

# COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

A General Conference Church Ministries Publication • January-March 1992

## No Time to Lose

**JOEL MICAH ZEPHANIAH**



# WHY SHOULD KIDS HAVE ALL THE FUN?

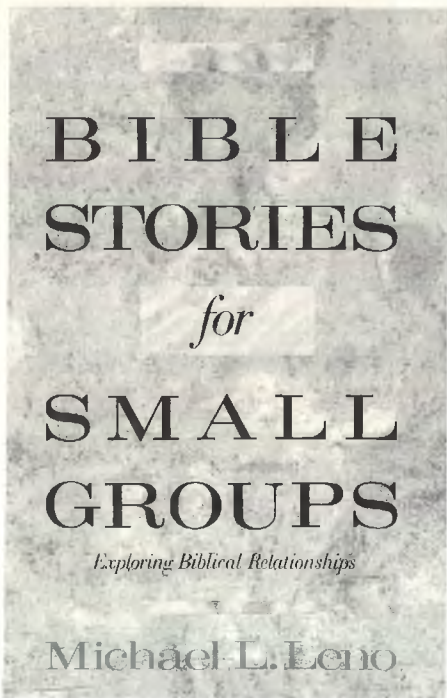
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# No Time to Lose

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## This Quarter's Artist



Robert Wright, a freelance illustrator and graphic designer since 1988 living in Martinsburg, West Virginia, is this quarter's artist. A specialist in airbrush illustration and watercolor landscapes, he is a 1978 graduate of California State University, Fullerton, with a degree in graphic arts.

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 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.

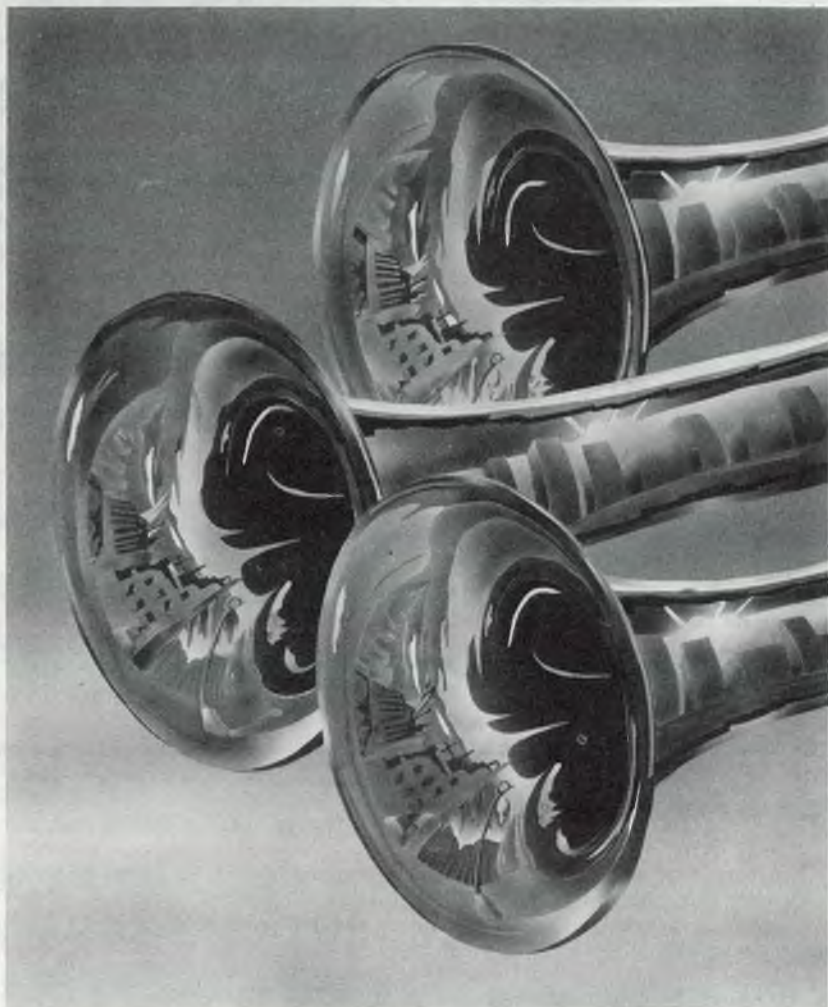
5. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

## 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, December 29–January 4

# The Day Before the Day After



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“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand” (Joel 2:1, NIV).

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# Unfriendly Grasshoppers

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## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Joel 1:1–2:11

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You could hear them pattering like raindrops as they hopped among the flower beds by the side door. Sometimes they attached themselves to the side of the house, outlining the edges of my wife's bushy cosmos. The grasshoppers did not eat the plants, however. They seemed to exist on the abundant pollen of the zinnias and other flowers. You could see the black and yellow banded creatures feeding in the middle of a blossom.

The grasshoppers seemed friendly little insects. Occasionally, when the door was open, they would jump inside, realize their mistake, then leap back out into the sunlight. Above all, they refrained from nibbling on my wife's flowers. Penny is extremely protective of her flowers. The insects would have not lasted long had they dared to dine on the leaves or petals.

The grasshoppers the prophet Joel spoke about were not so friendly, however. They did not

sup on flower pollen—they devoured the landscape.

We don't know much about Joel other than that he was the son of Pethuel. His name is a common Old Testament one meaning "Yahweh is God." Because he speaks so much about the temple, Mount Zion, Jerusalem, and Judah, we assume he lived in or near Jerusalem. He cites or echoes material found in such other prophetic passages as Isaiah 13:6, Amos 1:2, and Zephaniah 1:14, 15. Clearly he was steeped in the prophetic tradition and of some education.

Joel transforms the devastating locust plague into a mighty act of God in the manner of the Exodus. He points back to God's deliverance in the past, and then directs his readers to a promise of greater redemption in the future. The book zeroes in on the need of God's people and the only solution to that need. The invasion of unfriendly grasshoppers becomes an unforgettable symbol of how a friendly and loving God intervenes to end all devastation, whether physical or spiritual.

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by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is editor of *Winner* magazine at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Monday, December 30

# Ruin and Devastation

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## LOGOS

Joel 1:1-2:11

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The prophet summons his people to consider an event so striking that they will be compelled to describe it to succeeding generations (see Joel 1:1-3). They will add it to the Exodus and other mighty examples of God's intervention in human history. Locusts have devastated the Palestinian countryside, stripping the land not only of the crops but of all vegetation. Such insect invasions happened every few years, the hordes of leaping creatures being blown in from the eastern deserts. But this one is the worst in human memory. Joel describes the results of the locust plague in graphic detail, comparing it to an invading army (see verses 4-12).

The prophet calls for all in Israel to lament what has happened. Life has come to a stop because of the loss of the crops, including the services in the temple, which were dependent on grain and other produce given as offerings (see verse 9).

But Joel sees more than a freak of nature. Ancient Israel did not view the world as one of natural cause and effect as we do today. Whatever happened was directly God's doing. "Hebrew theology saw God as the ground of all life and its manifold experiences. It tended to ignore secondary causes and lead everything directly back to God, a

somewhat natural tendency in all religious faith that is conscious of absolute dependence upon a creator."<sup>1</sup>

Thus Joel sees in the locust invasion a national crisis that transcends the mere physical. It represents far more importantly a spiritual crisis—a clear warning of the coming day of the Lord. The prophet called for God's people to put on sackcloth, fast, and repent (see verses 13, 14), for the day of the Lord was approaching (see verse 15). Even the priests were to remove their liturgical garments and clothe themselves in the ancient symbols of mourning (see verse 13). Joel "has seen the horror of the locust, and discerned in that event the spectre of the coming day of the Lord. . . . It is a sign of his walk with God that he can perceive the divine word in the events around him. And it is a sign of his profoundest hope that, when faced with disaster, he spontaneously cries out to God."<sup>2</sup>

God's people have rebelled against God. They face judgment. But Joel did not just want to put fear in the hearts of his people because "in Old Testament thought the divine wrath has an evangelizing motif. Judgment is God's work to make men realize their sin and moral bankruptcy and so turn back to him."<sup>3</sup>

Joel merges the imagery of the locust plague and an invading human army to symbolize the awesomeness of the day of the

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by Gerald Wheeler

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Lord. Like a cloud of blackest hue the horde swallows the land. Nothing can escape it, nothing can stop it. The earth "quakes" before this army, and the heavens "tremble" (2:10). But again we have the imagery of a theophany. The earthquake symbolized God's divine presence both at Sinai and Golgotha.

The prophet asks of the day of the Lord, "Who can endure it?" (verse 11, NIV). But that does not mean that God has abandoned His people even though they have wandered away from Him. There is yet hope—otherwise why would He call for an alarm to be sounded in Zion? The trumpet summons His people to make a response.

The clouds and darkness and earthquakes of the day of the Lord should not inspire fear, but are to remind us of the continual presence of a loving God. What

might frighten us should actually inspire us with hope. Yes, God's people have apostatized. The day of the Lord is near. Everything might seem hopeless. Yet Joel knows his God hovers near behind the clouds and darkness. A God that the prophet will go on to describe as "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love" (verse 13, NIV).

In the traumatic and fearful buzz of the locusts, Joel heard the voice of the Lord. It might speak the fearsome sounds of judgment, but that judgment can save as well as condemn.

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1. Eric C. Rust, *The Book of Judges; The Book of Ruth; First and Second Books of Samuel, The Layman's Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 44.

2. Peter C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets, Volume 1: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, and Jonah* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), p. 96.

3. Rust, p. 18.

Tuesday, December 31

## Visions of Future Glory

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### TESTIMONY

Key Text: Joel 1:12, 15-18

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Ellen White shared Joel's sense of contemporary tragedy containing a hint of the future. That in the locust plagues of this life we can hear whispers of God's ultimate plans. She also stressed that we must never get so caught up in the suffering of the moment that we forget that even the most discouraging events can point to a God-ordained future.

In introducing a series of passages that offer visions of future glory, including quotations from the book of Joel, she made the following comments:

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

"Many were the messages of comfort given the church by the prophets of old. 'Comfort ye, comfort ye My people' (Isaiah 40:1), was Isaiah's commission from

God; and with the commission were given wonderful visions that have been the believers' hope and joy through all the centuries that have followed. Despised of men, persecuted, forsaken, God's children in every age have nevertheless been sustained by His sure promises. By faith they have looked forward to the time when He will fulfill to His church the assurance, 'I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations' "

There is danger we will dwell on the locust plagues and forget what they herald. Too often we speak and write as if there is nothing beyond last-day events. To some they have become an obsession in and of themselves. Last-day events are only preliminary—preliminary to restoration and reunion. God restores all that we may have lost, but infinitely even better than that, we begin an eternal, joyous, and intimate reunion and relationship with Him.

We would wonder about the mental and emotional health of a young woman who dwelled on the pain of childbirth to the point where she refused to have children. But that is almost what some do in their fascination with last-day events. Last-day events are meaningless if we forget what they precede. They precede eternity with God.

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*\*Prophets and Kings, pp. 722, 723.*

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by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is editor of *Winner* magazine at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Wednesday, January 1

# The Day of the Lord

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## EVIDENCE

Key Text: Joel 1:15

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The theme of the day of the Lord goes back to the early days of Israel in Palestine and originated in the concept of the holy war. In the holy war Israel's God fought on the side of His people as a divine warrior. Dr. Hans K. LaRondelle traces this biblical theme in his *Chariots of Salvation: The Biblical Drama of Armageddon* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987).

Unfortunately, God's people began to take the divine promise as an automatic guarantee of their safety, no matter what they did. Thus God, through His prophets, had to turn the day of the Lord on its head. Instead of a promise of hope, it became a threat against God's people.

Amos warned the northern kingdom of Israel that they should not long for the day of the Lord as in

the past, but should fear it because it was "darkness, and not light" (Amos 5:18). It was "very dark, and no brightness in it" (verse 20). The judgment would no longer be just upon the nations, but also upon Israel herself.

Zephaniah told his people to be silent, for the day of the Lord was at hand (see Zeph. 1:7). Instead of something for them to anticipate with joy, it would be for them "a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress" (verse 15) because the Lord would turn against Judah (see verse 4).

Joel speaks of the day of the Lord in two ways. He portrays it as a time of doom and destruction for Israel's enemies and deliverance for Israel. Yet at the same time he declares it to also be an occasion of destruction for those in Israel who have hardened their hearts against Him.

The day of the Lord is always a positive event to those who obey and a negative one to those who rebel.

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by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is editor of *Winner* magazine at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Thursday, January 2

# What Shall We Tell the Children?

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## HOW-TO

Key Text: Joel 1:2, 3

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Old Testament religious practice was very historically oriented. Feast days and celebrations pointed to God's historical acts, His direct intervention in human history. Passover reminded God's people of His deliverance in the Exodus. The Exodus thus became a symbol for God's salvation both past and future. Through Passover the abstract concept of redemption became concrete. It was a periodic reminder of how God had already intervened. The prophets further enlarged on how God would bring His people back home from Babylonian exile.

Christianity looked to the death and resurrection of Christ as the ultimate symbol of redemption and celebrated Easter as its concrete reminder of God's greatest act of salvation. Unfortunately, Seventh-day Adventists, because of the pagan overtones of the Easter observance itself, have been uncomfortable with such observances. We generally ignore Easter and the biblical observances such as Passover and the other feasts, and thus do not have as strong a historical perspective as we might have. The only date we were conscious of for a long time was October 22, 1844, which we sadly referred to as the great disappointment.

We need to memorialize God's

acts in our history in a more concrete way. This applies to us both as a people and as individuals. We could do it in many different ways.

1. *Let us remember the important events of denominational history.* We could celebrate through special occasions and articles the major dates of the development and organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its various institutions and aspects. Church services and publications could recount what happened on certain key dates, such as the recognition of the Sabbath and sanctuary doctrines; the organization of the General Conference and first local conference; the opening of pioneer schools, hospitals, and other institutions; the entrance of Adventism to a specific geographical area or country, etc. Just as families search out their histories and roots, so the church family needs a similar sense of identity and belonging.

2. *Institutions and organizations must make their employees and publics aware of the major events in their development.* They need to instill a feeling of purpose and divine leading and protection. Denominational employees should not think of themselves as working for faceless, impersonal institutions, but for organizations that see themselves as the hands, arms, and

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by Gerald Wheeler

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feet of God on earth.

*3. We need to reflect on how God has led in our individual lives, both the spectacular events that might surround conversion, baptism, deliverance from danger, or a call to service, as well as the quiet care and love He showers upon us each day.*

Joel raised the question, What shall we tell the children? (see Joel 1:2, 3). As members of the church as a whole and as members of individual families, we must decide what we will tell the children about what has happened in the lives of His people. How will we tell of His mighty acts.

Friday, January 3

# This Big Brother Isn't a Bully

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## OPINION

Key Text: Joel 2:1, 2

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When children are tormented by the school bully, they will often retaliate with the threat that their father or big brother is bigger than the opponent's, and that he will give him the thrashing he deserves.

Why do we look forward to Christ's return? Do we see it as the time when those who have persecuted and mistreated us will receive their just desserts?

Israel eventually learned that the day of the Lord involved them as much as their enemies. They faced judgment as surely as did the surrounding nations.

When we anticipate Christ's return, we must never forget that His coming means that the entire world will meet its fate. Each person will receive eternal life or death based upon the decision he or she has made. God has summoned each one of us to help the world to make the right choice.

When we proclaim the day of the Lord, do we preach and write and witness from the perspective of the child who wants his father

or big brother to beat up those who have frightened him?

To take the day of the Lord seriously is to accept our God-given responsibility for this world. We should long for the salvation of those about us with as great a fervor as we want Christ's return to end the mess of this sin-filled world. The second coming is not just our personal solution to our problems and frustrations—it is everyone's. Everyone's if we bring them to it.

God seeks to save everyone through His return, and until we share His perspective, the Holy Spirit cannot fully work through us. Yes, not everyone will choose to let God redeem them, but that is not our responsibility. Our task is to allow God to use us to seek to reach everyone.

The second that we concentrate on the concept that only a few will be saved, we limit the power and effectiveness of our witness. We slip into the mentality of ancient Israel, who thought God was with them and against everyone else. Also, we shirk our responsibility to the world and deny the mission that God gave to the church.

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by Gerald Wheeler

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# Where death is often preferred to life.

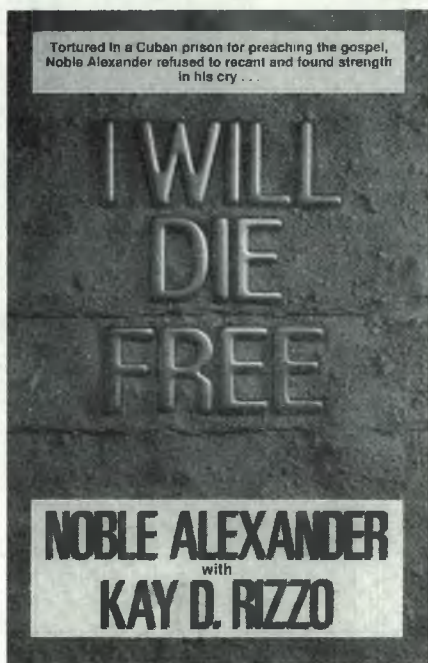
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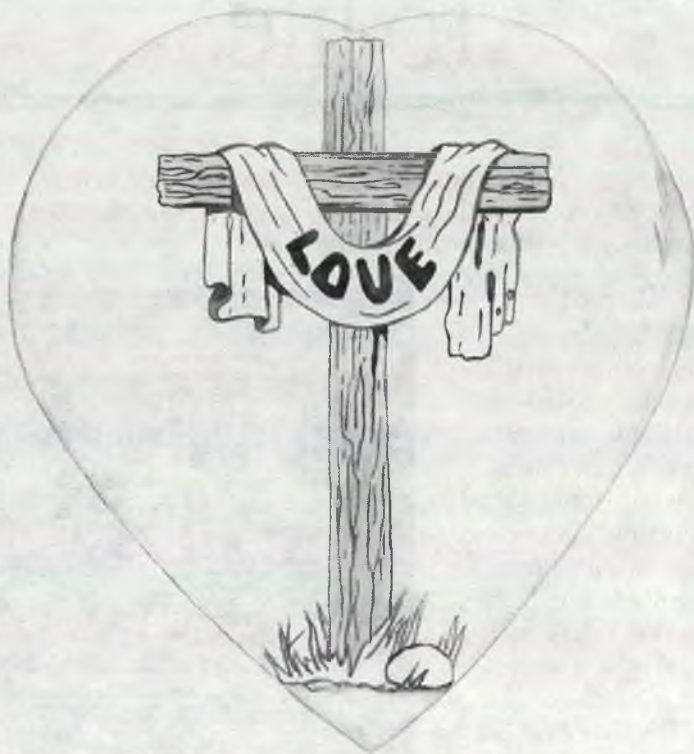


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Lesson 2, January 5-11

# The Three R's



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“Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity” (Joel 2:13, NIV).

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# The Need

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## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 15:8, 9

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“The love of God in the heart is the only spring of love toward our neighbor.”\* I know there is someone here today needing a deeper . . .”

The familiar words resounded from the pulpit. Jason knew it was inevitable—another fiery sermon, another altar call. He wandered forward mechanically.

But, to Jason’s surprise, the pastor reached the benediction and every eye was still dry! *Well, it made sense. This was only the third altar call this month,* thought Jason as he shook the usher’s hand en route to the cafeteria. Hold it, the usher was his chemistry professor! “Happy Sabbath, Dr. Crenshaw.”

Their eyes met. “Jason,” mumbled the professor, “please meet me in the kingdom.”

The rest of the day Dr. Crenshaw’s statement haunted Jason. Even as he belted out the bass line for Deluge Doomers, his coed octet, thoughts disturbed him: *He presumed that I’m not already Canaan-bound! Doesn’t he realize I’m actively involved at church? How can one filled with Christ’s joy cry?*

“Jason, it’s Saturday night! What are you doing studying? You’ve got to let your mind relax occasionally.”

“Mom, I’ve relaxed all Sabbath. However, Kevin is stopping by

any minute to go rent a video with me.”

“I’m glad you’re getting out at least. Just make it PG.”

“Right,” mumbled Jason after hanging up his dorm-room phone, “like I’m going to rent *Morganda’s Pleasure Palace*.”

Snow covered the downtown sidewalk as Jason and Kevin reached Lackluster Video. Entering quickly, neither boy noticed the figure huddled between the outside stairs and wall.

“Jase, we should have come right after sundown. There’s nothing left.”

“Wait, Kev. Check this out. They’ve got *Pretty Woman*! I haven’t seen this in ages.”

Decisions made, money paid, the two exited. “C’n you boys spare 50 cents for some coffee?” crackled a voice from the dingy corner. Defensively, the boys turned.

Kevin whispered, “We can scrape up a quarter apiece.”

“But he probably won’t use it for coffee.”

“I know, what can we do?”

“Forget it. Come on, Kev, let’s start this video. I’ve got to get some sleep so I’m awake to meet Heather in the library tomorrow at 10:00.”

“You lucky bum. Studying with Heather. Now, *there’s* a good excuse to get out of here.”

The friends snickered and headed for the car.

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\**The Desire of Ages*, p. 505.

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by Tom Gammon

Tom Gammon is an English and business administration student at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Monday, January 6

## Borrowed Time?

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### LOGOS

Joel 2:13, AMP

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#### **Step One: God's Personal Invitation (read Joel 2:12-14, AMP)**

*"Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to Me with all your heart . . . rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God" (Joel 2:12, 13).*

Verse 12 begins with "therefore," signifying that something of importance has occurred, and consequently that which follows the "therefore" deserves our closest scrutiny. That which follows the "therefore" is less potent and important if what took place before the "therefore" is not understood and appreciated.

We in this industrial age must not misunderstand or lose the significance of this lifesaving call because it is couched in quaint verbiage. The message should be very clear. If the devastation at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was unparalleled in human history, then the destruction to come will make what has happened look like child's play. How to respond to that reality is an individual choice—yours, mine. One either accepts or rejects. There is no abstaining vote. It is decision time; later may be too late.

How does one respond to this most urgent of calls? Hebrews 11 provides an excellent commentary on Joel 2:12-14. Rending or tearing one's garments was to the

Jews a sign of great sorrow. It was intended to be an external expression of an internal condition. However, the external and the internal did not always agree. Thus God called for a heart experience. True sorrow, true repentance should result in a changed life. The exploits of those in Hebrews 11 are the results of rending the heart. The response must be more than cerebral, it must be a response that allows God to recreate, to restore Himself in us.

Good students are not always students who are brilliant. Good students are not in the student lounge every evening. They do not attend every social event. They are not at every function on campus. The big exam in microbiology is coming, and they know the answers are not on the ball field, but in the textbook and their notes. They are willing to forego the one to gain the other. God through Joel appeals to us to be willing to forego the pleasures of the moment for the rewards of eternity. The little quizzes and weekly exams act as a barometer in relationship to the big one. Good students are not often surprised by the results of their efforts. Paul prepared for his final by dying daily (see 1 Cor. 15:31).

