dark then crawled through the hole.

Everything seemed quiet; but as they scrambled up the outside wall, a guard saw them and shouted. The guards chased them, but Harry and Alex had a good head start.

The two stopped a car on the road, made the driver get out, and took the car. They drove to the city and sold the car for parts. But someone became suspicious and told the police. Alex escaped, but Harry was caught. This time he was sent to a small prison where he could be watched more closely. That decision changed his life.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.

** Alex is a pseudonym.*

The Crisis (Within and Without)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Judg. 2:1–15; 1 Kings 12:26–31; 2 Chron. 33:9, 10; Jer. 2:1–28; 5:2, 3.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Israel was holiness to the LORD, the firstfruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; disaster will come upon them,’ says the LORD’ ” (*Jeremiah 2:3, NKJV*).

If we could pick one word to describe the human condition since the Fall, it would be *crisis*, the extent of which can be best understood by what it took to get us out of the crisis: the death of Jesus on the cross. The crisis must be pretty bad; after all, look at the extreme measures needed to solve it.

All through the Bible, many stories took place against the backdrop of one crisis or another. The situation during the time of Jeremiah and his ministry was no different.

God's people faced many challenges, both from within and from without. Unfortunately, despite the terrible military threat from foreign powers, in many ways the greatest crisis came from within. “Within” meant not just a corrupt leadership and corrupt priesthood, which were bad enough, but “within” was in the sense of people whose hearts had been so hardened and damaged by sin and apostasy that they refused to heed the warnings that God was sending them, warnings that could have spared them from disaster.

Sin is bad enough, but when you refuse to turn away from it—talk about a crisis!

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 10.

A Quick History

When the Israelites had finally entered the Promised Land, after years of wandering in the wilderness, it wasn't long before troubles began. All it took was for a new generation to arise, one that didn't "know the LORD" (*Judg. 2:10*), and a spiritual crisis started that, in many ways, infected the nation all through its history. It's a problem that, indeed, has infected the Christian church as well.

Read Judges 2:1–15. What caused the crisis, and how was it made manifest?

Verse 11 says: "Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD" (*NIV*). Each generation, one after the other, moved one step farther from God until the nation was doing exactly what the Lord had told it not to do. Due to their sin, the Israelites faced one crisis after another, but even then the Lord had not given up on them. He sent them judges (*Judg. 2:16*) who delivered them from their immediate woes.

After the era of the judges, the nation entered a time of relative peace and prosperity under what has been called "the United Monarchy," the rule of Saul, David, and Solomon, which lasted about one hundred years. Under David, then Solomon, it grew into a regional power.

The "good" times, though, did not last. After the death of Solomon (about 931 B.C.), the nation split into two factions, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Much of the blame can be placed on the misguided rule of Solomon, who, for all his wisdom, made numerous mistakes. "The tribes had long suffered grievous wrongs under the oppressive measures of their former ruler. The extravagance of Solomon's reign during his apostasy had led him to tax the people heavily and to require of them much menial service."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 88, 89. Things were never the same again for God's chosen nation. Everything the Lord had warned them not to do, they did, and thus, they reaped the doleful consequences.

Think about the problem of the next generation not having the values and beliefs of the one before it. How have we, as a church, dealt with this issue? How can we learn to transmit our values to those who follow us?

The Two Kingdoms

After the division of the nation, things went from bad to worse. In the Northern Kingdom, King Jeroboam made some terrible spiritual choices that had a long-lasting impact for evil.

Read 1 Kings 12:26–31. What should this tell us about how immediate circumstances can so blind our judgment?

The king’s introduction of idolatrous worship helped set the nation on a disastrous course. “The apostasy introduced during Jeroboam’s reign became more and more marked, until finally it resulted in the utter ruin of the kingdom of Israel.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 107. In 722 B.C., Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, put an end to the country and deported its inhabitants to different parts of his empire (see *2 Kings 17:1–7*). There was no turning back from this exile. For a time, Israel disappeared from history.

Things weren’t as bad in the Southern Kingdom, at least not yet. But they weren’t great either, and, as with the Northern Kingdom, the Lord sought to spare these people from the calamity that the Northern Kingdom faced, only now from the threat of the Babylonians. Unfortunately, with rare exceptions, Judah had a series of kings who continued to lead the nation into deeper apostasy.

What do these verses say about the reign of some of Judah’s kings? *2 Chron. 33:9, 10, 21–23; 2 Kings 24:8, 9, 18, 19.*

Despite all the terrible leadership, so many of the prophetic books of the Bible, including Jeremiah, are the words of the prophets whom God sent to His people in an attempt to turn them away from the sin and apostasy that was eating at the heart of the nation. The Lord was not going to give up on His people without giving them ample time and opportunity to turn from their evil ways and be spared the disaster that their sin would, inevitably, bring.

It’s so hard to step out of your own culture and environment and look at yourself objectively. In fact, it’s impossible. Why, then, must we constantly test our lives against the standard of the Bible? What other standard do we have?

Two Evils

It was against this background that the young Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry. “The word of the LORD” came to him, and he spoke it in hopes that the people, if they would heed these words, would be spared the ruin that otherwise was sure to come.

Read Jeremiah 2:1–28 and answer the following questions:

What promises had God made to the nation when they were faithful?
(See vs. 2, 3.)

What were some of the priests, pastors, and prophets doing that was sinful? (See vs. 8.)

In what terrible ways were the people self-deceived in regard to their true spiritual condition? (See vs. 23, 24.)

Even though the nation had experienced some spiritual reform under the leadership of Hezekiah and Josiah, the people reverted to their old ways and fell into worse apostasy. As he did all through his ministry, Jeremiah here spoke in no uncertain terms about what was going on.

Particularly interesting are his words in Jeremiah 2:13. The people had committed two evils: they forsook the Lord, the fountain of living waters, and as a result, hewed out for themselves broken cisterns that, of course, could not hold any water at all. In other words, having abandoned the Lord, they had lost everything. These words become even more meaningful in light of what Jesus said in John 4:10.

In Jeremiah 2:5, the Lord said that the people had gone after “worthlessness,” and as a result they had become “worthless” (ESV). The Hebrew words for both terms come from the same Hebrew word (*hbl*) that is often translated “vanity.” It also means “a vapor” or “breath.” How does going after worthless things make us “worthless”? What does that mean? How does this concept help us to understand those who, at times, feel as if their lives are meaningless or worthless? What is the answer for them?

The Babylonian Threat

The background to the political events that shaped the ministry of Jeremiah are, to some degree, lost to history. That is, many of the details are not available. But we do have in the Bible (with the help of archaeological finds) more than enough information to have a general picture of what took place. Though from a human perspective it probably seemed that no one was in control as these nations battled it out for land, power, and hegemony, the Bible teaches us differently.

Read Jeremiah 27:6. What are we to make of this?

The little kingdom of Judah had, in the early years of Jeremiah's ministry, found itself caught up in the military battles between Babylon, Egypt, and the waning power of Assyria. With the decline of the Assyrian Empire in the late seventh century B.C., Egypt sought to regain power and dominance in the region. However, at the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C., Egypt was crushed and Babylon became the new world power.

This new power made Judah its vassal state. Jehoiakim, king of Judah, could stabilize the country only by swearing allegiance to the Babylonian king. Many in the country, however, didn't want to be loyal to Babylon; they wanted to fight and free themselves from the Babylonians, even though that wasn't what the Lord intended for them to do. On the contrary, God was using Babylon specifically as a vehicle to punish the nation for its apostasy.

Read Jeremiah 25:8–12. What was Jeremiah's message to the people of Judah?

Again and again, Jeremiah warned the people about what would happen because of their sin, and time and again many of the political and religious leaders refused to heed the warnings, believing instead what they wanted to believe, which is that the Lord would spare them. After all, were they not God's specially called people?

When was the last time you believed what you wanted to believe, no matter how obviously wrong that belief turned out to be? What lessons have you learned so that the same thing doesn't happen again?

Swearing Falsely

In Jeremiah 5:1, the Lord tells the people to run through the streets and see “if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her [Jerusalem]” (*ESV*). This brings to mind two stories. One is from an ancient Greek philosopher of the fourth century B.C. named Diogenes, who, according to legend, used to walk around in the marketplace in the daytime, claiming that he was looking for an honest man. The other story, of course, one that we know is true, is that of God speaking to Abraham, telling him that if He could find 50 righteous men (soon reduced to 10), He would not destroy the city.

The point, though, in the Lord’s words through Jeremiah, was to reveal just how widespread the apostasy and sin had become among His people. Was there no one who did justice and sought truth?

Read Jeremiah 5:2, 3. What is being said here that shows just how bad things were becoming? (See Lev. 19:12.)

These verses bring up a point that appears all through the book. No matter how deeply fallen the nation had become, many of the people believed that they were still faithfully following the Lord! They were uttering His name, but they were doing it “falsely” instead of “in truth, in justice, and in righteousness” (*Jer. 4:2, ESV*) as the Lord had commanded them. They did not listen to the warning coming from God, but they went on in their lives and religious practices as if everything were all right between them and God, when in fact almost nothing was right between them.

The depth of their deception can be seen in Jeremiah 7:4 when the people would take a false comfort in these words, *hekhah yhwah hekhah yhwah hekhah yhwah hemma!* (“This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD”), as if having the temple there was all that they needed in order to ensure that all would go well with them. It’s one thing to know you’re in a crisis; but when you are in one and don’t know it, that’s an even worse situation.

With all the wonderful truth we have been given as Seventh-day Adventists, how can we make sure we don’t fall into a similar deception of believing our unique calling itself is enough to save us?

Further Thought: “Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes” (*Deut. 12:8*). “When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep all his commandments which I command thee this day, to do that which is right in the eyes of the LORD thy God” (*Deut. 13:18*). “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (*Judg. 17:6, 21:25*).

There’s a crucially important contrast presented in these verses, especially in this day and age when many people revolt against the idea of being told by an outside authority what to do, or being told what is right and wrong. Yet, we can see here a clear distinction between these two worldviews. In one, people do whatever they think is “right” in their own eyes; in another, people are to do what is right in the “eyes of the LORD thy God.” The problem with the first position is that, so often in history, what is “right” in someone’s own eyes is often wrong in God’s. That’s why we have to submit everything, even our own conscience, to the Word of God.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some examples you can think of where “good” people did very bad things, even though they thought at the time that what they were doing was right? Many cultures today look back in horror at what were once common practices. What lessons can we draw from this for ourselves today about why we not only need to submit to the teaching of the Bible, but also need to be very careful in how we interpret the Bible? This is especially important when we realize that, in some cases, some of the “bad” things that were done were done by those who believed they could justify their actions by the Bible. What should this tell us about how basic and foundational to all our beliefs the Ten Commandments need to be?
- 2 As we study Jeremiah this quarter, keep in mind the idea that despite warning after warning, the people believed that they were right with God. What could have caused them to be so deceived about their true condition? What message should this have for us as well?

A Most Satisfying Career: Part 2

Some Christian lay workers visited Harry's prison each week to teach prisoners about God. One of the prisoners invited Harry to join them. He went, but his mind was focused on a way to escape from prison. A lay worker gave him a book called *The Great Controversy*. Harry read it, but he was sure that God wouldn't bother with him because of all the crimes he'd committed.

Often at night, some of the prisoners would sing and pray together from their cells. One night the words of their song touched Harry's heart. "I've wandered far away from God, now I'm coming home," they sang. In the darkness, tears fell unchecked from Harry's eyes. Then he began sobbing. The same thing happened again a few nights later. Harry realized that God was calling him to come home, and he couldn't refuse.

Harry hesitated to join any one religious group, for he didn't know which one taught Bible truth. He began studying many religions. He even learned Arabic so he could read the Koran. But no religion seemed to hold the truth.

Then Harry remembered the book that he had received. He pulled it out and began reading it again. As he read *The Great Controversy*, he sensed that this book was teaching the truth.

Harry began meeting with the Seventh-day Adventist Bible class, then he joined their baptismal class and prepared to be baptized. But because of his reputation for escaping, the guards refused to allow Harry to leave for his baptism.

A month later Harry was transferred back to the original prison from which he had escaped. When he entered the prison, the guards greeted him. Some of them had heard that Harry had changed, and they watched to see if it was true. They even bribed other prisoners to spy on him.

Harry rejoiced to learn that Adventists held worship services in this prison too. He joined them and continued studying the Voice of Prophecy lessons he had started several months earlier. Finally, he was allowed to be baptized.

Harry wrote to his family and told them that he had given his life to God. When they visited him, they were amazed at the changes they saw. When Harry and his family prayed together, the guards bowed their heads too. They even left him alone with his mother, for they were convinced he would not try to escape again.

Harry threw himself into prison ministries from the inside. He held meetings, enrolled other prisoners in the Voice of Prophecy Bible course, and shared books by Ellen White with other prisoners. The Adventist group worshipping in the prison grew to about one hundred before Harry was released.

When Harry returned home, he began working as a literature evangelist. He loves sharing his faith with those he meets and leading them to God. "Leading souls to Jesus is a new and satisfying career, far better than the one that landed me in jail," he testifies.

HARRY MITENGO *lives in Liwonde, Malawi.*

The Last Five Kings of Judah



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Chronicles 34, Jer. 22:1–19, 29:1–14, 2 Chron. 36:11–14, Jer. 23:2–8.

Memory Text: “He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?” (*Jeremiah 22:16, NIV*).

Famed Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky spent four years in a Siberian prison in the 1800s for subversive political activities. Later, writing about his experiences, he talked about some of his fellow prisoners' utter lack of remorse for their terrible behavior. “In the course of several years, I never saw a sign of repentance among these people; not a trace of despondent brooding over their crimes, and the majority of them inwardly considered themselves absolutely in the right.”—Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky, The Years of Ordeal, 1850–1859* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 95.

Dostoevsky could have been talking about, with the exception of Josiah, the five kings who ruled Judah during the ministry of Jeremiah. One after another, these men seemed totally unrepentant for their actions, even as it became clearer and clearer that their actions were bringing the calamities that the Lord, through Jeremiah, had warned would come.

It had never been God's intention to give Israel a king; by the end of this week's lesson, we will better understand why. We'll understand, too, the severe pressure that poor Jeremiah faced during much of his unappreciated ministry.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 17.

Under the Rule of Josiah

Josiah was the sixteenth king to rule in the Southern Kingdom; his reign spanned 640–609 B.C. He became king at the age of eight, after more than half a century of moral and spiritual decline under his father (Amon) and grandfather (Manasseh), two of the most evil kings in Judah. Josiah's reign lasted for 31 years. Unlike his ancestors, however, Josiah “did that which was right in the sight of the LORD” (*2 Kings* 22:2), despite an environment that worked against him.

“Born of a wicked king, beset with temptations to follow in his father's steps, and with few counselors to encourage him in the right way, Josiah nevertheless was true to the God of Israel. Warned by the errors of past generations, he chose to do right, instead of descending to the low level of sin and degradation to which his father and his grandfather had fallen. He ‘turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.’ As one who was to occupy a position of trust, he resolved to obey the instruction that had been given for the guidance of Israel's rulers, and his obedience made it possible for God to use him as a vessel unto honor.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 384.

Read 2 Chronicles 34. What were the components of Josiah's reform, and why would they be central to any attempt at spiritual reformation, be it corporate or personal?

Josiah's reform consisted of two main components: First, it was getting rid, as much as possible, of anything and everything that smacked of idolatry. That is, he worked to remove the evil practices that had arisen in the nation.

But that was only the first step. An absence of evil or wrong practices doesn't automatically mean that good will follow. Second, after hearing the Book of the Law read to him, the king made a covenant before the Lord “to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book” (*2 Chron.* 34:31).

Read 2 Chronicles 34:32, 33. What do these verses tell us about the power of a good example, especially among people in positions of power and influence? Think long and hard: What influence do your words and actions exert on others?

Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim: Another Descent

Jehoahaz (also known as Shallum) was 23 years old when he succeeded his father, Josiah, on the throne. His reign lasted only three months. Pharaoh replaced him with his brother, Jehoiakim, because Jehoahaz was not favorable toward Egyptian politics. Jehoahaz was taken to Egypt, and there he died. (*See 2 Chron. 36:4, 2 Kings 23:31–34.*)

Jehoiakim reigned 609–598 B.C. When Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, Jehoiakim was taken to Babylon along with vessels from the temple. During the time of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, Jeremiah warned the people that these kings were leading the nation down a wrong path.

Read Jeremiah 22:1–19. What were some of the issues with Jehoiakim that brought such a stern rebuke from the Lord?

The Lord, speaking through Jeremiah, had very sharp words for this corrupt and covetous ruler. Jehoiakim was an oppressive and greedy king who imposed heavy taxes in Judah (*see 2 Kings 23:35*) in order to pay the Egyptians. Worse, using forced labor, he had elaborate construction done on his own palace, in defiance of the Torah, which was clear about paying people for their work: “Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning” (*Lev. 19:13*). Also, unlike Josiah, his father, Jehoiakim permitted pagan rites to flourish again in Judah.

Jeremiah 22:16 is a powerful text. In the context of comparing the corrupt Jehoiakim to his father, Josiah, the Lord said to him: “He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?” (*NIV*). In other words, the true knowledge of God comes from how one treats those who are in need; it comes when we step out of ourselves to benefit those who can really do nothing for us in return. We see here, again, as we see all through the Bible, the Lord’s concern for the poor and the helpless, as well as the obligation we have to help those who cannot help themselves.

Dwell on the idea that helping the “poor and the needy” is how we come to know the Lord. What does that mean?

The Short Reign of King Jehoiachin of Judah

The nineteenth king of Judah was Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim. He reigned on David's throne for barely three and a half months. In 598 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar brought his forces to Jerusalem and seized the 18-year-old king with his mother, his wives, and many other royal captives. In 561 B.C., in the thirty-seventh year of his captivity, Jehoiachin was given mercy by Evil-Merodach, Nebuchadnezzar's successor. He was granted the right to dine with the king of Babylon, and he could wear his kingly robes. (See *2 Kings 25:27–30*, *Jer. 52:31–34*.) His sons were also in Babylon with him, yet Jeremiah's prophecy said they would have to give up the throne of David.

Read *Jeremiah 29:1–14*, the words of the Lord through Jeremiah after King Jehoiachin and his family and the court were taken captive from Jerusalem. Even amid this tragedy, how were God's love and grace revealed?

One of the most famous verses in the Bible is this: “ ‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’ ” (*Jer. 29:11, NIV*). Here, of course, we have the immediate context: that of the Lord speaking through Jeremiah to the captives of Judah who had seen their lives completely uprooted by their Babylonian conquerors. Yet, even then, no matter how bad their situation seemed, the Lord wanted them to know that He still loved them and had only their good in mind. No doubt, considering the horrific circumstances, they must have welcomed such promising and hopeful words. Thus, even amid all dire warnings and threats, the people were still given the promise of “a future and hope.” How crucial it must have been for them, especially at that time, to have such assurance!

