

COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

A General Conference Church Ministries Publication

April-June 1991

Ezekiel: Future Perfect



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Ezekiel: Future Perfect

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For two years Robert designed *Message* magazine at Southern Publishing Association in Nashville, Tennessee; four years, *Life and Health* (now *Vibrant Life*); and four years, Sabbath School materials in the art department at the Review and Herald Publishing Association in Hagerstown, Maryland.

Robert enjoys photography and canoeing in West Virginia.

Getting the Most Out of the Collegiate Quarterly

Facts You Should Know

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is based on the conviction that there is transforming power in the Word of God and that one important way of tapping into that power is through group study. It is prepared with Adventist college students and young adults particularly in mind. Its purpose is to provide this group with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed together each week in Sabbath School.

Additionally, many who use the adult quarterly find that the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY, since it deals with the same topics as the adult, enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist colleges and universities, along with young-adult church groups, work together in producing the quarterly. The writing at each school is coordinated by the campus chaplain's office. Approximately 200 individuals contribute to the quarterly each year.

Circulation of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is about 25,000.

Pointers for Study

1. The Bible passage to be studied for each week is indicated in bold type on the introduction page (Sunday's lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

2. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the Logos pages (Monday's lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in the bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

3. Read the remainder of the sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.

4. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

Introduction (Sunday) is designed to get your attention and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

Logos (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

Testimony (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

Evidence (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective. It is likely to be the most scholarly article of the week.

How-To (Thursday) discusses what the "theory" in the lesson means for day-to-day living.

Opinion (Friday), a personal viewpoint on the lesson, is meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

5. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

The CQ and the Church

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is the General Conference-approved quarterly for the collegiate/young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.* Particularly in the Evidence and Opinion sections, views that are only individual opinion, not official denominational positions, are expressed.

Lesson 1, March 31–April 6

Calling and Mission



“Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking” (Ezek. 1:28, RSV).

Getting a Hearing

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezek. 1-3

It is not easy to get our attention. Anyone in marketing or advertising can tell us that. An overview of modern technology tells us that. Microphones. Public-address systems. Bullhorns. Emergency-vehicle sirens. Fifty-foot billboards. Four-color printing. Television ads played louder than the programming. And on and on . . .

To get our attention, public entertainment has gone the route of the gaudy, the spectacular, the strange, and the scary. In this supposedly enlightened age we are fascinated with the occult and the fanciful, all done up in gaudy and representational imagery. It is not easy to get our attention.

But we are not unique. Take a look at Ezekiel with all his fiery beings and mystical moving machines—or are they living beings? We are mystified at trying to comprehend, let alone explain, these things.

So we sing about Ezekiel. “Wheel in a wheel, way in the middle of the air.” That which we cannot process scientifically or rationally we celebrate through the arts. Or how about “Dry Bones”? “Foot bone connected to the ankle bone, ankle bone connected to the leg bone, leg bone connected to the knee bone, knee bone connected to the thigh bone, thigh bone connected to the hip bone,”

and on up the body.

Perhaps we celebrate Ezekiel’s imagery in song because we don’t know how else to deal with it. It seems so abstruse, so arbitrary, so contrary to our understanding and perceptions of reality—and of God. So we sing about it. And move it into the corpus of entertainment. Perhaps that is the only way we can handle it—or begin to handle it anyway.

Yet the setting relates to the order of Ezekiel’s day. Dreams, symbols, soothsayers, statues, fire—these seemed to make up the perceptual background of society. Remember Nebuchadnezzar and the dream of the metal man? Remember the attempts at interpretation? Remember the golden statue and the fire seven times hotter than standard? And remember the presence of a fourth Being in the fire?

So, is this the way God wants to talk to us? Are we to abandon sense and reason, looking for gaudy and spectacular manifestations to confirm our faith? Is this the same God who says, “Come now, and let us reason together”? Yes, amazingly enough, it is. And He will do whatever it takes to get our attention. Even at the risk of being misunderstood.

So we approach Ezekiel with this in mind. And we sing about it. And we are awed by it. And we are amused by it. But we ever remember that this is not God’s final word. His final word is Jesus.

by Gary B. Patterson

Gary B. Patterson is administrative assistant to the North American Division president.

Monday, April 1

The Risk of Communicating

LOGOS

Ezek. 1-3

If God really was that upset with Israel, why did He even bother sending a prophet? Why take the risk of being misunderstood? And certainly it was a risk. We even misunderstand Him today over the way He was forced

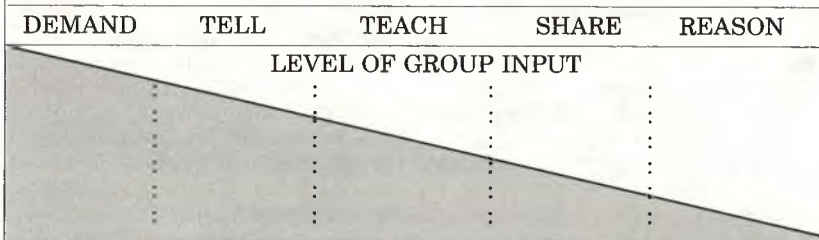
munication as we know it.

Let's suppose that communication can be graphed on a continuum from a relational model on the right side to dictatorial on the left. The diagonal line through the middle shows the level of group input in the decision-and-communication process. Such a graph might be designed like this:

"My people will go into exile" (Isa. 5:13, NIV)

"Come now, and let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18)

DICTATORIAL—RELATIONAL GRID



to deal with these people. It seems so arbitrary, so dictatorial. But how else do you deal with people who get so far from a relationship in which God can communicate with them?

Communication is a vast and interesting study. We enjoy approaching it as a theory from a safe and dispassionate distance. The world seems to be going toward democracy. In our democratic way of doing things dictators seem to be on the way out. But as much as we may favor this trend, still we must take an honest look at the realities of com-

At times we are most comfortable when God deals with us on the right side of this graph. We like to be reasoned with. In fact, it is God who says, "Come now, and let us reason together."

But the time for reasoning is gone. Not only did it fail to work before, but now it makes no impact at all. As much as God might prefer to reason, He receives no response to this mature communication approach. So He demands. He dictates. He threatens.

It would be an interesting study to analyze the words of God

by Gary B. Patterson

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through His prophets and observe how He has attempted to communicate in the various levels of our graph. He provided prophets before the captivity. During the captivity He provided them in both Jerusalem and Babylon. He used every method possible to communicate with Israel, but to no avail.

Now He is desperate. If they do not listen now, it will be too late. They will be gone forever. This is no time for a lecture and discussion on fire prevention and building evacuation. This is the time to shout, "Fire!" and demand on the bullhorn, "Everybody out immediately!"

Certainly there are times for *demanding* forms of communication. But when we read the book of Ezekiel in the placid setting of our quiet moments of worship, it seems remarkably overdone.

Israel is a house on fire. It is a locomotive bound for the canyon where the bridge is washed out. It is a pleasure cruise about to be sucked into a hurricane. So God uses desperate measures to communicate. The tragic and incredible thing is that Israel has institutionalized evil.

Both the royal house and the temple are shot through with corruption. The poor are oppressed. Drunkenness and gluttony are taken to be the right of the rulers. The temple of God is profaned with idolatrous worship, from which perversions of the vilest sort are advocated as religious festivals.

Nearly 200 years before the captivity Amos had warned: "An enemy will overrun the land; he will pull down your strongholds and plunder your fortresses. . . .

As a shepherd saves from the lion's mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear, so will the

Israelites be saved" (3:11, 12, NIV).

Fifty years later Isaiah repeated the same message: "Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent. Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers blow away like dust; for they have rejected the law of the Lord Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel" (5:22-24, NIV).

The stage had been set. The previous appeals had been rejected. And now the deliverance and restoration that God so earnestly desired was dependent on Israel's returning to God's way of doing things. Not that God was reluctant to restore and bless. He had desired to establish His chosen people since the promise to Abraham. And He had not gone back on His word even in this captivity.

Though it was not His choice, His will, that Israel should thus suffer, yet even at the risk of being misunderstood, He carries out the doleful task of disciplining His people in the desperate hope that they will turn and be restored.

What is the possibility that we may close off the channels of rational communication so that we force God to communicate with us in ways both He and we would rather not experience?

Is it possible that we misunderstand and misrepresent God's attempts to get our attention because of the situation in which we have placed Him?

How do we get back to and maintain a mature communion with God?

Tuesday, April 2

A Vision of Corruption

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ezek. 6:11

“While Jeremiah continued to bear his testimony in the land of Judah, the prophet Ezekiel was raised up from among the captives in Babylon, to warn and to comfort the exiles, and also to confirm the word of the Lord that was being spoken through Jeremiah. During the years that remained of Zedekiah’s reign, Ezekiel made very plain the folly of trusting to the false predictions of those who were causing the captives to hope for an early return to Jerusalem. He was also instructed to foretell, by means of a variety of symbols and solemn messages, the siege and utter destruction of Jerusalem.

“In the sixth year of the reign of Zedekiah, the Lord revealed to Ezekiel in vision some of the abominations that were being practiced in Jerusalem, and within the gate of the Lord’s house, and even in the inner court. The chambers of images, the pictured idols, ‘every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel’—all these in rapid succession passed before the astonished gaze of the prophet. Ezek. 8:10.

“Those who should have been spiritual leaders among the people, ‘the ancients of the house of Israel,’ to the number of seventy, were seen offering incense before

the idolatrous representations that had been introduced into hidden chambers within the sacred precincts of the Temple court. Verses 11, 12.

“There were still ‘greater abominations’ for the prophet to behold. At a gate leading from the outer to the inner court he was shown ‘women weeping for Tammuz,’ and within ‘the inner court of the Lord’s house, . . . at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshiped the sun toward the east.’ Verses 13-16.

“And now the glorious Being who accompanied Ezekiel throughout this astonishing vision of wickedness in high places in the land of Judah, inquired of the prophet: ‘Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: Mine eyes shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.’ Verses 17, 18.”

**Prophets and Kings, pp. 448, 449.*

by Gary B. Patterson

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The Nature of Sin

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ezek. 10:18, 19

Does God cause and control everything that happens? Was it His will that Lucifer rebel and entice Adam and Eve to sin in the garden?

And since that day has everything that has happened been His will? Someone puts his house up for sale, and it sells in 24 hours at the asking price. And we immediately assume that God was involved in the whole situation, blessing that family's move to a new location. But what about our neighbor who took a call to the mission field and has been struggling with financial disaster ever since because he could not sell his house, while the string of nasty renters has nearly ruined the premises while cheating the absentee landlord on the rent?

Admittedly, many comments in Scripture sound as if God were directly inflicting pain on the wicked. It seems as though He says, "If you violate My laws, I will kill you." But these are strong words. And before we elect them as part of our God-concept, we need to think about it a bit.

Way back in the Garden of Eden—where it all began—God's caution was clear. But He did not *threaten* Adam and Eve. He did not say, "If you eat of the tree, I will kill you." Rather, He *warned* them, "When you eat of it you will

surely die" (Gen. 2:16, NIV). Death was inherent in the sin itself.

This is the nature of sin. It is destructive. God is not in the business of killing sinners. Rather, He is in the business of saving us from sin and delivering us from its consequences. Destruction is inherent in the sinful way of doing things. Life is inherent in God's way of doing things.

God desires that His children turn from sin so they will not perish from it and with it when the universe is purged of sin.

In Ezekiel's day, Israel had nearly forgotten God and His way of doing things. God had sought to appeal to reason and good judgment for ages. But they had come to the point that they no longer possessed either reason or judgment. Appeals through such routes were no longer available to God.

So, to save them from total and ultimate destruction, God took on some strong measures and language. He says, "But the house of Israel is not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for the whole house of Israel is hardened and obstinate. But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are" (Ezek. 3:7, 8, NIV).

Not really God's preferred way of doing things! But hard situations call for hard measures, even at the risk of being misunderstood.

by Gary B. Patterson

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Thursday, April 4

The Nature of Faith

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ezek. 12:28

Surely one cannot read the introduction and setting of Ezekiel and conclude that behavior has nothing to do with Israel's problem. In fact, it seems to be the core of the problem. Ezekiel is called to warn Israel to turn from their "obstinate and stubborn" ways (Ezek. 2:4, NIV). "They are a rebellious house," and Ezekiel pleads with them to forsake their "evil ways" in order to save them from destruction (verse 5; 33:11, NIV).

One of our most prevalent errors in theology is to assume that faith and works are opposites, that they somehow are mutually exclusive, that we cannot have them both at the same time.

But what future would there be to faith if it did not promise deliverance from behaviors that destroy us? Why send a prophet to Israel if they can't be rescued from the problems that the prophet points out? If there is no salvation, the message of the prophet is nothing more than the shrill, hopeless voice of ranting and complaint.

God intends for something to change, or He wouldn't waste His breath. Israel's behaviors are destroying them, and if they turn to God's way of doing things, they will be saved from self-destruction.

After all, isn't that what faith is all about? Doing things God's way? And isn't *doing* things God's way a behavior issue? The behaviors listed in the Ten Commandments are the realities of universal existence. When I by faith accept God's way of doing things, murder—and all its attendant destructiveness—will not be part of my behavior. Thus, faith in God saves me from being a murderer—or a thief, or an adulterer, and on and on.

These are behavioral issues. Faith does not exist without them. Faith in God allows us truly to address these behaviors. When I become immersed in God's way of doing things, I will do things as He does them. My works will be like His. This is not righteousness by works; it is righteousness by faith. Likewise, when I separate myself from Him, my works will run counter to His purposes and counter to my own best interests. And this is wickedness by lack of faith in God's way of doing things.

Ezekiel's role as a prophet is for the express purpose of calling Israel back to faith so they might be freed from their self-destructive behaviors. The whole thing would be a cruel joke—an exercise in futility—if victory were not available. But God offers not only forgiveness for their folly but also restitution to godly behavior.

by Gary B. Patterson

Gary B. Patterson is administrative assistant to the North American Division president.

Does It Really Matter?

OPINION

Key Text: Ezek. 12:28

Ivan was the studious type. He was a senior history major, and the dean had appointed him as the hall monitor at our end of the dormitory—to see that we unruly freshmen kept at the task of studying.

He was of German descent, long and lanky, sandy-haired and blue-eyed. His upbringing made him friendly, but also serious. Diligent about his task, he expected us to be the same. He had a no-nonsense streak in him, and when he jumped on us for excessive rowdiness during study time, he showed a flash of authority that demanded respect.

Following graduation he moved to Texas, and in a free moment that summer he found some spare time for a tennis match. It was a hot afternoon, and having played a bit too long, Ivan experienced mild heat exhaustion. He was admitted to the hospital for rest and observation.

It was only a small mistake. Somehow, in preparing the sedative prescribed by the doctor, a hospital employee overlooked the decimal point. It was supposed to be .1 milligram, but it ended up as a dosage of 1 milligram. By the time someone discovered the error, Ivan was gone. I have never really quite recovered from the shock of it all.

Does it really matter? Do we

have to be so technical and accurate about such little things? “Well, we should be particular about some things,” you say. It mattered to Ivan, after all. But what about other things? Did it matter, for example, that Israel worshiped Baal rather than God? Does it matter that they took up vile and adulterous practices, finally offering the fruit of their corruption as infant sacrifices to their god?

But then, these are the extremes, are they not? What about the little things? Do they really matter? The answer is, Yes, they really do. Though results of error or deviation from truth may look minor at the outset, when taken to the full extent, they become devastating.

A classic example is the drift of the early Christian church into compromise with paganism. Pagan gods became worshiped saints. Fertility rites of spring were celebrated as the Resurrection. And the pagan day of worship replaced the biblical Sabbath. Did it really matter? Does it still matter today? People died in this struggle. Was it really worth it? Huss and Jerome were burned at the stake. Luther, excommunicated from the church, had to run for his life, hide from his enemies, and endure separation from friends. Was it really worth it? Does it really matter? I am no historian. I would like to ask my friend Ivan about this—but he is not here anymore.

by Gary B. Patterson

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Lesson 2, April 7 - 13

Listening to God



“But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God’; he that will hear, let him hear; and he that will refuse to hear, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house” (Ezek. 3:27, RSV).

Mental Deafness

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezek. 1-3

The other day I was walking to chapel when one of my friends ran up to me.

"Are you deaf?" She looked flustered. "You must have heard me. I called five or six times from back there." She motioned to some spot behind me. "But, no, you just walked on as if I weren't there."

"Angie, I honestly didn't hear you. I'm sorry." I added, "If I'm concentrating on something, I'm usually dead to what's going on around me."

I usually do not ignore my friends unless they are being obnoxious. I usually listen when people talk to me. But not always, I guess. For example, in my earlier teen years when my parents asked me to do the dishes or some other undesirable task, I played the ignorance game. That is when I wondered, If God made eyelids for eyes, why didn't He make "earlids" for ears? You see, I had selective hearing. While many of my friends were outright defying their parents' authority, I was rebelling in a subtle, passive way.

Now, as a college student and very much the product of my upbringing, I see this attitude often

reflected in my spiritual life. I do not rebel outwardly, deliberately doing everything I am told is wrong or bad for me. But if the Lord asks me to include Joe, the outcast, in my circle of friends, or if He asks me to wake up a little earlier so we can spend more time together, or if He asks me to eat something more healthful at this meal—I conveniently distract myself with something or cup my ears and ask God to repeat Himself, hoping He will say something else.

I do not think God plays games with us. He is not shouting from His throne a thousand light-years away, hoping we will hear Him. When He speaks, we *can* hear Him. Look at little Samuel in the sanctuary, or the Israelites at the rumbling base of Mount Sinai, or the multilingual crowd earnestly listening to the Spirit-filled apostles after Pentecost. God *must* make His message clear or Satan will say, "Unfair!" We are the ones playing games with our passive rebellion, our selective hearing.

Why do we do this? Are we afraid to make personal changes? Do we listen only when the message will benefit us or only when we are in danger? How can we develop an open ear to what God tells us? We will look at some of these questions this week.

by Roger Krum

Roger Krum is a junior technology education major with a graphic arts minor at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Monday, April 8

If You Could See What I See!

LOGOS

Ezek. 1-3, NIV

It is human nature to evaluate what we hear based on the source of the communication. Ezekiel is overwhelmed with the nature of his Communicant. He is duly prepared to listen with all his senses and to follow through with his entire being. What was so overwhelming? Study the word pictures in Ezekiel 1—"The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God" (verse 1, RSV). There "the hand of the Lord was upon him" (verse 3). After these brief statements follow some of the most resplendently graphic representations of God and His nature recorded in Scripture.

Keep in mind—Ezekiel and the people with whom he was commissioned to communicate were all accustomed to thinking about God as being accessible in His sanctuary. The sanctuary afforded a geographical locus in their concept of God. This was with God's encouragement (see Exod. 25:8). Now it seems important to broaden their understanding. And He begins with Ezekiel.

Visions of God (read Ezek.

1:1-3)

"The heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. . . . There the hand of the Lord was upon Him" (verses 1-3, NIV).

Simple to say, almost impossible to picture. Pull back the

curtains of the stratosphere, the ionosphere, and whatever other spheres might separate earth-bound creatures from heaven's splendors. Ezekiel was shown what few have even envisioned. The term *theophany* is applied by theologians to this fantastic vision that often accompanies a call to the office of prophet. This vision was not wasted on Ezekiel. He was duly impressed. And then comes the sense of God's power— infinite power that is described in the phrase "the hand of the Lord was upon him." How humbling to receive the special visions and then to sense the omnipotent energy and authority at his disposal. He would be the steward of the "power of the Lord."

Try to picture the shock to your system if you could be suddenly transported into the rare air of heaven and then from there almost immediately into the very courts of the Creator and Sustainer of all creation. And then the sensation—"the hand of the Lord was upon him." God's power was infused into him. God's invitations to service are never merely impotent requests. When He requests, He empowers. This was of supreme importance to Ezekiel.

Four Living Creatures (read Ezek. 1:4-28)

"And in the fire was what looked like four living creatures" (verse 5, NIV).

The descriptions that follow defy twentieth-century thinking.

by P. B. Morrison

P. B. Morrison is chaplain at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Ezekiel describes, as best he can, the indescribable. Human features, creature features, mechanical intricacies, and eyes seemingly everywhere. The entire collage of life and wheels moved about freely and effortlessly—always forward while never turning, yet somehow advancing in every direction. This is still not all. There are still the glistening, shimmering heavens to be struck by. Visual saturation has been reached and surpassed, so another sense is detonated.

The all-encompassing sound of rushing water appended to the roar of intense battle makes the sound experience as overpowering as the visual—yet Ezekiel tries to explain. The most important result, possibly, is that now Ezekiel is ready, after experiencing God, to receive the dreadfully important communication God has for this rebellious people.

Called of God (read Ezek. 2—3:3)

Ezekiel has no choice really. He was a “called” person being sent to warn a difficult, rebellious people, and God knew the tension He was putting on Ezekiel.

Callings are difficult because in the human evaluation there is no clear gauge of the degree of difficulty or of one’s success. A called person needs to be confident in his/her calling and thus in the Caller. So this called “son of man” is called upon to get into the message he is to relay to the people.

Do not read the scroll aloud in

the hearing of the whole nation—eat the scroll. It will become a part of you; it will permeate your being.

Be Hardheaded (read Ezek. 3:4-11)

Here goes—you will have to be hardheaded—I’ll help. Sure, they speak the same language, but you might as well be shouting from the moon. Go!

“Son of Man” (read Ezek. 3:12-15)

As Ezekiel goes he is transported from the glories of heaven to the lowest doldrums of earthly existence, and he needs time to adjust, called or not, prophet or not; after all, he is just a “son of man.”

Watchmen, Go! (read Ezek. 3:16-21)

Watchman as a word here carries the heaviest sense of responsibility and accountability. The people Ezekiel must reach have no sense of danger, though it is imminent. He has to build a real case for safety. Modern Christians are watchmen who must be alert to danger and committed to warn. It “goes with the territory.”

What is our concept of God or His nature? How does this color our sense of mission?

Who needs to be warned about what today?

Where does responsibility to warn end and the freedom not to need the warning begin?

Tuesday, April 9

Hearing God's Voice

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ezek. 1-3

Ezekiel 1-3 stresses the importance of listening to God, but many times we question exactly what this involves. We may wonder just how concerned God is with each one of us. "The Bible shows us God in His high and holy place, but not in a state of inactivity, not in silence and solitude, but surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of holy intelligences, all waiting to do His will. Through channels which we cannot discern He is in active communication with every part of His dominion. But it is in this speck of a world, in the souls that He gave His only-begotten Son to save, that His interest and the interest of all heaven is centered."¹

Since communication includes both speaking and listening, we may also seek to know how God speaks to us so we can prepare to listen to Him. "There are three ways in which the Lord reveals His will to us, to guide us, and to fit us to guide others. How may we know His voice from that of a stranger? How shall we distinguish it from the voice of a false shepherd? God reveals His will to us in His word, the Holy Scriptures. His voice is also revealed in His providential workings; and it will be recognized if we do not separate our souls from Him by walking in our

own ways, doing according to our own wills, and following the promptings of an unsanctified heart, until the senses have become so confused that eternal things are not discerned, and the voice of Satan is so disguised that it is accepted as the voice of God.

"Another way in which God's voice is heard is through the appeals of His Holy Spirit, making impressions upon the heart, which will be wrought out in the character."²

God is yearning for us to listen to Him. "Many are the ways in which God is seeking to make Himself known to us and bring us into communion with Him. Nature speaks to our senses without ceasing. The open heart will be impressed with the love and glory of God as revealed through the works of His hands. The listening ear can hear and understand the communications of God through the things of nature. The green fields, the lofty trees, the buds and flowers, the passing cloud, the falling rain, the babbling brook, the glories of the heavens, speak to our hearts, and invite us to become acquainted with Him who made them all."³

REACT

How do we avoid feeling arrogant, knowing that God lavished such attention on earth, this one speck in the universe?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 356.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 512.

3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 85.

by Juanita Moses

Juanita Moses is a freshman at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

God's Pets

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ezek. 1

Ezekiel 1 contains some of the most powerful imagery in the Bible. The power of Ezekiel is reflected in the Jewish story of a young person who attempted to understand the prophet and was consumed by fire. Consequently, a Jew will not study the book of Ezekiel until he is a mature adult.

Ezekiel's vision begins with his observation of a storm advancing from the north. This direction of approach instills a sense of foreboding in the reader, as the Assyrian and Chaldean armies had descended on Jerusalem from the north. A large cloud often represents a holy presence, as in the cloud that led the Hebrews through the desert.

