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A Place in His Plan



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Elder Holbrook and his wife, Donna, a former schoolteacher, have three adult children.

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Your Offerings At Work



A Place in His Plan

Themes for Today from Jeremiah and Lamentations

The time frame for Jeremiah's ministry is the last 40 years of Judah's existence (627-586 B.C.), before the nation collapsed under the attacks of the Babylonians (Jer. 50:23). Even after the Babylonian invasion of 586 B.C., Jeremiah prophesied to the remnant remaining in Israel and to those who later fled to Egypt.

For 18 years Jeremiah supported King Josiah in his attempt to reform the nation. The endeavor failed. And with the king's untimely death, idolatry and apostasy resurged like a flood. As a last act of mercy, God permitted Judah to go into an extended period of captivity and exile (70 years), to preserve a saving knowledge of Himself in the earth. It was Jeremiah's task to announce this coming judgment and to appeal for national and individual repentance.

Regarded as a traitor, Jeremiah was daily derided, sometimes beaten, and threatened with death. Although at first discouraged by Judah's angry response, he persevered in his appointed mission, eventually committing to writing God's predictions of judgments and promises of restoration.

The book of Revelation uses these historical events of Jeremiah's day as types or examples of last-day events. Modern "Babylon" is the false religious system that will absorb any person who is not committed to Christ. Christ presents the three angels' messages to the world, appealing for loyalty to Him and rejection of end-time "Babylon." (See Rev. 14:6-12.)

Throughout his writing, Jeremiah expounds on the principles of righteousness. As you study this quarter's lessons, notice how relevant these principles are for the church in general and your own life in particular. You will also want to look for the stunning similarities that exist between Jeremiah's life and the life of Jesus. It will help to think of Jeremiah as a living type of the coming Redeemer. "Each of them was 'a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief'; each came to his own and his own received him not; each passed through hours of rejection, desolation and forsakenness. And in Jeremiah we may see beaten out into detail, experiences that, in our Lord, are but lightly touched on by the evangelists."—F. B. Meyer, *Jeremiah* (Fort Washington, Pa.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1980), p. 6.

An introduction to Lamentations will be given in the lesson which studies that book.

A Place in His Plan



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Jeremiah 1, 2.

MEMORY TEXT: "The Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee" (Jeremiah 1:7).

KEY QUESTIONS: Sometimes we may feel God is not aware of the challenges His church faces. What divine attribute assures us that events do not take Him by surprise? How does God prepare His church for coming crises?

GOD CALLS YOUTH. Martin Luther was a young adult (early thirties) when he began the sixteenth-century Reformation. John Calvin joined the Reformation at 24 and wrote the first edition of the *Institutes* at 27. During the eighteenth century George Whitefield began his open-air preaching to huge crowds in his early twenties. In the nineteenth century, Ellen White received her first vision at the age of 17. God often calls young people to His service in times of crisis. Samuel and Josiah are two well-known Bible examples.

This quarter we will study the ministry and writings of the prophet Jeremiah, who may have been no more than 20 years of age when appointed to the prophetic office. The nation of Judah was spiritually apathetic, fatally stricken by her sins. Rampant idolatry clogged the arteries of spiritual life. The tears of the weeping prophet and his concerned appeals hopefully would reawaken the spiritual forces of a dying nation.

JEREMIAH AND HIS TIMES (Jer. 1:1, 2).

Jeremiah's ministry (627-c.570 B.C.) overlapped with that of his earlier contemporaries, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and the prophetess Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), and later with Daniel (603-535 B.C.) and Ezekiel (593-c.570 B.C.).

What circumstances of birth helped to prepare Jeremiah for his work as a prophet of God? Jer. 1:1, 2.

Anathoth, one of 13 cities appointed by Joshua as residences for the priests, lay about three miles northeast of Jerusalem. Evidence suggests that Jeremiah's father was a common priest, serving under a high priest of similar name. As "a member of the Levitical priesthood, Jeremiah had been trained from childhood for holy service."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 407.

Just as God bypassed the bustling cities to favor Bethlehem as Jesus' birthplace, so He chose the humble Anathoth and its equally humble citizen, Jeremiah.

The Last Kings of Judah (Jer. 1:2, 3).

Josiah—640-609 B.C., Grandson of Manasseh (696-641 B.C.).
 Jehoahaz—609 B.C., Son of Josiah (2 Kings 23:30).
 Jehoiakim—609-598 B.C., Son of Josiah (2 Kings 23:34).
 Jehoiachin—598-597 B.C., Son of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:6).
 Zedekiah—597-586 B.C., Son of Josiah; uncle of Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:17).

Since Jeremiah began his ministry in King Josiah's thirteenth year (627/626 B.C.), his writings portray the spiritual and moral decline in the kingdom of Judah during the last 40 years of its national existence. Three non-Jewish nations contended for control of the Near East: Assyria, Egypt, and the rising neo-Babylonian Empire. Assyria crumbled with the destruction of its capital, Nineveh, by the Babylonians in 612 B.C. Babylon also subdued the proud Egyptians. Josiah was caught in the political and military crossfire between Babylon and Egypt (2 Chron. 35:20-25). When Josiah died, Judah lost its national independence, first to Egypt, then to Babylon.

When others around me are drawn into apostasy, and political situations seem unstable, how can I maintain a positive witness for my God? (See Phil. 2:14, 15.)

CALL AND COMMISSION (Jer. 1:4, 5).

When did God plan Jeremiah's ministry? How would this fact strengthen him later in his task? Jer. 1:4, 5.

Christians are prone to pray to God to remove the mountains of difficulty that face His church. God's usual plan is to match spiritually strong men and women with the mountains! God quietly prepares people for an important role at the right moment on the stage of life.

"Each has his place in the eternal plan of heaven. Each is to work in co-operation with Christ for the salvation of souls. Not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 326, 327.

Jeremiah hesitated to accept the commission, but the Lord gave him assurances to overcome his reluctance (Jer. 1:6-10). "The abiding condition for proclaiming the word of Jehovah on the Divine side, is that of the consciousness of the sufficiency of God for all He appoints. Lord, I know not how to speak! Thou wilt speak exactly what I give thee! Lord, I am only a child! I am with thee! As we hear these words spoken to our souls, then we dare not adventure forth in our own strength; but we dare in His strength!"—G. Campbell Morgan, *Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah* (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1969), p. 28.

How was Jeremiah to relate to the expected reaction from rulers and people? Jer. 1:10, 17-19.

At this point in Josiah's reign Jeremiah could scarcely imagine the deadly opposition his messages would arouse. Eventually he would predict the downfall of the Davidic monarchy, the destruction of the temple, and would call for national surrender to Babylon. Blackened by charges of treason, he would become an object of scorn and derision, worthy of death. But the promise was certain: "I am with thee . . . to deliver thee" (Jer. 1:19).

Are you willing to accept God's plan for your life, even though, as with Jeremiah, it might mean great hardship? How can Jeremiah 1:17-19 encourage us to take a stand on moral and spiritual issues?

TWO VISIONS (Jer. 1:11-16).

What kind of tree appeared in the vision? What message did it convey by its symbolism? Jer. 1:11, 12.

Two scenes passed before the mind of the young prophet. They provide a divine briefing of what was to happen to the nation, and why.

In Hebrew, the word used for "almond" means "to be wakeful," "to watch," because the almond tree was the earliest tree to flower in the new growing season. The almond symbolized God's message to Judah. "What do you see? I see a wake-tree (a watch-tree). You see correctly, for I am awake (or watching) over my word to perform it." God was not asleep or indifferent to the conditions in Judah. His word given through the prophet would take place.

In the second scene how was the imminent destruction of Judah graphically portrayed? Why did the nation face such a fate? Jer. 1:13-16.

The large pot tilted southward ("away from the north," RSV), its boiling contents about to spill in scalding fury upon Judah. Although Babylon lay east of Jerusalem, because of intervening deserts her armies could march into Phoenicia and Palestine only at their northern borders. (See Eze. 26:7; Jer. 4:6.) Jeremiah saw in this symbol the strong disciplinary measures God planned for His rebellious people.

Jeremiah received his call in the thirteenth year of Josiah (627/626) B.C. Approximately 40 years later, July 19, 586 B.C., the predicted judgment was fulfilled. (See Jer. 39:1-3.) The princes of Babylon sat in the gate area of the defeated capital of Judah. Because they had sinned away their probation, the "word of the Lord" was fulfilled. The prophet witnessed "the literal fulfillment of his own prophecies of impending doom" and shared "in the sorrow and woe that . . . [followed] the destruction of the fated city."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 408.

Like Jeremiah, at one time Jesus uttered severe warnings (Matthew 23). Since "God is love," why does He sometimes express Himself in negative terms?

REVIVAL AND REFORMATION (2 Chron. 34:1-7).

At the age of 20 (his twelfth year as king) what kind of reform did Josiah institute? 2 Chron. 34:1-7. Working his way through the cities of Israel, as well as those of Judah, how did his actions fulfill prophecy? 1 Kings 13:1-3; 2 Kings 23:15-20.

Wicked King Manasseh repented and attempted to make amends (2 Chron. 33:18-20). Yet his half-century reign, promotion of the grossest forms of idolatry, and the relapse of his son Amon, left Judah spiritually bankrupt. Placed on the throne at the age of only 8, Josiah, Manasseh's grandson, reigned at first under the guidance of counselors.

Jeremiah joined Josiah the following year (Jer. 1:2). The two young men—together with Huldah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah—labored to revive the spiritual life of the nation. God desired to prevent the ruin of Judah, but the choice lay with the people.

Six years later, what effect did the discovery of the lost Scriptures ("the book of the law") have on the king's reform movement? 2 Kings 22:8-11; 23:1-3. Describe Josiah's attempts to remove the external forms of idolatry. 2 Kings. 23:4-14.

The Scriptures (the writings of Moses) became the basis of reform. Again God reminded the people of their covenant relationship. Jeremiah emphasized the necessity of a sincere renewal of covenant commitment to the Lord. But Josiah's death and the succeeding reign of his wicked son, Jehoiakim, quickly unraveled all that the reformers had accomplished. Later the Lord revealed to Jeremiah the unsatisfactory response of the people to Josiah's appeals (Jer. 3:10).

"The reformation under Josiah had cleansed the land of the idolatrous shrines, but the hearts of the multitude had not been transformed. The seeds of truth that had sprung up and given promise of an abundant harvest, had been choked by thorns. Another such backsliding would be fatal; and the Lord sought to arouse the nation to a realization of their danger."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 410, 411.

How can you tell whether revival and reformation are genuine?

LIVING FOUNTAIN OR BROKEN CISTERN (Jer. 2:1-3:5).

In Jeremiah's first public message in the reign of Josiah (Jer. 2:1-3:5), the Lord attempted to rekindle the early love of the nation for Him (Jer. 2:2).

Write in your own words the challenging question with which God confronted His people. Jer. 2:4, 5.

"For the moment, we have the amazing picture of God taking the high line of argument that suggests the loyalty of His people, and His own disloyalty: If you have turned from Me Who loved you so . . . there must be a reason for it! Is it in Me? . . . It was the challenge of wounded love . . . of conscious faithfulness."—G. Campbell Morgan, *Studies in the Prophecies of Jeremiah*, pp. 34, 35.

Why was the Lord amazed that Judah had abandoned Him? Jer. 2:9-11. Describe the two evils they committed in their pursuit of idolatry. Jer. 2:11-13.

Kittim (Chittim, KJV), the island of Cyprus, came to represent peoples and lands west of Israel. Kedar, a territory in the Arabian desert, symbolized nations east of Israel. Search the nations from west to east, God says, and you will not find disloyalty worse than that of My people.

"In the presence of such a Teacher [Jesus], of such an opportunity for divine education, what worse than folly is it to seek an education apart from Him—to seek to be wise apart from Wisdom; to be true while rejecting Truth; to seek illumination apart from the Light, and existence without the Life; to turn from the Fountain of living waters, and hew out broken cisterns, that can hold no water."—*Education*, p. 83.

A wife cherishes her bridal attire. But it would be astonishing if the garments were more important to her than the husband! Yet Judah cherished God's blessings (her attire), while deliberately disregarding and forgetting the Giver (her covenant Husband)! See Jer. 2:32.

How do the Sabbath and the Communion service remind us of God's blessings? What things in your life might cause you to forget the more important things of God?


FURTHER STUDY: How did other persons in Bible times discover God's plan for them? Joseph (Gen. 45:5-8); Esther (Esther 4:14); Isaiah (Isa. 6:8); Paul (Acts 13:1, 2); John Mark (Acts 15:37-39). How were they sure of God's direction?

Read "The Book of the Law," and "Jeremiah" in *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 392-409, and "The Life-Work" in *Education*, pp. 262-271.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The almond tree represented God's omniscience. He knows all and is ever vigilant. Is this fact a terror or a consolation to you? (See Psalm 139.)
2. What parallels exist between Jeremiah's upbringing and Jesus'?

SUMMARY: It was a critical time in Judah. Half a century of the most wicked forms of idolatry, cruelty, selfishness, and injustice had eroded the spiritual life of the people. The Lord meets such crises by appointing people to lead His people in a revival of their spiritual life. God commissioned King Josiah and Jeremiah for this purpose. Faithfully Jeremiah counseled Judah for the last 40 years of its national existence.



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United By the Power!

Victor Osorio

From Paraguay comes the story of 18-year-old Anibal Peralta, whose father was killed three months before Anibal was born, by a drunken man during a fight that stemmed from a card game.

"One day," Anibal's relatives told him and his three brothers when they were big enough to understand, "you will have to mete justice by killing that man who killed your father."

Anibal's mother eventually left her three sons to be reared by their grandparents. Time passed, and when Anibal was a teenager, a group of Adventist young people, who had walked many kilometers, arrived at their home in the heart of the jungle to share the gospel. Bible studies were begun with Anibal's grandparents, but the studies were soon discontinued.

Anibal, however, received the gospel and a year later left home to be baptized even though his grandfather forbade him ever to return. From the midst of the jungle Anibal came out of the darkness of sin to become a literature evangelist. He wants to take the gospel back to his people in their Guarani tongue—the language they will accept.

Early in 1991, the same Adventist youth group went to another village to preach and study again. Among the persons who took their stand through baptism were Ignacio and his wife, parents of 12 children.

Word reached Anibal that the youth group recognized Ignacio's name as the man who had killed his father. I (the author) was surprised to receive this request from Anibal: "I just got news that 600 kilometers from here lives the man who killed my father and that he is now a baptized member of the SDA Church, too. During the upcoming youth congress I would like to give a public testimony and embrace that man—whom I do not know—and tell him there that I forgive him for killing my father and that now I want to meet him in heaven."

On the youth-congress platform in September, 1992, with tears and emotions before hundreds of people, Anibal and Ignacio embraced, revealing the power of the gospel.



Anibal Peralta

In answer to prayer, Anibal Peralta located his mother to tell her the Adventist message. Please pray for Anibal's mother and grandparents as he seeks to draw them to Christ.

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A Prophet's Pilgrimage



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Jeremiah 11:18-12:4; 14:7-9; 20:14-18; 36:1-32.

MEMORY TEXT: "I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23, NIV).

KEY QUESTIONS: How is a Christian's experience like a journey? Why does it involve "unlearning," as well as "learning"? How does a Christian experience growth?

HOW WILL YOUR JOURNEY END? John's spiritual journey began in the coal mines. With a sense of hopelessness, the 17-year-old miner worked endless days at the coal's face. To break the monotony, he and his friends wasted their nights playing poker, smoking, and drinking. One night they slipped into a Billy Sunday evangelistic tent meeting.

"Listen, my friends," Sunday exhorted, "when a man starts on a journey, he has one object in view—the end. When pleasures pass away and sorrow and weeping take their place, *what shall the end be?*"

That night John L. Shuler surrendered his life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As he exchanged his shovel for the Scriptures, he began a long and arduous spiritual journey. He became a prominent Adventist evangelist.

Every believer is on a pilgrimage. Jeremiah was no exception. His struggles are similar to ours. Although everyone's experience is unique, the same God leads us all.

PREPARING THE PROPHET (Jer. 1:1; 15:10).

What kind of spiritual training would Jeremiah have received in his home at Anathoth? What may we infer? Jer. 1:1.

Assuming that Jeremiah was about 20 years old at the time of his call, he would have been born in the closing years of Manasseh's reign. Although many priests had compromised their faith (Jer. 2:8; 5:30, 31), Jeremiah's parents evidently remained faithful. His many allusions to God's instructions (*torah*, "the law") indicate his home training in the Scriptures. Living less than three miles from the temple, the youth—like Jesus at a later time—must have pondered the significance of the rites, in contrast to the careless crowds who came to the temple (Jer. 7:8-11).

"In the youthful Jeremiah, God saw one who would be true to his trust, and who would stand for the right against great opposition. In childhood he had proved faithful; and now he was to endure hardness as a good soldier."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 407.

Why was the youthful prophet prohibited from marrying? Jer. 16:1-4.

Marriage and children always held an important part in Israelite society (Ps. 127:4, 5). Jeremiah's imposed bachelorhood, while it denied this compassionate man a caring wife and the chance to be a caring husband, served as a grim warning to an unrepentant nation of the horrors of the coming siege (Jer. 19:9; Eze. 5:10).

The fact that Jeremiah bought land while in prison indicates that he had some source of independent income (Jer. 32:6-15). It is doubtful that the tithing system functioned at all after the death of Josiah. However, the priests and Levites owned the lands surrounding their appointed cities (Joshua 21:1-3). In difficult times these provided for their support. (See Neh. 13:10.) Jeremiah probably derived some income from inherited family lands.

How does the Lord use home, school, and church to prepare youth for service? What kinds of influence in these three institutions can destroy God's plan? Compare Jeremiah's training for service with that of Jesus.

THE SENSITIVE PROPHET (Jer. 14:7-9).

In what important way did the prophet identify himself with his wayward people? Jer. 14:7-9.

Counselors are trained to empathize with others, but to remain emotionally detached. This is especially difficult for a sensitive person to do. Although Judah closed its own probation (Jer. 7:16; 14:11, 12), Jeremiah was an earnest intercessor in behalf of his people. Like Moses and Daniel, he identified with them: "our iniquities," "our backslidings," "we have sinned."

How did the prospect of the nation's ruin by Babylonian conquest affect Jeremiah? Jer. 4:19-22.

The Hebrews thought of the intestines ("bowels," verse 19, KJV) as the seat of the emotions. We would say, "My stomach is tied in knots!" Jeremiah's life was bound up with Judah's. Its failure was his failure. He physically anticipated the distress that the people faced.

Why is Jeremiah sometimes called "the weeping prophet"? What was the significance of his tears? Jer. 9:1; 13:17; Lam. 2:11. Compare Christ's response to Jewish impenitence 650 years later. Luke 19:41-44.

"The Jewish nation was a symbol of the people of all ages who scorn the pleadings of Infinite Love. The tears of Christ when He wept over Jerusalem were for the sins of all time. In the judgments pronounced upon Israel, those who reject the reproofs and warnings of God's Holy Spirit may read their own condemnation. . . .

"Scorner of His love, He addresses you today. . . . Christ is shedding bitter tears for you, who have no tears to shed for yourself. . . . And every evidence of the grace of God, every ray of divine light, is either melting and subduing the soul, or confirming it in hopeless impenitence."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 587, 588.

Do you think Christian tears weaken Christian teaching? Explain. Why is a loving and lovable Christian a powerful witness for Christ's cause?

THE SUFFERING PROPHET (Jer. 11:18-23).

Jeremiah's experience may have been in Jesus' mind when He lamented over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37). The happier years under Josiah were soon replaced by daily derision and threats on the prophet's life. Imprisonment and physical abuse followed in the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah.

Who were involved in a plot on the life of unsuspecting Jeremiah? What was his response? Jer. 11:18-23; 12:6.

The parallel between Jeremiah's treatment by his countrymen and the treatment given Jesus centuries later is dramatic. Like Jeremiah, Jesus is compared to a Lamb led to slaughter. (See Isa. 53:7, 8; Rev. 5:6.) Jeremiah discovered, as Jesus later did, that "no prophet is acceptable in his own country" (Luke 4:24, RSV).

How did an officer of the temple react to one of the prophet's warning messages? Jer. 20:1-6.

The flogging consisted of not more than 40 lashes (Deut. 25:2, 3). The stocks confined him in a crooked position, painfully cramping his muscles. The priest misread the prophet, thinking to drive him into silence with a whip. But prompted by the Spirit, Jeremiah pronounced specific judgments on the sin-hardened official.

How did Jeremiah react to the charge made by the priests and false prophets that he should be executed for his predictions against the temple and city? Why did the princes rescue him? Jer. 26:8-19, 24.

God had permitted an associate, Urijah, to die as a martyr a short time before (Jer. 26:20-23). "Of all the gifts that Heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 225. Jeremiah's last imprisonment took place during the final siege of Jerusalem. Note how the princes treated him then, and who delivered him. (See Jer. 38:1-13; 39:15-18.)

Do you believe that suffering for Christ and His service is a privilege? Why? (See Phil. 1:29; Rom. 5:3-5.)

THE QUESTIONING PROPHET (Jer. 20:14-18).