*Look up the meaning of the words repentance and revival. You now have a pattern. Does your daily living fit that pattern? Write down what you can do to fit*

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by D. G. Rand

D. G. Rand is a chaplain at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

*the pattern, keeping in mind Joel 2:14.*

**Step Two: Action Commensurate With God's Call (read Joel 2:15-17)**

*"Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elderly people, gather the children and those that suck the breasts. . . . Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar" (Joel 2:16, 17).*

Again we say, the response must be more than cerebral. It is more than mental assent, more than wishful thinking. It must be concrete, tangible, something acted upon. Now that you have evaluated the situation, just don't sit there. Do something! God's directions as to what must be done are made plain by His Spirit.

Even our household pets have sense enough to raise a ruckus when they sense danger. Realizing the cataclysmic events about to happen, "raise a ruckus." By your actions and because of your actions, let others be sanctified or set apart for a singular purpose—to meet God in person.

Joel has alluded to reformation in verses 13 and 14, and now he expands on that theme. It is a call to gather before the Lord and

ask for His salvation. God will not hear or answer hearts untouched by revival (see Ps. 66:18).

In Joel's day the scene would have been one of a national emergency. There would have been weeping and mourning by both people and priests. Weeping and mourning for their sins that had brought them to the edge of destruction and for the heathen nations deriding Israel's God.

Not every aspect of Joel's day is to be duplicated in our time. But certainly the spirit of urgency in his day should be even more intense today because we are at the very end of all things. God is expecting repentance, revival, and reformation in individuals and congregations. We are on borrowed time. Our daily living is to be the rending of our hearts. Our daily living is to be proof of our recognition that we are living on borrowed time. Our daily living is to be an example of repentance, revival, and reformation.

**REACT**

1. If Christ should come today, would you be lost or saved? If not, why not?
2. What are you waiting for?
3. What more can God do for us than He has done?

Tuesday, January 7

# A Hope for Revival

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## TESTIMONY

Key Text: Joel 2:12-17

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Seventh-day Adventist Christians have inherited the spiritual legacy of two great revivals. In the chapter of *The Great Controversy* entitled "Prophecies Fulfilled," Ellen White describes the evidences of God's Spirit reviving the early advent believers waiting for Christ's return. Quoting an observer of the movement, she writes:

"It produced everywhere the most deep searching of heart and humiliation of soul before the God of high heaven. . . . As God said by Zechariah, a spirit of grace and supplication was poured out upon His children; they looked to Him whom they had pierced, there was a great mourning in the land, . . . and those who were looking for the Lord afflicted their souls before Him."<sup>1</sup>

Because these believers were fully convinced that the coming of the Lord was imminent, they were open to receive a "spirit of revival." The forerunners of the early Adventists, reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, were also filled with this spirit.

"The Reformers whose protest has given us the name of Protestant, felt that God had called them to give the light of the gospel to the world; and in the effort to do this they were ready to sacrifice their

possessions, their liberty, even life itself. In the face of persecution and death the gospel was proclaimed far and near."<sup>2</sup>

The book of Joel calls for a spiritual revival as Israel recognizes in the plague of locusts the judgments of "the day of the Lord." We Adventists believe that the day of God's final judgment is at hand, and that only God's mercy allows the suffering world to continue so that the nations may respond in faith, turn, and be saved. Yet, like Israel, many of us have become complacent; we have betrayed our non-Christian friends and neighbors. We watch the world die, hiding the last great hope of a hopeless world under masks of conformity to the world.

Yet, as the Spirit revived the early Adventists, He will surely convict us of our need to return to the Lord with all our heart. Spiritual revival, however, will only come to those who rest their hope in the reliability of God's Word—His Son.

God has honored us by showing how greatly He values us. We are bought with a price, even the precious blood of the Son of God. When His heritage shall conscientiously follow the Word of the Lord, His blessing will rest upon them in answer to their prayers.

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1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 403.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 627.

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by Anne Freed

Anne Freed is working on a master's degree in religion as well as serving as a campus ministries graduate assistant chaplain for the women's residence hall at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

# The Phenomenon of the Broken Heart

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## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Joel 2:13, NIV**

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Our society is accustomed to interchanging the meanings of heart and mind. For instance, many a young person's heart has been broken by a close friend. On Valentine's Day lovers exchange hearts with each other as a promise of their affection. Children promise to keep a secret "with all their hearts." Yet, in none of these instances are we really talking about the heart. What we mean is the mind.

Why, then, do we feel like we are going to explode inside when someone we love has died? Why do our hearts hurt so much when we break up with boyfriends or girlfriends, husbands or wives?

Ancient Bible prophets like Joel may not have understood the phenomena of the broken heart, but they knew it was real. Modern science and technology have helped us to understand the origins of the pain we feel from intense emotional experiences. In situations that cause an intense emotional reaction like those referred to earlier, the body responds by releasing epinephrine (adrenalin) into the bloodstream, producing many chemical and physiological changes in the body. The heart pumps faster and harder, causing the blood pressure to rise. Many of the body's

muscles tense, ready for action. The breathing rate rises, and the individual may begin to perspire.

Epinephrine's effects are fast and potent. It is one of the body's most extraordinary mechanisms for protection in an emergency situation. But those who have experienced this type of reaction know that epinephrine's after-effects leave the body's muscles, especially the heart, feeling fatigued and possibly in pain.

It was probably this kind of intense emotional reaction that Joel wanted from the people of Israel. They needed a physical stimulus to bring their minds to think again on spiritual realities.

Again and again they had strayed from God. No amount of suffering from plagues and attacks from enemies would bring them back.

Hoping for true repentance, Joel called for his people to experience a personal suffering, a rending of their hearts for God.

For us today, the struggle to submit and surrender our hearts to God remains the same as it was for people of past generations. It is the mental struggle of choosing between God and self, good and evil.

God has made each individual unique; some are more logical and less emotional than others. But we should not be surprised if a truly deep religious commitment leads us to this kind of intense emotional experience.

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by Joseline Garcia

Joseline Garcia is a nursing student at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Thursday, January 9

# How to Return

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## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Joel 2:12**

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Perhaps what makes reform so hard is the fact that in order for reform to take place you must come to the realization that some aspect of your life is wrong. It takes a truly repentant spirit and a desire for revival for true reform to take place. This week's study of Joel 2:12-17 is God's plea for you to reform and return to Him. In order to aid in this change, several key principles can be taken from the verses of our study.

### God Is Love

For those of us who have been brought up in the church this can seem like a horribly worn-out cliché. But it really is true. Fear, though temporarily effective, is not enough of a motivator to create a permanent change. In order for us to be able to return, we must see God as "gracious and compassionate . . . and abounding in love" (verse 13, NIV).

### God's Appeal Is to Everyone

Often we are tempted to think that there is no reason God would be interested in us or our welfare. However, in verse 16 a variety of people are mentioned. God desires

all of us to be included in His wonderful plan (see 1 Cor. 12:13).

### A Complete Change of Outlook Is Necessary

"Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning" (verse 12, NIV). A casual commitment simply will not do. If we are to change and allow God to direct our lives, we must be willing to reach deep within ourselves and completely surrender all habits, past experiences, and sinful desires to Him.

### We Are Squandering a Precious Privilege

God created us and has a definite interest in our lives. If we are willing to let Him, He can help us. Yet, by rejecting Him and not returning, we are making our "inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations" (verse 17, NIV). If we do not claim God's blessings, how can we be witnesses to others? It is only through claiming God's promises that a true revival can take place.

### REACT

Knowing the principles that are involved, are we now willing to make the commitment to accept them and make the change in our lives in a return to God?

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by Benjamin Bokich

Benjamin Bokich was a senior at Andrews Academy at the time of this writing and is now studying for a career in law.



# Echoes of Revival: Counting the Cost

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## OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 11:28-30

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As I read the text for this week's lesson, many question marks jumped out at me. The passage seemed confusing and outdated. Growing up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church I heard countless times about our urgent need to return to true godliness. Now I fear many of us have completely lost the ideal for which we should be striving.

If the intense emotional experience that Joel calls for were to happen, would we even know what to do? Take, for example, the recent celebration church movement. The leaders of this effort appear to be striving to meet current spiritual needs in a rapidly changing society. Yet some of their critics apparently cannot see past the seventeenth-century language of verse and text to the positive results taking place in these new churches.

Revival involves radical change, forcing us to ask penetrating questions: How would our lives change if there were a revival of godliness in the land? Do we picture a lot of "Christlike" creatures walking around and loving everyone? How would it affect our schooling, our work, our family lives? Is revival even relevant to our experiences today?

We are told that there must be an earnest effort to obtain the

blessing of godliness from the Lord. It's a little scary when we consider what we'd be asking for, but the benefits of sharing our lives with God should more than even it out. When Israel repeatedly turned from God, they turned from His protection and care. It was then that they were "afflicted" with the curses of life in this world. Although their experience may seem remote to us in today's world, we should take a little time to look around us. AIDS is reaching epidemic stages; divorce rates are sky-high—just everyday happenings these days with no apparent effect on our lives. Yet how many happy, satisfied people do we really know?

This is where Joel's plea begins to make sense to me. I hear Christ calling for us to come back, to apologize, and meet with Him again. Then He will be able to protect the people He loves. But He cannot give us anything beyond our power of choice. We need to ask ourselves if we like the direction we're headed, then beg the compassionate Lord to accept us back as companions and friends.

## REACT

1. What can we do to become better prepared to receive God's character?
2. How would receiving the gift of God's character make a difference in your life?
3. Why is this important for us today?

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by Melisa Baker

Melisa Baker is a premed student at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Lesson 3, January 12-18

# Don't Sleep Through the Revolution



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“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:28, 29, NIV).

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Sunday, January 12

# “Sonburst” Saves the Day

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## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Joel 2:26

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A gorgeous paradise greeted our excited eyes as we descended on the island of Utila, Honduras. Forty-four of us had volunteered to help Maranatha Flights International construct a secondary school on this tiny Caribbean island.

We arrived late Friday afternoon and settled into our makeshift home. Sabbath morning we spent worshiping the Lord and sharing our faith. During the afternoon the islanders escorted their newfound “yanqui” friends around their tropical island home.

Sunday we awoke early, eager to begin construction. After working all morning, we glanced skyward and saw ominous clouds overhead. The sky crackled, flashed, and then violently emptied itself. We quickly covered our tools and dashed for shelter. The downpour continued all afternoon, through the night, and into the next morning.

Monday we plodded to breakfast, disheartened. A line of storms was forecast to drench the island all week long.

We had come to the island with a purpose. Now we realized that only God could make that a reality. We divided into small groups and earnestly prayed that God would intervene to halt the torrents. Lifting our heads, we found that though it was still rain-

ing, it had slowed to a slight drizzle.

A sponsor headed toward the construction site. We asked where he was going, and he responded without hesitation that we had prayed for help; we must now believe that God would answer our prayers.

Although a bit wary, we followed him to the unfinished school. By the time we arrived, the rain had disappeared and the sun was shining. At times during the next week it threatened to pour, but it never actually showered while we worked. Even more miraculous, each evening as we left the job site, the heavens would open up. All night long it would rain, and then as we arrived to begin work, God would turn off the shower.

Romans 8:28 took on new meaning to me: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (NIV). I unquestionably believe that God sent an outpouring of His Spirit to stop the outpouring of His clouds. We accepted the invitation to work for the Lord, we were challenged with a difficulty, and we turned to God for help.

God has promised us, “You will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed” (Joel 2:26, NIV). That week I learned just how valuable are God’s promises.

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by Adam D. Rose

Adam D. Rose is a sophomore prelaw major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Monday, January 13

## What Can God Expect Now?

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### LOGOS

Joel 2:18-32

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Joel 2:18-32 pictures failed hope for literal Israel and God's very hopeful hope for spiritual Israel. There can be no question of God's love and concern for those ancient people. He wanted them to succeed. How often He must have grieved at their failures. What must He think of His people today, I wonder?

Verses 18-27 depict literal promises to literal Israel which will later be fulfilled in spiritual Israel. These verses in the literal sense answer the priests and the people in Joel 2:17, "Let the priests, who minister to the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, 'Spare Your people, O Lord, and do not give your heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, "Where is their God?"'" (NKJV). What of the "all important" spiritual fulfillment among modern spiritual Israel?

In the interest of time, space, and reader's interest we will avoid even trying to "spiritualize" every promise to recalcitrant old Israel. The symbols that beg to be interpreted are those that seem to have clear reference to the "last days." The danger of centering on the obvious "last-day" references is that their familiarity may cause some to overlook their value.

"And it shall come to pass after-

ward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Joel 2:28-31, NKJV).

Before commenting on this text further, it might be helpful to remind ourselves of the references to the agricultural year that set such a nice framework for describing phases of the distribution of the Spirit.

Joel 2:23: "Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you—the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month" (NKJV).

In the use of the rain analogy in reference to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, there are at least two applications we must consider. The first would refer to the promise as given to the church at large. There is to be a worldwide harvest of tremendous proportions. In the Palestine analogy the former rains were the rains that were essential to soften the ground for planting. Most of us have all seen television footage of

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by P. B. Morrison

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

life in parched, famine-plagued Africa or India, or even the “dust-bowl” days in the United States. It is heartrending to see the plow barely cutting into the crust and leaving behind, not a clean furrow, but rather just a mound of dust. There is no real potential there for even a minimal harvest. Just so, without that initial windy outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the disciples would not have experienced the beginnings of fulfillment of Jesus’ promises and prayer recorded in John’s gospel in chapters 14-17.

The promise: “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:26, 27, NKJV).

The prayer: “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As you sent Me into the world, I have also sent them into the world” (John 17:17, 18, NKJV).

These promises were still fresh when the company of believers gathered in that upper room. In fact, Luke reiterates still another promise as he introduces the Pentecost narrative.

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NKJV).

After hearing this promise the disciples watched Jesus ascend. Then they gathered in a group of about 120 and followed counsel to stay and pray until they would receive the promised power of the

Holy Spirit. And what a shower that turned out to be! Jerusalem was packed with people from everywhere (see Acts 2:9-11). The wind in the room created a breeze on the streets, and the record is that 3,000 followers of Christ were added in that one day. The ground was broken for the hope of Christianity to grow throughout the world. The promise of the “former” rain was in the process of fulfillment.

It has been a long growing season by human standards. There has been a lot of cultivation, fertilization—is it time for culmination, harvest? If so, is it time to look for and pray for the “latter” rains—the power of the Spirit that will ensure the greatest possible harvest? The idea of heaven’s human agency, God’s people, being empowered to an even greater degree than that company in Jerusalem, is hard to even imagine. It is ours to pray for.

The church is made up of individuals, and the rain motif can and should also be applied to individuals. The promise of the Holy Spirit is not just a promise for the corporate church. The ministry and power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the aspiring Christian is not a luxury to be hoped for, but rather an essential to be sought. If we should pray when temporal life is threatened, how much more when eternity is “on the line”? A Christian’s concern is not just for personal security. It is purely Christian to pray for the power of the Spirit in terms of personal salvation, but to be purely like Jesus includes praying for the power, wisdom, and tact to influence others to seek wholeness in this life and for eternity.

Tuesday, January 14

# A Promise Forgotten

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## TESTIMONY

Key Text: Joel 2:21-23

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I muddle through each day. It starts in the morning with a quick glance in the mirror at my sleep-mussed brown hair and the remnants of a short-night's sleep on my face. The day continues, and I attend lectures that I don't always understand and receive assignments that I won't be able to complete until 2:00 a.m. the next morning. I feel very much like I am caught in a terrible, dry storm—one filled with dust-bowls of calculus and landslides of thermo-chemical equations.

With so little time in my life, I fear sometimes that I've forgotten the promises I made in cradle roll to a big, Daddy-kind God and the ones I renewed when I left my comfy home for a bare dorm room. Now I don't have much time for Him and have little reason to pay attention to the things He says.

But the book of Joel, and this week's portion in the second chapter especially, provides me with reasons galore to praise that God. Verse 23 says, "Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God" (NIV). The passage goes on to describe how He has promised the people "autumn" and "spring" rains to provide them with plentiful food and merchandise.

Just as the people of Joel's day would rejoice at the promise of God after the plague of locusts

and the drought that had besieged them for several years, we today should pronounce praises and rejoicing to God for the "former" and "latter" rains, the gifts that Ellen White states will come upon us as they came upon the disciples at Pentecost.<sup>1</sup>

The gifts God promises will enable us to do wonderful things. "The outpouring of the Spirit in apostolic days was the 'former rain,' and glorious was the result. But the 'latter rain' will be more abundant."<sup>2</sup> Knowing what fantastic things were done in the first "rain," shouldn't we be awed at the power we will receive? Shouldn't we use the apostles' example, and the advice of Joel when he says "be glad and rejoice" (Joel 2:21), to spread the truth about a phenomenal God?

Perhaps, then, I have a few more things to be "praiseful" about than I thought originally. Perhaps we all should remember the wonderful powers that God has promised to give us, if we will only praise Him!

## REACT

1. When God starts giving the spiritual gifts He's promised, what kind of gift would you prefer to get?

2. Why do you wish one more than any other?

3. How do you plan to use it?

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1. See *The Great Controversy*, p. 611.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 827.

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by Rebecca J. De Wind

Rebecca De Wind loves to write and make fascinating chemical reactions at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

# The Heavenly Risorgimento

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## EVIDENCE

Key Text: Joel 2:32

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Early in the nineteenth century, Italy was nothing more than a handful of weak, insignificant states.

A man named Guiseppe Mazzini provided a solid foundation on which the philosophies of the *risorgimento*—the period of national revival and unification in Italy—could develop. Known as the greatest prophet of the *risorgimento*, Mazzini brought to the attention of Italians the importance of principles such as national consciousness, popular initiative, freedom, and liberty. In order to spread these principles he emphatically published articles in newspapers, traveled to conduct meetings, and wrote vast numbers of letters.

The establishment of *Giovine Italia*—Young Italy—was another important contribution of Mazzini. Young Italy was a political organization with one primary objective: to make Italy an independent, united, and republican nation. Mazzini's leadership was crucial to the success of Young Italy. At one time the movement had over 60,000 members scattered all over Italy and Europe, spreading the spirit of Mazzini to others.

Mazzini's work and dedication finally paid off in 1848, when one of his followers triggered a series of events which led to a revolution and eventually the

unification of Italy. However, the newly formed government was a disappointment for Mazzini. Instead of the free and independent republic he had visioned, Italy developed into a weak, decentralized state characterized by internal conflicts which, to this very day, continue to plague that nation.

In the book of Joel there is evidence that a heavenly *risorgimento* is developing—i.e., a unification of God's people together in the kingdom of heaven. Joel asserts that revival is an important part of the unification process. Consequently, God offers His Spirit to everyone who wishes to revolt against this unpredictable world. "I will pour out my Spirit in those days. . . . And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:29, 32, NIV).

God yearns for all of us to become citizens of His heavenly government. And, unlike Mazzini, we will not be disappointed! God has made specific promises to us within the book of Joel:

1. No food shortages (see 2:26)
  2. Eternal peace (see 2:20)
  3. Sublime happiness (see 2:23).
- What more could we want?

We must respond to God's call and receive His Spirit, poured upon us. Once this is done, we need to share the Spirit with the rest of the world as did the members of Mazzini's Young Italy. Only then will a heavenly unification occur, and we will become a part of a new and glorious history.

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by Steven S. Kim

Steven S. Kim is a history major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Thursday, January 16

# Beyond Tomorrow

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## HOW-TO

**Key Text:** Joel 2:28, 29

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As the ship's hull filled with the burdensome weight of the bricks, I felt their heaviness on my own soul. The ship rocked in the churning waters of the angry sea under this staggering weight. I knew the ship would not hold this mass much longer. As boards began to splinter and water gushed in, I heard men shouting, "Jump overboard!" The ship was losing its battle, yet an unknown force kept me from abandoning it. Then suddenly the entire side of the ship gave way to the thrashing waves. As bricks poured out of the hull, I stepped out into a very large, celestial banquet room. A saint stood at my side as though she had been expecting me. As I was led to the table, I realized that I had indeed made it through the storm.

Reflecting upon my dream the next morning, I realized how God can really speak through dreams which indicate His guiding presence in our lives.

How can we help to spread the message of God's comforting presence?

### **Recognize God Working in Your Life**

Be sensitive to the instances where God's hand had a part in making little "miracles" happen. The prayers God has answered are important for us to acknowledge because they prove His direction in our lives. We must re-

alize that God sometimes places us in certain situations to test our strength and to teach us to depend on Him.

We will recognize God when He speaks in harmony with His acts in the past and His promises for the future as laid down in the Bible.

### **Allow God to Lead**

To prepare for His second coming we must permit Christ to enter our lives and guide our ways so we can minister for Him. If we let Him work in us, He will lead us to those who need us most. By giving ourselves to Him each day, we allow Him to mold us into His perfect plan. By allowing Him to use our talents and abilities, we can become instruments working for His glory.

### **Accept God's Challenge**

As instruments working for Him, we must accept the challenge of telling others of His return and the miracles He has performed for us. Others need to know God works in our daily lives. He has challenged us to live as representatives of His character.

God is our lighthouse, and we must accept the challenge of keeping our eyes on Him instead of abandoning ship for earthly pleasures.

### **REACT**

1. How would you feel if God gave you a dream to share?
2. How would you know the dream came from God?

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by Jill Boughman and Jim Phillips

Jill Boughman is a nursing major, and Jim Phillips is a junior architecture major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.



# But I'm Not Qualified

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## OPINION

Key Text: Phil. 4:13

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But I'm not qualified! When the lay Bible ministry program came to my church, I promptly decided, "There's no way I can give a Bible study. I'm not gifted with an outgoing nature. Soon as I get in there I'll clam up and forget everything I know." But God had other plans for me.

I just happened to get sent along as an observer and learned that Bible texts didn't have to be memorized; there were lessons to follow, and the ones taking the studies were not scary people trying to prove us wrong all the time, but real people who were genuinely interested in learning more about the Bible.

When, a few weeks later, I was asked to help give the study, I wasn't even scared anymore. With God on my side, how could I be? When God has a plan for us to do, He does not leave us on our own to figure out how. He gives us ideas, teaches us through others, and gives us promises of His love even if we fail.

A lot of us think, "*I can't do anything for God. I'm not talented or outgoing. I can't preach or prophesy or any of those important things.*" It is important to remember that Jesus never asks us to do anything without giving us the strength to do it.

It is also important to keep in mind that we are working under His plan, and He is responsible for the results. A friend and I once conducted a series of Bible studies. I was giving a Bible study together with another friend. It seemed to be going well until the sixth week, when the man kicked us out and told us not to come back, or he would call the police. I wondered why God had led us to this house when He knew we would get kicked out. Only then did I realize that the work of a Christian is to spread the message of Jesus, but it is the Holy Spirit's job to impress the heart. God may have taught that man something during those six weeks that will someday lead him to Christ. We will never know until we get to heaven.

The Bible says, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me." Whatever work God has in mind for you to do in the fast-approaching "last days," He will not ask you to do anything without giving you strength and ability to accomplish it.

## REACT

1. What type of work might God have for me to do in the last days?

2. Do I really believe God could give me the courage and ability to do something I couldn't (or wouldn't) normally do? How might He do this?

