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The mind, someone said, is never satisfied, never. That’s because it faces a cruel paradox: the mind, which can contemplate the eternal, is composed of matter that isn’t eternal—and, worst of all, the mind knows that it is not eternal. Like chickens and oysters, we are going to die. The difference, however, is that chickens and oysters don’t know it. We do, and that realization causes us a great deal of anguish and suffering.

How did we get into this mess? The answer is, of course, one word: sin. Sin leads to death. Humans sin; therefore, humans die. It doesn’t get simpler than that.

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12, NRSV).

Yes, humans die. And here’s the rub: we were never supposed to. We were originally created for eternal life. The plan, from the start, was that we would live forever. Death, then, is an intruder—the most unnatural of all acts. We’re so accustomed to death that we take it for granted; we just accept it as being a “part of life.”

Death as a part of life? If that sounds absurd and paradoxical, it’s because it is. Death is the negation of life, not an aspect of it.

It is in this context that we come to this quarter’s lesson. Perhaps it can be best expressed by the famous quote, in which Ellen G. White writes that the great theme...
of the Bible is “the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 109.

And what is it that God does for us that we don’t have the power to do for ourselves? Of course, He saves us from the most unnatural of acts, death—the eternal death that would be ours were it not for God’s grace as revealed in the plan of salvation. In other words, it’s the call to us, both as individuals and as a church, to “seek the Lord and live” (*Amos 5:6, NIV*).

The theme we are going to study, then, is that of God doing for us what we can never do for ourselves, which is to give us the gift of life—eternal life in Jesus. We are, however, going to explore it in a place where we don’t often go, the “Minor Prophets,” the twelve short books that end the Old Testament. These prophets have been dubbed “the Minor Prophets,” not because they are of less importance than the Major ones but because their books are much shorter than those written by the other Old Testament writers.

Indeed, whether through Hosea’s marriage to an unfaithful wife, or Jonah’s attempt to flee God’s prophetic call, or Zechariah’s amazing vision of Joshua and the angel (and all the others as well), the Minor Prophets together have a powerful message, one that comes through again and again. The message is about God’s grace toward undeserving sinners. The message is that God wants to save us from our sins, to save us from the devastation that sin, rebellion, and disobedience bring. Again and again in these books we see the Lord pleading with His people to repent, to put away their sins, to return unto Him, and to find life not death, salvation not damnation, hope not despair.

There is nothing “minor” about that theme. It’s present truth—God’s message to us today just as it was a message to those who lived in the time of these twelve writers who, though long gone, still speak.

The question is, Will we listen? The answer is, We must, for it is a matter of life and death.

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**The Minor Prophets together have a powerful message, one that comes through again and again, [which is] . . . about God’s grace toward undeserving sinners.**
How to Use
This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Apply: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Create: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Hos. 1:1–3; Ezek. 4:1–6; Hos. 2:12–15, 18; 4:1–3; James 5:1–7; Rev. 14:6–12.

Memory Text: “I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’” “You are my people”; and they will say, “You are my God.”” (Hosea 2:23, NIV).

Key Thought: Even amid spiritual adultery and divine judgment, God’s love for His people never wavers.

The prophet Hosea ministered at the close of a very prosperous period in Israel’s history, just before the fall of the nation to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. At that time, God’s chosen people no longer worshiped the Lord alone but also served Baal, a Canaanite god.

Placed at the head of the Minor Prophets, Hosea’s book addresses the central question of the prophetic proclamation during this time of apostasy: Does God still love Israel, despite the spiritual harlotry? Does He still have a purpose for them despite their sins and the coming judgment?

Hosea’s personal story and prophecy are inseparably tied into his book. Just as the prophet forgave his unfaithful wife and was willing to take her back, God is willing to do the same for His people.

What can we learn from the experience of Hosea and the Lord’s way of dealing with wayward Israel?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 6.
A Strange Command

“When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, ‘Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord.’ So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son” (Hos. 1:2, 3, NIV).

For centuries, students of the Bible have debated the nature of this command, asking questions such as: Was Gomer a prostitute or just an unfaithful spouse? Was she immoral before her marriage to Hosea, or did she become unfaithful afterward?

We do not know for certain. One thing, however, is sure: when the Lord spoke to Hosea and through him, He wanted to turn people’s attention from Hosea’s story to God’s love story with Israel. Because Gomer was an Israelite, the story of her marriage to the prophet blends with the story of God’s covenant with Israel.