Jeremiah suffered doubts and discouragements. He endeavored to reconcile his hard experiences with his call. Depressed by the enormous negative reaction to the divine messages of reproof and promise, and demoralized by the display of physical violence, he questioned the purpose of his own existence.

Read the agonizing words the prophet used to vent his despondency. Jer. 20:14-18; compare 15:10.

"Despondency may shake the most heroic faith, and weaken the most steadfast will. But God understands, and He still pities and loves. He reads the motives and the purposes of the heart. To wait patiently, to trust when everything looks dark, is the lesson that the leaders in God's work need to learn. Heaven will not fail them in their day of adversity. Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness, and relies wholly on God."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 174, 175.

Since his predicted judgments did not occur right away, what question did Jeremiah ask God? Jer. 12:1-4. What did God's strange response mean (verse 5)?

What compelled Jeremiah to wonder whether God was failing him? Jer. 15:15-18; compare Jer. 20:7-9. How did God bring him to his senses? Jer. 15:19-21.

"Wilt thou be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?" (Jer. 15:18, RSV). Jeremiah alludes to a Palestinian wadi, a stream that may be a torrent in winter, but dry in the summer. He questions whether God is reliable. God does not argue the point, but promises His care if Jeremiah will trust Him.

Finally, the prophet surrendered completely to God's will. "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise" (Jer. 17:14).

Jeremiah's unease is the same as ours: God sometimes does not seem to act as we think He should. Why can God be fully trusted in all life's complex situations?

THE WRITING PROPHET (Jer. 36:1-3).

Why did God commission Jeremiah to write his messages in a scroll? Jer. 36:1-3.

Some prophets, like Elijah and Elisha, left no written messages that we are aware of. But God chose to extend Jeremiah's influence through writing. Twenty-two years had elapsed since Jeremiah's appointment to prophetic office; many hearers would have forgotten his oral presentations. A written summary would have a strong impact.

"Thus they had another opportunity to see their iniquity and repent. In this we see that God does not delight in afflicting His people; but with a care that surpasses that of a pitying father for a wayward child, He entreats His wandering people to return to their allegiance."—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 177.

How did Jeremiah produce his scroll? Jer. 36:4, 17, 18.

Although persons like Jeremiah and, later, Paul were capable authors, both employed secretaries. Baruch assisted Jeremiah for the duration of his ministry. He read the scroll to the people and later to the princes, insisting that the messages were Jeremiah's, not his (Jer. 36:5-19).

What was the king's reaction to God's written message? Jer. 36:20-26. **How did God respond to this open defiance of His grace?** Verses 27-32. **What counsel did Jeremiah give Baruch after this experience?** Jer. 45:1-5.

The king's destruction of the written Word is the only instance of such daring recorded in the Bible. It reveals the depths of human rebellion against God. Humankind may reject God's Word—may even destroy it—but cannot refute its message or prevent the fulfillment of its predictions. (See Isa. 40:6-8.) Within six years the king was dead, his body dragged beyond the gates like an animal's carcass (Jer. 22:18, 19; 36:30).

As Christians we are repulsed by the acts of those who have attacked and/or destroyed the sacred Scriptures. Why is a Christian's neglect of the Bible far more serious?

FURTHER STUDY: You may wish to study in depth the autobiographical sections that disclose the prophet's inner struggles. The principal ones are: Jer. 11:18-12:6; 15:10-18; 17:12-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-18. Read the last pages of "Jeremiah" and "Approaching Doom" in *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 419-421, 432-439.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How should the fact that we are all at different points on our own pilgrimages govern the way we treat others?
2. Realizing the tremendous influence of just one person for good (Jeremiah) or evil (Jehoiakim), how important should Christian parents and church members regard the spiritual nurture of children and youth?
3. Why are we encouraged to pray for others? Doesn't God already know their needs?
4. If Christians experience trials even as non-Christians do, what advantage is there in being a Christian? (Compare Isa. 43:2 with 1 Cor. 10:13.)
5. How does an understanding of the great controversy between God and Satan help us to reconcile the truth that God is a loving Father with all the suffering and hurting we see—and may experience?

"When called to drink of the cup of tribulation and sorrow, and when tempted in his misery to say, 'My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord,' he [Jeremiah] recalled the providences of God in his behalf, and triumphantly exclaimed, 'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.'"—*My Life Today*, p. 327.

SUMMARY: The autobiographical sections of Jeremiah's book give insight into his personal struggle to understand the God he served. Even though his life's journey led through sufferings and doubts, Jeremiah grew in grace to mature faith. We too will grow to spiritual maturity as we trust the Lord through the varied experiences of life.



First Baptism in 50 Years—in Albania!

Part 1

Janet Leigh Kangas

What would be your first words if, after waiting for baptism 51 years in the world's only officially atheistic state, the day of your baptism came? Hear the words of Meropi Gjika on April 18, 1992: "I praise the Lord for this day, and I thank Him for fulfilling my dream!"

Following the collapse of Communism in Albania in April, 1991, the Trans-European Division was able to locate Flora Lewis, widow of Daniel Lewis, who brought Adventism to Albania in 1939. Flora believed that all of the seven-to-ten converts who suffered for Adventism, but one, were dead. An investigation turned up the one—Meropi Gjika. Hear her first words to Ray Dabrowski, the minister who found her:

"Now listen, pastor. I had two dreams in my life. The first one was to hand this sacred money to the church, to the first missionary who would come, because, though it seems strange, I had an incredible hope that this day would come—that a pastor would come here. And here you are, and I see one of my dreams being realized.

"But I have a second dream, too. I have been waiting for 51 years to be baptized. I know that I am too old now, but you will do me this favor, pastor; you will baptize me. If not, the soil will not absorb my bones when I die!"

Daniel Lewis had been arrested before he could baptize Meropi or any of his small group. The tiny company were being beaten, left without food, thrown from their homes—yet, to pay their tithe they would go without eating.

Second to be baptized by David Currie that Sabbath was Meropi's granddaughter, Esther. Four baptisms followed, making 120 Adventist members in Tirana, Albania's capital. Three other towns have little groups of Adventists.

Next week a glimpse of Daniel Lewis, who would shout hosannas today could he see the tree he planted 51 years ago with his own life as seed.



Meropi Gjika waited 50 years during the atheism of her country, Albania, to become the first baptized Seventh-day Adventist.

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No Other God



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Jer. 5:1-6; 7:18-20, 29-34; 9:1-8; 10:1-16; 16:10-13.

MEMORY TEXT: "He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion" (Jeremiah 10:12).

KEY QUESTIONS: What is idolatry? Why is idolatry so attractive to the human heart? What is the relationship between idolatry and sinning against others?

GOD PROMISES A NEW HEART. Rita Tyson is a living miracle. She received two heart transplants within 23 hours. Within two hours after the first transplant Rita's body rejected the new heart. When a priority call went out for a second heart, another hospital was able to respond. Heart tissue can be kept healthy for only four hours outside the body. Because of rapid communications and surgical skill, the second heart was successfully pumping the life-giving current within three hours and 20 minutes after its removal from the donor. Rita thanks God every day.

The Creator has endowed many with marvelous medical skills, but He alone can replace the incurably sinful hearts of humankind. The people of Judah had given themselves to idolatry. They were in the last stages of open apostasy, yet stubbornly refused the skills of the Great Physician. None need follow their example. The Lord promises: "A new heart I will give you" (Eze. 36:26, RSV).

THE REASON WHY (Jer. 16:10-13).

Israel had maintained a "love affair" with pagan idolatry ever since their sojourn in Egypt (Eze. 20:6-8). Finally, God said of the northern kingdom: "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone" (Hosea 4:17). The same critical moment had now arrived for Judah.

When the Jews heard Jeremiah pronounce the judgments that were to come upon Judah, what "why" question did they ask? What effect did their idolatry have on their God-revealed religion? Jer. 16:10-13.

"In Jeremiah's time as in our own, the critical faith issue is not atheism, but idolatry. In Jeremiah's time the temptation was the attraction of the gods of Babylon. In our day the comparable temptation may be the gods of militarism, of nationalism, of naturalism, of consumerism, of technology."

"The modern form of idolatry is finally autonomy, the sense that we live life on our own terms."—Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, to Tear Down* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), pp. 97, 101.

Why are all forms of idolatry so serious in God's sight? Ex. 20:1-6.

Idolatry in any form displaces the Creator from His rightful seat of authority in each life. He is ignored, if not rejected or unknown, and His law is transgressed. Idolatry is human-centered. In its crude forms the false gods and their images are simply extensions of humans themselves. Humanism is a refined form: in it humanity thinks it has no need for God. We ourselves become the object of worship.

"Man is forbidden to give to any other object the first place in his affections or his service. Whatever we cherish that tends to lessen our love for God or to interfere with the service due Him, of that do we make a god."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 305.

The Lord's special message to the world's end-time idolaters is given in Revelation 14:6, 7.

How can I determine whether God really has first place in my life?

FAMILY RELIGION (Jer. 7:18-20).

Idolatry flooded Judah just as an incoming tide floods a beach. One is struck by Jeremiah's record of the national passion (Jer. 2:28; 11:13).

How did the parents involve their children, as well as themselves, in their daily pagan worship? Jer. 7:18-20.

The "queen of heaven" is usually identified with Ishtar, the Assyro-Babylonian goddess, known to the Hebrews as Astoreth and to the Canaanites as Astarte. She was worshiped as a goddess of sexual love, maternity, and of war. Her worship rites included practices that were immoral and debasing.

Describe the horrible practice that was widespread in Judah at this time. Jer. 7:31-34; 19:5; 32:35 (compare Ps. 106:37, 38).

Idolatry ultimately demeans and debases its devotees. We shudder at the idea of the parental murder of children as sacrifices to insensitive idols. But the modern heart can be just as cruel—as witnessed by all forms of child abuse.

What has always been God's ideal for family religion? Deut. 6:6, 7; Ps. 78:5-7 (compare Matt. 19:14; John 21:15).

In many parts of the world, it is necessary for both parents to earn a living outside their home. This often means they must place their small children in the care of others. Christian parents who do this must then devise effective ways of imparting their faith in Jesus to their children when they are the most impressionable.

"When you take up your duties as a parent in the strength of God, with a firm determination never to relax your efforts nor to leave your post of duty in striving to make your children what God would have them, then God looks down upon you with approbation."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 207.

If you are a working parent, what can you do to make sure your children are being molded by positive influences and nurtured in a knowledge of God's will for their lives?

FEEDING ON ASHES (Jer. 10:1-16).

When we fail to worship God, who is above us (the Creator), we inevitably worship that which is beneath us (the creature, Rom. 1:25). Displacing the true God from the center of our being does not remove our *sense of need* for the Deity, and we go about creating our own gods.

What attitude of mind resulted from the Jews' adoption of pagan idolatry? Why? Jer. 10:1, 2, 5. Why are idols powerless to do good or evil? Jer. 10:3-5, 8, 9, 14, 15. (Compare Isaiah's satire, Isa. 44:9-20, and Paul's reasoning with the Greeks, Acts 17:24, 27-29.)

Always there are some people who consider the forces of nature and the so-called afterlife to be powerful enough to influence life itself. Many have believed that by cooperating with these forces their lives now and after death would be materially and spiritually enriched. Thus the rich and poor, educated and uneducated, are attracted to the various forms of paganism, occultism, spiritualism, and mysticism.

The prophets show the folly of worshiping the forces of nature through man-made objects; they recognize the satanic agency behind paganism (Ps. 106:36-38; 1 Cor. 10:20, 21).

List Jeremiah's assertions about God that vividly contrast Him with all false gods:

Jer. 10:10 _____

Jer. 10:12, 16 _____

The God of Israel is *true*—dependable and trustworthy. He is the *living* God—the fountain of life, both physical and spiritual—to those who trust in Him. He is the *eternal king*—ruling over the nations of earth to bring about His purposes. As the *Lord of hosts*, He directs the far-reaching ministries of the angels. He is the *Creator* of all things. Humanists today are no wiser than ancient idolaters. They feed on ashes, expecting to find genuine security and peace apart from the Creator.

Why is true worship of the Creator the only safeguard against the many forms of false worship? Why and how is Sabbathkeeping a protection against false worship?

FOR ONE'S OWN SAKE (Jer. 5:1-5).

In order to show Jeremiah the deep-seated depravity of the nation, what promise did God make to him? Jer. 5:1-3. Failing to find a genuinely righteous person among the regular citizens of Jerusalem, to whom did Jeremiah turn? With what results? Jer. 5:4-6.

Bible religion has two dimensions: supreme love to God and impartial love toward one another (Matt. 22:36-40; compare *Welfare Ministry*, p. 48). When any form of idolatry displaces our love for God, it displaces our love for one another.

Abraham pleaded with the divine Judge to spare Sodom, even "for ten's sake" (Gen. 18:22-33). The Lord promised Jeremiah the extension of Judah's probation if the prophet could find *one* who lived justly with his neighbors and in harmony with the truth. Neither among the lower nor the higher classes could such a person be found!

What kind of sins were being committed throughout the land? Jer. 5:23-29; 6:6, 7, 13; 7:5-10.

The open and widespread violation of the last six precepts of the Ten Commandments, which govern human relationships, was a direct result of violating the first four. National idolatry resulted. The rights of the poor were trampled on; self-seeking excluded concern for those less fortunate. The two tables of the divine Law are inextricably bound together. Jesus affirmed that brotherly love among believers (the horizontal dimension) was an evidence of their discipleship to Him (the vertical dimension, John 13:34, 35).

"Love to man is the earthward manifestation of the love of God. It was to implant this love, to make us children of one family, that the King of glory became one with us. And when His parting words are fulfilled, 'Love one another, as I have loved you' (John 15:12); when we love the world as He has loved it, then for us His mission is accomplished. We are fitted for heaven; for we have heaven in our hearts."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 641.

How does love for God and humanity fulfill the Law? (See Rom. 13:8-10.) Why does this require a "new birth" experience? (See 1 Peter 1:22, 23.)

INCURABLE WOUNDS (Jer. 9:1-8; 30:12, 13).

How did God figuratively describe the nation's spiritual condition? Jer. 30:12, 13. Why did the prophet wish to get away from the people by retreating to a "shack in the desert" (TLB)? Jer. 9:1-8.

Some diseases are successfully cured if diagnosed early, but are fatal if permitted to run their course. Judah had long been warned by the prophets. But now in the last decades of national existence her spiritual heart disease seemed incurable.

"The people's lack of healing was not due to the absence of means to effect a cure, but to the refusal . . . to come to the Great Physician. Perhaps the people had become insensible to their needs. Perhaps they were too proud to accept the remedy. . . . Perhaps they had grown to love the disease. At any rate they would not look to the Healer and live."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 394.

No human society can function without the element of mutual trust. In Judah the whole fabric of morality was frayed beyond repair. Neighbor exploited neighbor. Covetousness, fraud, and overreaching characterized the conduct of the people at all levels.

What two striking figures describe the terrible spiritual plight of the nation? Jer. 17:1, 9, 10.

The Hebrew word indicates that the sharp stone set in the engraver's iron tool was probably emery, flint, or a stone of related hardness, not a diamond. Instead of God's law being written on the people's hearts (Ps. 37:31; Isa. 51:7), their transgressions had been engraved there. Such was—and is—the tragic result of a believer's pursuit of any form of idolatry. The phrase "desperately wicked" literally reads "incurable." The carnal mind has no ability to heal itself.

"One wrong trait of character, one sinful desire, persistently cherished, will eventually neutralize all the power of the gospel. Every sinful indulgence strengthens the soul's aversion to God."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 34.

How can the "unpardonable sin" be avoided? (Matt. 12:31-37).

FURTHER STUDY: Jeremiah states a universal truth (Jer. 17:9). In what terms do Ezekiel and Paul describe the same condition? Eze. 11:19; Rom. 8:6-8. How can this condition of the "natural man" (1 Cor. 2:14) be changed? Ps. 51:1, 2, 10, 11; Eze. 36:26, 27; John 3:1-15. What is accomplished by this means? Heb. 8:10. Read "The Sinner's Need of Christ" in *Steps to Christ*, pp. 17-22.

"Are we worshipers of Jehovah, or of Baal? of the living God, or of idols? No outward shrines may be visible; there may be no image for the eye to rest upon; yet we may be practising idolatry. It is as easy to make an idol of cherished ideas or objects as to fashion gods of wood or stone. Thousands have a false conception of God and His attributes. They are as verily serving a false god as were the servants of Baal."—Ellen G. White *Comments, SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1105.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you agree that the critical faith issue in today's society is not atheism, but idolatry? Explain.
2. Why does love for God—the God of the Scriptures—increase a believer's respect for and value of other human beings and the environment?
3. How can adults involve children and youth more actively in the faith we profess? What youth programs could our own congregation initiate and help develop?
4. Why does the worship of the true God tend to remove our human fears about so many things?
5. To whom do all forms of idolatry give allegiance? How can this allegiance be transferred to the true God?
6. How does Jesus warn against the idolatry of possessions in Luke 12:16-21?

SUMMARY: Idolatry violates the first table of the Decalogue by displacing God in the affections and allegiance of the believer. Thus idolatry opens the door for the assertion of human independence over the will of God. The moral collapse of Jewish society in Jeremiah's day was a direct result of their national rejection of God's authority. Such moral collapse is always the bitter fruit of humans' seeking to become independent of the Creator.

First Baptism in 50 Years—Albania!

Part 2

Janet Leigh Kangas

A word glimpse of Daniel Lewis is all we have, for his widow, Flora, has no pictures. The Communists destroyed all his belongings.

Before Daniel and Flora could escape the persecution in Albania, about 1950, with their two young children (John, 6; Esther, 3), they were arrested and jailed, Daniel in one jail, Flora and the children in another.

Four days later the children were taken, and for a year and a half Flora didn't know their whereabouts. (Esther and Flora were reunited upon Flora's release 18 months later, but John was kept in an orphanage and died in a mental hospital 20 years later.)

Meropi (see Part 1) received a letter from Daniel in jail, pleading with her to take care of him and Flora. Meropi went to the jail month after month. She washed Daniel's clothes and brought him food. Flora washed her own clothes. Meropi took them bread and pies.

Death came to Daniel about 1953—but only after severe suffering. Because he wouldn't work on Sabbath and woke up every morning saying, "Jesus is my life!" his teeth were broken and the inside of his mouth so injured that he could no longer talk.

Consequently Daniel took a pencil and wrote, "Jesus is my life!" The guards then pulled out his nails and damaged his fingers so that he was unable to write. Following that, Daniel raised his arms and bleeding hands toward the sky, then placed them over his heart to indicate "Jesus is my life!"

Flora never saw her husband again after the day of their arrest. Friends reported that Daniel was put in a cellar for four months with water up to his neck. When seen in court where he received a 20-year sentence, Daniel wasn't recognizable.

Adventist leaders first established contact with Flora in 1992. This led to contact with Meropi. At that meeting, Flora repeated her greeting at least 30 times: "How is it possible that a pastor is in my house?"



Janet Kangas

In perspective, the Holy Spirit is at work in a country long before the missionaries. Global Mission did not bring the Holy Spirit to Albania; the Holy Spirit brought Global Mission to Albania.

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Wedding Vows



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Jer. 3:1-20; 11:1-10; 18:7-10; 22:8, 9; 31:31-34.

MEMORY TEXT: "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

KEY QUESTIONS: How important to social stability are our promises in the agreements we make? In the spiritual realm why does God take our promises so seriously?

DO YOU VALUE YOUR COVENANT WITH GOD? "Brother," a woman spoke timidly, "do you have a Bible for my people?" The woman stepped from the back of the room where several had gathered to hear a layman speak.

This woman had traveled 6,000 miles to find a printed Bible from which her people could make handwritten copies. Willingly, the layman placed ten Bibles in the astonished woman's outstretched hands as tears of joy coursed down her cheeks.

How precious is the Word of God to these believers in spite of deprivation, harassment, and persecution! They prize their covenant with God more highly than life itself.

How unlike the people of ancient Judah, who lightly esteemed their ties to the Creator! They deliberately chose to abandon the covenant and disregard their promises. To her spiritual Husband, Judah's actions said, "I don't love You anymore. Leave me that I may go my own way."

BROKEN PROMISES (Jer. 22:8, 9).

Adam's transgression ruptured the relationship the Creator had initiated with the human family. In our sinful situation, God reestablishes that same loving relationship by means of a covenant of grace. The biblical covenant is both a committed relationship between God and believers (like a marriage bond) and an arrangement for saving and restoring them to full harmony with their Maker.

What explanation would the Gentiles receive when they asked why Israel's God had permitted the destruction of Jerusalem? Jer. 22:8, 9.

The biblical covenant contains three fundamental articles: (1) the covenant *promises*, affirmed by God's oath (Eph. 2:12; Gal. 3:16, 17; Heb. 6:13, 17); (2) the covenant *obligations*—obedience to God's will as expressed in the moral law of the Ten Commandments (Deut. 4:13); (3) the covenant *means* to meet the obligations or conditions: the plan of salvation through Christ (Isa. 42:1, 6, 7; Heb. 8:10-12).

When did Israel enter into a covenant relationship with God? With whom had that bond already been formed? Ex. 19:4-6; 24:3-8; Gen. 17:1, 2, 7, 8. What happened to this special covenant relationship when Judah fully embraced pagan idolatry? Jer. 1:16; 22:9.