Inside the cloud were four living creatures, which were like "a man, but each of them had four faces and four wings" (Ezek. 1:5, 6, NIV). Each face was different, one being that of a man, another a lion, the third an ox, and finally the fourth, an eagle. The human face can represent intelligence; the lion, fierceness; the ox, raw power; and the eagle can represent speed. Each face looked in a cardinal direction, indicating an influence over the whole world. Above the creatures is God's throne, indicating His rulership over all of the creatures and their

representative powers.

Different combinations of these faces are found in many ancient pagan religions, so God's sovereignty over the creatures can also be a representation of His superiority over all pagan religions. Each of the creatures has multiple wings, which is reminiscent of the six-winged seraphs of Isaiah. Isaiah's angels use one pair of wings to cover themselves, lest they be seen directly by God; another pair to cover their eyes, to keep them from seeing God; and the free pair are for whatever ministry the angels undertake. These creatures do not need the pair of wings to cover their eyes, as they never look directly at God; He is above them.

In Ezekiel's vision we see a representation of God's power and glory. A cloud filled "with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light" (verse 4, NIV) would be a most awesome sight. This is an indication that we must recognize God's power before He can communicate with us.

REACT

1. The story of God's revealing Himself in the still, small voice suggests that He often chooses less dramatic ways of letting humans see Him. How can we recognize those times when God is speaking to us?

2. Should we expect to see dramatic indications of God's power today? Why or why not?

by Sean E. Mattingly

Sean E. Mattingly is a sophomore physics major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Thursday, April 11

Can You Listen to God?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rom. 10:17

“Susan! It’s wonderful to hear from you! How are Mark and the kids?”

“We’re doing all right, Kirsten. Mark just lost his job, but the Lord is providing.”

“Oh, how terrible! Excuse me, I’ve got to turn down the stove—what were you saying?”

“Just keep us in your prayers. Kirsten, Mark’s been drinking. I’m sometimes worried that he’s going to hit the kids.”

“Uh, h’mmm . . . what was that you said, Susan? I just broke a nail on the can opener.”

“Oh, nothing. The weather has been so nice lately! It’s going to be so cold when the baby comes.”

“The baby? Hey, listen, Susan, the kids are going berserk. I’ll call you back later, OK?”

“Sure, Kirsten. Whenever you have the time.”

How would you feel if you were Susan? How hurt and disappointed God must feel when we, like Kirsten, miss the important things He tries to tell us.

Few people actually hear God’s audible voice talking to them. So how are we supposed to listen to God? Here are a few suggestions:

1. *Remember that God is on the throne and in control (see Ezek. 1:22-28).* When we have faith that God is in control, it is easier for us to realize that He

can act in our life.

2. *Spend time in nature, observing God’s handiwork.* As God said to Job, “Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are?” (Job 38:35). We may not understand how God created everything, but by spending time with His creation we can gain a better understanding of Him as our friend.

3. *While spending quiet moments with God, keep your mind open for thoughts that He may bring to mind.* We may see something as ordinary as a robin feeding her babies, which could bring to mind that we have a friend who needs help that only our friendship can bring. Maybe the thought has nothing to do with nature, yet if we had not had the solitude and time to reflect, God could never have spoken.

4. *Ask God for understanding as you search His Word.* God has given us His Word to encourage us by sharing how He has worked in the life of others. We can hear God’s voice by identifying with biblical stories and applying their principles to our life.

REACT

1. What other avenues besides nature might God use to communicate with us?

2. How or when might one avenue be superior to another?

by Karen J. Whitney

Karen J. Whitney is a sophomore premedical student at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Prophets in Our Own Country

OPINION

Key Text: Ezek. 2:4, 5

I wish that Ezekiel were here today. When God needed to give a message to His people, He called on Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a prophet of God, a holy messenger. Through him the Israelites knew the will of God.

I wish that Ellen White were here today. Through her God gave the founders of a new and struggling Seventh-day Adventist Church the strength and guidance they needed. God answered their prayers in a real and tangible way by giving them specific messages through His servant.

If we had a prophet or prophetic in our church today, would we be better off? Couldn't God speak to us now as He did then? Wouldn't He be able to solve all of our problems? I know that we'd like to think so, but I'm not sure.

Think about this scenario: Your hometown pastor announces from the pulpit that he has received a direct message from God to you and your church. Would you believe him? What would you feel? What would you say? "Well, sure, he's a nice man, and his sermons are always interesting, but he can't expect us to call him a prophet of God," or even, "Maybe this man has preached one sermon too many . . ." Even if God *did* send us a prophet today, we probably wouldn't be able to ac-

cept him for who he was. That doesn't mean, however, that we are to remain in a state of spiritual darkness.

Jesus too was a prophet when He was here on earth. After performing miracles in other towns, Jesus returned to His hometown, Nazareth. When He went to church on Sabbath, the people asked Him why He was not performing any miracles for them as He had for others. He said, "I tell you the truth, . . . no prophet is accepted in his hometown" (Luke 4:24, NIV). When the people heard this, they were so furious that they tried to kill Him! Yet it was not Jesus' resistance to these particular people that would not allow Him to help them, but their own lack of faith.

The lesson of this story is clear: God will help us if we will listen to Him. Bill Hybels suggests four primary ways that God speaks to us today: through His Word, through the counsel of godly friends and leaders, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and through circumstances. God speaks to us in many ways. Our obligation is to listen.

REACT

1. What must *you* do to listen to God?
2. In what other ways do you think God speaks to you?

*Bill Hybels, *Seven Wonders of the Spiritual World* (1988), pp. 107-117.

by Darren Gottke

Darren Gottke is a freshman at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Lesson 3, April 14 - 20

Problems in Hearing God



“Thus says the Lord God: Disaster after disaster! Behold, it comes. An end has come, the end has come; it has awakened against you. Behold, it comes” (Ezek. 7:5, RSV).

Turning Up the Volume

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezek. 4-7

Recently I had a chance to be a part of a performance of *Elijah*, the nineteenth-century composer Felix Mendelssohn's oratorio (a sort of biblical opera), which chronicled the adventures of Elijah, Ahab, Jezebel, and the children of Israel. I sang in a 50-member choir; we were accompanied by a full orchestra. The music of *Elijah* includes long tirades from Elijah about the fickle disloyalty of Israel, ranting from Jezebel and her priests, and a haunting solo in which an angel begs Israel to hear God and return to Him.

In Ezekiel's time, several hundred years after Elijah, Israel was still having trouble hearing God. In Ezekiel 4-8, you can hear echoes of Elijah's message. But by Ezekiel's time, the children of Israel must have been almost deaf. God had turned up the volume. Elijah's message was simple. He told Israel that God would withhold rain, and he asked them how long they would falter between two gods (see 1 Kings 18:20, 21). In a fiery spectacle on Mount Carmel, he proved to Israel that the Lord was God.

We singers and musicians thought that *Elijah* was pretty exciting—singing about the fire descending from heaven, the rain after the drought, the slaughter-

ing of the priests of Baal. As I read Ezekiel's message, I tried to imagine what an oratorio about Ezekiel would be like. It would be loud—louder than any part of *Elijah*. It would be fierce. I can imagine the choir singing double forte and the trombones and trumpets blaring and violins screeching and drums pounding and cymbals crashing. The choruses would have savage lines like "And I will lay the corpses of the children of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones all around your altars" (Ezek. 6:5, NKJV). How would the melody for that go? The music in *Elijah* was loud and exciting. An oratorio about Ezekiel would be frightening and deafening.

When I read the fierce messages of Ezekiel, I find it hard to imagine that the "for God so loved the world" God of the New Testament could yell at His people and say things like "My eye will not spare, nor will I have any pity" (5:11, NKJV). But then I remember Elijah, and how long God had talked to His people and worked with them; how patient He had been; and how deaf they were.

Just as any parent would shout as loudly as possible to keep his or her child from toddling into the middle of a busy intersection or crawling off a cliff, God shouted at the children of Israel to keep them from destroying themselves. It's not pretty, but it shows how much He loved them.

by Richard Moyers

Richard Moyers is director of public relations at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Monday, April 15

Ezekiel Mimes the Word

LOGOS

Ezek. 4-7

The Deaf (by Choice) Society

Ezekiel was called to prophesy the doom of Jerusalem to a crowd that didn't want to hear it. These were people who had been torn from their homes and their loved ones, more like hostages than exiles. The word *homesick* only begins to describe their sense of loss and pain. We can read the lament of an unknown exile in Psalm 137 and understand something of the depths of their emotions: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion" (verse 1, NIV).

The last thing this community of hostages wanted to hear was that their homeland would soon be devastated, razed from a scorched earth. They had hung all their hopes on a political or military solution that would allow them to return to Jerusalem. Whatever they were before, they were now superpatriots—true believers in the greater glory of Jerusalem. They would go home, and soon, and don't try to tell them anything different. They didn't want to hear it.

Is it any wonder that Ezekiel, overwhelmed at the prospect of his call, sat among the exiles at the Kebar River in stunned silence for seven days (see 3:15). Then the spirit of the Lord came to him again and said, "Whoever

will listen let him listen, and whoever will refuse let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house" (verse 27, NIV). It is hard to communicate with someone who chooses not to listen. Enter the mime!

Is Jerusalem Burning? A Tragedy in Four Acts

How do you get a hearing in a world of words, words, words, blah, blah, blah, ad nauseam? That's easy. You act it out. By the time we are two we are experts at it. And the more outrageous the act, the more likely that someone will stop, look, and listen. In the adult world the people who do this best are artists and terrorists and . . . prophets!

Prophets pay a price for this kind of witness. Our habit of "blaming the messenger" for bad news has ancient roots. Is it any wonder that in Ezekiel's first vision the Lord told him four times, "Do not be afraid" (2:6; 3:9, NIV)!

In order to get the attention of these exiles the Lord called Ezekiel to four dramatic-symbolic actions.

1. *The mimic siege (4:1-3).*

With the wisdom of a mime, in the hope that "actions speaking louder than words" might reach an ear willing to hear, Ezekiel followed his call and inscribed a blueprint of Jerusalem on a clay tablet. He next built what looked like a sand castle (siege works) around it. First the children, then

by George B. Gainer

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a crowd, gathered. He then placed an iron pan, like an iron curtain, between himself and the siege works. The message of this street theater was obvious. Jerusalem would again come under siege, and this time the siege would not be lifted. Jerusalem would fall.

2. *The prophet's vigil (4:4-8)*. The second act pointed to a real reason for the coming fall of Jerusalem, her "sin-full-ness." Ezekiel was told to lie on his left side for 390 days to "bear the sin" of Israel, the northern kingdom. He was then to lie on his right side for 40 days to "bear the sin" of Judah, the southern kingdom. (This was a representative rather than a substitutionary bearing of sin.) Each day of his vigil was to represent a year of apostasy against the Lordship of Yahweh. While lying there facing the mimic siege of Jerusalem, Ezekiel was instructed to "prophesy against her" (verse 7, NIV). Perhaps there would be an "ear to hear" in the crowd. Ezekiel 5:5-17 details the content of this prophecy. The Lord set Jerusalem in the "center of the nations. . . . Yet in her wickedness she has rebelled against my laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her" (verses 5, 6, NIV).

3. *Polluted siege rations (4:9-17)*. The curious crowd gathered in the street watched this strange man, Ezekiel, mix and grind wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt into flour for bread. This is a recipe that you won't find in the *Happiness Homemade Cookbook*. This was the anything-that-quiets-hunger-pangs bread that people were forced to eat for siege survival. Ezekiel shuddered and sipped a little of his sixth of a

hin (0.6 liter) of water per day. This siege would be no picnic.

4. *The prophet's hair divided (5:1-4)*. The last act of Ezekiel's street theater brought a gasp from the crowd. Ezekiel suddenly brandished a sword and began to shave his head and beard. It was not a pretty sight. He undoubtedly drew blood. The violence of the act was inescapable. A third of the hair he set ablaze inside the sand castle siege. A third of the hair he struck with a sword all around the besieged city. A third of the hair he scattered to the wind. Only a few strands of hair were tucked away safely in the folds of Ezekiel's garment. He later took some of those hairs and threw them into the flames. Yes, Jerusalem was burning. Now in parable, tomorrow in fact.

Why? Because of the ugliness of a society centered in the works of its own hands, i.e., its idols. Idolatry always equals "death in the city." Take Manasseh, king of Judah (see 2 Chron. 33:1-20). He started out erecting altars to Baal and all the starry hosts, and Asherah poles, and in the end he "sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom" (verse 6, NIV). The repulsiveness of child-sacrifice helps us understand the Lord's judgment against His own people.

The crowd was horrified. Men spat on the ground. Mothers hurried their children out of earshot of the strange man lying in the street. But for those with ears to hear there was a glimmer of light in the apocalyptic night. Ezekiel proclaimed that the Lord would "spare some," that among those "carried captive, those who escape will remember me" (6:8, 9, NIV). Is anybody listening?

Tuesday, April 16

Avoiding the Results of Sin

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ezek. 18:4

Sin is not an inconsequential or ambiguous thing. Sin is a choice. "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). Sin means "death" (Rom. 6:23).

"Sin, however small it may be esteemed, can be indulged in only at the peril of infinite loss. . . .

"Every act of transgression, every neglect or rejection of the grace of Christ, is reacting upon yourself; it is hardening the heart, depraving the will, benumbing the understanding, and not only making you less inclined to yield, but less capable of yielding, to the tender pleading of God's Holy Spirit. . . .

"Even one wrong trait of character, one sinful desire, persistently cherished, will eventually neutralize all the power of the gospel. Every sinful indulgence strengthens the soul's aversion to God. The man who manifests an infidel hardihood, or a stolid indifference to divine truth, is but reaping the harvest of that which he has himself sown. In all the Bible there is not a more fearful warning against trifling with evil than the words of the wise man that the sinner 'shall be holden with the cords of his sins.' Proverbs 5:22."¹

"It is not hardship, toil, or poverty that degrades humanity; it is

sin, the transgression of God's law."²

Jesus "is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25). Jesus is able because He "was in all points tempted like as we are," and He knows how "to succour [help] them that are tempted" (4:15; 2:18). He is able and worthy because, as a lamb brought to the slaughter, He was "made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death . . . that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Heb. 2:9; Rom. 8:34).

Jesus is ready to set us free from sin. Are we willing to allow Jesus to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy? (see Jude 24). Jesus longs to save us from death. He wants us to experience the joy of living for Him.

Accept Jesus *now* as your personal Saviour. Choose, *now*, to serve Him who loves you with an everlasting love.

REACT

1. How does a cherished sin neutralize the power of the gospel?
2. How does one allow Jesus to set him free from sin?

1. *Steps to Christ*, pp. 32-34.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 259.

by Jeff Sias

Jeff Sias is a theology major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

“The End Has Come!”

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ezek. 7:6-9

Again the “word of the Lord” came to Ezekiel. That word said, “The end has come! The end has come! It has roused itself against you. It has come” (Ezek. 7:6, NIV).

“After years of patience and centuries of forbearing, the time had run out. The Lord announced that it would be counter-productive for Him to give further opportunities for repentance. The time had come when, in the Lord’s view, He would begin to undermine His justice if He continued to express His mercy. The time had come for the Lord to do what He had been promising to do because if He held off any longer, people would assume He either didn’t mean what He said or couldn’t do what He promised. For either of these things to happen would be a disaster of major proportions. Better to pour out judgment on the unrepentant than to give opportunity to the unrepentant to think that the Omnipotent has become impotent. . . .

Makkeh

“But do not fail to see that even at the point of the ‘end’ when God says, ‘All right, that’s it,’ He still warns before He acts. There is no such thing as the judgment of God without warning, and there is never judgment without evidence of mercy. If the

Book of Ezekiel in these early, difficult chapters reminds us of nothing else, it speaks forcibly to the fact of God’s remarkable dealings with the people He has made. Dealings that are designed to draw them to Himself in lifestyles of trust, love, and satisfaction. Dealings that promise forgiveness and mercy even in the administration of justice and judgment.

“In the middle of the statement the Lord announced Himself by a striking title, ‘Jehovah-makkeh’—the Lord who strikes! (7:9) John Taylor states, “To hearers and readers who were used to the names of God like “Jehovah-jireh” and “Jehovah-nissi” it must have come home with tremendous force to have Him described as “Jehovah-makkeh.” The Lord who had provided and protected was about to strike.’

“In our need to know the Lord and His desire for us to know that He is the Lord, we must never be allowed to forget that Jehovah is ‘makkeh’ as truly as He is ‘jireh’ and ‘nissi.’ To leave out any aspect of His revealed Being is to paint an unsatisfactory picture. It’s rather like an artist determining to paint a woodland scene of light and shadow but arbitrarily deciding to use no black or grey and trying to portray the full glory of the scene with only pinks and greens.”

*Stuart Briscoe, *Dry Bones* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1977), pp. 60, 61.

by Stuart Briscoe

Thursday, April 18

Therapy for the Masses

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ezek. 7:3

If you were to go to a counselor today to attempt to change some behavior of yours of which you were not very fond, you would likely be given an exercise to help you visualize the results of your behavior. Some therapists might have you visualize all of the negative results that come if you make one choice and all of the positives that correspond with the opposite choice. Ezekiel was a therapist for the Israelites. His graphic portrayals forced them to visualize what the results were going to be if they kept up their current lifestyle. Visualizing is one tool to help a person *hear* God.

How can we avoid the Israelites' example of turning a deaf ear to God?

1. *Stop to listen.* At a particular time every day take a few minutes to conduct an inventory of your behavior. Stop and ask yourself the question "Am I truly comfortable with my behavior and choices?" Then just wait silently for a minute or two. Don't force any thoughts in or out of your consciousness. The Holy Spirit will find this a convenient time to convict us of what we should be doing.

2. *Never begin to think that you can handle the consequences of*

doing wrong. Sometimes we look at our lives and say, "Well, no, I shouldn't be doing that. But I think I can handle the consequences." It is a rule—you can count on it—God's responses will always surprise us!

3. *Remember that the Lord loves us very much and wants us to return to Him now.* Not tomorrow, not next week when we get more courage, not later when our motivation is up—but *now*. It never becomes any easier than now.

4. *Look at the larger trends that are revealed by the cycles of Bible stories.* People would eventually lull themselves into the idea that God is so loving (or unconcerned) that He wouldn't possibly do anything that would hurt them. They were always surprised! We look at those stories in amazement—how could they not see it coming?

REACT

1. What are you doing now that you probably shouldn't be doing, but thinking that the consequences "probably won't be that bad"?

2. Why might it be important to choose a specific time of the day to meditate? What keeps you from it now?

3. Why do you think we aren't hearing God very well today?

by Ricky E. Williams

Ricky E. Williams is vice-president for advancement at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Sleeping in the Streets

OPINION

Key Text: Isa. 65:1-3

He stunk. His one-shower-a-month odor filled my nostrils from five feet away. He sat on the sidewalk with his back to the building and his legs sprawled out in front of him, staring into nowhere. He wore four layers of mismatched clothing and seemed unconcerned that it was mid-August. As I approached I couldn't help staring at the peculiar figure. Dirt was buried deep within the creases of his face, and his tangled mop of hair hung wildly around his head.

Pity began to well up inside me, but I quickly suppressed it. I quickened my pace to keep in step with the crowds around me. Soon I was lost in the blur of motion, moving forward to my next appointment. The city has no time for these distractions, and neither do I.

How can we hope to hear God's whisper to our soul when we ig-

nore His screams to our face? We callously drive by the slum neighborhoods where families are struggling to feed their children. Statistics of dying people in faraway lands bounce off our thick skin as we flip the dial of our TVs. We stand in a glazed stupor as the majority of our generation become helplessly addicted to anything that can fill their emptiness. God cries out daily to those who have ears to hear. The question is not Why doesn't God speak to us? but Why don't we listen?

How long can we turn a deaf ear to our Father's voice? How many more "acted parables" must He place before us? How many more warnings can we shirk off on our way up the world's ladder of success? How much longer will God hold out His hands to children who refuse to listen?

REACT

How does sacrificing our time and money to help the suffering people around us affect our ability to hear God's voice?

by Robert Fournier

Robert Fournier is a senior theology major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Lesson 4, April 21 - 27

Results of Sin in the Life



“Then the glory of the Lord went forth from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight as they went forth, with the wheels beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the house of the Lord; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them” (Ezek. 10:18, 19, RSV).

The Separating Power of Sin

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezek. 8-10

Since the time of Moses, God lived among His people in the sanctuary. Always the center of the nation, the sanctuary represented God's presence. Now, in Ezekiel's time, the Israelites were driving God from His sanctuary. "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me from my sanctuary?" (Ezek. 8:6, RSV). So God revealed to His prophet what was happening.

As we examine Ezekiel's vision, we notice that the abominations driving God from His sanctuary were forms of idolatry. Israel was telling God they did not need or want Him around anymore. This is sad when we remember all God had done for the children of Israel.

Imagine coming home one day and finding that your spouse had forsaken you for someone else. Add to the situation many years of faithfulness and love given on your part. How would you feel? And if your spouse wanted the three of you to live together in your house, could you stay? Few people, if any, would comply with a situation like that.

It is wise to be careful in pro-

jecting human feelings onto God, but the point is clear: sin separates! God cannot coexist with sin. Just as no person can serve two masters at the same time, so it is that sin and God cannot remain on equal footing. One or the other must give way. What is amazing and wonderful about God is that even when He is forsaken, His love remains strong and unconditional. All He needs is our invitation to step in and conquer the sin in our lives.

I remember a friendship I had once that disintegrated because my friend decided he did not want to be around me. We had been best friends from fourth through sixth grade and shared many good times together. I was hurt by his decision and willing to do whatever was necessary to restore the friendship, but nothing worked. My friend simply did not want to be around me, and I could not force him to want to be. It is a similar situation with God and humans. If we do not want God to be our master and friend, He will not force Himself upon us. God must leave His sanctuary.

As we reflect on this week's lesson, let us remember God's everlasting and unconditional love and give Him the chance to live in our hearts and expel sin from our lives.

by Robert Skoretz

Robert Skoretz, a senior ministerial major at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California, will be working for the Southern California Conference after graduation.

Monday, April 22

Departed Glory

LOGOS

Ezek. 8-10

How Bad Can Sin Become?

"He then brought me into the inner court of the house of the Lord, and there at the entrance to the temple, between the portico and the altar, were about twenty-five men. With their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they were bowing down to the sun in the east" (Ezek. 8:16, NIV).

In Ezekiel 8 we have the prophet's first visions of the abominations in the temple (see verses 1-18). Later we will see a more focused view of sin. Chapter 9 describes the destruction of the wicked in Jerusalem (see verses 1-11), and finally chapter 10 pictures the sin of certain leaders gone bad (see verses 1-22). These three scenes of sinfulness provide the backdrop for a discussion about the evil of sin and God's attitude toward it.

Often we think that God somehow overlooks the sins of those who are doing good. After all, we think, God wants the saints to prosper. We rationalize that we can sin—just a little—and somehow, because we are working for God, or even witnessing to God's good will, we will be exempt from God's judgment. Ezekiel changes that picture. We are here to witness a detailed exposure of the very wrongs that have their seat at the core of Israel's worship and

national life: the sins in Jerusalem and in the temple.

The gods that were being worshiped here are traced back to the Sumerians, Dumuzi, god of the under-ocean and shepherds. Dumuzi was supposed to have a sister called Inanna, the famous Ishtar, who descended into the lower world to bring Dumuzi back. There he met his death, and all life on earth suffered accordingly. It was this god that may have been worshiped in the temple courts. Sun worship was not new to the temple courts, according to Scripture (see 2 Kings 23:11).

Why do you think people who have had such knowledge of God's leadership in the past would turn from that presence?

What are the causes of societal disregard for God's ways? What causes individuals and then groups to follow ways that are not revealed as the most positive and beneficial?

When What Is Bad Becomes Really Bad

"Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it" (Ezek. 9:4, NIV).

The nation seemed to have its priorities reversed. Israel was willing to put its faith in a nation notorious for faithlessness. The question facing the kingdom was, Should they trust Babylon, which

by V. Bailey Gillespie

V. Bailey Gillespie is professor of theology and Christian personality at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

had overwhelmingly superior power, or should they trust Egypt, "notorious for promising much and doing nothing"?¹ How should they decide?

God, it seems, was finally fed up with this wishy-washy approach to loyalty. Perhaps they were so trapped in their sins that they could not get out. We can only speculate here. But we do know that Ezekiel sees the executioners of the city who carry out God's judgment come from the north (see 9:1-5). All historic destructions of Jerusalem have come from the north.