There are important parallels between Hosea’s story and God’s experience with Israel. On a human level, Gomer was adulterous against Hosea; on the spiritual level, Israel was unfaithful to God. Just as Gomer’s immorality hurt her husband’s heart, so Israel’s idolatry grieved the great heart of God. Hosea was called to endure a broken heart and a broken marriage. He must have suffered public indignation and disgrace. Yet, the more he experienced Gomer’s unfaithfulness, the deeper was his understanding of God’s pain and frustration with Israel.

God often asked other prophets to do something beyond preaching. Read the following passages and explain how the prophets’ actions symbolized God’s dealings with His people. Isa. 20:1–6, Jer. 27:1–7, Ezek. 4:1–6.

What kind of witness for the Lord are your words and your actions? What is it in your life that reveals not simply that you are a good person but that you are a follower of Jesus?
Spiritual Adultery

When Hosea’s wife, Gomer, committed adultery against him, he suffered the agony of betrayal, humiliation, and shame. To the neighbors and friends who saw his pain, Hosea delivered a divine message through his words and actions: Israel, God’s wife, was just like Gomer. The chosen people were committing spiritual adultery.

The prophet Jeremiah compared God’s unfaithful people to “a prostitute” who lived with many lovers despite everything that God provided for them (Jer. 3:1, NIV). In a similar way, the prophet Ezekiel called idolatrous Israel “an adulterous wife” who had departed from her true husband (Ezek. 16:32, NKJV). For this reason, idolatry in the Bible is viewed as spiritual adultery.

Read Hosea 2:8–13. What warning is given here? In what ways could we, as Seventh-day Adventists, be in danger of doing the same thing in principle?

_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

The expression “grain, new wine and oil” also is used in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut. 7:12–14, NIV) to describe Israel’s staple produce that people enjoyed in abundance in accordance with God’s promises as given through Moses. In Hosea’s time, the people were so ungrateful to God, so wrapped up in the world around them, that they were presenting these gifts, originally given them by God, to their false idols. What a warning this should be to all of us that the gifts we have been given should be used in the service of the Lord and not in ways that never were intended for them (Matt. 6:24).

“How does God regard our ingratitude and lack of appreciation for his blessings? When we see one slight or misuse our gifts, our hearts and hands are closed against him. But those who received God’s merciful gifts day after day, and year after year, misapply his bounties, and neglect the souls for whom Christ has given his life. The means which he has lent them to sustain his cause and build up his kingdom are invested in houses and lands, lavished on pride and self-indulgence, and the Giver is forgotten.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 7, 1886.

Think about how easy it is to take the gifts given you by God and to use them selfishly, or even in an idolatrous manner. What are practical ways of preventing this sin in our lives?
A Promise of Restoration

Read Hosea 2. What is God’s basic message to His people here? How is the gospel revealed in this chapter?

Hosea’s message presents the profound truth of God’s steadfast love for an undeserving people. Hosea 2 contains a lengthy speech by the Lord about Israel’s apostasy, which is then contrasted with God’s unfailing love for His people. After the punishment, the husband (God) will lead the wife (Israel) on a trip to the wilderness, where they will be remarried. Thus, the chapter ends with a portrayal of a future time beyond the judgment when God will woo Israel to love Him as before (Hos. 2:12–15). The wild animals of the field will no longer devour the wife’s vines and fig trees but will become partners in the new covenant (Hos. 2:18). In addition, all the children will be renamed, revealing again God’s willingness to heal and forgive the past transgressions of His people.

God freely offers to pardon our sins. How much does forgiveness cost God? What was the personal cost of this lesson to Hosea? Hos. 3:1, 2.

Growing up as a male in Israel, Hosea was destined to enjoy a privileged status in that patriarchal society. But this privilege came with a great responsibility. A man in ancient Israel would have had to make a tremendous effort to forgive and take back an unfaithful wife, not to mention accept as his own the children who may have been fathered by another man. To stand by his wife and her children and thus endure social rejection would have to have been one of the most difficult of life’s experiences.