As the descendants of Abraham, the people of Israel were already in covenant with God when He led them from Egypt. At Sinai, God renewed His covenant with them as an organized nation. I "will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Lev. 26:12). Israel freely assented.

A hard core of three thousand people who remained unrepentant influenced the Sinai failure (Ex. 32:28). But now, after some 900 years of experience in the covenant bond, Judah's shamefully broken promises and collapsed morality are far more serious (Jer. 3:3; 6:15). Even so, rather than dissolve the covenant bond, a longsuffering God chooses to discipline His covenant partner with captivity.

How is the act of baptism like a covenant relationship? On my part? On God's part?

OBEY AND LIVE (Jer. 11:1-11).

While some contracts or covenants enumerate the privileges those who sign them will enjoy, they also specify penalties if the agreement is broken. The covenant that God established with Israel at Sinai specified both blessings (if obedient) and curses/judgments (if disobedient). This aspect of God's covenant moved Josiah to action. (See 2 Kings 22:8-13; Deuteronomy 28.)

Some Bible students believe the recovered "book" was the scroll of Deuteronomy (see Deut. 31:24-26); others, along with Josephus, understand it to have been a temple copy of the entire Pentateuch—the five books of Moses.

What was the intent of God's message to Judah: to destroy them or to bring them to covenant faithfulness? Jer. 11:1-5. To what places was Jeremiah to carry God's appeal? Jer. 11:6-8.

"Jeremiah called their attention repeatedly to the counsels given in Deuteronomy. More than any other of the prophets, he emphasized the teachings of the Mosaic law, and showed how these might bring the highest spiritual blessing to the nation and to every individual heart. 'Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein,' he pleaded, 'and ye shall find rest for your souls.'"—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 411.

Jeremiah continued to call for repentance and recommitment to the covenant (Jer. 7:3; 26:13). But eventually, what did God inform His servant about Judah's response? Jer. 11:9-12. (Note Jesus' calls to repentance in Mark 1:15 and Luke 13:3, 5.)

"This is an age in which many consider their word as of little weight. . . . Covenants are repudiated, agreements violated, pledges forgotten. Breaking faith is common, disregard of responsibility almost universal. Christ Himself wondered whether He should find faith on the earth when He returned at the last day."—M. L. Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1947), p. 121.

Why is repentance essential to transformation? What relationship does repentance have with the gospel? Why?

WANDERING WIFE (Jer. 2:2; 3:1, 20).

Under what beautiful figure does God describe the covenant bond? Jer. 2:2 (compare Eze. 16:8; 2 Cor. 11:2).

The Lord is "the faithful God who keeps covenant" (Deut. 7:9, RSV), and He expects His people to "keep covenant" likewise. For both the ancient Israelite and the modern believer, the covenant bond is a committed union like the marriage bond. In effect, God says, "I will be your husband and you will be My bride. I will supply all your needs, both spiritual and physical." And the believer responds, "You have redeemed me; therefore, I will love You and serve You with all my heart." Thus, in the covenant union God establishes a saving relationship with humankind.

When Judah began to dally with idolatry and finally to embrace it, how did God regard her action? Jer. 3:1, 20; 2:20; 11:15.

"Many lovers. Because Judah had been joined in solemn covenant relationship with God, her act of going after other gods was regarded as spiritual adultery. She was guilty not only of a single case of infidelity but of persistent and repeated wanderings after numerous gods."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 365.

According to the New Testament, how serious is the sin of infidelity to the covenant relationship? James 4:4-6.

"Sin is about betraying the divine Lover. It arises out of a personal relationship. It is about spurning the love God has for us. It is about unfaithfulness. It is about a desperate, irrational, self-destructive, unnatural, hell-bent determination to go it alone and play god for ourselves."—David Day, *Jeremiah* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1987), p. 33.

It takes quality time and effort to make a marriage succeed. List the parallels between marriage and our relationship with Christ. What am I doing to ensure that my "marriage" to God is a success?

GOD'S PROMISES: CONDITIONAL OR UNCONDITIONAL? (Jer. 18:7-10).

Jeremiah and apostate Judah differed theologically. Popular theology denied Jeremiah's assertion that the fulfillment of the covenant promises was conditional on Israel's obedience through faith.

In the days of King Hezekiah, what promise did God make to protect Jerusalem and the nation from the arms of Assyria? Why? Isa. 37:33-36 (compare 2 Kings 18:1-7).

Jeremiah's countrymen argued that because the temple was God's, He would protect it and His people. (See Jer. 7:4; compare Matt. 23:38; 24:1, 2.)

"In vain would be the trust they might place in the temple and its services. Rites and ceremonies could not atone for sin. Notwithstanding their claim to be the chosen people of God, reformation of heart and of the life practice alone could save them from the inevitable result of continued transgression."

"Let none who claim to be the depositaries of God's law flatter themselves that the regard they may outwardly show toward the commandments will preserve them from the exercise of divine justice. . . . A sin-hating God calls upon those who claim to keep His law to depart from all iniquity. A neglect to repent and to render willing obedience will bring upon men and women today as serious consequences as came upon ancient Israel."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 414, 416, 417.

What clearly stated principle governs the fulfillment of God's promises or curses/judgments? Jer. 18:7-10.

God's curses are as much a promise as His blessings. His blessings minister salvation to those who trust His word. Those who trust in themselves while claiming His word will find the curses to be as sure as the blessings. The fact that God will fulfill His word is unconditional. Which way His word is fulfilled is conditional upon a faith that manifests obedience. This is what Judah learned in the days of Jeremiah and the captivity that followed.

What lessons about covenant faithfulness can the Christian church today learn from its ancient counterpart?

RENEWING THE COVENANT (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:6-13).

Morally bankrupt, the Jews faced foreign exile. But the Lord encouraged them to look for the appearance of the Messiah and His subsequent reign (Jer. 29:10-14; 23:5, 6).

Because of their faith in the coming Messiah, what kind of covenant did God promise to make with them? Jer. 31:31-34. What is "new" about this "new covenant"?

There is nothing essentially *new* in God's new covenant promises (Jer. 31:33, 34). The parties are the same: God and Israel. The Ten Commandments are the same; God had always desired to write them in the heart (Isa. 51:7; Ps. 37:31). Grace for the forgiveness of sin (because Christ, the antitypical sin-offering, was coming) had always been available through the sanctuary rituals (Heb. 9:1). What was "new" about this covenant was its focus. In the "old" covenant, the Israelites failed to realize the "exceeding sinfulness of their own hearts," and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God's law. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371, 372.) They entered into it under the false assumption that they themselves possessed the power to obey God's will (Ex. 19:8; 24:3, 4). But the new covenant "is founded on better promises" (Heb. 8:6, NIV), God's promises of salvation in Christ. "'Jesus has become the guarantee' (Heb. 7:22) of its fulfillment by forgiving our sins and writing His law on our hearts."—Arnold V. Wallenkampf, *Salvation Comes From the Lord* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1983), p. 89.

When did Jeremiah's forecast of a renewal of the covenant find fulfillment? Matt. 26:26-30; 1 Cor. 11:25.

The Messiah could not renew the covenant with national Israel; they would not receive Him (John 1:11). After the captivity the Jews forsook pagan idolatry, but they rejected the Covenant-maker Himself (John 19:15). Christ renewed the covenant with only a "remnant" of Israel—His disciples—in connection with the institution of the Communion Supper. In this manner He became the Mediator of the new, or renewed, covenant as foretold by Jeremiah (Heb. 8:6-13).

How does participation in the Communion ordinances renew my covenant relationship with God?

FURTHER STUDY: To establish that the Abrahamic covenant was offered to Israel at Sinai and is offered to us today, study: Gen. 17:7, 9; Ps. 105:8-10; Gal. 3:15-17. Read "Jeremiah" in *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 415-417, and "The Law Given to Israel" in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 303-314.

"In the Bible the sacred and enduring character of the relation that exists between Christ and His church is represented by the union of marriage. The Lord has joined His people to Himself by a solemn covenant, He promising to be their God, and they pledging themselves to be His, and His alone. He declares: 'I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies.' . . .

"The unfaithfulness of the church to Christ in permitting her confidence and affection to be turned from Him, and allowing the love of worldly things to occupy the soul, is likened to the violation of the marriage vow."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 381.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Could the Adventist Church—like Judah—sin away our day of grace? Does the fact that we have been given the special truth for this time (the three angels' messages) prevent the church from falling out of covenant with God should we pursue a course of open violation of the divine will? Explain why the "temple" of truth cannot save us individually or corporately if we willingly forsake it.
2. Which arrangement promotes the greatest human happiness: To call upon the Creator in time of need, or to live in a committed covenant relationship with Him each day?
3. List three or four steps a person can take to mend a broken covenant relationship with God. How can an already good relationship with Him be strengthened?

SUMMARY: The religion of the Bible is fashioned in the form of a love covenant between God and the believer. Like a marriage bond it is a committed relationship requiring faithfulness on the part of each. To break covenant with God, as Judah did, is to commit spiritual adultery. But those who choose to live within the parameters of the covenant of grace enjoy a saving and enriching relationship with their Creator.



The Argument

Nicola Levterov

One evening as Pastor Nicola Levterov was walking to the meeting hall where he was to preach, he noticed some young men arguing. As he approached he asked, "Why are you arguing?"

"None of your business," said a young man, dropping his cigarette.

"Well, I don't know what you are arguing about now, but I know what you'll be arguing about in a few minutes," challenged the pastor, arousing their curiosity. "Do you know which church is the true church?"

The young men answered that they had many problems, and asked why should they *even think* about churches? "If you want to learn something, come to my lecture," challenged the pastor again. All but one youth agreed they would rather go to a cafe near the meeting hall.

The undaunted pastor persisted. "First come to the meeting and then I'll come with you to the cafe." The youth entered the church, with the pastor praying silently for them.

Afterward, the pastor met them. "Now, can you tell me the true church?"

"My grandmother said the true church is Orthodox," replied one.

"Are we going to argue now?" the pastor teased.

"No, I must read more and talk with my grandmother."

"Next Sunday I'll meet you here, and we'll continue this conversation. Come early and attend the Bible study group," the pastor invited. "You may find it interesting."

During the week the pastor and his family prayed for these young men. The next Sunday two youth arrived for church. They also attended The Bible study and asked many questions. The second Sunday they brought two more friends. The following week they attended the Friday and Sabbath evening meetings, and on Sunday they all brought their girlfriends. One brought his sister. They attended every lesson.

At the conclusion of the Bible course, three young men and three young women were baptized. If you visit one of our churches in Sofia, you will find these youth active in the church.

One youth's father became angry and decided to see this strange church that had changed his son. He began attending and liked the church services. Now he and his wife are going to be baptized soon!

"Witnessing approaches that may not succeed for one pastor or layperson may work well for another. Don't make a principle out of your own experience. Let the Holy Spirit be as creative with others as He is with you."—Janet Kangas

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The Praying Prophet



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Jer. 3:12-4:2; 14:1-9, 19-22; 17:5-8; 29:11-14; 32:16-25.

MEMORY TEXT: "Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee" (Jeremiah 32:17).

KEY QUESTIONS: If God knows all about us, why should we pray? Why are our prayers in behalf of others acceptable to God?

PRAYER UNLOCKS DIVINE RESOURCES. Nations transmit messages by code to their embassies, service forces, and other entities, thereby protecting national secrets. National governments also employ cryptanalysts—code breakers—who try to decipher the coded messages other nations flash over the airwaves.

God has encoded His message to humankind in the Bible. Even though its "good news" is hidden to millions (1 Cor. 2:14), this is not because the Creator desires to hide it (John 7:17). The *key* to unlock God's Word is sincere prayer in the hand of faith. "Ask," God encourages, "and it shall be given you" (Matt. 7:7).

"Why should the sons and daughters of God be reluctant to pray, when prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven's storehouse, where are treasured the boundless resources of Omnipotence?"—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 94, 95.

TEACH US TO PRAY (Jer. 3:22-25).

Whether aloud or silent, public or private, prayer is the believer's way of conversing with God. Jeremiah is sometimes called the "weeping prophet," but he equally deserves the title of "the praying prophet."

What was God's strong appeal to Israel at the outset of the prophet's ministry? Jer. 3:12-14. How does a sinner approach the Lord? What prayer did the Lord compose for repentant Jews to pray? Jer. 3:22-25.

Although the proclamation of Jeremiah 3:12-14 was made to the northern tribes (in captivity since 722 B.C.), God's appeal to Judah was similar. The Lord outlined in simple terms the steps back to His welcoming embrace and care: Acknowledge your transgressions and return to Me.

The Lord's Prayer is a model that Jesus gave ("After this manner therefore pray," Matt. 6:9). Through Jeremiah the Lord outlined a prayer for His people to repeat just as a parent teaches a small child how to pray.

"Coming to Christ does not require severe mental effort and agony; it is simply accepting the terms of salvation that God has made plain in His Word. . . . Come with humble hearts, not thinking that you must do some good work to merit the favor of God, or that you must make yourself better before you can come to Christ. . . . Claim the Promise of God, saying, 'Lord, forgive my sin; I put my hands into Thy hand for help, and I must have it, or perish. I now believe.'"—*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 333, 334.

What assurance does God give His people if they pray the prayer of repentance He has suggested? Jer. 4:1, 2.

It is always God's desire to receive and forgive every sincere penitent who calls upon Him for forgiveness, no matter how brief or halting the prayer (Luke 6:37; 18:13, 14). Jesus even teaches us the words we may say—simple words that a child may use, yet more profound than the wisest can fully grasp.

What evidence do we have that God will *hear* our prayers whatever our circumstances may be? List the reasons that He does not always *answer* in the way we think best.

THE HOPE OF ISRAEL (Jer. 14:7-9).

One of Jeremiah's recorded intercessory prayers was uttered during the time of an extreme drought in Judah (Jer. 14:1-6). The reason for this natural calamity was obvious in light of the covenant curses/judgments (Jer. 3:1-3; Deut. 28:15, 22-24).

What does Jeremiah openly confess as he identifies himself with his people? What is his request? Jer. 14:7.

Jeremiah's confession is full and free—without any self-justification. The prophet personally acknowledges "our" iniquities and backslidings, that they have been committed *against God* and are *many*, and that they *testify* openly of their guilt. "Do thou it for thy name's sake" means for God to "act" (RSV) for the sake of His own character. God's name (character) possesses the qualities of mercy, grace, longsuffering, and forgiveness (Ex. 34:5-7). In his petition Jeremiah alludes to these characteristics, thereby asking God to pardon their sins.

By what title does the prophet address God? What is its significance? Why does Jeremiah use four figures of speech? Why would his final petition be the most appealing to the heart of God? Jer. 14:8, 9.

Jeremiah is the only Bible writer to address God as "the Hope of Israel." (See also Jer. 17:13.) Without the only true God, the nation was doomed to destruction. The interceding prophet reminds God that He has always been "the Saviour" of Israel "in time of trouble" (Jer. 14:8). Doubtless he was thinking of God's many deliverances of His people from trial and calamity. These past deliverances indicated clearly God's intense love for Israel. Why, then, argues the praying prophet, should You act like a stranger (or foreigner) or a traveler or as some helpless giant—apparently indifferent to the terrible condition of Your people? The appeal is heart-rending: Dear Lord, our only hope, Your name *on* us indicates Your ownership *of* us. Don't abandon Your own.

Does God answer an intercessory prayer that confesses another person's sin? What is the purpose of such prayer?

JEREMIAH PRAYS FOR HIS PEOPLE (Jer. 14:19-22).

Both prayers recorded in chapter 14 are thought to have been uttered during the time of the drought. Both reveal the concern Jeremiah felt for his people and his persistent intercession for their salvation.

What challenging, anguished questions does the heart-sick prophet ask God? Jer. 14:19. Again, what wide-sweeping acknowledgment does Jeremiah make? How far back does he go? Jer. 14:20.

Jeremiah was a child of his times just as were the apostles-in-training in a later age. He too found it incredible that God would permit the destruction of the nation, temple, and capital at the hands of Babylon. Would God really reject Judah?

Jeremiah is one of several prophets who at various times prayed earnestly in behalf of other spiritually needy people. Recall their names and prayers. (See Gen. 18:23-32; Ex. 32:30-32; 1 Sam. 7:7-12; Dan. 9:3-19; also note Jesus' prayer for His disciples and us in John 17:6-26.)

Jeremiah closes with three short pleas involving God's character, throne, and covenant. What is his reasoning? Jer. 14:21. What was God's sharp response? Jer. 15:1, 6, 7. Compare His responses to earlier unrecorded prayers. Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11.

To Jeremiah the honor of the true God was at stake. God had chosen Israel to be His special people because He loved them (Deut. 7:7, 8) and had entered into a solemn covenant to be their God (Deut. 7:9). Thus, He became their king. To permit their destruction by pagan armies would make it appear that He was capricious in His love, powerless in His rule, unfaithful to His covenant.

Jeremiah was slow to grasp the sin-hardened condition of Judah. Judah no longer loved Yahweh or honored His kingship or witnessed for Him to other nations. This is why the Lord was "weary of relenting" (Jer. 15:6, RSV).

What does Jeremiah's experience suggest regarding prayer for those who we think will respond to the Spirit's drawing?

ELEMENTS OF PRAYER (Jer. 29:11-13).

We gain insights for a more meaningful prayer life by observing some elements of prayer illustrated by Jeremiah's personal petitions.

In what manner does the prophet approach God? Jer. 12:1; 4:10; 20:7.

God is the believer's friend (James 2:23). Although Jeremiah is always respectful of the Deity, his prayers are not formal. He converses freely with God about his questions and doubts, and at times intercedes for Judah. He lived, it would seem, in continual communion with the Lord. (See 1 Thess. 5:17; Phil. 4:6, 7.)

What attitude of mind is required if we sincerely wish God to hear us? Jer. 29:11-13.

"The whole heart must be yielded to God, or the change can never be wrought in us by which we are to be restored to His likeness. By nature we are alienated from God. . . . God desires to heal us, to set us free. But since this requires an entire transformation, a renewing of our whole nature, we must yield ourselves wholly to Him. The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 43.

How does Jeremiah illustrate the element of faith, an essential ingredient in effective prayer? Jer. 17:5-8 (compare Heb. 11:6).

In the Old Testament faith is often referred to as *trust*. There is no other source of salvation than Christ (Acts 4:12). Faith in Him alone provides access to the waters of eternal life. Faith in God enables us to confess our sins (Jer. 3:13) and to acknowledge our inability to change ourselves (Jer. 13:23; 2:22).

In what ways could my prayer-walk with God be made more natural and significant to my Christian experience?

PRAYING IN PERPLEXITY (Jer. 32:16-25).

There never is an inappropriate time or place to pray. Nor is there any matter inappropriate to share with our Father. Never does God turn Jeremiah away.

Why is Jeremiah deeply perplexed by God's instruction to buy a field in Anathoth from one of his relatives? Jer. 32:16-25. What assurance did God purpose to give Judah by this act even while they were being besieged by the Babylonians? Jer. 32:42-44.

God hears every prayer. Place and posture are not the major concerns when the heart is burdened and turns to God. The early Christians prayed at the Jewish temple (Acts 3:1). God also heard the prayers of Eliezer standing beside his camels at a watering trough. Nehemiah prayed as he stood before the king and queen of Persia. Job prayed from an ash heap. Jesus wrestled with issues of eternal consequence in an olive orchard.

For whom did Jeremiah direct the exiles to pray in spite of their difficulties as captives? Jer. 29:4-7 (compare 1 Tim. 2:1-4).

"Take to Him everything that perplexes the mind. Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 100.

One of the last recorded acts of Jeremiah's long prophetic ministry was to pray for others. (See Jer. 42:1-4.) The request came from insincere, hardened field captains who recognized that Jeremiah was a man of prayer, one who daily lived in communion with God.

Why is praise a vitally important element in prayer? (See Rom. 15:11.)

FURTHER STUDY: Believers commonly pray for themselves, since prayer is the medium of communion with God. However, intercessory prayer (praying in behalf of others) is also an important spiritual privilege. What can you learn from the following examples: Luke 22:31, 32; 23:34; John 17:1-26; Eph. 3:14-21. Read "Secret Prayer" in *Gospel Workers*, pp. 254-258, and "The Privilege of Prayer" in *Steps to Christ*, pp. 93-104.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As committed Christians, why do we need to pray daily? Compare the practices of David and Daniel (Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10).
2. What is "persevering" prayer? Why is it needed? Doesn't God hear us the first time we pray? (See Luke 18:1-8.)

SUMMARY: "Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 254. Jeremiah's personal prayers, as well as his writings, provide us rich insights into the genuine, down-to-earth prayer-walk available to every believer.

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Why Not a Name?

Luis Barba Briceno

Why doesn't this little girl have a name? mused Flora, in Arequipa, Peru, as she pondered the Bible story of the little captive girl who served in General Naaman's estate.

I know! Flora thought. *The Lord wants me to give her my name!* And so Flora prayed for the opportunity to repeat the story! Her story was to resemble the inspirational story more than she imagined, for she soon went to work as a housekeeper and nanny to two daughters of a professional couple, José and Eliana.