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by Lisa Parry

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Lesson 4, January 19-25

# No Hiding Place



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“Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her” (Joel 3:17, NIV).

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Sunday, January 19

## Wars and Rumors

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### INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Joel 3:9, 16

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*Armageddon* was a word used rather freely as the confrontation between Iraq and the UN coalition turned into a hot, shooting war. Was this “the mother of all battles,” as Iraq’s rather hyperbole-prone president Saddam Hussein promised, or just another dirty war to balance the needs and aspirations of political forces?

Even more than during the Vietnam war, and in spite of considerable censorship, you and I were “there.” We saw the scuds arching through the clear skies of Palestine—saw the “weeping in Israel” at the destruction. We saw the devastation in Bagdad—sensed that the shapeless blobs dragged out of bunkers had once been vital, living human beings. And when we saw from the air a desert plain littered with hundreds of destroyed tanks, we agreed with newsmen that this had indeed been a victory “of biblical proportions,” as one put it.

Jesus warned His followers to expect wars, and rumors of wars. “The end is not yet” just because of these signs, He said (Matthew 24:6-8).

In a very literal sense, what we saw gives some indication of the coming cataclysmic clash Joel portrays. He does indeed speak of actual battles: nations arrayed against Israel. Nations armed “to the teeth” and adamantly opposed

to peace and goodness.

The real battle, however, is always one of “hearts and minds,” to borrow a term used in the Vietnam war. Joel is most concerned with the security of God’s faithful people. He is concerned with their hiding in God as He battles one last time for their security. This is the last battle Joel looks to, and not some bloody clash between coalition and dictator.

One commentator remarked that one of the scuds directed against Israel fell in the valley of Megiddo. He was straining at a coincidence of geography. No, it was not Armageddon, nor was it the valley of Jehoshaphat, a term used in Joel. The rich imagery of Bible lands and apocalyptic crowded together so rapidly that the secular world had trouble deciding what it all meant.

Joel was very aware of the power of literal Babylon. This persecuting power descended a number of times upon Israel. Beyond Babylon Joel indicts Philistia and other long-standing enemies. The point is clear—all the powers of evil were to meet their doom at the day of the Lord. But the clearest, most thrilling point of Joel chapter 3 is that God’s remnant people will be sheltered from destruction and set in heavenly places.

“Desert Storm” teaches us a very clear truth from Joel. “Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe” (Joel 3:13). The hour is late, the harvest of souls Christ predicted cannot be far away.

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by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press Publishing Association, Nampa, Idaho.

Monday, January 20

# The Final Battle

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## LOGOS

Joel 3:1-21

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### Judgment on the Nations (read Joel 3:1-13)

*"I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel" (Joel 3:2, RSV).*

Only a few months ago I penned the words for my contribution to the Collegiate study on Ezekiel 38. The parallel is striking. Both prophets looked forward to a day when God would gather the nations and judge them for their rebellion. In both cases the prophets no doubt expected the "mother of all battles" scenario to be quite literal and involving the historical enemies of Israel. And no doubt such a literal confederacy would have developed had God's nation of Israel remained faithful. He intended to fight their battles and vindicate their faithfulness in judgments against encircling powers of wickedness.

But something tragic intervened. Israel slipped ever deeper into apostasy and denial. Eventually their leaders crucified the very Son of God—the same Jesus Christ who wept over Jerusalem for stoning and killing the prophets. "Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate," He declared in anguish (Matthew 23:38, RSV).

"The description of the return is in terms of how the promises of God would have met fulfillment if

the nation of Israel had cooperated with God. . . . The prosperity of Israel would have excited the enmity of the nations. . . . The application of this prophecy to the future must be made on the basis of the revelation of the NT" (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 948).

Of course there was a fulfillment for God's people in a limited historical way. They did return from a Babylonian captivity, and there were numerous signal moments of God battling for His faithful ones. But the time and absolute fulfillment of these apocalyptic words must wait till the very last moment of the great controversy on the planet; and it must involve all of God's faithful, "all of Israel," as Paul summarized those who follow Christ. Spiritual heirs, a spiritual Israel, will inherit the promise of victory held out by Joel.

"Prepare war" is the charge of verse 9. Yes, we see the "wars and rumours of war" in the nations round about. More significantly we see a final paroxysm of evil developing. Morality is beyond disgust. Cruelty has become an art form. Actual Satan worship is alive and given equal civil rights to the practice of Christianity. Spiritual Armageddon must be very near.

"Plowshares into swords" and "pruning hooks into spears" (verse 10) are fine figures of the uncontrolled arms race we see in the world today. This is a perverse twist to the words of Isaiah 2:4, which promise demilitarization in

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by Lincoln E. Steed

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God's final kingdom of peace. The United Nations has inscribed those words in stone outside its headquarters, but the reality is Joel 3:10.

Joel 3:12 speaks of judgment in the valley of Jehoshaphat. Even with the original literal intention of the prophecy, the location itself was of little significance. Jehoshaphat means "Yahweh has judged," and that doubtless was the prime meaning of the valley. The great moment of truth for the nations will come.

### **The Day of the Lord (read Joel 3:14-16)**

*"Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision"* (Joel 3:14, RSV).

"The day of the Lord" resonates throughout prophetic and apocalyptic writing. God's people always understood the term as shorthand for the final reckoning. There was nothing beyond that for the wicked. Too late for second thoughts. For God's people it was a day of mixed apprehension and joyous expectation.

Perhaps the best example of how God's people regarded the day of the Lord might be the situation on the typical day of atonement. Each Israelite had confessed known sins and offered the correct sacrifices. Then the high priest entered the most holy place to minister the blood before the very presence of God. The waiting crowds listened with bated breath for the tinkle of bells on the high priest's garments. What if he should die before the Lord? What if the Lord sensed unconfessed sin? The tension was no doubt palpable to all.

Joel portrays multitudes in a moment of judgment or decision. The text is a little misleading. Its primary sense is of them coming before God for His decision. However, in anticipating that day, all

are placed in a position of making an eternal decision—for or against God—faithfulness or rebellion.

"Sun and moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining" (verse 15, RSV). These words seem lifted retroactively from Revelation and the figures of Christ's return. And this is the correct reading today. The scope of Joel's day of the Lord is universal and a final accounting for evil. A fearful day.

But "the Lord is a refuge to his people" (verse 16, RSV): a remnant of faithful ones will be preserved and redeemed from the final battle. There is no record of the high priest falling before the anger of the Lord on the day of atonement. God loves to reward His penitent followers.

### **Blessed Deliverance (read Joel 3:17-21)**

*"So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who dwell in Zion, my holy mountain"* (Joel 3:17, RSV).

These concluding verses in chapter 3 are rather all embracing. The words "never again" (verse 17, RSV) and "for ever" (verse 20, RSV) point to a once-and-for-all resolution to the problem and to eternal rest and security for God's people.

"The picture is of the Jerusalem that might have been. . . . When the New Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven . . . Satan and the vast host with him will seek to overrun the holy city, but they will perish in the attempt" (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 950). End of story—happily-ever-after time! "For the Lord dwells in Zion" (verse 21, RSV).

### **REACT**

1. What evidences can I list for the nearness of "the day of the Lord"?
2. Why are the nations angry at God's people?

Tuesday, January 21

# The Roar of Victory

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## TESTIMONY

Key Text: Joel 3:16

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“The Lord roars from Zion . . . and the heavens and the earth shake” (Joel 3:16, RSV). Embedded as these words are in a chapter heavy on war and destruction, they carry a chill warning. God is stirring Himself—watch out!

But God has revealed Himself before. “Never since man was created had there been witnessed such a manifestation of divine power as when the law was proclaimed from Sinai. . . . Amid the most terrific convulsions of nature the voice of God, like a trumpet, was heard from the cloud. The mountain was shaken from base to summit, and the hosts of Israel, pale and trembling with terror, lay upon their faces upon the earth”<sup>1</sup> What a scene! And in the next few words Ellen White quotes our text for today, drawing a parallel to the last, great day of the Lord. Another day of fear for many.

“An earthquake marked the hour when Christ laid down His life, and another earthquake witnessed the moment when He took it up in triumph. He who had vanquished death and the grave came forth from the tomb with the tread of a conqueror, amid the reeling of the earth, the flashing of lightning, and the roaring of thunder. When He shall come to the earth again, He will shake ‘not the earth only, but also heaven.’”<sup>2</sup> And then Ellen White

quotes our text for today—the second part. “But the Lord will be the hope of His people, and the strength of the children of Israel.”

God’s people have greatest need of His protection in a time of war and distress. The scene of Joel chapter 3 is one of war, revenge, judgment, and turmoil on every side. But thank God, it is also one of assurance to God’s faithful remnant. When God roars out His judgments, they will be words of commendation for the company of the faithful.

“Soon I heard the voice of God, which shook the heavens and the earth. There was a mighty earthquake. Buildings were shaken down on every side. I then heard a triumphant shout of victory, loud, musical, and clear. I looked upon the company, who, a short time before, were in such distress and bondage. Their captivity was turned. A glorious light shone upon them. . . . Their enemies, the heathen around them, fell like dead men; they could not endure the light that shone upon the delivered holy ones. This light and glory remained upon them, until Jesus was seen in the clouds of heaven, and the faithful, tried company were changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, from glory to glory. . . . Rich, musical shouts of glory and victory were upon every immortal tongue.”<sup>3</sup>

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1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 34.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 780.

3. *Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 272, 273.

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by Lincoln E. Steed

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# For Better or Worse

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## EVIDENCE

Key Text: Joel 3:14

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Joel looks forward to our day and sees a great moment of decision. Yes, our world is wicked beyond imagination. The atrocities committed upon innocent Kuwaitis by plundering Iraqi soldiers are a vivid example of that. So too are the countless murders in our drug- and sex-ravaged cities. But a great moment of decision implies many tetering between absolute evil and a last-minute return to God: last-chance time. A last chance for God's people to cry out His goodness and call the undecided back from the field of death.

"Too often Christians have focussed on sin's latest triumphs as proof that something exceptional is soon to occur," writes author Douglas Cooper in his thought-provoking book *Living in Our Finest Hour*. "Ask yourself this question," he challenges. "As evil grows continually more aggressive, can we expect a corresponding surge of good?"<sup>1</sup>

Good question. Satan is banking on evil to overpower good. He's putting all his bets on the massive callup Joel describes in chapter 3. Satan is certain that his armies will sweep away the few righteous and confound God.

"The challenge of this hour appears to be this: The increasing intensity of evil and selfishness in some must be matched by a

parallel increase of love and righteousness in others. When iniquity abounds, grace and truth must much more abound. . . . People must recognize the special chance that is theirs to align with God's cause of righteousness and love and must be willing to defend their faith in God to the death if necessary."<sup>2</sup>

Before a game a coach will talk victory to the team. Before a war the generals inspire the troops. "You are going to win."

The big one is coming up soon. All the universe is watching. The general is standing by to advise and reinforce us. It's a time for action. "There is no more exciting hour to be alive. There have never been, nor will there ever be, greater challenges or more magnificent opportunities to accomplish, to contribute, and to serve. The stakes have never been higher, but neither have the rewards and satisfactions ever been greater. . . . Satan will be permanently defeated in the life of every individual human being who chooses to live completely for love, for God who is love."<sup>3</sup>

## REACT

How real is the battle in my life?

What were the conditions of enlistment in God's cause?

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1. Douglas Cooper, *Living in Our Finest Hour* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1982), p. 9.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 11.

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by Lincoln E. Steed

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Thursday, January 23

# A Time for War

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## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Matthew 10:34**

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Taken in the truest sense the scene of Joel chapter 3 is the great climax to the great controversy.

I see three distinct elements. First, the process of separation: the result of the latter-day call to come out of Babylon. The good are getting closer to God, and the bad are drifting together into a great clump of evil.

The second element in Joel chapter 3 is judgment. We are face to face with the reality of a God acting powerfully and decisively against evil. This is the "strange" work of God—the same God who told Moses on Sinai that "I will not clear the guilty" (Joel 3:21, cf. Exodus 34:7). And the same God who from the cross cried, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). But the moment for forgiveness has passed. In Joel we see God cradling those who have claimed His forgiveness—and casting into everlasting doom those too proud to come to Him.

Part three is the best part for those of us who yearn for a better world. True, the promises of a heavenly home and a New Jerusalem are more familiar to us in the words of John's revelation. However, we only need a quick look at Joel chapter 3 to see that much of the new world terminology of John comes directly from the old world hope of Joel.

Yes, through Joel, God has

promised ultimate peace and safety for those of us who will run and hide under the shadow of the Almighty. But our message here and now, in these latter days, cannot really be one of "peace and safety." Jesus no doubt shocked His hearers when He said, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34, RSV).

The key to this text is "on earth." Yes, Christ did come to bring peace beyond the trauma of sin. He came to bring peace to minds troubled by sin. He is the Prince of Peace. But His intention was and is to "stir the pot" and trouble the minds of forgetful, sinful men—to force a decision. When the issue is made clear-cut, there will indeed be conflict between good and evil. There will be inner conflict as men struggle with conscience and the promptings of the Spirit. And worldwide conflicts as wickedness writhes under a clarion call from God's people to heed His call before it is too late.

The How-To of our lesson involves us in a very practical way. We are God's agents to effect the disposition of troops in the upcoming battle. We can warn the world of sin's dangers, of God's coming judgment, and proclaim His last-minute call of mercy. We can add to the army of God.

## REACT

Am I a pawn in a great power struggle, or an agent for change?

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by Lincon E. Steed

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# Apocalypse Now

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## OPINION

Key Text: Joel 3:17

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The second half of Joel's rather short collection of prophetic pronouncements is unarguably latter-day stuff. The promise of God's Spirit in chapter 2, verse 28 was applied by Peter to the day of Pentecost, but its scope is far wider: "all flesh," "prophesy," "dreams," and "visions" overwhelm even Pentecost. And beyond this prediction we are shown the great trauma of the final battle—the day of the Lord itself.

But how literally can we read Joel? A lot of the book sounds as overstated as Saddam Hussein's "wallowing in their own blood," and "mother of all battles." And after all, God does not now work through the nation of Israel—so maybe the whole scenario is a spiritual allegory, in the sense that we Christians are spiritual Israel?

A good friend and I have spent many hours debating, and just plain discussing the battle of Armageddon. Is it literal or spiritual? We have bounced around the great prophecies of Old and New Testaments and the clarifying statements of Ellen White. I still find room to disagree with my friend on some points. We are both agreed that Armageddon is primarily the great and climactic struggle between the forces of good and evil—a spiritual clash.

I am inclined to see a quite

literal component also—if only a magnification of the "wars and rumors of wars." After all, we know the battle with evil is palpably real; it led to the murder of Abel, and it leads to constant wars. It is a natural consequence of evil that it will attempt to destroy all in an ever-increasing frenzy of killing.

I am writing this column in the aftermath of the war to liberate Kuwait. Going into Operation Desert Storm, many Americans feared another Vietnam. Others feared it might be immeasurably violent. The term *Armageddon* was banded about.

My attention was caught by a two-page article in the February 11, 1991 issue of *Insight*, a news magazine of the *Washington Times*. The heading said it all: "Prophets See Another Armageddon."

"Many Christians who take the Bible as literal truth see the specter of Armageddon in the Persian Gulf war," wrote author Sean Picollin, citing Zachariah as one prophet to watch. Picollin then went on to quote the opinions of a wide range of religious leaders: "People believe they are watching the hand of God move," said a spokesman for Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network. "Armageddon in ebyronic form," said the Reverend Fletcher, of the Washington Bible College. "This war . . . will be . . . Armageddon," pronounced Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan.

"The scenario . . . hits all the symbolic and mythical touch-

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by Lincoln E. Steed

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stones,” conceded Scot Appleby, associate director of the Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Rabbi Schneerson, an ultraorthodox Jew, sees the war as “definitely part of the preparation for redemption.”

No, the war wasn’t Armageddon. Adventists do have some very particular insights into the chronology of final events, and we should never have seen more in the war than a rapid escalation in the power of evil, a sign perhaps of God withdrawing His restraining hand.

What saddened me was the notable absence of comment from Adventists in such an article. Perhaps the author never came asking. I hope that was the case. I can only hope that our Adventist answers would have paralleled two of the last comments in the article.

“God has things well under control,” maintained the Reverend Fletcher. “I believe God is the author of history, the superintendent of history, [that] he controls history, and that everything is eventually going to lead under God’s control to the eventual next event, the greatest event in the world, when Jesus Christ returns to earth. I have great confidence,

and great hope, an air of excitement that says, ‘Is our lifetime when we will see Jesus Christ the Lord?’ ”

“For those who believe they are ready to meet Christ, these are heady days,” summarized the article. “The Media keeps asking me, ‘Are you afraid?’” Baptist minister R. L. Hymers reports. “Well, they ask me that because they aren’t Christians. . . . It should be a time of fear for them, because they are not prepared to meet Christ. For the persons who are prepared, it is a time of great hope and joy.”

And that’s my point. We don’t really know the landscape of any final battle, but we do know that the end of all things is at hand. The days Joel warned of/promised are at hand. For God’s people these are exciting times.

“Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28, RSV).

## **REACT**

1. Is there any difference between being ready for Jesus to come and wanting Him to come soon?

2. Am I a spectator or a participant in final events?



Lesson 5, January 26–February 1

# A King Is a Father, Is a Person



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“I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people” (Micah 2:12, NIV).

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# A King Is a Father, Is a Person

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## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Micah 1:5

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Once upon a time in an underwater kingdom ruled a good and loving king. He was fair, just, and merciful in his reign, and he was a parent. He had several daughters in his household, but the youngest princess was his favorite. Concerned for her welfare, he set certain rules for her to obey. Even though the rules were wise, the littlest princess did not obey them all of the time. The king warned her against swimming to the surface where men might trap her, but she was fascinated by the world above. Often she would make short excursions to search for "human stuff" to add to a secret collection in her room. By accident, her father found out.

The king knew he would have to punish his daughter for disobeying him. It was not the first time she had disregarded the rules. His fury was fueled not only by his sense of justice but by love and concern for his daughter. In an effort to communicate the magnitude of the situation to his child, he sought out and de-

stroyed her collection. He attacked the objects that promoted her disobedience.

Surrounded by the shattered fragments of her treasures, the young princess sobbed in her room. Leaving her room, the father's countenance changed from sovereign wrath to deep sorrow. He lowered his scepter and hung his head, deeply regretting that it had come to this, as he walked away with his beloved daughter's sobs echoing in his ears.

This fanciful little fairy tale can speak to those who have children and to those who have parents. Discipline is often a necessary regret in child rearing. In our story the king's pain was as real as his daughter's even though the punishment was the just consequence of her disobedience. The following lessons deal with punishment, anguish, and restoration. By keeping the perspective of children to a heavenly Father we add another level of understanding to the prophecy of Micah. We see not only a God dealing with His people, but a Father dealing with His children and His children dealing with each other.

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by Irene Hiendlmayr

Irene Hiendlmayr recently graduated from Columbia Union College with a degree in rhetoric, literature, and composition.

Monday, January 27

# From Wasteland to Pasture

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## LOGOS

Micah 1:1, 2

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Judgment begins in the house of the Lord, but His punishment is not without the promise of a hope beyond.

**The judgments of God always begin with those of His own house (Micah 1:8).** Micah's cry is similar to that of his contemporaries, Isaiah and Jeremiah, when he prophesies the coming judgment of the Lord upon Israel. The Lord, he says in chapter 1, is coming forth to tread the high places and split the valleys. His displeasure is so great that He says, "I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones into the valley and lay bare her foundations" (verse 6).

The motifs of fire and earthquake were familiar to Israel. This was not the first time wrath had descended upon the house of God. Israel was called to be God's light to the world. His justice and mercy were to shine forth through a nation of true believers. "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa. 49:6, NIV). But they repeatedly spurned the true God. Their faith and practice were sporadic and inconsistent, at best (see 1 Kings 19:10).

God's prophets often illustrated the heavenly point of view in their own lives. Micah took upon himself the role of a

mourner for Israel, following in the custom of sack and loincloth, barefoot and howling. His emotional display was not just one man's sorrow as he prophesied doom to this country, but mirrored the extreme sorrow of the God who sent the message to His people. In this first part of Micah, God's infinite love is revealed following the actions of His children.

**Israel strayed from God and so often filled its proverbial cup of iniquity (see Micah 2:1, Isa. 5:24; Jer. 8:9).** According to Micah, their sins included idolatry (1:7a), harlotry (1:7b), greed (2:1-2), perverting of true religion (2:6-9; 6:2-7), following false prophets (3:5, 6), occult practices (3:7), and presumption (3:9-11). They had deviated far from God's plan.

Centuries later Jesus summarized keeping the Ten Commandments as loving God with all of your heart, mind, body, and soul, and loving your neighbor as yourself (see Mark 12:29, 31). In Micah's lifetime the people of Israel rejected God not only through their idol worship but because they treated each other in a despicable fashion. They became selfish, power-hungry businessmen who built their houses upon the broken lives of the people they oppressed.

Rejecting God goes hand in hand with rejecting your fellow person. The two great commandments Jesus presented are undeniably linked (see Matt. 7:20). The outward evidence of our true worship

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by Irene Hiendlmayr

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and devotion to God can be found in our dealings with those around us. The idol worship and feudalism of Israel only served to fuel their inner rejection of the true God and His laws.

**The hope of deliverance (Micah 2:12).** After judgment and punishment was the ever-present deliverance. After the fires and earthquakes come the pastures. Micah paints a picture of peace and harmony to a condemned nation, using the familiar image of a shepherd tending his flock and assuring their safety under his watchful eye in a secure pen. Their judge will not forsake them. Their Redeemer will reconcile them once again (see Isa. 40:11).

The immediate fulfillment of

the prophecy was in 722 B.C., when the Assyrians laid waste to Israel and enslaved its people. But the message reaches through the ages to all of God's people. Judgment indeed comes to the house of the Lord, but deliverance is at hand. God's flock today continues to stray in their imperfection. These are the ones He has chosen to carry His light to a desperate world. Yet, even as they receive the just consequences of their actions, their deliverance is sure. The One who goes before them (2:13) is even now waiting to reclaim them after this time of siege in their lives. Today we are Israel, and our deliverer is Jesus Christ. The hope is sure.

Tuesday, January 28

## “Get Up!”

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### TESTIMONY

Key Text: Micah 2:10

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Arise! Get up! I heard the same thing every morning for four months when I served in the U. S. Army. It was not the nicest way to get up, but it surely worked because I was up and on my feet almost instantly. It even got to the point that when 3:30 a.m. rolled around, without any need of a screaming sergeant, my body got out of the bed as if an internal alarm had sounded. It took a while, but it finally happened.

Many in our church today seem to need a wake-up call. The dormancy of God's people has reached a point where drastic action must be taken if we are to complete our work here on earth. Although we serve a God of love, we must also understand that He is a righteous and just God. A God that will not just sit there and tolerate His people sleepwalking when there is destruction looming on the horizon.

Israel in the days of the prophet Micah was in a “time of great peril. The forces for good were rapidly diminishing, the forces of evil multiplying.”<sup>1</sup> This

is the situation today.