Hosea, however, “bought” her back. God, in a sense, did the same thing for the human race, but the cost was the death of Jesus on the cross. Only by looking at the Cross, then, can we get a much clearer picture of what it cost God to buy us back from the ruin that sin has caused.
The Case Against Israel

Hosea 4:1–3 presents God as one who brings a charge or a legal dispute (Hebrew ṭīḇ) against Israel. The chosen nation stands guilty before her God because the people have failed to live up to the terms of the covenant. Truth, mercy, and the knowledge of God were to have been qualities of Israel’s unique relationship with Him. According to Hosea 2:18–20, these are gifts that God bestows on His people at the renewal of the covenant.

Due to sin, however, Israel’s life was devoid of these gifts of grace. The crimes listed by Hosea had brought the nation to the brink of anarchy. The religious leaders, priest and prophet alike, shared responsibility in the current deterioration of Israel’s life and were held accountable for it. Theirs was a heavy responsibility. If they did not confront the abuses and did not condemn the acts of injustice, they themselves would be condemned by God.

However, due to the dry climate, rains in the land of Israel were a matter of life and death. The Israelites came to believe that their blessings, such as life-giving rain, were coming from Baal. This responsibility was made even heavier by the fact that in the Old Testament, idol worship was considered to be the most serious sin because it denied the role of the Lord God in the lives of the nation and the individual. Thus, it was a serious problem when they built shrines to foreign gods and began mixing immorality with worship.

At the same time, social injustice was rife in the land. The rich classes in Israel exploited the peasants in order to be able to pay tribute to Assyria. Many resorted to fraud and cheating (Hos. 12:7, 8). It was through this injustice that the formerly peaceful and prosperous period led to a time of political and social turbulence. The country was at the brink of total chaos.

“Poor rich men, professing to serve God, are objects of pity. While they profess to know God, in works they deny Him. How great is the darkness of such! They profess faith in the truth, but their works do not correspond with their profession. The love of riches makes men selfish, exacting, and overbearing. Wealth is power; and frequently the love of it depraves and paralyzes all that is noble and godlike in man.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 682.

Read James 5:1–7. How do these words fit in with present truth as expressed in the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12? Whatever our financial position, how can we protect ourselves from the dangers that money always presents to the followers of Christ?
A Call to Repentance

“‘And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent’” (John 17:3, NKJV).

The name Hosea in Hebrew means “the Lord saves” and is related to the names Joshua, Isaiah, and even Jesus. The prophet calls the people to reject sin and find refuge in their Lord God because He is their Creator and Redeemer. The purpose of the divine judgment was to remind the sinners that their life and strength come from the One to whom they must return. Thus, even amid all the warnings and pronouncements of judgment, Hosea’s book presents the themes of both human repentance and divine forgiveness.

The prophet urges the nation, which was perishing in sin “‘for lack of knowledge’” (Hos. 4:6, NKJV), to press on to know God fully and live in harmony with His eternal principles. It was the people’s lack of knowledge, the knowledge of God, that led them to rebellion and eventually resulted in judgment.

In contrast, through faith and obedience the people could come to know the Lord for themselves. This knowledge can be close and intimate too. That is precisely why, time and again, marriage is a symbol of the kind of relationship that the Lord wants with us.

That is also why the Christian life consists primarily of a relationship with the living God. That is why the Lord calls people to know Him and follow His will for their entire lives.

The sin problem brought a fearful separation between God and humanity. But, through the death of Jesus on the cross, a way has been made so that each one of us can have a close walk with the Lord. We can, indeed, know Him for ourselves.

What is the difference between our knowing about God versus our knowing God? How is this difference reflected in our everyday living? If someone were to ask you, How can I come to know God, what would you answer? What do the following passages teach about the importance of “knowing the Lord”?

Exod. 33:12, 13 ____________________________________________

Jer. 9:23, 24 _______________________________________________

Dan. 11:32 ________________________________________________

1 John 2:4 ________________________________________________
**Further Study:** “As time went by, Hosea became aware of the fact that his personal fate was a mirror of the divine pathos, that his sorrow echoed the sorrow of God. In this fellow suffering as an act of sympathy with the divine pathos the prophet probably saw the meaning of the marriage which he had contracted at the divine behest. . . .

“Only by living through in his own life what the divine Consort of Israel experienced, was the prophet able to attain sympathy for the divine situation. The marriage was a lesson, an illustration, rather than a symbol or a sacrament.”—Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Mass.: Prince Press, 2001), p. 56.