Flora efficiently prepared food as she had learned at the church, and asked whether she could pray when someone in the home was sick. Eventually she requested permission to take the girls to a special Sabbath School program. José and Eliana, although concerned, consented because of their affection and respect for Flora. The girls began to go to Sabbath School regularly.

One Sabbath curiosity led José and Eliana to visit the Cradle Roll class themselves. They were profoundly impressed with the enthusiasm and methodology. And also when the girls began singing the little songs and praying over the food at dinnertime.

Flora gave God the glory and prayed, "Lord, I want to invite my pastor to come and meet them. Please make a miracle happen, just as in the old days! Amen."

After a cordial meeting between Flora's pastor and her employers, Bible studies began. José says, "I was interested only to learn more about Christian culture. I never thought I would discover so many eternal truths." In September, 1989, about five years after Flora came, José and Eliana were baptized.

And that's not the end. José is an architect, and has supervised the construction of five churches, on Sunday he checks roofs of others, and has volunteered his work on an evangelistic center. "He's a tremendous man, very consecrated," reports a mission leader. "He never says no to a pastor."

Flora says, "Thanks to God that He uses humble human beings, and doesn't consider social position, culture, or job."

Like Flora, would you be willing to give the little captive maid *your* name in the story?

Those who are humble in heart the Lord will use to reach souls whom the ordained ministers cannot approach. They will be moved to speak words which reveal the saving grace of Christ - Testimonies, vol. 6, p. 43.

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God's Object Lessons



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Jer. 8:4-12; 13:1-11; 19:1-15; 27:1-15; 35:1-19.

MEMORY TEXT: "Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the Lord hath spoken" (Jeremiah 13:15).

KEY QUESTIONS: Why do words like *authority*, *law*, and *submission* often seem negative? Why is it so difficult for the human will to obey our Father's authority?

GOD ORDERS BOTH NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL LAWS. Each year around November, 100 million black-and-orange Monarch butterflies start their annual migration from south-eastern Canada and northeastern United States to the mountains of southwestern Mexico, 2,500 miles away. Scientists have tracked some elements of this major migration at 3,000 feet, gliding with the thermal currents. Fragile, apparently helpless, the butterflies unerringly find their winter breeding grounds. The returning progeny, three or four generations later, make the trip north. Evidently their "navigational system"—we call it instinct—is passed on genetically. We marvel at the wisdom and power of our Creator when we see such precise obedience to physical law. Only humankind willfully rebels against God's laws.

God directed Jeremiah to employ a variety of object lessons—some from the natural world and others from everyday human life. His purpose was to persuade His people to obey His laws, which were for their benefit.

A HORSE RUSHING INTO BATTLE (Jer. 8:4-12).

What simple illustrations does God employ to urge His people to repentance? But what was Judah's unnatural reaction to mention of her moral deviations? Jer. 8:4-6.

In this passage the Lord attempts to reason with Judah by graphically illustrating the unreasonableness of their persistent sinning, which broke their covenant with Him.

What striking phenomenon does God use as His third illustration? What is His implied appeal? Jer. 8:7.

In this context the Hebrew word translated "judgment" (KJV) means "ordinance" (RSV) or "requirements" (NIV). The divine ordinance governing the migratory behavior of certain birds is paralleled with the divine ordinance governing human behavior.

Natural science demonstrates that our universe functions in harmony with physical laws. Migratory instincts imprinted in the genetic code of some birds enable them to perform amazing feats. The arctic tern, born within ten degrees of the North Pole, at six weeks of age migrates 11,000 miles to the Antarctic for wintering, returning on time to its same arctic nesting place for the summer.

We human beings live under moral law, as well as under physical law. It is not natural for us, as unregenerate sinners, to obey the divine will (Rom. 8:6-8). Israel was God's covenant bride, redeemed from Egyptian bondage and carefully taught and instructed in the will of God. Their problem was not a lack of knowledge, but an incredible lack of *fidelity*.

When the sure word of God is spurned, how does it affect human wisdom? Jer. 8:8, 9 (compare Deut. 4:5-9).

"To man alone, the crowning work of His creation, God has given a conscience to realize the sacred claims of the divine law, and a heart capable of loving it as holy, just, and good; and of man prompt and perfect obedience is required. Yet God does not compel him to obey; he is left a free moral agent."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 216.

RECHABITE FAITHFULNESS (Jer. 35:1-19).

In the nomadic Rechabites God found an object lesson on choosing to obey. (If you are interested in the history of the Rechabites, see 1 Chron. 2:55; Judges 1:16; Num. 10:29; 2 Kings 10:15-28; Jer. 35:11.)

Why did Jeremiah invite the Rechabites into one of the temple chambers? Jer. 35:1-5. Why did they refuse Jeremiah's invitation? Jer. 35:6-10. What lesson did God teach through this illustration? Jer. 35:12-17.

Observing the ills that derived from alcohol drinking and certain problems in city dwelling, Jonadab commanded his sons to abstain from wine and to remain a nomadic people. For more than 200 years the Rechabites had faithfully obeyed the charge of their ancestor. Strange as it may seem, people are sometimes more loyal to the commandments of men than they are to the commandments of God.

"If the directions of a good and wise father, who took the best and most effectual means to secure his posterity against the evil of intemperance, were to be so strictly obeyed, God's authority should be held in as much greater reverence as He is holier than man."—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 175, 176.

The essence of righteousness by faith is wholehearted dependence on God's word. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Because the just live by faith (Rom. 5:1) and faith comes by God's word, righteousness comes by God's word.

Abraham believed God's word, and that belief was counted to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). By faith he acted upon God's promise, "being fully persuaded that, what he [God] had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21). Today, God calls us to be people of the Word. As the Rechabites' faithfulness to their earthly father contrasted with Judah's faithlessness to their heavenly Father, so we will be distinct from all other people. Why? Because we "keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12).

What can cause us to obey human laws while disobeying God's laws? How can we counteract those causes?

THE SHATTERED JAR (Jer. 19:1-15).

Twenty years from Judah's downfall, what powerful parable did Jeremiah enact for the elders and priests? Jer. 19:1-10.

The setting for this parable added strength to its meaning. The east gate, more correctly translated "the Potsherd Gate" (RSV, NIV), through which the party passed, was most likely the place where broken pottery was discarded. And although desecrated by King Josiah (2 Kings 23:10), the valley of Hinnom apparently was still used by Judah for human sacrifice as well as a place to bury criminals.

What was the message of the parable? Jer. 19:10-13.

Jeremiah's statement in verse 3 "was like pouring gasoline onto a burning fire. . . . Perhaps someone standing there would recall the dying screams of his own child, sacrificed in such fire. The very ground to which Jeremiah had brought them was stained with the blood of innocents. They had been brought to the scene of their crime, caught red-handed in their guilt. . . .

"Lifting it [the jar] high for all to see, he smashed it against the Potsherd Gate. His voice rises above the hollow burst of sound. [Verse 11 quoted.] They [Judah] shall receive the burying place of criminals. How fitting! Yet how offensive to their self-righteousness!"—John Guest, *The Communicator's Commentary*, vol. 17, pp. 151, 152.

Judah had become like the dry and brittle clay pot. Unlike the malleable clay (Jer. 18:1-6), the Master Craftsman could no longer work this clay (Jer. 19:10, 11). God had meant for them to be a vessel carrying forth His righteousness to the world. Instead they had allowed the world to fill their vessel with all manner of abominations.

The implications of the smashed jar were not contrary to the promises of restoration to be fulfilled after the captivity. The potsherds lying scattered on the ground "shouted" doomsday for Judah as it was. No further opportunity now remained for the spiritual life of the nation to be mended.

What does the shattered jar teach us about personal accountability to our Creator? What relevance does this parable have for the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

THE LINEN LOINCLOTH (Jer. 13:1-11).

What did God tell Jeremiah to purchase and wear? Jer. 13:1, 2. Whom did the garment represent? Verse 11. What was the significance of the particular garment chosen? Where was Jeremiah to place and later retrieve the garment? Jer. 13:3-7.

Moses exclaimed: "What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?" (Deut. 4:7, RSV). The pillar of cloud and fire that guided Israel in the trackless wilderness (Ex. 13:21, 22) and the tabernacle/temple—God's dwelling place (Ex. 25:8)—should have reminded Judah of the intimate union God sought.

The river Euphrates formed the boundary between Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia. Its nearest point to Jeremiah was 350 miles distant. Two round trips meant a total of 1,400 miles! The term *Euphrates* foreshadowed Judah's removal to Babylon on the Euphrates.

What was the message of the ruined garment? Jer. 13:8-11.

Pride, the excessive love of self, is the real root of human sin and the hidden element alluded to in these visual aids. No bird stifles its migratory instinct, but human pride struggles to suppress the promptings of the Spirit. Pride asserts its desires over those of the Father—so it can do its own thing. Pride hardens the will into a stubborn stance even though it thereby faces obvious ruin. Pride accepts a connection with God, but only to receive His gifts, not His authority. Pride accepts no yoke imposed by God.

"The sin that is most nearly hopeless and incurable is pride of opinion, self-conceit. This stands in the way of all growth. When a man has defects of character, . . . when he is so imbued with self-sufficiency that he cannot see his fault, how can he be cleansed?"—*Testimonies*, vol. 7, pp. 199, 200.

How can we reject the pride that struggles for the control of our lives and become humble Christ-like characters? (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 661.)

WOODEN YOKES (Jer. 27:1-15).

At the time this object lesson was enacted, 10,000 Jews were already in exile. Zedekiah, who had sworn loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar in the name of the true God, was reigning (2 Chron. 36:13).

Describe the enacted parable found in Jeremiah 27:2. What message was this parable intended to convey to Israel's neighbors? Jer. 27:3-11.

The Hebrew text indicates that Jeremiah made a yoke for each ambassador to take back to his monarch, as well as a yoke for himself. He may have worn his yoke before them. The council of foreign ambassadors discussed the matter of a united revolt against Babylon.

Divine compassion and reluctance shine through in this passage. Jeremiah had predicted deportation. Now the promise: those nations submitting would be permitted to remain intact in their own homelands.

With whom did Jeremiah plead that Judah should submit to the overlordship of Babylon, thereby saving the nation from total ruin? Jer. 27:12-15.

"The lightest punishment that a merciful God could inflict upon so rebellious a people, was submission to the rule of Babylon; but if they warred against this decree of servitude, they were to feel the full rigor of His chastisement. The amazement of the assembled council of nations knew no bounds when Jeremiah, carrying the yoke of subjection about his neck, made known to them the will of God. Against determined opposition Jeremiah stood firmly for the policy of submission."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 444.

Submission was God's will; it was also sound policy. The lives of thousands were at risk, as well as the survival of the city and temple. But the stubborn pride of Zedekiah and his princes, blind to God's will and the safety of their subjects, was false patriotism. In their defiance they pulled the whole tottering Jewish state down on their own heads.

In this life we are subjects of either God or Satan. Why is Christ's "yoke" and burden "light"? (See Matt. 11:28-30.)

FURTHER STUDY: Read "Approaching Doom" and "The Last King of Judah" in *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 423-426, 431, 432, 442-444; "The Beatitudes" in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 6-9 (first beatitude).

"If we would permit our minds to dwell more upon Christ and the heavenly world, we should find a powerful stimulus and support in fighting the battles of the Lord. Pride and love of the world will lose their power as we contemplate the glories of that better land so soon to be our home. Beside the loveliness of Christ, all earthly attractions will seem of little worth. . . . The words and the character of Christ should be often the subject of our thoughts and of our conversation, and each day some time should be especially devoted to prayerful meditation upon these sacred themes."—*The Sanctified Life*, pp. 91, 92.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why does the sin of pride require a new-birth experience? (See John 3:1-17; Rom. 8:6-8.)
2. Explain the meaning of Proverbs 16:18.
3. How does the believer receive "the mind of Christ," who lived such a self-sacrificing life to bless others? (See Phil. 2:1-8; Acts 10:38; 1 Cor. 2:9-16.)
4. Compare the function of instinct in the animal kingdom and the function of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life. How are they similar? dissimilar?

SUMMARY: Abstract reasoning is hard to grasp, but the mind readily pictures an illustration or concrete object and naturally searches for its significance. That is why Jesus many times taught the principles of His kingdom through parables. And that is why God instructed Jeremiah to use visual aids in presenting His messages to Judah. These visual aids included migratory birds, the family of the Rechabites, a clay jar, a linen undergarment, and a wooden yoke. Each had its specific emphasis, but each in some way touched on the universal human problem—pride.

If we are willing to surrender to Christ's Lordship, then God will create within us a humble, teachable spirit that will delight to do His will.



The Angry Atheist

Nicola Levterov

How stupid of these people to work without pay! thought the atheist neighbor of the Adventist church as she passed the workers who were building it. She also believed that being a Christian was stupid, even suggesting to her neighbors that they burn the church.

For 15 years the Adventist members were the object of her ridicule, during which time she wrote reports against them and collected signatures demanding the closure of the church.

During the Communist regime she was assigned to spy on the Adventist church. She began with prayer meeting and listened to the prayers. One person prayed for God's protection from their enemies! How she laughed at that.

However, when she left the church, she couldn't forget that prayer. It was constantly on her mind. Her friends asked about the sermon she had heard. She told them about this prayer and said, "These people prayed for us.

"Are you going to be a Seventh-day Adventist?" they asked. "I would rather die than be a Seventh-day Adventist!" she assured them.

The Communists again ordered her to spy on this church. She attended every Sabbath, which gradually became a desire! Now when someone would talk against religion, she would agree, but would say that they should not talk against Seventh-day Adventists. "They are different," she would say.

The Communists were upset at her change of attitude and they forbade her to attend anymore. But the following Friday evening she went anyway. They were angry with her. Now she was as firm in her conviction to attend as she had once been in her conviction to ridicule the church.

Following an evangelistic campaign, she joined a Bible study group. She began keeping the Sabbath. She obeyed all the Bible principles. But she did enjoy her gaudy makeup and earrings. She asked Pastor Levterov for advice. He told her that she must decide and that he would pray for the Lord to give her wisdom and power.

On May 30, 1992, she was baptized. Where were the earrings? "I left them on earth. I'm preparing for heaven. I traded my earrings for a crown of glory!" Now her mother, aged 90, plans to be baptized as well.

*Forth from his dark and lonely hiding place
(Portentous-sight!) the owlet Atheism,
Sailing on obscene wings athwart the noon,
Drops his blue-fringed lids, and hold them close,
And hooting at the glorious sun in Heaven,
Cries out, "Where is it?"*

Samuel T. Coleridge. *Fears in Solitude*

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A New Start



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Jer. 18:1-12; 24:1-10.

MEMORY TEXT: "Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel" (Jeremiah 18:6).

KEY QUESTION: *Failure* is never a welcome word, yet our failures can become steppingstones to something better. Why is this especially true in the spiritual realm?

GOD'S LOVE ILLUSTRATED. Willie Davis, or "Mr. Willie," as the children called him, was the gentle custodian of an elementary school in the State of Georgia, USA. The children and their teachers were his life. Recently "Mr. Willie" died.

Davis never learned to read. But he wanted to give disadvantaged children a new start. He named as a beneficiary of his life-insurance policy the behavior-disordered students of the first grade. Already the teacher of the class has begun to use part of the large bequest to buy equipment to make "Mr. Willie's" dream come true.

Willie Davis' concern for these young, misdirected children reflects the great concern God had for rebellious Judah. Unlike the situation of these children, Judah had every advantage from the very beginning. But their craving for idolatry had led them into apostasy. Yet God determined to give them a new start, even though it involved a period of captivity.

ANOTHER VESSEL (Jer. 18:1-12).

Where did the Lord send Jeremiah to learn about His forgiveness and recreative power? What challenging question did God ask Judah? Jer. 18:1-6.

"We are not ignorant of his [Satan's] devices," the apostle Paul declares (2 Cor. 2:11). The plan of the enemy is to cause us to sin, crush us with guilt, then lead us to believe we are beyond God's saving grace.

The object lesson of the potter at work on his wheel appears to have been given early in Jehoiakim's reign, when national reform still seemed within reach. (See Jer. 36:1-3.) The potter's first attempt to form a vessel was unsuccessful. But he molded the yielding clay into a new object of beauty.

The figure of the potter emphasizes God's sovereignty over His creation. In the parable, why did the potter form the clay into a second vessel? What important principle is illustrated here? Jer. 18:7-10. What kind of response did Judah make to God's warning and appeal in the light of the potter's lesson? Jer. 18:11, 12.

God will not violate the individual's right of choice. God was willing to pardon His people and give them a new start. But the choice was theirs. If they repented, the Lord would build the nation again; if they refused, He would destroy them. Both God's covenant promises and His judgments depend on the human response to His appeals.

In Jeremiah 18:8, 9 God's reaction to Judah's choice is termed "repentance." But God's repentance differs from human repentance. "Man's repentance implies a change of mind. God's repentance implies a change of circumstances and relations."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 630.

Unfortunately, the response of the people of Judah was, not an exclamation of despair, but of defiance. We do not need to follow their example. As penitent sinners we may choose to remain in the Potter's hand, willing to be remade into whatever serviceable vessel He sees fit to mold.

Does your spiritual experience seem to be a failure? If so, will you let the Master Potter remold you according to His design?

A PARALLEL PARABLE (Luke 15:11-24).

Six hundred years after Jeremiah's time, Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son. Its message is similar to the object lesson of the potter. Both are addressed to persons who once rejoiced in God's love, but who departed into the "far country" of self-serving. Both display the depths of God's love.

How does Jesus describe the younger son's departure from his father's plan for his life? Luke 15:11-16.

The youth is weary of the restraints of home life. He has his own ideas of what constitutes happiness. He desires his father's wealth, but not his authority. He runs from an authority that commands only for his good, to become enslaved to an authority that drives him to ruin.

"Whatever the appearance may be, every life centered in self is squandered. Whoever attempts to live apart from God is wasting his substance. He is squandering the precious years, squandering the powers of mind and heart and soul, and working to make himself bankrupt for eternity."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 200, 201.

What brought the son back to his senses? What did he determine to do? Luke 15:17-20. How did the father receive his repentant son? Luke 15:20-24. How does this relate to the potter's experience? Jer. 18:4-6.

"Can you believe that when the poor sinner longs to return, longs to forsake his sins, the Lord sternly withholds him from coming to His feet in repentance? Away with such thoughts! . . . Nothing can hurt your own soul more than to entertain such thoughts of our heavenly Father. Our whole spiritual life will catch a tone of hopelessness from such conceptions of God. They discourage all effort to seek God or to serve Him. We must not think of God only as a judge ready to pronounce sentence against us. He hates sin; but from love to sinners He gave Himself, in the person of Christ, that all who would might be saved and have eternal blessedness in the kingdom of glory."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 633.

**What caused the son's view of his father to change?
What is your view of our heavenly Father?**

PETER'S PARDON (Luke 22:61, 62).

The experience of the potter (Jer. 18:1-12) and the story of the younger son (Luke 15:11-24) were parables. Both portray God's design, but not His actual accomplishment. The Bible, however, includes many accounts of people like ourselves who permitted God to remake them.

What flaw in Peter's life led to his undoing? What was his great need? Luke 22:31-34.

Read Luke 22:54-60. What was Christ's reaction to Peter's cowardly behavior? What was Peter's? Why didn't the grieved disciple commit suicide? Verses 61, 62. How did Christ enable Peter to make a new start? John 21:15-22. What soon became evident in the new Peter? Acts 4:13.

Peter's spiritual condition was ripe for a crisis. His high opinion of himself (Matt. 26:33, 35), his irregular prayer life (Matt. 26:40, 41), his personal refusal to acknowledge the cross of self-denial (Matt. 16:21-24), and his self-sufficient nature shaped him for failure. Does this sound like anyone else you know? Yourself, perhaps?

"The same compassion that reached out to rescue Peter is extended to every soul who has fallen under temptation. It is Satan's special device to lead man into sin, and then leave him, helpless and trembling, fearing to seek for pardon. But why should we fear, when God has said, 'Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me'? [Isa. 27:5]. . . .

"Christ offered up His broken body to purchase back God's heritage, to give man another trial. . . . [Heb. 7:25 quoted.] By His spotless life, His obedience, His death on the cross of Calvary, Christ interceded for the lost race. And now, not as a mere petitioner does the Captain of our salvation intercede for us, but as a Conqueror claiming His victory."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 156.

Recall the dismal failures and subsequent glorious victories of David (Psalm 51), Mary Magdalene (Luke 7:37-50; compare John 12:1-8), and Zacchaeus (Luke 19). Since these sinners found a new beginning through Christ, you may too. Read Phil. 4:13.

FIRST THINGS FIRST (Jer. 7:1-7).

What was the earliest appeal Jeremiah made for a thorough change? What would this kind of circumcision involve? Jer. 4:3, 4.

A new spiritual start cannot succeed if we insist on perpetuating our former experience. (See Eph. 4:22.) For every believer in Christ, this is the important "first."

The scriptural basis for Jeremiah's preaching was the "book of the law," the Pentateuch, and especially the book of Deuteronomy. According to Moses, spiritual circumcision required cutting away of stubborn, obstinate attitudes toward God (Deut. 10:16) and, in their place, cultivating wholehearted devotion to Him and His will (Deut. 30:6).

In his later "temple Discourse," how did the prophet repeat God's appeal for thorough change? Jer. 7:1-7.