People are marked to be saved, however. "The man in linen marked those to be saved with a *taw*, the final letter in the Hebrew alphabet, written in the oldest script as 'x'—a cross, as Christians have noted."² Early Christians marked graves with an *x* to mark the spot for the saved on the day of resurrection. It seems that God wants those who stand against evil to be spared.

This picture is obviously not pretty. But in the midst of this judgment we learn about God's attitude toward sin. From this destruction some emerged who would continue to serve God and who actually cried for the sins of the city and hoped in their hearts that God's will would finally be seen.

How does God clarify how we should react to sin in the lives of others?

What do you think God would have us do in response to the sin we see in society today?

How should Christians relate to such issues as abortion, apartheid, and human rights?

El Shadday

"The sound of the wings of the

cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks" (Ezek. 10:5, NIV).

This chapter is filled with images: whirling wheels, cherubim, clouds, thrones, sapphires, and burning coals. The vision of the prophet pictures the people's worst fears. God Almighty (El Shadday) is gone. God, who always dwelt in the temple, in the midst of the people, has left them without hope.

The wheels become symbolic for the fact that God no longer dwells in the temple building itself. The withdrawal was not by God's own choosing. God wanted to dwell in the midst of His people. He wanted to be in their hearts and souls. He wished to motivate their actions, but because of their sins, He seemed to leave them.

We often think that God has left our world to our own desires. Many believe there is no place for God in their own world. Like Israel, humankind often organize their lives around secular, selfish, and personal goals and whims. Our society is subject to political, economic, and personal pressures. We might ask the same question that Ezekiel is asking. Where is God? Has El Shadday departed from us?

What evidence can you cite of God's concern for the lives of the saints today?

What are some of the "new forms" in which we see God work in the world?

1. George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), vol. 6, p. 111.
2. Philip Yancy and Tim Stafford, *Notes on the NIV* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), p. 726.

Tuesday, April 23

Driven Away From Home

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ezek. 8:6

“You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3, NIV). This is the first commandment God gave to His people from Mount Sinai. The second commandment also addresses the issue of other gods. God makes it clear that He does not want His people to split their loyalties between Himself and *anything* else. “God refuses to share His glory with idols. . . . He declines the worship and service of a divided heart. . . . Jesus Himself said, ‘No man can serve two masters’ (Matt. 6:24).”¹

God planned that Israel should not mingle with the idolatrous nations in Canaan. “Plain and decided were the warnings that had been given Israel against the idolatrous customs prevailing among the neighboring nations. ‘Take ye . . . good heed unto yourselves,’ was the counsel given; ‘lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image.’”²

Over the years the Israelites began to accept and practice many of the religious activities of the nations they had been warned against. At first the worship of idols was in secret, but soon it became a more open and accepted practice. Some Israelite leaders had taken up the worship of graven images, thinking that God would not see, but the God who sees in secret made public their offenses.

Ezekiel was taken in vision to the temple in Jerusalem to see the wickedness going on in the holy city and in the temple itself. The fact that people cannot serve two masters caused God to be driven out of the house He had had erected to be close to His people.

God’s people had decided to choose new gods while maintaining the façade of worshipping the one true God. Because God is a jealous God, He removed Himself from the temple until the day His people would again welcome Him into their hearts. But this day would not come soon; the children of Israel had to learn things the hard way. Trial and adversity awaited the nation because they had turned their backs on God.

If “imitation is the highest form of flattery,” then hypocrisy is the highest form of insult. Israel had taken to imitating neighboring nations, but by hypocritically continuing to worship God in His temple, they offended God the most.

REACT

1. Satan claimed that God selfishly seeks only His own glory. In light of the first and second commandments, was Satan right when God claims to be a “jealous” God?

2. Why was God justified by “leaving” the temple as He did and then bringing on persecution? List your reasons.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, pp. 602, 603.
2. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 294, 295.

by John Blanchard

John Blanchard is a senior religion major at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Wednesday, April 24

What Is Sin?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ezek. 7:2-4

There are myriad theoretical and functional differences between the viewpoint that humans are corrupt, and therefore in need of saving, and the view that people are just weak and need to grow up. Christians have believed the former, while some therapists and "moderns" have often believed the latter. The church is a community of both.

Trying to figure out what makes people *go* wrong or *do* wrong is complex. When you realize that the human predicament is serious, critical, a matter of life and death, then some radical change or shift in allegiance becomes not only preferable, but morally necessary.

Those in the world have hoped that the cure-alls of "en-

lightenment," "growth," or "common sense" might prevail to lift them up above and beyond the corruptness of culture and society gone mad.

Ezekiel points out that the biblical cure for sinfulness is "conversion," or the "new birth." "I [God] will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws' " (Ezek. 36:26, 27, NIV). Such a change in heart will result in a refocusing of priorities toward a life lived for God rather than one lived struggling to surface in the pools of sinful life.

REACT

What do you think the cure for sin is in your life? Why would such a cure work?

by V. Bailey Gillespie

V. Bailey Gillespie is professor of theology and Christian personality at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Thursday, April 25

Drying Up Sin

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 12:43-45

Bob had been trying to rid his life of sin for quite a while, but was unsuccessful. It seemed as though every time he attempted to change, his resolve would last for only a short time, and he would find himself back in sin, worse than before. Bob was extremely frustrated and tired of this vicious cycle.

Then one day Bob decided to try something new. Instead of trying to rid his life of sin himself, he tried filling his heart with Jesus. The result was remarkable and wonderful. As Bob's relationship with Jesus grew, he found the sin in his life disappearing. He had broken out of the cycle of sin and Christless works into the sunshine of love and grace.

We have learned from Ezekiel's vision that sin is not to be taken lightly. Sin drives God away from us. The apostle Paul clearly points out that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23, RSV). His letter to the Romans also tells us that "all have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:12, RSV). Thus sin is a serious and universal problem.

Bob's story illustrates a common and dangerous pitfall for Christians. It is very tempting to

try to "do it ourselves." In a highly individualistic society it is admirable to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. This approach, however, does not work with sin. Sin has rendered us powerless and helpless, and we need a Saviour!

There is only one step we can take to get rid of sin in our lives, and we need to continue to take it every day: Focus on Jesus. Imagine yourself standing between a clump of weeds and a beautiful plant. Because you wish to destroy the weeds, you take a hoe and begin to chop at the weeds. But as you chop you also water. Anyone who has kept a garden knows what will happen. It is a no-win situation, and the weeds will only grow back thicker!

Say you decide to water the beautiful plant instead and forget about the weeds. What will happen? The plant grows and blossoms, while the weeds dry up and wither away. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, / Look full in His wonderful face; / And the things of earth will grow strangely dim / In the light of His glory and grace."^{*}

REACT

How do societal rules and pressures contradict the biblical concept of grace?

^{*}The SDA Hymnal, no. 290.

by Robert Skoretz

Robert Skoretz, a senior ministerial major at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California, will be working for the Southern California Conference after graduation.

No Other Gods

OPINION

Key Text: Exod. 20:3

If I had been alive during the time of the Israelites, I would never have worshiped idols as they did! How many of us have ever thought this? We can look back at those silly Israelites and criticize them for their foolishness, but would we really have been any different?

When we consider the cultural differences between our time and theirs, we see that the Israelites lived and learned on a completely different level from ours. They were much more dependent on their leaders—particularly the king and the priests—to teach them acceptable behavior. They couldn't run to the Bible to see "what saith the Lord." Ever wonder why God said He visits the "iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Exod. 20:5)?

As we have reflected upon Ezekiel and the idolatry practiced by the Israelites, we can easily overlook the principle behind the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me" (20:3, NIV). In Ezekiel we see the worship of physical idols in the place of God. But what does God mean when He says "other gods"?

Does He simply mean images?

Our jobs, hobbies, possessions, money, even our school books can serve as a god to us. What qualifies as a god? Anything that replaces our loyalty to God.

"But I don't have anything in my life that stands in the way of my loyalty to God!" you might say. Are you sure? The things that command our attention may not seem to be a god or distraction from our loyalties to God, but this can be a deadly deception.

One day while Jesus was talking to His disciples, He told them that if He was not the most important thing in their lives, they were not worthy of Him. That included family members, as well as possessions (see Matt. 10:34-39). Sound tough? Sound unreasonable? Are we serving a God who makes outrageous demands? God demands from us only one thing: our loyalty. He must be the most important thing in our lives. Anything that is more important to us than God becomes a god to us and drives a wedge between Him and us.

REACT

1. If you had lived in the time of the Israelites, what would have made you less likely to worship idols than they?

2. What things in your life could possibly be a god to you?

by John Blanchard

John Blanchard is a senior religion major at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Lesson 5, April 28–May 4

Love and Judgment



“Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord God; None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word which I speak will be performed, says the Lord God” (Ezek. 12:28, RSV).

God Will Bring Us Together

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezek. 11-13, 24

My freshman year in college turned out to be a winner. Many friends I made that year have become friends for life. As we unpacked bedding and boxes, we had no way of knowing that the heady excitement, the newness of college, the beginning of "life's work," and the discovery of college men would pass all too quickly. We would converge for a few brief months, then depart, taking paths as diverse as the ones that brought us together. The bonds we formed so easily and so readily would now have to stretch over hundreds, sometimes thousands, of miles. In some cases, they would also have to stretch over time into years.

And now, of the many in our original group, only a few are still in touch. I count them as precious. Some have made something grand of their lifework. There are nurses, counselors, therapists, communications experts, and at least one attorney in the making.

Some lives have shipwrecked, and their stories tear the heart. When word comes of death or divorce or loss of faith in God, sometimes we think, If only we could see her, hug her, talk to her, comfort her. If only we could be there!

But we've been scattered, the way Ezekiel describes the scattering (see 11:16). All we can hope for, when we cannot be there, is

that our grieving, hurting friend will somehow make God a sanctuary. It's a good place to be.

If separation from good friends is difficult, imagine how hard it was to be separated from God. The prophet Ezekiel delivered his message to a conquered Israel. Idolatry and abomination in high places of leadership shocked the prophet. God had simply had enough—especially from Israel's false-hearted prophets, priests, and faithless kings. He sent counsel and warnings and urgent pleadings. They were met with scorn and derision and rebellion.

So now the Israelites were captives of Babylon, cut off from the blessings of freedom, but not from God's love. The lessons of love and service to Him, which could have been so easy and pleasant, must now be learned with bitterness and heartache. Sin takes a terrible toll. And though God is merciful, sometimes He does not intervene between cause and effect. If sin is within us, we must recognize it, confess, and repent. And He promises to see us through the consequences.

Babylonian captivity, with all its harsh lessons, was no easy way out for Israel. Yet at the end God gave a new start in Jerusalem—they would rebuild. He promises us something more. He will gather the long-separated ones, college buddies, or lost loved ones, scattered through time, from all across the land, and bring them to the New Jerusalem.

by Kyna D. Hinson

Kyna D. Hinson teaches English and communication at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Monday, April 29

Love in Judgment

LOGOS

Ezek. 11-13, 24

Love in Strange Clothes (read Ezek. 11:8-10)

You've heard it: "I'm punishing you because I love you, and it hurts me as much as it hurts you," says Mother or Father. But it comes across so mixed, so curious, so odd. Have I knowingly broken a certain rule? Yes. Am I guilty of wrongdoing? Yes. Do I believe my parents love me? Yes.

But I thought love always forgives, overlooks, and covers our faults. Love does all of these, but it does more. Love always seeks the best good of its objects, and sometimes that means punishment and judgment. "The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son" (Heb. 12:6, NIV).

Example? The Jews in 605 B.C. and 597 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem, raided the temple, and took the Jews captive (see 2 Chron. 36:2-7; Dan. 1:1-3; Jer. 52:28; and 2 Kings 24:10-16). Where was God, you ask, when all this was taking place? The prophet Ezekiel, who was right there among the captives, said that because of the wickedness of the Jewish leaders (see 11:1-4), God Himself handed them over to the Babylonians as an act of judgment (see verses 9 and 10). You must remember, however, that when God judges His people, His judgment is for their best good and is a saving act

of love to help bring them to a right relation with Himself.

That's why God's message of judgment through Ezekiel carried also a note of hope as God promised, "I have been a sanctuary for them. . . . And I will give you back the land of Israel again" (11:16, 17, NIV).

Judgment Portrayed (read Ezek. 12:1, 3, 8-11)

Isn't it amazing? The lengths to which God will go to break through to us! It could almost be called "by whatever means necessary." Sometimes even the prophet of God becomes a spectacle in the drama. Like the wounded prophet confronting King Ahab (see 1 Kings 20:35-43), or like Jeremiah and his marred girdle (see Jer. 13:1-11), or Hosea and the harlot wife (see Hos. 1-3). Yes, and like Ezekiel, whom the God of heaven sends through a pantomime routine showing that God is aware of Israel's exile into Babylonian captivity. Awareness that God knows our condition helps us to understand His love.

On top of his barn a farmer placed a weather vane bearing the words "God is love." An agnostic passing by quipped, "Aha, so by this you admit that God's love is as fickle as the blowing wind, right?" "Wrong," answered the farmer. "No matter which way the wind blows, God is love."

Caught Red-handed (read Ezek. 13:1, 2, 6-8, 17, 18, 20-23)

"The eyes of the Lord are every-

by Mervyn A. Warren

Mervyn A. Warren is chairman of the Department of Religion at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

where, keeping watch on the wicked and the good" (Prov. 15:3, NIV).

You'd think, of all people, prophets would know this. God sees. Among God's findings in Ezekiel's day were prophets who belied their calling and responsibility. Or perhaps they were false prophets to begin with. At any rate, God had to say through Ezekiel, "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying" (Ezek. 13:2, NIV).

What were the charges? They prophesied "out of their own imagination" (verse 2); were "foolish" (verse 3); uttered "false words and lying visions" (verse 8); and led God's "people astray," promised "peace" when there was no peace, and tended to "cover it with whitewash" (verse 10)—and the list goes on and on. But through it all, as usual, God's charges and condemnation included solution and salvation.

Solution and salvation had already been set in motion by the raising up of at least three dependable prophets to minister to exiled Israel: Jeremiah, for those captives left in Judah; Ezekiel, for those taken to Babylon; and Daniel, in the royal court of Babylon. All bases were covered. And that which God desired of His people from the beginning could once again take place: "Then you will know that I am the Lord. . . . I will save my people" (13:21-23, NIV). Knowing (Hebrew *yadha*) is not only to be aware of Him, but to experience Him and His love.

Here Comes the Judge (read Ezek. 24:20, 21)

We can take heart that the

Judge of the universe knows all the facts of our case, and because He does, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). Of course He will. Furthermore, we know through His latter-day prophesies that "God's love for His church is infinite. His care over His heritage is unceasing. He suffers no affliction to come upon the church but such as is essential for her purification, her present and eternal good. He will purify His church even as He purified the temple at the beginning and close of His ministry on earth. All that He brings upon the church in test and trial comes that His people may gain deeper piety and more strength to carry the triumphs of the cross to all parts of the world."¹

When the divine Judge comes into our affairs, He brings a saving judgment that is always in our best interest—whether or not we ourselves can see His providential purposes.

"There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty.

"There is no place where
earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in
heaven;
There is no place where earth's
failings
Have such kindly judgment
given."²

—Frederick Faber

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 228.

2. *The SDA Hymnal*, no. 114.

Tuesday, April 30

God's Word Executed

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 145:15, 16

God's people should be the head and not the tail. But so often we are the spectators when we should be the participants. We fail to believe that God will do what He promised and that His word will not return unto Him unfulfilled.

Take Joshua, for instance. "Joshua knew . . . that whatever God should command, He would make a way for His people to perform."¹ Joshua was appointed by God to lead Israel after Moses died. God promised Joshua, "This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee" (Josh. 3:7). God kept His word. "So the Lord was with Joshua and his fame was noised throughout all the country" (6:27).

"God will do great things for those who trust in Him. The reason why His professed people have no greater strength is that they trust so much to their own wisdom, and do not give the Lord an opportunity to reveal His power in their behalf."² In essence, our unbelief hinders God from carrying out His promises in our lives.

"When the way is prepared for the Spirit of God, the blessing will come. Satan can no more hinder a shower of blessing from descending upon God's people than he can close the windows of heaven

that rain cannot come upon the earth."³

The secret of God's word coming to pass in our lives is trusting in His promises. "There is no limit to the good you may do. If you make the word of God the rule of your life, and govern your actions by its precepts, making all your purposes and exertions in the fulfilling of your duty a blessing and not a curse to others, success will crown your efforts."⁴

By believing in God's word and realizing it will come to pass, we will be exalted to the highest nobility of character. God will do what He promised so "that all people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever" (Josh. 4:24).

"In His strength we may do much greater and more perfect work. The promises of God are rich, and full, and free, and we may have the power of His salvation with us. . . . You must trust Jesus for yourselves, appropriate the promises of God to yourselves, or how can you teach others to have humble, holy confidence in Him?"⁵

"Claim the promises of God. The Lord will do all for you that He did for Daniel, if you will cooperate with Him as Daniel did."⁶

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 482.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 493.

3. *Messages to Young People*, p. 133.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

5. *Gospel Workers*, 1892 ed., pp. 456, 457.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

by Charlotte Denise Robins

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Love and Judgment in Tension—A Cosmic Dilemma

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Hos. 4:17; 22:8, 9

“Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone” (Hos. 4:17). And the Lord agonized over his people saying: “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? . . . mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee” (11:8, 9).

These texts provide only an infinitesimal glimpse into the anguish of the Almighty when He is torn between love and judgment. By nature “God is love” (1 John 4:8). But the law, which is a transcript of His character, requires judgment. God has to deal with the problem of balancing His love for His creatures against the demands of His just law. God’s dealings with ancient Israel, especially prior to and during the period of the Babylonian captivity and the restoration which followed, provide us with a clearer understanding of how He endeavors to fulfill both the requirements of love and judgment.

For centuries before the Babylonian captivity God had sent His prophets to warn Israel of the dire consequences of their apostasy. In fact, idolatry had become so widespread that there

were as many gods as there were cities in Judah (see Jer. 11:13). In the spirit of love and judgment God permitted the Babylonian captivity to take place in three successive phases to provide opportunity for repentance.

Ezekiel was both a prophet and a priest. His writings are full of symbols and dramatizations. For example, to dramatize an approaching captivity, Ezekiel actually moved from house to house (see Ezek. 12:3). God even used the death of Ezekiel’s wife to dramatize a prophecy of doom (see 24:16-24). Just as Ezekiel was instructed not to mourn for his wife, Israel would mourn neither for the temple that was to be destroyed nor for their slain sons and daughters.

In spite of such vivid warnings, Israel scorned the long-sufferings of God and said: “The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth” (12:22). God’s response was swift. He told Ezekiel to tell Israel, “Thus saith the Lord God; There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God” (verse 28). Shortly thereafter the city of Jerusalem with its magnificent temple was destroyed by the Babylonians.

Let us follow God’s example by extending a loving attitude toward the erring while warning them of judgment to come unless they repent and become converted.

by Emerson A. Cooper

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Thursday, May 2

Apparently With No Surprise

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 143:10

Apparently with no surprise
To any happy flower,
The frost beheads it at its play
In accidental power.
The blond assassin passes on,
The sun proceeds unmoved
To measure off another day
For an approving God.

Emily Dickinson uses nature in this poem to suggest that God gets some unnatural pleasure out of seeing humans suffer. Both nature and God are pictured as indifferent as they continue with their routine.

Unfortunately, many of us feel that way when we are faced with difficulties. It is only human to feel slighted or unloved when we are chastised by someone we love. Usually our punishment comes as the consequence of our own disobedience or unwillingness to comply with God's will. But God has promised that although the mountains and hills depart, His kindness toward us will never depart (see Isa. 54:10). Once judgment has fallen upon us, there are only a few things that we can do.

1. *Instead of wallowing in pity, anger, and doubt, consider the times when God restrained His*

anger (see Ps. 78:37, 38). We have many times said and done things that we knew were contrary to Christian character. We have even sometimes knowingly disobeyed God to fulfill our own purposes. But God, "being compassionate, forgave our iniquity and did not destroy us."

2. *Let bygones be bygones.* Often we spend time nurturing our wounds, which would heal much more quickly if we would leave them exposed. In the words of a contemporary gospel song, "I'll keep pressing on. Lord knows I took a licking, but I'll just keep on." To learn from your mistakes is one thing; to dwell on the past is quite another. Decide where you have gone wrong and how you could have altered the circumstances.

3. *Correct what you can, but press on.* Paul had the right idea. He realized that he was not where he should be, could be, or wanted to be in his Christian experience, but he knew that there was no reason for him to look behind. He knew the goal could be attained only by looking forward (see Phil. 3:12-14).

REACT

What can we do to let God know that we are truly sorry about our disobedience?

by Chandra L. Tyler

Chandra L. Tyler was a senior at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama, when she wrote this article.

But You Said You Loved Me

OPINION

Key Text: Ezek. 11:20

Ellen, my four-year-old daughter, suddenly became fascinated with the large electric fan on my study table. Was it the whirling of the blades or the sheer energy that blew the air around her face that had become the center of her curiosity? I wondered. After a few minutes of watching her, I realized that the games she was playing seemed innocent, and my eyes strayed away from her only momentarily. All along she had been lulling me into a false sense of her own safety—and then it happened!

Ellen's curiosity had gotten the better of her. She had poked her index finger through the protective cover on the fan. Her frightful cries roused me from my reverie. I scooped her up in my arms out of harm's way, but I was so upset with what she almost succeeded in doing that I spanked her. With tears streaming down her face, and looking straight into my eyes, she exclaimed, "But you said you *loved* me!" I had a difficult time trying to explain to her why I have to discipline her even though I love her.

God loves us more intensely than any parents can ever love their children. He has a yearning to reach us in a language we can understand. What appears as

judgment from God is a deep expression of His love. God tells us about the consequences of our disobedience to Him, and we make the choice to obey or not to obey.

God requires obedience to His will, and He even helps us to obey Him by converting our disobedient dispositions to conform to His will. He wants our ultimate salvation and promises that "they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 11:20). Good parents go to great lengths for their children, even when that means disciplining them (see Matt. 7:11). God is like the good parent—He does all He can to save us from destruction. But when He has done all that is possible, and we do not return to Him, He leaves us to be destroyed—forever.

Ezekiel's picture of God points to a contrast—love and judgment. He loves us so much that He sent His Son to die for us. But if we spurn His love, then He has to give us up to eternal death and separation from Him—the source of our lives.

REACT

1. How do you reconcile the idea that a loving God can also take the life that He has given to His creatures?

2. Is there a limit to love?

3. How do you explain the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross to save us?

by Sammy R. Browne

Sammy R. Browne is an assistant professor of English at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Lesson 6, May 5 - 11

Trials and Hope



“Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord God: None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word which I speak will be performed, says the Lord God” (Ezek. 12:28, RSV).

Understanding Who's Fake

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezek. 13:21, 22

The marketplace hummed with the vibrant sounds of goods being sold. Near the center of the market two men were hurriedly whitewashing a crumbling old wall. Then an uneasy silence crept in, like the hush before a hurricane, as Ezekiel, dressed in a linen robe, strode to the center of the market and stepped up onto the wall.

"Captives of Babylon. Men of Israel. Hear the word of Yahweh. I am Ezekiel, prophet of the living God. Yahweh commanded me to tell you that unless you turn from your evil ways, He will destroy you. Oh, people, hear the word of the Lord. Do not listen to the prophets and prophetesses who tell you that nothing bad is going to happen. You don't understand their plot. They tell you Jerusalem is not going to be destroyed, but listen! Can't you hear the battering rams pounding on the gates and walls of the city? These false teachers are like starving dogs seeking the weak to devour.

"Look at this wall that I am standing on. These men are not repairing the wall; they are covering up all of the holes with whitewash. Will this stand in the

day of battle? Thus saith the Lord. I will rain hailstones down upon the wall and totally destroy it. I will destroy those who cover it up, and then you will know that I am the Lord" (see Ezek. 13:11-14).

Another thing that Ezekiel would probably include in his message is a section on standing up for God. Few people do stand up for Him. Elijah is a good example of what happens when just one person stands up for God. He stood up for God and changed a nation.

What about us today? Do we seek false prophets? Are we hiding things we should not be hiding? What would Ezekiel's message be to us today? God would probably give him a message similar to the one the Israelites got. Look around you. Every day ads on TV tell us how to get happiness and fortune. All one has to do is pick up the phone and dial 1-900 . . . and fame, sex, and fortune are ours.