A future and a hope? What promises can you claim from the Lord for “a future and a hope” even right now, regardless of your circumstances?

At the End of the Dead End

Read 2 Chronicles 36:11–14. What do these verses tell us about the last king of Judah before the final destruction of the nation? What spiritual principles of apostasy are revealed in these texts?

Zedekiah (also known as Mattaniah) took the throne at the age of 21, placed there by Nebuchadnezzar as a puppet king. Unfortunately, as the texts say, he hadn't learned many lessons from what had gone before with previous kings, and as a result he brought even greater ruin to the nation.

Second Chronicles 36:14 states something very profound, a point that in many ways went to the heart of their apostasy. Amid the list of all the evil done under the reign of Zedekiah, it is said that Judah was following "all the abominations of the nations" (*NKJV*).

There they were, hundreds of years after the Exodus, hundreds of years as the covenant people who were to be a light and a beacon to the nations (*Deut. 4:5–8*), and yet they were still so caught up in the prevailing culture, so caught up in the cultural and religious environment of their neighbors, that they were doing "all the abominations" of the pagans.

Might there be a message there for us?

Read Jeremiah 38:14–18. What did the king ask him, and why?

The Lord had made it clear on numerous occasions that the nation was to submit to the rule of Babylon, that this conquest was punishment for their iniquity. Zedekiah, however, refused to listen, and he formed a military alliance against Nebuchadnezzar. The nation relied heavily on the hope of an Egyptian military victory. But Nebuchadnezzar was victorious over Pharaoh's army in 597 B.C. This defeat permanently sealed the fate of Jerusalem and the nation. Despite so many opportunities to repent, to reform, to be revived, Judah refused.

We as a church have been raised up to proclaim a message to the world that no one else in the world is proclaiming. In many ways that is very similar to what Judah was to do. What lessons can and should we learn for ourselves from their mistakes?

The Dark Years

What became of Israel and Jerusalem after rejecting God's message?

Jer. 39:8, 9.

Everything that God had warned them would happen to them is exactly what happened. However much they didn't want to believe the warnings, they certainly did believe them after they all came to pass. Who hasn't, even on a personal level, experienced something similar? We're warned by the Lord not to do something or else this will happen, but we do it anyway and, sure enough, what we were told would happen happens.

What message is found in Jeremiah 23:2–8? What hope was given the people there?

From a human perspective, all seemed lost: their nation lay in ruins, their temple was destroyed, their rulers were exiled and held captive, and the city of Jerusalem was a pile of stones. The Jewish nation and the Jewish people should have at that time disappeared from history, as had so many other nations that had undergone what they just had.

The Lord, though, had other plans, and in the verses above (and in many others) He gave them the hope that all was not lost but that a remnant would return and through them the promises would be fulfilled. That is, amid all the warnings of doom and destruction, the prophets also gave the people their only hope.

“The dark years of destruction and death marking the end of the kingdom of Judah would have brought despair to the stoutest heart had it not been for the encouragements in the prophetic utterances of God's messengers. Through Jeremiah in Jerusalem, through Daniel in the court of Babylon, through Ezekiel on the banks of the Chebar, the Lord in mercy made clear His eternal purpose and gave assurance of His willingness to fulfill to His chosen people the promises recorded in the writings of Moses. That which He had said He would do for those who should prove true to Him, He would surely bring to pass. ‘The word of God . . . liveth and abideth forever.’ 1 Peter 1:23.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 464.

Further Thought: “In the closing years of Judah’s apostasy the exhortations of the prophets were seemingly of but little avail; and as the armies of the Chaldeans came for the third and last time to besiege Jerusalem, hope fled from every heart. Jeremiah predicted utter ruin; and it was because of his insistence on surrender that he had finally been thrown into prison. But God left not to hopeless despair the faithful remnant who were still in the city. Even while Jeremiah was kept under close surveillance by those who scorned his messages, there came to him fresh revelations concerning Heaven’s willingness to forgive and to save, which have been an un failing source of comfort to the church of God from that day to this.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 466.

Look at the phrase, “Heaven’s willingness to forgive and to save.” Think about all the ways that we have been shown “Heaven’s willingness” to forgive and save. After all, the Cross alone should tell us about this willingness. We have the Word of God, which reveals to us the plan of salvation. We have been given the Spirit of Prophecy, a wonderful gift. What are other ways we have been shown “Heaven’s willingness to forgive and to save”?

Discussion Questions:

① “[The people approached] Jeremiah the prophet and said to him, ‘Please hear our petition and pray to the LORD your God for this entire remnant. For as you now see, though we were once many, now only a few are left’ ” (*Jer. 42:2, NIV*). What does this verse and what we read in Jeremiah 23:3 have to say about the remnant theme in Jeremiah?

② It’s so easy from our perspective to look back at sacred history and see all the faults and shortcomings and spiritual deficiencies of God’s people of antiquity. And we should, because we have been told that these stories were written as examples for us (*1 Cor. 10:11*). The sad thing is, many of these people at the time, in their own context and culture, thought that they were doing the right thing, that they were just fine with the Lord. What warning should that give us about just how blind we can be to our true spiritual state? What are ways we can come to grips with our true spiritual condition? Why must we keep the Cross central to that process? What would happen to us if we didn’t keep it central to our spiritual lives?

The Unexpected Answer

A small group of Seventh-day Adventists in Malawi planned to hold evangelistic meetings. On the first night of the meetings, we were disappointed when only a few people came. We prayed, but attendance hovered around thirty people. Some suggested that we cancel the meetings, but the speaker refused. “If we pray earnestly,” he said, “God will make something happen.”

The next evening, the meeting opened with the same 30 people. We sang and prayed, then the speaker stood up. Suddenly, a commotion of clapping and cheering drowned out the speaker.

The commotion increased as a crowd of people following a *Nyau* [*nee-ow*]*—*a spirit worshiper dressed in swishing grass skirts and rags and wearing an ornate headdress and mask*—*approached the meeting place. The *Nyau* probably was on his way to a graveyard.

When the *Nyau* came nearer, he stopped dancing and turned toward the speaker. The crowd following him stopped, and the *Nyau* didn’t move. Instead, he leaned against a wall, apparently planning to listen to the evangelist. The crowd following him stopped clapping and listened as the speaker quickly resumed his message.

The *Nyau* listened quietly to the rest of the sermon. (Someone estimated that two hundred people who had been following the *Nyau* listened as well.) The speaker was nervous, but he continued with his presentation about Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2. After the closing prayer, the *Nyau* and his followers continued toward the cemetery.

The next evening the meeting started with the same 30 people; but as the program progressed, more came. Even the *Nyau*, dressed in his mask and swishing skirts, came with his followers. He didn’t stand outside the meeting place this time but entered the tent and sat down. His followers sat down too. The speaker couldn’t be sure that the *Nyau* was the same one who came previously, but he recognized many of the *Nyau*’s followers. Other visitors came, curious to know what was being preached in their neighborhood that could possibly interest a *Nyau*. That night almost eighty people attended the meeting.

Attendance at the meetings continued increasing. A few nights later, the speaker invited listeners to accept Jesus as their Savior. That evening 95 people accepted Jesus and asked for further Bible studies.

The next night nearly two hundred people came, including two more *Nyaus*, dressed in torn clothes and wearing leafy branches to cover their faces. That night an additional 50 answered the call to accept Jesus.

The meetings continued for 21 nights, and baptismal classes followed. On the day of the baptism, 145 were baptized. Among them was a man who identified himself as the *Nyau* who had interrupted the meeting when he stopped to listen that first night. This former *Nyau* continues to be faithful to Jesus.

WILLAM MKANDAWIRE *is an active lay worker in Lilongwe, Malawi.*

Rebuke *and* Retribution



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jer. 17:5–10, Jer. 17:1–4, John 3:19, Jer. 11:18–23, Jer. 12:1–6, 14:1–16.*

Memory Text: “Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for You are my praise” (*Jeremiah 17:14, NKJV*).

What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun” (*Eccles. 1:9, ESV*).

Nothing new under the sun? This is especially true when it comes to the lives and work of God's prophets, who were often called to deliver words of warning and rebuke to those who should have known better. Though seeking to be faithful to their calling, the prophets for the most part faced fervent opposition, even retribution, often from the spiritual leaders, those who should have been the first to listen to them. No wonder Jesus said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets” (*Matt. 23:29, 30*).

This week we'll start to look at the trials of Jeremiah, whose ministry seemed to consist of nothing but rebuke and retribution: he giving the rebuke, the leaders giving him retribution.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 24.*

The Two Ways

From the earliest chapters of Genesis to the last chapters of Revelation, the Bible presents to us only two options on how to live: we either follow the Lord with all our heart and soul, or we don't. As Jesus said, in words that many have found troubling, "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth" (*Luke 11:23*). This is a powerfully unambiguous statement about spiritual realities greater than what appears to the naked eye or than what common sense would seem to tell us. It's the great controversy theme at its most basic level. And yet, in one sense, Jesus isn't saying anything new or radical. It's always been this way.

Read Jeremiah 17:5–10. What crucial spiritual principles do we find here, especially in light of the great controversy between Christ and Satan?

The immediate context of these words probably reflects Judah's political dalliances, and the Lord wanted them to understand that their only help was in God, not in political or military powers, a point that they would later learn but only after it was far too late. Though the Lord can and does use other people to help us, in the end we must always put our trust only in Him. We can never know for sure the motives of others; we can always know God's intentions for us.

With good reason, Jeremiah 17:9 warns about the deceitfulness of the human heart. The Hebrew text says that the heart is more deceitful than "everything." The horrific physical effects of sin, as bad as they are, aren't as bad as the moral and spiritual effects. The problem is, because our hearts are already so deceitful, we can't fully know just how bad they really are. Jeremiah was soon to see for himself how very bad human intentions can be.

How can you learn to trust in the Lord more than you have before? What are ways that you can step out in faith, right now, and do what is right in the eyes of the Lord?

The Sin of Judah

Certainly, Jeremiah's task was not going to be easy. Maybe some people might find perverse pleasure in pointing out people's sins, but most would find it to be very unappealing work, especially because of the reactions their words would provoke. Though some, when they hear the words of rebuke, might repent and reform, that's usually not the case, especially when the rebuke itself is very pointed and strong. And indeed, as with all of the prophets, the words of Jeremiah were just that: pointed and strong!

Read Jeremiah 17:1–4. What were some of the warnings that Jeremiah gave to the people?

The imagery of the sin engraved on the heart is especially powerful. It shows the depth of the corruption. The idea isn't just that the sin is written there, as with a pen, but that it is *engraved* there, etched in with a tool. This all becomes even more powerful when one remembers the words of the Lord to Judah's ancestors: "If you obey the LORD your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (*Deut. 30:10, NIV; compare with Ps. 40:8 and Jer. 31:33*). It was out of their hearts that they were to love God and obey His law; now, instead, their sin—the violation of that law (*1 John 3:4*)—is etched in their hearts.

"Let none who claim to be the depositaries of God's law flatter themselves that the regard they may outwardly show toward the commandments will preserve them from the exercise of divine justice. Let none refuse to be reprov'd for evil, nor charge the servants of God with being too zealous in endeavoring to cleanse the camp from evil-doing. A sin-hating God calls upon those who claim to keep His law to depart from all iniquity."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 416.

Sin engraved on the heart? That's a scary thought, is it not? What does that image say about just how deep and intense the work of purifying our hearts is? What's the only way to accomplish it?

The Warning to Jeremiah

“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

The sad story of Jeremiah is that the opposition he faced came from the very ones whom, through him, the Lord was trying to save. The Lord wanted to spare them the disaster that was sure to come. The problem, though, is that people often don't want to hear what they need to hear, because it cuts against their sinful and corrupt desires.

Read Jeremiah 11:18–23. What is going on here? What does some of the imagery remind us of?

Though in ancient Israel those who falsely prophesied in the name of the Lord could face death, in this case there was no indication that the men of Anathoth thought Jeremiah was speaking falsely. Instead, it seemed that they just wanted him silenced. They didn't want to hear what he had to say. Though the text doesn't say how they planned to kill him, some scholars have thought that they might have been thinking of poisoning him.

As we saw, too, Anathoth was Jeremiah's hometown, and its people were rejecting his message, even to the point of being willing to kill him. This, though, was only the beginning of a much wider rejection by all but a "remnant" of his own nation.

Of course, all of this, including the "lamb led to the slaughter" imagery, evokes the sacrifice of Jesus. In a sense, Jeremiah prefigured Christ, not as a type (like the animal sacrifices), but in that he, like Jesus, faced powerful opposition from the very ones he was trying to help. This situation in Jeremiah's life definitely calls to mind what Jesus went through early in His ministry as well (*Luke 4:14–30*).

When was the last time you heard something that you knew was right, but you simply didn't want to hear it? What was your initial reaction? In cases like this, why must we learn to take up our cross?

A Lament

In the earliest chapters of Jeremiah, the Lord had warned his servant that his work as a prophet was not going to be easy. At the time of his calling, Jeremiah was told that Judah's princes, kings, priests, and people would "fight against [him]" (*Jer. 1:19*). Although he was told that the Lord would sustain him and that his opponents would not "prevail against [him]" (*Jer. 1:19*), no doubt the warning that most of his own people were going to fight him wasn't welcome news. Jeremiah, though, didn't yet know the half of it, and when trials came, he was understandably angry and hurt.

What universal issue is the prophet struggling with in Jeremiah 12:1–4? What is the prophet's attitude toward those who have hurt him? What does this tell us about the humanity of even God's most faithful servants?

Jeremiah 12:1 is filled with Old Testament legal language: the Hebrew words for "righteous," "bring a case," and "justice" (*NIV*) all appear in legal settings. The prophet, so upset over what he has been facing, is bringing a "lawsuit" (*see Deut. 25:1*) against the Lord. His complaint, of course, is a common one: why do evil people always seem to prosper?

We can see, too, Jeremiah's humanity exhibited. He wants those who have done evil to him to be punished. He's not speaking here as a theologian; he's speaking as a fallen human being in need of grace who, like Job and like many of God's faithful people, doesn't understand why these things are happening to him. Why should Jeremiah, God's servant, called to declare God's truth to a rebellious people, be subjected to the treacherous plots of his own village? Jeremiah trusted in the Lord, but he surely didn't understand why things were happening as they were.

How can we learn to trust in the Lord despite all the things that happen that just don't seem to make sense to us?

A Desperate Situation

Read Jeremiah 14:1–10. What is happening here?

Drought struck all of the land; every city, town, and village suffered. The poor and the rich suffered together. Not even the wildlife could bear the lack of water. The aristocrats waited for their servants at the city gates, hoping they had found water, but the springs had dried up. There was no water, and without water, life could not continue. Their misery grew from day to day. The people put on mourning clothes, and walked with their eyes downcast. Then they would suddenly kneel and cry out in desperate prayer.

At the time of such a natural catastrophe, it was the custom to visit the temple of Jerusalem (*Joel 1:13, 14; 2:15–17*) to fast and to make special offerings to God.

Jeremiah saw the eagerness of the people, but he knew well that they didn't seek the Lord, only the water. This saddened the prophet further. Jeremiah was also praying, not for water but for the mercy and presence of God.

Jeremiah understood, too, that this was only the beginning of the trials to come. God saw the hearts of the people and knew that if He were to remove the drought, then the repentance would also disappear. The people did everything to try to change their situation, including going to Jerusalem, praying, fasting, putting on sackcloth, and making offerings, but they forgot one thing: true conversion, true repentance. They were looking only to remove the results of the problem, not the problem itself, which was their sin and disobedience.

Read Jeremiah 14:11–16. How do we understand this?

“Do not pray for this people, for their good,” God told Jeremiah, even though Jeremiah presented earlier a great example of intercessory prayer: “O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for Your name’s sake” (*Jer. 14:7, NKJV*). Though we are told to “pray without ceasing” (*1 Thess. 5:17*), in this case the Lord, who knows everything from beginning to end, is revealing to Jeremiah just how corrupt and fallen these people are. Of course, God knows people’s hearts, and God knows the future; we don’t. Hence, the New Testament admonition to pray, even for our enemies, doesn’t lose any of its force here.

Further Thought: Jeremiah struggled with a question that we all do: How do we make sense of evil? But maybe that's the problem, trying to make sense of what's not sensible, what could even be deemed as "nonsense."

In this regard, Ellen G. White wrote: "It is impossible to explain the origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence. . . . Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 492, 493. Replace the word *sin* with *evil* and the statement works just as well: *It is impossible to explain the origin of evil so as to give a reason for its existence. . . . Evil is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be evil.*

When tragedy strikes, we hear people say, or we ourselves think: *I don't understand this. It doesn't make sense.* Well, there's a good reason that we don't understand it: it's not understandable. If we could understand it, if it made sense, if it fit into some logical and rational plan, then it wouldn't be that evil; it wouldn't be that tragic because it serves a rational purpose. How crucial it is that we remember that evil, like sin, cannot often be explained. What we do have, however, is the reality of the Cross, which shows us the love and goodness of God despite the inexplicable evil caused by sin.

Discussion Question:

❶ Dwell more on this idea that evil and suffering don't make sense, that they don't have a rational or good explanation. Why is it better that way? Think about it. A horrible tragedy strikes: perhaps a young child dies of a terrible disease after years of suffering. Do we really want to believe that a good and rational reason exists for this? Isn't it better to chalk it up to the terrible and evil results of living in a fallen world? Discuss in class.

Nothing but Faith: Part 1

John grew up knowing that God was calling him to become a minister. When he tried to ignore or avoid the call, he found that he could not.

In Zimbabwe, work for students is nearly impossible to find; so, John had to rely on his mother's income when he enrolled at Solusi University, a Seventh-day Adventist university in Zimbabwe.

During school breaks, John held short evangelistic meetings in several churches and rejoiced to see 100 people come to Christ.

But when he returned home he learned that his mother's goods weren't selling, and there wasn't enough money for his tuition. "Perhaps you'll have to wait a semester to go back to school," she suggested to John.

"Don't worry," John told her. "God is the one who called me to the ministry, and He will help with my school fees."

John packed his bag, kissed his mother good-bye, and got on the bus to Solusi, arriving with not enough money to buy a bus ticket back home. He had nothing but his faith.

Because he arrived at Solusi too late to register, John stayed in a friend's dormitory room that night. The next day he went to see the dean of men to be assigned a dorm room. The dean was reluctant to give him a room without financial clearance. But he knew John, and finally he agreed. "Here's your key," the dean said. "But if you haven't received financial clearance by 5:00 P.M. tomorrow, you'll have to move out."

John thanked him and put his things into the room. Before unpacking, he knelt down and prayed. "God, thank You for the time that I have this room. If You don't pay my fees, I'll have to move out tomorrow; so, it's up to You. Thanks, Lord. Amen."

John had heard that an evangelist friend of his, Sister Jeremiah, was holding meetings on campus. He went to visit her. "Did you pay your fees?" Sister Jeremiah asked him.

"No," he said honestly. "My mom doesn't have the money. I've come so we can pray about it."