Even though pagan idolatry had replaced the true worship of God, the outward show of the temple services was maintained. Yet no new beginning could occur for Judah without a thorough change in attitudes and lifestyle.

"The fountain of the heart must be purified before the streams can become pure. . . . The Christian's life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is a death to self and sin, and a new life altogether. This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 172.

Why is the new-birth experience—taught elsewhere in the Scriptures (Eze. 36:26, 27; John 3:1-17)—essential to a successful new start? Jer. 13:23.

A major reason why some believers do not enjoy a victorious experience, and find the Christian way so difficult, is that they attempt to attach themselves to Christ without detaching themselves from cherished sins and idols. (See Matt. 6:24; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 231.)

How can you know that you have experienced "the new birth," a new start in Christ? (See Rom. 8:6-8; Ps. 40:8.)

LOOKING AHEAD (Jer. 24:1-10).

Judah rejected the offer of a new beginning, portrayed by the object lesson of the potter and clay (Jer. 18:12). But looking beyond the discipline of the captivity, God foretold a new start for His people.

Shortly after the 597 B.C. deportation, what strange vision was given the prophet? Jer. 24:1-3. Who had been exiled? 2 Kings 24:10-16.

The two baskets of figs represented the divided Jewish community, one part in Babylon and the other in Judah.

Human wisdom would suggest that the exiles were the subjects of God's wrath, while those who remained had been protected. But whom does God identify as the "good figs"? Jer. 24:5. What was His plan for them? Verses 6, 7.

The Babylonian captivity could easily have become the graveyard of Judaism and the true faith. Though largely apostate itself, the community in exile and their descendants possessed the potential for the rebirth of the nation. Through the writings of Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2) and especially through the ministry of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2, 3), God kept the torch of truth burning during the captivity. A remnant would accept God's grace (a new heart) and would renew their covenant relationship (Jer. 24:7; Eze. 36:24-28). God would replant them in Palestine.

What counsel did God instruct Jeremiah to give the Jews in Babylon by means of a letter? Jer. 29:1-10. Why did God want them to build, plant, marry, and rear families? What spiritual appeal did He make? Verses 11-14.

The providences of God seem mysterious to us. What often appears as the end is really a new beginning. Under the watchful eye of the Refiner, the fiery crucible of war and exile was separating the dross (Jer. 24:8-10) from the silver (verses 5-7), making possible a new start.

How does Romans 8:28, 29 envision a new start for each of us?

FURTHER READING: Study the following passages on repentance: Acts 5:31; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:9-11; 2 Tim. 2:25. Read "Repentance" in *Steps to Christ*, pp. 23-36; "Two Worshipers" and "Lost, and Is Found" in *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 152-160, 198-207.

"When Jesus speaks of the new heart, He means the mind, the life, the whole being. To have a change of heart is to withdraw the affections from the world, and fasten them upon Christ. To have a new heart is to have a new mind, new purposes, new motives. What is the sign of a new heart?—a changed life. There is a daily, hourly dying to selfishness and pride."—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 100.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Alcoholics and other persons addicted to destructive lifestyles never start to heal until they admit helplessness. Why? Where does the Bible teach this attitude of admission?
2. Why are we often helped to understand our wonderful God better through tragedy than through prosperity?
3. If a potter fails the first time, he can rework his clay and form another vessel similar to the one he originally intended to make. Why is this not always possible with God and sinners, even though He graciously receives any repentant sinner who comes to Him?
4. What attitude should we take toward our failures? Why should we not regard them as the end of meaningful life?
5. Why is it possible for a believer to "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess. 5:18, RSV)? Consider the crisis for thousands of captured Jews in 597 B.C. and their subsequent experience.

SUMMARY: The object lesson of the potter attempting to make a second vessel from the clay, Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, and Peter's recovery from his terrible denial of Christ teach one central lesson: failure and backsliding need not mean the end of meaningful life. By God's grace, we can begin again. There is, indeed, a "land of beginning again." It is the glory of Christ to save to the uttermost those who reach out to God in sincere penitence.



Holdup in Pigtown—U.S.A.

Darcy Smith

Doris, a woman in her late 60s, sat on her apartment steps, smoking. It was a nice day to be outside, but not to be invited to a meeting.

Two people, lay volunteers recruited by Adventist Resource Management Service, approached Doris. They were involved in a Global Mission thrust aimed at Pigtown, a suburb of Baltimore, Maryland, where there was no Adventist church. The two extended an invitation to Doris to attend a series of meetings, beginning that night. In her loud, outspoken way, Doris declared, "I don't need any of that religion!"

For many people, that would have been a final answer, causing them to move on. But Doris met her match in boldness. Sara, one of the volunteers, looked her in the eye and responded, "Maybe you *do* need religion. I tell you what. The meetings start tonight at 7:00 p.m. I'll be at your house at 6:45, and I want you to be ready!"

Doris was ready that night and every night after. The evangelistic meetings soon were replaced with regular Sabbath services, for a church is now functioning in Pigtown. Doris came to church every week. The Spirit of God is moving in her life, prompting her to make changes. For instance, she rescheduled her job at Burger King (a fast-food restaurant) in order to have Sabbaths free.

Even though she hasn't joined the Adventist faith through baptism yet, and is still part of a group who meet outside between Sabbath School and church to have a smoke, God's Spirit is calling her to something better.

In her rough way, Doris expresses a hunger for truth. One Sabbath as the congregation waited for the church service to begin, Doris stuck her head into the room where the pastor was making final preparations. In a loud voice she queried, "What is the holdup, Pastor? Come on out here and preach to us!"



Darcy Smith

The Global Mission thrust in Pigtown resulted in 22 baptisms, with 33 more attending a weekly Bible study.

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Sabbath Sacredness



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Jer. 17:19-27.

MEMORY TEXT: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God" (Exodus 20:8-10).

KEY QUESTION: The book of Jeremiah often refers to the Ten Commandments. But God instructed Jeremiah to make an extended presentation of Sabbath sacredness. Why is Sabbath observance so important to the believer's covenant relationship with God?

SABBATH EFFICIENCY. A good swimming stroke is one that provides a period of rest. It does not matter how efficiently the arms pull or the legs kick; if there is not a regular time when the arms and legs can rest, the swimmer will become exhausted all too soon. Our spiritual, mental, and physical natures all need rest on a regular basis, or we will become extremely inefficient.

Thus God planned not only for daily rest but for weekly rest, as well. The Sabbath originated in Eden. Its true observance ever keeps the Creator in view, counteracts the tendency to idolatry, and strengthens the believer's saving relationship with God. In spite of Jewish apostasy and the later substitution of another day by many Christian churches, the Sabbath continues to be a blessing to those who worship God in spirit and in truth.

WORK TIME—HOLY TIME (Jer. 17:19-27).

Like Jesus (Luke 6:1-9), Jeremiah was a true Sabbath reformer. As he moved from one gate to another, what appeal did Jeremiah proclaim to both rulers and people? Jer. 17:19-22. What sweeping promise did God make to Judah if the nation would faithfully observe the Sabbath as a day of spiritual rejoicing and praise? Jer. 17:24-26.

Since Judah professed to worship the true God, the Creator of all things (Jer. 10:10, 12), the Sabbath was an important day of worship. Jeremiah was given a special message for the nation regarding its observance.

Labor—both physical and mental—is essential for the well-being of the individual. But human beings also are given spiritual natures that have needs (1 Thess. 5:23). In Eden God set apart the seventh day of the week as a special time for heartfelt communion with Him. But Judah chose to starve her spiritual life for the sake of monetary gain.

“Great blessings are enfolded in the observance of the Sabbath, and God desires that the Sabbath day shall be to us a day of joy. . . . Our heavenly Father desires through the observance of the Sabbath to preserve among men a knowledge of Himself. He desires that the Sabbath shall direct our minds to Him as the true and living God, and that through knowing Him we may have life and peace.” —*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 349.

What besetting sin of Israel recurred at times throughout her history? Compare Amos 8:4-7 (eighth century B.C.) with Nehemiah 13:15-18 (fifth century B.C.). What would offset the urge to cherish this sin at the expense of spiritual health? Matt. 6:24-33; 1 Tim. 6:6-10.

Begrudging God of true worship on His sacred day is, unfortunately, a common sin. Many pursue secular profits on the Sabbath. Others turn the holy day into a holiday and pursue the goddess of self-centered pleasure. Either choice cheats the Christian of a satisfying relationship with God. The sacrifice of genuine contentment, trust, and peace of mind results inevitably in spiritual bankruptcy.

How important is Sabbath observance to you? What personal lesson does Judah's experience have for us?

THE CREATOR'S SIGN (Ex. 31:16, 17).

What did God call the Sabbath? With what important event is it linked? Ex. 31:16, 17.

"Keep the sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers" (Jer. 17:22, RSV).

The observance of the seventh-day Sabbath functions as a distinguishing sign or mark. It separated ancient Israel from its pagan neighbors, and today it continues to distinguish those who honor all of God's ten commandments from those who reject them or who acknowledge them only in part.

When and how did God institute the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath? Gen. 2:1-3.

"The importance of the Sabbath as a memorial of creation is that it keeps ever present the true reason why worship is due to God—because He is the Creator, and we are His creatures. 'The Sabbath therefore lies at the very foundation of divine worship.' . . . So long as the fact that He is our Creator continues to be a reason why we should worship Him, so long the Sabbath will continue as its sign and memorial."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 437, 438.

What Person of the Trinity was the special agent in Creation and the author of the seventh-day-Sabbath rest? John 1:1-3, 10; Heb. 1:1-3; Col. 1:3, 16, 17; Luke 6:5. For whom did He institute the Sabbath? Mark 2:27.

There are only three basic options regarding God's existence: theism (there is a God); atheism (there is no God); pantheism (God is in everything). Most people throughout history have believed some form of pantheism. Today many secular humanists accept New Age pantheism. And there are many atheists in the modern world.

The Sabbath observer says, I believe in a personal God, the eternal God of the Scriptures, who created the world in six days and who has a purpose and plan for my life.

What does it mean to you to worship the living Creator, the Lord of the Sabbath?

THE SANCTIFIER'S SIGN (Ex. 31:13, 14).

In the Exodus passage we are studying, Moses links the Sabbath first with redemption and then with Creation. What does he first call the Sabbath? Ex. 31:13, 14.

Both the Sabbath and marriage come from the Edenic world. After the entrance of sin, the Sabbath received a new dimension. It became a symbol of salvation (Ex. 31:13).

When Israel was a theocracy, ruled directly by God, all major violations of the moral law, including Sabbath desecration, were punishable by death (Num. 15:32-36).

The essential meaning of the verbal expression "to sanctify," or "to hallow," is "to separate," or "to set aside for a holy purpose." When a sinner surrenders his life to God's authority, the Lord separates him from a life of sin. Israelites were to be a "holy" people, belonging wholly to God. (See Lev. 19:2.) The covenant union of God and Israel provided not only forgiveness for sins but also transforming power. Sin is viewed in Scripture as impurity, unholiness. (See Ps. 51:2, 10.) The Sabbath is the sign of purity, holiness, and cleansing from sin.

"The Sabbath given to the world as the sign of God as the Creator is also the sign of Him as the Sanctifier. The power that created all things is the power that re-creates the soul in His own likeness. To those who keep holy the Sabbath day it is the sign of sanctification. True sanctification is harmony with God, oneness with Him in character."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 350.

In what way was the Sabbath truth to become a part of Israel's saving outreach to the surrounding Gentile nations? Isa. 56:6, 7.

Christian Sabbathkeepers testify that they have found spiritual rest in Christ. By trusting in the merits of Jesus we have deliverance from works-righteousness, and we receive the free gift of His righteousness (Heb. 4:1-11). Sabbath observance is a sign of salvation by faith in Christ. And it is a means by which our faith is strengthened as we commune with Him on His holy day. Spiritual rest in Christ is fostered by Sabbath rest and worship.

Why must my salvation be another creation?

A SIGN OF SECURITY (Ex. 31:16).

The Sabbath precept, being a definite part of the Ten Commandments, occupies a significant place in the covenant between God and His people.

In addition to being a sign of Creation and redemption, to what other truth did God relate the Sabbath? Ex. 31:16.

"The covenant of circumcision" (Acts 7:8) was in reality the "token," or sign, of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:11). The "perpetual covenant" of the Sabbath was a sign of the Sinaitic covenant, which God intended to be a renewal of the everlasting covenant. (Compare Gen. 17:7, 9, 19 with Ex. 19:5; Ps. 105:8-10.) Circumcision was a sign in the "flesh." True observance of the Sabbath is a sign of the heart. Circumcision was a temporary ritual; the Sabbath, drawn from the Ten Commandments, is permanent.

"To us as to Israel the Sabbath is given 'for a perpetual covenant.' To those who reverence His holy day the Sabbath is a sign that God recognizes them as His chosen people. It is a pledge that He will fulfill to them His covenant. Every soul who accepts the sign of God's government places himself under the divine, everlasting covenant. He fastens himself to the golden chain of obedience, every link of which is a promise."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 350.

What is the key idea in every formulation of God's everlasting covenant? Gen. 17:7, 8 (Abrahamic); Lev. 26:9, 12; Jer. 11:3, 4 (Sinaitic); 31:33 (new).

Like a faithful husband's commitment to his wife, God's commitment to His people means security. "I will be your God." God is the believer's protector, provider, sustainer, and comforter. All the resources of Deity are pledged to the well-being of the believer in the covenant relationship. Sabbath observance regularly points God's children to their caring and compassionate Father.

"The Sabbath is a golden clasp that unites God and His people."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 351.

How can Sabbathkeeping reduce my many fears?

SIGN OF LIBERATION OR RELEASE (Deut. 5:12-15).

When God chose Israel to be His witness to the world, He entrusted them with the written Scriptures (Rom. 3:1, 2) and all the truths of salvation (Rom. 9:4, 5). Their national experience added another dimension to the ancient Sabbath.

For what additional reason was Israel to observe the Sabbath? Deut. 5:12-15.

"The Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage" (Ex. 1:13, 14). The miraculous deliverance from slavery was a redemption that was never to be forgotten (Ex. 6:6, 7). The Sabbath, as a memorial of physical and spiritual rest, could naturally function as a commemoration of this mighty deliverance.

"The Sabbath is a day on which it is our happy privilege to become better acquainted with our Father in heaven."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 972.

How was Israel taught to prepare for the Sabbath? Ex. 16:4-30 (compare Luke 23:54-56).

The "preparation" day (Friday) enabled the Israelites to prepare for their physical needs so that the Sabbath hours could be free for worship, meditation, and fellowship. The preparation principle is still valid.

"On Friday let the preparation for the Sabbath be completed. See that all the clothing is in readiness and that all the cooking is done. Let the boots be blacked and the baths be taken. It is possible to do this. If you make it a rule you can do it. The Sabbath is not to be given to the repairing of garments, to the cooking of food, to pleasure seeking, or to any other worldly employment. Before the setting of the sun let all secular work be laid aside and all secular papers be put out of sight. Parents, explain your work and its purpose to your children, and let them share in your preparation to keep the Sabbath according to the commandment."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 355, 356.

How may I observe the Sabbath in a manner that will develop my spiritual relationship with God?

FURTHER STUDY: What principles in the following texts contribute to satisfying, happy Sabbath observance? Luke 4:16; Heb. 10:25; Deut. 6:4-7; Ps. 111:1-4; Matt. 12:10-12; Isa. 58:12-14. Read "The Sabbath" in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 281-289; "The Observance of the Sabbath" in *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 349-359.

"None should feel at liberty to spend sanctified time in an unprofitable manner. It is displeasing to God for Sabbathkeepers to sleep during much of the Sabbath. They dishonor their Creator in so doing, and, by their example, say that the six days are too precious for them to spend in resting. . . . They should, upon that day especially, interest their families in its observance and assemble at the house of prayer with the few or with the many, as the case may be. They should devote their time and energies to spiritual exercises, that the divine influence resting upon the Sabbath may attend them through the week. Of all the days in the week, none are so favorable for devotional thoughts and feelings as the Sabbath."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 704.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do spiritual concerns sometimes seem less important to us than our secular work and "getting ahead"?
2. According to both Israelite practice and Jesus' example (Luke 4:16), corporate worship is a major component of Sabbathkeeping. Why is it so important?
3. How can I make the observance of the Sabbath a pleasure for my children?
4. Although the word *Sabbath* means "cessation/rest," what kind of activity is appropriate to true Sabbath observance?

SUMMARY: Because Judah fell into idol worship, they no longer felt the need to observe God's Sabbath. God designed the observance of the Sabbath as a distinguishing sign or mark whereby its observers acknowledge their love for and allegiance to Him as their Creator, Saviour, and Protector. The Sabbath provides special time for the strengthening of the bond between Christ and His church and for ministry to those in physical or spiritual need.



"You Won't Go Away Alive"

Nicola Levterov

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When Nicola Levterov, an Adventist worker in a Muslim area of Bulgaria, arrived as a special guest at the home of a Turkish family, he found many others invited also. After washing Nicola's feet, the group seated themselves cross legged on the floor around the table containing baklava, a special treat, in the center. Nicola began telling them about Creation, sin, Abraham, and Jesus.

A door behind Nicola opened, and instantly fear froze on all faces. Men formed a circle around the seated group. Into the middle of the table the leader thrust a big knife downward, going completely through both the metal baklava dish and wooden table.

"I know you have come to change our beliefs. You won't go away from this house alive," said the three fanatics (otherwise known as "friendly").

Nicola answered, "I am speaking of the God in which you believe. I call him God; you call Him *Allah*. You have 125,000 prophets, but only five were the greatest." "Yes," the leader answered.

Nicola wrote down the names of the five great prophets: Abraham, Moses, David, Mohammed, and Jesus. "Who can save us from our sins?" he asked. "Only one who is clean, without sin, and righteous."

Nicola told the story of Abraham. "Can one who lied be our Saviour?" "No," the stranger agreed.

Nicola told the story of Moses. "Can someone who murders be our Saviour?" "No."

Nicola told the story of David. "Can an adulterer be our Saviour?" "No."

Nicola told the story of Mohammed. "Can someone who murders his friends to take their wives be our Saviour?" "No."

Nicola proceeded to tell the story of Jesus, and how even His enemies found Him sinless. "Because He lived a perfect life, I believe Jesus Christ is my Saviour."

Nicola said no more. One by one the strangers left, leaving the death weapon stuck in the table. Someone whispered, "You were dead. Only God helped."

When Nicola left the house he saw parked outside a horse-drawn cart. A man was waiting, as instructed, with empty grain sacks—intended to be the body bags for Nicola's dismembered body!

Soon afterward Nicola saw the leader who had threatened his life. The man confided to Nicola that he was having some problems. Nicola invited him to his home, where his wife, Pepa, cooked lunch for them! Then Nicola gave him a Bible, and they parted as friends!

Divine Discipline



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Jer. 4:19-31; 25:1-38; 46:1-6.

MEMORY TEXT: "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

KEY QUESTION: God's acts of judgment are always redemptive in purpose—both for those who are needing discipline and for the innocent who are obliged to suffer with the guilty. How is this so?

GOD'S DISCIPLINE HAS A PURPOSE. Bill Bendall was a good boy. Neighbors and friends could not believe it when young Bill, tagging along with "the gang," was arrested for driving a stolen car. The teenagers didn't sell the cars they stole; they only drove them around for excitement.

Neighbors appeared at the trial; some were character witnesses for Bill, but they could not help. The court sent Bill to a reform school for an extended period of time. In the institution Bill reviewed his past and resolved to live differently in the future. The discipline changed his life.

God desired to accomplish for each citizen of Judah what the judge hoped to effect in Bill—a changed life. Seventy years away from the homeland of Palestine was a long time. The discipline was severe, but it was effective. Cured of their infatuation with pagan idolatry, the people of Judah were enabled to make a new beginning. There is room in God's heart for every sincerely repentant sinner who wants to begin again. Nothing makes heaven happier.

SEVENTY YEARS (Jer. 25:1-14).

Divine discipline is the work of a loving heart, not the act of a tyrant. (See Prov. 3:11, 12.)

After more than two decades of labor for Judah, what results could Jeremiah and other prophets see? Jer. 25:1-7. What direct announcement was now made? Jer. 25:8-14.

"From the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, Jeremiah had little hope of saving his beloved land from destruction and the people from captivity. Yet he was not permitted to remain silent while utter ruin threatened the kingdom. Those who had remained loyal to God must be encouraged to persevere in right-doing, and sinners must, if possible, be induced to turn from iniquity."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 412.

The 70-year exile is usually computed as starting with the first deportation of Jews to Babylon in 605 B.C. (Jehoiakim's third year and Nebuchadnezzar's accession year, Dan. 1:1-4). Mercifully, the judgments fell upon Judah in stages, indicating repentance was still possible.

A second major deportation of Jews to Babylon occurred in 597 B.C. The final deportation came in 586 B.C. with the destruction of the city and temple. The 70-year period closed when King Cyrus of Persia authorized the Jews to return to Palestine. Promulgated in 537 B.C., the decree was implemented by the actual return of the Jews in 536 B.C. Thus, 605 to 536 B.C. (counting inclusively) marked off the seventy-year period.