Now is when the church needs to take a stand, now, when evil is multiplying and it has become very easy to “go with the flow,” to compromise, to live on middle ground. Now is when we must arise and go to the world telling them about Jesus. It has become very easy to look like the world. We dress like them, talk like them, listen to their music. Our standards differ little from the nominally Christian. We wouldn't want to offend anyone. But this will never work, because it is not Jesus' plan to trick people into coming to church or staying in church. Salvation comes through Jesus—not gimmicks.

God has waited long enough for His church to “arise and depart.” The Lord has been very patient. Ellen White puts it very beautifully when she says, “The God whom we serve is long suffering.”<sup>2</sup> But time is running out. When we as a church arise, stand up for Christ and to the world, then God will, as Micah 2:12 says, “gather His remnant” and take us home.

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1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 324.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 325.

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by Roger Hernandez, Jose Cortez

Roger Hernandez is a junior theology major, and Jose Cortez is a freshman theology major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.



# “Why Disasters, Why Catastrophes, Why Grief . . .?”

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## EVIDENCE

Key Text: Micah 1:1-8

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God is shown by Micah as coming down from heaven and treading upon the mountains to destroy Samaria for her persistent idolatry. The gangrene had spread into Judah also, and God's judgment is at the gates of Jerusalem. Micah pictures the approach of the invading army coming from the coastal plain through the hills of Judah to Jerusalem.

In verse 2, Micah addresses the message solely to Israel, but then we see that a summons is directed specifically to the Assyrians (who had conquered Samaria in 722), the Babylonians (who in 598 and 587 B.C. had turned Jerusalem to rubble and ashes, deporting its inhabitants), and in a general way to neighboring nations. The prophetic word that had been proclaimed long before serves as evidence. God appears at Israel's trial as a witness, to bear testimony to the watching world.

“Why this?” the people asked, pointing to the sad results of the catastrophe (verses 3-8).

The answer is given: “All this because of Jacob's transgressing, because of the sins of the house of

Israel.” It is not sufficient merely to make a connection between God and catastrophes; one must also connect the catastrophes and guilt.\*

Micah not only preaches repentance; he sets forth God's method of dealing with those who know that He pardons as well as punishes. We see Micah's strong conviction of the intimate connection between sin and punishment, repentance and forgiveness. The prophet contrasts wickedness with its results, punishment with blessing, mercy with comfort. Above all else, he knows what “justice” is. His prophetic authority enables him to announce the consequences of sin with utmost sharpness and to extend God's accusations and threats.

God gives warning so we will not suffer His wrath. Judgment is certain if God's warnings are not heeded. God disciplines us because He loves us.

All of us may experience again what it means when Jesus Christ comes to us as King. Await it day by day. He is gathering us from the dangerous situation of dispersion! Let us gather close to Him in obedience.

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\*Hans Walter Wolff, *Micah the Prophet* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1981).

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by Elvina C. Tomenko

Elvina C. Tomenko is a Russian student studying theology at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Thursday, January 30

# After the Fires and Earthquakes

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## HOW-TO

Key Texts: Micah 2:1, 12

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Israel's relationship to God was displayed in their dealings with others. Often our diversions from the Lord's path are most evident in our disposition toward others. We are imperfect people in a corrupt world, and it is not hard to believe that our relationships at times need mending. The same deliverance promised to Israel from their transgressions is ours to claim today. The redemption of Jesus Christ gives us the freedom to renew our covenant with God and mankind.

**Relationships require communication.** This means regular dialogue with God through prayer and Bible study. It is an old and often-quoted method because it is the best. You have to spend time with Him in order to develop your relationship. Reading the Bible will show you the faith and failings of others who followed God

and His infinite love and solutions for them. Prayer should be the conversational mode whereby you interact directly with your heavenly Father.

**Words require deeds.** No change is really a change until it becomes evident in your life. The test of the success in your vertical relationship with your Lord will show in your horizontal relationships to people. Find ways to constructively deal with others that fit in with your talents and lifestyle. Don't feel obligated to volunteer for every church/community program in order to prove yourself. Your place in the body of Christ is not something you work to earn. Your pastor, family, and friends may well discover hidden talents in you and request your help. Or you may become involved in church activities that interest you. Remember, dealing justly and kindly with those you are closest to, when no one is watching, is a personal ministry in itself. Please, don't neglect it.

---

by Irene Hiendlmayr

Irene Hiendlmayr recently graduated from Columbia Union College with a degree in rhetoric, literature, and composition.

# Will You Make Israel a Better Place?

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## OPINION

Key Texts: Micah 1:8

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Today's miracles are high-tech special effects. Promises are easily bought and broken for modern man. For many today a God who speaks through fire, earthquakes, and men in sackcloth seems distant, even bizarre. The tirades of life when explained by nature and science make the Old Testament a little melodramatic.

Perhaps understanding comes from a more personal parallel. As an adolescent, I could relate to Israel when I remembered the storms of childhood and the tempests of my parents. All parents discipline their children (or at least should), and all children exasperate their parents. The result is definitely a parallel to God laying waste to Israel. And the parallel enabled Micah to reach down through time and speak to me about my transgressions and my Father.

The greatest impact of Micah's message came from the several aspects he showed of the one God. It is easy to box God into a

judge's bench or a king's throne, but He is also a tender Shepherd and a loving Father. I saw this being, capable of great wrath and mercy, provide comfort to a condemned nation and grieve in the agony of rejection. The image of the God of the cosmos, barefooted and naked, weeping for His children, cannot be soon forgotten. It is underscored by a remembrance of Christ's tears. I think of Him barefooted and naked on a cross, once again rejected by His own.

The thought of a person so scorned and in such suffering is heartbreaking enough. How much more should it be when we realize that Christ is the King of the universe and a Lord of infinite love who remains by the side of a people who persist in ingratitude and anarchy. I don't know many parents, spouses, or friends who would subject themselves to so much heartache and still refuse to cast off those they love. However, our imperfection is not an excuse. I know I can't always love and serve God and people without error. But if I can pass on the hope of Jesus and maybe make Israel a little better place, I want to try.

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by Irene Hiendlmayr

Irene Hiendlmayr recently graduated from Columbia Union College with a degree in rhetoric, literature, and composition.

Lesson 6, February 2-8

# The “No>Returns”



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“But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin” (Micah 3:8, NIV).

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## Follow the Leader

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### INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Micah 3:1

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I was cruising near the dairy case when I ran into an Adventist acquaintance in the grocery store.

We exchanged a few pleasantries, talked of "getting the kids together," and then, before continuing down the aisle, she paused to peer into my grocery cart.

"Any hamburger?" she inquired. The grin on her face told me she spoke in jest.

Of course, what isn't funny is the fact that there are some people who would actually take the presence of hamburger in someone's cart as a statement of their standing with God. They are the same people who might fear for your salvation if you waded in the water over your knees on Sabbath.

For many people the externals become the very ground of salvation. Ultimately a person's salvation hangs solely on a cross in the person of Jesus Christ. Our obedient response to that means much,

but in itself it does not save.

Our spirituality isn't as much a product of what we do, but of who He is. Our response comes after we establish a relationship with Him. Then we are made free in body and soul to produce the works He calls us to.

If we get "the cart before the horse" on this one point, we run the risk of ending up with a passed-down religion that is meaningless to both the person who passes it and the one who receives it.

If, on the other hand, we take that "setting an example" stuff to mean embracing Christ in an intimate relationship, others will be moved to follow our commitment. We will be a vital congregation of persons united in the fact that each has a vital, satisfying, personal, and saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Wise are the church leaders and members who recognize that what they do isn't as important as who they are. It is in being sons and daughters of Christ that we truly show Him to the world.

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by Stephanie Irwin

Stephanie Irwin is an account executive with the Miami Valley Hospital communications department and coordinator of the *Dayton Daily News* youth page, in Ohio.

Monday, February 3

# In Trouble When the Leaders Are Bad

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## LOGOS

James 2:12, 13

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### Background

Micah's first discourse in chapter 2 denounces corruption in the Jewish business arena. Now, in his second sermon recorded in chapter 3, he goes on to decry the corruption of the political and religious leaders and to warn them of the consequences if they persist in their sin.

We expect a lot out of our leaders today! Before we vote for someone or appoint them to high office, we want to know not only their position on issues, but also what type of person they are publicly and privately. The hard look at public officials through the media microscope is a phenomena of today's national interest in having leaders who are a cut above what we expect in ourselves. Considering their influence and the example they carry, that's probably not a bad idea.

It wasn't much different in Micah's day. God's people counted on the nation's leaders to govern with justice and mercy. They were sorely disappointed.

Three influential classes of leaders are referred to in Micah:

1. The rulers, judges, and magistrates who administer the executive and judicial branches of government.

2. The priests, who were the religious leaders and teachers in

Israeli society.

3. Those trained in the schools of the prophets, who were the counselors of wisdom in the community.

### When Government Officials Go Bad (read Micah 3:1-4)

Rulers and political leaders are entrusted to administer justice and be the servants of the people to achieve their common good. Instead of righteously administering the law, the leaders of government in Micah's day sought to enrich themselves. They accepted bribes (see verse 11) and made mockery of justice. They built luxurious palaces and increased their personal wealth by exorbitant taxes and unrighteous decisions. Micah says they were not only attracted to evil, they loved it, and reveled in their pursuit of defrauding the poor and middle class.

In chapter 2 God referred to His people as a flock of sheep. Now the shepherds, those chosen by God to lead, protect, and comfort the sheep, are proven unworthy. Ezekiel 34:1-10 speaks of the same problem. The leaders were to tend the sheep, take care of the weak, heal the sick, bandage the hurt, round up the wanderers, and seek out the lost. Instead they had taken care of themselves at the expense of the sheep. Micah says such rulers are not shepherds, they are butchers!

*Where do you go for justice*

---

by Dan Stevens

Dan Stevens is associate pastor at the Kettering, Ohio, Seventh-day Adventist Church, in charge of education and young adults.

*when the leaders of an organization are corrupt? What should a Christian do if he knows of such?*

Micah warns corrupt leaders that in the judgment they will receive measure for measure (2:4). When they cry for help, God will not hear them.

### **When Religious Leaders Go Bad (read verses 5-8)**

The term *prophet* in the Old Testament covered a broader role than receiving divine instruction through visions or dreams. This class included all those who had completed the school of the prophets and were employed in giving instruction and wise counsel to the people. This group had increased significantly by Micah's day.

But wisdom had ceased to be the basis for their counsel. They had become more concerned in feeding their bellies than feeding the people. They would predict anything you wanted for the right price: peace, prosperity, and long life to any who paid. But if the "offering" was not included, then one could expect only a prediction of calamity.

False prophets and fortune-tellers promise the seeker a higher revelation, represented by new light; how fitting that their judgment is darkness even in the daytime!

Then, in the midst of this denunciation, Micah makes a wonderful claim. He is inspired by the Spirit of Jehovah, which has given him (1) power that his words may fall with force and conviction, (2) judgment to discern the real problems of his society, and (3) strength to face any opposition. This is a real contrast with the false prophets, who are not inspired by God but by their own greed.

### **When All Is Said and Done (read verses 9-12)**

What is worse than personal gain in public or religious office? Answer: not feeling bad about it. Apparently the leaders had been doing it for so long that they had actually deluded themselves into thinking they were right with God.

Or even worse, knowing that they were wrong, they excused their behavior by relying upon externals for their safety net from judgment. The Jews felt secure in their possession of all the right things:

1. The right doctrine based on revelation
2. The right identity as God's chosen people
3. The right temple
4. The right kingdom set up originally by divine appointment and faithfully passed down to the present.

God could not possibly let them be destroyed, they reasoned. They were convinced that the status quo was permanently theirs.

*Are Adventists ever in danger of looking at the externals of doctrine, organization, and history as the validation of our existence and mission?*

The internals that God wants and that Micah's contemporaries neglected will be pointed out in Micah 6:8: "What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God" (TEV).

Because of neglect for true heart religion, judgment is predicted for Jerusalem, the seat of government, and Zion, the center of religion. The temple, long the glory of the faith, will no longer be the dwelling place of God; after the judgment is past, the site will return to the wild condition in which Abraham found it so long ago. How fitting! Everything the wicked leaders cherished and connived to build for their glory reduced to rubble and decay.

Tuesday, February 4

# Ambassadors for Christ

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## TESTIMONY

Key Text: Micah 6:8

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God calls people to be leaders in His church. Because the position of leadership is full of responsibility, certain guidelines are given for those in such positions. In particular, every leader should follow the example of Jesus Christ. His life was characterized by love, unselfishness, and concern for others.

God pays special attention to the work of the leaders. Precious souls may be won or lost through their influence.

"The man at the head of any work in God's cause is to be a man of intelligence, a man capable of managing large interests successfully, a man of even temper, Christ-like forbearance, and perfect self-control. He only whose heart is transformed by the grace of Christ can be a proper leader."<sup>1</sup>

The leader should be "like Daniel, seeking for the power that comes alone from God, that he may represent, not himself . . . but the truth in righteousness."<sup>2</sup>

"God desires to have upon this earth righteous representatives, through whom He can communicate to His people His peculiar favor. Those representatives are to be men who honor God by keeping His commandments,—wise, true men, who can act as leaders, walking circumspectly, showing to the world the meaning of true loyalty to God."<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes the work of the

leader is to call sin by its name.

It is a very sensitive task that, nevertheless, must be tackled.

Like Micah, the prophet, the leader should be ready "to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (Micah 3:8, NKJV).

"In order to prosper, every church must have men upon whom it can rely in times of peril, men who are as true as steel, unselfish men, who have the interest of God's cause lying nearer their hearts than anything which concerns their own opinions or their worldly interests. . . . Those who are valuable in life and influence have felt the importance of following Jesus closely, of making the life of Christ their study and example. This will require effort, meditation, and earnest prayer."<sup>4</sup>

Paul the apostle reminded Timothy: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, NKJV).

## REACT

1. How can a sinner in need of God's saving grace be a representative of truth and righteousness?

2. How can you tell if a leader is faithful to his calling?

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1. *Medical Ministry*, p. 164.

2. *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 357.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 2, p. 1032.

4. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 637.

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by Petre Udrea

Petre Udrea is a medical student at Wright State University School of Medicine, Dayton, Ohio.



# Leadership by Example

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## EVIDENCE

Key Text: Micah 3:8

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Micah's life and ministry has some similarities to Christ's life. Micah chose to live and work among the common people. His ministry was always to others. He pointed out the faults of specific groups of people, but never the institution. He always spoke with and of the authority of God. He refused to compromise his mission, even though it was not accepted by the leaders of the day. He made sure that God was the authority by which he lived and taught.

Micah "saw and judged the officials in terms of the old ideal of Israel as a society governed and preserved by YHWH. His indictments uncovered a fundamental shift of fealty. Though they still engaged in pious talk (2:7f; 3:11b), the officials had found another authority which ruled their actions. It was wealth. In their dedication to their new 'sovereign,' neither God nor neighbor had much chance."<sup>1</sup>

Leaders can learn from Micah's life and teaching. His example-life must be our calling. If we follow the three gifts which Micah was given, we can lead God's people to greater understanding and truth. "Micah does not speak of his own aptitude, but of capacities which have come

upon him for the performance of mission. The gifts are three. The first is *koah*, power to persevere in the face of opposition and discouragement (Isa. 40:29, 31; 49:4; Ps. 31:11). The third is *geburah*, the courage and might that equips warriors for action surrounded by danger and enemies (Judges 8:21; Prov. 8:14; Isa. 3:25, etc.). The second, middle term is the discriminating and critical capacity for discerning what is at issue between God and people; it is *mispat*, the sense for what is just according to the norms set by YHWH for the social order of Israel. *Mispat* is what the leaders in Jerusalem are responsible for (3:1), but they abhor and pervert it (3:9)."<sup>2</sup>

In 1977 Jimmy Carter is sworn in as president on a Bible opened to Micah 6:8. In 1959 the Soviet Union presented the United Nations with a bronzed sculpture of a man beating a sword into a plowshare, with words on the base of the sculpture referring to Micah 4:3, "We shall beat our swords into plowshares."

## REACT

1. What gives a leader the authority to lead?
2. How can we as leaders learn from Micah?

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1. James Luther Mays, *Micah* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 20.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

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by William J. Nordgren

William J. Nordgren is a computer programmer at Electronic Data Systems, Inc.

Thursday, February 6

## A Fire From God

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### HOW-TO

Key Text: Micah 3:8

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The charismatically outstretched arms and broad “righteous” smile caught my attention as I scanned the newspaper. A pastor, obviously! The caption beside his picture explained his excitement: “Church Plans Book Burning.” His noble aspiration was “. . . to rid our city . . . [of] satanic paraphernalia, and then . . . the Holy Spirit will have a greater freedom to flow.” Members of his church, neighbors, and unidentified “heathens” contributed their witchcraft books, horoscopes, playing cards, secular records, cultic church literature, and an assortment of other “satanic paraphernalia” for the flames.

I doubt their fiery tactic will deter my city’s trade in satanic software. While I commend them for seeking a better “local” world, I also recognize that it’s easier to toss a book wishfully into the fire than to confront the underlying spiritual problems raging within our hearts or our churches.

### A Challenge

Micah rebuked Israel’s leaders for their injustice, perversion of truth, and political adventurism. These blatant sins burn at the heart of government, church, and home, hollowing our hearts more surely than a whole library of witchcraft books. Worse yet, when the smokescreen of religious piety and pride blinds us so that we

cannot see our own spiritual needs, we make our faith a mockery to the world. The prophet’s rebuke challenges us to reexamine just what it is that fuels our flame of faith.

### Knowing Justice (read Micah 3:1-4)

Biblical justice concerns itself more with restoring relationships than upholding the law. Whenever the relational impact of justice is not considered, a judgmental attitude causes spiritual cannibalism—faith in God’s leaders and His church is stripped down like flesh from the bones (see verse 2) and eaten by the critical and power hungry.

The restoration of justice that God seeks for us (see Isa. 42:1-4) will bring a restoration of relationship with others and with God. Justice is more than doing the right thing, it is also being the right thing to all people (see 1 Cor. 9:19-23).

### Preaching Truth (read Micah 3:5-8)

Micah contrasts his Spirit-filled declarations of Israel’s need with the prophets who preached for their stomachs, fearing to bite the hand that fed them. Truth, like justice, is concerned about relational impact. To speak truth without love is cruelty; to speak love without truth is a lie. For all truth reveals the love of God; love reveals all the truth about God. Love and truth are meaningless apart from God.

---

by Randy Daniel

Randy Daniel is a researcher for the ombudsman’s office in Dayton, Ohio.

**Political Neutrality (read Micah 3:9-12)**

Israel's leaders torched the nation's future on the altar of personal greed. They killed or blackmailed anyone who stood between them and a richer, more powerful lifestyle for themselves. Their greed and political adventurism cloaked itself in the garb of "doing the Lord's work." "Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the Lord and say, 'Is not the Lord among us? No disaster will come upon us'" (Micah 3:11, NIV).

To act contrary to self-interest

rages against a deep primal instinct to protect and promote ourselves. But that is exactly what we are called to do: To "lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16, NIV). Burning books is senseless if it is not a fire from God—a Spirit-filled blaze that cleans and illuminates our hearts, churches, and community.

**REACT**

1. What is the laity's role in leadership accountability?

2. What can the church do to dissuade political adventurism in its structural organization?

Friday, February 7

# Accept, Forgive, and/or Depose?

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## OPINION

**Key Texts: Luke 6:37; Matt. 6:14, 15**

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In chapter 3, Micah lambastes the leaders of Israel, including the religious leaders. Their values have become inverted—they “hate good and love evil.”

The Scriptures provide so many reassurances that the church and individuals survive despite the curse of fallibility! In biblical history Israelite leaders frequently fell short of God’s plan for them. This chapter identified a mass failure. Spiritual or moral weaknesses are obviously still a part of human nature, which is why even the converted are called upon to “die daily.”

How do we relate to the lack of perfection in church leadership? The first response might be to place our expectations of them on a low level, no matter how good or moral they might appear. Even the great fall once in a while; they just tend to crash more loudly and injure more bystanders than the norm! Those who do not publicly fall may still mislead us if we follow through blind admiration. And most important, our conscience must always override the voice of even the most “holy” of our spiritual guides.

Another response is that we allow our leaders the latitude to be human, to fail. Just as we desire acceptance despite our errors, we must offer that same acceptance to them. Many issues appear so simple when observed remotely, but the complexity increases as one becomes more involved. I believe this applies not only to logical decision making but also to moral dilemmas.

A third response is recognition that there is a point when corruption must be exposed, and “the rascals should be thrown out!” While we must accept some imperfections, we also have the right to expect certain levels of behavior. There are times when an individual must be removed from his or her position. When someone has betrayed our corporate trust, the feelings run high. It is prudent then to make leadership changes. But this should not interfere with our forgiveness of the individuals. A Saviour who forgave His murderers certainly set an example of forgiveness in extreme circumstances.

## REACT

1. If Christ is saving a church full of sinners, is it reasonable to expect the leadership to be in the same class?

2. How much fallibility can we grant them?

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by Brian Christenson

Brian Christenson is a systems consultant at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio.

# Does God really understand what I'm going through?

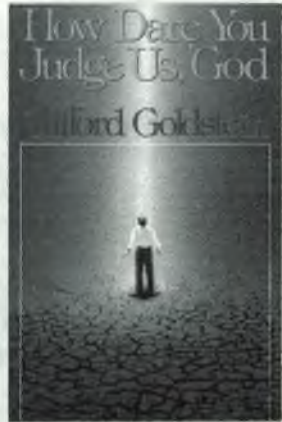
Why can't God just use His omnipotence to protect His children from the hurts and tragedies of life? Isn't God greater than Satan? Then why the suffering?

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Lesson 7, February 9-15

# A Way Out



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“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times” (Micah 5:2, NIV).

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Sunday, February 9

## Taking Sides

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### INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isa. 9:6

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Isaiah 9:6 reminds us of Christmas. The words are usually sung at Christmastime in Handel's *Messiah*. And they describe things we like to think about during December. But now it's February, and we still need "the Child"; maybe more so now than then!

The fourth and fifth chapters of Micah are all about choices. They describe the choices between certain spiritual extremes. Micah 4:3 says, "He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide" (NIV). This sounds very much to me like choice.

Later in Micah 5:8 God states that "the remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples" (NIV), implying that there is quite a gap between

two types of people in Israel: those for God and those who are "His enemies." It seems we are required to take sides for or against God. Which again makes the issue one of choice.

"This is such obvious stuff," you say. "Why tell us we must make a choice?" Quite frankly, I raise this issue here precisely because so many people today fool themselves into thinking they don't have to make a choice. Many today think that the best mode of transportation through this life is riding a fence. And they think the best safeguard against accident is to buckle down against making any commitments. But God pushes us. He invites us to make choices for or against Him. He asks us to take sides. He actually brings about circumstances in our lives that require us to make a choice.

---

by Charles Liu

Charles Liu is campus chaplain for Loma Linda University and pastor for campus ministry at the Campus Hill Church, Loma Linda, California.

Monday, February 10

# God Takes Sides

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## LOGOS

Micah 5:2

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There are several other possibilities I see for how God might have dealt with the problem of sin. He could have taken the distant approach and let man disappear in the solution.