"Let's not ask God for the money," Sister Jeremiah said. "Let's just thank Him for providing the money you need." So, the two knelt down, and Sister Jeremiah thanked God for the money John hadn't yet received.

The money didn't come that day. As John walked around campus, several friends stopped to ask how things were going. John didn't tell them about his financial needs but replied, smiling, "Everything is fine; God is in control."

One girl on campus knew John's situation. When she encouraged him to drop out of school, he replied, "Don't try to discourage me. God *will* provide."

But by bedtime that night, nothing had happened. John again placed his situation in God's hands then went to sleep.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

More Woes for the Prophet



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jer. 23:14, 15; Jeremiah 20; Acts 2:37; Job 3; Jer. 18:1–10, 18–23.*

Memory Text: “O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, everyone mocketh me” (*Jeremiah 20:7*).

One thing anyone who has followed the Lord for any length of time will learn is that being a believer in Jesus and seeking to do His will do not guarantee an easy passage through life. After all, as we have been told, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (*2 Tim. 3:12, NKJV*). This is a truth that Jeremiah was surely learning for himself.

At the same time, however, what our faith can do for us in times of trial is give us a broader understanding upon which we can steady ourselves amid our struggles. That is, when unfair and unjust sufferings and trials come (and no question, so many of them are unfair and unjust), we don't have to be left alone with a sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness that people who don't know the Lord often feel. We can know something of the big picture, and the ultimate hope God offers us, no matter how dismal the present is, and from this knowledge—and hope—we can draw strength. Jeremiah knew something of this context, though at times he seemed to forget it and instead focused only on his woes.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 31.

Godless Priests and Prophets

Removed as we are by more than two thousand years chronologically from Judah, and perhaps even further removed culturally and socially, it's hard for us to understand all that was going on in the time of Jeremiah. When reading the Bible, especially the harsh warnings and threats that God uttered against the people, many people think that the Lord is portrayed here as harsh, mean, and vindictive. This, however, is a false understanding, based only on a superficial reading of the texts. Instead, what the Old Testament reveals is what the New Testament does as well: God loves humanity and wants it saved, but He does not force our choice. If we want to do wrong, even despite His pleas to us, we are free to do so. We just have to remember not only the consequences but that we were warned about them beforehand.

What were some of the evils that the Lord was dealing with in Judah?

What were some of the evils Jeremiah was prophesying against?

Jer. 23:14, 15; 5:26–31.

The litany of evils presented here is just a small sampling of what God's people had fallen into. Both the priests and prophets were “godless,” an incredible irony considering that the priests were to be representatives of God, and the prophets to be spokesmen for Him. And this is just the beginning of the problems Jeremiah confronted.

The evils presented here come under a variety of types. There is the apostasy of the spiritual leaders; they also lead others to do evil “so that no one turns back from his wickedness” (*Jer. 23:14, NKJV*). Even when the Lord warns about coming judgment, the prophets tell them that it won't come. Meanwhile, as far as they were from God, they had forgotten the admonition about taking care of the orphans and about defending the poor (*Jer. 5:28*). In every way, the nation had fallen from the Lord. So much of the Bible, at least among the prophetic books of the Old Testament, records the Lord seeking to call His wayward people back. That is, despite all these evils, and more, He was willing to forgive them, heal them, and even restore them. But if they refused, what else could be done?

Jeremiah in the Stocks

The job of the prophets has always been to convey God's message, not to count how many people accept or reject it. Generally, the number of those who accept what the prophets preach at the time they are preaching it is low. For example, though we don't know how many were alive at the time of Noah, we can reasonably assume that the majority was not very receptive, given the small number that got into the ark. All through sacred history, this seems to be the pattern.

Read Jeremiah 20:1–6. What kind of reception did his message get?

To gain a better understanding of what was going on here, it's best to read just what the words were that Jeremiah had prophesied, the words that got him in trouble with such a high official. In Jeremiah 19, we have some of that prophecy: God will bring "evil upon this place" (*Jer. 19:3*), He will cause the people to fall by the sword and their bodies to be eaten by birds and animals (*Jer. 19:7*), and He will cause the Judeans to cannibalize each other (*Jer. 19:9*).

Though no one would have been too happy to be the focus of such a prophecy, as a leader, Pashur was especially offended. As with most people, his initial reaction was to reject the message; after all, who would want to believe something that horrible? More than that, using his position, Pashur made the mistake of punishing the messenger. He had Jeremiah beaten according to the law (*Deut. 25:1–3*) and locked him up in stocks. Though Pashur released him the next day, this painful and humiliating experience didn't stop Jeremiah from continuing to give his prophecy, this time not just against Judea but specifically against Pashur and his own family. Before long, the fate of Pashur and his family would be a horrifying example to all who would see them in the chains of captivity. This is also the first place in the book of Jeremiah in which Babylon is mentioned as the place of exile. (The chapters, and even sections of the chapters, are not in chronological order.)

Imagine hearing something like that prophesied against you. What do you think your initial reaction would be, as opposed to what it should be? (What should it be, anyway?) (See Acts 2:37.)

A Fire in His Bones

Jeremiah's harsh words to Pashur and the nation (*Jer. 20:4–6*) weren't his own; they were not uttered out of his anger at having been locked in the stocks for a day. They were the Lord's words to him for the people.

What comes after, though, comes directly from Jeremiah's own heart, written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is the heartfelt cry of a human being who simply doesn't like the situation he is in and is crying out about it.

Read Jeremiah 20:7–14. What is he saying? What does this teach us about his humanity, and our own humanity as well?

His words at first seem almost blasphemous. One wonders, though, why he would say that the Lord had deceived him when, right from the start, the Lord had warned him that he was going to face fierce opposition. Nevertheless, he complains, "Whenever I speak, all I am speaking is 'violence and destruction.' No wonder people are against me."

At the same time, what is the crucial significance of what he says in Jeremiah 20:9?

He would have liked to have given up and stopped preaching, but God's word was like a fire in his heart and a fire in his bones. What a powerful metaphor of someone who knew his calling and, despite the personal pain, was going to follow that calling no matter what. (We find similar thoughts written in Amos 3:8 and 1 Corinthians 9:16.)

All through these verses, we see the struggle Jeremiah faces; we can see the great controversy raging both outside and inside him. One minute he's praising God for rescuing the needy from the wicked; the next (as we will see tomorrow), he's cursing the day he was born.

Why is it so important, especially in terrible circumstances, to praise the Lord and to dwell upon all the ways that He has revealed His love to us?

“Cursed Be the Day”

Even the harshest critics of the Bible would have to concede a major point: the Bible does not gloss over human foibles and weaknesses. With the exception of the spotless and sinless Son of God, few Bible characters whose lives are presented in any detail in the Bible come away without their weaknesses and faults exposed. This goes even for the prophets. As stated before, the God these prophets served is perfect; the prophets who served Him were not. They, like the rest of us, were sinners in need of the righteousness of Christ to be credited to them by faith (*see Rom. 3:22*). From Noah to Peter, and everyone in between, all were sin-damaged creatures whose only hope was, as Ellen G. White says, to go before the Lord and say: “I have no merit or goodness whereby I may claim salvation, but I present before God the all-atoning blood of the spotless Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is my only plea. The name of Jesus gives me access to the Father. His ear, His heart, is open to my faintest pleading, and He supplies my deepest necessities.”—*Faith and Works*, p. 106.

Read Jeremiah 20:14–18. What does this passage tell us about the prophet’s state of mind concerning his own personal situation?

His words here, of course, remind us of Job’s, whose situation was much worse than Jeremiah’s (*see Job 3*). Though Jeremiah had the assurance that he was doing God’s will and the assurance that the Lord was with him, at this point the pain of his present situation consumed him. Whatever his intellectual understanding of what the truth was, for now it was overshadowed by his own sorrows.

At times, many people might find themselves in a similar situation: they might intellectually know all the promises of God, but they are so overwhelmed by sorrow and pain that these promises are pushed into the background, and all they can focus on is their immediate suffering. This is an understandable reaction; it doesn’t mean it’s a correct one, but it is understandable. What we see here again is the humanity of Jeremiah, which is similar to the humanity of us all.

Have you ever felt the way Jeremiah did here? If so, what did you learn from that experience that could help you better cope the next time you feel that way?

Plans Against the Prophet

Read Jeremiah 18:1–10. What important principles about prophetic interpretation do we find here?

In those same verses, what crucial spiritual principles do we find as well?

Despite all the evil, the Lord was still willing to give people a chance to repent. Hence, here, too, we see the grace of God being offered to those who will accept it. Even now, they still had time to turn around, despite all that they had done.

In these verses, too, we can see the conditionality of many prophecies: God says that He will do something, which is often to bring punishment. But if the people repent, He will not do what He said He would do. What He will do is conditional, depending upon how the people respond. Why would God do anything else? He would not admonish the people to turn from their evil ways and then still bring punishment upon them if they repented and turned from their evil ways. In such cases, He won't punish, and He explicitly says so in these texts.

Read Jeremiah 18:18–23. What reasons do the people believe they have for what they want to do to Jeremiah? What is Jeremiah's very human response?

How utterly frustrated Jeremiah must have felt to be condemned by people who attacked him because, they said, they wanted to save the "teaching of the law," the "counsels of the wise," and "the word from the prophets." How self-deceptive the heart really can be!

What lessons should we learn about how careful we need to be in doing things in the name of the Lord? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Further Thought: In Jeremiah 18:11–17, we find the Lord telling His people to stop doing the things that they are doing. Verse 11 says: “So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions” (*NIV*). Verse 12 basically has the Lord saying that He already knows they won’t listen to His warnings and pleas but that they will continue to walk in the “stubbornness of [their] evil hearts” (*vs. 12, NIV*). The Lord then tells what He will do because of their disobedience. This is one of many places in the Bible that show that God’s foreknowledge of our free choices in no way infringes upon those free choices. After all, why would the Lord have pleaded with them to turn from their evil if they didn’t have the freedom to obey or disobey Him? Then, too, why would He punish them for not obeying if they didn’t have the freedom to obey? What’s clear is that the Lord knew exactly what their free choices would be even before they made them. This crucial truth is also seen, for instance, in Deuteronomy 31:16–21. Even before the children of Israel enter the Promised Land, the Lord tells Moses that He knows they will “turn to other gods and worship them” (*Deut. 31:20, NIV*). Here is more evidence that God’s foreknowledge of our choices does not impinge on the freedom we have to make those choices.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the final question at the end of Thursday’s study. Who hasn’t heard people say that they were doing such and such because the Lord told them to? (With what can you respond to someone who says that?) Though there’s no question that God will lead us, in what ways can we test these leadings to make sure that they really are of the Lord?
- 2 Jeremiah said that the word of the Lord was like “a fire in his bones.” How can we keep that fire burning within us as well?
- 3 What can we find in the verses we looked at this week that can help us to understand what’s involved in revival and reformation? (After all, wasn’t that what the Lord was looking to do in His people?) For example, why is a sense of our own sinfulness so important for revival? With this in mind, why must the Cross, and the hope it offers, be central to revival as well?

Nothing but Faith: Part 2

The next morning John went to a campus prayer service where he prayed for the students who had needs, and silently prayed for his own need.

A couple of hours later, he met a friend from Botswana on campus. “Is everything OK?” his friend asked.

“Yes,” John said, “everything is OK. God is in control.”

“How’s your mom?” the friend asked.

“She’s fine,” John answered. Then without thinking, he added, “But she’s worried about my school fees.”

“How much do you need?” the friend asked.

John needed 50,000 Zimbabwean dollars to register.

“Here’s 250 pula,” his friend said. At that time, the Botswanan currency was equivalent to 23,000 Zimbabwean dollars. John thanked his friend warmly.

John quickly found someone willing to exchange his pula for Zimbabwean dollars—at a rate that gave him 25,000 Zimbabwean dollars! John hurried to a phone to tell his mother that God had worked half a miracle.

“Mom,” he said, “can you please send Mercy [John’s sister] to the bank to deposit 25,000 [Zimbabwean] dollars?”

“John,” she answered, “you know I don’t have the money.”

“Just send Mercy to town,” John said. “God will provide the money.” His mother was puzzled, but she didn’t argue. So, she asked Mercy to go to town and wait for God to give her the money for John.

Meanwhile John went to town to deposit the money he had received into Solusi’s bank account, then he called his mother again.

“I’ve been trying to reach you!” she said. “Mercy met a friend of yours in town who had promised to give you some money for food, but you had already left for school. So, he asked Mercy to deposit it into your account. When Mercy told him how much you needed, it was more than he had planned to give; but when he opened his wallet, he had more than 25,000 Zimbabwean dollars. So, he gave Mercy the money for you. We just need to know Solusi’s account number so we can deposit it!”

John’s eyes filled with tears as he heard how God answered his prayers. He thanked his mother and his sister for helping to make the miracle happen.

Hurrying back to school, John arrived just minutes before the registrar’s office closed. His heart felt light, and his step was easy as he thought of how God had pulled off another miracle for a young man with nothing but faith.

More than 1,000 students are enrolled at Solusi University. Many, like John, are there by faith. The school is growing larger, and more space in the dining hall is needed. Thank you for supporting the Thirteenth Sabbath Mission offering.

JOHN MAVESERE was a theology student at Solusi University when this was written. He now serves the Lord in Zimbabwe.

Symbolic Acts



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 4:3–7, Num. 21:1–9, Isa. 29:16, Rom. 9:18–21, Jeremiah 19, Heb. 5:14, Jer. 13:1–11.*

Memory Text: “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” (*Romans 9:21*).

Every student of the Bible knows that it is filled with symbols, things that represent concepts and ideas other than themselves. The entire earthly sanctuary service, for example, was a symbolic prophecy of the plan of salvation. “The significance of the Jewish economy is not yet fully comprehended. Truths vast and profound are shadowed forth in its rites and symbols. The gospel is the key that unlocks its mysteries. Through a knowledge of the plan of redemption, its truths are opened to the understanding.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 133. Through the symbolism of the earthly sanctuary, or the symbols of prophetic books (such as *Daniel 2, 7, 8, and Revelation*), and in many other ways, the Lord has used symbols to convey truth. Meanwhile, Jesus Himself, with His parables and object lessons, used symbols to explain deep truths.

The book of Jeremiah itself is rich with symbolism and imagery. This week we're going to take a look at a few of these symbols, what they were, what they meant, and what lessons we should take away from them for ourselves.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 7.

Truth in Symbols

Scripture is exceedingly rich in symbols. All kinds abound, and in most cases, they represent truths greater than themselves.

Read Genesis 4:3–7. What do their two different sacrifices symbolize?

Very early in the Bible we can see the difference between the attempt to work one's way to heaven (in the offering of Cain) and the realization that salvation is by grace alone, made available to us only through the merits of a crucified Savior (the offering of Abel).

Read Numbers 21:4–9. What was the symbolism of the bronze serpent uplifted on the pole? (See also John 12:32.)

“The Israelites saved their lives by looking upon the uplifted serpent. That look implied faith. They lived because they believed God’s word, and trusted in the means provided for their recovery.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 431.

All through the Old Testament, the earthly sanctuary service was the most detailed symbolic representation of the plan of salvation. How much the Israelites understood about the meaning of all the rituals has been an open question for millennia, though no doubt many did grasp the most important of all truths taught there: substitutionary atonement, the idea that in order for their sins to be forgiven, a substitute had to die in their stead (see *1 Cor. 5:7*).

In fact, through the sanctuary service we have been given symbols, not only of the death of Jesus but also of His high priestly ministry in heaven, the pre-Advent judgment, and the final disposition of sin at the end of the age.

What other biblical symbols of the plan of salvation can you think of? Which ones especially speak to you about God’s saving grace and the hope we can derive from it?

The Potter's Clay

What crucial truths are taught from these verses and the symbolism found there? (See Gen. 2:7.)

Jer. 18:1–10 _____

Isa. 29:16 _____

Isa. 45:9 _____

Isa. 64:8 _____

Rom. 9:18–21 _____

Because of the constant rejection and persecution that he faced, Jeremiah no doubt wanted to give up. Was it worth struggling and fighting for that nation? At times he certainly felt that the answer was “No!”

No question, though, as he watched the potter's hand, he was given an image, a symbol, of how the Lord worked with human clay. Whatever other truths are found in the image of the potter and the clay, it does teach the ultimate sovereignty of God. That is, however hopeless the situation might have seemed from Jeremiah's perspective, the symbolism of the potter and the clay showed him that ultimately, despite the wrong or even *willfully* wrong decisions that people make, the Lord is in control of the world. He is the absolute source of power and authority, and in the end He will triumph, regardless of appearances now.

Centuries after Jeremiah, Paul picks up on this Old Testament image in Romans 9 and continues with it, basically using it to teach the same lesson that it was to teach Jeremiah. In fact, Paul may even be directly referring to Jeremiah 18:6 in Romans 9:21. We can rest assured that, despite the reality of human free will and free choices, and the often calamitous results of abusing that free will, in the end, we can hope in the absolute sovereignty of our loving and self-sacrificing God, whose love is revealed on the cross. Evil won't triumph; God and His love will. What a hope we have!

How can you learn to trust in the lesson of the potter and the clay, regardless of present circumstances? What other Bible texts show us the reality of God's sovereignty?

The Degeneration of a Nation

“Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents” (Jer. 19:4).

In this text we are given a few examples of the evils that had overtaken Judah. Besides forsaking the Lord, offering incense to “other gods,” and shedding innocent blood, they also “estranged this place.” The Hebrew verb there means “to make foreign,” “to make strange,” or to “profane.” Whether “this place” was the temple itself or Jerusalem, the text doesn’t say. The crucial point, though, is that the nation was to be holy, special to the Lord (*see Exod. 19:5, 6*), something different and distinct from the nations around them. But that’s not what happened. They lost their unique character, the distinctiveness that would have made them a witness to the world. They became just like everyone else.

What lessons are here for us?

“They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind” (Jer. 19:5).

Though the concept of human sacrifice was known in the ancient world, it was anathema to the Lord, who forbade the practice to the Israelites (*Deut. 18:10*). The phrase, translated above as “neither came it into my mind,” in the Hebrew reads, “it did not rise up on my heart.” This was an idiomatic expression showing just how alien and far from God’s will such a practice was. If we, sin-hardened, fallen beings find it abhorrent, imagine what it must have been like to our Holy God!

Nevertheless, over time, the power of corruption and culture so overwhelmed His people that they had degenerated into this horrific ritual. What a lesson it should be to us all about how easily we can become so blinded by the prevailing culture that we accept, or even take part in, practices that—were we connected to the Lord and in tune with His Word as we should be—we would never accept. We would, instead, be horrified by them (*see Heb. 5:14*).

Smashing the Jar

As we saw yesterday, the nation had fallen into deep apostasy. The people weren't getting the message. God then used Jeremiah to do a powerful symbolic act that, ideally, would help wake them up to the danger they were facing.

Read Jeremiah 19:1–15. What was Jeremiah to do, and what was the meaning of this act?