What were the captives encouraged to do? Jer. 29:4-7, 10. How were they to regard the land of Judah? 2 Chron. 36:21; compare Lev. 26:33-35; 25:1-7. How did Jeremiah's prediction affect Daniel many years later? Dan. 9:2-20.

Read Jesus' instructions for dealing with those in sin. Matt. 18:15-35. What parallels can we draw between God's dealing with His people and our dealings with one another in this process?

Family discipline may be momentary or for an extended period of time. Explain why the latter was more effective for Judah.

CUP OF WRATH (Jer. 25:15-29).

What did the wine cup that was put to the lips of the nations symbolize? Jer. 25:15, 16 (compare Isa. 51:17, 22; Rev. 14:10; 16:19).

God's "wrath" is not the selfish anger we humans sometimes experience as a result of sinful impulse. God's wrath is the reaction of a holy God against wrong in all its forms.

What nations in particular were to be judged for their sins? Who were the most accountable? Why? Jer. 25:17-29.

The list records the major nations of the Near East who were either blood-related to the Jews or who lived in the region known as the Fertile Crescent. Judgment began with the Jews; they had the greatest understanding of God's requirements. (See 1 Peter 4:17.) Egypt, second in the list, was Judah's political ally (Jer. 37:5, 7). Although Babylon's wars of conquest were permitted to punish these nations, Babylon itself would come under judgment (Jer. 25:26; 50; 51).

Judah and the Gentile nations were forced to take the cup of judgment; they did not drink by choice (Jer. 25:15, 17, 28). How did Jesus respond to the cup of judgment put to His lips? Matt. 26:39 (compare 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13).

The judgment that fell upon Judah and the nations was intended to be remedial. The judgment that fell upon Christ was atoning; He made expiation for *our* sins. "The sword of justice was unsheathed, and the wrath of God against iniquity rested upon man's substitute, Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father. . . . The power that inflicted retributive justice upon man's substitute and surety, was the power that sustained and upheld the suffering One under the tremendous weight of wrath that would have fallen upon a sinful world. Christ was suffering the death that was pronounced upon the transgressors of God's law."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1103.

Do you wish to live in a society where wrongs are never punished? Explain.

DOUBLE FOCUS (Rev. 19:11-21).

The Old Testament descriptions of divine judgments are often painted in terms more severe than what actually occurred. This phenomenon suggests that the prophet is shown the final, future judgment of all nations, as well as a local, partial application of the divine wrath. Thus, these judgment passages have a double focus.

In what terms does the Lord describe the total destruction of the armed forces of Judah and the nations under Babylonian assault? Jer. 25:28-33. How will this prophecy meet its complete fulfillment? Rev. 19:11-21 (compare Isa. 11:4; 2 Thess. 2:8). What will be the apocalyptic or end-time fulfillment of Jeremiah 4:19, 20, 23-31? Rev. 20:1-3.

Since the extent of destruction described never took place in the Babylonian conquests, some have suggested that the prophet used poetic hyperbole (exaggeration). More likely he saw beyond the local Babylonian judgment to behold the ultimate ruin of our rebellious planet. In describing the "day of the Lord" the prophet has dual focus. "Looking forward to the great day of God, the prophet Jeremiah declares: 'I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void.'"—*The Great Controversy*, p. 659. This is the time of the millennium.

The acts of God are not without purpose. What effect should past judgments have on us living today? 2 Peter 2:6, 9, 10; Jude 5-7.

"You who are slighting the offers of mercy, think of the long array of figures accumulating against you in the books of heaven; for there is a record kept of the impieties of nations, of families, of individuals. God may bear long while the account goes on, and calls to repentance and offers of pardon may be given; yet a time will come when the account will be full; when the soul's decision has been made; when by his own choice man's destiny has been fixed. Then the signal will be given for judgment to be executed."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 165.

From studying Judah and its national ruin, what can I learn about God and my personal salvation?

MESSAGES TO THE NATIONS (Jer. 46:1-6).

Three segments of the book of Jeremiah convey messages to the Gentile nations in proximity to Judah. One section (Jer. 25:15-28) announces that they must drink the cup of God's judgment. Another section (Jeremiah 46-51) contains extensive prophecies concerning 10 of these peoples. Finally, in the reign of Zedekiah, another message called upon several of these same nations to submit to the yoke of Babylon (Jer. 27:2-11).

Who were the 10 nations especially identified by specific messages addressed to them? Jer. 46:1, 2; 47:1; 48:1; 49:1, 7, 23, 28, 34; 50:1.

The Israelites were blood-related to four of these nations: Moab and Ammon (descendants of Lot); Edom (descendants of Esau); Kedar (descendants of Ishmael, Gen. 25:13). Unfortunately, these nations absorbed the paganism around them and developed their individual forms of idolatry. Some of them were especially troublesome enemies of Israel; some exerted a negative influence on Israel's religious life.

What sin is especially mentioned as the common downfall of three of these nations? Jer. 48:29, 42; 49:7, 15, 16; 50:29. Compare Obadiah's message to Edom. Obad. 1-4. Ezekiel, a contemporary of Jeremiah, was also given prophecies against the nations. What were some other sins of Judah's immediate neighbors? Eze. 25:1-3, 6, 8, 12.

Pride lay at the foundation of Judah's sinful rebellion. This attitude pervaded these pagan powers as well, reflecting the satanic agency that controlled them. (See Isa. 14:13; Eze. 28:2, 6, 9.)

The crisis in Palestine, brought to a head by Babylonian dominance, drew out the worst in Judah's neighbors. Gloating (Ammon), contempt (Moab), and revenge (Edom) surfaced. Even though they sent ambassadors to counsel with King Zedekiah (Jer. 27:2, 3), envy and jealousy lay beneath the veneer of their polished, diplomatic speech.

Since God's justice touches all nations, how does His grace reach them? John 3:16, 17; Matt. 28:18-20; Rev. 14:6.

THE DAY OF THE LORD (Zeph. 1:12-18).

The discipline of Judah is described under two figures in the writings of Jeremiah and his contemporaries: drinking the cup of God's wrath, and the day of the Lord.

In what striking terms does Zephaniah, an older contemporary of Jeremiah, describe the judgment to fall on Judah by the Babylonian conquest? Zeph. 1:14-18. What two classes in Judah did the "day of the Lord" expose? Zeph. 1:12; 2:1-3.

People have their "day" to employ as they see fit. The prophets designate as the "day of the Lord" the times when God intervenes. God executes His judgments upon the wicked and delivers His faithful people.

Judah's "day of the Lord" came in stages. The first two invasions separated "the good figs" (Jer. 24:5; Dan. 1:1-6) from the bad. With the former, God intended to rebuild the nation. The "lees" (Zeph. 1:12) are the dregs or sediment in the wine, representing dependence on sin by complacent sinners in Zion.

What great event was foreshadowed by every local day of the Lord mentioned in the prophets? 1 Thess. 5:1-10; 2 Peter 3:3-5, 10-13.

The ultimate day of the Lord is initiated by the second coming of Christ. Unexpected by most, the Lord takes over the affairs of earth completely. Note that the day of the Lord is not a point in time so much as it is an era, extending from Christ's second advent to the remaking of the earth. God's "day" includes the millennium, during which the review and executive phases of final judgment are conducted (Rev. 20:4; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Rev. 20:11-15).

Today is our "day"—while mercy lingers—to seek the Lord (Zeph. 2:3). "Let ministers and people remember that gospel truth ruins if it does not save. The soul that refuses to listen to the invitations of mercy from day to day can soon listen to the most urgent appeals without an emotion stirring his soul."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 134.

What kind of preparation am I making for the final "day of the Lord"? What kind of day will it be for me?

FURTHER STUDY: Reflect on the varying nature of God's judgments on sin and His unvarying purpose to remove its contaminating influence. Can you sing the song of Moses and the Lamb now? Rev. 15:3.

1. Remedial judgments—Example: Seventy-year captivity. Saved the nation from total ruin; it was rebuilt.

2. Punitive judgments—Examples: Flood, destruction of Sodom, etc. Prevented a malignancy from infecting the rest of the human family.

3. Atoning judgment—Calvary: Makes salvation possible for all sinners who accept by faith the substitutionary death of Christ.

4. Annihilation of the wicked at the final judgment: Removes the contagion of impenitent sinners from the universe.

Read from "Approaching Doom" in *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 430, 431.

"A life of rebellion against God has unfitted them [the wicked] for heaven. Its purity, holiness, and peace would be torture to them; the glory of God would be a consuming fire. They would long to flee from that holy place. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 543.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How is divine discipline like human discipline? What are the dissimilarities? (See Heb. 12:5-11.)
2. What risks did God take to enforce such an extended period of discipline on Judah? Why was the captivity extended so long (70 years)?
3. Why are warnings of divine judgments stated in such severe language? Do they frighten people into salvation?

SUMMARY: For nearly 900 years God sought to train Israel to be a people reflecting His grace to the world. There were periods of success, but the general tendency was downward, because they embraced pagan idolatry. As a last resort the Lord caused them to go into an extensive period of exile—70 years. What can we of Laodicea learn from the experience of ancient Judah?



"You're Going to Love Me Forever!"

Rose Otis

Chun Ok Im didn't win more than 300 converts in Almatta, South Korea, with a timid witness. Listen to how she persisted with one of her converts.

Evangelistic meetings were about to begin, and Chun Ok wanted her Buddhist neighbor to attend. But every time Chun Ok tried to talk to her about the meetings, the lady would quickly disappear into her house. But driven by love for her Buddhist friend, Chun Ok persisted.

One day, while shopping in the village market, Chun Ok was startled to see her neighbor there, too. "This is my chance," Chun Ok thought as she moved cautiously through the crowd in the direction of her neighbor. When the neighbor lady noticed Chun Ok, she scooped up her vegetables and quickly left the market.

Chun Ok was right behind her. First the two women walked at a brisk pace; one lady looking for a way of escape and the other determined to catch up. Chun Ok took off her shoes and pursued the lady right into her house.

The neighbor lady was trembling. "What do you want from me?" she asked Chun Ok.

"My friend," Chun Ok replied, coming closer and speaking in a calm voice, "I know you're angry now. But if you'll come and learn how much Jesus loves you, you won't be angry any more. In fact, you'll love me forever!"

Think about Chun Ok's loving persistence. Hold on to somebody you love, and don't let them slip from your grasp. Backing people into a corner to preach doctrine is not an approach that usually works. It's the love for souls that makes us irresistible channels of God's love.



Chun Ok Im

One of the 600 women who attended a women's conference held by the author in South Korea.



Rose Otis

*Director of Women's Ministries,
General Conference of S.D.A.*

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Prophets of Peace



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Jeremiah 23, 29.

MEMORY TEXT: "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:28, 29).

KEY QUESTION: Since all must answer before the bar of God, why does He hold the leadership of His people accountable?

GOD WILL NOT ALLOW HIS FAITHFUL PEOPLE TO BECOME EXTINCT. The southern species of the American bald eagle faces extinction. The official 1988 survey found only 509 remaining pairs. Eagles lay annually only one clutch of two eggs, averaging a success rate of one young bird per year.

In a successful attempt to help nature repopulate the species, scientists remove eggs from the nests of eagle-rich Florida, hatch and mature the birds, and return them to the wilds of other areas. If the eggs are removed early in the nesting season, the parents lay another clutch of eggs.

Like the southern bald eagle, impenitent Judah faced "extinction." In the years of Babylonian exile, God sought to develop a new Israel who, when restored to Palestine, would prepare the way for the Messiah. But false priests and prophets opposed God's rescue plan. A constant hindrance to Jeremiah, they taught Judah to rebel against God's long-range plan for His people.

FORGOTTEN PAST (Jer. 2:5-8).

Throughout his long ministry Jeremiah was harassed by apostate leadership. Priests, prophets, and civil authorities, including kings and judges, ruled with little regard for God's will. The three classes formed a corrupt confederation.

At what point did Judah's leaders begin their apostasy from the Lord? Jer. 2:5-8.

God charged Judah with forgetfulness. They had ceased talking about His marvelous deliverance of their ancestors from Egyptian slavery and desert wanderings. They ceased to obey the wise and just laws He had provided for their national and personal well-being. As a result, public institutions collapsed. Religious worship degenerated into dead formalism, for the priests no longer "knew" the Lord. Civil rulers no longer reflected divine justice and guidance; and the prophets' messages were influenced by the Baal cult. The results were inevitable: leadership itself became a stumblingblock to the people. (Compare Isa. 3:12.)

"In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what the Lord has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."—*Life Sketches*, p. 196.

To what primary sin did Jewish leaders yield? Jer. 8:9, 10 (compare Eph. 5:5).

"Trace every breach of the moral law, whether murder, adultery, theft, slander, or any of the sins of which these are the heads and representatives, back to their source, and it will be found that it has been suggested and inspired by one or another of the vices of which covetousness is the chief."—John Burr, *Studies on the Ten Commandments*, p. 146, cited in Taylor G. Bunch, *The Ten Commandments* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1944), p. 163.

List the steps that leaders and people can take to renew their fellowship with God and obedience to His will.

FALSE HEALERS (Jer. 6:13, 14).

While priests and Levites were appointed to provide religious instruction and to lead out in the national worship, prophets were sent to call both leadership and laity to repentance and to warn of divine judgment.

As the apostate nation drifted toward ruin, what message did the false prophets proclaim? Jer. 6:13, 14; 8:11.

Not all who claim to be prophets of God are genuine. Naturally, the people desired peace with Babylon, not war and captivity. The false prophets aggravated the situation by telling the people what they desired to hear. But the Lord said: "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious" (Jer. 8:11, NIV). Idolatry, materialism, and self-seeking had led Judah to malignant apostasy. Only thorough repentance and reform could revive and restore the nation.

How did Ezekiel illustrate the peace-and-prosperity message that the false prophets were promoting? Eze. 13:10-16. What effect did these false promises have on the people? Verse 22.

The "wall" symbolized the peace hopes of the people. The false prophets "daubed" or "whitewashed" this wall with lying assurances of peace. It is easy to see how impenitent people would have reasoned: "If the end of the war is in sight, then our lives must not be as bad as Jeremiah asserts. Such prophets have uttered their somber warning for 150 years at least." The "peace" speeches of the false prophets confirmed the rebels in their sins.

"**God's plan** is not to send messengers who will please and flatter sinners; He delivers no message of peace to lull the unsanctified into carnal security. Instead, He lays heavy burdens upon the conscience of the wrongdoer and pierces his soul with sharp arrows of conviction. Ministering angels present to him the fearful judgments of God, to deepen the sense of need and to prompt the agonizing cry, 'What must I do to be saved?'"—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 435.

How may I and my fellow church members affect the ministry of our pastor? (See 2 Tim. 4:2-4.)

NO COMMISSION (Jer. 14:13-16).

The "prophets of peace" had no commission from God. They incorrectly interpreted the political scene.

How did the Lord respond to Jeremiah's report that false prophets were countering his warnings? Where did their messages originate? Jer. 14:13-16.

"Absolute loyalty and obedience to the revealed will and word of the Lord was the ultimate criterion for distinguishing between true and false prophets. The deficient spirituality of the latter led to an equally inadequate understanding of God's dealings with His people. Consequently their pronouncements were false because they did not appreciate the conditional character of Israelite covenantal traditions, and therefore they misread completely the contemporary political situation."
—R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah & Lamentations* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1972), pp. 122, 123.

For what additional reason did the false prophets predict peace and confirm the wicked in sin? Jer. 23:14-17. How did God know all about these false leaders? Verses 21-26.

Jesus and the apostle Peter forewarned of false prophets in the last days (2 Peter 2:1-3; Matt. 24:24). The results of the ministry of these false shepherds are always the same: they fail to bring genuine healing to sinners and unity to God's people. They pervert the true word of the Lord (Jer. 23:36).

"Satan hopes to involve the remnant people of God in the general ruin that is coming upon the earth. As the coming of Christ draws nigh, he will be more determined and decisive in his efforts to overthrow them. Men and women will arise professing to have some new light or some new revelation whose tendency is to unsettle faith in the old landmarks. Their doctrines will not bear the test of God's word, yet souls will be deceived."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 295.

There are many today who claim to be bearers of new light. How can I avoid being deceived by persons not sent by God?

TEACHING REBELLION (Jer. 28:1-17).

Jeremiah refers to four false prophets by name: Hananiah, Ahab, Zedekiah, and Shemaiah. The first lived in Jerusalem; the others were among the exiles deported with Ezekiel. More serious than their false hopes of peace was their bad influence on the people by their rejection of God's messages given through Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

What was Hananiah's challenge to Jeremiah in the court of the temple before the priests and people? Jer. 28:1-4. What answer did Jeremiah give? Verses 5-9. How did Hananiah underscore his prediction? Verses 10, 11. In what striking manner did God endorse the truthfulness of Jeremiah's messages? Why was the action so severe? Jer. 28:16, 17 (compare verse 1).

Jeremiah answered that the earlier prophets had given announcements of coming doom on Judah and the surrounding nations similar to his own message. The people would have to wait and see which prediction was fulfilled in order to know whether he or Hananiah was sent by God.

Hananiah's startling prediction and action created confusion. He discredited Jeremiah and nullified the divine appeal to repent. But Hananiah's swift death jolted both leaders and people to ponder the seriousness of rebellion.

Shemaiah, a false prophet among the captives in Babylon, lashed out at Jeremiah through letters to the priests. What did he want them to do with Jeremiah? Jer. 29:24-29. How was Shemaiah punished? Verses 30-32.

How serious it is for leaders, appointed to represent God, to violate their trust by teaching His people to disobey Him! Judah's situation was astonishing. Two false prophets in Babylon, Ahab and Zedekiah, were so intent on stirring discontent among the exiles in the name of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar burnt them to death. Living in open sin themselves, they dared to speak falsely in the Lord's name (Jer. 29:20-23).

Every Christian has influence. Am I teaching my family, friends, and neighbors rebellion against God's will, or loyalty to Him, by my attitudes, words, conduct, and dress?

THE TRUE SHEPHERD (Jer. 23:5, 6; 33:15, 16).

As a true shepherd, how did Jeremiah attempt to persuade leaders and people that the false prophets were not sent by God? Jer. 27:12-22.

If the king had obeyed the Lord's directives, the priests, prophets, and people would have submitted. But Jeremiah records no positive response from the king.

Had the priests accepted God's directives for the nation to submit to Babylon's yoke, they would have been strong enough to draw the king to their side. The temple and city would have been saved from destruction. But once again, Jeremiah's appeal fell on deaf ears.

"Faith in a lie will not have a sanctifying influence upon the life or character. No error is truth, or can be made truth by repetition, or by faith in it. Sincerity will never save a soul from the consequences of believing an error. Without sincerity there is no true religion, but sincerity in a false religion will never save a man. I may be perfectly sincere in following a wrong road, but that will not make it the right road, or bring me to the place I wished to reach."—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 56.

What kind of spiritual shepherds will God appoint to lead the remnant of His people? Jer. 23:3, 4. What does the divine Shepherd do to counteract the influence of false shepherds and prophets? Verses 5, 6.

The fulfillment of these prophecies given to the people of Judah was conditional upon their repentance. But after the captivity they failed to rely upon the Lord for righteousness and wisdom. The "righteous Branch" is the Lord Jesus Christ, "a shoot from the stump of Jesse" (Isa. 11:1, RSV). When the nation was reduced to the mere stump of the tree it once was, Christ came to die for the sins of all humanity and to lead them from sin to righteousness. (See 1 Peter 2:21-25.) When Christ, by His Spirit, fills the hearts of believers, His righteousness reigns in their lives, and they reflect to the world the beauty of His character. (See Eph. 3:14-19; 1 Cor. 1:30.)

What change in our manner of life occurs when we accept Christ as our righteousness?

FURTHER STUDY: On the work of the righteous Branch, study: Isa. 4:2-6; 11:1-16; 53:1, 2; Zech 3:8; Rev. 5:5; 22:16. Read "The Last King of Judah" in *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 440-451.

"Error is never harmless. It never sanctifies, but always brings confusion and dissension. It is always dangerous. The enemy has great power over minds that are not thoroughly fortified by prayer and established in Bible truth.

"There are a thousand temptations in disguise prepared for those who have the light of truth; and the only safety for any of us is in receiving no new doctrine, no new interpretation of the Scriptures, without first submitting it to brethren of experience. Lay it before them in a humble, teachable spirit, with earnest prayer; and if they see no light in it, yield to their judgment; for 'in the multitude of counselors there is safety.'"—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 292, 293.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what practical ways can we avoid forgetting what the Lord has done for us as individuals? As a church body?
2. We are all sin-wounded persons who should never take our sinfulness lightly. What does Ellen White mean when she writes, "At every advance step in our Christian experience our repentance will deepen."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 561? Does God not fully forgive us when we first repent? (See 1 John 1:9.)
3. Since the church encourages every member to study the Bible, should we assume that all will arrive at the same views on all matters? If not, how can the church experience unity of belief? (See 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 4:1-3.)

SUMMARY: Apostasy in leadership is always devastating to the church, even if it occurs in only one or a few. The total moral collapse of Judah's leadership was largely responsible for the ruin of the nation. Warnings of present and future delusions urge the followers of Christ to maintain such a close union with Him that His righteousness and wisdom will keep us from falling into error and apostasy.



2,000 Baptized in One City—in China!