“In symbolic language Hosea set before the ten tribes God’s plan of restoring to every penitent soul who would unite with His church on earth, the blessings granted Israel in the days of their loyalty to Him in the Promised Land. Referring to Israel as one to whom He longed to show mercy, the Lord declared, ‘I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.’”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 298.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. We tend to think of idolatry as the act of bowing down to statues. In what ways can idolatry be something that is much more subtle and deceptive than that?

2. In class, further explore this idea of what it means to know God. If you say that you “know the Lord,” what do you mean by that? How is this knowledge of God acquired?

3. Some ancient theologians argued that God is impassible, that is, He does not experience pain or pleasure due to the actions of other beings, such as humans. What might cause people to argue this position? Why do we, however, reject it?

4. Dwell more on the fact that our redemption is so costly. What does that tell us about what our worth is to God?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Hosea 2:23

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize God’s intolerance toward sin and His love for His people.
Feel: Foster the feeling of love toward sinners as God loves them.
Do: Submit to God’s plan and praise Him for His acceptance of us.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: God Cannot Tolerate Stubborn Disobedience

A. Why does God ask Hosea to marry Gomer, a promiscuous woman?
B. What does his marriage say about the condition of Israel before their exile to Assyria?
C. How did God, through the example of Hosea, refocus Israel on the essentials of real relationships in life?

II. Feel: God’s Unselfish and Unconditional Love

A. What does God’s condescension to our human level of understanding and behavior say about His love?
B. Why does God love people so much? Why is God concerned about humans?
C. How does it make you feel to know that the scattered ones will be gathered and planted again, the unloved will be loved again, and those who are called not-His-people will be adopted as His children?

III. Do: God’s Grace Reverses the Situation

A. Why is Hosea’s behavior of forgiveness toward a wayward wife so disturbing and important to our church today?
B. How do God’s gracious actions toward sinners help you to treat those who err against or around you?

Summary: When we return to God as a response to His calling of love, He forgives us, changes our status, blesses, and leads us into new lives.
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Hosea 3:1–3*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God is like a loving and caring husband, and His people are His bride. This husband-wife relationship is dramatized in the life of Hosea, God’s prophet, whom God asked to marry a promiscuous woman. God’s deep, forgiving, tender, and persistent love is a model of faithfulness for our love relationship with God and our spouses.

**Just for Teachers:** Our week’s lesson opens the study for this quarter on the topic of the twelve Minor Prophets of the Old Testament. Even though they are called “minor,” these twelve prophets are major. The distinction “minor” refers only to the relatively short length of their books in comparison to the larger books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

The term “the Twelve” was mentioned for the first time in the second century before Christ (around 180 B.C.) in an apocryphal book *Ecclesiasticus* (*Sirach* 49:10). Josephus was also aware of the term (*Against Apion*, 1.8.3). It is interesting that each book of the Twelve is quoted at least once in the New Testament (the most cited prophet is Zechariah). Pay close attention to the meaning of the names of these minor prophets, because each name conveys, in sum, the message that is expanded on and explained in each prophet’s respective book.

**Opening Discussion:** If you had the chance to change your name, which name would you choose? Which personality from the past or present would you like to carry? If you prefer to have several names, instead of just one, which ones would you choose? Why do people appreciate it when you call them by name? What is so precious and important about names? What do they reveal about us? How, if at all, is our character defined by our names? How do biblical names function in comparison to ours?

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Why do God’s people need prophets? What is so specific and irreplaceable about their role?

2. Why is the prophetic voice often disturbing? In what ways are prophetic messages overall positive or negative? How do we reconcile in our minds
that the messages of doom and condemnation, on the one hand, and the mes-
sages of hope and restoration, on the other, are expressed in the same book?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Hosea is an eighth-century B.C. prophet whose ministry lasted several decades (Hos. 1:1). He was the only prophet who came from the Northern Kingdom. Sent by God to deliver His message of repentance to that kingdom, it was his appointed task to help to divert the tragedy of the Assyrian captivity and prevent the fall of Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom (722 B.C.). If the leaders and the people had listened to God, they would have been spared those calamities and a national and personal tragedy.