Jeremiah had to go to the potter's house again. This time, though, the Lord wanted to make sure that he brought witnesses with him to see exactly what he was going to do. The witnesses were the elders and priests from Judah (*Jer. 19:1*). As leaders, they were responsible for what happened in the nation, and so they needed to get the message that Jeremiah was to give to them through the power of his symbolic act. The Potsherd Gate (*Jer. 19:2, NKJV*), where he was to smash the jar, might have been near where the potters worked, and just outside the gate might have been where they would dump their shards of ruined pots. Thus, the symbolism became even more powerful.

What good is a smashed clay jar? If the jar were cracked, some use might be found for it, even if not for the original intent of the jar. But Jeremiah wasn't merely to crack it. Instead, he was to break it, essentially rendering it useless. Between the act itself and the words that followed, it's hard to imagine how the people could not have understood the warning. Of course, understanding the warning and acting on it are two different things entirely.

What's even more frightening is the apparent finality of the act. Who can repair a smashed jar? Though the Lord gave the nation a hope for the future, yet for the moment, unless they were to turn around, the Judeans were doomed, they and their children. All the places that they had defiled with their abominations and sinful acts would soon be defiled with their corpses. Perhaps, the depths of their depravity can be best understood by the depths of the punishment that their depravity brought upon their heads.

Think of something ruined—ruined beyond repair. What was it originally made for, and what happened to it that now rendered it useless? How careful we need to be that this doesn't happen to us!

The Linen Belt

Read Jeremiah 13:1–11. What was the symbolic act Jeremiah was ordered to do, and what important lesson was it to teach?

This symbolic act has caused some difficulties for interpreters because the river Euphrates (a common interpretation of the Hebrew but not necessarily the only one) was hundreds of kilometers from Jerusalem. Ezra needed four months to travel there in one direction only (*Ezra 7:9*). In order to understand the message better, God made Jeremiah go back and forth twice. Thus, some scholars have argued that some other geographical location was meant. On the other hand, some argue that the long distances he had to travel helped show him just how far away the children of Israel would be taken. What's more, after returning from such a long trip, Jeremiah could understand the joy of returning after 70 years of captivity.

Whatever the case, the belt symbolizes both the house of Israel and the house of Judah, pure and unstained at the time of God's request. The man wearing the belt is God Himself. This shows, among other things, just how closely tied God Himself was to His people. Some commentators have seen significance in the fact that the belt was made of linen, the same material as the priestly garments (*Lev. 16:4*); after all, Judah was to be a priestly nation (*Exod. 19:6*).

Just as the belt had been ruined, the pride of the nation would be too. As a belt clings to a man's waist, these people had once clung to the LORD and were His source of praise and glory. But they had become tarnished and spoiled by contact with the surrounding cultures.

Read Jeremiah 13:11 and contrast it with Deuteronomy 4:5–8. How do these verses together show what happened to the nation? What should these texts say to us as well?

Further Thought: The image of the potter and the clay, especially as seen in Romans 9, brings up the important question of how we seek to understand God's actions. The fact is, of course, we often don't. That shouldn't be surprising, should it? Read Isaiah 55:8. As human beings, we simply are very limited in what we can know about anything, much less about all the ways of God.

This point, the limitation of human knowledge, is revealed by what has been called the "self-referential problem." Look at this sentence: "The barber of Seville shaves everyone who doesn't shave himself." Does the barber of Seville shave himself? If he shaves himself, he can't shave himself because he shaves everyone who *doesn't* shave himself. But if he doesn't shave himself, then he has to shave himself, for the same reason—because he shaves everyone who doesn't shave himself. The answer forms an insolvable paradox that reveals the limits of reason. Thus, if reason gets tangled in itself on something as mundane as whom the barber of Seville shaves, how much more so on something as profound as the nature and extent of God's dealings in the world? What we do have is the Cross, which gives us abundant reason to trust in Him and His love even when what happens in His world makes no sense to us at all.

"To many minds the origin of sin and the reason for its existence are a source of great perplexity. They see the work of evil, with its terrible results of woe and desolation, and they question how all this can exist under the sovereignty of One who is infinite in wisdom, in power, and in love. Here is a mystery of which they find no explanation. And in their uncertainty and doubt they are blinded to truths plainly revealed in God's word and essential to salvation."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 492.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What challenges does the idea of God's absolute sovereignty present to us in regard to the question of evil? How does the great controversy scenario help us work through the tough questions, at least partially for now?
- 2 What other symbols can you find in the Bible? Why would God use symbols anyway? What are the advantages of symbols?

Enlarge My Vision: Part 1

I never intended to become a Christian. I met God while enrolled in a public boarding school. Actually, I met a girl whom I wanted to date. I got up the courage to ask her out then went to her study hall to charm her into dating me. I knew she was a Christian, but that didn't bother me. When I entered the room, I found her reading a pamphlet. I sat down beside her and asked her what she was reading. She offered me one of the pamphlets, and I pretended to read it just to impress her. When I asked her for a date, she gently declined but asked me to keep the pamphlet. Later that evening I sat down and read it. It was a Voice of Prophecy lesson about hell, and it worried me. I hardly slept that night.

I was often in trouble because I frequently broke the school's rules. On Saturday morning, the day after I had asked this girl for a date, I went to the administration building to see if I had been caught breaking any rules that week and had been assigned campus duties.

As I was reading the list, a boy came up beside me and invited me to come to a worship service with him that day in the auditorium. I hadn't been to church in ten years and wasn't interested in religion. But, for some reason, I accepted this boy's invitation. I think even he was surprised when I accepted! We walked across campus together and entered the auditorium. It didn't dawn on me that the girl I had asked out the day before was a Seventh-day Adventist.

Something else really strange happened. I had two dollars in my pocket that I had planned to spend on drinking on Saturday night. But when the offering basket was passed, I surprised myself by giving the two dollars. Later I realized that this action saved me from drinking that weekend.

I discovered that this group of high school students on campus did more than just pray and sing. They had a strong Pathfinder program. I was interested in what Pathfinders do, so I stayed through the afternoon and watched. The next week I joined the Pathfinder Club. Everyone was surprised.

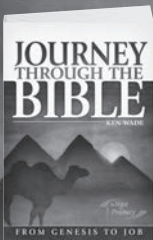
While I hadn't accepted the invitation to attend church because of the girl I wanted to date, I was glad when I saw her at church. She befriended me and helped me to feel welcome at the church meetings. But she still wouldn't go out with me.

From the first day I attended church, I decided to stop smoking and drinking. Thank God, I never smoked or drank again. When I broke away from old friends, they gave me trouble about my new religious interest. They begged me to go drinking with them and did everything they could to get me back. But I refused. I made new friends in church. Several months later I gave my life to Christ and followed Him in baptism. I was 17 years old at the time.

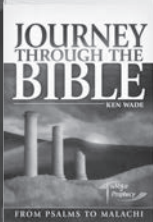
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The Crisis Continues



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jeremiah 9, Jer. 10:1–15, Rom. 1:25, Jeremiah 26, Acts 17:30, Acts 5:34–41.*

Memory Text: “But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the LORD” (*Jeremiah 9:24, NKJV*).

The travails and trials of God's servant continue. In fact, pretty much all of the book of Jeremiah deals with the challenges and struggles the prophet had in trying to get the people to listen to the words that the Lord was seeking to convey to them out of love and concern.

Imagine what would have happened if the people had listened to Jeremiah and had accepted the prophet's warning. If they had listened—if the people, the kings, and the leaders had humbled themselves before God—the terrible crisis would not have come. The chance for repentance was before them. Even after they had done so much wrong, so much evil, the door to redemption and salvation had not closed. The door stood open; they simply refused to walk through it.

Again, it's so easy for us today to shake our heads at the hardness of their hearts. “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (*1 Cor. 10:11, NKJV*). We have these examples before us; what will we learn from them?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 14.

Let Him Who Boasts . . .

In Jeremiah 9, the prophet began his lamentation because he saw the inevitable catastrophe coming to his country and people. God pronounced judgment over Jerusalem, and when God says something, He does it. What they would face wasn't something fortuitous, not just one of those terrible and inexplicable things that happen from time to time. No, what they would face was going to be the direct judgment of God. And it was this realization that was causing Jeremiah such sorrow. His sorrow, though, was only a small reflection of the pain that God must have felt.

Though the context is different, this quote captures the idea so well: "The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him. When there came upon Israel the calamities that were the sure result of separation from God,—subjugation by their enemies, cruelty, and death,—it is said that 'His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.' 'In all their affliction He was afflicted: . . . and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old.' Judges 10:16; Isaiah 63:9."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 263.

Read Jeremiah 9, the prophet's sorrowful lament. Focus especially on verses 23, 24. Why are those words so relevant even to us today?

It has been said that when it comes to death, we are all like an "unwalled city." Wisdom, might, and riches all have their place, but to rely on these things, especially amid catastrophe, or when death looms, is fruitless, meaningless, and empty. Amid all the warnings about the doom, the people are told what really matters, and that is to know and to understand for oneself, at least to the degree that we can, the loving kindness, the justice, and the righteousness of God. What else is there, what else alone can give us hope and comfort when everything earthly, everything human, including our own flesh, fails us?

What does the Cross tell us about the loving-kindness, the justice, and the righteousness of God?

Creatures or the Creator?

As we have seen already, God's people had been called out to be different from the nations around them, which were all steeped in paganism, idolatry, and false teachings. So many of the warnings in the first five books of Moses were especially against following the practices of their neighbors. Instead, the Israelites were to be witnesses to the world of the truth about the Lord as Creator and Redeemer. Unfortunately, so much of Old Testament history is the story of how they were often lured into the very practices that they were warned against.

Read Jeremiah 10:1–15. What is the Lord telling His people here? If this same warning were given today, in our time and culture and context, how might it be written?

Jeremiah is telling the people what they should have already known: these pagan gods are nothing but human creations, figments of people's own demonically warped imaginations. This is a prime example of what Paul, writing centuries later, meant when he wrote about those who "changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen" (*Rom. 1:25*).

Notice in this verse how Paul contrasts the creation and the Creator. This same contrast is presented in these verses in Jeremiah, which talk about the impotence and weakness of these "gods" in contrast to the true One. All through these texts Jeremiah is trying to show the people how foolish and silly it is to put their trust in these things, which are incapable of doing anything. All this in contrast to the Creator God, who not only created the world but sustains it by His power (*see Heb. 1:3*).

However ancient these texts, the message is still so relevant. We might not be tempted to bow down and worship man-made statues; nor are most of us dismayed or worried about the signs in the heavens. Instead, though, it's still so easy to put our trust in things that can no more save us than these idols could save Judea on the day of judgment.

What are some things that, if we are not careful, we come to trust more than we should?

A Call to Repentance

Read Jeremiah 26:1–6. What hope is the Lord offering the people here?

The message here was the same as the message all through the Bible, Old and New Testament, and that is the call to repentance, to turn away from our sin and find the salvation that God offers to all.

What is the message of the following texts? *2 Chron. 6:37–39, Ezek. 14:6, Matt. 3:2, Luke 24:47, Acts 17:30.*

“The inhabitants of Judah were all undeserving, yet God would not give them up. By them His name was to be exalted among the heathen. Many who were wholly unacquainted with His attributes were yet to behold the glory of the divine character. It was for the purpose of making plain His merciful designs that He kept sending His servants the prophets with the message, ‘Turn ye again now everyone from his evil way.’ Jeremiah 25:5. ‘For My name’s sake,’ He declared through Isaiah, ‘will I defer Mine anger, and for My praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off.’ ‘For Mine own sake, even for Mine own sake, will I do it: for how should My name be polluted? and I will not give My glory unto another.’ Isaiah 48:9, 11.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 319.

Old Testament, New Testament—in the end, the message of God is the same to all of us: we are sinners, we have done wrong, we deserve punishment. But through the cross of Christ, through the atoning death of Jesus, God has made a way for all of us to be saved. We need to acknowledge our sinfulness; we need to claim by faith the merits of Jesus, which are freely given us despite our unworthiness; and we need to repent of our sin. And, of course, true repentance includes putting sin out of our lives by the grace of God.

No matter what we have done, we can repent of our sin and be forgiven. This is the great provision of the gospel. What sin, or sins, do you need to repent of right now?

The Call for Death

From our perspective looking back, it's hard to believe the hardness of the hearts of the people. As we saw in yesterday's lesson, Jeremiah's message—however strong—was still filled with hope. If they repented, God would avert the horrific punishments that, based on the covenant promises and curses, would come upon them. If only they would do what they were supposed to do, if only they would obey God and obtain the blessing that obedience would bring, then all would be well. God would forgive, God would heal, God would restore. The gospel provision, which would eventually come through the sacrifice of Jesus, would be enough to forgive all their sins and restore the people.

What a message of hope, of promise, of salvation!

What was the response to Jeremiah and his message? (See *Jer. 26:10, 11*.)

In Israel, only a legally assembled court could pass a death sentence. Only a majority vote of the judges was acceptable for the death sentence. The priests and the prophets prosecuted Jeremiah with their deadly accusations. Those opposed to him wanted to present him as a political criminal and as a traitor.

What was Jeremiah's response? (*Jer. 26:13–15*).

Jeremiah didn't back down at all; with the threat of death before him, the prophet, no doubt in some fear, nevertheless did not soften a single word of the message that he had been given by the Lord, who specially warned him at the start not to hold back a word (*Jer. 26:2*). Thus, in contrast to the Jeremiah who at times was whining, complaining, and cursing the day of his birth, we see him now as a man of God who is standing faithfully and with conviction.

When was the last time you had to stand faithfully, at a personal cost to yourself, for the truth as it is in Jesus? If you never have had to do that, what's wrong?

Jeremiah's Escape

As we saw yesterday, whatever his fears, whatever his own emotions, Jeremiah stood firm, fully aware of the potential death that his stance could bring him. He warned the princes and the people very clearly in Jeremiah 26:15 (“know for certain” *[NKJV]*, he said) that if they killed him they would face punishment for spilling innocent blood. Jeremiah knew that he was not guilty of the charges against him.

Read Jeremiah 26:16–24. How did Jeremiah escape death?

How fascinating that the priests and the prophets, the ones who were supposed to be the spiritual leaders, had to be rebuked and challenged by mere “elders” and “regular people” who came forward in defense of Jeremiah. They brought up the memory of Micah, who had lived a century before Jeremiah, in Israel. The king then did not hurt Micah but listened to his advice, the whole nation repented, and disaster was averted, at least for a time. Now these people in Jeremiah’s day were wiser than their leaders and wanted to spare the nation from making a big mistake by putting a prophet of God to death.

The acquittal emphasized that Jeremiah was not guilty of those things he was accused of. However, the priests’ and prophets’ hatred became stronger. Anger and the desire for revenge rose in them so that at a later time they would pounce on Jeremiah with their full fury. His release meant only a moment of ease for the prophet. He was not completely out of danger.

What we can see here is an example of how some people learned lessons from history while others, knowing the same history, refused to learn the same lessons. We can see something similar centuries later, with the Pharisee Gamaliel and his caution to other leaders concerning how to handle the followers of Jesus.

Read Acts 5:34–41. What parallels exist here with what happened to Jeremiah? More important, what lesson can we ourselves learn from history and from the mistakes of those who have come before us?

Further Thought: “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16). No doubt we can look around in nature, in human relationships, and in the marvels of the creation itself and get a view of God’s love, however much sin has damaged that creation as well as our ability to appreciate or even read it correctly. But at the cross, veils were torn off, and the world was given the starkest and sharpest revelation possible of that love—a love so great that it led to what Ellen G. White called “the sundering of the divine powers.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 924.

The sundering of the divine powers?

So great was God’s love for us that the Godhead, whose members loved each other from eternity, endured this “sundering” in order to redeem us. “‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’” (Matt. 27:46) is the clearest and most powerful expression of that “sundering,” of what it cost to save us. Here, we can again see the pain and suffering the Lord has endured because of our sin.

No wonder, then, that “we love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19, NIV). Of course, as fallen humans we only imitate that love, and even that imitation is often warped by our own selfishness and sinful desires. God’s love transcends ours; we reflect God’s love the way an oily mud puddle reflects the sky.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Though many of us today don’t worship animals or things in nature the way the ancients did, in what ways are we still in danger of making an idol or a god out of nature itself?
- 2 What is the role of repentance in the life of a Christian? That is, outside of one’s initial repentance in the course of first accepting Jesus, what role does repentance continue to have in the life of faith?
- 3 Try to wrap your mind around the idea of the “sundering of the divine powers.” How are we to understand this? If nothing else, what does this tell us about just how deadly and costly sin is?

Enlarge My Vision: Part 2

After completing high school, I worked as a literature evangelist for three years. One day I visited a hospital, and there I saw someone who looked familiar. I barely recognized him, but it was one of my former drinking buddies, my childhood friend. He was dying of tuberculosis and AIDS. I stared at him in shock as he lay there unconscious. It was too late for me to share Christ with him; but I couldn't shake the realization that if I had resisted God's call, it could have been me lying there. My former friend died a few days later. This experience deepened my conviction that I must answer God's call whenever and wherever it comes. To put it off could mean death.

I planned to be a literature evangelist for the rest of my life. After all, it had been the printed page that had influenced me to consider Christ. But the local field called me to pastor three churches. I had no training as a minister and had never thought about doing this kind of work. I struggled to decide whether to take this call, because it was not in the direction I thought God had been leading me. Nevertheless, I finally accepted the call.

After I had been in the ministry for several years, the conference urged me to study at Solusi University. During school breaks, I held evangelistic meetings wherever someone asked me to go. Word spread that I was willing, and more invitations came. I discovered that this is what I love to do.

During an evangelism field school, a speaker challenged us to expand our vision of how God can use us. "Don't limit yourself," he said, "and don't limit God." The speaker's words challenged me. But how could I expand my vision of what God expected of me? He had already done so much more than I thought would ever be possible!

Several months later I received a call to hold evangelistic meetings in South Africa. I looked at the calendar and realized that the dates they gave me were the dates of my final exams. Because of my prayer for God to expand my territory, I didn't tell the people in South Africa of my dilemma, but I fasted and prayed that God would make it possible for me to go. I believed God would open the way. I knew that the dates for the meetings were not changeable, and I knew I could not change my exam schedule. God went to work on my behalf, and I learned that my exams had been moved up a full week. I could take my exams and still minister in South Africa!

The meetings were such a blessing. Nineteen people gave their lives to God. Surely God has increased my territory, enlarged my vision, and made a worthless sinner into a willing instrument of God's power.

MOSES MUYUNDA *completed his studies in theology and is now serving as an ordained minister in Zambia.*

Josiah's Reforms



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Chronicles 33, Hab. 1:2–4, 2 Kings 22, Phil. 2:3–8, 2 Kings 23:1–28, 1 Cor. 5:7.*

Memory Text: “Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him” (*2 Kings 23:25, NKJV*).