Are we desensitized to the things going on around us? Do we look the other way if we see a drunk on the street, or do we try to hide him in the alley? What about the things we watch on TV? Do we change the channel when something is shown that violates our Christian values, or are these things becoming too familiar to us?

by Edmund Heinrich

Edmund Heinrich is a theology major at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Monday, May 6

Mirrors of Confrontation

LOGOS

Ezek. 13, 21, 22

Seldom, if ever, has a *real* prophet been wholeheartedly liked. Tolerated, maybe; but not liked. Some kings prophesied, but no prophet was a candidate to be “kingified”! Prophets were not consulted by the curious public as were the town fortunetellers or astrologers. Instead, prophets suffered insult, rejection, misunderstanding, and abuse. They may not have been consulted for their advice, but they often wielded the unasked-for divine sword of uncomfortable, seemingly untimely, confrontation. Even though they also delivered words of comfort, hope, and peace, most prophets were remembered for their alarming directives of destruction, doom, and judgment. It was as if their words themselves produced the doom—not the mandate behind the words. It’s understandable that prophets were avoided; their power was too strong; their words nonnegotiable; the calamity unavoidable. Such is the tenor of Ezekiel 13, 21, and 22. Ezekiel scores another wrath-filled message of “gloomy doom.” “Lord, isn’t there any good news?”

Why is being confronted by the prophet to be avoided? My five-year-old son gives a sensible answer. He covers his eyes with his hands, then chuckles because Daddy can’t see him now! Maybe if I avoid God, I can avoid the

doom. Or maybe if I run away from the message, I will suffer no consequences. If I don’t listen, reality may mysteriously leave me alone. We do not live in a world of magic, however, with destinies controlled by the whim of evil spirits. What we sow, we reap.

What you hear in a message of judgment is determined by your relationship to the message-bearer. A trainer correcting every move of a delicate acrobatic routine seeks to improve the skills of the gymnast. It is not censure. A coach shouting a message from the sideline is not understood to be giving vindictive threats. Confrontation should not presume dislike! God’s judgments are not disclosures of wounded ego, but mirrors in which we see ourselves stripped bare of the many masks we wear to create illusions of self-respect. Stripped bare of the fig leaves with which we cover ourselves. Stripped bare of our attempts to be whole apart from Him who is wholeness.

Mirrors are not thrust before us to make us feel ashamed or belittled. They are intended to help us view our real condition. We must face, process, and deal with what we have become! Our illness does not go away by itself. Our psyches, however, have constructed an enormous number of coping mechanisms to hinder our taking “what we have become” seriously. We live so detached from who we are that God’s words of judgment sound like those of an enemy. So we hide!

by Perry Tkachuk

Perry Tkachuk is assistant professor of Old Testament at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

That particular distortion is what we call sin. When calmly calling, "Adam where are you?" does not bring Adam out from behind the tree, God risks the next best approach—mirrors! But we have come to think poorly of those who carry mirrors. They are villains, not friends.

Thus not many will study Ezekiel 13, 21, and 22 very deeply. Too many mirrors. Too much confrontation. Too much denial. Since Ezekiel does not sound friendly, he must not be a friend! Right? Wrong! His mirror just happens to carry your portrait. It might not be the pose in which you fancy yourself at your best. Take a look anyway.

Although the structure of Ezekiel 13, 21, and 22 is delicately formed, let us rather discuss his message. He focuses on four main issues while targeting the entire culture of Israel: their prophets, prophetesses, sanctuaries, land, princes, priests, and the people of the land. The issues: (1) Your prophets have been like foxes among the ruins; (2) And you shall know that I am the Lord; (3) Until He comes whose right it is; and (4) No one is standing in the breach.

Foxes Among the Ruins

Ezekiel speaks of prophets and prophetesses in chapter 13 with tongue in cheek. These are not real prophets/prophetesses, for they carry no real mirrors. Instead, they further tear Jerusalem down, as "foxes dig holes among ruins." They do not openly undermine Jerusalem. But neither do they actively build it up. (They are not willing to stand in the breach.) They are much like the self-appointed critics of the church today who seem to know all the answers, but who will not personally become involved to help the church become a transformed community. In-

stead, they whitewash what they do not wish to change. This is being a false prophet. Do you see yourself yet in Ezekiel's mirror?

"And You Shall Know That I Am the Lord"

This phrase occurs six times in these three chapters. The outcome of God's judgments is that Israel will know how their behavior brought on their captivity. This phrase does not intend to portray a vengeful spirit: "Just wait till I destroy you; then you shall know that I am the Lord." It rather validates that God's dealings with Israel are redemptive in nature. When Israel walks away from God, He is unable to draw a circle of protection around them.

"Until He Comes Whose Right It Is"

"Remove the turban [priesthood], and take off the crown [king]. . . . Ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it . . . until he comes whose right it is; and to him I will give it" (Ezek. 21:26, 27, RSV).

Hope glimmers through the dismal forecast. Leaders will come and leaders will go. But God does not abandon His covenant with Israel. The coming One will don Israel's real crown and priestly garments and straighten what is bent.

No One Is "Standing in the Breach"

It is noteworthy that Ezekiel 13:5 and 22:30 begin and end with this concept of the "breach." These are the only two uses of this word in Ezekiel. A breach was a hole in the wall. "Standing in the breach" meant a willingness to defend Jerusalem against the enemy from that point of weakness. This is a fascinating metaphor of intercession. A person who really loves Jerusalem will do more than whitewash the walls! He will stand in the breach, lending his strength in

place of Israel's weakness, thus saving the endangered ones in the city. This is Israel's real mandate. God is looking for such a person, but finds none—thus Israel is overcome by her enemies.

God's victories are won through people who stand in the breach. With just 300 such intercessors (Gideon and his men), God confounded the army of Midianites. With just one such intercessor (David), the Philistines were reduced to flight; through Esther, God spared a nation under threat; through Daniel, all Babylon's wise men were spared; and through another (Jonah), a nation repented. God is not looking for a majority. He doesn't need numbers. He is looking for those who believe in Jerusalem, though they see the city in disarray. He seeks those who see a vision and dream a dream for Israel.

Babylon is setting up its battering rams. But Babylon is fallen! Fallen before those who dare to see it as a conquered foe. Fallen

because God found a remnant to stand in the breach. Through them "the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10, RSV). Judgment? It is all in how you view the God behind the message. Is He chiding? Or is He encouraging?

How do you relate to God's judgments? Are they mirrors or vengeance?

Do you see yourself as one who actively builds up the church?

Are you one of those self-appointed reformers who knows just what's wrong with the church but wonders why nobody seems too enthusiastic about your suggestions?

Does God actually work through individuals to stay the tide of evil?

Is the church an extension of the intercessory work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit? Or is Jesus the only personage actually involved in intercession? What is intercession?

Wise Counsel?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 3:5, 6

"A pope is one who presumes to occupy the place in counsel which rightfully belongs to God alone. The man who makes himself pope by following his own counsel is just as bad as the man who dictates to another, and he is more likely to be led astray than is the man who follows some pope other than himself. If one is to follow a pope at all, it would be more consistent to accept the pope of Rome, because he has had more experience in popery than any other. But none is necessary, since we have the Word of God. When God speaks, the part of wisdom is to obey at once without taking counsel even of one's own heart."¹

Judah was plagued with those who took counsel from their own hearts. Continually the people of Judah ignored "Thus saith the Lord God" and continued in their self-destruction. Ellen White points out the ruin that results from listening to our own wisdom. "Foremost among those who were rapidly leading the nation to ruin was Zedekiah their king. Forsaking utterly the counsels of the Lord as given through the prophets, forgetting the debt of gratitude he owed Nebuchadnezzar, violating his solemn oath of allegiance taken in the name of the Lord God of Israel, Judah's king rebelled against the prophets, against his benefactor, and against his God. In the van-

ity of his own wisdom he turned for help to the ancient enemy of Israel [Egypt]."²

There is no need to take the counsel of another or of ourselves, since we have the Word of God. "Let the student take the Bible as his guide and stand like a rock for principle, and he may aspire to any height of attainment. All the philosophies of human nature have led to confusion and shame when God has not been recognized as all in all. But the precious faith inspired of God imparts strength and nobility of character. As His goodness, His mercy, and His love are dwelt upon, clearer and still clearer will be the perception of truth; higher, holier, the desire for purity of heart and clearness of thought. The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought is transformed by intercourse with God through the study of His word. Truth is so large, so far-reaching, so deep, so broad, that self is lost sight of."³

REACT

1. What is the result of listening to the "wisdom of the world" and ignoring "Thus saith the Lord"?

2. What does it mean to "lean . . . on your own understanding" in Proverbs 3:5, 6?

1. E. J. Waggoner, *The Glad Tidings Studies in Galatians* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn.), pp. 24, 25.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 450, 451.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 322.

by Susan Magill

Susan Magill is a biology major at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Wednesday, May 8

The Unprofitable Prophets

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Deut. 8:19, 20

Just as blame is easier to give than receive, so lies are often more palatable than truth to human hearts. Our ears eagerly turn toward the flatteries of forked tongues, preferring their well-oiled words to the sincere admonition of our loving, sovereign Father.

The intrigues of exiles in Babylon were incited by seers who spoke from their own wisdom, stating that the captivity would be over in a matter of months—for surely the chariots of Pharaoh would crush Nebuchadnezzar in battle.

Ezekiel denounces the preaching and practices of these unprofitable prophets in marvelous metaphor, comparing them to craftsmen who repair a feeble wall with whitewash! Many walls of this era were constructed of unbaked brick, which normally needed repair on a regular basis because of rain, and like such a wall, the house of Israel needed to reform. These prophets, however, presented counsel that was merely cosmetic, rather than urging their countrymen to return wholeheartedly to God.

Men were not alone in leading the gullible astray—women, as well, engaged in prophesying for profit. Here, however, there are a few difficulties with obscure

terms within the text. The Hebrew word *mispatchoth*, for instance, which the NIV translates as “veils,” is used in Ezekiel 13:18, 21 and nowhere else in the Bible. The lack of comparative evidence has resulted in conflicting interpretations among scholars, leading some to conclude that the “pillows” and “charms” mentioned in verse 20 relate to the “divination” of verse 23—an occultic implication. It is, perhaps, more satisfying to assume that these pillows were sewed in an ornamental fashion, and used to recline upon. The veils worn by these women served a seductive purpose—suggesting more than merely prophesying falsely. This is consistent with the Hebrew idea that body and soul are inextricably linked, so that those who associated with these women were victimized in flesh, as well as in spirit. The underlying principle of deceit and disloyalty to God remains unchanged in either view.

Let us keep in mind that God’s dismay is directed against a group of people who deliberately provoked Him by their behavior, and is particularly poignant when we consider that, because of them, righteous people were disheartened (see verse 22). A loving Father must, on occasion, rebuke His rebellious children and in justice expose the exploitation of profitless prophets.

by Robert Luis Rabello

Robert Luis Rabello is an aspiring writer in Angwin, California.

Handling Revenge

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ezek. 21:27

Most of us do not appreciate being oppressed, regardless of the type of oppression. Whether it is being victim to a violent mugging, treated unkindly at home, censured at school, or not being fully accepted at church for simply not being part of the "established clique," oppression is undesirable. So much so that oppression often instills in its victims feelings of revenge. If we had our way, we would cut the mugger's arms off, bring retribution to the abuse suffered at home, retaliate against the censure suffered at school, and "put them in their place for not accepting me for who I am" at church.

And yet Scripture holds out a motto for us to live by—to love enemy as well as friend, regardless of how we have been treated. When it comes to recompensing the wrong others have done to us, the Lord says, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay" (Rom. 12:19). Consequently, in this week's scripture lesson we see God sticking up for the oppressed. His promise to change the circumstances of oppressiveness comes through in Ezekiel 21:27: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him."

It was in God that Israel was to find their hope for justice from oppression.

God calls us today to live righteously, loving Him with all our heart, mind, and soul, as well as loving our fellow human beings as ourselves. And when we are wronged, the recompense as promised in Ezekiel should be left with God. Let our attitude be that of love, forgiveness, and mercy—to rise above oppression by loving the oppressor. To do otherwise is to sow unto ourselves greater injury than that which has already been done to us.

So then, it is to our advantage to have the following attitudes when we have been wronged:

1. *Believe that God is able to make every situation (even the really bad ones) work for our own good and to thank Him for doing so (see Rom. 8:28).*

2. *Believe that God, in the timing He knows is best, will overturn the situation so that justice will rule over oppressiveness (see Ezek. 21:27).*

3. *Recognize how easy it is for us to be just as oppressive. Thus, we should cherish an attitude of mercy and forgiveness toward the oppressor, even as we would wish others to show us if we blundered into oppressive actions (see Matt. 7:12; Rom. 12:19-21).*

4. *Find our strength and security in our relationship with the Lord rather than in how others may treat us (see Ps. 55:22).*

by Olaf Betat

Olaf Betat is a junior theology major at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Friday, May 10

Ezekiel: God's Alarm Clock

OPINION

Key Texts: Ezek. 13:10-16; Rev. 3:14-21

Let's face it. Six weeks into this quarter's lessons, and some of us are quite weary of Ezekiel. As we tune our ears to his messages, it seems that all we hear are pronouncements of judgment and calls to repentance. We are turned off by his lack of encouragement and affirmation. A few of my students are candid enough to admit this. In the reaction papers that they are required to write for my Prophets of Israel class, they will occasionally use such words as "Same song, 30th verse. A constant litany of doom and gloom! Do we really need these messages today?"

To an avowed lover of the Old Testament, such as myself, the answer to the above question is a resounding yes! I believe that Ezekiel's messages are needed by God's people today, just as they were needed in the sixth century B.C. Here is one of the many reasons this is true:

We need these messages to rouse us from our spiritual complacency. In a materially prosperous society devoid of religious persecution it is easy for Christians to become spiritually drowsy. We lose our first love. We grow lukewarm. And sometimes our spiritual leaders tell us the nice words we prefer to hear

rather than issuing the call to reformation that our perilous situation demands. There is a vacuum of voices willing to diagnose our true condition. Ezekiel and the other prophets fill this vacuum.

It behooves us to remember that, as this week's scripture passage points out, it was the false prophets who cooed soothing messages of peace (see Ezek. 13:10; Jer. 6:14). The true prophets were spiritual alarm clocks, rousing God's people from slumber. Their words still ring out today, fulfilling the same function.

And if we think that a warning of judgment combined with a stirring call to reformation is simply a legalistic legacy of the Old Testament prophets, we should meditate upon the message of Jesus, the ultimate prophet (see Heb. 1:1, 2), to His church of the last days (see Rev. 3:14-21). The Laodicean message attempts to awaken us from spiritual complacency while warning of judgment for those who continue in their lukewarmness. However, it climaxes with a hopeful phrase, a phrase that Ezekiel would heartily affirm: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (Rev. 3:20). The eternal question is simply this: Will you let Him in today? Will I?

REACT

Am I at the point in my Christian experience that I need to be awakened? Why or why not?

by Greg A. King

Greg A. King is an assistant professor of religion at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

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Lesson 7, May 11 - 17

Victory



“But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness which he has done he shall live” (Ezek. 18:21, 22, RSV).

The System Works!

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezek. 14, 15, 18

In about seven years Dennis Levine, formerly one of the managing directors of Drexel Burnham Lambert, Inc., had turned almost \$40,000 of largely borrowed money into a fortune of \$11.5 billion. He did it by illegal trading.

Levine was involved in some of the largest financial deals of the 1980s. "The daily exposure to such deals, the pursuit of larger and larger transactions and the numbing effect of 60- to 100-hour work weeks," he wrote, "helped erode my values and distort my judgment. . . . In the world of billions and billions of dollars, the millions I made . . . seemed almost insignificant. No one led me down the garden path. . . . For the hard work and creativity I brought to my investment-banking career, I was well rewarded. When I broke the law, I was punished. The system works."

This is the system that God is appealing to in this week's lesson.

"They will bear their guilt. . . . Then the people of Israel will no longer stray from me, nor will they defile themselves anymore with all their sins. They will be my people, and I will be their God, declares the Sovereign Lord" (Ezek. 14:10, 11, NIV).

Not many of us will ever make more than a billion dollars a year, but the principles that applied in Dennis Levine's case are pertinent to the way we react to the

pressures of the secular, humanistic world around us.

In a world in which gross sin is publicized and accepted, have our morals and ethics been eroded?

This appears to have been the case with certain "elders of Israel" who came to Ezekiel. But God has irrevocable, inviolable standards by which righteousness and unrighteousness are judged. We transgress at our peril. There is a penalty to pay. But it is a penalty meted out by the hand of a loving God who seeks to bring us back to harmony with Himself. "They will be my people, and I will be their God, declares the Sovereign Lord" (verse 11, NIV).

In the past a general tendency existed in which we equated righteousness with obedience to a series of rules and laws, which we accepted and applied. This saved us from the difficult and dangerous task of evaluating principles and making our own judgments and decisions.

Now our world has changed. There is almost a phobia about standards and rules. We want to sail our own ship, chart our own course, be in charge of our own destiny. But instead of making life easier, it has made it more complicated. Our conduct is more open to criticism. Peer pressures beat upon us, and we drift off course. But there are still stars set in the heavens to guide us and, if we will allow Him, God will direct our gaze heavenward, and we will be His people, and He will be our God. The system works.

by Lyndon McDowell

Lyndon McDowell is the pastor of the Olney, Maryland, SDA Church, and editor of the *Ministry* Tape-of-the-Month.

Monday, May 13

Principles of Conduct

LOGOS

Ezek. 14, 15, 18

Even six years after the captivity of King Jehoiachin, the people revealed an almost complete insensitivity to sin. They had lost their sense of their covenant relationship with God and the principles that undergirded their position as the people of God. Idolatry, adultery, oppression, robbery, and unjust dealing were practiced. To save the people, God had to reeducate them concerning the importance of individual responsibility.

One could make many parallels between the people of Ezekiel's day and some within the Adventist Church today. The old corporate, authoritarian type of religion has been rejected, leaving many in uncertainty and confusion. What guiding principles of conduct make a people the "people of God"?

True Principles of Conduct Are Rooted in Revelation

"Walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper" (Deut. 5:33, NIV).

At the nursing home where I serve as chaplain, videos of old black-and-white movies are sometimes shown, for old people relate to memories of younger days. Two things have fascinated me as I have watched portions of these movies. The first is how morally "clean" those old movies are by

comparison with the revolting explicitness of films today. The second is how acceptable cigarette smoking was in the early films. Everyone—both men and women—seem to be constantly puffing a cigarette. Today this is not quite so evident.

The lesson is clear. Fashions of conduct change, and if we were to guide our lives by the ethical and moral fashions of society, we would sink into a sea of depravity. Today radio talk-show hosts, for example, even discuss the "ethics" of adultery and fornication, except that euphemistic terms such as "your partner," or "when you make love," are used. Christian lifestyle must not be molded by the lifestyles of society.

As Christians we must ever remember that principles of conduct are rooted in revelation: "I am the Lord your God. Be ye holy, for I am holy."

True Principles of Conduct Are Rooted in the History of God's People

The Old Testament people of God were reminded that Israel had chosen to serve the Lord because He had rescued them from slavery, and that they had entered into a covenant relationship with Him. God's commandments had been prefaced by the statement "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exod. 20:2, NIV). The people had all responded willingly and freely together, "We will do everything

by Lyndon McDowell

Lyndon McDowell is pastor of the Olney, Maryland, SDA Church, and editor of the *Ministry* Tape-of-the-Month.

the Lord has said" (19:8, NIV).

Gratitude to God for deliverance already experienced was the basis of their obedience.

We have also been delivered from slavery. "You were slaves to sin," Paul reminds us, "but now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life" (Rom. 6:20, 22, NIV).

What Jesus has done for us must be the basic motivating principle of our lives. In Christ we have been delivered.

True Principles of Conduct Are Rooted in an Awareness of God's Call

"Confront them with the detestable practices of their fathers and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: On the day I chose Israel . . . I said to them, 'I am the Lord your God''" (Ezek. 20:4, 5, NIV).

Paul makes it clear that God still makes a choice of people. "At the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace" (Rom. 11:5, NIV). Peter is very emphatic: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9, NIV).

A call from God brings with it a terrifying responsibility. Be silent, listen to what God says, "You have now become the people of the Lord your God. Obey the Lord your God and follow his commands" (Deut. 27:9, NIV).

Following True Principles of Conduct Means People Have to Be Different

"You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the

land of Canaan. . . . Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 18:3, 4, NIV).

This principle has never changed. Paul stated it clearly: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2, NIV). Peer pressure has tremendous power. It can be resisted only in the light of Calvary.

When Our Lifestyle Is Incongruous With Christian Principles

"God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness" (Heb. 12:10, NIV).

Salvation is an individual matter. So is God's discipline. Its purpose is our salvation. "I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!" (Ezek. 18:30-32, NIV).

How are the principles of conduct outlined above pertinent to Adventist young people today?

Would you say that a general insensitivity to sin exists in the Adventist Church today, or is it simply a matter of a less authoritarian form of church government?

Have standards lowered, or is this just a perception because "unimportant" external standards have been rejected?

Tuesday, May 14

The Powerful Influence of Good Works

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Eph. 1:3-7

"We are to believe that we are chosen of God, to be saved by the exercise of faith, through the grace of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit; and we are to praise and glorify God for such a marvelous manifestation of His unmerited favor. It is the love of God that draws the soul to Christ, to be graciously received, and presented to the Father. Through the work of the Spirit the divine relationship between God and the sinner is renewed. The Father says 'I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. I will exercise forgiving love toward them, and bestow upon them my joy.' . . . In the council of heaven, provision was made that men, though transgressors, should not perish in their disobedience, but, through faith in Christ as their substitute and surety, might become the elect of God, predestined unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will. God wills that all men should be saved; for ample provision has been made, in giving His only-begotten Son to pay man's ransom. Those who perish will perish because they refuse to be adopted as children of God through Christ Jesus. The pride of man hinders him from accepting the provisions of salvation.

But human merit will not admit a soul into the presence of God. That which will make a man acceptable to God is the imparted grace of Christ through faith in His name. No dependence can be placed in works or in flights of feelings as evidence that men are chosen of God; for the elect are chosen through Christ."¹

"The good works of God's people have a more powerful influence than words. By their virtuous life and unselfish acts the beholder is led to desire the same righteousness which produced so good fruit. He is charmed with that power from God which transforms selfish human beings into the divine image, and God is honored, His name glorified. But the Lord is dishonored and His cause reproached by His people's being in bondage to the world. . . . With a large number there seemed to be an alarming lack of principle. They were swayed by un consecrated influence and seemed to have no root in themselves."²

In vision Ellen White inquired what these things meant and was referred to the words of Ezekiel: "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?" (14:3).

1. Ellen White, *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 2, 1893, p. 9.
2. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 443, 444.

by Lyndon McDowell

Lyndon McDowell is pastor of the Olney, Maryland, SDA Church, and editor of the *Ministry* Tape-of-the-Month.

Being the People of God

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Jer. 31:29, 31, 34

The destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jewish people marked a great divide in the history of Israel. Most people were blind to the real cause of the national disasters. The popularity of the proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," reflected their disillusionment and depression. It seemed incomprehensible to the people that God would allow a heathen people to destroy their city and their temple.

God met the situation by raising up such people as Daniel and Ezekiel and by sending messages designed to force the people into a new concept of personal ethics.

Personal accountability is implicit in the "new covenant" that Jeremiah outlined, and is quite explicit in the message given by Habakkuk: the righteous person would be he who lived "by his faith" (Hab. 2:4, NIV). In the face of national disaster and the overthrow of all the externals that had shored up their religiosity, individual righteousness, a person's personal faith in God—as expressed so eloquently by Habakkuk himself (3:17-19), is what would determine a person's salvation.

Is there a parallel in the Adventist Church today? In the 1890s, whether one visited an isolated mission station in the

African bush or a little church on a side street of Southampton, the sense of a worldwide spiritual community of God's people gave a satisfying sense of security and contentment. We were "God's people," sheltered by His favor and united around the world by our world mission and our Adventist lifestyle.

Today our sense of community is not nearly so strong. There is a demand for more freedom of self-expression. Our institutions, once our pride, are now our concern. Some even secretly question whether the church can survive.