Prophets were not only spokespersons for God; sometimes they were asked to enact their message as seen in Isaiah (Isa. 20:2–4), Micah (Mic. 1:8), or Ezekiel, who performed 12 symbolic actions (Ezek. 3:26, 27; 4:1–3; 4:4, 5; 4:6–8; 4:9–17; 5:1–4; 12:1–6; 12:17–20; 21:6, 7; 21:18–23; 24:15–26; 37:15–23). The purpose of these sign-actions was to shake people out of their stubbornness, lead them to new decisions for God and His truth, and guide them away from foreign gods, immorality, and unethical behavior.

I. Hosea’s Marriage (Review Hosea 1–3 with your class.)

The Lord asked Hosea to enact His message in an extremely unusual, dramatic, and spectacular way. Even though scholars’ opinions vary regarding some aspects of the interpretation of Hosea 1–3, the best available evidence leads to the following interpretation. The prophet had to marry Gomer, a promiscuous woman who already had children from her previous illicit relationships (Hos. 1:2). The reason is given: “The land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord” (NIV). Thus, Hosea’s family life became a life parable of the Lord’s relationship with Israel.

Hosea had three children with his wife, Gomer. The names of these children carry a message too. The firstborn was a son, Jezreel (meaning “God Scatters”), followed by a girl named Lo-Ruhamah (meaning “Not Loved”), and finally another son Lo-Ammi (meaning “Not My People”). God Himself chose these strange names. Every time that Hosea revealed his children’s names to the people, they must have stopped to think, which was, after all, God’s intention. The names were a strong message to them that could not be easily overlooked.
Consider This: How did Hosea’s marriage serve as a living parable of God’s relationship with Israel? What impact should the names of Hosea’s children have exerted on the hearts and minds of the people of Israel?

II. Hosea’s Marriage in Crisis (Review Hosea 3:2, 3 with your class.)

The event described in chapter 3 chronologically follows the experience described in chapter 1. Gomer should have been enormously grateful to Hosea for his acceptance and forgiveness of her, for elevating her to the status of a legal wife, as well as for his providing for the family. Instead of embracing his unselfish love, she engaged, even as a married woman, in unfaithfulness. In spite of her repeated adultery, Hosea was a caring husband and did not divorce Gomer or expose her to the severe punishments applicable at that time for unfaithfulness (one of which was death). Instead, he showed her mercy and love. He redeemed her by paying for her freedom, an equivalent of 30 shekels (half in money and half in goods; see Hos. 3:2; compare with 2 Kings 7:1, 16, 18). He called her gently back: “‘You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you’” (Hos. 3:3, NIV).

Discussion Questions: How did Hosea treat Gomer, despite her faithlessness? What did the law say that she deserved instead? How does Hosea’s treatment of Gomer reveal God’s redemptive love for Israel? In this regard, discuss with your class Christ’s ultimate sacrifice of love on our behalf, a sacrifice that remains the model for husbands and the way in which they should unselfishly love their wives (Eph. 5:25).

III. God’s Love Is Incomprehensible (Review Hosea 2:7 with your class.)

As Gomer pursued her lovers and committed adultery, so Israel committed adultery against God by following Baal’s fertility cults and many other foreign gods (Hos. 2:7). God provided everything for His people, and, again and again, He forgave and wooed Israel back to Himself. He commanded Hosea to love Gomer “as the LORD loves the Israelites” (Hos. 3:1, NIV). God hoped that His love relationship for His wife Israel would lead her to a change of attitude, repentance, full devotion, and faithfulness: “‘I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now’” (Hos. 2:7, NIV). He longs to show His love to her: “‘I will betroth you to me forever, I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD’” (Hos. 2:19, 20, NIV).

God demonstrated His love for His people by changing the names of Hosea’s children. This is a powerful message and a complete change of status. Jezreel’s name was no longer “God scatters” but “I will plant.” Lo-Ruhamah would no
more be “Not Loved” but “I will show My love.” Finally, Lo-Ammi would no longer be “Not My People,” but “You are My people.” How incredible is God’s love for His people! The only proper response to such overwhelming love of the Lord, our true Husband, is “You are my God.” *(Study carefully Hos. 2:23, NIV.)*

**Consider This:** How do the changes of the names of Hosea’s children reflect a change in status? According to Revelation 2:17, God will give each of His followers a new name. What would you like your new name to reflect?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** In our promiscuous society, the lack of faithfulness to God and to our spouses is a tremendous problem. Help your class to understand the importance of healthy relationships and ways in which to cultivate them.