But God chose to take sides. God chose a particular way of saving humankind from sinfulness; a way that made the ultimate sacrifice yet gave ultimate freedom from the consequences of sin.

### Two Sides (read Mic. 4:1-5)

The first verse of Micah 4 gives us a sense of competing mountains; peaks striving for our attention. People of Micah's day thought that worship became more elevated—literally—as the venue for that worship gained elevation above sea level. Remember how the builders of the Tower of Babel strove to reach to the very heavens. Elevation itself represented power and authority to the people of Micah's day also.

The two sides alluded to in the heading of this section are sides built around power. To be above the other mountains, Mount Zion would have to grow a great deal! Physically it was a relatively small mount. Carmel and Bashan and Sharon are all much taller mountains in Palestine. But spiritually Mount Zion was to triumph over all. Why? Because those who led the worship on

Mount Zion were to derive their power from God.

### God's Side (read Mic. 4:6-13)

These verses present the lame as the ones on the top of "Mount Zion." They are to be established in the watchtower—an elevated position in the city.

They are to rise from the obscurity of low-level disability to high-level visibility. And, the most important part of this swing from "low" to "high" is that it is all part of God's plan. It is not something the poor and afflicted talk God into doing, but rather it is part of His master plan for them (see verse 12).

### A Leader for God's Side (read Mic. 5:1-5)

As God's people become used to the idea that God has a plan for their lives, they naturally seek leadership to guide them to His side. It is a natural response for people, when called to make a decision between sides, to want someone to lead them in that commitment. God promises them such leadership. But it is to be based upon authority, rather than power. The security of the people of God will not be assured through arms or might or strength they possess, but only through a security based upon "his greatness" (verse 4, NIV). The text points to the first coming of Jesus and is a prophecy of the leadership and authority centered in the person of Jesus, "who is from of old" (verse 2, NIV).

---

by Charles Liu

Charles Liu is campus chaplain for Loma Linda University and pastor for campus ministry at the Campus Hill Church, Loma Linda, California.



## **God Delivers Us to His Side (read Mic. 5:5-15)**

In these 11 verses God's name, or a personal pronoun referring to Him, is mentioned 14 times. This strong emphasis on God's activity in this process of taking sides is to show us that we do not fight the battle of choosing sides on our own. Rather, God delivers us over to His side if we ask Him.

In the battle of life we must constantly choose sides. We are asked every day to choose for or against God. We are overwhelmed if we try to make all these deci-

sions on our own, let alone follow through on them. Our only hope is in God, who, 14 times in these verses on choosing sides, gives us the assurance He is in charge of this drama, and we are the recipients of His grace.

### **REACT**

1. What was it like the last time you tried to choose for God in your own power?
2. How has God shown you His creative power in your battle to choose the right side?
3. How do you know which side is God's side?

Tuesday, February 11

## Watch the Middle

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### TESTIMONY

Key Text: Joshua 24:15

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Taking sides in the great controversy has been the theme of this week's lessons to this point. And taking sides implies new issues arising which call for decision. But in this case the issues are really old ones.

"Satan, by means of his success in turning man aside from the path of obedience, became 'the god of this world.' 2 Corinthians 4:4. The dominion that once was Adam's passed to the usurper. But the Son of God proposed to come to this earth to pay the penalty of sin, and thus not only redeem man, but recover the dominion forfeited. It is of this restoration that Micah prophesied when he said, 'O Tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto Thee shall it come, even the first dominion.' Micah 4:8. . . .

"This hope of redemption through the advent of the Son of God as Saviour and King has

never become extinct in the hearts of men. From the beginning there have been some whose faith has reached out beyond the shadows of the present to the realities of the future."<sup>1</sup>

Taking sides in a controversy also implies some pain in the confrontation. God realized this when He decided to confront Satan and thus allowed the human race to participate in this same confrontation. He knew with this kind of temptation He must also provide a way of escape. "O daughter of Zion, . . . the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies. Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. But they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they His counsel.' Micah 4:10-12. God will not fail His church in the hour of her greatest peril. He has promised deliverance."<sup>2</sup>

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1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 682.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 538.

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by Charles Liu

Charles Liu is campus chaplain for Loma Linda University and pastor for campus ministry at the Campus Hill Church, Loma Linda, California.

# I, Eye, Aye

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## EVIDENCE

Key Text: Micah 5:15

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Many college students know the chorus based upon Micah 6:8 that tells us about loving mercy, doing justice, and walking humbly with God. But very few of them remember that it comes *after* Micah 5, where God talks about some “nastier” things.

Vengeance, anger, and wrath are not exactly the sort of things we write praise choruses about! So why are these words in the Bible?

A little background on Micah’s time is useful. First, recall that Micah lived at the end of a long downward spiral in the spiritual and moral climate of Israel. As a contemporary of Isaiah he was well acquainted with the nation of people Isaiah called “sons of a sorceress . . . offspring of adulterers and prostitutes” (Isa. 57:3, NIV).

Tradition holds that Isaiah paid the ultimate sacrifice for those words by becoming a martyr for his faith during the horrific reign of King Manasseh. Micah is writing to people who killed prophets for saying things they didn’t like to hear! We’re not talking about disagreements over the color of carpet in the sanctuary. We’re discussing who dies next when theological disagreement exists. No wonder the people of God were sighing and crying for justice and a way out of this world of “might makes right.” Micah is directed to people starv-

ing for righteousness and godly anger, for carefully balanced vengeance and absolutely fair judgment.

Micah was written to a culture used to a black-and-white understanding of issues. Gray was not a color of the times. If one were right, then others must be wrong. If there were disagreements, only one action was possible; get rid of the opposition. To disagree in an agreeable way was not an option. How does one communicate to such a mind-set? Apparently with a black-and-white message.

Micah was written to a group of people who needed to know that in the midst of an ebb and flow of pagan practices, God can always be counted on as a steady and absolute influence for right. A child may initially rebel against the absolute constraints of his or her parents yet later admit that parental authority gave him or her the security to rebel. Just so, God gives apostate Israel that same steady assurance that He will never change. He will be a steady rock of security for them.

Yet, even in the middle of this strong passage of judgment and justice, there comes a section that may be summarized as “I, Eye, Aye.” In the last six verses of Micah 5, there are six uses of the personal pronoun *I* to refer to God’s active role in human history. God will actively bring all who will come over to His side. He says *I* will do it.

Earlier God has referred to Je-

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by Charles Liu

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rusalem as the “watchtower of the flock” (Mic. 4:8, NIV). The watchtower was a common spot from which shepherds could guard their flocks. From the tower they could see clearly how their sheep were doing. God likens this symbol of clear sight to the victory over enemies His people will experience as they choose His side. He is pleading to His children to come to His side that He might give them a clear “eye to see with.”

And finally, God shows His eternal vindication of His people

as well as of His name when He speaks of those who will “live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth” (Mic. 5:4, NIV). Thus throughout these verses on taking sides and choosing commitments we see that God is in charge.

“I will make the lame a remnant” (Mic. 4:7, NIV, emphasis supplied). He says He will make us stand where each of us can see with a clear eye. The dictionary defines “aye” to mean always, or forever. And He will bring us vindication for aye.

# A Mountaintop Retreat

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## HOW-TO

Key Text: Micah 4:1, 2

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Inscribed on the wall of the United Nations in New York City are the words from Isaiah 2:4: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives: Nation shall not lift sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." This hopeful message from Isaiah is certainly not a reality in today's world.

Just as in ancient times, conflict is all around us. The world seems like a lost cause with all the quarreling and conflict among nations, between races, and within families. Do you ever wonder if there will ever be peace anywhere? Why doesn't God put an end to all this confusion and trouble? This issue of conflict is a central theme in Micah 5.

Then in Micah 4:1 there is that wonderful promise of the mountaintop home for the family of God. Micah 4:2 goes on to describe the composition of this family. It will consist of many nations coming together. Let's explore the implications.

1. *The family in the mountaintop retreat will be a rainbow of people.* There will be no exclusiveness, no shunning, no separatism. This raises some searching questions: Do we want to live in this kind of a family? How do we really feel about spending eternity in close as-

sociation with people of a different culture or race, or even with those homeless people? *The best way to find out is to try it out now.* Spend time with people of a different race, culture, or economic status. Do feelings of separatism or superiority emerge? If so, now is the time to confront this issue honestly.

2. *Micah 4:2 says that on the mountaintop God will teach "His ways" to the people of many nations.* Have you ever thought that maybe these different people groups won't all think or respond like we do? Maybe they will express His ways differently than we would.

Am I willing, like Jesus, to accept the differences? Am I willing to learn from people different from myself, to allow God to teach me His ways through these people? The best way to find out is to honestly evaluate our responses when someone of a lesser status, different culture, or different race becomes our "teacher."

## REACT

The roots of conflict and confusion are hatred and prejudice. God sent Christ to teach us the ways of peace and love. Instead of asking, Why doesn't God put an end to all this confusion and trouble? perhaps we need to ask, Are we following His ways? Are we a part of the problem or a part of the solution?

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by Barbara Frye

Barbara Frye is an assistant professor in the school of medicine, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

Friday, February 14

## What Is God's Plan?

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### OPINION

Key Text: Micah 4:12

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Plans are so crucial to every aspect of our life. Particularly since the future is uncertain. Because of that uncertainty human plans are never definite until they are history.

Not so with God's plans! Since God knows the beginning and end, His plans are never changed because of unforeseen circumstances. Thus the prophet Micah is able to say with complete confidence that even though the children of Israel will fall and will have to be punished, the Saviour of the world will still come through their clan.

Because of God's omniscience, the biblical writers are able to boldly proclaim, This is how the universe started, this is how sin was introduced to the world, these are the ways that God will reach out to sinful humans, this is how God will deal with the problem of sin.

What does all this mean, then, with regard to questions about my future? After all, it's great that God has given us a few hints about how the world will end, but what about the meantime? Or is

it right to wonder about the meantime?

As an Adventist, shouldn't I be mostly concerned with the events of the last days, with telling others about the end of earthly history and the glorious events that will follow? Is it sinful for me to plan such things as graduate school, a career, what I might be doing when I reach that faraway age of 40? Would I be more spiritually correct if I just assumed that Christ will return any moment? Would this spare me from the traps of the world? And my actions really have an impact on the timing of Christ's second coming?

It is reassuring to know in a rapidly changing and busy world, with always more challenges, more opportunities, more confusion, that there is a God who understands what is happening. His plan, made long ago, took into consideration all those changes. Even more important, that same God has offered to give all who ask, including me, the wisdom needed in making my plans and then carrying them out. Most important, God gives a goal that makes life sensible—love. For without a goal, a plan does not exist, and a life is meaningless.

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by Jim Banta

Jim Banta is a student in the school of public health at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.



Lesson 8, February 16-22

# Scaling the Heights



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“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8, NIV).

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Sunday, February 16

# More Than Just Words

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## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Psalm 16:11

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Think back a few years when you were in junior high or academy. Think back to weeks of prayer, school campouts, or other events at your school. A big part of the program was always someone leading the group in singing songs that you seem to have always known.

One of these songs is from the lesson this week—*Micah 6:8*. It is one of those that was stuck in there between “Sing Alleluia to the Lord,” and “Pass It On,” and after the rush and excitement of the other songs, the meaning of these quiet, devotional songs tended to get lost somewhere between the singer’s mouth and the ceiling.

*Micah 6:8* is a very well-known verse, not only because of being the words to a song, but also because we have always heard it, ever since we were learning our memory verses in cradle roll and kindergarten. We can’t recall the first time that we heard this verse. For all we know, we knew it from the minute we were born.

If someone would ask us to repeat the words to them right now, we could rattle them off without even hearing what we are saying:

“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good;

and what doth the Lord require of thee,  
but to do justly, and to love mercy,  
and to walk humbly with thy God?”

So what does it mean? It isn’t a statement or a reprimand or any of the other basic ideas that we may have about it. Instead, it is a statement followed by a question. The writer of the text is saying, We know what is good; God has shown us. And then the question is asked, How much does the Lord ask us for? Only three things: to be just in what we do, to be merciful, and to be humble in the sight of God.

This text in itself has such a simple but powerful message. What a shame that, sitting around the campfire, singing during week of prayer and those countless other youthful sing-alongs, we missed its deeper meaning for our lives. We could have gotten so much more from the program than the excitement and release of energy that we regularly felt whenever we took part in a song service.

The challenge that is being presented to you is to think about what you are saying in your prayers, your readings, and your songs, and you will find an abundance of blessing that you may never have realized was right with you all the time.

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by Kent Rogers

Kent Rogers is a junior English major at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

Monday, February 17

## Rites and Wrongs

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### LOGOS

Micah 6:1-16

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This week's chapter is a classic. Old Testament scholars see it as a prime expression of certain tensions between the prophets and the priests in ancient Israel. But Micah would have thought of it more as a matter between God and His people; and in those terms it is still pertinent to us today.

#### **The Summons to Trial (read Mic. 6:1, 2)**

In these opening verses, Micah speaks as if he were a kind of court announcer, calling upon the whole created order to hear the arguments on each side in the case between God and His people. In the first verse he invites God's people to come state their grievances against Him—an invitation to which the people never respond. In verse 2 Micah makes it clear that God is going to press His case, whether His people press theirs or not. The lopsidedness of the relationship between Yahweh and His people is really the whole problem.

In turning to earth's mountains and fountains to bear witness, Micah reminds his hearers that God is Creator of all that is. As Jesus later said, even the stones would cry out their allegiance to God if the people were silent (see Luke 19:40). It is clear that this is serious business.

#### **Yahweh Pleads His Case (read Mic. 6:3-5)**

There was a particular rhetorical style used for setting forth legal claims in ancient Israel and neighboring cultures. Now God speaks in that style, including a play on a couple of similar-sounding Hebrew words.

God opens His case in verse 3 by repeating the call for any evidence against Him: "My people, what have I done to you?" (NIV).

In verses 4 and 5 God simply states what He has done. It is all positive, a catalog of His "saving acts" on behalf of His people. (Part of the line about Shittim and Gilgal is missing from the ancient Hebrew manuscripts that exist today. Our various English translations try to plug the gap in various ways. The general idea, however, is clear: God has led His people through all kinds of difficulties, including their entry into the promised land.)

#### **Uh-oh. God's Mad Again. How Are We Going to Appease Him? (read Mic. 6:6, 7)**

Rams and calves? Oil and blood? Firstborn children?

We must remember that what we read here represents things Micah first shouted at passersby in the public places of Jerusalem and environs. He asks their questions for them. But he takes away any hope they may have that these approaches to God will get them "off the hook."

The series of ascending sacri-

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by John R. Jones

John R. Jones is dean of the school of religion at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

fices is not just an attempt to run their response into the ground by reducing it to absurdity. The fact is that the ancients, even the Israelites on occasion, indeed offered rivers of animal blood and olive oil, at great personal cost, without seeing anything absurd about it at all. People have indeed sacrificed their own offspring, in their desperation to somehow win His favor. However mistaken, they have been utterly sincere about this.

Micah is not mocking them, but he is claiming that their rites are wrongheaded. Their ritualized religion is wrong because it seeks to fob God off with gifts. No matter how expensive the offerings, this appeasing attitude keeps Him at arm's length, out of the arena of daily life.

Similarly, it is wrong because it refers the whole of religious experience to the level of the ceremonial. Not that rituals are inherently wrong. But when the entirety of morality is collapsed into them, they inevitably go flat. The result is the attitude Malachi deplored in the temple priests, when he saw them turning up their noses and sniffing "What a bore this is!" (Mal. 1:13). When this happens, the ceremonies don't die, but simply continue as empty shells, or as mere cynical manipulation of divine powers.

This progressive loss of meaning is a common phenomenon in religious symbolism. The scholars call it "semantic depletion" and trace the tendency across cultures

and religions.\* It apparently has something to do with a profound psychological gap that sometimes opens up between religion and reality. The tendency, then, is to counter the encroaching emptiness by stepping up the rituals—perhaps making them more elaborate and awesome, perhaps increasing the sheer volume of the gifts and offerings, perhaps escalating to ever more heroic sacrifices.

The problem, of course, is that it doesn't work. This is all on the wrong end of the equation. Apparently the only effective way to bridge the psychological gap is not from the sacred, symbolic side, but from the side of real life. The answer is not to somehow pump up the rituals, but to get on with the real itself.

### Getting Real

The point of the chapter is that the way to a religion that doesn't try to manipulate God is through a life that doesn't try to manipulate our fellow human beings. Get the worldly level straight, Micah would tell us, and you won't have to worry about how to approach Yahweh.

### REACT

1. What are the counterparts in our religious lives to the ancient ceremonies and sacrifices?
2. How do these modern observances relate to our social and ethical responsibilities?

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\*See, for example, Adolf E. Jensen, *Myth and Cult Among Primitive Peoples* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 76-78, 113.

Tuesday, February 18

# Needful Bedfellows

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## TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Timothy 4:1, 2

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Ellen White grew up a Methodist. Like John Wesley, the Methodist founder she so respected, she was an advocate of social action and a seeker after the Holy Spirit. Ellen White was just as comfortable attending prayer meeting and pleading for the baptism of the Holy Spirit as she was promoting radical abolitionism and encouraging the civil disobedience of the underground railroad. This combination of social activism and humble openness to the Holy Spirit which we find in our early Adventist history is relatively rare today, especially in Adventist circles.

Our text this week reminds us that God requires both a commitment to justice and a humble submission to His Spirit. Ellen White emphasizes this balance in the ministry of Christ, as well. "The Saviour loved the solitude of the mountain in which to hold communion with His Father. Through the day He labored earnestly to save men from destruction. He healed the sick, comforted the mourning, called the dead to life, and brought hope and cheer to the despairing. After His work for the day was finished, He went forth, evening after evening, away from the confusion of the city, and bowed in prayer to His Father. Frequently He continued His petitions through the entire night; but He

came from these seasons of communion invigorated and refreshed, braced for duty and for trial."<sup>1</sup>

"The example of Christ in linking Himself with the interests of humanity should be followed by all who preach His word, and by all who have received the gospel of His grace. We are not to renounce social communion. We should not seclude ourselves from others. In order to reach all classes, we must meet them where they are. They will seldom seek us of their own accord. Not alone from the pulpit are the hearts of men touched by divine truth. There is another field of labor, humbler, it may be, but fully as promising. It is found in the home of the lowly, and in the mansion of the great; at the hospitable board, and in gatherings for innocent social enjoyment."<sup>2</sup>

Some say the church needs more service and less prayer. Others say we need more prayer and less emphasis on social issues or social activism. Both groups are right and wrong. Where there is little prayer there is little power, but when the Spirit comes with power there is always a revival of service and social reform. Isolationism and lack of openness to the Holy Spirit are our greatest problems in the church today. We need to address them equally and simultaneously, for these are indeed needful bedfellows.

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1. *Gospel Workers*, p. 256.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 152.

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by Steve Daily

Steve Daily is campus chaplain at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

# Fulfilling God's Expectations

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## EVIDENCE

Key Text: Micah 6:8

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The "Third Way," they called it. By the beginning of 1986, the Filipino people had rejected both of their other alternatives for social structure. The Marxists' seductive promises of land redistribution and shared prosperity had given way to bands of murderous insurrectionists. And the grand vision of Jeffersonian democracy, never fully at home in Asia, had been betrayed by its long identification with corrupt and oppressive power. Clearly, something else was needed.

Micah helped provide the answer. His ancient cry for social justice, for love and humble decency, spoke with new immediacy to a people who, spurning both Marx and Marcos, turned to their own deeply rooted religious traditions for direction. They drew upon the messages of the Hebrew prophets and the gospel writers, proclaimed them afresh from Filipino pulpits, and wove them into a uniquely native fabric of convictions about what God intends for society.

Since that time we have continued to see religious beliefs making a difference in how societies define themselves, from South Korea to Eastern Europe. The very real world of cynical politics, military might, and vested interests can be made to yield when challenged by principled convictions like Micah's.

But what about the rituals? Micah decried the common human tendency to substitute symbolic action for direct involvement—especially when the symbolic actions are aimed at placating God over our failure to address wrongs in this world. But it is instructive to trace the very different role played by ceremony when people are taking direct action based upon their religious convictions.

In the case of the "people power" movement, it was precisely the prayers in the streets, the constant recitations over the loudspeakers, that expressed and cemented the common bond welding the hundreds of thousands into human barriers. Young seminarians who linked arms with their professors in the pathway of advancing infantry columns later reported that it was the hymns they were singing that stiffened their resolve.

Symbols and ceremonies, then, do serve a legitimate religious function. They can galvanize people into effective action and confirm bonds of common cause. They can provide rallying points around which the issues of the great controversy cluster. But they do all of this only when they are the *expression* of convictions, when they mirror and prompt responsible action in the world, rather than being used as a *substitute* for conviction and action. That's the difference between idolatry and true faith.

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by John R. Jones

John R. Jones is dean of the school of religion at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

Thursday, February 20

# Stop! Contradiction!

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## HOW-TO

Key Text: Micah 6:8

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Within two phrases in the same sentence in the same verse, we see two seemingly contradictory statements. Act justly, but love mercy. What God seems to be saying is there should be consistency in every judgment that you make, but do not make laws more important than humans. Like we often do.

### Act Justly

Work an honest day for your wage. Pay an honest wage for work done. Pay your taxes. Accept responsibility for what you've done wrong. If the clerk gives you too much change, return it, whether it's a penny or a hundred dollars.

### Love Mercy

Work a little extra when circumstances warrant it. Pay a little more when the need arises. Be willing to help somebody who needs it instead of sending them to the tax-funded soup kitchen. Give a little extra to your church when it needs it, although you've paid your tithe. Be willing to for-

give those who have wronged you. (Remember how many times God has forgiven you for your stupidity.) If you have extra change in your pocket, give it to a beggar, whether it's a penny or a hundred dollars.

### Walk Humbly With God?

Why should a Christian/Son of God/child of the King have to walk humbly?

I used to enjoy walking onto the army base with my father the colonel, because everywhere we went people would salute. Privates would salute. Majors would salute. I felt proud. Then one day it dawned on me. They weren't saluting me, I wasn't the colonel. I wasn't even in the army. To them I was nothing. The salutes were only coming my direction because of my companion. I was not the colonel. I was a child of the colonel. I learned to walk humbly with my father.

Read the final phrase like this: *Walk*, don't be stagnant. Don't stand still. Walk . . . *with God*. Let God be your guide. And watch doors open up to you. Walk *humbly* with God. Realize that it is not you but God who is the source of all of your blessings.

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D. P. Harris

D. P. Harris is director of the MICOL computer center at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

## Accepting Simplicity

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### OPINION

Key Texts: Mark 12:29-31

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In his book *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, Robert Fulghum maintains that wisdom is really gained at the lower rungs of the educational ladder. The following is included in Fulghum's list of the essential things he learned in kindergarten.

"Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together."

It may seem a bit simplistic, but then again, some good lessons can be learned through simplicity. Take Micah 6:8, for example. It gives a very simple answer to what is often thought to be a complex question: What do I need to do? The answer is very clear—act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. These actions are directly tied to the two greatest commandments: love God and love your neighbor as yourself (see Mark 12:29-31). Conscientious adherence to these two commandments will automatically lead a

person "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8, NIV).