Eugene Hsu

After surmounting numerous obstacles, by the grace of God, 2,000 believers were baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a city in China during the summer of 1992. Initial permission was obtained from the government to invite a Seventh-day Adventist minister from a different city to officiate at the baptisms on July 30 and 31, and August 3 and 4.

However, Sunday believers lodged a complaint to the provincial authorities, causing them to cancel their permission for the pastor to attend the baptism. But because of the strong desire of the believers to be baptized, leaders decided to proceed with the ceremony as planned, officiated by local elders.

On the morning of July 30, after the baptism began, leading cadres of the United Front, the Religious Department, the Street Committee, and the Police Station were sent to the church with the intention of stopping the baptism. But Adventist believers, while praying to God, formed a wall around the church, and the baptism proceeded as planned.

More than 1,500 people were baptized on the first day, from 8:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m., and more than 400 were baptized on the second day. From the evening of the second day, July 31, until the evening of August 1, a police car was parked in front of the church door and so about 200 believers, who came from rural areas, were unable to be baptized.

On Sabbath, August 1, 2,500 people arrived to attend the communion service, but they were prevented from entering the church by the police and government cadres. A Religious Affairs cadre announced that the previous baptisms were invalid and therefore the communion service should not be held. But about 1,800 people, many of whom had traveled a long distance, refused to leave. They continued to wait outside in the hot sun.

After much earnest prayer, the members decided to proceed with the communion service. The police attempted in vain to stop the service, but they could only watch as 1,800 Adventists participated in communion.



We pray that the door of China will open wide for the Adventist world church to work with our Chinese brothers and sisters in proclaiming the everlasting gospel. But we should never, never try to work for (instead of with) our Chinese believers.

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Precious Promises



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Jeremiah 30-33.

MEMORY TEXT: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jeremiah 31:3).

KEY QUESTION: A thoughtful bit of advice says, "Tarry at the promise till God meets you there. He always returns by way of His promises." Why is implicit trust in the divine promises such an important part of Christian living?

HAPPY HOMECOMING. "Jack!" "Francis!" The laughing Jack embraced his younger brother. Quickly Jack opened his case and began distributing presents to his family. Twenty years earlier Jack had run away from home and joined the navy. Francis did not know the whereabouts of his wandering brother. But now Jack was home! The brothers were reconciled! A new life with great promise had begun. What a happy homecoming!

The Lord planned a homecoming for His people too! The exiled descendants of Israel and Judah were to be restored to Palestine as a united people. The long-awaited Messiah would arrive, and God would renew His covenant with Israel. It seemed an impossible dream, but nothing is too hard for God. Precious promises—encouraging lamps of hope in the deepening shadows of the inevitable Babylonian exile.

EXODUS TWO (Jer. 31:1-14).

With what did the Lord compare the Exodus from Egypt? Jer. 23:7, 8.

Israel had gone down into Egypt as a free people under the oversight of Joseph. They were unjustly enslaved, but miraculously released from bondage. But in the eighth, seventh, and sixth centuries B.C., Assyrian and Babylonian conquests obliterated the national governments of both Israel and Judah, deporting the people from their homelands into exile. Politically the Jewish states ceased to exist. Who could have imagined that in God's providence, three of Persia's greatest kings (Cyrus the Great, Darius I, and Artaxerxes I) would not only release the Jews from exile but would also restore their statehood, as well as their temple and city?

In both exodus movements what divine characteristic is prominent? What is God's assurance? Jer. 31:1-4.

God extended His love and grace to His people in both the exodus from Egypt and the exodus from Babylon. As sinners and backsliders, we may think that it is altogether up to us to take a first step toward God. The fact is, the Spirit nudges us homeward. (See John 6:44.) "Every longing awakened in the soul to return to God is but the tender pleading of His Spirit, wooing, entreating, drawing the wanderer to his Father's heart of love."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 632, 633.

How did the Lord predict the people would react in the promised exodus from Babylon? What did God promise to do for them? Jer. 31:7-14.

In a sense, all sinners who accept God's grace pass through a double exodus. First, they experience freedom from slavery to sin's rule (Rom. 6:17, 18). Second, at Christ's return in glory, the saved will experience an exodus from earth to the eternal kingdom. Great is the rejoicing in each exodus (Luke 15:7, 10; Rev. 7:9, 10).

Spiritually speaking, what is the great danger facing the Christian in a "Babylonian" world today?

JACOB AND RACHEL (Jer. 31:15-17).

Jeremiah, chapters 30 and 31 are sometimes designated "the little book of consolation" because they record messages about the future restoration (30:1-3). In these chapters Jacob and his wife Rachel are mentioned figuratively to describe both the ruin and restoration of Judah.

How is the destruction symbolized? What is this period of conquest and captivity called? What promise is implied in the figure and stated verbally, as well? Jer. 30:4-9.

Earlier Jeremiah had compared the apparently sudden national collapse under foreign arms to the birth pangs of a mother in labor (Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 13:21). Two elements in the birthing experience are emphasized: its sudden onset and its excruciating and exhausting pain. (Compare 1 Thess. 5:3.) To underscore the terrible anguish Judah will experience, the Lord transfers the mother's suffering to "man," that is, to "Jacob," who personifies the nation. In its primary sense, "the time of Jacob's trouble" refers to the sixth-century B.C. destruction and exile of Judah. But the promise was, "He shall be saved out of it" (Jer. 30:7). Jacob's birth pangs and distress at this historical point implied the birth of a new nation—a new Israel that would come from the captivity to fulfill God's plan.

In what way does Rachel (Rahel, KJV) personify the bitterness of the Babylonian exile? What comforting promise does the Lord make to His sorrowing people? Jer. 31:15-17.

At Ramah, in the territory of Benjamin about five miles north of Jerusalem, the captives were assembled for the long march to Babylon (Jer. 40:1). Their weeping is likened to the suffering of Rachel, who died giving birth to Benjamin. (See Gen. 35:16-20.) She personified the nation weeping for her "children" being led away in chains. But again, a promise is made that they will return (Jer. 31:17).

What secondary application did Matthew make of this personification of Judah's experience? Matt. 2:17, 18. Why must Christians go through the time of Jacob's trouble before Christ returns? What positive aspects are there to human suffering?

NOTHING TOO HARD FOR GOD (Jer. 32:26, 27).

The people must have experienced extreme swings in mood from stubborn obstinacy to abject despair as they continued to hear of Babylon's successes on the battlefield.

How did God assure the Jews that they did not face national extinction? Why was He permitting them to be conquered? Jer. 30:10, 11; 46:28. Why was this correction necessary? Jer. 32:28-35.

Although God withdrew His blessing and protection from Judah and permitted the Babylonian wars to discipline His people, Babylon itself would have to give account for its evil ways. God would acquaint that pagan power with His truth (Jer. 51:9), but He foresaw Babylon's negative response and its ultimate judgment (Jer. 50:1-51:64). Judah had not filled its cup of iniquity; there was yet hope. In mercy God would not make a full end of sinful Judah. A remnant would respond positively to the discipline of the captivity, and He would plant them again (Jer. 32:41).

When Jeremiah turned to the Lord in his perplexity, what wonderful promise did the Lord reaffirm? Jer. 32:26, 27, 37-44.

Jeremiah had acknowledged in his prayer, "There is nothing too hard for thee" (verse 17), and God had reminded the prophet of this fundamental truth in His reply: "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?" (verse 27). In the court of the prison, as embattled soldiers shouted and alien armies assaulted the walls, a simple business transaction took place (verses 6-15). Property was purchased and the evidence of the sale preserved—an enacted promise that one day Judah would be resettled. A bright future lay beyond the captivity for a penitent nation. There is no lack of power on God's part to carry out the purposes of His will. "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23).

How much evidence does your faith need in order to believe the promises of God?

ONE NATION (Jer. 31:8, 9).

Shortly after Rehoboam ascended the throne, 10 tribes broke away to form a separate kingdom under Jeroboam I. Two tribes remained under the Davidic dynasty, better known as Judah. For more than 200 years the "brother" nations (Israel and Judah) led a separate existence, often warring. In 722 B.C. Assyria conquered Israel and deported its peoples. Prior to the invasion of Judah and the deportation of its people by the Babylonians, God promised to unite the two segments into one nation.

What were God's intentions for Judah and Israel that Jeremiah was to record in a book? Jer. 30:1-3. With what picturesque language does God describe the repopulation process? Jer. 31:27, 28.

One of Jeremiah's earliest messages addressed the Israelite exiles in northern Mesopotamia (Jer. 3:12-14). Appealing for repentance, God promised their restoration. The houses of Judah and Israel would "come together out of the land of the north" to their homeland (verse 18).

In a sense, the Christian church also lives like Israel and Judah, in "Babylonian" exile. (See Rev. 14:8.) This world is not our home. We await the coming of Jesus and "the restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21). Although we are divided into many nations (Rev. 14:6), we can even now learn to be "one" in Christ Jesus (John 17:20-23).

For what types of "wounds" would the Lord provide healing? Jer. 31:8, 9; 30:17. What promise did God make about the ruined city of Jerusalem? Jer. 30:18.

Both nations had been deeply wounded by their gross idolatry and apostasy. In captivity some would respond to the Spirit's wooing and repent in bitter tears. Zion would loathe herself (Eze. 20:43). God's forgiving grace would bring healing to every penitent even as His power would bring about the restoration of the political state. (See Zech. 3:1-4.) And the estranged tribes would experience genuine reconciliation.

What am I personally doing to promote unity and bonding in my church family? (See Eph. 4:1-3.)

MESSIAH'S APPEARANCE ANNOUNCED (Jer. 33:15).

The descendants of Abraham had long awaited the coming of the Messiah, the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham (Gen. 22:18). Now, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel locate His appearance in connection with the Jewish restoration from Babylonian captivity. Daniel specifies the exact year (Dan. 9:24, 25).

How does Jeremiah show the Messiah's connection with the Davidic dynasty? Jer. 23:5; 33:15 (compare Luke 1:30-33). What is the significance of His name? Jer. 23:6.

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God had decreed that the throne of David would remain empty until the Messiah should set up His kingdom (Eze. 21:26, 27). Both prophets were moved by the Spirit to announce the Messiah's appearance at some point in time subsequent to the national return from Assyrian-Babylonian captivity.

Under the figure of what individual is the Messiah described as a shepherd of His people? Eze. 34:23, 24; Jer. 30:8, 9 (compare John 10:11, 14).

David, as a shepherd, prefigured the Messiah, his greater Son and Shepherd of the people (Isa. 40:10, 11). The Messiah's advent would bring about the renewal of the everlasting covenant (see Lesson 4). Christ's sacrifice confirms all the promises God has made to His people. (See Jer. 31:31-34; Rom. 15:8.)

How did God certify these precious promises of restoration that He gave to the Jews through the prophet? Jer. 31:35-37; 33:19-22. Does this mean God's promises are never canceled even if His people reject Him? Jer. 18:7-10.

We must not misread God's promises as did many Jews of this period. All God's promises are conditional on the obedience of His people. The condition is stated in the covenant: God's law is to be written in the heart. Persons who willingly experience this transforming grace find themselves in harmony with their Creator. To such, the divine promises are absolute. (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 106.)

FURTHER STUDY: "The time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:4-9) may be applied in a secondary sense to the plight of God's end-time people after the close of probation when they face a universal death decree (see "The Time of Trouble" in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 613-623). The "day of the Lord" prophecies are types of the ultimate Day of the Lord; that is, they also portray an end-time fulfillment. Just as ancient Babylon swept down to conquer the Jews (Jacob's time of trouble), so in the spiritual interpretation of the prophecy, end-time Babylon will seek to destroy the church (spiritual Israel, Rev. 12:17; 13:15-17). The promise is true in both instances: "He [Jacob] shall be saved out of it." Read also "Light Through Darkness" and "The Coming of a Deliverer" in *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 464-476, 681-702.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What can we learn from Israel's long sojourn in Egypt and exile in Assyria/Babylon that will nourish our hope in Christ's return and our entry into the heavenly Canaan?
2. Jacob had "a time of trouble" when he wrestled with the Angel. What can we learn from his experience that will enable us to meet our own conflict should we be living at the close of probation?
3. How can our faith in the Lord's promises to His church be increased? (See Luke 17:5.)
4. How essential is church unity to the success of the church's mission?
5. What specific predictions and promises regarding the Redeemer's second advent do we see being fulfilled? How does their fulfillment help strengthen and maintain our faith in the Second Advent?

SUMMARY: As Christians, we need a faith that rests on the promises of God. As we see His promises fulfilled, our faith is strengthened that He will fulfill all of His other promises. The promises made to Judah of restoration and a bright future kept alive the hopes of the Jews during their long night of exile. In like manner, Christ's promises to return minister to modern Israel. Our hopes remain fervent as we carry the gospel to the world. Christ is our sure hope. And He alone is the hope of the world.



"Did Stephen Die?"

Nicola Levterov

Stephen was born to a 45-year-old doting father. How Stephen's father loved him! Nothing was refused spoiled Stephen. He wasn't *really* bad, but he did like to do things that others weren't allowed to do.

When Stephen grew he began frequenting taverns. His greatest pleasure after becoming drunk was to ring the church bell in the Orthodox church tower—at one or two in the morning. The community, believing the bell should be rung at night only if there was an emergency, was angry and asked Stephen's father to curb his son.

"Tell me what you want me to buy you so you won't ring the bell," Stephen's father asked him. "A bicycle," responded Stephen. The second night after Stephen received the bicycle, the bell rang again. Frustrated, Father asked, "Tell me what else I can buy you so you won't ring that bell." "A moped," said Stephen.

For two nights the bell was silent, and then the bell rang again. Father pointed out that he was the laughing-stock of the town. This time the humiliated father bought him a German MZ 125 CC motorcycle. For several nights the bell didn't ring. Then early one dark morning everyone was again awakened by the tolling of the bell. Father was in despair, convinced that nothing could help.

One evening Stephen came home to find his mother visiting with an Adventist pastor and two Adventist ladies. Stephen decided to have some fun by asking some questions he was sure the pastor couldn't answer. The pastor firmly told him he would finish his study on Daniel 2 before answering his questions. Impressed with history, Stephen enjoyed the study!

Stephen attended each Bible lesson, and on the nights of the Bible study, the community noticed the church bell was silent. On other nights it rang. But soon the townspeople were getting a full night of rest *every* night! They asked, "Did Stephen die?" They found him in the street and asked, "What happened? We thought you were dead!"

"No, I'm not dead, but I soon will be!" Stephen smiled. He told them of his plans for baptism and how he would bury his sins. He had asked the pastor to pray with him about his drinking problem, and now he was free of it!

The reaction of Stephen's father is most amazing: "I would rather have you ring the bell than be baptized."

"Father, the Stephen you know is dead," he told his father.

Stephen is an energetic missionary. His work as an electrician gives him many opportunities to share his faith as he visits homes. Stephen has led many people to Christ.

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The Siege of Jerusalem



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Jeremiah 21, 34, 37-39.

MEMORY TEXT: "Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men" (Lamentations 3:32, 33, NIV).

KEY QUESTION: What would have been the effect on Judah's spirituality if God had cancelled the Babylonian invasion without the genuine repentance of His people?

ATTITUDES MAY INVITE CALAMITY. Dusk was falling as the cyclist turned his motorcycle onto the highway with a great roar of the engine. The workday over, he relaxed as wind swirled around his body. Too occupied with his own thoughts as he approached a congested area, he failed to slow down. When an approaching car turned across his lane, he braked too late, and his motorcycle smashed against the car's rear bumper. Flipped over the handlebars, the cyclist struck the road violently. With a shattered leg, body burns, and bruises, he took months to heal. But his life was spared. Was this an accident waiting to happen? Was it preventable?

Judah's leaders and people were so preoccupied with their own misguided attitudes and actions that they could not see calamity coming. Being captured by Babylon was not an accident. Their inordinate attachment to idolatry and self-seeking invited destruction. The captivity was God's last resort to keep faith alive on earth.

INQUIRE OF THE LORD (Jer. 21:1-10).

On January 15, 588 B.C., the Babylonian army laid siege to Jerusalem. Thirty months later, on July 19, 586 B.C., the city fell (Jer. 39:1, 2; 52:4-7). A month later the temple, palaces, and city were burned, and the walls were thrown down (Jer. 52:12-14). The events we will study this week took place during this two-and-a-half-year period.

As the enemy forces made their initial approaches to lay siege, what request did the king make of Jeremiah through an official delegation? Jer. 21:1, 2. What plain statement did Jeremiah send back to the king? Jer. 21:3-7.

Zedekiah, the third of Josiah's sons to rule Judah, was an indecisive, moral weakling—dominated by a hard-core of rebellious princes (Jer. 38:5). He evidently hoped that Jeremiah's intercession, like that of Isaiah's when the Assyrians attacked Jerusalem (Isaiah 37), would rescue the city from destruction. But at that time Hezekiah and his court had sought a spiritual revival; Zedekiah and his princes were leading their subjects in idolatry and brazen apostasy.

The invasion of the Babylonians would be as though God Himself fought against Judah. Death would result not only from battle but also from famine and pestilence. Thousands would die. Distress would lead many into cannibalism as a means of survival (Jer. 19:8, 9; compare Eze. 5:10).

What course of action did the prophet urge the people to follow? Jer. 21:8-10.

Jeremiah now turned directly to the people, bypassing the stubborn court (compare Jer. 21:3 and 8). Each could choose "the way of life" or "the way of death." Anyone who, believing the Lord's promise, surrendered to the Babylonians would live. Those who disbelieved would perish. To choose God's way required faith in the prophetic word and a willingness to break with the majority. Many followed the inspired counsel (Jer. 39:9; 52:15). God sought only to save His people.

Jeremiah spoke of "two ways" that affect physical life; Jesus spoke of "two ways" that affect spiritual life (John 5:24; 8:51). How are we empowered to follow Jesus' counsel?

FICKLE MORALITY (Jer. 34:1-21).

What message did the prophet pass on to the king regarding his personal future? Jer. 34:1-7. In their desperation to influence God to remove His judgment, what did the king and his princes do under oath? Jer. 34:8-10.

The Babylonians systematically subjugated the country until only the fortress cities of Azekah and Lachish (15 and 35 miles, respectively, southwest from Jerusalem) remained, besides the capital itself. Yet God was merciful to the weak ruler. His kingdom was doomed, his captivity was inevitable, but he would be honorably buried.

According to the Mosaic law a Hebrew slave was to be released after six years of labor (Ex. 21:2; Deut. 15:12-14). But such provisions had been long disregarded. Now in fear the king and the princes attempted to buy God's favor by freeing all Hebrew slaves.

When the Babylonians unexpectedly broke up the siege and retreated southward to meet an approaching Egyptian force (Jer. 37:5, 11; 34:21, 22), what did the former slave owners do? Jer. 34:11. How did God regard their fickle morality? Jer. 34:12-21.

"When the invader was at their gates Zedekiah and his people were so terrified that they were willing to do and promise anything that would mitigate the wrath of God. . . . Fear was the sole motive of their hasty covenant of emancipation. Now, this may be a useful initiative of a thorough repentance; but it must then lead to deeper feelings of hearty detestation of sin on its own account. Fear of penalties, without any abhorrence of the moral evil that merits them, can only produce superficial results. Earnest repentance involves a turning from sin rather than a flight from its penalties. Hence the importance of seeking to lead men to repentance through influencing the conscience, rather than by means of mere appeals to selfish terror."—W. F. Adeney, "Homiletics," *The Pulpit Commentary* (Chicago: Wilcox & Follett Co., n.d.), vol. 26, p. 88.

Notice how seriously God takes covenant promises. Ask yourself: As a Christian, what promises have I made to Him? Have I been faithful to my covenant commitments?

ARRESTED (Jer. 37:1-21).

When the siege was lifted, hope revived. Egypt, Judah's ally, was responding to her distress. Once more the king requested: "Pray now unto the Lord our God for us" (Jer. 37:3). He evidently desired intercession that the Chaldean retirement from Jerusalem would be permanent.

What reply did Jeremiah give the king? How did he underscore the certainty of the city's fate? Jer. 37:6-10.

"It was the will of God that Babylon should conquer Jerusalem. Therefore, if the Chaldean army were reduced to a disorganized group of wounded men, Jerusalem would still succumb. The Jews had found that, while they were faithful to God, they were strong against hordes of enemies. They were to learn that when they had put themselves against God, the position was reversed, and the weakest foe could overthrow them."—W. F. Adeney, "Homiletics," *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 26, p. 123.

As Jeremiah attempted to return to his home in Anathoth, who arrested him? Jer. 37:11-13. How did the princes react to the false charge against the prophet? Verses 14-16. With what questions did the prophet again challenge the king? Jer. 37:17-19. What favor did he ask? Verses 20, 21 (compare Jer. 32:1-5).

Jeremiah's imprisonment this time lasted for about a year. He seems to have been placed at first in solitary confinement underground.

When Jeremiah had responded to Hananiah's false prediction of peace, he proposed a test: "The prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet" (Jer. 28:9, RSV). But where were these prophets now? Why had the king imprisoned Jeremiah for having told the truth? He begged not to be sent back to the dungeon, and Zedekiah ordered him to be moved to the court of the prison and given a daily ration. Already famine had begun to weaken the citizens of the doomed city.