Parents know just how hard it is to see their children, especially when they are older and out of the parents' control, make choices that they know will hurt them. Of course, this heartache doesn't apply only to parents and children: Who hasn't at some point seen friends or relatives or anyone make choices that you knew would be detrimental to them? This is an unfortunate aspect of what it means to have free will. Free will, especially moral free will, means nothing if we don't have the freedom to make wrong choices. A “free” being who can choose only the right is not truly free or even truly moral.

Thus, much of Scripture is the story of God warning His people about not making wrong choices. This has been a major part of what the book of Jeremiah is about, too: the pleadings of God, who respects free choice and free will, to His chosen nation.

And though, unfortunately, most of the stories are not good, this week we will get to see a glimmer of hope; that is, we see one of the few kings who, using free will, chose to do what “was right in the sight of the LORD.”

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 21.

The Reigns of Manasseh and Amon

However much we like to talk about objectivity, about viewing things as they really are, as human beings we are hopelessly subjective. We see the world, not so much as the world really is but as we really are. And because we are fallen and corrupted beings, this corruption is going to impact our perceptions and interpretation of the world around us. How else, for instance, can we explain someone like King Manasseh of Judah (about 686–643 B.C.), especially those early years of his terrible apostasy? One can hardly imagine how he justified in his own mind the horrific abominations he allowed to flourish in Judah.

Read 2 Chronicles 33. What does this story tell us about just how corrupt a king Manasseh was? More important, what does this teach us about the willingness of God to forgive?

No question, being hauled off to Babylon with nose hooks and bronze fetters was certain to get a man to rethink his life. Nevertheless, the text is clear: Manasseh truly repented of his ways and, when restored to the throne, sought to repair the damage that he had done. Unfortunately, the damage was greater than he might have imagined.

“But this repentance, remarkable though it was, came too late to save the kingdom from the corrupting influence of years of idolatrous practices. Many had stumbled and fallen, never again to rise.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 383. And, even more unfortunate, among those who had been terribly impacted by Manasseh’s apostasy was his son, Amon, who took the throne after his father died and who “did evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done; for Amon sacrificed to all the carved images which his father Manasseh had made, and served them” (2 Chron. 33:22, NKJV). Worse, unlike his father, Amon never repented of his ways.

Who doesn’t know personally the terrible consequences that can come even from sin that has been forgiven? What promises can you claim for the victory over sin? Why not claim them now before the sin brings its doleful consequences?

A New King

A preacher once said, “Be careful what you pray for. You just might get it.” Israel asked for and longed for a king, just like the nations around it. The people got what they asked for, and so much of Israelite history after the era of the judges was the story of how these kings corrupted themselves on the throne and, as a result, corrupted the nation as well.

Nevertheless, there were always exceptions, such as King Josiah, who ascended the throne in 639 B.C. and ruled until 608 B.C.

What was the context in which the new king had come to the throne?
(See 2 Chron. 33:25.)

Though democracy is supposed to be rulership by the people, it generally wasn’t conceived of functioning as it did in this case. Nevertheless, the people made their will known, and it was done according to their will. The young king came to the throne at a time of great turmoil, apostasy, and violence, even at the highest levels of government. Seeing what was going on, many faithful in the land had wondered whether God’s promises to ancient Israel could ever be fulfilled. “From a human point of view the divine purpose for the chosen nation seemed almost impossible of accomplishment.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 384.

The anxiety of the faithful ones was expressed in the words of the prophet Habakkuk in Habakkuk 1:2–4. What is the prophet saying?

Unfortunately, the answer to the problems of iniquity, violence, strife, and lawlessness would come, but from the north, from the Babylonians, whom God would use to bring judgment upon His wayward people. As we have seen all along, it didn’t have to be that way; however, because of their refusal to repent, they faced the punishment that their sins brought upon them.

From a human point of view, how often does “the divine purpose” seem to be impossible to accomplish? What does this tell us about how we need to reach out in faith beyond what we see or fully understand?

Josiah on the Throne

“Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left” (2 Kings 22:1, 2).

Considering the context of Josiah coming to the throne, what is so remarkable about the above texts?

The Bible doesn’t give us any explanation for this remarkable young man who, considering the circumstances, was most likely destined to be as corrupt and wicked as his father before him. That, however, wasn’t the case. For whatever reasons, he chose a different course, and that was to have a positive, though ultimately limited, impact on the nation.

Second Kings 22 mentions what Josiah did in regard to the temple. From the dedication of the temple by Solomon, long centuries had passed until Josiah’s reforms (622 B.C.). The kings had not really taken care of the temple. Time had eroded the building, which had once been beautiful. The young king saw that the temple was no longer suitable for worship as a result of long years of neglect.

What did Josiah do when he discovered the temple was in such disrepair? 2 Kings 22:3–7.

Today we would say that the king sent his minister of finance to the high priest and asked him to plan and oversee the materials and labor required to renovate the temple. They did not have to account for the money with which they were entrusted because they were acting faithfully. For whatever reasons, Josiah showed trust in them, and as far as the record shows, that trust was honored.

Refurbishing the temple is fine, but in the end, what really is crucial for a true revival and reformation? (See Phil. 2:3–8.)

The Book of the Law

The renovation of the temple, long the center of Israelite worship, was important, but renovation of a building wasn't all that was needed. The most beautiful and elaborate structure, though designed to help worshipers sense something of the power and grandeur of the Lord, in and of itself isn't enough to evoke piety among the people. History is replete with the sad stories of people who one minute were "worshipping" in some beautiful church somewhere and the next minute were walking out and committing an atrocity, which was perhaps even instigated by what they learned inside that beautiful structure.

What happened during the renovation of the temple? What is the powerful significance of Josiah's reaction to those events? *2 Kings 22:8–11*.

They found the "Book of the Law." The Bible doesn't specify which of Moses' writings were found. It was probably found buried in the walls somewhere in the temple.

Read *2 Kings 22:12–20*. What was Huldah's message from God to the people and for King Josiah? What should these words say to us?

Huldah transmitted the same message Jeremiah had already prophesied several times. The people who had turned away from God had dug their own grave through their deeds, and they were going to reap the consequences. Josiah never would see the trouble and die in peace.

"Through Huldah the Lord sent Josiah word that Jerusalem's ruin could not be averted. Even should the people now humble themselves before God, they could not escape their punishment. So long had their senses been deadened by wrongdoing that, if judgment should not come upon them, they would soon return to the same sinful course. 'Tell the man that sent you to me,' the prophetess declared, 'Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: because they have forsaken Me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore My wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.' Verses 15–17."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 399.

Josiah's Reforms

Despite the forewarning of doom, Josiah was still determined to do what was “right in the sight of the LORD.” Maybe disaster couldn’t be averted, “but in announcing the retributive judgments of Heaven, the Lord had not withdrawn opportunity for repentance and reformation; and Josiah, discerning in this a willingness on the part of God to temper His judgments with mercy, determined to do all in his power to bring about decided reforms.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 400.

Read 2 Kings 23:1–28. What was the essence of the reform that the faithful king sought to bring to his corrupted nation? What do these acts tell us about just how bad things had become in the chosen nation?

Josiah gathered all the people in Jerusalem in order to renew their covenant with God. The recently found Book of the Law was read, and then they made the vow to follow the God of Israel.

The king did not execute this work by himself but asked those who had spiritual responsibilities to do what was needed. As an example, throughout the centuries, different objects—statues and symbols that popularized foreign worship in Israel—had been gathered into the temple. Sometimes they had been part of the conditions of peace, imposed upon the nation; sometimes kings had exhibited them in order to signify their pacification, a sign of surrender. Whatever the reasons, they did not belong there, and Josiah ordered them removed and destroyed.

Also, the Passover celebration during Josiah’s reform did not take place only within the family households, as had been the custom before, but now the whole nation celebrated it together. Its symbolic message for the people was that they had left the old era behind them, and that they had now entered a new time in which they vowed to serve the true God, who led them out of Egypt, who provided a home for the tribes as He had promised, and who was with them in their everyday lives.

The significance in celebrating the national Passover was to start something new because (ideally, anyway) all the old things had come to an end. What should the symbolism of the Passover mean to us now, as Seventh-day Adventists? (See 1 Cor. 5:7.)

Further Thought: As the lesson stated, the depth of corruption that had befallen Israel can be seen in the kind of reforms that Josiah had to undertake. How, though, could the nation have fallen so far? In one sense, the answer is easy: it's because humanity has fallen so far. Just how far humanity has degraded was revealed in a famous experiment conducted at Yale University in the 1960s.

Participants were brought in arbitrarily through newspaper ads and told that they were to administer electric shocks to people tied down to chairs in another room. The switches that administered the shocks were marked from "Slight Shock" to "Danger: Severe Shock," including two more ominously marked "XXX." Participants were told to administer the shocks according to the orders of the scientist leading the experiment. As they did, the participants would hear the people in the other room scream and plead for mercy. In reality, the people in the other room were just acting; they were not getting shocked at all. The point of the study was to see how far these "normal" participants would go in inflicting what they thought was pain on those whom they didn't know, simply because they had been ordered to do it. The results were frightening. Though many participants got anxious, distraught, and even angry, that didn't stop *a stunning 65 percent* from administering the severest "shocks" to these people, believing that they were truly hurting them. "Ordinary people," wrote the scientist who conducted the experiment, "simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process." How many "ordinary" people have done terrible things throughout history, or even today? Too many have, for sure. Why? Christians know the answer. We are sinners, plain and simple.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does the story of Josiah's reform tell us about the importance of the Word of God in our lives?
- 2 A valid question could be raised now: If it were too late to avoid the coming catastrophe, why the call for repentance and revival and reformation? What was the purpose of it all? What answer would you give? In what ways might the reason be found in how such a revival would impact the people individually, as opposed to the nation as a whole?

God's Saving Hand: Part 1

Wesley Banda pastored several villages in Malawi. The family lived in a two-room house. Because the area had no electricity, Mrs. Banda prepared the family meals outside over an open fire.

One evening after dinner, Mrs. Banda returned to her fire to prepare the morning meal of *sadza* (a thick porridge of cornmeal). Her husband sat in the family's front room, working on some papers. The children sat quietly waiting for family devotions, but five-year-old Joshua had fallen asleep.

As Pastor Banda lit the kerosene lamp, their only source of light, the flame sputtered because the lamp was running low on fuel. He fetched the kerosene and began refilling the tank. But unknown to him, the kerosene was contaminated with a small amount of gasoline. As he poured the fuel into the lamp's reservoir, the fumes caught fire, and the lamp exploded in his hands.

Instinctively Pastor Banda threw the lamp across the room, but his clothes had caught fire. Mrs. Banda saw her husband run out the door, his clothes aflame. She immediately threw a pan of water onto his burning clothes while he rolled on the ground. Soon the fire was out.

The children ran out of the house, screaming, "Fire! Fire!" The burning fuel had set the front room ablaze. In the excitement, nobody noticed that little Joshua was missing. Moments later Mrs. Banda looked at the doorway and saw Joshua crawling out of the house; his clothes were burning. She shrieked and grabbed her youngest child and dropped him into a pan of water. The fire hissed and went out, but Joshua was terribly burned.

Their village had no clinic or hospital; so, a neighbor ran to the house of a farmer who had a car. They banged on his door and begged for his immediate help. He rushed over to drive the Bandas to the nearest hospital. Even so, it was nearly midnight when the family entered the hospital emergency room. It had been more than four hours since the explosion.

The doctors shook their heads as they looked at the burns that the pastor and his son had suffered. Pastor Banda's burns were serious, but little Joshua was injured even more seriously. Terrible burns covered his legs, stomach, and chest. Every movement brought screams of pain from the little boy. Even while the doctors worked to save the father and son some of the doctors tried to prepare the family for the likelihood that Joshua wouldn't survive.

"We're doing everything we can for your son," the doctor said gently. "But he is so badly burned that it would be a blessing if he died."

"No!" Mrs. Banda said firmly. "God has saved his life. Do what you must, but God will save my son."

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

Jeremiah's Yoke



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jer. 16:1–13; Hos. 1:1–3; Jer. 27:1–18; Dan. 4:25; Jeremiah 28; 2 Tim. 4:3, 4.*

Memory Text: “And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (*Luke 9:23*).

As we have already seen, God's prophets preached not only through words but also through object lessons. At times the prophets had to live out the messages; it was another way to get the point across.

Thus, Jeremiah again was called to “live out” the words he was to deliver. First, he had to wear a wooden yoke. “Thus saith the LORD to me; make thee bonds and yokes, and put them upon thy neck” (*Jer. 27:2*). That must have been a burdensome task, even under the best of circumstances; in this case, it became harder because a false prophet challenged what Jeremiah said. This week we will get a powerful look at truth and error contending for the hearts and minds of the people. We will see, too, how a message of grace can also be a false message.

Jeremiah also was forbidden to enter into mourning when others mourned and rejoicing when others rejoiced. In these cases, the point was to help the people realize what was coming because of their sins, and so to repent and obey, lessening the doleful consequence of their sinful actions.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 28.*

A Solitary Life

No question, Jeremiah's lot in life wasn't an easy one (he would be the first to admit it too!). Things, though, were even harder than we might have imagined.

Read Jeremiah 16:1–13. What was the Lord's message to Jeremiah here? However harsh, in what ways would it have been a blessing to the prophet? (Compare with Hos. 1:1–3.)

In contrast to Hosea, who was to marry a harlot in order to show just how corrupt the relationship had become between the Lord and Israel because of the nation's spiritual harlotry, Jeremiah was to refrain from marriage and from having children altogether. This was something rather rare and extreme for that time and culture. In Israel, starting a family was very important for every young man. Besides the love and companionship between spouses, it was also important to carry on the family name. Why did God forbid Jeremiah from starting a family? It was so that his own life would be an object lesson on how terrible that time would be when families broke up and when the pain of separation became a heavy burden on the survivors. Jeremiah's lack of family life was a constant warning and lesson for his contemporaries.

Jeremiah's solitary lot extended into other areas as well. He was forbidden to enter a house where there was mourning; this would symbolize the people's unwillingness to respond to God's calls for repentance and revival.

Along with times of mourning, he was not to join their festivals of joy and celebration. This was to symbolize the coming time when the Babylonians would bring an end to all of their joy and rejoicing.

In these ways, the human bonds that are forged, whether in mourning or joy, would be denied Jeremiah. His life and the sorrows of his life were to be object lessons. If only the nation would learn from them!

How should this account help us learn to appreciate the human support that we enjoy getting from others, or that we give to others? However important this support, how can we learn that, ultimately, our best support comes only from the Lord?

Jeremiah's Yoke

Read Jeremiah 27:1–18. What is the message of the Lord to the people? Why would this seem treasonous to many who heard it?

The yoke Jeremiah had to put on his body was an unmistakable sign of the humiliation that the nation suffered; it's what we call a military occupation. (In Deuteronomy 28:48 and 1 Kings 12:4, the idea of a yoke appears as an expression of oppression.) Jeremiah had to experience physically what the Babylonian invasion meant. The wooden yoke Jeremiah put on his arms and shoulders was one and a half meters long and eight centimeters thick. The essence of his message was that if a country revolted against Babylon, the Lord would take it as if the country had revolted against Him, and the rebellious would suffer as a result.

Though there is some ambiguity in the original texts, it seems that Jeremiah not only had to make a yoke for himself but also make yokes for the envoys of foreign countries who had come to Jerusalem and were plotting against Nebuchadnezzar—despite the Lord's warnings not to. The natural response would be to fight against a foreign invader, which is what they wanted to do. No doubt, then, Jeremiah's words were not at all welcome.

What is especially important about the message in Jeremiah 27:5? (See also Dan. 4:25.)

Here again, as we find all through both the Old and New Testaments, the Lord as Creator is Sovereign over all the earth. Even amid what appears to be chaos and catastrophe (invasion and dominion by a pagan nation), the power and authority of God are revealed, and this was, and is, to be a source of hope to all in the faithful remnant.

It's one thing to be under a yoke of bondage. However, ask yourself: Have you placed someone else under an unfair yoke, and if so, why not remove it now?

War of the Prophets

Bad news is bad news, and often we don't want to hear it, or we want to rationalize it away. Such was the case here in Judah with Jeremiah and the yoke that he bore, an unmistakable message of warning to the people. "The amazement of the assembled council of nations knew no bounds when Jeremiah, carrying the yoke of subjection about his neck, made known to them the will of God."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 444.

Read Jeremiah 28:1–9. Imagine you are a Judean standing there and watching all this going on. Whom would you believe? Whom would you *want* to believe? What reason would you have, if any, for believing Hananiah rather than Jeremiah?

Jeremiah raised his voice in the name of God, and Hananiah spoke in the name of God too. But who was speaking for God? They both couldn't be! For us today, the answer is obvious. For someone at that time, it might have been more difficult, even though Jeremiah does make a powerful point in verses 8, 9: *the prophets in the past have preached the same message that I am, that of judgment and doom.*

"Jeremiah, in the presence of the priests and people, earnestly entreated them to submit to the king of Babylon for the time the Lord had specified. He cited the men of Judah to the prophecies of Hosea, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and others whose messages of reproof and warning had been similar to his own. He referred them to events which had taken place in fulfillment of prophecies of retribution for unrepented sin. In the past the judgments of God had been visited upon the impenitent in exact fulfillment of His purpose as revealed through His messengers."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 445.

In short, just as we today are to learn lessons from sacred history, Jeremiah was seeking to get the people in his time to do the same thing: *learn from the past so you don't make the same errors that your forefathers did.* If it had been hard for them to listen to him before, now with the "ministry" of Hananiah there to counter him, Jeremiah's task was going to be that much more difficult.

Hananiah, whose name means "God has been gracious," seemed to be presenting a message of grace, of forgiveness, of salvation. What lessons should we learn from this false preacher of grace?

The Yoke of Iron

The battle between the prophets wasn't just one of words, but of deeds as well. In obedience to the command of God, Jeremiah put the wooden yoke around his neck; this was an overt symbol of the message that he had carried to the people.

What was the prophetic symbolism of Hananiah's act? *Jer. 28:1–11.*

Imagine, for example, that after Jesus cursed the fig tree (*Mark 11:13, 19–21*), someone who had heard what Jesus said and knew what had happened had planted a new fig tree in the same spot, all in an attempt to refute the prophecy of Jesus there. This is what Hananiah did with Jeremiah and the prophecy that the yoke around his neck symbolized. It was an act of open defiance of what Jeremiah said.

Note, too, Jeremiah's reaction. The texts record nothing of what he said right after the yoke was broken. He just turned around and walked away. If the story ended there, it would have seemed that the prophet had retreated in defeat.

Read Jeremiah 28:12–14. What happened next? What was Jeremiah's new message?

Jeremiah's response wasn't a message of revenge: *you did this to me, so I will do that to you*. Instead, it was another clear message from the Lord but even stronger than what came before. Hananiah might have been able to break a wooden yoke, but who can break an iron one? In a sense, what the Lord said was that by the people's obstinacy and refusal to obey they only were making matters worse. If you thought a wooden yoke was bad, try an iron one.