Fulghum's list is also tied to these commandments. If you have genuine love for both God and your friends, you will share, play fair, say you're sorry when you hurt someone, etc. In kindergarten we live by these simple rules whether or not we know the motivation behind them. We are happy and satisfied that we have done enough. As we get older, we somehow get away from the simplicity and think we need to do more in order to achieve happiness.

What do we need to do? Love God. Love our neighbor. Act justly. Love mercy. Walk humbly with God. Simple commands, simple actions. Why can't we just accept them? I think the reason lies in our human tendency to want to do things ourselves. We never feel right just accepting something as ours unless we have done enough hard work on our own to feel we have earned that something. We need to realize that, in the case of eternal life, Jesus Christ has already done all the hard work. All He asks us to do is accept it and follow a few simple rules for a happy life.

\*Robert Fulghum, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* (New York: Villard Books, 1988).

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by Kharolynn Pascual

Kharolynn Pascual is a sophomore ministerial and educational ministry major at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

Lesson 9, February 23-29

# The Triumph of Faith



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“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy” (Micah 7:18, NIV).

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# Looking Unto Jesus

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## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: John 1:29

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"When Jesus came to be baptized, John recognized in Him a purity of character that he had never before perceived in any man. The very atmosphere of His presence was holy and awe-inspiring."\* John's invitation to mankind still rings out victory to the remnant people of God in the race for eternal life: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

After the Israelites by faith crossed the Red Sea, they triumphantly proclaimed, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exod. 15:11). Had the Hebrew people daily reflected on this signal deliverance from death, the God of heaven would have increased their faith and surety in Him.

But they murmured about the quality of their drinking water, they hungered for the flesh pots of Egypt, they complained about the rugged wilderness terrain, and they became insubordinate to-

ward Moses, their divinely appointed leader. Psalm 106 pictures the story of the Israelites' rebellion and God's grace. As they delayed their travel to the promised land because of their ingratitude and disobedience, David shows the long-suffering and goodness of God when he sings these words: "Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry; and he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies. He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives" (verses 44-46).

In this week's lesson Micah bemoaned the sinfulness of Israel. He reassured them, as well as God's followers today, that He is the only hope for apostates. In simplicity the remnant of God must accept His word: look and live. By our "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2), "he will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19).

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\**The Desire of Ages*, p. 110.

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by Oliver J. Davis

Oliver J. Davis is an associate professor of English at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Monday, February 24

# The Triumph of Faith

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## LOGOS

Micah 7:18

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### National Apostasy (read Mic. 7:1-7)

*"The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains. All men lie in wait to shed blood; each hunts his brother with a net" (7:2, NIV).*

The words paint a picture similar to that of Jeremiah, who later hounded the streets and squares of Jerusalem in search of a righteous person (see Jer. 5:1), and also Diogenes, who later still walked about Athens, Greece, with a lantern in search of honesty. Micah, whose name in Hebrew asks the question, "Who is like Jehovah?" carried on his prophetic ministry during the latter half of the eighth century B.C., when Assyria ruled as the dominant world power. A contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea, Micah served as a prophet to Judah sometime between 750 and 686 B.C. during the reigns of Jothan, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (see Mic. 1:1; Jer. 26:18).

Micah bewails a society which, in the words of Shakespeare, "drinks the venom of its own spleen" by becoming its own punishment. Widespread disregard of right makes it impossible for people to be secure even in the most intimate relations of life—with friends and family—for they somehow become foes.

The four couplets (see 7:2-4)

vividly describe the web of iniquity woven over Palestine in such terms as people "lying in wait to shed blood," "hunting one's brother or sister with a net," "being skilled in doing evil," and so on. Even in the most private and romantic of circumstances the people were warned to raise their guard. Micah said, "Even with her who lies in your embrace be careful of your words" (verse 5, NIV). In short, the people of God were in misery—the sure bitter fruit of sin.

### A Vision of Restoration (read Mic. 7:8-13)

*"Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the Lord's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his justice" (Mic. 7:9, NIV).*

Is this not always the case? When we confess our sins, God is there to forgive and set us on the road to another chance and a better way of life (see 1 John 1:9).

Micah expresses such hope in poetic fashion in chapter 7, verses 8-13, which might be called a prophetic liturgy or even a psalm where speakers and mood and tone shift from section to section. God's suffering people speak in verses 8-10, defiant of their enemies and humbly confident in their God. A prophetic voice seems to speak in verses 11-13 announcing a glorious time when Palestine will enlarge her borders, and nations, including bygone enemies, will flood her

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by Mervyn A. Warren

Mervyn A. Warren is chairman of the religion department at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

with tribute and praise. In verse 12 the words *fortified* and *fortress* are translated from the Hebrew word *masor*, which may also be rendered "Egypt." That is the reason so many modern Bible versions read as follows: "People will come to you from Assyria and the cities of *Egypt*, even from *Egypt* to the Euphrates" (NIV).

The restoration that God's righteousness brings often affects not merely our internal disposition but also our external conditions.

### **God's Assurance (read Mic. 7:14-17)**

*"Shepherd your people with your staff . . . in fertile pastures"* (Mic. 7:14, NIV).

As sheep need the protection of the shepherd lest they again become entrapped or perish, the people of God need His guidance so that "goodness and mercy may follow them" (Ps. 23:6), "the flock" of Jehovah's inheritance (Mic. 7:14). Although human leaders have their part to play in the welfare of the church, God Himself is the

great Shepherd-King—their best insurance, their blessed assurance.

### **The Remnant Forgiven (read Mic. 7:18-20)**

*"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance?"* (Mic. 7:18, NIV).

A rhetorical question if there ever was one! It seeks no answer, for the answer is implicit within the inquiry. There is no God like Yahweh! Thus Micah's liturgy ends with a hymnic acknowledgment of the greatness of God's divine compassion. The poetic turn of the latter part of chapter 7 allows for a possible play the prophet might be making on his own name *Micah*, which is a shortened form of the Hebrew *Micayah*, meaning Who is like Yahweh?

A question worth pondering, is it not? Who is like God, who, when He gives, He gives His Son Jesus Christ (see John 3:16)? Who is like God, who, when He forgives, forgives all? What heart could not strengthen with this hope? What faith could not triumph with this assurance?

Tuesday, February 25

# The Lord, Our Light and Our Salvation

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## TESTIMONY

Key Text: Micah 7:7-9

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“Through His prophets [God] had sent to His chosen people message after message of earnest entreaty—messages that had been despised and rejected by the ten tribes of Israel, now given over to the enemy. But from Judah there remained a goodly remnant, and to these prophets continued to appeal.”<sup>1</sup>

Even in our day God still tenderly pleads with the sinner through the promptings of the Holy Spirit. “No earthly parent ever pleaded so earnestly with an erring child as He who pleads with the transgressor. No human, loving interest ever followed the impenitent with invitations so tender.”<sup>2</sup>

If the sinner does not resist, he will experience a change in his life. “The Holy Spirit is implanting the grace of Christ in the heart of many a noble seeker after truth, quickening his sympathies contrary to his nature, contrary to his former education. The ‘Light that lighteneth every man that cometh into the world’ (John 1:9), is shining in his soul; and this Light, if heeded, will guide his feet to the kingdom of God.”<sup>3</sup>

These are words of instruction to us as we labor for souls. As we labor, let us remember how much

God loved us: “But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

The light that God manifests to us not only offers pardon from sin, but also strength to keep us under any circumstances. If we decide to continually surrender ourselves to God, He will never fail us. Ellen White gives us these words of encouragement:

“Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour. By prayer, by the study of His word, by faith in His abiding presence, the weakest of human beings may live in contact with the living Christ, and He will hold them by a hand that will never let go.”<sup>4</sup>

## REACT

1. How should we deal with those who are erring and seem incorrigible?
2. What can we do when we are faced with a besetting sin or bad habit over which we have not gained the victory? How can we encourage those who are facing this problem?

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1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 333.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 275.

3. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 376, 377.

4. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 182.

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by Tracy D. Cook

Tracy D. Cook is a theology and communication major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

# Stand Up and Be Counted

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## EVIDENCE

Key Text: Jer. 31:33, 34

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In chapter 7, Micah's prophecy about the destruction of Israel is interposed with visions of a happy, prosperous, God-fearing future. The prophet was a witness to the apostasy of the government and the people. Wickedness, ingratitude to God, religious pretense, dishonesty, and idolatry were the prevailing practices. In the prophecy, Micah recounts the treachery and violence of the so-called leaders of the people and their impending destruction, but abruptly points to a time in the future when Christ will usher in an eternity of universal peace.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly it takes faith to look forward to a future like that. "I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?" (Jer. 32:27, NIV). God will triumph whether we cooperate with Him or not.

The odds are stacked against anyone who takes God for

granted. The more we try by our own strength to get out of the quagmire of sin, the deeper we sink. We need the lifeline of faith in Jesus Christ to enable us to get out of this sin situation. Just as the contemporaries of Micah sought God in fervent faith for His deliverance, we need to take hold of the Lord's promises of deliverance. St. Augustine writes in his *Confessions*, ". . . because you made us for yourself . . . our hearts find no peace until they rest in you."<sup>2</sup>

In an age when belief in a God who forgives sins is unfashionable, it is even more difficult to stand up to be counted. It takes courage and conviction to do so, but, "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:8, NIV). That is triumphant faith.

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1. Henry H. Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), pp. 366, 367.

2. Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (New York: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1981), p. 21.

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by Sammy R. Browne

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

Thursday, February 27

# How to Walk Humbly With God

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## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Micah 6:8**

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Christian humility is the most misunderstood concept. To be Christlike is to be humble. To be a good citizen is to be humble. To be a good neighbor is to be humble. Even a model student is said to be a humble one.

The Word of God gives us goals to grasp, and every newborn in Christ needs an awareness that walking humbly with our God is as an uncharted jungle to be trod and also the goal to be attained. What strategies and advanced weaponry must I solicit for this journey?

1. *I must bring to bear a realization that there is going to be a conflict between my emotions and my disposition.* The law of my uncharted jungle is: the fittest survive, and we take no hostages. This agitates my natural instinct to survive and preserve self. Hence, I rise up to conquer or defend or even police myself along my walk.

2. *I must pay attention to the natural arousal of my sinful tendencies, harness them, and, in a*

*fight to the death, bring them under control.* The apostle Paul says this another way: "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:26, 27).

3. *I must bring myself down to where I ought to be.* For many a newborn in Christ this descent is not a long one because the birth pains were so severe that they leave the correct birthmarks a growing Christian must display. But with many it is not so. They are either treading along a long journey or somehow discovered a rest station and with displaced vision fail to get back on track.

When I reach my goal, I will have a cheerful and hopeful endurance. I will have a constancy when under the gun of temptation and trial. I will have fortitude when in an inferior position. But I will hold my own ground with expectancy. For the Holy Spirit is given to help me.

## REACT

Do you agree that to be a good citizen one has to be humble?

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by James A. Payne

James A. Payne is the resident dean of freshmen at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

# God Is the Answer

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## OPINION

Key Text: Heb. 11:6

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Faith in the context of our lesson suggests an ultimate trust or belief in the knowledge that God is, "and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

Only a few years ago it was declared that God was dead and therefore irrelevant. Having replaced God, we became overconfident in our scientific and technological achievements. In so doing we have crafted a world of our own making, a world riddled with uncertainties and insecurities.

Almost 3,000 years ago the prophet Micah described a similar national apostasy that had overtaken Israel. He wrote: "The good man is perished out of the earth; and there is none upright among men. . . . The son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother" (Mic. 7:2-6). There is a striking parallel between Micah's day and ours. Paul echoed the sentiments of Micah when he stated: "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate

mind . . . backbiters, haters of God . . . disobedient to parents . . . [and] without natural affection" (Rom. 1:28, 30, 31).

Is there any solution to what appears to be a "no-win situation"?

Yes, there is hope, but only when we look beyond our own limitations. Micah reassures us that confession of our sins and submission to God will restore our sense of direction. Most of the time we turn to God as the last resort when everything else has failed. But even then we are sure of His support. For when we fall, we shall rise again (see Mic. 7:8-13).

Christ raised a disturbing question as He looked to our times. "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). This question disturbs even the remnant. But He will find the faithful few whose sins He will have forgiven because of their trust in Him.

## REACT

1. Do we really believe that God is the answer for the twentieth century?

2. As God's people, both young and old, are we so affected by current trends that we no longer see God as the answer?

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by Emmanuel Saunders

Emmanuel Saunders is chairman of the department of history and political science at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Lesson 10, March 1-7

# When the Lights Go Out . . . ?



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“The great day of the Lord is near—near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the Lord will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there” (Zeph. 1:14, NIV).

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# The "Wolf, Wolf" Syndrome

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## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Zeph. 1:14

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"WARNING: THE SURGEON GENERAL HAS DETERMINED THAT CIGARETTE SMOKING MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH." In spite of that bold warning on every pack, there are still millions of cigarettes smoked every day. There is something about slow and insidious evils that we seem to ignore.

If someone comes into a room screaming, "Fire, everybody get out immediately!" we promptly beat a hasty retreat. But put up a sign that says, "Slow, curves ahead, 35 mph," and I say to myself, "*I wonder if I could get through them at 50—maybe 55.*"

Part of the problem may be related to our own misuse of warnings. Adults seem to possess a proclivity for manipulating children with phoney warnings. "If you make ugly faces like that, one day your face will freeze in that position!" we are told. "Don't jump on the bed, you will fall off and

break your neck!"

It is simply a fact of life—or should we say a fact of death—that turning away from God and His way of doing things brings disaster. Zephaniah gives no vain and idle warning. This is not a manipulative ploy. God is not crying, "Wolf, Wolf!" There really *is* destruction coming. And it is a direct result of the behaviors of the people of Judah in their idolatry. This is not a "jumping on the bed" issue. It is as real as the surgeon general's warning. Idolatrous behavior brings destruction.

Zephaniah addresses people who are numb to God's pleading in a corporate disregard for His appeals. Society is, after all, the sum total of individual behavior. And in Judah, it was corrupt. Zephaniah does not provide us with the extensive listing of evils that we find in other of the prophets such as Isaiah and Amos, for example. But he does make it clear that idolatry has done its evil in destroying society by demeaning the dignity of humanity as the children of God.

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by Gary B. Patterson

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

Monday, March 2

## The Inside Track

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### LOGOS

Zeph. 1:7, 8

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Placing the prophecy of Zephaniah during the reign of King Josiah gives us a rather broad time range. Josiah reigned for 31 years as indicated by 2 Kings 22:1, and his reign is dated between 640 and 609 B.C. Narrowing the field a bit, we know that Zephaniah prophesied the overthrow of Nineveh (see 2:13), which occurred in 612 B.C. And he speaks of “the King’s children” (1:8), which makes it sound as if the prophecy comes after Josiah was old enough to father some children. It seems plausible that these events would have occurred somewhere in the neighborhood of 625 to 615 B.C.

There is the possibility, however, that Zephaniah may be referring to members of his own family as the king’s children. He lists himself as being in the lineage of King Hezekiah—his great-great grandson—thus providing him with inside information on the royal goings-on. This lineage listing is unique among the prophets. Usually only the prophet’s father is mentioned in these lineage rehearsals. But in this case there is significant information to be given. Zephaniah was a member of the royal family, and possibly the king’s children he refers to are his own relatives, especially in view of the fact that any children of Josiah would hardly have been old enough to

have earned the rebuke given by Zephaniah to the king’s children.

Zephaniah was on the inside track. He knew firsthand of the corruption at the highest levels. This is not a message sent in through a stranger from a distant land as was the case with Amos. None could question the validity of Zephaniah’s information. He was part of the clan.

The opening warning is savage indeed. Nothing escapes the desolation. It extends not only to the elements of agrarian society such as man and cattle, but even to nature and the wild animals, including birds and fish.

### The Baal Solution

The culprit was Baal, that perennial nemesis of Jewish worship. It is not easy in our contemporary society to comprehend Israel’s fascination with Baal worship. The passing of years and seasons, to us, is understood in a linear progression, while to them it was the repeated cycle of the struggle between the gods. To us, the seasons are explained by the rotation of the earth and its orbit around the sun. Storms come up—observed by satellite—in high- and low-pressure variations, and these systems are driven by such elements as the jet stream. Watch the evening news, and not only do you have a pretty accurate prophecy on the weather, you even know why it is doing what it does.

To the Jewish agricultural society it was all an incomprehensible mystery. No one knew the mecha-

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by Gary B. Patterson

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nism for why the seasons came and went, or why storms or droughts occurred. The explanation extant in Canaan when the children of Israel arrived from Egypt and Mount Sinai was Baal. He was the god of the storm and the rains that brought fertility and growth to the land. After the storm passed through, things grew. And when no storms and rains came, everything dried up and died—including the people. It was a matter of survival.

Baal was the god of the storm, and Mot was the god of drought. Legends had it that Baal and Mot had a big fight in which Baal was killed. But Baal's sister, Anath, the goddess of war, fought with Mot and killed him. Then she carried the lifeless form of her brother to the mountain of the gods, where he was resurrected. As a result, this battle between Mot and Baal continued annually with Baal's death during the dry season and his resurrection during the wet season.

To complicate matters even more, Baal was not one being—as monotheists like us might think—but rather he was multiple in his presence. He was the god of the trees or the god of the hills or the god of the springs or wherever nature blessed the land. Thus we find a confusing array of Baal gods in multiple locations. There is Baal-gad, Baal-peor, Baal-tamar, Baal-zebub, Baal-zephron—and on and on. His death was always mourned by the people, and his return was celebrated with fertility rites.

Naturally there were times when the forces of nature were harsh, and the rains did not come, and crops did not grow. It

was times such as these that seemed to encourage even more ceremony and violence in order to invoke the blessing of the gods. If a little ceremony was good, then more should be better. If a little sacrifice would not serve to appease or attract a recalcitrant god, then maybe larger and more violent ones would.

### **Vile Practices**

Society was corrupted further and further by these appeasement rituals, even to the place that innocent children—the fruit of the corrupt fertility rites—were offered as sacrifices to the gods. It was Elijah who most vividly exposed and derided these vile practices when he gathered the prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel. There he exhorted the prophets to call louder, as perhaps their god was sleeping or on a journey.

The point here in Zephaniah is not that God's ego is too big and bruised to allow the worship of anyone other than Himself. He knows who He is. He doesn't need us to affirm His authority. But rather, these pagan practices and concepts were leading society to the point where life was being destroyed. The principles of God's law provide the only means by which the universe can operate in harmony.

Baal worship was destroying society. It had gone so far that it was too late to save even what was left of Judah. Josiah's 31-year reign was marked by a turning back of the tide of Baal worship. But it was too late. The corruption of Baal worship was too ingrained. Only a total purge would save Israel now.

Tuesday, March 3

## Dual Meanings

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### TESTIMONY

Key Text: Zeph. 1:12, 13

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“During the reign of Josiah the word of the Lord came to Zephaniah, specifying plainly the results of continued apostasy, and calling the attention of the true church to the glorious prospect beyond. His prophecies of impending judgment upon Judah apply with equal force to the judgments that are to fall upon an impenitent world at the time of the second advent of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

“It was needful that men should be awakened to their danger; that they should be roused to prepare for the solemn events connected with the close of probation. The prophet of God declares: ‘The day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?’ Who shall stand when He appeareth who is ‘of purer eyes than to behold evil,’ and cannot ‘look on iniquity?’ Joel 2:11; Habakkuk 1:13. To them that cry, ‘My God, we know Thee,’ yet have transgressed His covenant, and hastened after another god, hiding iniquity in their hearts, and loving the paths of unrighteousness—to these the day of the Lord is ‘darkness, and not light, even very dark, and no brightness in it.’ Hosea 8:2, 1; Psalm 16:4; Amos 5:20. ‘It shall come to pass at that time,’ saith the Lord, ‘that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil.’

Zephaniah 1:12. ‘I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.’ Isaiah 13:11. ‘Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them;’ ‘their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation.’ Zephaniah 1:18, 13.” . . .

“In view of that great day the word of God, in the most solemn and impressive language, calls upon His people to arouse from their spiritual lethargy and to seek His face with repentance and humiliation: ‘Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain: Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.’ ‘Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children: . . . let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar.’ ‘Turn ye even to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.’ Joel 2:1, 15-17, 12, 13.”<sup>2</sup>

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1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 389.

2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 311.

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by Gary B. Patterson

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

# My Hero

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## EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Kings 22:18-20

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Josiah was my hero—my icon—the little boy-king whose refurbishing project at the temple brought about the discovery of the holy scrolls, which he asked Hilkiah to bring out and read to all the people. He was my model of leadership, revival, and reformation. My parents and my teachers presented him to me as the model to follow. How can it be that the prophet says all these dreadful things about Judah during the reign of good king Josiah?

Indeed Josiah was a remarkable young man—child really—as he was only eight when his reign began. And early on he did not have immediate access to the words of Scripture, which were to so dramatically affect his life and reign. It was 18 years into his reign that the scroll was found and the public readings instituted.

But Judah was too far gone even for the righteous 31-year reign of Josiah to spare it from the impending doom. As Josiah heard the doleful warnings, he inquired of the prophetess Hulda to discover whether the fate was sealed or if it could still be turned back.

Hulda replied, "This is what the Lord says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its peo-

ple, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will not be quenched" (2 Kings 22:16, 17, NIV).

But there was yet another message for King Josiah. Hulda continues, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the Lord. Therefore I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place" (2 Kings 22:18-20, NIV).

Even in the face of disaster, Josiah did not deviate from what was right. He was not motivated by doom but by principle. "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left" (2 Kings 22:2, NIV). Thus his 31-year reign was the civilized bright spot in a decaying society.

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by Gary B. Patterson

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

Thursday, March 5

# The Straight Testimony

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## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Zeph. 1:1-3**

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We already know too much to read Zephaniah properly. And with this knowledge we tend to collapse it all together as we begin to read his words. "I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth. . . . I will sweep away both men and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. The wicked will have only heaps of rubble when I cut off man from the face of the earth" (Zeph. 1:2, 3, NIV).

All the words of all the prophets from all times and all places come crashing back because we already know the story in all its gruesome details. Then we read them over and over and over again in an incessant threnody, till we either experience the numbness of depression or take up a shrill refrain of condemnation as if it were the whole of the message of God. Having already addressed numbness to warnings, we also need to address the shrill voice of the unrelenting "prophets."

This accordionlike collapse of prophetic messages often becomes the model used to excuse what actually are pathetic character faults. The prophets were not the incessant hounds of society. In reality, when you look at the actual historical setting, the messages of

Zephaniah and the other prophets are quite limited in time, space, and repetition.

Without the ease of modern travel and the amplification of our media, his words—as well as the words of his fellow prophets—tended to reach small and specific audiences. In order for God to get His message out, it was necessary to call on prophets wherever His people might be found. But some today make use of the collected corpus of Scripture by massing prophet messages out of context, and used the result to justify what is in reality obnoxious and antisocial behavior.

One shudders to think how many seekers have been driven from the fellowship of the church community by overzealous "prophets" who justify their behavior by a misrepresentation of the words and work of the prophets.