Israel survived. But it was only with the coming of the Messiah and the birth of a new spiritual community whose eyes were now turned away from themselves to a personal Saviour that God's ideal was expressed. "If ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed," was the message. To be Christ's means that we belong to Him. We follow His example. God said: "Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right. . . . He follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws. That man is righteous; he will surely live" (Ezek. 18:5-9, NIV). Christ left us the example (see 1 Peter 2:21).

REACT

Do you think that the changes that are coming into the Adventist Church are positive? What reasons do you have for agreeing or disagreeing?

by Lyndon McDowell

Lyndon McDowell is pastor of the Olney, Maryland, SDA Church, and editor of the *Ministry* Tape-of-the-Month.

Thursday, May 16

Surrender, Not Strength, Is the Key

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ezek. 18:21, 22

God's ways are equal. He is no respecter of persons. This truth, taught by Ezekiel in the Old Testament, is echoed by Peter in the New. "Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right'" (Acts 10:34, 35, NIV).

The problem is, What makes a sinful man want to do right?

A growing number of young people's lives have been harmed by divorce, seared by abuse, hardened by neglect, or warped by any one of a number of the social tragedies of our day. How can anyone from a dysfunctional family benefit from the equal justice of God?

God's equal justice demands that the sinner "keep all My statutes, and do that which is lawful and right." How can this be done by those growing up in maladjusted homes?

The truth is that apart from Christ no one can do good works. Nothing that we can do of ourselves can make us worthy of the "equal justice of God." All of us have been deformed by sin.

Ellen White puts the matter very clearly. "In order to meet the requirements of the law, our faith must grasp the righteousness of

Christ, accepting it as our righteousness. Through union with Christ, through acceptance of His righteousness by faith, we may be qualified to work the works of God, to be co-laborers with Christ. . . . Through faith the Holy Spirit works in the heart to create holiness therein; but this cannot be done unless the human agent will work with Christ. We can be fitted for heaven only through the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart; for we must have Christ's righteousness as our credentials if we would find access to the Father. . . . It is the work of the Holy Spirit to elevate the taste, to sanctify the heart, to ennoble the whole man."*

It is not the work of feeble humans to effect a change in their lives; only the divine power of the Holy Spirit can do the work. Surrender, not strength, is the key.

When the crucified Christ is portrayed before our eyes, love is awakened in the heart, sorrow for sin follows, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is given. It is our claim on the righteousness of Christ that makes us fit to receive the "equal justice of God," not our own good works. The good works that follow come from a deep desire to respond to God's love in Christ.

**Signs of the Times*, Nov. 1, 1982, p. 607.

by Lyndon McDowell

Lyndon McDowell is pastor of the Olney, Maryland, SDA Church, and editor of the *Ministry* Tape-of-the-Month.

Community Obligation

OPINION

Key Text: Ezek. 18:30-32

Benjamin West, a famous British painter, tells the story that when he was a boy he was left in charge of his little sister while his mother went shopping. Searching for something to do, he found some brushes and some bottles of colored ink. They gave him a bright idea: he would paint a picture of his sister.

By the time his mother returned, ink was all over the place. Her eyes took in everything as she opened the door. She looked at the mess, at the two children, and at the drawing. Then she smiled. "Why, it's Sally," she said, picking up little Benjy and kissing him. All through his life Benjamin West would say, "My mother's kiss made me a painter."

It is easy to criticize youth. If Ellen White ever gave a so-called blueprint of education, one of the fundamental principles was that "God never designed that one human mind should be under the complete control of another. And those who make efforts to have the individuality of their pupils merged in themselves and to be mind, will, and conscience for them, assume fearful responsibilities."*

Adventist, and that often means American Adventist, cultural-life commandments have sometimes been elevated almost to equality with God's commandments.

Because cultural lifestyles have changed, the present generation of Adventist youth do many things that their parents would never have done. Externals can change, but underlying principles remain the same.

On the other hand, we should remember that the new age of individual responsibility does not completely overthrow the ethic of community obligation. The Christian church has always stood for principles of morality and unpretentious living. God, at great risk, to be sure, gave the control of His church into the hands of men and women (see Matt. 16:19; 18:18-20). Because we live in an imperfect world, imperfect laws are sometimes necessary. Without a reciprocal ethic of concern for the total good of the community, freedom becomes license; and license, anarchy. We are still our brother's keeper. We are still responsible for the good name and unity of the church.

One of the great problems of the family today is quite simply the problem of living together in loving concern each for the other. That is true also of the church family.

REACT

1. How can one distinguish between cultural-life commandments and God's commandments?
2. How responsible are we for the total welfare of the church?

* Testimonies, vol. 3, p. 134.

by Lyndon McDowell

Lyndon McDowell is pastor of the Olney, Maryland, SDA Church, and editor of the *Ministry* Tape-of-the-Month.

Lesson 8, May 19 - 25

Forgiveness



“When I passed by you again and looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yea, I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine” (Ezek. 16:8, RSV).

Sunday, May 19

Let's Forgive and Forget

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezek. 16, 20, 23

God's Forgiveness

When I was young I did not know
And could not understand
The fullness of God's loving gift
Of forgiveness shown to man.

I would say my prayers each day,
But still I did not know
How God could take my sinful life
And make it white as snow.

I had never said to God,
"Please take it all from me,
And make in me a brand new heart
And truly set me free."

Instead I said, "Forgive my sins,
But let me do the rest."
As time went by I saw my life
Had become quite a mess.

And as I grew, I continued to
Be burdened through life
By wayward sins I thought were
gone.
I was filled with pain and strife.

Well, finally I saw I had
To give to God the task
Of forgiving sins and removing
guilt.
All I could do is ask.

Forgiveness is, I now realize,
A gift that's sent from God.
It can't be earned or bought I've
learned

While on this earthly sod.

If I let God remove my sin
And pain and guilt and sorrow,
Then I can live with inner peace
For all of my tomorrows.

God's forgiveness is tough to comprehend. As a human, I find it difficult to forgive someone of something he does against me, especially if he does it again and again. But God says that He will blot our sins out of the books, so sins that have been forgiven will not be used against us later, provided we are in a full saving relation to Christ.

Now, if this person repeats the act against me, it is more difficult to forgive him, and it becomes increasingly harder each time he does it. Even if the person tells me that he is sorry, I cannot see inside his heart. He says that it won't happen again, but after the second or third time I think he is either kidding himself or lying to me.

Repeatedly rejecting God does distance a person from God, but if he truly wants forgiveness and a change of heart, God will forgive him. And with the forgiveness, God can also change the person's heart and remove the desire for sin. I don't think we humans can completely understand the fullness of this act, because it is entirely beyond our capabilities. We cannot forget, and we cannot change a person's heart.

by Samuel Clay

Samuel Clay, a computer science major at the University of Washington, plans to attend Walla Walla College to study theology.

Monday, May 20

God's Covenant and Loving Forgiveness

LOGOS

Ezek. 16, 20, 23

God is always ready to forgive. However, people must be made aware of their sin to desire the grace of God's forgiveness.

God Loves Unconditionally (read Ezek. 16:1-14; 23:1-4)

Both passages deal with God's choosing to love people who we might think do not deserve it. Chapter 16 starts out as a love story. In the allegory a person (God) passes by a field and sees a helpless, dirty, unloved baby of mixed background. He takes compassion on her and tells her to "live, and grow up like a plant of the field" (16:6, RSV). Years later, he comes by again and sees she is "at the age for love." He is again moved by love and enters into a covenant with her. He bathes and anoints her and lavishes her with gifts. Soon she becomes known throughout the land for her beauty.

In chapter 23 God takes two sisters, Oholah (Northern Kingdom of Israel) and Oholibah (Southern Kingdom of Israel), who are harlots in Egypt, as His own; that is, He marries them and gives them sons and daughters. Once again God is loving people whom no one else loves, people whom He has no obligation to love.

These allegories were to re-

mind Israel that they were not chosen as God's people based on any merit of their own, but simply because God loved them first (see Deut. 7:7-9). This fact is what made them special and changed their lives.

How has God's love changed your life?

What effect does God's love for you have on other people?

Forgetfulness Leads to Abuse of God's Love (read Ezek. 16:15-22; 23:5-11)

Unfortunately, as humans we often fail to appreciate the grace inherent in God's love for us. Soon the young woman and the two sisters began taking God's love for granted. They became prostitutes to the Egyptians, Philistines, Assyrians, and Chaldeans. They worshiped their idols and sacrificed food, clothing, and their children from their marriage with God. They were actually worse than the other nations because they gave gifts to attract their lovers (see 16:32-34), and knew the consequences of their actions (see 23:11), but continued blatantly in their ways. Finally, God had had enough (see 23:18, 19).

How could the women (the Israelites) do this to God? He tells them in 16:22. They forgot about the condition of their lives before God came along and helped them out—even though they were cautioned from the very start that for-

by Pam McDow

Pam McDow is a pharmacy major at the University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

getfulness of God's love would be their downfall (see Deut. 8:2-20).

Oholibah, though she had the example of Oholah's evil life, chose to ignore it, and was even worse than her sister. Once she forgot God, the young woman of Ezekiel 16 started taking pride in her beauty as if she were somehow responsible for it, which started her on her destructive path. Forgetfulness of the reasons for God's love leads to pride, which results in a life of piety and self-righteousness, which leads ultimately to destruction.

When have you taken credit for something because you have forgotten the true source?

God Keeps His Covenants (read Ezek. 20:5-31)

All three chapters are meant to shake the Israelites out of their forgetfulness and point them back to God. In chapter 20, Ezekiel recaps their history from a perspective somewhat different from the one they were used to. He points out God's promises, but highlights the Israelites' failures. They broke the first covenant with God even before they left Egypt. But God loved His chosen people and knew the surrounding nations were watching. So He renewed His covenant with the Israelites, both out of love for them and to show the nations that God is faithful to His people. In the wilderness they broke their promise again, so God renewed His promises with the next generation, but they failed too.

In His last endeavor God makes known the consequences of not following Him. The same thing is happening in Ezekiel's time as happened in the wilderness in the past—they are going to have to suffer the consequences of their decision to learn, the hard

way, that God keeps His word.

All three chapters include a judgment section that appears bleak and awful (see Ezek. 16:35-43; 20:33-39; 23:22-35, 45-49). But God explained why the consequences had to happen (see 16:43) and what the Israelites should learn from the experience: He is *not* doing it just to punish them.

Did Israel have a choice to enter into the covenant?

Should they have to suffer the consequences if they did not?

God Doesn't Stop at Justice (read Ezek. 16:59-63; 20:40-44)

In the final analysis, love triumphed over the Israelites' disregard of the law. God could have let the Israelites follow their chosen path to destruction, or He could have destroyed them for breaking their covenant; but, unlike us, God's love is long-suffering. He is patient and not willing that any should perish *in the long run*. However, we must frequently suffer the consequences of our decisions in the short term to understand why those decisions were wrong and why God is right.

For love to prevail, to produce a change, we must experience the results of our decisions and recognize the sinful elements in them. Once we recognize the sinfulness in our decisions, we can feel a genuine repentance and accept God's forgiveness, remembering our unworthiness (because we experienced it), and, relying on God for strength, not make the same mistakes again.

What is God's covenant with us today?

How is your reaction the same and how is it different from that of the Israelites?

Tuesday, May 21

Forgiveness Unmerited and Unlimited

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 130:3, 4, 7, 8

The patience of God is profoundly described by Ezekiel. He describes a living God waiting while His people plumb the depths of futility, waiting for a moment in time when the ravages of self-seeking finally catch up with them. It is clear by the extreme examples cited by Ezekiel that no sinner is beyond the reach of God's patience and love. Indeed, He is waiting for us to recognize our true condition and become loathsome in our own eyes. Then our gracious God can bestow on us the gifts of love and forgiveness that He has been waiting to give.

How does Ellen White describe the limits of forgiveness? "The word of God says, 'If he repent, forgive him.' . . . Luke 17:3, 4. And not only seven times, but seventy times seven—just as often as God forgives you."¹

There is a divine flow of compassion in forgiveness that benefits all in its path. "In God's forgiveness the heart of the erring one is drawn close to the great heart of Infinite Love. The tide of divine compassion flows into the sinner's soul and from him to the souls of others. The tenderness and mercy that Christ has revealed in His own precious life will be seen in those who become sharers of His grace."²

Forgiveness is a divine principle based on the "unmerited love of God." "We are not forgiven *because* we forgive, but *as* we forgive. The ground of all forgiveness is found in the unmerited love of God, but by our attitudes toward others we show whether we have made that love our own."³

The Exile did have a purifying effect on God's people, and Ezekiel's prediction of revival did transpire during Ezra's and Nehemiah's time. From this time of revival the pen of inspiration provides a tremendous promise of encouragement.

"Every true turning to the Lord brings abiding joy into the life. When a sinner yields to the influence of the Holy Spirit, he sees his own guilt and defilement in contrast with the holiness of the great Searcher of hearts. He sees himself condemned as a transgressor. But he is not, because of this, to give way to despair; for his pardon has already been secured. He may rejoice in the sense of sins forgiven, in the love of a pardoning heavenly father. It is God's glory to encircle sinful, repentant human beings in the arms of His love, to bind up their wounds, to cleanse them from sin and to clothe them with the garments of salvation."⁴

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 250.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 251.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 668.

by David Pershall

David Pershall is producer/director for Telemedia Productions, Inc., a video production company in Seattle, Washington.

Cheap Grace in the Old Testament

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ezek. 20:8, 9, 13, 14, 21, 22.

One often gets the impression that God in the Old Testament is different from God in the New Testament—harsh, unforgiving, and concerned with justice, rather than gentle, forgiving, and concerned with mercy. For example, contrast the story of Achan (see Josh. 7) with the story of the woman caught in adultery (see John 8:1-11). A closer examination reveals that this is not the case.

When we think of Ezekiel, we may think of wheels within wheels and mass resurrections. But there's more!

Take a look at the three pairs of verses in the key text from Ezekiel 20. Do you notice anything interesting about them? Three times God has done something for Israel (just prior to each passage). Three times Israel rebels. Three times God threatens to destroy them. And three times God refrains "for the sake of my name." The only thing that Israel has done to deserve this was to rebel against God.

The structure of these three passages is rather interesting. Each pair of verses is divided into three parts—rebellion, judgment,

and mercy. This structure is parallel in all three of the passages. This serves to drive home the message that God's forgiveness and mercy have nothing to do with our own merit. No mention was made of any previous good works performed by Israel. God didn't say, "Well, you were pretty good for a while, so I'll overlook your rebellion this time." Instead, God said, "You rebelled; I should destroy you, but I won't, for My own name's sake."

We have all rebelled against God. God has passed judgment against all of us. Now we are offered forgiveness. It's yours. It's mine. Do you accept?

REACT

1. How do these three instances relate to Jesus' advice to Peter to forgive seventy times seven (Matt. 18:21, 22)?

2. Contrast Jesus' advice with the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11.

3. Since we are freely offered forgiveness, why doesn't God just abolish the laws and save some work?

4. Since God seems to be concerned with the reaction of the surrounding nations if Israel is punished, what about their reaction if Israel's rebellion goes unpunished?

by Brent Seidel

Brent Seidel is a software engineer with Boeing Commercial Airplane Group in Everett, Washington.

Thursday, May 23

Responsibly Forgiven

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Cor. 5:18, 19

It had been years since God picked up this deserted, filthy baby out of a cow pasture. He adopted it, nourished it, perhaps even spoiled it a little. At this point (see Ezek. 16:8) He is dealing with a pubescent teenager who has tasted just a bit of the freedom so much desired—that sense of self-sufficient immortality.

Now He goes into a covenant with the stripling—a betrothal. Cooperative fidelity. She doesn't know how to handle His forgiving, loving nature.

Have you ever wanted desperately to forgive someone who refused to accept your forgiveness? How did you feel?

A teenager is experiencing difficulties—self-image, relationships. The counselor at her school offers ready help. What is her role? She must first acknowledge her need for help. She must trust the counselor to hold her confidences. She plays an *active* role in developing that trust. She must hold nothing from her counselor if he is to help her.

There is more to being for-

given than simply accepting. Our role must be an active one. Answering the following questions may help assess our forgiveness relationship with the Almighty Counselor.

Am I aware of my constant need of His help?

Am I continuously, actively developing a trust relationship with Him?

Am I holding back any part of me so as to hinder God's ability to help me?

Today's society is particularly self-sufficient. It is particularly difficult for us to acknowledge our dependency on anybody or anything. The pressures to succeed independently are higher for our age group than any other—perhaps higher than they have ever been. We can either displace this pressure to God, or take it on ourselves. Neither choice will be easy. Both will be active. One is much less stressful, and it bears incomprehensible results.

REACT

How do we deliver the "message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19)?

by Jon B. Albertson

Jon B. Albertson is an English teacher, free-lance writer, and codirector of Oasis, a Christian drama group at the Green Lake SDA Church in Seattle, Washington.

Selective Amnesia?

OPINION

Key Text: Ezek. 16:60

We have often heard it said that to truly forgive, one has to forget the wrong. When His people ask for forgiveness, the Lord will “cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Mic. 7:19). He “blotteth out . . . [their] transgressions . . . and will not remember . . . [their] sins” (Isa. 43:25).

The Bible gives us a detailed and, at times, even sordid history of the sins of God’s people, beginning just after Creation through New Testament times. Ezekiel 16, 20, and 23 repeatedly point out the transgressions of Israel since the Exodus, and the subsequent price the nation paid for turning from the Lord. If God’s forgiveness entails forgetting, why are their sins vividly recounted, and how can we benefit from these reminders?

Although He delivers a severe admonition to His people in Ezekiel, God’s grace is yet revealed. “Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant” (Ezek. 16:60). This is the good news of salvation—that God, because of His infinite love for us, chooses to forgive us despite our past iniquities. Even if our sins are not forgotten, He chooses not to view

us in our sin-scarred state, but to see us entirely in Christ’s righteousness. Forgiveness, a manifestation of *agape** love, requires choice. We are forgiven not because we are worthy, not because God cannot remember our sins, but because His love transcends our transgressions.

We are asked to forgive our fellow humans freely. This does not mean that we can somehow force ourselves to forget their wrongdoings, i.e., to have selective amnesia. Rather than dwelling on old grudges, true forgiveness chooses to look upon what is good in others. Even Paul had trouble forgiving John Mark, who had abandoned him on an earlier journey (see Acts 15:36-40).

Forgiveness, when practiced through the grace of God, is part of a growth process that lends credence to our Christian experience. As we learn to forgive, human relationships will improve. But more important, as we forgive, we increase our understanding of the great love and forgiveness that God freely offers to us.

REACT

Can there be true forgiveness without forgetting?

**Agape* was the uncommon Greek noun used in the New Testament to describe the self-giving love of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, that is the motivating power of Christian living. It is a God-like love.

by Wui-Jin Koh and Stephanie Phillips

Wui-Jin Koh teaches at the University of Washington, and Stephanie Phillips recently completed her law degree from the University of Washington. They are members of the Green Lake SDA Church, Seattle, Washington.

Lesson 9, May 26–June 1

Community



“The word of the Lord came to me: ‘Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord God: “Because your heart is proud, and you have said, ‘I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,’ yet you are but a man, and no god” ’ ” (Ezek. 28:1, 2, RSV).

Cause and Effect

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezek. 25-30, 33

We are all aware that, in nature, for every effect there had to be a cause. A strong wind can cause a weak or unstable tree to be blown to the ground; a bolt of lightning striking dry tinder will cause a wildfire; and in the most basic elements of life the introduction of particular chemicals will always have the same effect. We can count on these things; God created this world that way. In the same way, societies are continually affected by any number of causes brought about by the people who run their governments.

In Ezekiel 25-30 God has His servant proclaim a judgment (effect) on the nations that have allowed their societies to fall into sin (cause). Many of us might read over these chapters and contend that God is vindictive in punishing these communities. But if you read carefully, each proclamation of doom is accompanied by a lamentation of sorrow for the retribution they will endure. It is *their* sinful ways over many years in spite of many warnings that have brought on these unfortunate effects. The continued refusal of the governments in these communities to heed the warnings of

the prophets has brought them down the path of self-destruction—inevitable in a community not adhering to God's commands.

In our daily lives societal pressures are constantly shaping our lives. Television, radio, and magazines proclaim a lifestyle long on the superficial and short on morals. These environmental influences affect everyone in many ways.

The way we treat strangers, neighbors, and our families is the result of societal influences. We also exert an influence on those around us through our words and actions. As Christians, we have a responsibility to share God's saving grace by showing kindness and caring toward others through the articles we write, the church policies we support, or through political activity. Traditionally, Adventists have been working through the ministry, health-care professions, and teaching, but to cause a greater effect in our community it might take a more public position, such as city council, mayor, or congressman.

No matter how we choose to be active, God's cause should affect our daily lives, for we will be judged more severely if we "do not speak to warn the wicked from his way; . . . his blood I will require at your hand" (Ezek. 33:8, NKJV).

by Eric Komarniski

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Monday, May 27

Limitations or Lamentations?

LOGOS

Ezek. 25-30, 33

The Demise of the Nations (read Ezek. 25:1-26:21; 28:30-29:21)

"Therefore I will stretch out my hand against you and give you as plunder to the nations. I will cut you off from the nations and exterminate you from the countries. I will destroy you, and you will know that I am the Lord" (25:7, NIV).

Chapters 25 through 29 of Ezekiel are not for the faint-hearted or sentimental. Contained within a few short verses are accounts describing the destruction of seven of Judah's surrounding neighbors who were (1) about to have a close encounter of the worst kind or (2) about to meet their Maker in a most unpleasant fashion.

We must remember that these nations were not strangers to God's sovereignty. The nations of Ammon and Moab descended from Lot's incestuous relationships with his two daughters. Edom descended from Esau, Jacob's twin brother. These three nations are relatives, distant to be sure, but still family, and would have known the stories about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Philistia had experienced numerous displays of God's power: Shamgar, Judges 3:31; Samson, Judges 15; 16:23-30; results of capturing the ark, 1 Samuel 5; Samuel's prayer meet-

ing, 1 Samuel 7:10, 11; Jonathan and his armorbearer, 1 Samuel 14:1-23; and David and Goliath, 1 Samuel 17. Tyre and Sidon saw God through their close relationship with Judah during the time of David and Solomon, and Egypt experienced God through the Exodus.

When we examine the reasons for destruction, we learn that Ammon laughed at the destruction of the sanctuary (see Ezek. 25:3). Edom and Philistia were seeking revenge (see Ezek. 25:12, 15). Tyre planned to grow rich by pillaging a broken Jerusalem (see Ezek. 26:2), and Egypt never was a faithful ally (see Ezek. 29:6, 7). Each of these nations witnessed divine intervention regarding Judah. Yet each ignored the evidence for God's sovereignty. Each displayed centuries of hostility toward Judah and arrogance toward God. Finally, God declared that enough was enough.

In the end, God acted as He always does, so that all would know that He was the Lord (see Ezek. 25:11).

What does destruction teach us about God?

Prejudice, Semitic Style

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28, NIV).

Tucked into the reasons for which God destroyed the nations were hints regarding issues we each must face in life. Ammon ap-

by Mark R. Weir

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peared to be displaying an unreasonable amount of malice and envy toward Judah (see Ezek. 25:3).

(The Germans call it *Schadenfreude*, the spirit of ill will that finds delight in gloating over the misfortunes of others.¹ This is often the first step down the path of prejudice.) When Jerusalem revolted, Ammon was also involved in the insurrection (see Ezek. 21:18-23). It was an open question as to where Nebuchadnezzar would strike. When he turned toward Jerusalem, the Ammonites may well have gloated, saying, "Better them than us."

Moab showed a prejudice that refused to see anything of worth in an individual's cultural tradition (see Ezek. 25:8-11). Moab rationalized that Judah's military and economic might were of little significance.

Edom displayed a prejudice rooted in a blood relationship.² Often, when there is much in common, there is little tolerance for differences. Frequently, the closer we are to people, the harder it is to let them be different.

Finally, we see the full bloom of prejudice displayed by Philistia (see Ezek. 25:15-17). Open, violent annihilation became acceptable. The consequences were and always are tragic.

How do we prevent prejudice from plaguing our lives?

Tyre Up Close

"Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings" (Ezek. 28:17, NIV).

Three of the six chapters in this week's lesson talk about Tyre. Why would half of the space be devoted to only one of the seven surrounding nations? It seems that the answer is found in

the predictive/prophetic nuances contained in those chapters. Here we find that God's divine foreknowledge (omniscience) is displayed with regard to the destruction of Tyre, and a deeper prophetic element is displayed with regard to the king of Tyre.