Who hasn't learned the hard way about making things more difficult for ourselves by obstinacy? When dealing with the Lord, why is it always better to submit and surrender right away than to keep on fighting and making things harder on yourself?

Trusting in Lies

“Hear now, Hananiah; the LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie” (Jer. 28:15).

The answer about who was right, whether Jeremiah or Hananiah, came soon enough. Jeremiah 28:16, 17 tells the fate of the false prophet, which was just what the true prophet had said it would be.

Though Hananiah died, he still had done damage to the nation. His works, in a sense, followed him. He made the people “to trust in a lie.” The Hebrew verb is *hiphil*, a causative form of the verb “to trust.” He caused them to trust in a lie, not in the sense of physically forcing them, but through deception. Even though the Lord had not sent him, he spoke in the name of the Lord, which carried a lot of weight in Judah. Added to that, Hananiah’s message of “grace,” “deliverance,” and “redemption” was certainly something that the people wanted to hear, considering the great threat that Babylon posed to the nation. It was, though, a false “gospel,” a false message of salvation that the Lord had not given them. So, at a time when the people needed to hear the words of Jeremiah and the message of redemption that he brought, they listened to the words of Hananiah instead, and this made their woes only worse.

What do the following texts have in common with Jeremiah 28:15?

2 Tim. 4:3, 4 _____

2 Thess. 2:10–12 _____

Things are no different today: we are in the great controversy, a battle for the hearts and minds of the world’s billions. Satan is working diligently to get as many as possible to “trust in a lie,” and that lie can come in many guises and forms, just as long as it is always a lie. After all, because Jesus said “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (*John 14:6*), Satan’s lies can be about anything and everything, just as long as they don’t contain the truth as it is in Jesus.

What are some of the lies that are prevalent in your culture today? Why is clinging to Jesus and His Word our only protection against them?

Further Thought: As we have seen, people want to believe good news, not bad. They wanted to believe, for instance, in Hananiah's message, not Jeremiah's. Today the same thing happens as well. Many still insist, for instance, that our world will only improve over time. Yet, even an atheist such as Terry Eagleton sees just how farcical that idea is: "If ever there was a pious myth and piece of credulous superstition, it is the liberal-rationalist belief that, a few hiccups apart, we are all steadily en route to a finer world. This brittle triumphalism is a hangover from the heroic epoch of liberalism, when the middle classes' star was in the ascendant. Today, it sits cheek by jowl with the cynicism, skepticism, or nihilism into which much of that honorable lineage has degenerated." —*Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (Yale University Press, 2010), Kindle Edition, p. 70. Though some aspects of life have improved, our world, in and of itself, offers us little hope, little consolation, especially in the long run. If we are to have any real hope, it has to be in something divine, not earthly, in something supernatural, not natural. And of course, that's what the gospel is all about: God's divine and supernatural intervention in our world and our lives. Without that, what do we have other than just more Hananiahs and their lies?

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think about our earth's future as a whole, even if from a purely human standpoint. Does it look hopeful and full of promise, or does it look fearful, dangerous, and full of uncertainty? What reasons can you give for your answers?
- 2 Jeremiah's message, as we saw in the context of Hananiah's lies, was to look at the past, to look at history, and to learn from it. Ellen G. White wrote something similar: "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."—*Life Sketches*, p. 196. What does she mean by that? What has happened in our past, and God's teaching in it, that can help us be prepared for what will undoubtedly come in the future?
- 3 Hananiah gave a false message of grace. What are some of those false messages of grace today that we must guard ourselves against? Grace, of course, is our only hope, but in what ways can it be presented as a lie?

God's Saving Hand: Part 2

The burn treatment was very painful. Every day nurses removed the bandages and soaked the burns in saltwater. Then they gently scraped the burns to remove the dead skin to prevent infection. The nurses taught Mrs. Banda how to wash the wounds and apply the medicine. She stayed in the hospital with her husband and son to help care for them.

After two long months, Pastor Banda insisted that he must return home. He could barely walk, but he was concerned about his church members.

Joshua and his mother remained in the hospital for four more months. Every day his mother talked gently to him as she cleaned and dressed his wounds. Her presence strengthened the boy and gave him hope.

It was difficult for the family to be separated for so many months. They couldn't visit one another, but they could pray.

After six months, Joshua was transferred to a rehabilitation hospital for another three months of physical therapy. He couldn't walk, but he learned to shuffle along behind a walker. His mother began a new routine of daily therapy. She soaked his legs in warm water then stretched the muscles in his legs. It was painful, but she urged Joshua to sing instead of cry.

At last Joshua was able to go home, but his mother continued treating him and encouraged him to walk. After a year of recovery and therapy, Joshua was able to walk without help.

Pastor Banda's recovery took a long time too. His damaged leg muscles would not stretch enough to allow him to ride a bicycle. And this made it very difficult for him to get from one church to another in the countryside. But his churches continued to grow in size and in faith.

Pastor Banda knows that throughout their ordeal God was beside each member of the family, encouraging, blessing, and healing. "God was blessing us even during our most difficult hour," he says. "When I returned to work from the hospital, the church prospered even more, and more people came into the church than had been coming before the fire."

Mrs. Banda is also grateful for God's blessings during the terrible ordeal. "I thank God for saving my husband and son," she says. "This experience taught me the importance of spending more time with my family. I had failed to notice some special qualities in little Joshua that I saw when he was in the hospital. For example, he has a wonderful talent for singing that I did not fully realize until I heard him singing while he was confined to his bed in the hospital. During our long hospital stay, we had time to become good friends with each other and with God."

After studying at Solusi University in Zimbabwe, WESLEY BANDA is now an ordained minister working in Malawi. While at Solusi, OLIVA BANDA also took some classes, as time permitted.

The Destruction of Jerusalem



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ezekiel 8, Rom. 1:22–25, Jer. 37:1–10, 38:1–6, Jer. 29:1–14, Dan. 9:2.*

Memory Text: “Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (*Jeremiah 29:7, NIV*).

Within a few short years the king of Babylon was to be used as the instrument of God's wrath upon impenitent Judah. Again and again Jerusalem was to be invested [surrounded] and entered by the besieging armies of Nebuchadnezzar. Company after company—at first a few only, but later on thousands and tens of thousands—were to be taken captive to the land of Shinar, there to dwell in enforced exile. Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah—all these Jewish kings were in turn to become vassals of the Babylonian ruler, and all in turn were to rebel. Severer and yet more severe chastisements were to be inflicted upon the rebellious nation, until at last the entire land was to become a desolation, Jerusalem was to be laid waste and burned with fire, the temple that Solomon had built was to be destroyed, and the kingdom of Judah was to fall, never again to occupy its former position among the nations of earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 422, 423.

As we have seen, and will see, none of this came upon them without plenty of warnings and pleadings by the prophets, especially Jeremiah. Their refusal to obey brought only ruin. May we learn from their mistakes!

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 5.

Weeping for Tammuz

Though Jeremiah might have felt very much alone at times, he wasn't. God had raised up Ezekiel, a contemporary, among the captives in Babylon, in order to comfort and to warn the exiles as well as to confirm what the Lord had been speaking through Jeremiah all these long and hard years. Through his ministry, Ezekiel was to warn the captives against the folly of believing the false predictions of an early return from Babylon. He was also to foretell, by various symbols and messages, the devastating siege that would eventually befall Jerusalem because of the people's refusal to repent and turn away from their sin and apostasy.

Read Ezekiel 8. What was the prophet shown? What does this tell us about how powerful the prevailing culture can be, and how it can impact even the most sacred things? What warnings should be here for us?

No matter how often, and clearly, the writings of Moses and the prophets warned against idolatry and worshipping other gods, these verses show that this is exactly what was being done, even within the sacred precincts of the temple. "Weeping for Tammuz" was a lamentation ritual for a Mesopotamian god. No wonder 2 Chronicles said: "Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem" (*2 Chron. 36:14*).

Look carefully at Ezekiel 8:12. The translation about the chambers of their own "imagery" is a little ambiguous. It could mean the chambers where they stored their own idols, or it could mean the chambers of their own imagination, their own hearts. Either way, the elders, the leaders, had fallen so far that they said the Lord didn't see what they were doing, that the Lord had abandoned them. It is another way of saying, "The Lord doesn't care about these things; they aren't important." Right there, in the sacred precincts of God's temple, these people engaged in the grossest idolatry, doing everything that they had specifically been forbidden by God's word to do. Even worse, in their own minds they justified their deeds. Here we see again what Paul meant when he talked about those who worshiped the creation instead of the Creator (*see Rom. 1:22-25*).

The Unhappy Reign of King Zedekiah

Zedekiah, whose name means “righteousness of Yahweh,” was the last king on the throne of Judah before its destruction by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. At first he seemed to have been willing to obey the words of Jeremiah and submit to the Babylonians. However, this attitude did not last.

Read Jeremiah 37:1–10. What was Jeremiah’s warning to King Zedekiah?

Under pressure from his subjects, most likely the nobility, Zedekiah ignored the warnings of Jeremiah and made a military alliance with the Egyptians instead, in hopes of staving off the Babylonian threat. (*See Ezek. 17:15–18.*) As he had been duly warned, salvation didn’t come from the Egyptians after all.

Read Jeremiah 38:1–6. What happened to Jeremiah (again) because he proclaimed the word of God to the people?

As Jesus said, “A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house” (*Mark 6:4*). Poor Jeremiah again faced the wrath of his own countrymen. Like the rest of the nation, though, Jeremiah couldn’t say that he hadn’t been warned. In this case though, the warning was about the trials that he would face if he stayed faithful, which he did!

How difficult it must have been for Jeremiah, too, because he was accused of weakening the morale of the nation. After all, when the people were facing an enemy from without, whom they wanted to fight against, and Jeremiah had been going around for years and years saying it’s a lost cause, that they couldn’t win, and that even the Lord was against them—it’s understandable that you would want to shut him up. So hardened in sin, they didn’t hear the voice of the Lord talking to them; indeed, they thought it was the voice of an enemy instead.

However difficult the pit was, think about how much harder it was for Jeremiah to hear the charge against him that he was seeking the hurt, not the welfare, of his own people. What’s it like to be accused of hurting the very ones you are trying to help?

The Fall of Jerusalem

The siege of Jerusalem began in earnest in January, 588 B.C., and lasted until the late summer of 586 B.C. Jerusalem had been able to hold out for more than two years before Jeremiah's prophetic words were fulfilled, and the Babylonian troops broke through the wall and destroyed the city. Starvation was so bad inside the walls that the defenders lost all strength and couldn't resist any longer. King Zedekiah fled with his family, but in vain. He was captured and taken to Nebuchadnezzar, who had his sons executed before his eyes. We can read much of this sad story in Jeremiah 39:1–10.

Read Jeremiah 40:1–6. What is the significance of the words of Nebuzaradan to Jeremiah?

How fascinating that this pagan commander understood the situation so much better than did Jeremiah's own people! Obviously the Babylonians knew something about Jeremiah and his work, and they were treating him differently from the way they did the others, such as Zedekiah (*see Jer. 39:11, 12*). Just why this pagan leader attributed the demise of Jerusalem to the Lord as a punishment for the sins of the people rather than to the superiority of his own gods over Judah's, the text doesn't say. Whatever the reason, it's a startling testimony to how, even amid such unnecessary calamity, the Lord had revealed something about Himself to the pagans.

What choice would Jeremiah make—go with the captives to Babylon, or stay behind with those remaining? Neither prospect would be particularly appealing, considering the circumstances for them all. Certainly, though, the spiritual needs of both groups would have been great, and Jeremiah could minister wherever he went. Jeremiah decided to stay among the group that remained behind in the land, with the poor people who no doubt were going to need all the encouragement and help that they could get (*see Jer. 40:6, 7*).

How can you learn to minister to others, regardless of the situation you are in? Why is it important, even for yourself, that you minister in whatever way you can?

All Your Heart

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (*Jer. 29:13, NIV*). What has been your own experience with this promise? What does “with all your heart” mean?

The Lord knows the beginning from the end. Even while people in Jerusalem were still fighting the Babylonians, still hoping that the words of the false prophets were true, the Lord was using Jeremiah to speak to the future, to speak to those who were already in Babylon and to those who would eventually be there. And what words he spoke!

Read Jeremiah 29:1–14. How are the love and mercy of God revealed in these texts?

Here was a true message of grace, unlike the false message of “grace” that the people had heard from the prophets who told them that their exile would be over in short order, even just two years. That was not God’s plan, and it was not going to happen. Instead, based on the clear teachings of Moses, they had to accept that this was their fate, at least for now; but just as Moses had said, if they repented, they would be restored to the land.

Read Deuteronomy 30:1–4. How do these texts reflect what Jeremiah said to the people? (*See also Deut. 4:29.*)

We have been given the prophetic gift in the wonderful ministry of Ellen G. White. How can we be sure that we don’t show the same attitude toward her today that many (but not all) had toward Jeremiah?

The Seventy Years

Jeremiah's prophecies should have had a double effect on the thinking of the captives: on the one hand they should not believe what the false prophets were saying, and on the other hand they should not be dispirited. He asked his captive countrymen to pray for Babylon. This request might have surprised those who had been deported. What Jeremiah was asking from the captives was unheard of in the earlier history of Israel. It had been absolutely unknown to pray for an enemy who had done what the Babylonians had done to them, God's chosen nation. The prophet broke all their understandings regarding the temple and Jerusalem; they could pray in a pagan country, and the Everlasting God would listen to them.

Notice, too, what Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 29:7: that the prosperity of their "host" nation will mean their prosperity too. As aliens and strangers in the land, they were especially vulnerable if things went badly in the nation in general. All through history, we have seen sad examples of intolerance becoming especially bad when a nation faces hard times; people look for scapegoats, those whom they can blame, and minorities, or aliens, often become easy targets. It is an unfortunate reality.

What wonderful hope is given to the exiles in Jeremiah 29:10? (See also *Jer. 25:11, 12; 2 Chron. 36:21; Dan. 9:2.*)

Everything the Lord had said would happen had happened; so, they had every reason to trust that He would fulfill this prophecy as well (*Jer. 29:10*). Why 70 years would be the exact time of their exile we don't know, though it clearly is linked to the idea of Sabbath rest for the land (see *Lev. 25:4, 26:34, 43*). What's so important about this prophecy is that, if they had taken in the concepts of faith and submission, it would have given the captives great hope and assurance of the Lord's complete sovereignty. Despite appearances, despite the terrible calamity that befell them, they could know that all was not lost, and the Lord had not left them. They were still the covenant people, and the Lord wasn't through with them or the nation of Israel. Redemption was available there for all of those ready to meet the conditions.

What prophecies give you great hope for the future? Which ones strengthen your faith and help you learn to trust the Lord for whatever will come?

Further Thought: “We are in continual danger of getting above the simplicity of the gospel. There is an intense desire on the part of many to startle the world with something original, that shall lift the people into a state of spiritual ecstasy, and change the present order of experience. There is certainly great need of a change in the present order of experience; for the sacredness of present truth is not realized as it should be, but the change we need is a change of heart, and can only be obtained by seeking God individually for His blessing, by pleading with Him for His power, by fervently praying that His grace may come upon us, and that our characters may be transformed. This is the change we need today, and for the attainment of this experience we should exercise persevering energy and manifest heartfelt earnestness. We should ask with true sincerity, ‘What shall I do to be saved?’ We should know just what steps we are taking heavenward.” —Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 187, 188.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As we saw, Jeremiah told the people to “seek the Lord.” How do we do that? What if someone were to say to you, “I want to know God for myself; how do I find Him?” How would you reply?
- 2 Dwell more on the idea of why, historically, the prophets had been so mistreated and misunderstood in their own time. What should and could this teach us about how we relate to the ministry of Ellen G. White? Think about her in the context of what Jesus said here: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets” (*Matt. 23:29–31, NIV*).
- 3 Dwell more on the final question at the end of Thursday’s study. Many Bible prophecies have been fulfilled in the past, and from our perspective today we can see that they were fulfilled. In what way can these fulfillments help us to trust that the ones yet future to us will be fulfilled as well?

Cry of the Kalahari: Part 1

Waves of heat danced above the burning sands. A tiny, black Bushman strode purposefully eastward across the vast Kalahari Desert, glancing frequently at a small gray cloud in the sky ahead. Sekoba was obeying instructions given to him in a dream. An angel had directed him to look for a man named William, who would teach him about the true God.

As the wise men once followed a star, so Sekoba followed the cloud until it stopped over a village. But when he told the inhabitants of the village about his dream, they mocked and laughed at him. That night the angel appeared again and told him to continue his eastward journey. After traveling across the desert for nearly a month, Sekoba found Pastor William Moyo, who had been prepared for his coming through a dream.

For several weeks, Pastor William taught Sekoba about God. In turn the Bushman told a marvelous story of God's guidance. As a young man he had felt a strong impression that he must learn to read and write; so, now he was able to read Pastor William's Bible for himself. Several years earlier when hungry lions were killing many cattle, he felt impressed that a higher power controlled the lions. When he prayed to this power, the lions left the area. When he heard of Christianity and began seeking God in earnest, an angel in a dream had led him to Pastor William.

After Sekoba had learned the good news of the gospel, he took Pastor William back with him to tell the rest of his family and prepare them for baptism. And that is how, at a camp meeting in 1948, the first converts among the Bushmen were baptized.

The Bushmen are a short race, averaging about five feet in height, who traditionally wander in small groups, gathering wild fruit and hunting. They are a nomadic people who have learned to survive in the harsh desert region of Botswana.

Botswana's climate is generally arid; the Kalahari Desert, which covers the southwestern part of the country, receives less than nine inches of rain a year.

For many years, these Bushmen have had contact with Seventh-day Adventists through the dedicated doctors at Kanye Hospital. In the next Inside Story, Dr. K. Seligman tells of one encounter.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

The Covenant



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 9:1–17; 12:1–3; Gal. 3:6–9, 15–18; Exodus 24; Jer. 31:31–34; 1 Cor. 11:24–26.*

Memory Text: “‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah’ ” (*Jeremiah 31:31, NIV*).

Although the Bible speaks of “covenants” in the plural (*Rom. 9:4, Gal. 4:24*), there is only one basic covenant, the covenant of grace, in which God bestows salvation upon fallen beings who claim it by faith. The idea of plural “covenants” arises from the various ways God has restated the essential covenant promise in order to meet the needs of His people in different times and settings.

But whether it's the Adamic covenant (*Gen. 3:15*), the Abrahamic covenant (*Gen. 12:1–3, Gal. 3:6–9*), the Sinaitic covenant (*Exod. 20:2*), the Davidic covenant (*Ezek. 37:24–27*), or the New Covenant (*Jer. 31:31–33*), the idea is the same. The salvation God provides is a gift, unmerited and undeserved, and the human response to that gift—in a sense, humanity's holding up its side of the deal—is faithfulness and obedience.