Why should believers not be surprised if suffering becomes a part of their experience? (See Matt. 16:24, 25.)

LAST APPEAL (Jer. 38:1-28).

In the eyes of the princes Jeremiah was a traitor. What did they finally demand of the yielding king? Jer. 38:1-6. How was Jeremiah rescued from death? Verses 7-13.

Under other circumstances Zedekiah might have appeared a successful ruler. But he feared the anger of his princes more than the judgments of God. The desperate, angry princes took their wrath out on Jeremiah, who had warned for years that ruin was coming unless Judah repented. But they chose to call the prophet's warning treason. The innocent Christ was likewise accused of treason (Luke 23:2).

When the king once more asked for a "word from the Lord," what advice did the prophet give him? Jer. 38:14-18. Why was the king reluctant to surrender his person? Verse 19. What counsel, if accepted even at that late date, would have preserved the king, his family, and city from a terrible fate? Verses 20-23.

This was Zedekiah's last interview with Jeremiah. The conditions were fearful. The imprisoned prophet was truly more free than the king, with his nation and capital under siege and his own decisions dominated by the princes.

"Some men have no firmness of character. They are like a ball of putty and can be pressed into any conceivable shape. They are of no definite form and consistency, and are of no practical use in the world. This weakness, indecision, and inefficiency must be overcome. There is an indomitableness about true Christian character which cannot be molded or subdued by adverse circumstances. Men must have moral backbone, an integrity which cannot be flattered, bribed, or terrified."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 297.

How did Zedekiah's excessive fear of his princes surface once more? Jer. 38:24-27. Would you have complied with his request as Jeremiah did? Explain.

How can I develop moral independence that is first loyal to God, yet cooperative with my society? What are the limits to my cooperation?

CITY CAPTURED (Jer. 39:1-7).

On July 19, 586 B.C., Jerusalem's walls were breached; the Chaldeans set up headquarters in the "middle gate" and directed the reduction of the city from there. Famine had weakened the defenders (Jer. 39:2, 3; 52:6).

How did Zedekiah and his remaining soldiers attempt their escape? What was the king forced to watch before being cruelly blinded? Jer. 39:4-7; 52:7-11, 24-27.

Evidently the fugitives planned to cross the Jordan near Jericho for refuge in either Moab or Ammon. Zedekiah and the national leaders were marched in chains approximately 150 miles north to Nebuchadnezzar at his Palestinian campaign headquarters in Riblah, Syria. "Prisoners were commonly blinded by piercing the eyeballs with the point of a spear. Besides enduring the torture involved in the losing of his eyesight, Zedekiah suffered the mental anguish of having to remember throughout the rest of his life, as the last thing he ever beheld, the fearful sight of the execution of his sons."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 538.

After a month of plundering by the enemy, what terrible destruction took place? Jer. 52:12-14. What happened to the large bronze sea and the two pillars that stood in the court of the temple? Verses 17-23.

"Among the righteous still in Jerusalem, to whom had been made plain the divine purpose, were some who determined to place beyond the reach of ruthless hands the sacred ark containing the tables of stone on which had been traced the precepts of the Decalogue. This they did. With mourning and sadness they secreted the ark in a cave, where it was to be hidden from the people of Israel and Judah because of their sins, and was to be no more restored to them. That sacred ark is yet hidden. It has never been disturbed since it was secreted."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 453. According to Jewish lore, Jeremiah hid the tabernacle, ark, and altar of incense in a cave (2 Maccabees 2:4-7).

How only can I prevent in my life the inevitable consequences of a sinful course? (See Gal. 6:7, 8.)

FURTHER STUDY: On the future history of Jeremiah and the remaining inhabitants of Judah read: Jer. 39:11-14; chapters 40-44. Read "Carried Captive Into Babylon" in *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 452-463.

Released from prison by order of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 39:11-14), Jeremiah was given his choice of going to Babylon or remaining in Judah (Jer. 40:1-5). He chose the latter and settled at Mizpah with Gedaliah, the governor appointed by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 40:6). Ishmael, of royal blood, murdered Gedaliah and the Chaldean garrison at Mizpah and took the local people, including Jeremiah, captive (Jeremiah 41). Intercepted by another field officer, Ishmael and eight others escaped. The remaining guerilla bands and many of the rescued persons, rejecting Jeremiah's inspired counsel, fled to Egypt (Jeremiah 43). Jeremiah predicted that, because of their rebellion against God and their commitment to false gods, the Jews would perish in Egypt (Jeremiah 44).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can we avoid becoming spiritual and moral weaklings like Zedekiah?
2. Since he made no effort to change his own ways or those of his subjects, why did Zedekiah continually ask for "a word from the Lord"? What insight on our personal prayer-life does Zedekiah's continuous request give us?
3. Because wicked men often do good things under pressure, why does God generally delay His judgments? (Compare Eccl. 8:11.)
4. The evil consequences of personal sin are seldom limited to the perpetrator. Usually others are hurt. Why is this so?

SUMMARY: For Judah the "last movements" were extremely rapid ones. In 30 months the besieged city was put to the torch. The palaces of the king and princes, as well as the temple, were looted and burned. City walls were thrown down, and the survivors of the sword, famine, and pestilence were in chains, on a forced march into captivity on foreign soil. Among these survivors was Daniel, who gained influence in the Babylonian and Persian governments, where he championed God's cause. Thus God was able to keep the faith alive on earth.



Fifteen Times Bigger

South Pacific Division

When Nako met an Adventist lady while visiting another village in Papua New Guinea, he decided to attend her church, intending to stop after they were married.

After three Sabbaths, however, Nako became interested in what he was hearing and soon was baptized. Returning to his village, which now had seven baptized Adventists, he built a small Adventist church in front of his house that would hold up to 10 people.

One night, one of the leaders of Nako's former church dreamed that he and his family were climbing a hill that was leading higher and higher, singing the song (page 596 in the *SDA Hymnal*):

Look for the waymarks as you journey on,
Look for the waymarks, passing one by one;
Down through the ages, past the kingdoms four—
Where are we standing? Look the waymarks o'er.

The leader, Kibiropa Soly, visited the three dominant churches in the area, asking whether they knew the song. No one did. Finally he went to the Adventist church, where after humming snatches to them, they sang the entire song. As a result, he and his wife and children were baptized.

On May 22, 1992, the small church, with room for 10 people, was dedicated. The next day 41 people were baptized, with 96 joining the baptismal class—among them three leaders of Nako and Kibiropa's former church!

The next baptism could bring the membership of this little church, which holds 10 people, up to 144! Please pray that not one of this "special number" will be missing! And while you're praying, take another moment to ask God's leading in providing the group a church home 15 times the size they have!

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"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Lamentations 1-5.

MEMORY TEXT: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22, 23).

KEY QUESTION: Why is the faithfulness of God such an important truth to us, particularly now as we face the climactic events of these last days?

INTRODUCTION TO LAMENTATIONS. Because the book of Lamentations describes the horrors of the siege and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C., it is thought to have been written shortly after those events. The Hebrew text does not identify Jeremiah as the author, but traditionally both Jews and Christians have believed that he was. (See *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 461-463.)

Each chapter of Lamentations uses a specific Hebrew literary device to help get its message across to the reader. Each chapter forms a complete poem of 22 verses or sections. The first four chapters are acrostics; in the Hebrew each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet (A, B, C, etc.). Chapter 3 has 66 verses in 22 sections. Each section contains a triplet of verses, each verse beginning with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet (AAA, BBB, CCC, etc.). By vividly lamenting Jerusalem's destruction, Jeremiah tried to inspire the survivors to trust in God. The book calls us to fellowship with God as we face the events of the last days.

WIDOWHOOD (Lamentations 1).

The first four chapters of Lamentations are separate poems written in a specific Hebrew meter as elegies (funeral songs, or poems of mourning). The last chapter is a prayer. The poems reflect the national despair in the wake of the collapse of Judah and the desolation of Jerusalem and the temple. "Yet their message is not without hope. Through the picture of desolation runs a thread of expectation that the Lord will forgive and relieve the sufferings of His people."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 544.

Under what figure is Jerusalem/Judah depicted? Who were her lovers and friends? Lam. 1:1-7.

Widowhood can be a difficult lot for women. In biblical times it was especially so. Poverty usually pressed widows in their struggle to survive. Jerusalem is personified as a widow. The emphasis is not on her poverty, however, but on her desolation and misery as a conquered people, her abandonment by those nations she once thought to be her confidants.

**Consider these emphases in Jeremiah's first elegy:
Lam. 1:8, 9—The real reason for Jerusalem's widowhood.**

Lam. 1:10, 11—The center of the nation's religious life and its economic prosperity have been destroyed.

Lam. 1:12-20—Jeremiah acknowledges that Judah's sins have caused their suffering.

Lam. 1:21, 22—Jeremiah prays that Judah's enemies will be punished for their cruelty.

Judah's experience after the destruction of Jerusalem foreshadowed the experience of God's professed people after the end-time close of probation. There will be two classes of professed believers, as there were among the survivors in Israel: (1) the sealed, who are true to God (Rev. 7:1-3; 14:1-5); (2) those who receive the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:16, 17; compare 9:4). As God sustained the remnants of His people, whether in Palestine or in captivity, so He will protect and support His sealed people in the end-time. Even though deprived of normal earthly support, they trust in the Lord to protect them from spiritual and physical enemies.

THE UNFAITHFUL FORSAKEN (Lamentations 2).

In the second elegy, who is said to have attacked Judah?
Lam. 2:1-9.

While the first poem centers on Judah's desolations—like a widow in mourning—the second depicts God as a hostile warrior attacking her strongholds. "The Lord has become like an enemy, he has destroyed Israel" (verse 5, RSV). He has decimated her people, rulers, and armies (verses 2-4). The Lord has disowned His temple and laid it in ruins, its services and ritual are ended (verses 6, 7). He has laid the city's walls in ruins (verses 8, 9).

This passage exemplifies an often misunderstood Hebrew thought pattern. Since God is always regarded as the ultimate authority, He is sometimes said to do the things that in reality He simply does not prevent. Judah had broken covenant with the Lord, and He withdrew His blessing and protection.

Jeremiah's lament continues:

Lam. 2:10-13—Elders, maidens, and mothers with babies die of starvation or are destroyed.

Lam. 2:14-22—Because the people have accepted the teachings and predictions of false prophets, "the Lord has done what he purposed" (verse 17, RSV). National apostasy has led to national ruin.

Note that those who today reject God's love and law will be subject to judgments similar to those suffered by Judah (Rev. 15:5-8; 16:1-21).

"Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose. The whole world will be involved in ruin more terrible than that which came upon Jerusalem of old [A.D. 70]."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 614.

"Those professed Christians who come up to that last fearful conflict unprepared will, in their despair, confess their sins in words of burning anguish, while the wicked exult over their distress. These confessions are of the same character as was that of Esau or of Judas. Those who make them, lament the *result* of transgression, but not its guilt."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 620.

GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE FOR THE REPENTANT
(Lamentations 3).

In the third elegy, Jeremiah personifies Judah. The sufferings of his people are identified as his sufferings (Lam. 3:1-20). Though God is just and must discipline His sinful people, this central poem emphasizes His compassion and desire to save.

Why does the unchangeableness of God provide a basis of hope for the sinner? Lam. 3:21-24 (compare James 1:17).

The Creator certainly is not capricious, or moral confusion would overwhelm the human family. The prodigal son determined to return home because he knew his father's love toward him would never vary (Luke 15:11-32). The hope of Judah—and of every penitent sinner—lies in the fundamental truth that God is faithful to His principles. Although the seas of human sin and transgression surge against Him, they cannot erode His mercies toward those who put their trust in Him.

What was the divine purpose in placing Judah under the yoke of Babylon for an extensive period of time? Lam. 3:25-30.

"None who receive God's word are exempt from difficulty and trial; but when affliction comes, the true Christian does not become restless, distrustful, or despondent. Though we cannot see the definite outcome of affairs, or discern the purpose of God's providences, we are not to cast away our confidence. Remembering the tender mercies of the Lord, we should cast our care upon Him, and with patience wait for His salvation. Through conflict the spiritual life is strengthened. Trials well borne will develop steadfastness of character, and precious spiritual graces. The perfect fruit of faith, meekness, and love often matures best amid storm-clouds and darkness."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 60, 61.

What encouraging promise does the prophet hold out to the suffering exiles? Lam. 3:31-33. Despite their suffering (verses 45-54), what does he urge them to do (verses 40-44)? How will the Lord repay the enemies of His people? Lam. 3:55-66.

SUFFERING FOLLOWED BY DELIVERANCE (Lamentations 4).

Note the major emphases in Jeremiah's fourth poem:

Lam. 4:1-12—Famine conditions and forced cannibalism of the siege and final destruction of the city.

Lam. 4:13-16—Retribution was suffered by false religious leaders.

Lam. 4:17-20—All external help was withdrawn.

Lam. 4:21, 22—The unrepentant enemies of God's people are punished. But the penitent are delivered from exile.

The nation was shamed before its enemies (Lam. 4:1-12). They had once thought of themselves as God's holy people, as fine gold and precious stones, reflecting God's character in contrast with the base metal of the surrounding pagans. But as apostates, they gave the lie to God's character; their enemies saw through the sham and regarded them as worthless clay pots. Some, like Daniel, Ezekiel, and their companions, remained shining lights—pointing their captors to the true God; but the experience of many dimmed in the moral darkness of the Chaldean Empire.

How does the Lord plan to deliver His end-time people from the world's greatest tribulation? Dan. 12:1-3; Matt. 24:15-22; Rev. 18:4; 19:7, 8.

Protection in the great time of trouble. "The people of God will not be free from suffering; but while persecuted and distressed, while they endure privation and suffer for want of food they will not be left to perish. That God who cared for Elijah will not pass by one of His self-sacrificing children. He who numbers the hairs of their head will care for them, and in time of famine they shall be satisfied. While the wicked are dying from hunger and pestilence, angels will shield the righteous and supply their wants. . . .

"Could men see with heavenly vision, they would behold companies of angels that excel in strength stationed about those who have kept the word of Christ's patience. With sympathizing tenderness, angels have witnessed their distress and heard their prayers."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 629, 630.

TOTAL DEPENDENCE UPON GOD (Lamentations 5).

Jewish suffering did not end with the fall of the city. What kind of conditions did the people face following the Babylonian conquest? Lam. 5:1-18.

With what earnest prayer in behalf of his people does Jeremiah close the fifth elegy? Lam. 5:1, 19-21.

God is eternal (Lam. 5:19), and the principles of righteousness—the components of His character—are everlasting. Babylon, the symbol of all human oppression, would fall, and so will every other entity that is opposed to God, including Satan, the power behind all forms of wickedness. The eternal God will have the last word in the great controversy between good and evil.

God does not abandon His people. Jeremiah's prayer for the conversion of backslidden Judah is directed to God, whose grace can change hearts. (See Eze. 36:26-28.)

"[God] alone can turn the wanderer unto himself. By the authority of his Law, by the winning, melting power of his gospel, by the sweet constraint of his Spirit, he alone can transform the heart, reverse the steps, and renew the olden days of those who have transgressed but have now at length sought his favour and forgiveness."—J. R. Thompson, "Homilies by Various Authors," *Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 26, p. 89.

How do we prepare for the great time of trouble immediately ahead for end-time humankind? Rev. 3:2, 5, 11, 12, 18-21.

"Had not Jacob previously repented of his sin in obtaining the birthright by fraud, God would not have heard his prayer and mercifully preserved his life. So, in the time of trouble, if the people of God had unconfessed sins to appear before them while tortured with fear and anguish, they would be overwhelmed; despair would cut off their faith, and they could not have confidence to plead with God for deliverance. . . .

"All who endeavor to excuse or conceal their sins, and permit them to remain upon the books of heaven, unconfessed and unforgiven, will be overcome by Satan."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 620.

FURTHER STUDY: Study Jacob's night of wrestling as an example of the suffering of God's penitent people during the great last-day time of trouble: Gen. 32:24-30. Read "The Time of Trouble" in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 613-634.

"As Satan influenced Esau to march against Jacob, so he will stir up the wicked to destroy God's people in the time of trouble. And as he accused Jacob, he will urge his accusations against the people of God. He numbers the world as his subjects; but the little company who keep the commandments of God are resisting his supremacy. If he could blot them from the earth, his triumph would be complete. He sees that holy angels are guarding them, and he infers that their sins have been pardoned; but he does not know that their cases have been decided in the sanctuary above."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 618.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. God's faithfulness, His unchangeableness, is a truth that is affirmed many times in the Bible. What is it that causes Him at times to appear otherwise to us?
2. What is the "unpardonable sin"? How does this condition develop? (Compare Jeremiah 44 with Matt. 12:22-37.)
3. Lamentations is essentially a book of mourning. When is mourning and sorrow over a sinful past a good thing? When is it not good? (See Matt. 5:4; 2 Cor. 7:9-11.)
4. In the introduction to this quarterly, we urged you to notice the parallels between the lives of Jeremiah and Christ. Take some time to reflect upon these parallels or to think of others you may not have thought of before. How does *your* life parallel with Jesus'?

SUMMARY: The blow—predicted as early as the prophets Amos (767-753 B.C.) and Micah (740-700 B.C.)—finally fell upon Jerusalem and Judah (586 B.C.). The victorious arms of the Chaldeans swept everything before them. The book of Lamentations expresses the heart sorrow and penitence of many Jews. Just so, in the great last-day time of trouble, truly penitent believers will survive the calamities that will envelop the impenitent. Why? Because the Lord is their portion, and they hope in Him. (See Lam. 3:24, 25.)

Leaders Led the Way

Janet Leigh Kangas

The Adventist movement was begun through severe sacrifice on the part of its leaders. Here are some examples.

Rather than pay for a berth in which to sleep on the trains, W. A. Spicer, who held four General Conference posts, including the presidency, would sit up night after night in order to save the Lord's money. He did his own laundry in his cheap hotel rooms when traveling. Frequently a bag of peanuts lasted him all day, keeping food expenses to a minimum. On several occasions he refused to draw his salary for weeks so that the amount saved would be available for pressing calls from mission stations when needed.

J. N. Loughborough and the Whites in 1867 asked public forgiveness for selfishly spending money on photographs of themselves.

Edward and Victor Thomann, leaders in Chile, were reduced to a pair of shoes between them, which the brothers took turns wearing. One went out canvassing, while the other stayed home to pray.

When Mary Loughborough requested money from John to buy some thread and matches, John gave her a silver three-cent piece and asked her to purchase only one cent's worth of each and bring him back the change so that he would not be completely out of cash.

Ellen White wrote, "It is very easy to multiply hotel bills and railroad fares, expenses that might be avoided or very much lessened. We have passed over the road to and from California twelve times, and have not expended one dollar for meals at the restaurants or in the attached dining car. We eat our meals from our lunch baskets. After being three days out, the food becomes quite stale, but a little milk or warm gruel supplies our lack."

One winter's pay for John Loughborough on the gospel circuit in 1857 was three ten-pound maple-sugar cakes, ten bushels of wheat, five bushels of apples, five bushels of potatoes, a peck of beans . . . and \$4 cash.



"The early members were not outsacrificed by their leaders. Our pioneers, laity and leaders united, gave by one standard: everything they could. Proportionate sacrifice did not seem to be part of their thinking."

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A SIMPLE

Carpenter

CHANGED
THE
WORLD . . .

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TAILORS, COOKS,
ELECTRICIANS AND
YOUR OFFERINGS**

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Secondary Goal

JUNE 25, 1994

Your Offerings At Work

Lessons for Third Quarter, 1994

Sabbath School members who have not received a copy of the adult Sabbath School lessons for the third quarter of 1994 may study the following outline of the first two lessons. The title of the series is "Humiliation and Exaltation of Jesus." The lessons cover the books of Philippians and Colossians.

Lesson 1: How Will Christ Finish What He Began?

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Philippians 1:1-11.

MEMORY TEXT: Philippians 1:6

KEY THOUGHT: Paul rejoices with the Philippians in their faith and love and focuses on the spiritual goals that Christ upholds to Christians who are awaiting His second advent.

OUTLINE:

Sunday: Saints Have Grace and Peace (Phil. 1:1, 2, 7).

Monday: "It's Not Over Till It's Over" (Phil. 1:3-6).

Tuesday: Growth Preceeds Victory (Phil. 1:8, 9).

Wednesday: The Goal Is Attainable (Phil. 1:10).

Thursday: The Reward for Seekers (Phil. 1:11).

Lesson 2: Jesus, Our Friend

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Philippians 1:12-30.

MEMORY TEXT: Philippians 1:21

KEY THOUGHT: Christ will be exalted in the lives and work of His faithful servants, despite the opposition they face and the persecution that, at times, they must endure.

OUTLINE:

Sunday: Bonds for Christ (Phil. 1:12-14).

Monday: Christ, Regardless (Phil. 1:15-18).

Tuesday: Christ Magnified (Phil. 1:19, 20).

Wednesday: "To Live Is Christ" (Phil. 1:21-26).

Thursday: Loyalty to Christ (Phil. 1:27-30).

Lessons in Braille

The regular Adult Sabbath School Lessons are available free each month in Braille and 16 2/3 rpm records to blind and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact the Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506.



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