Tyre was an ancient city. Fortified in Joshua's time (see Josh. 19:29), it later became a great maritime commercial center. Yet Jeremiah (see Jer. 27:2-7; 47:4) and Ezekiel (see Ezek. 26:3-21; 28:6-10) foretold utter destruction for Tyre, naming not less than 25 separate details, each of which in the following centuries came true literally. "Mathematicians have estimated, according to the Law of Compound Probabilities, that if a prophecy concerning a person, place, or event has twenty-five details beyond the possibility of human calculation, collusion, collaboration, comprehension, and coincidence, there is only one chance in more than thirty-three and one-half millions of its accidental fulfillment. Yet Tyre's history at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, then centuries later at the hands of Alexander the Great, and centuries after that at the hands of the Crusaders, was the striking fulfillment of each detail of the prophets' forecasts. Nor could any other city in the world's history have fulfilled them. The authenticity of God's Word leaves no chance for sane denial" (note on Ezek. 26:14, AMP).

Until the thirteenth century A.D., the grandeur of the ancient city of Tyre was visible, but God's Word did not fail. "Soon Tyre had become an almost uninhabited pile of ruins. A large part of the western section of 'the island' became covered by the sea, and early travelers told of seeing 'houses, towers and streets far down in the deep.' In modern times the population of Tyre, made up largely of fishermen who

spread their nets on its beaches, has increased to around 6,000, but the city as such has never been revived, and the original site has long since become obliterated" (note on 27:36, AMP).

In Ezekiel 28:1-10, God through Ezekiel is addressing the ruler of Tyre, the actual historical contemporary of Ezekiel. This ruler had some problems with pride, ambition, and conduct. He thought he was a god (see Ezek. 28:2), claimed great wisdom (see verses 2, 3), and incredible business acumen (see verse 5). These were the results of following the "true king" of Tyre, addressed in Ezekiel 28:11-19.

Here we find evidence of a being that is more than just a literal local ruler. These verses seem to be describing the "king" of all that is opposed to God. Why? Four reasons are given: (1) this being had been in Eden, the garden of God (see verse 13); (2) this being was the anointed cherub that guards and was on the holy mountain of God (see verse 14); (3) this being was blameless from Creation until wickedness was found in him (see verse 15); and (4) this being was driven in disgrace from the mountain of God (see verse 16). This evidence seems to point to Satan, the evil genius who works through human agents to accomplish his goals.

The Way of the Watchman

"Son of Man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me" (Ezek. 33:7, NIV).

In conclusion to chapters filled

with destruction, prejudice, and pride, comes the answer to guarantee that these consequences never happen in my life or my family or my church community. The answer is the "watchman concept." This involves looking for the inroads of the enemy, warning of potential disasters at the door. But being a genuine watchman involves much more than just blowing "the trumpet to warn the people" (Ezek. 33:3, NIV). Jesus came not only to *tell* good news but also to *be* good news. His involvement with His community allowed Him to change it in ways that mere warnings never would.

God's delight is that we turn from our wicked ways (see verse 11), and learn that we cannot trust our own righteousness. God wants each of us to be a genuine *watchman* outwardly, as well as inwardly. This is stated beautifully in Ezekiel 33:31. "My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain" (NIV). God wants genuine watchmen to warn and uplift His people. For that to happen He must have complete control of your life. Are you willing?

What is a genuine watchman for today? Who fits that role?

How can I make sure that who I am does not get in the way of what I am saying?

1. George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), vol. 6, p. 201.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

The Privilege of Loving

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ezek. 33:7, 8

Perhaps, as a Christian, you have struggled for years to discover the “good news” about the subject of community responsibility. However, upon reading passages like these in Ezekiel, you may have despaired at the impossibility of the task.

Ellen White must certainly have understood this elusive “good news” when she wrote:

“It is not meet for you to neglect the divine favor that Heaven offers you if you will care for those who need your care, and thus let God knock in vain at your door. He stands there in the person of the poor, the homeless orphans, and the afflicted widows, who need love, sympathy, affection, and encouragement. . . . Avail yourselves while you may of every privilege of doing good. These privileges improved are as a passing shower, which will water and revive you. Lay hold of every opportunity within your reach of doing good.”¹

On the other hand, if we approach the subject with an overburdened sense of obligation, it is likely that we will completely overlook God’s startling intention:

“God does not propose to rain means from heaven with which to sustain the poor, but He has placed His goods in the hands of agents. . . . And what they do for His suffering children they do for Him, for He identifies His interest with that of suffering humanity.”²

Yes! This is the stunning paradox! That in the experience of deeply caring about other humans, I, who desperately need God, literally meet God’s need. “But,” you ask, “what could the omnipotent Creator and Sustainer of the universe possibly need?” Nevertheless, there is something for which God longingly yearns, something even His omnipotent power cannot guarantee: the love and friendship of human beings. When, by acts of unselfish kindness, we love and befriend people, we are loving God. This is neither a parable nor clever mental gymnastics, but stark reality. To have loved God in the very midst of loving another human is an unparalleled experience.

REACT

Discuss ways that such love for God can be practiced daily.

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 330.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 511.

by Brent Buhler

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Wednesday, May 29

Godless Independence, the Universal Crime

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ezek. 28:26

Masses danced and cried in the streets. World War II ended, and some of the most brutal murderers known to our age would be condemned to death at the Nuremberg trials. These trials were to become unique, their legal implications unprecedented. Since the Nazis could not be tried under French, British, or American laws, an international code of right and wrong was, for the first time, applied to all people regardless of country.

Similarly, judgments based on a higher law is paralleled in Ezekiel. This higher code clarifies a beautiful, divine principle of justice and salvation and forms the basis for an ideal social government and authentic spirituality.

Beginning in chapter 25, Ezekiel's vivid imagery of godly punishment, heretofore reserved toward defiant Israel, now extends to neighboring nations who had not the laws of God that were given to Israel. Hence, under what rules or standards could these nations be tried? What actions could be penalized? Ezekiel explicitly condemns the following crimes:

Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia were sentenced for exacting revenge on, and dominating, the

house of Judah (see Ezek. 25:1-17). They also denied that Judah had any special relationship with the true God (see verse 8).

Tyre, an ancient Phoenician city-state 100 miles up the coast, was the Mediterranean trading hub. Accused for advancing their economic position at the expense of Israel's ruin (see 26:2), Tyre jumped to a malignant realm when it defied itself blatantly, saying, "I am a god" (28:2, NIV). Consequently, Tyre became "a place to spread fishnets" (26:14, NIV). Nebuchadnezzar, and centuries later, Alexander the Great, followed by the Muslims, besieged and eventually destroyed Tyre.

Passing a quick sentence on Sidon, Ezekiel travels south to Egypt, who likewise was charged with a lofty, "God-like" attitude by claiming supreme dominion (see 28:22; 29:3, 9; 30:6). These accusations essentially distill to the recognition and acceptance of Israel's God as sovereign.

Ironically, these multiple crimes are really byproducts, or degrees, of a terminal deficiency—"self"-sufficiency. The equation reads, "God"-deficiency equals "self"-sufficiency. Ezekiel's nations on trial exemplify the universal crime of godless independence and the destructive social and personal elements that subsequently follow. This crime strikes at the root problem of dom-

by Sherri Bragg

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ination found in all social organizations.

In Patriarchs and Prophets

Ellen White exposes the same independent pattern: "The men of Babel had determined to establish a government independent of God. . . . Their confederacy was founded in rebellion; a kingdom established for self-exaltation."¹ "As men turned away from God the divine attributes—justice, purity and love—were supplanted by oppression, violence, and brutality."²

Donald B. Kraybill, a sociologist and author of the fascinating book *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, further illuminates this condition. Evident throughout history, "all hierarchies soon begin to function as deities. Men bow down and worship them. They obey them. Paul Minear is correct when he says 'that wherever a man or a group yields to any authority as ultimate—there a particular deity stands revealed.'"³ No wonder God undercuts the authority and challenges the legitimacy of the Palestinian power structures.

The sequence of thoughts that naturally flow together fit an inverse equation: "God"-sufficiency equals "self"-deficiency. This universal code entails that we acutely recognize and believe our desperate, innate need for God's revitalizing infusion—His Spirit motivating us and becoming one with us. Only then are we empowered to "become" genuine and active lovers toward God and humankind. Thus, "God"-sufficiency can be discovered only by those who doubt their own ability.

Many authorities on this subject concur that certain dimensions in the human condition prevent the lifestyle modifications

necessary to create social, economic, and political harmony. Robert L. Heilbroner addresses the question "Is there hope for man?" in his book *An Inquiry Into the Human Prospect*. He believes that the underlying capabilities for political change are rooted in human nature. And the political propensities in this nature drift toward a strong exercise and abuse of political power. Hence, the usual catalyst for social (and personal) change is not human initiative, but "convulsive change"—external events forcing change.⁴ Perhaps "convulsive change" is the method God used ideally to interact with the nations on trial.

God is not ambiguous. He clearly communicates the universal code being applied to the nations on trial. He leaves no doubt as to the crime being committed and the purpose for judgment. The quintessence of "God"-sufficiency implies knowing God. Because of this fulfilling relationship, we trust Him enough to submit and become dependent.

REACT

1. How would you explain the universal code of right and wrong to a Buddhist? What "code of conduct" applies to everybody, regardless of his upbringing?

2. What "convulsive changes" occur today that cause people to rethink their relationship with God?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 105.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1978), p. 279.

4. Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Human Prospect* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1980), pp. 153, 154, 158.

Thursday, May 30

Make a Commitment to Community

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ezek. 27:1, 2

The concept of *community* is paradoxical. Webster's dictionary definition includes: (1) a group of people residing in the same locality and under the same government; (2) a group or class having common interests; (3) society as a whole.

How can we develop a sense of community within all three definitions?

1. *Allow others to fill needs in your life and be there to fill their needs.* This takes an element of humility. The major chastisement in Ezekiel 27:1, 2 is against the pride of Tyre. The concept of autonomy goes against the ideal of community, where the strong must help the weak to survive. "A real community provides, in full, for the balance of human experience and human life."¹ Humble yourself to give and receive.

2. *Create a sense of community within the church.* We have "common interests" and beliefs, yet do we feel that we belong to a thriving community?

Without caring, communication, and time together, church becomes boring and impersonal. Take time to develop a group of people in your age group who need you and whom you need.

3. *Create a sense of community with society as a whole.* Too often we become so comfortable with our own church community that we fear ministering to the rest of the world. Jesus' answer to the question "And who is my neighbor?" was the parable of the good Samaritan (see Luke 10:29). Everyone is our neighbor, a part of *our* community.

To the people of Tyre the world was their oyster. Just look at all the important ports of call that are listed in Ezekiel 27:3-25. Today we have extended our known world. Advanced communication networks allow us to witness, from the safety of our living rooms, history-making incidents as they occur around the world.

A bumper sticker reads simply "Think globally/Act locally." We can't change the world. But then again, maybe we can.

REACT

1. "Sophocles wrote that life would be unbearable were it not for the freedom to initiate action in a small community."² How do you act in your immediate community?

2. How can we impact our world community?

1. Christopher Alexander et al., *A Pattern Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 140.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

by Cheryl Wells and Alwin Vhymeister

Cheryl Wells is an architectural intern, and Alwin Vhymeister is a developer of educational software in Portland, Oregon.

Secure and at Ease

OPINION

Key Text: Prov. 1:31, 33

“They shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices. . . . But he who listens to me will dwell secure and be at ease” (Prov. 1:31-33, RSV).

Throughout this week’s lesson we have seen condemnation of at least six sinful nations—plus a few harsh admonitions to Israel itself. It’s interesting to go through and seek exactly what the reasons were for these condemnations. Every case cited an overt action against God as represented by His people, Israel—in every case an arrogant sense of disrespect. This is true even in the case of Israel itself.

What stood out were the sentences passed on Tyre and Egypt. These two giants had proved themselves as disrespectful as the others. They had taken overt actions against Israel. Yet these two countries had experienced unique opportunities to learn from God’s people (see Ezek. 28:2 and 29:3).

Not only did these two empires refuse a unique opportunity to acknowledge the principality of Yahweh, but the rulers set themselves up as gods. They became so caught up in their own achievements that they saw themselves as independent.

If there ever was a nonbiological disease, today it is arrogant self-sufficiency. We have learned that with an education, a good job, and proper investments, there are no limits to our ability to achieve. *Our* ability to achieve!

Stress is the underlying cause of many deaths today. Yet we insist on our ability to achieve. People no longer work to live—they live to work. And in the process all else is left behind. Churches are empty. Homes fall apart. Little hope is seen for future generations. Our environment gasps its last breaths. All for the sake of *our* success.

When God created us, He had a triangular establishment in mind. Person to person to God. When any one of these three corners is forsaken, the triangle cannot stand. We must share our burdens with our fellow humans and with God. When we attempt independence from any corner of the triangle, it topples.

Psychiatrists and counselors offer several solutions to this self-induced stress. Take time off from work. Find somebody to share with. Take up a hobby. Get involved in your church or a philanthropic activity. Spend more quality time with your family.

Love thy neighbor as thyself, and the Lord thy God with all thy heart. That should do it!

by Jon B. Albertson

Jon B. Albertson is an English teacher, free-lance writer, and codirector of Oasis, a Christian drama group at the Green Lake SDA Church in Seattle, Washington.

Lesson 10, June 2 - 7

A God-Directed Life



“For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.” “And you are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, says the Lord God” (Ezek. 34:11, 31, RSV).

Bad News and Good News for Leaders

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezek. 34

“Just wait until election time. We’ll show him.”

How many times have you heard comments like this about public and church leaders? Leaders are easy targets. They are high-profile people who are forced to make difficult decisions. One of the greatest problems the shepherd-leader faces is multiple constituencies. The public official has to represent pro-life, pro-choice, environmentalists, big business, the rich, and the poor. Leadership under such conditions is a difficult task.

In the church it is not much different. The college president leads the faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni; and each group sees things from a different perspective. The conference president has pastors, big and small churches, educators, and more boards than he has time for. In view of this, how can any leader be successful? It is in the context of this question that we approach the study of Ezekiel 34.

This chapter sounds as though God is saying, “I’ve got bad news, and I’ve got good news for leaders.” The first half scorches Israel’s leaders. The prophet tells them they are fired. Unlike the messy situations in which today’s personnel managers find themselves, Ezekiel’s situation presents no

lack of just cause for the firing. These leaders have been self-serving and neglectful to the point that the flock is in disarray.

The good news comes in the second half of the chapter. The Lord says He is stepping in. He takes ownership and says that now things are going to be done right. This chapter is strikingly similar to John 10. In John, Jesus is referred to as the Good Shepherd, and the Good Shepherd’s qualities are described. In contrast to the bad shepherds, Jesus says, “I know My sheep, and no one can take them from Me!” John also describes the bad shepherds as Ezekiel does in chapter 34. After comparing the two chapters, it appears that the bottom line for a good leader is taking ownership.

No matter who we are, at times we find ourselves on both sides of the fence, sometimes leading and at other times following. As you study the lesson this week, and you identify yourself more as a follower, know that God holds the shepherd-leaders responsible for their actions. If the Lord holds them responsible, so should we. If you identify yourself primarily as a leader, be sobered. Ask yourself as you study this week, “Is my style of leadership found more in the first part of chapter 34 or the second part? Am I bad news or good news to those who look to me for guidance?”

by Victor F. Brown

Victor F. Brown is enrollment vice-president and chaplain at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Monday, June 3

“All We Like Sheep . . .”

LOGOS

Ezek. 34

As a pastor and prophet working with the exiled Jews in Babylon, Ezekiel was extremely concerned about the spiritual well-being of his people. As he looked back, he could see how often they had been misled and exploited by those who had been responsible for giving God-directed leadership to the nation. This had had devastating effects, especially in the spiritual realm. Many of the people themselves had shown little desire for a God-directed life; they thoroughly deserved the sad situation of exile in a foreign land. The prophet, nevertheless, was able to look forward in faith to the time of the coming of the Messiah, when those who sincerely followed Him would see their hopes fulfilled. The special relationship with God expressed in the covenant could be a reality again.

Ezekiel uses the common biblical symbolism of shepherding. The Bible often portrays God as the good, or conscientious, Shepherd. It likewise describes the leaders of His people as shepherds (His undershepherds), either faithful in their responsibility or unfaithful. However, shepherding was not only symbolic of leadership. Looking after sheep was apparently good preparation for human leadership. Both Moses and David were called to heavy responsibility

after tending flocks.

As one who grew up on a sheep farm, I remember well that working with sheep can be both satisfying and frustrating. Sheep are unintelligent and stubborn—hard to turn aside once they have decided to go in a certain direction. Shepherds, therefore, need patience and perseverance in caring for them.

Presumably Ezekiel had seen such shepherding activities before he left Palestine. In the rugged hills of Judea he must have seen the courage and persistence, as well as the patience and loving care, demonstrated by faithful shepherds.

Thus Ezekiel 34 is a beautiful metaphor of the work of shepherds (faithful and unfaithful). He was also acquainted with the twenty-third psalm written by the poet-shepherd of four centuries earlier, and thus he predicted the work of the ultimate Shepherd in somewhat similar terminology.

A Condemnation of False Shepherds (read Ezek. 34:1-10)

Both the kings and religious leaders of Israel and Judah had repeatedly failed to lead the people in sincere worship of the true God. Sometimes they had been the ones who had led out in apostasy, placing it on an official basis (as during the reign of Amon and the first part of the reign of his father Manasseh, 2 Kings 21). Ezekiel 34:1-6 describes the sad condition of the

by Lloyd Willis

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sheep because of the selfish, greedy, wayward, and irresponsible behavior of the shepherds who had been looking after their own comforts and welfare rather than caring for their sheep. In verses 7-10 the prophet emphasizes that judgment will come to these unfaithful shepherds.

A Portrait of the Good and Faithful Shepherd (read Ezek. 34:11-16)

God desires to direct in the life of His people. He is tender and loving toward them, and if they will accept Him as their shepherd, He wishes to make their life satisfying, rich, and rewarding.

The Flock Has Many Disobedient Sheep (read Ezek. 34:17-22)

Selfish, inconsiderate, and persistently rebellious individuals will ultimately be removed from the flock. On the other hand, the true sheep will be protected and saved.

The Coming of the Messianic Good Shepherd (read Ezek. 34:23, 24)

Although the word *Messiah* is not used, the reference is not to another, or resurrected, David, but to the Messiah, the true successor of David. He is the one who will live and reign forever (compare 37:24-28). He is the ultimate Shepherd.

The Covenant of Peace and Restoration (read Ezek. 34:25-31)

The blessings of God will come in great abundance if God's people will relate to Him in humility and love. The covenant had always been one of grace extended in love. As the grace was accepted and a special relationship established, a rich and rewarding way of life (of obedience to God's better way) was stipulated. Because Israel and Judah did not maintain this relationship with God, some of these promises could not be fulfilled to the nation, but only to spiritual Israel.

The God-directed life is not a life devoted to self, but one of responsibility to others. Christ is the Good Shepherd, but I am His undershepherd. As a disciple and forgiven sinner Peter was instructed, "Feed my sheep. . . . Feed my lambs."

How do my views and practices in leadership measure up to Ezekiel's standards? (We are all leaders in one way or another.)

What are the priorities in my function either as a leader or as a follower?

How do I relate to those in leadership positions? Am I supportive, or do I simply "pass the buck," expecting leaders to do everything?

Am I actively involved in fostering my relationship with the supreme Shepherd-Leader?

Tuesday, June 4

“The Most Helpless”

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ezek. 34

Ezekiel 34 begins with a rebuke to the shepherds of Israel who were feeding and caring for themselves and neglecting the flock that had been entrusted to their care. The Lord, by His own love and mercy, then takes over the work that had been neglected, and searches for the lost sheep to bring them back to the fold.

“The sheep that has strayed from the fold is the most helpless of all creatures. It must be sought for by the shepherd, for it cannot find its way back. So with the soul that has wandered away from God; he is as helpless as the lost sheep, and unless divine love had come to his rescue he could never find his way to God.”¹

A shepherd’s care must be constant and untiring. “As the shepherd leads his flock over the rocky hills, through forest and wild ravines, to grassy nooks by the riverside; as he watches them on the mountains through the lonely night, shielding from robbers, caring tenderly for the sickly and feeble, his life comes to be one with theirs. A strong and tender attachment unites him to the objects of his care. However large the flock, the shepherd knows every sheep. Every one has its name, and responds to the name at the shepherd’s call.”²

Several incidents show the unfitness of the leaders of Israel to

lead the flock. “The Pharisees had just driven one from the fold, because he dared to bear witness to the power of Christ. They had cut off a soul whom the True Shepherd was drawing to Himself. In this they had shown themselves ignorant of the work committed to them, and unworthy of their trust as shepherds of the flock.”³

Throughout history philosophers and teachers have presented their own theories and religious systems to satisfy the needs of people. By their teachings they have managed to lead people away from God and the safety of His fold. Jesus sees those who are misled by false shepherds, and He longs to gather them under His protective care. “Not even one of the straying sheep of God’s fold is overlooked, not one is left unsuccessful. Every one that will submit to be ransomed, Christ will rescue from the pit of corruption and from the briars of sin.”⁴

Since God is the shepherd, what does He require of the sheep? “Let none entertain a masterly spirit; a self-righteous, criticizing spirit; for not one sheep would ever have entered the fold if the Shepherd had not undertaken the painful search in the desert.”⁵

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 187.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 479.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 477.

4. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 188.

5. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 124.

by Joy L. Baylon

Joy L. Baylon is secretary to the financial vice-president of Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Wanted: Sheep

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ezek. 34:11, 31

Shepherd. One who herds, guards, and cares for sheep. In the key text for today, God offers to be our shepherd.

When one thinks of shepherds and sheep, a picture like this comes to mind. Sheep graze peacefully in a green meadow; butterflies are flitting everywhere. The boyish shepherd smiles serenely and gently plays his lute.

This setting may apply about half of the time. But sheep rank on the IQ scale with chickens and turkeys. And they are timid and shy creatures.

The shepherd's tasks are many. He has to be with his flock day and night. He has to protect his flock from things ranging from cold night weather to robbers. The sick sheep have to be gently cared for. The mother ewes cannot be subjected to too much walking, and tired lambs have to be carried. "Did Isaiah have his precious glimpse of the shepherd's care in mind when he wrote of God as the Shepherd carrying the lambs in His bosom?"*

Every morning and evening he will count his flock to make sure that not one is missing. He will contend with other shepherds for

good pasture land and water. The shepherd will wake up at intervals during the night to make sure that the sheep are safe.

Sheep will not drink from running water. The shepherd has to dam up a running brook to form a still pond where the sheep can drink. He has only a sling or a thick club studded with metal nails with which to defend the flock from robbers, lions, and other wild animals. The shepherd is often paid in milk, wool, or sheep. Shepherding is not a job most people would scramble for.

God is stating in Ezekiel 34:11 that He will search for His sheep and find them. We are the lost sheep He is searching for. He wants to be our shepherd. When we consider how much the shepherd had to do in biblical times, we realize that God must love us a great deal.

A shepherd does not do this job for fun. He does this because he enjoys being with his flock. The shepherd knows all of his sheep by name, and they know his voice. God is serious about being our shepherd. He even sacrificed His Son's life to make sure that we are safe from the roaring lion, the devil.

*Herbert Lockyer, *All the Trades and Occupations of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), p. 202.

by Jea Hyun Lee

Jea Hyun Lee is a sophomore biology major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Thursday, June 6

The Excitement Point

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ezek. 34:11

"Dad, we learned punctuation today!" Opening her reader and settling on the couch, my first-grader began explaining the purpose of each punctuation mark. We had covered the period, comma, and question mark when she stopped abruptly. "Dad, here is my favorite, the excitement point!" Ezekiel pictures God in chapter 34 as the shepherd whose greatest desire is to love the scattered and abused flock. Loving the lost is an excitement point to the shepherd for several reasons that could be helpful in our folds today.