The first mention of the New Covenant is in Jeremiah, in the context of Israel's return from exile and the blessings that God would grant them. Even amid calamity and trouble, the Lord extends to His wayward people the offer of hope and restoration.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 12.

God's Covenant With All Humanity

We look at how bad the world is today; that is, we see all the evil in it, and yet God still bears with us. Thus, we can only imagine just how bad things must have been in order for the Lord to destroy the whole world with a flood. “God had given men His commandments as a rule of life, but His law was transgressed, and every conceivable sin was the result. The wickedness of men was open and daring, justice was trampled in the dust, and the cries of the oppressed reached unto heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 91.

Read Genesis 9:1–17. What covenant was made between God and humanity, and how does it reflect God's grace toward the creation?

The covenant God expressed to Noah was the most universal among the biblical covenants; it was with all humanity, and it included the animals and nature too (*Gen. 9:12*). Also, this was a one-sided arrangement: the Lord didn't impose any requirements or stipulations upon those with whom He was establishing the covenant. He simply was not going to destroy the earth with water again, period. Unlike other covenants, nothing was conditional about it.

God then sealed His covenant with a visible sign, that of a rainbow, which symbolizes the covenant promise that the earth will never be destroyed by a flood again. So, anytime we see a rainbow, the mere fact that we are here to see it is, in its own way, a vindication of this ancient covenant promise. (After all, if we had been wiped out in a universal flood, we wouldn't be here to see the rainbow!) Amid the constant sin and evil here on earth, at times we are blessed with the beauty of the rainbow, a sign of God's grace toward the whole world. We can look up at it and draw hope, not only from just how beautiful it is in and of itself, but also because we know that it's a message from God, a message of His love toward our wretched planet.

Dwell upon the grandeur and beauty of a rainbow. Especially in light of what the Bible tells us about the rainbow, in what ways can it draw us toward God, toward transcendence, toward something greater than what this mere earth itself offers?

The Covenant With Abraham

Read Genesis 12:1–3, 15:1–5, 17:1–14. What do these texts tell us about what the Lord intended to do through the covenant He made with Abraham?

The Abrahamic covenant of grace is fundamental to the entire course of salvation history. That’s why Paul used it to help explain the plan of salvation as it was fulfilled in Jesus Himself.

Read Galatians 3:6–9, 15–18. How does Paul connect the covenant made with Abraham to Jesus and to salvation by faith alone?

Through Abraham’s seed—referring not to his many descendants but in particular to one, Jesus (*see Gal. 3:16*), God would bless the entire world. All who would be a part of Abraham’s seed, which happens by faith in Christ (*Gal. 3:29*), would find that Abraham’s God would be their God as well. Even back then, Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (*Gal. 3:6*). Abraham was no more saved by works than the thief on the cross was; it’s always and only God’s saving grace that brings salvation. Abraham fulfilled his end of the covenant promise. His obedience revealed the faith that took hold of the promise of salvation. His works didn’t justify him; instead, the works showed that he was already justified. That’s the essence of the covenant and how it is expressed in the life of faith (*see Rom. 4:1–3*).

Dwell upon the great truth that your hope of salvation comes only from the righteousness of Jesus credited to you by faith. What great hope and joy can you derive from this wonderful provision made in your behalf?

The Covenant at Sinai

How was the covenant made between Israel and God at Mount Sinai?

Exodus 24.

Moses and some leaders went to Mount Sinai. These leaders included Aaron and his two sons, who represented the priests, and the 70 elders and leaders, who represented the nation. The men accompanying Moses had to stop from afar, but Moses was allowed to go up to where God appeared.

Moses later returned and affirmed the covenant with the whole nation. He proclaimed what God had spoken to him, to which the nation answered with the following words: “All the words which the LORD has said we will do.” (*See Exod. 24:3, NKJV.*)

Of course, as sacred history has shown and as our own experience often proves, it’s one thing to make the claim to be obedient; it’s quite another to reach out in faith and surrender in order to harness the divine power that gives us the grace to do what we say we will.

Read Hebrews 4:2. What does this verse say about Israel’s failure? How can we learn to avoid the same mistake?

Only by faith and by grasping the promises that come by faith can we be obedient, an obedience that is expressed by loyalty to God’s law. Obedience to the law was no more contrary to the everlasting covenant in Moses’ time than it is in ours. The common misperception about the law and the covenants, which usually arises from reading Paul, stems from a failure to take into account the context in which Paul was writing, that of dealing with his Judaizing opponents. They wanted to make the law and obedience to it central to the faith; Paul, in contrast, wanted to make Christ and His righteousness the central component.

How often have you said, “All that the Lord has told me, I will do,” only to fail to follow through? How does this unfortunate reality make the promise of grace so much more precious? What hope would you have without it?

The New Covenant: Part 1

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34. What do these texts mean both in their immediate context and in ours today?

Jeremiah uttered these words amid the greatest crisis the people had yet faced: the coming Babylonian invasion, when the nation was threatened with all but certain extinction. Here again, however, as in other places, the Lord offered them hope, the promise that this was not going to be the ultimate end, and that they would have another chance to thrive in the presence of the Lord.

So, the first promise of the “new covenant” found in the Bible is in the context of Israel’s eventual return from Babylonian exile and the blessing that God would grant to them upon that return. Just as the breaking of the covenant made at Sinai (*Jer. 31:32*) brought them into exile, so the remaking of this covenant would preserve them and their hope for the future. Like the Sinai covenant, the new covenant would be relational, and it would include the same law, the Ten Commandments, but now written not just on tablets of stone but in their minds and on their hearts, where it should have been all along.

“The same law that was engraved upon the tables of stone is written by the Holy Spirit upon the tables of the heart. Instead of going about to establish our own righteousness, we accept the righteousness of Christ. His blood atones for our sins. His obedience is accepted for us. Then the heart renewed by the Holy Spirit will bring forth ‘the fruits of the Spirit.’ Through the grace of Christ we shall live in obedience to the law of God written upon our hearts. Having the Spirit of Christ, we shall walk even as He walked.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 372.

Under the new covenant, their sins would be forgiven, they would know the Lord for themselves, and they would obey God’s law through the power of the Holy Spirit working in them. Old covenant in shadows and in symbols, new covenant in reality, salvation was always by faith, a faith that would reveal “the fruits of the Spirit.”

The New Covenant: Part 2

The prophecy of Jeremiah about the new covenant (*Jer. 31:31–34*) contains a double application: first, it refers to Israel's return to God and His bringing them home; second, it refers to the work of Jesus the Messiah, whose death ratified the covenant and would change the relationship between humans and God. It's in the New Covenant that we get the fullest expression of the plan of salvation, which before had been revealed only in shadows and types (*Heb. 10:1*).

Read Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:24–26. How do these texts link back to Jeremiah's prophecy?

The broken body of Christ and His shed blood were revealed in the Old Testament in the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb. The juice of the vine represents the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, revealed in the New Testament. The work of Jesus did not begin with the New Testament; it embraced the Old, as well, and in the Communion service we can see the link that unites what Jesus has done all through salvation history.

The bread and the juice, then, provide the shortest summary of that salvation history. Though they are just symbols, it is still through these symbols that we understand God's incredible work in our behalf.

The Communion service points not just to Christ's death, but also to His return, without which His death would be all but meaningless. After all, what good would Christ's first coming be without the second, when we are resurrected from the grave (*1 Thess. 4:16, 1 Cor. 15:12–18*)? Jesus established the link when He said, "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (*Matt. 26:29*). No question, Christ's first coming is inseparably tied to His second. The first finds its ultimate fulfillment only in the second.

Next time you partake of the communion service, think about Christ's vow not to drink of the fruit of the vine until He does so with us in the kingdom of God. How does that make you feel? What does that say about the closeness that Christ seeks with us?

Further Thought: As we saw, the Bible teaches that the rainbow is a sign of God’s covenantal promise never to destroy the earth by water again. Sure, thanks to science, we now know that a rainbow occurs when sunlight is both refracted and reflected in drops of water, dispersing the light at various angles. Light enters a raindrop at one point, is reflected off the back of that drop at another, and leaves at another, creating the colors that we see. Poet John Keats feared that science would “unweave a rainbow,” but even if we could parse, measure, predict, and quantify everything about a rainbow down to the innards of each photon and the underbelly of every quark, what would that prove other than that we understand better the natural laws God used to create the signs of this covenant promise? Science might one day be able to explain everything about how rainbows are made—even to 25 digits to the right of a decimal point—but it can never explain why they are made.

We, though, know *why*. Because God created our world in such a way that when sunlight and mist are in right relationships to each other, the mist breaks up the light by refracting and reflecting it at different angles that create bands of electromagnetic waves, which, when reaching our eyes, imprint the image of rainbows in our minds. And He did it (the “why” that science can never explain) to remind us of His covenant promise that never again would He destroy the earth by water.

Discussion Questions:

- ① What are some other crucial truths revealed by the Bible that science can never teach us? In fact, could you argue that the most important things we know could never be revealed by science? If so, what truths would they be?
- ② In class, go over the crucial relationship between faith and works in the plan of salvation. That is, what is the role of faith, and what is the role of works, and how do they relate to the Christian experience?
- ③ What does it mean to say that the law is engraved on our hearts? How does this idea show the perpetuity of the law, even under the New Covenant?

Cry of the Kalahari: Part 2

The desert sun streamed down mercilessly as the little man crept forward with his bow. From his thin, wrinkled appearance one might suppose he was in his seventies, but his body was accustomed to the scarcity of food and water, and his reflexes were lightning fast.

Steeped in the accumulated wisdom of his ancestors, he cautiously moved closer to the small herd of grazing buck.

When he was close enough, he fitted a poisoned arrow to his bow, aimed carefully, and let the arrow fly.

It found its mark, but the buck's hide was tough and the arrow didn't penetrate deeply. The buck looked around then charged the Bushman, catching him on its terrible horns and tossing him until his intestines hung out of his abdomen, now covered with sand and grit.

After the buck left, the Bushman staggered to his feet and, clutching the dirty mass to himself, headed for the only help he knew—the Seventh-day Adventist hospital miles away!

He was barely conscious when he reached the hospital compound. The horrified staff rushed him to the operating room, marveling at the desperate stamina that had brought him there.

The surgeon prayed earnestly as he cleansed the intestines, replaced them in the abdominal cavity, and sutured the gaping wound closed. He knew that only God could heal the Bushman.

With careful nursing and much prayer, he eventually recovered and returned to his family, leaving the hospital staff to wonder if he also had learned of God's love during his hospital stay.

Several months later, a little man with a horrible scar on his abdomen came to the hospital bringing a four-foot chain of beads, painstakingly handcrafted with primitive tools, as his expression of gratitude to the doctor who had saved his life.

Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help to establish a Seventh-day Adventist primary school in Botswana.

Please plan to give generously on the Thirteenth Sabbath, or any time on our secure Web site: giving.adventistmission.org.

DR. K. SELIGMAN *is a practicing physician in Gaborone, Botswana.*

Back to Egypt



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jer. 40:7–16, Jeremiah 41–43, Exod. 16:3, Num. 16:13, Jeremiah 44.*

Memory Text: “ ‘May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with everything the LORD your God sends you to tell us’ ” (*Jeremiah 42:5, NIV*).

This week's lesson brings us toward the end of the saga of Jeremiah the prophet. However, this is not an “and they lived happily ever after” ending. In a sense, one could summarize this week's study, and even a good portion of the book of Jeremiah, by saying that what we see here is an example of the limits of grace. That is, grace will not save those who utterly refuse to accept it. No matter how much the Lord spoke to them, offering them salvation, protection, redemption, peace, and prosperity, all but a tiny and faithful remnant scorned and rebuffed God's offer.

And what of Jeremiah? His was a life and work that from all human appearances seemed futile! The “weeping prophet” had plenty to weep about. Even after everything he warned about came to pass, the people still clung to their sins and paganism and rebellion, openly defying the prophet to his face and scorning the Word of the Lord to them.

How we need to be careful ourselves. Grace is grace because it's given to the undeserving, yes; but it's not forced on anyone. We must be willing to accept it.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 19.*

Political Anarchy

One would think that with the destruction of the city and the total defeat by the Babylonians, all the people would have learned their lesson. Unfortunately, not all did, and the drama wasn't over yet.

Read Jeremiah 40:7–16. What message was given (again) to the people? What is the significance of the word *remnant* used in verse 11?

Despite the message of peace, and even the ensuing prosperity (*see Jer. 40:12*), not everyone was content with the status quo.

Read Jeremiah 41. What new problems would the “remnant” now face?

Though the reasons for the assassination weren't given, the fact that it had been done by someone of the “royal family and of the officers of the king” (*Jer. 41:1, NKJV*) suggests that these elitists still had not accepted the idea that the chosen nation needed to submit to Babylonian rule. Because Gedaliah had been put on the throne by the king of Babylon (*see Jer. 40:5*), these people might have seen him as a treasonous puppet who was disloyal to the nation and who therefore had to be eliminated along with his court.

As the chapter continues, we can see that this remnant now faced a new threat: fear of the Babylonians, who—perhaps not knowing the details of what happened—would seek revenge for the death of Gedaliah and the Babylonian soldiers (*see Jer. 41:3*).

The sins of Ishmael and his men caused fear among those who had nothing to do with those sins. What should this tell us about how, by our disobedience, we can bring pain and suffering to others, even those who had nothing to do with our sins?

Seeking Divine Guidance

Read Jeremiah 42. What powerful message is found there, not just for them, but for anyone who seeks guidance from the Lord in prayer?

Fearful of the Babylonians, the people seek out Jeremiah and ask him to pray for them for divine guidance. They must have known by now that Jeremiah was indeed a prophet of God, and what he said when he spoke in the name of the Lord would come true.

They also vowed they would do whatever God asked or commanded them to do. So, as we read, we see a people who seem to have learned their lesson, who want not only to know what God's will is but, more important, to follow it. The words—"Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God to whom we send you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the LORD our God" (*Jer. 42:6, NKJV*)—were a powerful confession of faith. After all that had happened, it was about time.

Notice the parallel here with Jeremiah's earlier messages: *don't trust in foreign powers. Trust in the Lord, and He will prosper you and He will deliver you when the time is right. Salvation isn't from anywhere or anyone else. The foreign powers didn't help you before, and they won't help you now.*

God has to warn them because He knows the tendency of their hearts: He knows that they are thinking of going back to Egypt (think of the symbolism here) in order to seek the protection they wanted. So, the Lord gave them very clear and specific commands not to do that, that such a course would bring ruin upon them.

Again, such a stark choice, the choice we all have to face: life and peace through faith and obedience to Jesus, or misery and death through lack of faith and lack of obedience. No matter the different circumstances, in the end the issue is the same for all of us. Unlike these people, we don't always have the warnings given to us so specifically and so clearly expressed, but we have been given the warnings just the same.

Life or death, blessing or cursing. What kind of choices are you making, every day, either for life or for death?

Returning to Egypt

If you haven't read ahead, Jeremiah 42 could be very exciting. What will the people do? Would they reach out in faith, a faith that is revealed in obedience, and remain in Judah? Or would they make the same mistakes that were made in the past, and instead of following a clear "thus saith the LORD," do what they want to do, despite the Lord's clear warning in the last few verses of chapter 42 about what would await them if they did go back to Egypt?

Read Jeremiah 43:1–7. What did they do?

When God's Word does not agree with our intentions or desires, we tend to have doubts about its divine origins. Likewise, the people and the leaders had doubts about Jeremiah. Apparently, in Israel, only the circumstances had changed, but the people remained the same in their thinking and in their heart. They excused themselves from their vow by attacking the prophet Jeremiah. However, they did not want to attack the aged Jeremiah directly. So, they blamed Baruch, his friend and sometimes scribe, and turned their wrath against him, claiming that he had turned the prophet against them.

Read Exodus 16:3 and Numbers 16:13. What parallels exist between what the people said to Jeremiah and what their ancestors said to Moses?

Human nature is human nature, always looking for someone else to blame for its problems, always looking for an excuse to do what it wants. Thus, for whatever reason, Baruch was accused of wanting all of his countrymen to die by the hand of the Babylonians or to be taken into exile there. Jeremiah 43:1–7 does not say why the people thought Baruch wanted this to happen, any more than Scripture explains why the children of Israel thought Moses wanted them to die in the wilderness after they had left Egypt. People in the thrall of emotions and passions may not have sound reasons for their thinking. How crucial it is, then, that we keep our passions and emotions submitted to the Lord!

How often do we allow emotions or passions to cloud our judgment or even override a clear "thus saith the LORD"? How can we protect ourselves from letting emotions and passions get the better of us? (See 2 Cor. 10:5.)

Taken Into Exile

Read Jeremiah 43:8–13. What did the Lord say through Jeremiah?

Tahpanhes was a town at the northeastern border of Egypt, that had significant fortifications and where a great number of Jewish colonists lived.

Here again, the Lord wants Jeremiah to act out a prophecy symbolically. Even though words are powerful, sometimes when things are done in real life, when they are acted out before us, the point comes through even more strongly.

How exactly Jeremiah was to bury stones at the entrance to Pharaoh's house, we aren't told. The point, however, was clear: even the mighty pharaohs were no match for the Lord, and He would fulfill His word just as He had said. The refugees who thought that they would find protection and safety by going to Egypt were as wrong as those who, as we saw earlier, thought that they could find protection and safety by having Egypt come to them (*Jer. 37:7, 8*). The Egyptian gods were useless, figments of warped imaginations; these gods were pagan abominations that kept the people in abject ignorance of truth. The Israelites should have known, as we should now know, that our only true protection and safety is in obeying the Lord.

“When self-denial becomes a part of our religion, we shall understand and do the will of God; for our eyes will be anointed with eye-salve so that we shall behold wonderful things out of his law. We shall see the path of obedience as the only path of safety. God holds his people responsible in proportion as the light of truth is brought to their understanding. The claims of his law are just and reasonable, and through the grace of Christ he expects us to fulfill his requirements.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 25, 1890.

Think about the symbolism, too, in the Israelites' going back to Egypt in their desire to find safety. How ironic! In a spiritual sense, what are ways that we could be tempted to “go back to Egypt” to find what we think we can't find with the Lord?

Open Defiance

Read Jeremiah 44:1–10. What were the captives doing in Egypt?

During the Egyptian captivity, Jeremiah had to face the same problem he had while he and his people had lived in Judah. At that time he had to talk to the leaders; now he had to talk to the common people, who in captivity were committing some of the same sins that brought this devastation on them to begin with.

What startling answer did they give to Jeremiah when confronted by their sins? (*Jer. 44:15–19*).

The hardness of their hearts and the deception that had overtaken them are astonishing. Basically, they looked Jeremiah in the face and defied him and what he spoke to them in “the name of the Lord.”

The rationale was simple: in the early days, before the reforms of Josiah, when they were heavily steeped in worshipping pagan gods, even burning incense to the “queen of heaven” and pouring out drink offerings to her, things went well for them. They were materially well off and dwelt in safety. However, it was only *after* the reforms of Josiah (which were too late) that calamity struck. So, why should they listen to Jeremiah and all his warnings?