Surely I do not deny the need for rebukes and corrections. To refuse to give or hear them is folly. But to use them in the name of God as justification for brutish and antisocial behavior is a blasphemous violation of the third commandment, "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God" (Exod. 20:7, NIV).

## REACT

1. How can we know the correct response to a case of open sin in the church?

2. Are we to be judges or healers?

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by Gary B. Patterson

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

# Love and Theodicy

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## OPINION

Key Text: Zeph. 1:18

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So—I hear the surgeon general doesn't like you. Well, you do have lung cancer. And he did warn you. And you ignored it and went on smoking anyway, even with that obvious warning on the package. What else do you expect? That ought to be proof enough that the surgeon general doesn't like you!

Somehow this line of reasoning sounds pathetically familiar. Like Lucy arguing with Charlie Brown. Or like fatalists expounding on their view of cosmic order. There is a vast difference between warning us of the results of sin and imposing the results on us. It would be folly to blame the surgeon general for our illness. Likewise it would be folly to blame God for the results of sin.

When I first moved to the Washington, D.C., area a few years ago, I was shocked to learn that the murder rate was about one per day. In fact, that year we ended up with just about right on 365 murders. It was a stark and stunning statistic. But now, a few years later, when we are nearing 500 murders in a year, it almost makes going back to 365 seem like a return to the good old days.

The fatalist is prone to sit back and tut-tut over such matters. After all, the prophets did say things would be terrible in the last days. Maybe we are even tempted to find an odd sort of glee that it somehow fixes us near the end of apocalyptic flow. But when our fixation centers on our prophetic flowchart fulfillment rather than on the needs of our fellow man and the good news of salvation in Christ, then we become as guilty as the murderers, for we are holding back the ministry of grace entrusted to us.

The "Lucy" style of reasoning, convenient as it may appear, does not address the issues of theodicy. There *is* evil in the world. There has been ever since the fall in Eden. And following the path of evil will result in destruction. Experiencing evil does not mean that God does not like us. In fact, Scripture is at pains to express that God does love us even when we choose evil. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, NIV).

Judah was on the path to destruction. If God didn't like them, all He had to do was leave them alone. They would have killed themselves. By nature, we also are on the path to destruction. The fact that God has reached out to make Himself known to us proves His unmerited love.

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by Gary B. Patterson

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

Lesson 11, March 8-14

# “Dial 911”



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“Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord’s anger” (Zeph. 2:3, NIV).

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Sunday, March 8

## Just Do It!

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### INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Zeph. 2:3

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Little Bryan woke with a start. His seven-year-old mind told him that something was terribly wrong. As he lay there trying to make sense of what was happening, it dawned on him that there were strange noises in the other room. Noises he had never heard before. Noises coming from his mother's bedroom.

A stranger had broken into the house and was physically assaulting Bryan's mother. As noises of the struggles permeated Bryan's room, he felt terrified. He knew that he could not go in and face the intruder because he was no match for a grown man.

Bryan thought for a few moments before quietly slipping out of bed and racing for the telephone. He knew he had to call for help: 911. He quietly dialed the number and was immediately on the line with the downtown emergency dispatcher. Little Bryan told the lady that there was a man in his house, and that the man was hurting his mother. The dispatcher radioed the patrol on duty and then proceeded to try to keep little Bryan on the line. Bryan broke out in sobs several

times and asked where the policeman could be. He just couldn't understand why it was taking so long.

As the police car finally rolled to a stop in front of the house, Bryan dashed out to join the policeman. The intruder saw the car in the front yard, escaped out a back window, and got into his car in the back alley. After a high-speed chase for several miles, the policeman finally caught the criminal.

911! Day and night the dispatcher waits for all the Bryans of the city—little Bryans, whose simple, childlike faith reassures them of the security in that number. How foolish it would have been for Bryan to have challenged the intruder, to puff out his seven-year-old chest, and take on a hardened criminal.

Even more so, how foolish for us to take on the master criminal alone. No, far better to seek the comfort and reassurance of a heavenly "dispatcher," One who can summon an army of angelic patrolmen. "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger" (Zeph. 2:3, NIV).

Just do it! Dial 911!

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by Marcus James

Marcus James is a freshman biology major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Monday, March 9

## Scare or Prepare?

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### LOGOS

Zeph. 2:1-3

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#### God Says Gather Together

*"Come together and hold assembly, O shameless nation . . . before there comes upon you the day of the wrath of the Lord" (Zeph. 2:1, 2, RSV).*

Zephaniah's original message was to the rulers and people of the land of Judah. The warning was in direct reference to the severity of the coming judgments on that nation, the terrible reality of "the day of the wrath of the Lord." Specifically that was the impending Babylonian invasion. However, the prophecies of coming judgments also apply equally to those coming upon an unrepentant world at the end of time.

#### God Says Seek the Lord

*"Seek the Lord . . . who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility" (Zeph. 2:3, RSV).*

The stage is set in verses 1 and 2—the terror of the wrath of God is to come. But in typical God-fashion, when a sin problem is mentioned, a cause for hope in desperate times is also stressed. In verse 3 the solution quickly follows—seek God, seek righteousness, seek humbleness. The word *seek* implies more than a casual looking; it suggests a desire—almost a desperate one—to find the Lord. All four versions I checked used the same word—*seek*.

Did you ever want to find something or someone so badly that

you were panicky? I have. My three-year-old daughter had asked permission to go for a walk with her friend Kim and her mother. When they hadn't returned after half an hour, I went to Kim's house looking for Julie. "No, Julie never went for a walk with us," said Kim's mom. "She never caught up with us." Panic!

We were living in university housing at the time, so there were many apartments, playgrounds, and streets to check out. My husband joined in the search. In a turmoil himself, he kept telling me not to get upset. After we had searched all the logical places—including the insides of all the washers and dryers in the laundromat—we fanned out to less likely places Julie might have wandered off to. Kim's father had joined us in the search, and it was ultimately he who found her, blocks away, happily playing with some strange children in their front yard.

If you have ever lost a child for over an hour, you *do* know the meaning of seek. And God wants us to seek Him just as desperately as we would for a lost child—seek until found, no matter the time or cost.

And one more consideration. We don't usually find something unless we are looking for it, searching for it, consuming our energies in the search. Kim's father found Julie. Why? Because he *searched*, not because he sat at home wondering where she might be. And God wants to impress

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by Wilma McClarty

Wilma McClarty is professor of English and speech at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

upon us that fact—we must come together and actively seek the Lord.

### God Gives a Promise

*“Perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the wrath of the Lord”* (Zeph. 2:3, RSV).

Though Judah generally had become degenerate and apostate, some still had remained true to God, so why the “perhaps”? The Hebrew word for *perhaps* means “an expression of hope, pleading, or fear.”<sup>2</sup> In face of the degradation of Judah, Zephaniah is moved to offer a tentative promise, thus stressing their need of reconciliation with God.

But how are we today to know for sure that we have a Saviour? Are we doomed to wonder constantly about our relationship with Christ? Must we forever be saying, “Perhaps I will be saved,” or “Perhaps Jesus will take me to heaven,” or “Perhaps Christ’s robe of righteousness will cover me”? Is there no assurance?

Whenever I think of the judgments to come, I think of our family friend, Tom. Several months after we met him, he shot his ex-wife’s new husband, the man she had left Tom for. Two weeks later the man died. Tom was the most-talked-about criminal in town. For he had held a prestigious professional position there for 15 years.

At the trial, Tom’s lawyer pled for a self-defense verdict. The dead man’s lawyer wanted a first-degree murder verdict. The jury recommended a second-degree murder verdict, and the judge sentenced Tom to five years in the state penitentiary. Tom’s lawyer cried when he lost Tom’s case—why? because he was Tom’s close friend. He felt he had failed Tom when Tom needed him most.

But our Friend will take our case in court one day too—Mediator Jesus will argue that we are not criminals, because we have accepted Jesus as our personal Saviour. Unlike Tom’s lawyer, *Christ will never lose the case of a friend.*

We must seek Him now and establish that friendship—that is the message of Zephaniah 2:1-3.

### REACT

1. If we must have a relationship with Jesus in order for Him to be our friend, just how long does it take to establish such a bond?

2. Can it be done in a moment of crisis? As long as a week of prayer takes? A lifetime?

3. This lesson emphasizes that we should seek God. In what ways does God seek us?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1063.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 1066.

Tuesday, March 10

# Severe Weather Warning!

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## TESTIMONY

Key Text: Zeph. 2:1-3

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Alert people prepare for storms; they listen to the forecast, notice the dark clouds, and listen for the thunder. By the time rain and wind have arrived, their homes are in order and all are safe from the storm's fury. Likewise, alert Christians need to attend to the warnings of the coming storm that lies ahead in the day of the Lord.

Like the dark clouds and thunder, God's warnings precede the end of time. "God has given the world an opportunity to learn and to obey His will. He has given them, in His word, the light of truth; He has sent them warning, counsel, and admonition; but few will obey His voice."<sup>1</sup> To benefit from warnings, such as the one found in Zephaniah, one must listen and recognize the admonition, then prepare for the fury.

Ellen White saw in a vision a forecast of the "weather" that Christians will have to face. "Evil angels crowded around them, pressing their darkness upon them, to shut out Jesus from their view, that their eyes might be drawn to the darkness that sur-

rounded them, and they distrust God and next murmur against Him. Their only safety was in keeping their eyes directed upward. Angels of God . . . were continually wafting their wings over them, to scatter the thick darkness."<sup>2</sup>

Even now the clouds are thickening, giving us more reason to heed the warnings mentioned in Zephaniah 2:1-3. Time is drawing to a close, and we must prepare for the tempest ahead. It is urgent that we get our lives in order, that we seek righteousness and mercy, and that we fix our eyes on heaven. In this way, we build a shelter against the rising storm. "It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger."

## REACT

1. What does it mean to "keep our eyes fixed on heaven"? What is necessary for us to do this?

2. How can we prepare our lives so that we will be ready to face the end of time? Are there changes needed in the way we appear to others, such as dress or diet?

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1. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 99.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 180.

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by Thomas E. Huntress

Thomas E. Huntress is a senior English major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

# When the End Is Upon Us

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## EVIDENCE

Key Text: Zeph. 2:1-3

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Faced with a message that the end of the world is at hand, what can a person do? Until the young Zephaniah gave what one contemporary scholar has called the first prophecy to assume "an apocalyptic character,"<sup>1</sup> such a message had been given only once—Noah's warning of an impending flood and his plea to come into the ark. Other prophets had foretold the "Day of the Lord" as a time when heathen nations would punish God's rebellious people. Their message was a call to the people of Judah and Israel to quit their idolatry, to quit exploiting the poor, to reform their way of living.

But when a message like Zephaniah's speaks of universal destruction; when God says, "I will sweep the earth clean of all that is on it" (Zeph. 1:2, NEB); when the prophet says, "The great day of the Lord is near, it comes with speed; no runner so fast as that day, no raiding band so swift" (Zeph. 1:14, NEB); when the prophet says the Lord "will make an end, a swift end, of all who live in the land" (Zeph. 1:18, NEB), then what is a person to do?

One thing is to do what many in the days of Zephaniah did—nothing. "At that time I will search Jerusalem with a lantern and punish all who sit in stupor

over the dregs of their wine, who say to themselves, 'The Lord will do nothing good or bad'" (Zeph. 1:12, NEB).

Another alternative is to try to do something to avert the catastrophe. Do what the prophets before Zephaniah called the people to do. Put away the Baals. Quit exploiting the poor. Quit breaking the Sabbath. Help the widows. Obey God's commandments. Do something!

Although Zephaniah was not against reform, his focus is different. He had little faith in human efforts. He had seen that the reforms of his contemporary, good King Josiah, made little headway. The reforms imposed by the king and his party upon the people made little change in their hearts and lives. Zephaniah saw no salvation through the slow process of social reform. For him, "judgment, swift and sure must precede salvation."<sup>2</sup>

Since God will act and act swiftly, there is but one thing to do, according to Zephaniah: Seek the Lord. A remnant will be preserved, and God will do the preserving. Ethical reform must be coupled with apocalyptic hope. We can be part of the remnant by heeding Zephaniah's call.

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1. Raymond Calkins, *The Modern Message of the Minor Prophets* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), p. 67.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

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by R. Lynn Sauls

R. Lynn Sauls is chairman of the journalism and communication department at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Thursday, March 12

## Warning of Love

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### HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Peter 3:9

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The Bible is filled with words of happiness and praise, thoughts of inspiration and strength, as well as promises of peace and comfort. But when I read certain parts of God's holy Word, I find myself frustrated and confused. Zephaniah's warnings are a case in point.

In order to gain a true understanding of the prophet's warnings and cries for repentance, we must look to the great themes of the Bible. There is, at the heart of Scripture, the outline of a great controversy raging between God and Satan. A terrible war has claimed the little planet we call home, and now the Father's adversary is doing all he can to make men fear their Creator. It is the fallen angel, Lucifer, who has spread lies about God and convinced them that He cannot be trusted.

This is not what God wants. A walk through the pages of the Bible reveals a God of love and justice, slow to anger, and desiring that no one should perish.

The history of Israel proclaims this great truth. What our Father

seeks most is trustworthy friends who are willing to serve their Creator with love. Abraham was such a friend. He was willing to leave his country, his home, and even his family to follow God. But through the centuries his children forgot where their Creator had led them. His still, small voice, filled with love, was taken as weakness, and they rejected Him time and time again. Throughout it all He never left them. Little did they know but that one day He would come and die so that they could live.

It is still true today. God wants us to take Him seriously. Sin is a grave problem, and He will do all He can to win us over, even if it means we might misunderstand His warnings of love. If these words in Zephaniah are to have any meaning in our lives, we must understand them in light of the greatest testimony of God's love—Calvary. There on a blood-stained cross God saved us from the ravages of sin. Now we are called to repent and come to Him. Repentance that is more than a long list of things we're sorry for, but repentance that comes from the heart ready to accept the love of a heavenly Father who can be trusted. Now, that's good news!

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by Jeff Gang

Jeff Gang is a senior religion and history major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

# When Concealment Is the Cure

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## OPINION

Key Text: Col. 3:3

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There is an old Ethiopian proverb that goes like this: "He who conceals his disease cannot expect to be cured." What problems do we conceal or hide because we hope the situation will simply improve on its own?

At times, hiding the truth from a friend seems to be the ready cure for conflict. Later we realize this only helps to magnify the rift. Convicts sometimes try to solve their problems by hiding from the law. But usually this only leads to a greater sentence. And yes, by not telling the physician about my ailment, I only prolong or worsen my condition. The sickness does not go away simply because my doctor is unaware of my predicament. Indeed, hiding just doesn't seem to be the answer.

There is an exception to this rule, however. There is a situation in which hiding is the only answer. If Satan finds the record of our sinful lives, he will read it aloud, and we will be lost.

So where do we hide? Satan has plenty of good suggestions. Hide behind our church membership. Hide behind our academic achievements. Hide behind our filthy-as-rags good works. Hide be-

hind our annual donation to the local charity. The reason the devil makes these recommendations is that he knows he can find us in these locations. By choosing to hide where the seeker will find us we are placing our eternal plans in the hands of Lucifer.

But praise God! There is a perfect place to shelter ourselves. Clothed in the robe of Christ's righteousness we are invisible to the devil, and thus he cannot make charges against us. Satan simply cannot stand to look into the face of Jesus, and thus he will never know that we are right behind our Lord—in the perfect hiding place. Because our pitiful life histories are hidden behind the 33 perfect years of Jesus' life history on this earth, we are given a verdict of not guilty. The only record on which we can be judged is that of Jesus.

Hiding in Christ is the remedy for our earthly ailments. His cure will mend all wounds of sin 100 percent of the time. Yes, concealment in Christ is the cure.

## REACT

1. What things might you hide behind in order to feel secure from the devil?

2. Do you ever feel too self-sufficient or mature to hide behind Christ?

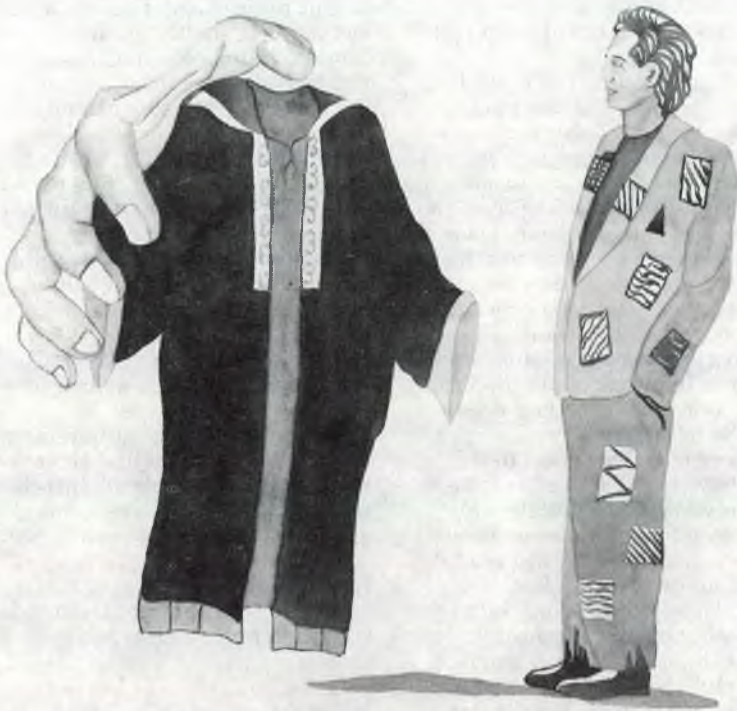
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by Alex Bryan

Alex Bryan is a religion and history major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Lesson 12, March 15-21

# Of Righteousness and Love



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“The Lord within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail, yet the unrighteous know no shame” (Zeph. 3:5, NIV).

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Sunday, March 15

## Turn or Burn

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### INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Zeph. 3:7

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Have you ever seen someone on the streets shouting out messages about the earth's destruction or about coming calamity? Maybe you have seen a "scripture" car or van. Usually older rattletaps, these vehicles are covered with scripture and destruction messages. Both the street preachers and scripture cars are heavy on judgment messages. Phrases like "weighed in the balances and found wanting" and "turn or burn" are common.

Most people would agree that this is not the most effective way of getting out the Word. But then what way is?

We try to avoid giving judgment messages. Maybe it is because we don't want to be critical, or we think of Jesus' injunction to "judge not lest you be judged." Then it could be that we are just chicken.

While being asked to withdraw from school isn't exactly equivalent to being given a warning of imminent destruction, it can be somewhat analogous. Fred would not have said he was asked to withdraw; he would say he was "kicked" out. Fred had been told that going into the girls' dormitory was grounds for being asked to withdraw. In both dorms the

deans had talked about what had happened the year before when several students were caught and had to leave. Now Fred had been caught, and he came to me.

As the chaplain, I was not the one to pronounce his judgment, but I still felt uncomfortable. I liked him and did not want to see him go. I think that one of the reasons he came to me was that he hoped I would be able to change the judgment. When I told him I couldn't, and that I agreed he should have to leave, he became angry. He implied that I did not really care, and he said that the school was just being legalistic.

Later Fred's father called and told me that his son's salvation was at stake. The father even sent me a compilation of Ellen White's writings to prove that what we were doing was wrong. I think the administration handled Fred's case correctly, but it is hard to bring judgment against people. It is so much easier to be a Jonah and run the other way.

This week, as you study these chapters concerning judgments against Israel and other nations, think about your church and yourself. Is God asking you to be a Zephaniah? And then, from the other point of view, and more important, does God need to bring a Zephaniah to your church or to your home?

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by Victor F. Brown

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

Monday, March 16

## A Timely Appeal

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### LOGOS

Zeph. 2:4-3:7

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The book of Zephaniah contains two central themes that are intertwined throughout the book. The first theme is the most obvious, "the day of the Lord" or judgment, with over three-fourths of the book consumed with this theme (see 1:2-3:13).

The second theme is just as prominent, but implicit more than explicit, "the inheritance of the repenting remnant" (see 2:3, 7, 11; 3:14-20).

We will see in our study this week how these themes blend and contrast to make the prophet's message timely and relevant. Ellen White says concerning the prophecies of Zephaniah: "His prophecies of impending judgment upon Judah apply with equal force to the judgments that are to fall upon an impenitent world at the time of the second advent of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

### Judgments Upon the Nations (read Zeph. 2:4-15)

Laughter can be heard in the streets as the children dart playfully from building to building. The ox-drawn carts, empty of produce from a day at the marketplace, slow down and sometimes stop as children dash between them. Some families are preparing for their evening meal as candles are being lit throughout the city.

But one young man hears

much different sounds in the distance. Instead of children laughing, he hears the well-ordered march of soldiers; instead of carts, heavily armed chariots. In place of candles, he sees the sky lighted with the torches of an army. He is aware of coming war, devastation, and tragedy. The heaviest burden this young man must carry is that no one else hears these sounds or senses the danger. Judgment is fast approaching.

The enemies of God are specifically mentioned as the region of Philistia (see 2:4-7), Moab and Ammon (see verses 8-11), Cush (see verses 8-11), and Assyria (see verses 13-15), with specific denunciations on each. One of the questions that must loom in the reader's mind is, What had led to such a prediction of total destruction and annihilation? Does there come a time when characters are fixed and the time of pleading ends, and there remains only the separation of the bad from the good even among those who are supposed to be God's elect?

The messenger of God sees no reason to identify the vehicle that Yahweh will use to bring this scourge, but one thing is for certain—the "day of the Lord is near," very near. The picture appears dark, but there is a light that pierces the veil. God will have a remnant.

### Warning to a Wayward People (read Zeph. 3:1-4, 6, 7, 11, 13)

The Lord had planned and pro-

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by William Kilgore

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

vided so abundantly for the people of Judah. He wanted to cover them with the cloak of His almighty power. The surrounding nations should have then seen a God, not made of stone or wood, not abiding in rivers and streams, but the God who lived with His people and clothed them. All the nations would have said, "Yahweh, the God of Judah, He is a provider, a sustainer, a tailor who fits His people with a garment of peace, security, and compassion." The nakedness of a nation would be clothed in the righteousness of their God.

It is apparent from Zephaniah's message that the moral condition of Judah had reached its lowest ebb also. Rulers are compared to wild beasts (see 3:3). The prophets and priests are described as reckless and faithless (see verse 4). It was no wonder that the people of God had become steeped in apostasy and gone the way of their heathen neighbors.

The "day of the Lord" has a purpose in Zephaniah beyond declaring the devastation of the wicked; there is also an appeal for repentance. "Announcing that the awful Day of Yahweh was imminent, he declared that the nation had no hope save in repentance (2:1-3), for which Yahweh had of-

ferred one last chance (3:6f)."<sup>2</sup>

God's purpose for judgment was to chasten and purify a remnant who would be the recipient of His benefits and an instrument of service in His hands again (see verse 13).