1. *He is seeking.* "Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out" (verse 11). The Shepherd's heart was broken because his sheep were "scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them" (verse 6, NIV). We often think of evangelism as working with the strangers out there somewhere. What about closer to home? "We need not go to heathen lands, or even leave the narrow circle of the home, if it is there that our duty lies, in order to work for Christ."¹

2. *He is securing.* "I will bind up the injured and strengthen the

weak" (verse 16, NIV). *Fellowship* is a word that some have seen as synonymous with "potluck dinners." The New Testament word *koinonia* (translated "fellowship") is also used in Luke 5:10 to describe the relationship between Simon Peter and the brothers, James and John. They were fishing *partners*.²

3. *He is serving.* "I will feed them with good pasture" (verse 14, RSV). One Christian writer describes the impact on the youth of today that a church could have if they began loving the lost through service: "Young people are not attracted so much by a church that tries to entertain them as they are attracted to a church that challenges them to do for others. If your church provided concrete ways for young people to minister to the needs of others and to effect social change in the world, they would find your church very attractive."³

REACT

What are some of the signs that someone is losing interest in spiritual things?

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 81.

2. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), vol. 3, p. 804.

3. Anthony Campolo, *Ideals for Social Action* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), p. 9.

by William Kilgore

William Kilgore is a religion professor at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

The Forsaken Lamb

OPINION

Key Texts: Ezek. 34:11, 12, 16;
James 2:1-9

There was once a flock of sheep tended to by a kind shepherd. Every morning he would let them out into the meadow, and every evening he would bring them safely into the fold.

On this particular morning the shepherd opened the gates, and the sheep rushed past him, their white wool soaking up the sun. A small rabbit caught the eye of one of the lambs and enticed it to follow. With increased curiosity the lamb bounded after the rabbit. The chase ended abruptly when the little lamb stumbled into a mudhole. She quickly struggled out and found herself covered from head to hoof with the black, murky mud. The rabbit forgotten, the lamb shuffled back to the flock.

The other sheep were appalled by the lamb's tainted appearance and quickly formed committees to discuss how the lamb could be cleansed before the shepherd returned. One strongly suggested that she go to the stream and wash. Another told the lamb to disguise herself with the white sand along the stream's edge. A third demanded that the lamb roll in the soft green grass to rub the dirt off.

The lamb was overwhelmed by all these suggestions and asked

the sheep for help. Each declined with the excuse of needing to stay clean as an example to the flock. The bewildered lamb tried each suggestion in vain. She returned to the flock just as filthy as she had been before.

As the shepherd's return drew near, an elder sheep told the lamb that she must run away so her appearance would not reflect poorly on the others in the flock. Feeling outcast, the lamb slowly turned and walked away. As she reached a small grove some distance from the flock, the shepherd's call rang out across the meadow. The lamb watched as the rest of the sheep rushed to the fold. She thought that she could not let the shepherd see her soiled condition.

Soon it was dark, and only the moon shone above. The lamb trembled as a dark figure approached and stopped right above her. The shepherd reached down, picked up the lamb, and gently held her in his arms. He looked down at the lamb and whispered, "Don't be afraid. I'm just glad I finally found you."

REACT

1. Why do you think people become so wrapped up with what others think about them that they cannot be a friend to someone in need?

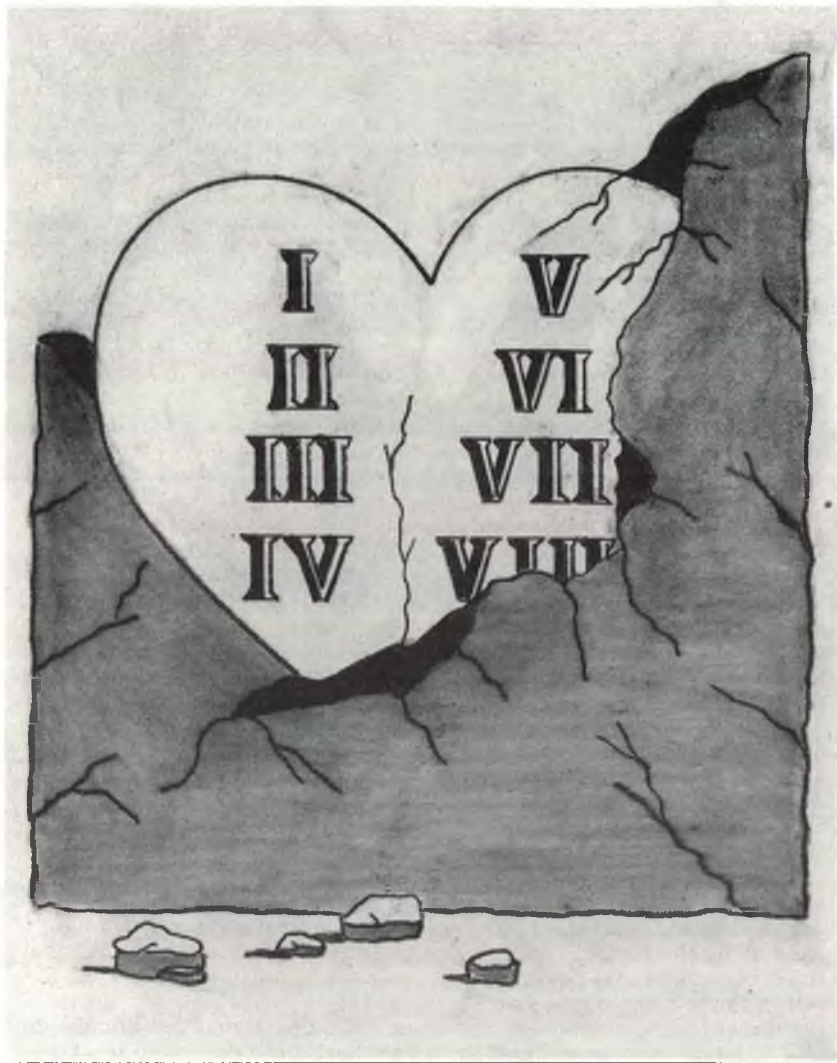
2. If Christ died for sinners, do we have to be perfect before we come to Him? Why or why not?

by Holly R. Harder

Holly R. Harder is a junior physical therapy major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Lesson 11, June 9 - 15

Renewal and Future



“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26, NIV).

“You Don’t Know Nothing!”

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezek. 36:26

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26, NIV).

“Come on, man, you think you’re bad? Show me what you got!” a man shouted as we pulled up in the car to visit the homeless.

“You ain’t nothing!” he taunted. The recipient of this abuse, a young man, seemed to be terrified. “Hit him, Mike,” one of the bystanders yelled. Mike threw a few punches but missed as the young man dodged and backed off.

“Aw, man, you don’t stand still so I can fight,” snarled Mike as he walked off.

At that point the voice of Sergeant Pratts roared through the lot. “Whoever wants to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, come; all are welcome.”

Sergeant Pratts preached about the prodigal son. Mike, just a few yards away, was still trying to let out his frustrations on somebody.

I called to two young friends to back me up as I approached Mike. “What’s up?” I said to him.

“Don’t you try to preach Jesus to me. That stuff don’t mean nothing,” growled Mike.

Squatting down beside him, I asked, “Why did you stop fighting with the other guy, Mike? Was it

because you really didn’t want to get hurt, or because you didn’t want to hurt him?”

“I wanted to get hurt!” replied Mike. “You don’t know what it is like living on the street every day. I don’t want to do drugs, steal, cheat, or rely on anybody for food or shelter. I want to do for myself.

“I had a job,” he continued, “but I was fired because my boss said I wasn’t making the hamburgers straight. What a cheap excuse! He found out I did some time, and I didn’t tell him that when I was hired.”

I then started to tell Mike the story of my own life of stealing. He listened as if he could relate to what I was saying. “The man from whom I stole changed my way of thinking,” I told him. “The man told me a short story, and as I applied it to my life, I sought out the Lord Jesus Christ for help. Over a period of time He changed my thinking and, most of all, my heart.”

I advised Mike that next time he applied for a job to be honest and admit up front that he was an ex-convict, but that if given a chance, he would be an honest, hard worker. “You have to lay all the cards out on the table so people know what’s up.”

He said he would try. I asked Mike whether I could pray, and he joined me in prayer.

I was happy to see his stony heart melt. I gave him a card that said, “God Bless You.” He took it, laughed, and flicked it aside.

by Richard Guerrero

Richard Guerrero is the lay youth pastor of the Forest City Spanish SDA Church, Orlando, Florida.

Monday, June 10

A New Heart and a New Spirit

LOGOS

Ezek. 36:26, 27

In this chapter Ezekiel continues to address his companions in exile. His attention is still directed to the future. God is going to perform a new work among His chosen people. The essence of Ezekiel's theology springs from these verses. Not only does he indicate what God is going to do but also the reasons for His future actions.

The passage begins with Ezekiel recalling the past. By abusing the privileges God had given, abusing the land and rejecting divine guidance, God's people had experienced divine judgment.

To be sure, the Israelites deserved their heavenly Father's punishment. However, as all too often happens, when God disciplines He is frequently misunderstood. In this case negative consequences ensued: the citizens of other nations observed only that the Israelites had been given a land but had failed to keep it.

Thus, the whole point of election had missed the mark; the people, who had been called to form a special nation in the world of human nations, had failed. More important, they had lost the honor of being a light to all mankind. They should have demonstrated to the whole world the holiness, the true character, of God. Instead, the world received the distorted picture of God as an inadequate national deity.

What kind of picture do people receive about the God I serve? Would they be attracted to Him?

God Acts

"Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name'" (Ezek. 36:22, NIV).

Israel's God is going to act again. His purpose in choosing His people is to be fulfilled. His further actions must demonstrate His holiness to all mankind. Yes, God will act again, not for Israel's sake—they had demonstrated time and again their unworthiness—but for the "sake of His holy name."

This will involve the radical transformation of His people. In the past they had been unclean, so He will sprinkle fresh water on them and make them clean (see verse 25). In the past they had been hardhearted, unwilling to discern truth and to maintain the faith, so He will give them a new heart. We are talking radical surgery here! The old spirit of evil and disobedience would be replaced by a new spirit, more pliable to the will of God. Old stony hearts, old stubborn spirits, would be replaced with God's new living hearts and life-giving spirit.

The focus in this portion of Ezekiel's prophecy is right where it should be: upon the initiative of God, rather than the human re-

by Bill Crofton, Jr.

Bill Crofton, Jr., is an associate director for youth and young adults in the Department of Church Ministries for the Florida Conference.

sponse of the people. God's character is vindicated. Does that ring a bell? It is the central issue of the great controversy. Imagine a people whose hearts and spirits are continually seeking the will of their Creator. What a place to live! Only then would the land be restored and become like the garden of Eden (see verse 35). Only then would the chosen people form such a kingdom that all the nations of the world would perceive the holy hand of God at work in their midst. To His honor and glory, isn't that what it's all about?

Radical Reappraisal of Israel's Covenant With God

The covenant at Mount Sinai had established Israel as a nation. You might say the covenant was, in effect, Israel's constitution, its Magna Carta. Remember, the nation was to have been a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6), demonstrating to all the world's peoples the holiness and character of the one true God. But Israel had failed in its calling. Therefore, God revealed to Ezekiel a new kind of covenant. The kingdom of God would no longer be in the form of a nation state. The state of chosen people had been singularly unsuccessful in its task of revealing God's righteousness to the world. The new covenant (which had been God's intent from the beginning) would involve the

radical, inner transformation of human beings. Those who choose to accept a new heart and a new spirit would reveal God's true nature to the world.

Ezekiel's Prophecy: Contemporary Implications

To be a Christian is to receive from God a new heart and a new spirit; it is to receive that radical spiritual surgery which will enable us to live our lives fully to the glory of God. And for the new covenant, which is the Christian faith, this transformation of heart and spirit is the prerequisite of membership. As the transformation of heart and spirit was preceded by the symbolic sprinkling of fresh water, so in Christianity the water of baptism symbolizes the transformation of heart and spirit.

But for us, as for Israel, one of the hardest lessons to learn is that all this work for God is not for our sake alone, but for the sake of His name. Through Israel and through the church, God works to reveal His nature and character to all mankind. Ezekiel had a message of hope. It was not rooted in a liberal and optimistic view of mankind's potential for self-improvement; it was based, rather, in his vision of God and of the continuing mercy and forgiveness of that God. Now that's hope!

What kinds of harm does lip-service Christianity do?

Tuesday, June 11

A New Heart

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 51:10

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10, NIV).

When we read chapter 36 of Ezekiel, we see the power and truth of the Word of God.

"The truths of God's word are not mere sentiments, but utterances of the Most High. . . .

"The words, 'A new heart also will I give you' (Ezek. 36:26), mean, 'A new mind will I give you. This change of heart is always attended by a clear conception of Christian duty, an understanding of truth. The clearness of our view of truth will be proportionate to our understanding of the word of God.'"¹

"The truth of God is to sanctify the soul. . . . The sanctifying power of truth is to abide in the soul and be carried with us to our business, there to apply its continual tests to every transaction of life, especially to our dealings with our fellowmen. It is to abide in our households, having a subduing power upon the life and character of all its inmates."²

When Christ pleaded with the children of Israel just as Ezekiel had done centuries before, He had

the same message, but unfortunately the people still had the same stony hearts, and they had so hardened in unbelief that they did not discern in His character the likeness of God. They would not see that His mission was in fulfillment of the scriptures (see *The Desire of Ages*, p. 407).

One must ask, How can I maintain this new heart? What assurance do I have that it, rather than the stony heart, will control my life?

"Henceforth through the Spirit, Christ was to abide continually in the hearts of the children. Their union with Him was closer than when He was personally with them. The light, and love, and power of the indwelling Christ shone out through them, so that men, beholding, 'marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.'"³

REACT

Can you recall evidence that the promise of "a new heart and a new spirit" was fulfilled in your own life?

1. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 452.

2. *My Life Today*, p. 261.

3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 75.

by Renee Roberts and Karen Knudsen

Renee Roberts is an English education major at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. Karen Knudsen is an elementary-school teacher in Orlando, Florida.

Wednesday, June 12

Hearts of Stone

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ezek. 36:26

Restoration Within

God's promise to give us a new heart and spirit is just one of a series of steps that represents the final restoration of Israel to her homeland.

The pattern of this restoration is described in verses 22-32, which include (1) the return, (2) cleansing from sin, (3) enablement of the Spirit, and (4) prosperity.¹ In verses 22-24 God says He will vindicate His name because it had been profaned by His people in other lands. He would do this by bringing them back to the land of Canaan, a land promised their forefathers in the Abrahamic covenant (see 11:17).

Next comes the cleansing by the sprinkling of water (see verse 25). "The mention of clean water to be sprinkled on the people as the means of purification can only be understood symbolically; it does not refer to any mere external rite, or to any specific ordinance of the old covenant. . . . It is rather to be viewed in reference to the purifications by water collectively, which were all, in one respect or another, symbolical of the removal of impurity and the establishment of the worshiper in a sound and acceptable condition."²

The significance of the sprin-

gling of water to cleanse is effective only if true repentance and sorrow for sin take place. And the way this inward change is accomplished is beautifully written in verse 26.

"And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (NASB).

Stones are cold, hard, and *dead*. This is the condition before conversion takes place. "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you."

Only by this inner transformation can the restoration process be fully employed. David's prayer for God to "renew a steadfast spirit within me" should be our frequent pleading too.

And since the choice of restoration has been made, the promise of prosperity is given in verses 29 and 30 because the Israelites have returned to the land flowing with milk and honey. As you can see, this four-step process is vital for us to follow, as well. May we also say:

I come in faith to Thee,
For all my sins atone.
A new heart give to me
For this, my heart of stone.³

1. Frank E. Gaebeline, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), vol. 6, p. 921.

2. George Barlow, *The Preacher's Complete Homiletic Commentary* (Funk & Wagnall Co.), vol. 18, p. 388.

3. H. M. S. Richards, *The Promises of God* (Takoma Park, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1956), p. 129.

by Melvin Liwag

Melvin Liwag is a senior electrical-engineering missionary/student at the University of Central Florida.

Thursday, June 13

Avoiding Cosmic Embarrassment?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ezek. 36:32

The topic of reform and restoration fills many Christians with fear and self-doubt. We are afraid that some areas of our lives are either too difficult to change or will require more sacrifice than we are willing to give.

God said He will give us a new heart, that He will remove our uncleanness. And He said He isn't going to do this for our sakes. He is going to do it for His own sake.

The first time I heard this I looked at it in much the same way I viewed my parents' concern that my misbehavior might embarrass them in our neighborhood. But now I have a son of my own, and I see a deeper meaning. God's work in our lives isn't to save Him some kind of cosmic embarrassment. It is the natural outgrowth of the kind of person He is. We are His children, and it is His greatest desire to help us become the happiest, most fulfilled people we can be.

We are created in God's image, which means it is logical and natural for us to be like Him. In fact all of God's laws can be summed up in one: Be like God. The first step in reforming our lives is to recognize that being Christ-like is

the norm; being selfish is the distortion.

Next, we must understand that God is on our side and is looking for every possible way to save us; He is not looking for one unconfessed sin to keep us out of heaven.

Third, we need to recognize that, at the point of justification, we are starting with a clean slate. We do not need to be discouraged by past failings. God has promised us a new garden to dress and to keep, not a ruined one to weed and clean up. And we have the privilege of starting over with that perfect garden every day or even several times a day.

Finally, we must see that this whole business of reform is God's work, not ours. Not that we don't have a part to play. We need to invite Him to cleanse us and recreate us. Then we must trust Him enough to let Him go to work. Ezekiel saw a bright future for Israel and for us. But we must let God change us from the inside out to achieve it.

REACT

Is it easier to ask help of a friend who will help you with no strings attached, or one who finds it necessary to give you some "helpful advice" before lending a hand?

by Kent White

Kent White is the owner of a computer-software company in Orlando, Florida.

The Potential of a New Heart

OPINION

Key Text: Mark 10:27

For years I had been involved with various drugs, mired in continual sin without repentance, and far away from the sheltering grace of my Saviour. My whole life apart from Christ was a continuous search for a bigger thrill and a better high. I had little care for anything or anyone else. My actions were selfish, and my heart reflected it. In my eyes my potential was realized in bringing home a paycheck to feed my habits.

But, looking back on those years of struggle in my life, I can now see where Jesus had always held His hand out for me to grasp. And on September 16, 1988, I wept shamelessly on my knees as my burdens were lifted. My life and the lives of God's children whom I've come to know have changed so dramatically that I can now claim firsthand experience in the receiving of a new heart.

I am surrounded by those who were once society's outcasts, who are now living, loving examples of what the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can do for the human race. This same race that has seen Adolf Hitler, the atomic bomb, and AIDS, now sees very little hope in this world.

But the experience of Christ shatters all hopelessness. And

with this experience Christ has given us unlimited potential to bring glory to our Father.

When I was young I tried and failed to meet my Christian potential and to earn myself a new heart. I failed because I was trying in my own strength to attain righteousness by following the laws of God and various sublaws of the church and school. And while these things are a great pattern for the Christian life, they don't bring salvation.

We can't reach for our potential while we are dependent on the law for salvation, as the Pharisees were. Christ declared through Paul that "a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). This is so critical because "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (verse 23).

No man can mix his unrighteousness with Christ's righteousness and come up righteous; it is by Christ's grace alone that we are saved. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

This knowledge of our present, not future, salvation through the substitution of Christ's blood for our sins is central to the gospel. It is paramount to the confidence of eternal life that we must have to serve the Master fully and to realize our great potential.

by Peter Knudsen

Peter Knudsen is an equipment mechanic at South Seminole Community Hospital, Longwood, Florida.

Challenges



“I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Ezek. 37:26, RSV).

Sunday, June 16

Could It Happen Today?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezek. 37

The preacher had stopped speaking in midsentence. All eyes focused on the back of the sanctuary, riveting on an elderly gentleman slowly proceeding down the center aisle.

I did not know Tommy very well. I had heard the teachers talk about his problems. He began showing signs of maladjustment when his dad died several years before. But it was still hard to believe that he had deliberately disobeyed his mother's instructions. There was no way anyone could have foreseen the consequences of such disobedience—his freak death.

The elderly man continued down the aisle. No one dared to stand in his way. Something was strangely different about him, something that demanded our respect and awe.

He stood next to the casket. Raising his hands to the sky, he began to speak in a low, steady voice. I could not quite understand what he was saying, but I thought I caught the words "Will they learn?" I had never heard anyone speak with such earnestness.

The audience was spellbound. Nobody moved. But what he did next caused all to be taken aback. He stooped down and gently lifted the boy. And then, slowly turning to the audience, he held the little

boy in his outstretched arms.

His eyes slowly scanned the audience. Surely something spectacular was about to happen. I could not keep from shaking with excitement.

Taking several steps forward, he spoke: "Do you believe this child can be raised to life?" There was an uneasy silence!

Again the question, but this time in a louder, more commanding voice: "Do you believe this child can be raised to life?"

Slowly the mother rose. Tears flowed freely down her face as she answered quietly, "Only God could give me back my child."

He answered, "It is as you say."

Then, glancing back at the audience, and with a voice of unquestionable authority, he continued: "So that you may know that the same power that raises this little boy may also raise you. . . . In the name of Jesus . . . Tommy, arise!"

Have you ever tried to do what was right and failed? Have you ever felt "dead" in the condition you are in? Or maybe you have looked at the church and felt its fatal condition. The message of Ezekiel 37 is good news for us today. What do you think? Did the little boy come back to life? You finish the story. "O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them. . . . I will put my Spirit in you and you will live" (Ezek. 37:12-14, NIV).

by Greg Carter and Diana Perez

Greg Carter and Diana Perez are senior secondary-education majors at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Monday, June 17

Hope in Despair

LOGOS

Ezek. 37

Life From Death (read Ezek. 37:1-14)

"I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land" (verse 14, NIV).

Ezekiel saw the vision of the dry bones soon after Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C.¹ The bones of the dead from that disaster probably lay unburied long enough to become bleached just as Ezekiel saw them. In the vision they were a figure of the despairing exiles. Their national existence was dead; their temple was burned; they had no hope for restoration.

When the Lord asked Ezekiel whether these bones could live (see verse 3), his cautious response reflected the hopelessness of the people: "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know" (NIV). If there was to be a revival, it would have to be the work of God.

But God resurrects the dead bones.² Twice He commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones (see verses 4 and 9). After Ezekiel's first preaching, the bones come together without breath, but with his second the Spirit blows into them, and they live.³ With God all things are possible, even the reviving of a dead people and making them "a vast army" (verse 10). They are once again ready for service.⁴

Although the resurrection is God's work, Ezekiel also has a

part to play. He proclaims "the word of the Lord" (verse 4, NIV), and his preaching is God's channel of creative power.

Union From Division (read Ezek. 37:15-28)

"I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God" (verse 23, NIV).

In this second vision the Lord commands Ezekiel to take two sticks of wood, writing the name of Judah on one and Ephraim on the other. Joining them in his hand before the people, he explains that the Lord intends thus to gather the scattered children of Israel and Judah and reunite them in their own land. There will be one king over them, and they will never be two nations again (see verse 22). Their king will be David, who "will be their prince forever" (verse 25, NIV).

This political restoration, however, is based on spiritual renewal. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols; the Lord will save them from their backsliding. He will cleanse them, and they will follow His laws (see verses 23, 24).

What this all points to is reestablishing God's covenant with the people. The "covenant of peace," "an everlasting covenant," is specifically referred to in verse 26, but covenant language is found throughout the vision:

Verse 21 promises, "I will gather them from all around and

by Ralph E. Neall

Ralph E. Neall is professor of theology at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

bring them back into their own land" (NIV). This is a reversal of the covenant curse that scattered them. Verses 23 and 27 predict, "They will be my people, and I will be their God," which is the ultimate covenant blessing. Verse 24 says, "They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees" (NIV), which is the covenant requirement. The Lord has already promised in Ezekiel 36:25-27, "I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart. . . . And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (NIV).

Finally, the Lord pledges to put His "sanctuary among them forever" (37:26, NIV).⁵ This means that His promises are eternal. He will "make Israel holy" (verse 28, NIV) and dwell among them perpetually.

Understanding After Mystery

"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29, NIV).

Ezekiel 37 raises a serious question. When was it fulfilled? Very few from the northern kingdom returned from exile. A Davidic king did not become their prince forever. And, finally, the returnees never experienced a great spiritual revival. Worst of all, when their true King appeared, they crucified Him.

The cross of Christ, however, is the answer to the question. The prophecies show what God intended for His people, but His original plans could not be fulfilled

when they rejected Him. We read God's plans now through Jesus. The New Testament applies them to spiritual Israel, the church (see Matt. 21:43; Gal. 3:29; and 1 Peter 2:9, 10). Since the church is a universal people, while literal Israel was local, the apostles saw many of the prophecies occurring through their ministry. The promise "They will be my people, and I will be their God," partly fulfilled among God's people of the New Testament era, will finally be fulfilled in the earth made new.