Jeremiah’s response (*Jer. 44:20–30*) was, *No, you don’t understand. It was precisely because you did all these things that these calamities have come upon you. Worse, your stubborn refusal to change means that even more calamity will come, and the safety you thought you would find in Egypt is a deception and a lie, just like the pagan gods you worship. In the end, you will know the truth, but it will be too late.*

What about those who, steeped in sin and unbelief, seem to be doing very well, while at times faithful Christians go through terrible trials? How do we work our way through this reality?

Further Thought: All through the book of Jeremiah, as through all the Bible, we are confronted with the question of good and evil. And as Christians we know good from evil, because God has defined these terms for us in many different ways. (See, for example, *Rom. 7:7, Mic. 6:8, Josh. 24:15, Matt. 22:37–39, Deut. 12:8.*) But what if you don't believe in God? How can you know good from evil? Well, atheist author Sam Harris has a suggestion. He wrote a book called *The Moral Landscape*, in which he argues that good and evil can and should be understood only in terms of science. That is, the same way that science has helped us understand the difference between the strong nuclear force and the weak nuclear force, it should help us know right from wrong and good from evil. He even speculates that science might one day cure evil. "Consider what would happen if we discovered a cure for human evil. Imagine, for the sake of argument, that every relevant change in the human brain can be made cheaply, painlessly, and safely. The cure for psychopathy can be put directly into the food supply like vitamin D. Evil is now nothing more than a nutritional deficiency."—Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2010), Kindle Edition, p. 109. Most scientists, however, even those who don't believe in God, would have a problem believing that science can solve these problems. If, however, you don't believe in God, where else can you find these solutions?

Discussion Questions:

- 1 "With us, everything depends on how we accept the Lord's terms."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 118. Why is it a mistake to assume that salvation comes with no condition? Conditions are not the same things as works, or something that gives us merit before God. How can we learn to differentiate between the false teaching of salvation by works (legalism) and the false teaching that salvation is nonconditional (cheap grace)?
- 2 Dwell more on the difficult question at the end of Thursday's study. If someone says: "I don't believe in Jesus, I don't even believe in God, and yet look at how well my life is going. In fact, I would say that my life is going better than yours, and you are a Christian," how would you respond?

All Things Work Together for Good

Like many young people in Africa, Siyoka migrated from his village to a larger town in search of a job. He lived with relatives and sent every cent he could back to his widowed mother and two younger brothers.

It was the music that first attracted him to the meetings held by Pastor Mbena; but when he heard the story of Jesus, Siyoka kept thinking about how wonderful it would be to go to heaven with Him, and to *never be hungry, sad, lonely, or afraid again!*

After the meetings, Siyoka returned home. Perhaps, someday, he could become a pastor too. The local elder who was in charge of following up with those who had attended the meetings thought Siyoka had lost interest when he left town. But at home Siyoka did whatever work he could to pay for his school fees, as well as care for the family garden. But that year the rains did not come. Sadly the villagers watched their crops wither and die. Sometimes there was a little rain but not the steady, soaking rains needed to bring life to the barren earth.

The famine was terrible. Many died and many more, including Siyoka, became sick. In desperation, his mother, seeing he was about to die, managed to bring him to a hospital in the nearest city. It was there that Pastor Mbena, visiting some of his church members, found him.

After relating these events, Siyoka's thin face lit up as he said in a weak whisper, "God is good, Pastor Mbena. He kept me from dying in the famine, and now I will be alive to see my people baptized. You will come to my village, won't you?"

"Yes, Siyoka, I must come to your village and hold some meetings so your people can learn about Jesus," answered the pastor warmly.

"Oh, they already know Jesus, Pastor!" Siyoka assured him earnestly. "There are 25 ready to be baptized. I told them everything I learned when I attended your meetings and taught them the songs too. I met with them every Sabbath. Even when the famine was really bad we prayed, and God answered our prayers. He brought me here so I could find you. When can you come?"

Pastor Mbena could hardly believe his ears. This boy who had had so little opportunity to learn had become a preacher for God! When Siyoka was well enough to go home, the pastor accompanied him. He visited the people and found that they had indeed been well taught. What a wonderful day it was when Siyoka and his 25 converts were baptized.

This story was written by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN.

Lessons From Jeremiah



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jer. 2:13, 6:20, 7:1–10, Matt. 9:12, Deut. 6:5, Jer. 10:1–15, 23:1–8.*

Memory Text: “Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth’ ” (*Jeremiah 23:5, NKJV*).

We’re now at the end of our study of Jeremiah. It’s been an adventure; a lot of drama, emotion, and energy have been expended in the saga of our prophet.

Like all the prophets, Jeremiah didn’t write in a vacuum: his was a message from the Lord and for people at a specific time and place and under specific circumstances.

And yet, however radically different his circumstances were from ours or from those of the many other generations who have read Jeremiah, crucial principles expressed there are the same for God’s people in every generation.

Such as faithfulness to God and obedience to His commandments. Such as true religion, a religion of the heart, as opposed to empty and dead rituals that can leave people in a false state of complacency. Such as the people’s willingness to listen to correction, even when it cuts across what they want to hear. Such as true revival and reformation. Such as trusting in the Lord and His promises instead of the arm of flesh. Such as . . .

The list goes on. This week, let’s take a look at some of the many lessons we can learn from this revelation of God’s love for His people even amid many thunderous warnings to them about where their actions will lead.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 26.

Jeremiah's Lord

Seventh-day Adventists understand that at the center of the great controversy exists a crucial issue: What is the character of God? What is God really like? Is He the arbitrary tyrant that Satan makes Him out to be, or is He a loving and caring Father who wants only the best for us? These questions really are the most important questions in the entire cosmos. After all, what would our situation be if God were not kind and loving and self-sacrificial but mean and arbitrary and sadistic? We'd be better off if no God existed than to have one like that.

So, the questions are of huge importance. Fortunately, we have the answers, and they are best seen at the Cross.

“Never will it be forgotten that He whose power created and upheld the unnumbered worlds through the vast realms of space, the Beloved of God, the Majesty of heaven, He whom cherub and shining seraph delighted to adore—humbled Himself to uplift fallen man; that He bore the guilt and shame of sin, and the hiding of His Father's face, till the woes of a lost world broke His heart, and crushed out His life on Calvary's cross. That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 651.

How are the nature and character of God revealed in the following texts in Jeremiah? That is, what do these texts tell us about Him?

Jer. 2:13 _____

Jer. 5:22 _____

Jer. 11:22 _____

Jer. 31:3 _____

Jer. 3:7 _____

These are just a few of the many images and expressions used in the book that reveal to us something of the nature and character of our God. He is the Source of life, the powerful Creator, a God of judgment, a God who loves us and calls us, again and again, to repent of our sins and to turn away from the paths that will lead to our destruction.

What evidence of God's loving character have you experienced during your lifetime?

Rituals and Sin

“There is a document that records God’s endless, dispiriting struggle with organized religion, known as the Bible.”—Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (Yale University Press, 2010), Kindle Edition, p. 8.

Not quite true, and that’s because the religion of the Bible, the religion that God has given humanity, has always been an “organized religion.”

On the other hand, there is no question that in the book of Jeremiah, the Lord was seeking to get people away from the cold, dead, but very organized rituals that came to dominate their faith, rituals that they believed covered their sin.

As said earlier, yet it is worth repeating, the vast majority of Jeremiah’s struggles were with leaders and priests and people who believed that because they were the chosen ones of God, the children of Abraham, the covenant people, they were just fine with the Lord. What a sad deception, one that we, also of Abraham’s seed (*Gal. 3:29*), need to watch out for.

What is the message of the following texts in Jeremiah? Most important, how can we apply the principles there in our own walk with the Lord? (*Jer. 6:20, 7:1–10*).

Read Jeremiah 7:9, 10. If one ever wanted to find a situation that fits what has been called “cheap grace,” the term certainly applies here. The people do all these sinful things and *then come back to the temple and “worship” the true God and claim forgiveness for their sins*. God is not mocked. Unless these people change their ways, especially how they treat the weak among them, they are going to face harsh judgment.

What a deception they are under, the belief that they can claim God’s forgiveness and go on doing what they want, without regard to the conditions of the covenant so that they can continue on in those sins.

What is the difference between what Jeremiah is warning about here and what Jesus said in Matthew 9:12? Why is it important to know that difference?

Religion of the Heart

“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God”
(*Rom. 14:12*).

So much of the book of Jeremiah is directed toward the nation as a whole. Time and again he talked about Israel and Judah corporately, as God’s “choice vine” (*Jer. 2:21, NIV*), or the “beloved” of the Lord (*Jer. 11:15, 12:7*), God’s own “heritage” (*Jer. 12:7–9*), His “vineyard” (*Jer. 12:10*), and His “flock” (*Jer. 13:17*). Without doubt, in the book we get a sense of the corporate nature of the Lord’s calling to this nation.

Of course, it’s the same in the New Testament, where time and again the church is understood in a corporate sense (*see Eph. 1:22, 3:10, 5:27*).

Yet, salvation is personal, not a corporate issue. We are not saved as package deals. As with the New Testament church, the nation of Judah was composed of individuals, and it’s here, at the level of the individual, that the real crucial issues arise. The famous text in Deuteronomy 6:5, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (*NKJV*), though spoken to the nation as a whole, is written in the singular second person. That is, the “you” in each case is the singular; God is talking to each one individually. In the end, each one of us, personally, will have to give an account of ourselves to God.

We find that same thing in Jeremiah as well.

What do the following texts say about the importance of a personal, individual walk with the Lord?

Jer. 17:7 _____

Jer. 17:10 _____

Jer. 29:13 _____

Jer. 9:23, 24 _____

Though both Testaments of the Bible talk about the corporate nature of God’s church, true faith is a matter of each person, himself or herself, making a daily surrender to the Lord, a personal choice to walk in faith and obedience.

Though there’s no question that we are each individually responsible for our own souls, how can we make sure that we are doing everything we can to uplift and encourage others? Whom do you know, right now, that you can say some kind and uplifting words to?

Twilight of the Idols

What was one of the great sins that the people committed that Jeremiah had to deal with constantly? (*Jer. 10:1–15*).

What's interesting in these texts is not just the way in which the prophet shows how vain and useless and silly these idols are but how he contrasts them to the living God. These things are powerless, useless, empty, and false; what a contrast to the Lord who made the heavens and earth! He will endure forever, while these idols will vanish forever. So, whom should we be worshiping and dedicating our lives to: that which is weak, false, vain, and powerless, or to the Lord, whose power and might are so great that He created and sustains the universe? The answer, of course, is obvious.

Yet, however obvious the answer, the fact is, we are in danger of falling into idolatry as well. Though today we might not worship the same kind of idols that those in Jeremiah's time did, our modern life is full of false gods. These modern idols can be anything that we love more than God; whatever we "worship" (and worship doesn't always mean singing and praying) becomes our god, and we are guilty of idolatry.

What are some of the things that we can be in danger of making into idols? What about things such as digital devices, money, fame, even other people? Make a list of what these potential idols are, and then ask yourself: In the end, what real salvation do they offer?

Of course, we know intellectually that none of these things is worthy of worship. We know that in the end, nothing that this world offers us, nothing that we make into idols, can ultimately satisfy our souls and certainly not redeem them. We know all these things, and yet, unless we are careful, unless we keep before us Jesus and what He did for us and why He did it, we can so easily be swept up in a modern form of the idolatry similar to that which Jeremiah so passionately railed against.

The Remnant

“In the closing years of Judah’s apostasy the exhortations of the prophets were seemingly of but little avail; and as the armies of the Chaldeans came for the third and last time to besiege Jerusalem, hope fled from every heart. Jeremiah predicted utter ruin; and it was because of his insistence on surrender that he had finally been thrown into prison. But God left not to hopeless despair the faithful remnant who were still in the city. Even while Jeremiah was kept under close surveillance by those who scorned his messages, there came to him fresh revelations concerning Heaven’s willingness to forgive and to save, which have been an unailing source of comfort to the church of God from that day to this.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 466.

Even amid that prevailing apostasy and doom, God always had a faithful people, however small in number. Though as with many of the books of the prophets, much of the emphasis in Jeremiah was on apostasy and unfaithfulness—because these were what the Lord wanted to save the people from—all through sacred history the Lord had a faithful remnant. This, of course, will continue down until the end of time (see *Rev. 12:17*).

How is the concept of the remnant expressed in Jeremiah 23:1–8? How does this apply to New Testament times? (See also *Jer. 33:14–18*.)

In verses 5–7 scholars have long seen a Messianic prophecy, a prophecy of redemption for God’s faithful people. Though it’s true that, after the Babylonian exile, a remnant returned, it was not a glorious return. However, God’s purposes would be fulfilled through the lineage of David, through a “righteous Branch,” the King who would one day reign.

This prophecy had a partial fulfillment in the first coming of Jesus (see *Matt. 1:1, 21:7–9, John 12:13*). It will have its ultimate fulfillment in the Second Coming (see *Dan. 7:13, 14*), when all of God’s faithful people, His true remnant, will dwell forever in peace and safety. The redemption, first symbolized by the Exodus from Egypt, will be final, complete, and eternal.

In what are you putting your hopes? How can you learn to trust more and more in the promises of God and their ultimate fulfillment in your own life? What else besides them do you have?

Further Thought: Many years ago a Seventh-day Adventist minister named W. D. Frazee preached a sermon called “Winners and Losers.” In it he went through the lives of various Bible characters, looking at their work and ministry, and then he asked the question regarding each one: *Was he a winner or a loser?*

For example, he looked at John the Baptist, who lived a lonely life in the wilderness. Though eventually John had a small following, it never amounted to much, and certainly it was not what Jesus, who came later, had. And, of course, John lived out his last days in a dank prison where, at times, he was harassed with doubt, finally only to get his head chopped off (*Matthew 14*). After recounting all this, Elder Frazee asked: “Was John a winner or a loser?”

What about Jeremiah the prophet? How successful was his life? He suffered a great deal, and he wasn’t afraid to whine and moan about it either. With few exceptions, it seems that the priests, prophets, kings, and common people not only didn’t like what he had to say, but also thoroughly resented it. He was even seen as treasonous against his own people. In the end, the destruction and doom that he spent his life warning about came, because time and again the people rejected his words. They threw him into a muddy pit, hoping he’d die there. He lived to see his nation go into a terrible exile while Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. Thus, from a human perspective, not much went well for Jeremiah. From one perspective, you could argue that he had a fairly miserable life.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Was Jeremiah a winner or a loser? What are the reasons for the choice you make? If you say he was a winner, what does that tell us about how crucial it is that we not judge reality by the world’s standards? What standards are we to use to try to understand what is right and wrong, good and evil, success and failure?
- 2 In what ways do we see the life and ministry of Jesus prefigured in Jeremiah? What are the parallels?
- 3 Earlier this week we saw the problem of believing that going on with religious worship without a change of heart is a deception. What is true grace, in contrast to the cheap, worthless, and even deceptive version of it warned about here?

Now Is the Time

Debrah, a Seventh-day Adventist, missed her church fellowship after she married an unbeliever and moved with her husband to an area where there was no church.

After some years, a group of Adventist laymen calling themselves the “Now Is the Time” team decided to hold meetings in this area. The first night of the meetings, Debrah’s husband happened by and came in. Although he was very drunk, he realized that these meetings were being conducted by members of his wife’s church.

“Where have you been?” he demanded loudly. “My wife is a Seventh-day Adventist, and she has been waiting years for you to come!” One of the workers persuaded him to come outside where his drunken behavior would not interrupt the meeting. Finally, he asked for a Bible to take to his wife and set off for home, some distance away.

Meanwhile, Debrah had awakened from a vivid dream in which she had seen her husband entering the house with a Bible as a gift for her. She lay in the darkness, wondering what the dream meant. She knew it was unlikely that her husband would spend his money to buy her a Bible.

About 2:00 A.M. her husband came home and presented her with the Bible, just as she had dreamed. Thrilled over this sign of God’s care, she couldn’t go to sleep and finally decided to get up and find the place where the meetings were being held.

Arriving very early in the morning, Debrah found the preachers and studied earnestly with them. She decided that nothing would keep her from serving the God who had spoken to her in a dream.

Debrah’s husband was tolerant, but his parents were angry. They burned all of her clothes. When the evangelistic team gave her more clothes, they burned them too. When her husband’s parents realized that she would not forsake her religion, they threw Debrah out of the home and bought another wife for their son. But eventually, because of his unhappiness, they relented and reinstated Debrah as their son’s wife.

Although her husband was glad to have her back, he showed no interest in religion himself. But as Debrah worked hard to please him and make him comfortable, while also spending as much time as she could helping others, her beautiful Christian life made an impression on him, and he decided to become a Seventh-day Adventist. Today, he and Debrah work together to share God’s love.

Debrah and her husband live in an unspecified country in Africa.

Creation was “blessed” by God. The great controversy came to earth when Satan deceived Adam and Eve and diverted their allegiance from God to himself. Had Adam and Eve stayed faithful to God’s commands, trials and suffering never would have arisen on our planet.

God pledged to bear in Himself the full responsibility for all human rebellion and to suffer the consequences for every evil we have committed. This is the only way God could restore His relationship with us as well as the relationships between humans, and humanity’s relationship with the rest of creation.

It is in this context that we see Satan’s passion to deface creation and to obliterate God’s people. His strategies are revealed in the Bible, and God is constantly defeating Satan’s purposes throughout Scripture.

Jesus won at the cross. The challenge always has been where we place our loyalty. The choice should be easy, but the battle for our hearts and minds continues. Our prayer is that these lessons, entitled *Rebellion and Redemption* by David Tasker, will reveal some of these deceptions and help us to choose Christ and to remain in Him.

Lesson 1—Crisis in Heaven

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Fall in Heaven** (*Isa. 14:4, 12–15*)

MONDAY: **The Prince of This World** (*John 12:31*)

TUESDAY: **War in Heaven** (*Rev. 12:7–13*)

WEDNESDAY: **Satan Evicted** (*John 12:31*)

THURSDAY: **The Continuing Battle** (*John 16:33*)

Memory Text—*Revelation 7:10, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Lucifer’s lust for power resulted in a “war in heaven” (*Rev. 12:7*). By deceiving Adam and Eve, Satan brought war to earth, and we have been dealing with the consequences ever since. God’s plan of salvation is His way of restoring order and harmony.

Lesson 2—Crisis in Eden

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Three Blessings** (*Gen. 1:22, 28, 2:3*)

MONDAY: **The Test at the Tree** (*Gen. 2:15–17*)

TUESDAY: **The Fall: Part 1** (*Gen. 3:1–5*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Fall: Part 2** (*Gen. 3:6–7*)

THURSDAY: **The Consequences** (*Gen. 3:10–19*)

Memory Text—*Genesis 3:15, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The story of the Fall remains a powerful reminder that our only safety exists not only in believing what God tells us but, more important, in obeying what He tells us as well.

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