### **The Righteousness of God (read 3:5)**

Zephaniah has been a faithful prophet and not neglected to deliver a message of judgment, but within his message is assurance as well. "The just Lord is in the midst thereof" (verse 5). God's people shared a common bond. They lived in a world of sin that was facing a judgment hour. The prophet pleads with his people not to cover their nakedness with a tattered cloak, patches upon patches, begged from their neighbors. Can you hear him pleading, "Don't you know that doom awaits those who put their lives together with scraps, rejecting the royal robe of the King?" What greater appeal could be given to God's people now as then? Be as Zephaniah, "hidden in Yahweh," the one characteristic that has always defined the remnant!

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 389.

2. John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 320.

Tuesday, March 17

# Is the Fallacy Your Truth?

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## TESTIMONY

Key Text: Zeph. 3:6, 7

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Many people have a false impression of God. Some have taught that God sits in heaven as a stern judge anticipating the iniquity of man. People choose to believe this picture instead of searching the Scriptures for themselves, thus missing the opportunity to view a loving Father. Ellen White makes God's purposes for judgment very clear. By no means does God allow someone to plunge into wrongdoing without first warning them of judgment and advising them to repent.

"He uses every means to bring them back to obedience and does not visit their iniquity with judgments until He has given them ample opportunity to repent."<sup>1</sup> In dealing with the Israelites specifically, "He stays His judgments; He pleads with them to return to their allegiance. He had brought them [His chosen people] out of bondage that they might faithfully serve Him, the only true and living God; but they had wandered into idolatry, they had slighted the warnings given them by His prophets. Yet He defers His chastisement to give them one more opportunity to repent and avert the retribution for their sin."<sup>2</sup>

Throughout history, God has not only warned man of His judgments, but protected those who fear and obey Him.

"God has always given men

warning of coming judgments. Those who had faith in His message for their time, and who acted out their faith, in obedience to His commandments, escaped the judgments that fell upon the disobedient and unbelieving. The word came to Noah, 'Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before Me.' Noah obeyed and was saved. The message came to Lot, 'Up, get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city.' Genesis 7:1; 19:14. Lot placed himself under the guardianship of the heavenly messengers, and was saved. So Christ's disciples were given warning of the destruction of Jerusalem. Those who watched for the sign of the coming ruin, and fled from the city, escaped the destruction. So now we are given warning of Christ's second coming and of the destruction to fall upon the world. Those who heed the warning will be saved."<sup>3</sup>

God wants nothing more than for us to follow Him, always remembering His great lessons of love.

## REACT

1. What must we do in order to escape the judgment?

2. Is God truly being fair in casting judgment against the wicked, destroying them?

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1. *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 179.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 634.

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by Susan Hevener

Susan Hevener is a first-year special education major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

## A Tigon?

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### EVIDENCE

Key Text: Zeph. 3:13

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Does there come a time when characters are fixed and the time of pleading ends, and there remains only the separation of the bad from the good, even among those who are supposed to be God's elect? This question was posed earlier this week, and as I contemplated the answer, I began to think about the differences between God's people and the people of the world. God's people have begun to intermingle with the world, and the line dividing the two groups is often very gray. How easy would it be to separate the two?

I think of the two groups like two species of animals such as a lion and a tiger. A species is defined as a group of organisms with a common gene pool. Members of a species interbreed with other members of the same species to produce fertile offspring and do not mate with members of different species. In other words, a species has a gene pool that is isolated from that of other species. Lions do not interbreed with tigers in the wild.

But have you ever heard of a *tigon*? Organisms that are assigned to different species in the

wild may interbreed if they are brought into a zoo, a herbarium, an aquarium, or the laboratory. Lions can be bred with tigers to produce a tigon. This is called hybridization. Christians can "interbreed" with the world, but it is not the way God intended it to be.

There are a number of mechanisms that prevent the natural interbreeding between different species. This is important because each species has gene combinations that are adaptively significant. Hybridization breaks up or dilutes the gene combinations. This usually results in producing a sterile organism. (Occasionally, a fertile offspring develops which produces a second generation. However, this second generation has defects that prevent it from successfully reproducing.)

Hybridization of Christians with the world dilutes the pure character of God just as hybridization of different species dilutes gene combinations. A tigon cannot reproduce lions, tigers, or tigons. A hybrid of the world cannot produce God's character.

How easy will it be to separate God's people from the world on the day of judgment? I think it will be as easy as separating lions from tigers.

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by Flavia Rochester and Omar Illingworth

Flavia Rochester is the admissions counselor, and Omar Illingworth is a sophomore biology student at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Thursday, March 19

# Avoiding Drift

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## HOW-TO

**Key Texts:** Zeph. 3:5; Prov. 14:12

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The problem of the church being “incorporated” into the world’s system has been around since the beginning of history. Babylon, the Roman Empire, and the Papacy are just a few examples. The problem is that no matter how good the church’s intentions are, it seems to drift toward the world. This is what had happened to Israel in the years leading up to Zephaniah. Zephaniah told them that they would be destroyed just like other wicked cities had been if they didn’t get back on course.

To what extent has our church drifted? And if it has, how do we stop the drift and get back on course? The following are some suggestions:

1. *Know what you believe and especially why you believe it.* It is harder to drift when you not only know what your course is, but also why you are traveling it.

2. *Avoid a judgmental attitude.* Ask for wisdom to discern the difference between simply updating

and dangerous compromise, or between matters of taste and right and wrong.

3. *Study history.* It is good for the believer and the church to review the history of God’s people. We should study both Adventist history and the history of God’s people in general. From seeing how people and institutions drifted from God’s course, we can learn valuable lessons.

4. *Spend time in prayer, asking for guidance.* The Lord wants us to stay on course and not be incorporated into the world’s system. We must believe that He will reveal His course to us.

## REACT

1. Today the church has many vocal groups with judgment messages. Now these messages are even being passed by video. How do we sort out the authentic from the false?

2. Is the problem of drifting into the world an institutional one or a personal one?

3. Why is it so hard to learn from history when it comes to the problem of drifting?

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by Kenneth Bodine

Kenneth Bodine is a junior business administration major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

# Habits—Are They Worth It?

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## OPINION

Key Text: Zeph. 3:7

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If habits were easy to break, we would not need groups like Weight Watchers or Breathe Free stop-smoking plans. Webster states that habits can become addictions, and addictions can soon take control of our lives. Sin is a deadly addiction that everyone encounters. Even Paul wondered why he did the things that he knew were wrong, and why he couldn't control himself. Sin causes people to become enslaved to their habits (see Rom. 7:18, 19).

Look at the children of Israel. They got into the habit of ignoring God's warnings and doubting His protection and wisdom. They ended up wandering in the desert for 40 extra years.

This habit of ignoring and doubting God was passed down through the generations. Most of Zephaniah chapters 2 and 3 deal with cities that have been destroyed or overthrown. The prophet tells the people of Israel that these cities went about their own way, ignored God, and were destroyed. He warns that the consequences will be the same for Jerusalem if they do not repent

and make some changes.

With clear case studies, it would seem such an easy and rational decision for the Jews to make some necessary changes in their lives. Yet God states in Zephaniah 3:7, "Surely you will fear me and accept correction! Then her dwelling would not be cut off, nor all my punishments come upon her. But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did" (NIV).

In other words, not even the sight of the ruined cities and enslaved people could change the hearts of the people of Jerusalem. The habits were too deeply ingrained.

All around us today we see the consequences of sin. Yet we are just as likely to ignore God as were the people in Zephaniah's day. The only way out of this terrible mess is to pray daily for Jesus to take control of our lives. We need to get into the habit of relying on Jesus and listening to Him. Forming good habits can help as much as bad habits can destroy.

## REACT

Are there habits in my life that are separating me from God and His plans for my life? If so, what strategies will best help break them?

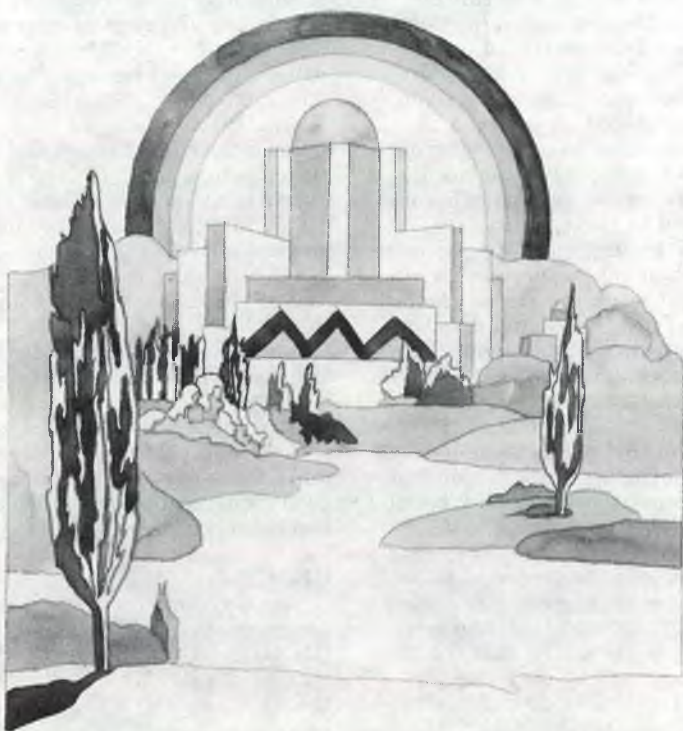
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by Noelle Nelson

Noelle Nelson is a freshman nursing major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Lesson 13, March 22-28

# End of the Rainbow



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

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# My Scattered People

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## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Zeph. 3:17

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In the time of Zephaniah shepherds used songs, either played on crude flutes or sung aloud, to call their dimwitted charges and keep them on safe paths. At times, persons with sinister plans imitated those songs, attempting to lure the sheep away.

Sometimes, when two shepherds passed near one another, the sheep became confused and lost. Sheep from both flocks mingled together, and the best way to separate them was for one shepherd to cease his song while the other led his sheep away. But not all the sheep could be reclaimed this way as some quickly forgot their shepherd's identifying song.

In the quotation for this segment God's believers were diverted by idolatry from the worship of the Lord. Zephaniah refers to the children of Israel in the Lord's prophecy as "my scattered people," scattered like so many lost sheep. The children of Israel had fallen prey to a false shepherd and lost their way.

The portion of Scripture under

investigation speaks of a restoration in Israel. In verse 9 it states that from all peoples and cultures believers will come, speaking one "pure language" uncontaminated by idolatry.

In the analogy of God as the shepherd and we the sheep, one further consideration should be added: the shepherd *can* retrieve his sheep entirely. When the sheep are scattered and can no longer recall the song of their shepherd, he must create a new song from the old, but unlike the song which led the sheep astray. Further, the shepherd must seek out all his sheep and teach them the new song. In this way a new "pure language" is developed, untainted by idolatry. A new order of devotion will be apparent among God's people—the Good Shepherd's song.

Zephaniah 3:20 speaks the words of God: "At that time I will gather you" (NIV). When the people are gathered and safe once again with their rightful master, the shepherd sings again. This time he sings a song of joy, comfort, and gladness for the scattered people—the wandering sheep are gathered home.

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by Trevor Mahlum

Trevor Mahlum is an education major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Monday, March 23

## Blessings After Curses

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### LOGOS

Zeph. 3:12, 13

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After delivering the children of Israel from Egypt and bringing them to Sinai, God offered them a covenant of love through Moses. "If you obey me fully and keep my covenant," the Lord said, "then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. . . . You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:5, 6, NIV).

In Deuteronomy 30:19 Moses warned them, "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses" (NIV). These blessings and curses are listed in Deuteronomy 28.

The prophets were "enforcers" of the covenant. This is why we find doom alternating with hope in their writings. The blessing or curse depended on the response of the people.

Our scripture for this week's lesson is a beautiful message of hope following the warnings of doom we have been studying. The people were facing exile in Babylon, but all was not lost. A remnant would be purified, restored, and glorified.

### Salvation for the Remnant (read Zeph. 3:8-10)

Verse 8 can be read either with verses 6 and 7 or with verses 9 and 10. If we read it with 9 and 10, then it is part of

the promise that the Lord will purify the peoples (not only Israelites!) that they might call on the name of the Lord. First He pours out His wrath on all who act corruptly (see verse 7); then He gathers His scattered people from distant places, even from beyond the rivers of Cush (Ethiopia). "The whole world will be consumed" (verse 8, NIV), but there will be a remnant of purified worshipers gathered out of the destruction.

Verse 9 says they will "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (NIV). This pictures a unity among God's people that we sometimes overlook in our emphasis on individual decisions. God's people may be scattered today, but His goal is to gather them into His one great family in heaven and earth.

### Purifying the Remnant (read Zeph. 3:11-13)

These verses reflect the pure grace of God. There is no other reason why He should show such kindness to those who had wronged Him so much. He is willing to overlook it all, except for those who "rejoice in their pride" (verse 11, NIV). They are to be removed.

With them gone, see what the Lord does for those who remain! The meek and humble ones ("afflicted and poor," verse 12, KJV) trust in the name of the Lord. He sanctifies them; they do no wrong, speak no lies, and have no deceit in their mouths (see verse 13).

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by Ralph E. Neall

Ralph E. Neall is chairman of the department of religion at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

The 144,000 in Revelation 14:5 also have no guile in their mouths, and the same truthfulness is found in the "entrance liturgy" of Psalm 15. All meek and humble ones who trust in the name of the Lord are purified into this kind of people.

The last two lines of verse 13 assure the holy remnant that the Lord will be their Shepherd, and no one will make them afraid. Ancient Israel was indeed protected from enemies after their exile, and we today are protected by our mighty Saviour from all who would accuse us of wrong (see Rom. 8:31-39).

### **Rejoicing Over the Remnant (read Zeph. 3:14-17)**

These verses form a little psalm of praise which reflects the Lord's gift of forgiveness. Three times in verse 14 Israel is invited to sing, and verse 15 tells why: the Lord has taken away their punishment. Here again is His gracious assurance that there is hope for them beyond the exile.

Twice in verses 15 and 16 the Lord says He is with His people; they have nothing to fear, for He is mighty to save (see verse 16). We saw the same promise in the last line of verse 13. Over and over the Lord holds out hope and reassurance to His meek and humble people.

Verse 17 ends with a note of singing which corresponds to that

in verse 14, only now it is *the Lord* who is singing over His people. He "takes great delight" (NIV) in them; He quiets them with His love. This is truly a wonder when we remember what they have been. Out of sheer kindness and grace He has made them precious to Himself. No wonder *they* sing in verse 14!

### **Gathering the Remnant (read Zeph. 3:18-20)**

Verse 18 seems to promise that God's people, who could not celebrate their feasts in captivity, would observe them again when they returned.

The key words in these verses are *scattered* (NIV) in verse 19, and *gather* (NIV) in verse 20. The great covenant curse was a scattering; the covenant blessing is a gathering. The Lord gathered Israel to Jerusalem after the exile. He is now gathering true Israel to Himself by faith, and He will soon gather His people to the New Jerusalem. Twice in these verses He says He will give them praise and honor when He restores their fortunes.

### **REACT**

1. Realizing that this prophecy applied originally to people facing the Babylonian exile, how shall we read it today?

2. To what extent does the covenant framework of blessings and curses help us apply this prophecy?

Tuesday, March 24

# Emmanuel, God With Us

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## TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 1:23

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In the Old and New Testament Christ is the great pivotal theme. This theme is seen in Zephaniah 3:17, "The Lord your God is with you" (NIV), or you might say, as Matthew did when referring to Christ, "God with us" (1:23). We today can be assured, just as Israel of old, that God is with us in Christ His Son. Because God is with us in Christ, the "Lord has taken away your punishment and turned back your enemy" (Zeph. 3:15, NIV).

"Christ did not yield up His life till He had accomplished the work which He came to do, and with His parting breath He exclaimed, 'It is finished.' John 19:30. The battle had been won. His right hand and His holy arm had gotten Him the victory. As a Conqueror He planted His banner on the eternal heights. . . . All Heaven triumphed in the Saviour's victory. Satan was defeated, and knew that his kingdom was lost."<sup>1</sup>

In Christ, divinity and humanity met, and He gave to mankind the atonement (at-one-ment) or the God with us, forever making peace between God and man in Him (see Rom. 5:11; Eph. 2:12-17). This was accomplished in Christ as He "bore the curse [or punishment, Zeph. 3:15] of the law, suffering its penalty, carrying to completion the plan whereby man was to be placed where he could keep God's law,

and be accepted through the merits of the Redeemer."<sup>2</sup>

We can rejoice in the knowledge that our God has wrought out an at-one-ment for mankind in His Son. As Zephaniah brings out, we have hope and can rejoice in the future God has promised to spiritual Israel. Looking forward to when "Satan's work of ruin is forever ended. . . . The whole creation has groaned and travailed together in pain. Now God's creatures are forever delivered from His presence and temptations. . . . And a shout of praise and triumph ascends from the whole universe. . . . 'Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.' Revelation 19:6."<sup>3</sup>

"The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. . . . From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love."<sup>4</sup> When this hope is realized and the at-one-ment is final, then all beings will exclaim the truth of Emmanuel: God is with us!

## REACT

1. Why was God's work in Christ so vital to us?
2. Is God being fair to His own law by pardoning sinners?

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 758.

2. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 240.

3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 673.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 678.

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by Paul Blake

Paul Blake is a theology major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Wednesday, March 25

# God Will Then Rejoice With His People

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## EVIDENCE

Key Text: Zeph. 3:14-18

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Zephaniah presents powerful and moving images of the love of God. Author O. Palmer Robertson says that in the word of Zephaniah, "God and his people attain heights in the ecstasy of love that are hard to comprehend."<sup>1</sup>

"The prophet opens this final message with a grand summons for the people to rejoice. The prophetic 'Woe' had been spoken over the royal city of Jerusalem. Equally with the foreign nations this rebellious community must be destroyed.

"Sadness and depression would seem to be the order of the day. Unrelieved lamentation would be expected. But the prophet can look beyond these tragedies. He calls for an unrestrained celebration of joy.

"Sing!

"Shout!

"Rejoice and be jubilant!

"By piling up every available expression for joy, the prophet leaps across the vale of gloom into the realm of grace-beyond-devastation. In his confidence about this future glory, he summons the people now to sing this song of celebration."<sup>2</sup>

In verse 17, "the prophet moves into the 'holy of holiest' by a rapturous description of the love of God for his people. This verse is the John 3:16 of the OT."<sup>3</sup>

"That Almighty God should derive delight from his creation is significant in itself. But that the Holy One should experience ecstasy over the sinner is incomprehensible.

"God is breaking out in singing!

"God joyful with delight!

"All because of you!"<sup>4</sup>

"If the prophet's mode of expression appears excessive, it must be remembered that God in his very essence is love (cf. 1 John 4:8). As the direct source of all true love, he not only is capable of achieving every depth of salutary love experienced by his creation. He by his very nature may excel every human emotion of true love. If a human being with all the limitations of his nature may revel in the purity of essential love in short, snatched moments, then certainly the Almighty himself may reach even greater depths of love and sustain these depths without restriction of time.

"So these considerations would remove any hesitation about understanding the prophet to be affirming that God sinks into contemplative quietness in his love for sinners. . . . Over you will he be quiet in his love."<sup>5</sup>

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1. O. Palmer Robertson, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans 1990), p. 334.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 335, 336.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 339.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 340.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 341.

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by Byard Parks

Byard Parks is a junior theology/business major and Union for Christ director at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

# End of The Rainbow

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## HOW-TO

Key Text: Zeph. 3:17

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We rely on promises. As children we decide on friendships through them. If a playmate vows to share a pack of bubble gum at recess, we wait and see if they keep their word. If they do, a friendship is made. If they do not, we feel our trust has been betrayed.

Promises fulfilled are associated with faith and security, and it is through these associations that positive relationships are formed.

The Scriptures are full of promises from our heavenly Father. Just as earthly parents vow to love and care for their children, God does the same for all mankind. As His children, we can take these promises and claim them for our own. We can expect God to keep them. By doing so, we allow Him to fulfill His vows. As a result, a trust relationship is formed between us and our heavenly Father.

In our readings we find God's promises to us communicated through the prophet Zephaniah. In verse 17 of chapter 3 there is a vow from our Lord that He will be

with us, and He is willing to save us. In claiming such a powerful vow, we can find peace and strength for our everyday lives. During a stress-filled finals' week or a job interview, God is there. Beyond praying for His presence, we can claim His promise and in doing so feel a confidence that He will fulfill it.

Surely God is pleased when we claim His words for ourselves. It gives Him an opportunity to display His love in caring for us. But beyond that, in using God's promises we are illustrating that His words have meaning in our lives, and we are willing to build a trusting relationship with Him. We are willing to build a relationship built on promises fulfilled.

In reading Zephaniah's writings we discover messages to the wayward Israelites. Yes, we find reprimands for the erring nation, but above these stern words we see messages of hope. God gives promises of a return and a home for His sinning children. Just as a child truly expects to be given the birthday present promised by a loving parent, we should expect the gifts from our Lord. By reading these words and claiming them for our own, we are building a faith relationship with our Lord.

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by Kerri Allen

Kerri Allen is a senior elementary education major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Friday, March 27

# Going Home

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## OPINION

Key Text: Zeph. 3:20

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I suspect most of us have no use for streets of gold and other obviously materialistic analogies of heaven. Apparently Zephaniah didn't either, because instead of promising us silver-lined mansions, he speaks of God's bringing us home.

Home is a much more comforting parallel. Even those of us who are products of tumultuous childhoods can imagine the family gathered around a glowing fireplace on Friday evening drinking hot chocolate while Father leads out in family worship. We can visualize home as a shelter from the big bad world that threatens to rob us of our hard-won values. Home in the best sense of the word means security, and security is something most of us are short on.

Home means having parents who are proud of our every accomplishment, however insignificant. Home means having someone to

bring you 7-Up when your stomach isn't feeling so good. Home means having someone to mark the important times in your life, like the birthday no one else remembered.

Someday we will have the home that many of us never had. Zephaniah tells of the homecoming that is to be ours. "At that time I will gather you, at that time I will bring you home" (3:20, NIV). Odd to think that someday we will be going home to a place we've never been. No one will have any doubts that heaven might not be for them, because in the analogies of streets of gold and silver-lined mansions we see the infinite care that God is taking in His plans for our heavenly home. In the cross we see the pains that He took to ensure that our homecoming would be possible.

Most of heaven is left to our imagination. What we know as a certainty is that it will be a place of security and peace and unconditional love. And that is what God also offers us in the present.

---

by Kelly V. Schmitt

Kelly V. Schmitt was a senior history and religion major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska, when this article was written.

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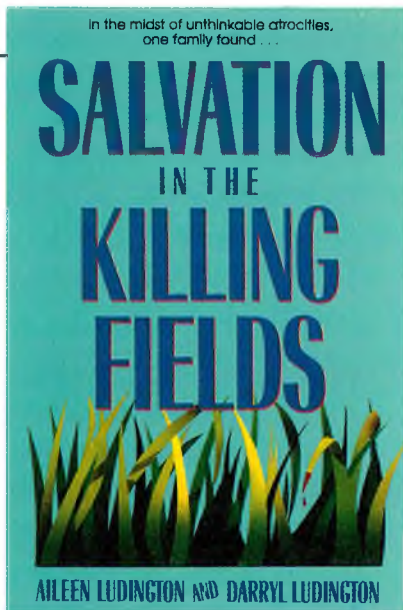
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