Think of the promises mentioned in Ezekiel 37: the dead are raised; I will put My Spirit in you; scattered peoples become united; I will save you from backsliding and cleanse you; you shall be My people, and I will be your God; and I will make an everlasting covenant of peace with you. Which of them apply to you, and which apply to the church?

If these are God's plans for us (and they are), what is God's part and what is our part in their fulfillment?

What are some of the challenges that tend to prevent our attaining these ideals? What help is available?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 538, 572.

2. This was similar to the two-stage creation of Adam in Genesis 2:7, when the Lord first formed his body and then breathed into him the breath of life.

3. There is a play on the Hebrew word *ruach*, which is translated as "breath," "wind," and "Spirit" in verses 5-10.

4. This is not to deny that Ezekiel may have the final resurrection in view, but his immediate application is to his own people in exile. See Ezekiel 37:11-14.

5. This promise obviously looks forward to the temple, whose plans are laid out in Ezekiel 40-48.

Tuesday, June 18

Witness or Weakness?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ezek. 37:26-28

A pile of bleached bones, a couple of dead sticks—just what is God trying to tell Ezekiel anyway? The story we read in Ezekiel 37 may seem odd at first, but it contains a vital message. God's people had experienced death, destruction, and ruin, but Ezekiel was given a message of hope and of renewal. From this ruin God would raise fresh life in His people.

But wait! The hope grows stronger. Not only did God plan to revive the fallen nation of Israel, He intended to bring the scattered and divided people back into a unified whole. It was important to God to unify His people, and He desires that we as a church experience the same unity today. Ellen White expresses it this way: "O that all might repent and do their first works. When the churches do this, they will love God supremely and their neighbors as themselves. Ephraim will not envy Judah, and Judah will not vex Ephraim. Divisions will then be healed, the harsh sounds of strife will no more be heard in the borders of Israel."¹

In Ezekiel's day Israel was to be God's witness to the surrounding nations. Without an inner unity, they would actually discredit the name of God. The same is true of our church. "We are to

demonstrate to the world that men of every nationality are one in Christ Jesus. Then let us remove every barrier and come into unity in the service of the Master."²

The challenge we as Christians face, then, is the removal of these barriers. Only a divine miracle can fuse our diversity. "It may seem to some that the contrast between their gifts and the gifts of a fellow laborer is too great to allow them to unite in harmonious effort; but when they remember that there are varied minds to be reached . . . they will hopefully endeavor to labor together in unity. Their talents, however diverse, may all be under the control of the same Spirit. In every word and act, kindness and love will be revealed; and as each worker fills his appointed place faithfully, the prayer of Christ for the unity of His followers will be answered, and the world will know that these are His disciples."³

REACT

1. If the Holy Spirit can bring our souls into unity, why is it that we still see disharmony in our church?

2. How can I, as a member of God's church, make sure that I am a witness and not a weakness for Him?

1. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 385.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 196.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

by Beth Brown

Beth Brown is an elementary-education major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

To Choose or Not to Choose

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ezek. 37:4, 5

One way of trying to discover how Ezekiel 37 can benefit us is to study the subject of bones.

Bones first appear in Ezekiel 6:5. God told Ezekiel that He would place the Israelites' dead bodies in front of their idols and scatter their bones around the altars they worshiped. God's message is that He would destroy the Israelites, their cities, and their idols.

Ezekiel is among the exiles in Babylon when he writes his book. He was probably taken captive the second time Israel was invaded by Nebuchadnezzar. The prophecy seems to show the people that Israel would be totally destroyed, because they continually worshiped other gods.

The next time bones are found in Ezekiel is in chapter 24. God told Ezekiel to boil bones in a cooking pot until they were charred. Israel is then condemned because they would not let God cleanse them from impurity.

So far the attitude in Ezekiel has been warnings sent to Israel about what they are doing wrong. They are condemned for not worshipping God.

The emphasis changes starting with chapters 36 and 37, when God promises to restore Jerusalem to its former glory. An illustration from American history can illustrate what is happening in Ezekiel.

When the pioneers started west, they had a trail boss who led them and who would bring them all the way to their destination. They also had a scout who showed them the best way to go. Sometimes people in the wagon train thought they knew a better way, so they left the wagon train and went their own way. These people died, leaving their bones among their possessions. This seems to be the case with the Israelites. Nothing was left of them. They had chosen their own path, and they could not be helped, could they? God shows us that they *could* be helped.

Ezekiel is now shown a valley of bones. These are the Israelites. These are people who have totally rebelled against God. After Ezekiel prophesies, the bones come together—Israel becomes a complete nation. These bones are now completely human except they are not alive. Ezekiel has to prophesy again before that happens.

REACT

1. Both the prophecies about the destruction of Israel and the restoration of Israel are for the glory of God. What does this show you about the kind of God we serve?

2. What meaning can we place on Ezekiel's prophesying twice before the bones came alive? Why two prophecies instead of one?

3. What can we learn from Ezekiel 37 that can help us in our daily lives?

by Virgil Minden, Jr.

Virgil Minden, Jr., is a theology/business-administration major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Thursday, June 20

How Average People Can Witness Too

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ezek. 2:1-8

They say witnessing for God is easy—all you have to do is to tell people about your own experience with the Lord. That may work fine for many people. But let's face it! For a lot of people witnessing can be tough. What if you feel that your own experience has not been what it should have been? What if the people to whom you are trying to witness do not want to listen?

Ezekiel was an effective witness for God; but even he stepped on a few toes. We can learn three powerful techniques from studying Ezekiel that will help us to be more effective witnesses for God.

1. *When God impresses you to say something, say it.* God spoke to Ezekiel: "Son of man, stand up on your feet" (Ezek. 2:1, NIV). There was no hesitation there! Ezekiel stood right up and was ready to receive anything that the Lord wanted to tell him. Perhaps God does not come to you in a vision and tell you exactly what to say, but He does give impressions. When you are impressed to say something in His behalf, you must take the op-

portunity.

2. *Be sure to accentuate the positive.* Ezekiel's words were words of mourning and lamentation, but they were also words of hope for the future. It is important when witnessing to avoid being condescending. People who have been doing wrong need to know that they have forgiveness and an opportunity to make things right with God. They need to have hope.

3. *Speak your message, leaving the results with God.* When God gave Ezekiel instructions as to what he should say, He really laid it on the line for him: "And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them" (verse 5, NIV). When we witness to others, we always run the risk of their ignoring our advice. But if we believe in God's message, then we must believe in His power to drive it into the hearts of people who hear it.

REACT

In the old times God told His servants exactly what to say to the people to whom He wanted them to witness. Does He still do that today?

by Michael Jaquez

Michael Jaquez is a junior communications major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Now Showing: *Ezekiel 37*

OPINION

Key Text: Mic. 4:1-5, NIV

If Ezekiel 37 were a movie, would Adventists rent the video? Images of a "vast army" of lifeless corpses force one to reconsider the real value of such principle-laden texts as Philippians 4:8. Such a film would not meet current standards of Adventist-family viewing, leading one to question why God would use such symbolism.

He used it for the same reason that tasteless people tell rude stories at the dinner table, stories that make us cry out, "Not while I'm eating!" That kind of story grabs even our Laodicean attention and forces us to listen to the message behind the story.

The first and foremost message of Ezekiel 37 is that we *are* His people. Although we are dry and rattle about and often feel hopeless, God is waiting to raise us to a new life. By no means are all of us dead, or all of us fully alive. Many of us are in that constant struggle to attain life. Others fight the easier struggle of remaining dead. Attention to often irrelevant issues assures them that they will continue in that

state. Their bones are rattled by a different percussionist.

The life that is promised does not come all at once. The skeletons in the valley came together piece by piece and tendon by tendon, until they were covered with fresh new skin. Then He sent the wind, and the valley came to life.

Which, after all, is truly the message of Ezekiel 37. Death is present until the word of God comes and gives life. The life that God gives is invigoratingly expressed through us. Every day we are given opportunities to be of service to others and to share the life that has been given to us.

The high points of the chapter are the "coming home" portions (see verses 12-14, 21-28). These are happy endings to the gruesome beginning, and they are perfectly appropriate to Adventist tastes. Acceptable to everyone's taste, in fact, because all people in all times have been looking for home. Home is where we all belong.

REACT

What are specific ways that you are sharing God's life with others?

by Kelly V. Schmitt

Kelly V. Schmitt is a history and religion major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Results and the Life



“And he said to me, ‘Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel for ever’ ” (Ezek. 43:7, RSV).

What's Going on Here!

INTRODUCTION

Scriptures: Ezek. 38-48

A whole generation of young people in the West grew up expecting nuclear annihilation—or at the very least Soviet tanks spreading over Europe like devouring locusts. The unthinkable battle seemed imminent.

Now we have *glasnost*. And the threat seems to have vanished with the Berlin Wall, dissipated by an invasion of window-shoppers from the East.

We also grew up expecting the fledgling post-World War II state of Israel and its Arab neighbors to obliterate each other in a war to end all wars.

A 1967 war did reshape boundaries, and an *intifada* (Arab-Israeli conflict) continues. But today the PLO appears ready to recognize a powerful Israel, and realpolitik is emerging. Maybe whispered Zionist plans to rebuild the temple on the Dome of the Rock and to reinstitute the sacrificial system hint of real conflict to come—but who's listening right now?

We are in the midst of a surreal "peace." Almost everyone on planet Earth knows that we are in the final moments of a great cosmic plan. But so many changes, so quickly, have un-

nerved even the usual prophets.

Ezekiel was once used to bolster some fanciful views of world history. Chapters 38 and 39 speak of Gog and Magog—unidentified hordes of evil men intent on destroying God's people. Biblical expositors guided more by present world views than textual evidence identified Russia as Gog—they knew an anti-God confederacy when they saw one. Books like *The Late Great Planet Earth* hailed the secular state of Israel as fulfilling the promised return of God's people. Yet the authors ignored the clear word of God in the New Testament and the obvious fact that this new nation fulfilled no criteria of a repentant covenant people.

It is vital that we be thoroughly familiar with all of God's Word. Adventists have the special privilege of seeing the overview of God's purposes. We know just how God's promises of restitution will be accomplished. We see in the open book of Revelation the final destruction of Gog and Magog and all that is satanic. We see a New Jerusalem returning with Christ and the redeemed after the 1,000 years. And we see in today's incredible events the hand of a God determined to make short work of it in righteousness (see Rom. 9:28).

by Lincoln E. Steed

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Monday, June 24

God Never Forsakes His People

LOGOS

Ezek. 38-48

Host of Wickedness Destroyed by the Lord (read Ezek. 38-39:24)

"And my holy name I will make known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let my holy name be profaned any more; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel" (39:7, RSV).

Under the symbol of Gog and Magog, Ezekiel is told of a great confederacy of evil that will seek to destroy the remnant of God's people who have returned to Jerusalem.

Commentators have long sought to identify these kings and kingdoms—Goths, Cretans, Scythians, and Russians have been identified. Clearly the angel meant to impress on Ezekiel that every force opposed to God's people would eventually unite to destroy them.

Ezekiel understood the description as relating to a literal return of Israel to the land of promise. And so it could have been if God's covenant nation had returned in faith. The prophecy was conditional, but it meets its definite fulfillment on the plains in front of the New Jerusalem come down from heaven after the millennium. Satan and his wicked angels unite with the unrepentant to attack the city. Fire from God utterly destroys them. This is the actual fulfillment of Ezekiel

38 and 39, so full of references to "the latter years," the "latter days," and "after many days."

Many negative forces in this world would keep me from serving God. What evidence exists in my life that God is overcoming them?

The Faithful of All Ages Rewarded (read Ezek. 39:25-29)

God here repeats the constant theme of the Bible that He will reward and restore His people. Although the promise of restoration to Israel as a nation was conditional on national obedience, the promise to individuals is all-encompassing and conditional only on the individual's response.

In Romans 11 Paul shows that indeed all of Israel will be saved, since true Israel is composed of God's elect from Jew and Gentile. Today God is gathering His people together to shield them from wicked forces.

A New Temple Possible (read Ezek. 40-42)

"Set your mind upon all that I shall show you . . . ; declare all that you see to the house of Israel" (40:4, RSV).

Beginning in chapter 40 an angelic messenger outlines to Ezekiel a master plan for a new temple. It is no accident that the angel Ezekiel saw is described in much the same terms as John's guide in Revelation. Ezekiel describes the temple in almost mathematical detail. John describes the New Jerusalem in

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similar fashion. Both blueprints underscore the concrete nature of God's promises, while clearly showing by context that the details themselves are more symbolic than architectural.

Of course, the Jews did rebuild the temple, but not on the grand scale Ezekiel outlined. Ezra records that those who remembered Solomon's temple "wept with a loud voice" (3:12, RSV) when they saw the foundation of the new temple. Yet in Haggai we read that "the latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of Hosts" (2:9, RSV). That splendor can be understood only in light of Christ Himself, revealed during His earthly ministry and then reigning in glory with the redeemed.

Because God seems particular in the temple directions, it is a fair assumption that He is particular about how I respond to Him. In what ways am I particular?

A Glorious Presence (read Ezek. 44-48)

"The Spirit lifted me up, and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple" (43:5, RSV).

God's presence was more important than the temple itself. It shows that God's favor rested on His people. But far beyond this image is the reality of Revelation—God will fill the New Jerusalem with His glory. There will be no need for a temple.

Ezekiel heard the voice of God Himself announce that He intended to dwell in the midst of His people forever (see Ezek. 43:7). This clearly prefigures the promise of Revelation. Then He says something most significant: "Describe to the house of Israel the temple and its appearance and plan, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities" (43:10, RSV). This, then, was the

real purpose of the entire outline—to show how careful was God's plan to eradicate evil. God always intended the open-in-heart to comprehend its true purpose. The closed-minded saw only a round of ceremonies and felt the fear of a God behind the veil.

The priests in this new temple, outlined to Ezekiel, were not mere functionaries to carry on the rounds of service. The angel directed that "they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the common, and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean" (44:23, RSV).

Clearly the Lord intended, as always, to have justice and holiness prevail. God could dwell only among a people willing to let Him dwell in their minds. A careful reading of the sweep of Old Testament pronouncements shows that heart religion is no New Testament invention. In Ezekiel God orders that only those circumcised in heart and flesh come into His temple (see 44:7).

In chapter 47 the prophet is shown streams of water issuing from beneath the temple. To the Eastern mind water was life itself. This symbol would naturally accompany a temple where God was worshiped with true heart devotion. It is synonymous with the river of life issuing from the throne in Revelation 22. There could be no more powerful, more positive image of the life-giving purity that results from reconciliation with God.

Ezekiel ends his vision where Revelation ends. The name of the city, he says, is "the Lord is there" (48:35, RSV). Yes, the Lord will dwell forever with His people, the redeemed of all ages, for all time. What a wonderful promise!

How do I know God's Spirit dwells in my heart and works in my life?

Tuesday, June 25

Destruction and Healing

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ezek. 47:1, 9

All those "wheels within wheels" and the apocalyptic talk of the unidentified Gog and Magog! What are we to make of Ezekiel's often-difficult book? Prayerful study of this message in light of God's overall presentation in His Word will help unlock its treasures.

Ellen White says that "the book of Ezekiel is deeply instructive." Her rationale: "The Bible is designed of God to be the book by which the understanding may be disciplined, the soul guided and directed."¹

In the language used by Ezekiel to describe the battle between God's covenant people and the hordes of wickedness, Ellen White describes the scene on the earth after the millennium.

"Satan succeeds in deceiving them, and all immediately begin to prepare themselves for battle. . . . Then with Satan at their head, the multitude move on. . . . Jesus closes the gates of the city, and this vast army surround it, and place themselves in battle array, expecting a fierce conflict. . . . But fire from God out of heaven is rained upon them, and the great men, and mighty men, the noble, the poor and miserable, are all consumed together."²

The great controversy is ended. Evil is destroyed, God reigns triumphant in the "new" Jerusalem, among His loyal followers—the

true fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision.

Ezekiel then saw a stream of water issuing from the restored city (see chapter 47). John in Revelation 22:1, 2 explains this stream as issuing from beneath the throne of God in the New Jerusalem. It is a wonderful symbol of life and regeneration.

"Our work has been presented to me as, in its beginning, a small, very small, rivulet," wrote Ellen White, applying the same symbol to the advent message. "Our work was presented to me as extending to the east and to the west, to the islands of the sea, and to all parts of the world."³

Gog and Magog represent the unrepentant forces of evil, sure to fail as they rise against God's kingdom. The upside of Ezekiel's symbology is the wonderful possibility of renewal, of healing.

"Wonderful is the work which the Lord designs to accomplish through His church, that His name may be glorified. A picture of this work is given in Ezekiel's vision of the river of healing."⁴

REACT

1. How can we as God's people bring healing to a rebellious planet?

2. Why would Satan and the wicked want to destroy the New Jerusalem?

1. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 395.

2. *Early Writings*, pp. 293, 294.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 7, pp. 171, 172.

4. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 13.

by Lincoln E. Steed

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A City Where God Dwells

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Ezek. 48:35; Rev. 21:23

"The great triumphant theme of Ezekiel is struck in the last two words of the prophecy: *Yahweh Shamah* . . . 'Yahweh is there.' This shall be the name of the New Jerusalem in the midst of a restored land. It is the most important message Ezekiel had for his people—namely, that any society must be sure that 'the Lord is there,' since the difference between life and death, hope and despair, was the presence of God. . . . So the great prophet gave to posterity a lasting insight into the ways of God with the spiritual life of man."¹

Of course, to see Ezekiel's vision of the last battle with evil forces, the rebuilt temple, and a triumphant people as merely an allegory of spiritual victory is shortsighted. Ezekiel understood the visions as literal. In light of God's intention to work directly and historically through the nation-state of Israel, we too should recognize their literal intention.

But God's people tested the intention of this prophecy beyond its historical capacity. They rejected the Messiah, the One who intended to dwell as King among His blood-covenant people. "O Jerusalem. . . !" He lamented. "Your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:37, 38).

The literal fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision is now seen only

in light of God's universal purposes—promised to all, Jew and Gentile, as Paul so often emphasized. "We do no injustice to the historic import of Ezekiel's mission when we say that the dwelling of Jehovah in the midst of His people is an emblem of reconciliation between God and man, and that his elaborate system of ritual observances points towards the sanctification of human life in all its relations through spiritual communion with the Father revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ."²

The New Testament looks to Ezekiel for themes that are played out on the grander scale of God's final dealings with sin and His reconciliation with humanity. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* notes that "the Gospel of John and the Revelation are most directly akin to the prophet. . . . Jesus was well acquainted with the book of Ezekiel, from which he drew expressions to frame the new picture of Christian faith."³

The New Testament looks to Ezekiel to fully draw the reality of the final battle with Satan. But most glorious of all, it applies the fulfillment of "Yahweh is there" to the New Jerusalem of John's revelation.

1. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), vol. 2, p. 210.

2. W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor's Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1947), vol. 4, p. 329.

3. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 212.

by Lincoln E. Steed

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Thursday, June 27

No Casual Relationship

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ezek. 39:26

God's Word is of little value to us unless we can apply it to our own lives. Chapters 38 to 48 of Ezekiel at first reading have struck some readers as so apocalyptic, so obscure in the many seemingly irrelevant details, that they have failed to look for any application.

Many times Ellen White appealed to God's people to pay attention to the great law of cause and effect. So many of the punishments endured by God's Old Testament people were simply the natural result of their actions. And so many of their victories too were a result of what they did right.

The downside of the cause-and-effect phenomenon is seen early in these last chapters of Ezekiel. Gog and his hordes refused to acknowledge God as sovereign. They represent all who harden their hearts against the call of God's Spirit. Some disobey arrogantly. Others offend in some small way, not intending to challenge God outright, but unwilling to obey. Eventually the natural consequences of rebellion mature into absolute alienation from good. God destroys these people, not just to remove evil, but to protect His faithful people.

Safe in the city are those who have turned to the Lord for shel-

ter. In Ezekiel 39:23 God refers to the fact that He has had to rebuke His people in the past for unfaithfulness. But now they have returned, and He welcomes them into His favor.

The drawn-out descriptions of the temple can only underscore how careful God's people must be in obeying His instructions and how particular our God is in everything. His love is no casual relationship. God intends to order the lives of His people in harmony for eternity.

It is no accident that the carefully contrived temple described by Ezekiel, supported by a faithful priesthood, is filled with the glory of the Lord. Historically this was the case. Solomon's articulate prayer brought the Shekinah down to its appropriately fashioned home. Today too God's Spirit will dwell within every heart-temple ordered after His will.

REACT

1. God sent this awe-inspiring message of restoration to His people in exile. What does that tell me of His concern for my daily battles, victories, and even failures?

2. Why would God destroy anyone? What if He were to allow Gog and Magog to storm the walls of Jerusalem?

3. Can God dwell in any temple? Why do I want His Spirit within me?

by Lincoln E. Steed

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New Laws, New Ways

OPINION

Key Text: Ezek. 43:6-12

We humans tend to think simplistically. We often see the universe bounded by our close horizons. We define everything by our local frames of reference.

The Jews of the Old Testament tended to see the eternal "I Am" as even smaller than a regional God—He was theirs alone. They were so wrong. Even within the bounds of a theocracy God intended to gather all who believed into the nation of Israel.

Two thousand years after God pointedly widened His purpose to a church universal, after a Messiah was rejected by His own, after the type fulfilled antitype, even people with good intentions ignore the larger view and construct their own models of salvation.

There is currently a growing call by "Christian Reconstructionists" for the United States of America to adopt the rules and regulations of ancient Israel. Foolishly they imagine that by applying Levitical laws, sacrifice, and the forms of ancient Israel, the United States will become the new nation of promise.

British Israelites of a generation or two ago attempted to build a case for linking the Anglo-Saxon line to the lost tribes of Israel. As if salvation depended on blood lineage! They obviously missed the point in much that Paul wrote.

In the United States the

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints bases much of its creed on a literal reinstitution of the Jewish priesthood and a supposed link to the lost tribes of Israel.

And in the Middle East the nation-state of Israel exists as an open statement of continuity from the Jewish nation of Christ's day. Such an unnecessary claim!

Ezekiel wrote against the historical backdrop of Old Testament Israel. No doubt he expected the showdown to be a literal battle. No doubt he believed the temple and its services outlined in chapters 40-47 to be much as the ancient order. No doubt he hoped the return to the land was literal for his people. But as one of God's faithful, bearing the Exile with the forgetful nation because of disobedience, he knew too well the conditionality of God's promises.

Thank God, His purposes are universal and beyond humanity's more immediate needs.

All evil will be destroyed. All Israel—the faithful from Jew and Gentile—will be saved. A New Jerusalem, in unimagined splendor, will come down from heaven. And the temple, symbol of God Himself, will be superseded by His continuing presence among the saved.

REACT

1. Am I expecting too little of God? What has He promised for me?

2. What is the basis of my confidence in God?

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is the editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press Publishing Association, Nampa, Idaho.

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me.' "—Ellen G. White, *Selected Writings*, vol. 7, p. 941.

In John 3:14 we find Jesus telling Nicodemus that he must be "lifted up" on the cross. To lift up is to place on the cross becomes the great center of attraction, and all beings are drawn together. Thus God and humanity all that separates, is overcome as the mightiest of rebellions, the sinfulness, "The cross now serves as the mightiest of attractions."

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1 and 2 Thessalonians

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Lesson 1: Your Other Vocation

Scripture: 1 Thess. 1:1-10; 3:1-13

Theme: This lesson develops the background of the Thessalonian epistles and discusses mission—how a Christian is to witness to those who need to hear of Christ. The lesson's thesis is that one is best able to reach those he lives among.

Lesson 2: Strength for Today

Scripture: 1 Thess. 2:13-3:5

Theme: This lesson investigates how a Christian should relate to persecution. Although God will not necessarily shield him from all trouble, God's strength is sufficient to keep him faithful if he depends on Him.

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Does God really understand what I'm going through?

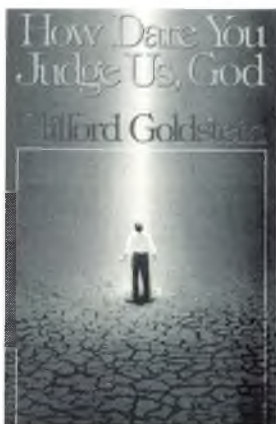
Why can't God just use His omnipotence to protect His children from the hurts and tragedies of life? Isn't God greater than Satan? Then why the suffering?

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