**Application Questions:**

1. In what ways can we practice our true devotion to our God, and how can we show it in practical ways in our families?

2. What are the things and issues in our lives today that distract us from being completely devoted to God and to our spouses?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Hosea 1–3 is a parable of our life. God’s faithfulness, care, and love must be seen vividly in it. Help your class to see this picture of God in this way.

**Activities:**

1. Ask your class to write a short script on the message of Hosea 1–3. As much as possible, include all the characters of the story and incorporate God’s perspective and voice. If applicable, have the youth group in your church act out the play.

2. Discuss with the class what it means to each member that God promises, “I will plant,” “I will show My love,” and “You are My people.”
Lesson 2
*April 6–12
(Sabbath Afternoon)

Love and Judgment:
God’s Dilemma (Hosea)

Read for This Week’s Study: Hos. 7:11, 12; 10:11–13; Matt. 11:28–30; Rom. 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24; Hosea 14.

Memory Text: “But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always” (Hosea 12:6, NIV).

Key Thought: Hosea reveals more of God’s love for His wayward people.

A common way in which biblical authors talk about God’s love relationship with His people is by using metaphors. A metaphor conveys something profound about a lesser-known subject through something that is already known or familiar. Metaphors are symbols used to explain something other than themselves.

The two most commonly used biblical metaphors regarding God’s relationship with His people are husband-wife and parent-child metaphors. Last week we looked at the husband-wife metaphor. This week we will look into a few more of Hosea’s metaphors, the most dominant of which is the parent-child one.

Hosea used metaphors for the same reasons that Jesus taught in parables: first, to explain truths about God through the familiar things of life; second, to impress on people’s minds important spiritual principles that could be applied to everyday existence.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 13.
Easily Deceived and Senseless

“‘Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless—now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria. When they go, I will throw my net over them; I will pull them down like birds of the air. When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them’” (Hos. 7:11, 12, NIV). Read these verses in context. What warning is being given here? What principle can we take from these verses for ourselves?

Ephraim was the name of the younger son of Joseph. Because Ephraim was the name of the principal tribe of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the name is applied to the entire kingdom, just as the name Judah was applied to the kingdom in the south. In the above verses, Israel is compared to a senseless bird (compare Jer. 5:21), allowing itself to be an easy prey for the fowler’s net. In this context, her reliance on other nations for help was an act of rebellion against God.

Why? Because an alliance with the mighty Assyrian Empire or ambitious Egypt would require Israel to recognize the supremacy of the gods worshiped by those two superpowers (see also Isa. 52:4, Lam. 5:1–6). Going to them would mean, by necessity, turning away from the Lord. What Israel needed to do was return to the Lord, repent, obey His commandments, and put away its gods. That was their only hope, not political alliances with pagans.

“The very position of Palestine exposed it to invasion by these two ancient empires. . . . The much-coveted prize for which these powerful empires fought was this highway that connected the rich watersheds of the Nile and the Euphrates. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah were caught in this international counterplay and squeezed between the two rivals. In desperation, without spiritual trust in her God, Israel fatuously appealed first to the one and then to the other for a support that could only turn into a snare to her own national well-being.”
—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 908.

It is so easy to seek human aid for our problems instead of seeking the Lord, is it not? Of course, the Lord can use human agents in answer to our prayers. How can we be sure that, in desperate situations and in need of help, we do not make the same mistake that Israel did here? How can we use human aid without, by necessity, turning away from the Lord?
A Trained Heifer

Read Hosea 10:11–13. What message is the Lord giving to His people here? How do we understand the phrase, “until he comes and showers righteousness on you”? (NIV).

In Hosea 10, God’s child, Ephraim, is compared to a trained heifer who loves to thresh grain because she can eat as she threshes. Thus, instead of being productive, Israel’s existence has become self-centered. When God yokes Israel to work in the open fields as the nation should, righteousness and kindness grow instead.

In Bible times, the yoke was an instrument of service. Young beasts of burden were trained to be docile by working first on the threshing floor (Jer. 50:11). While yoked, they simply would tread out corn with their feet. At the next stage, they pulled a threshing sledge over the corn (2 Sam. 24:22, NIV). This type of work prepared them for the more disciplined task of plowing a furrow in a field (1 Kings 19:19, Jer. 4:3). God had a similar plan in His training of Israel. He would put a yoke on Ephraim’s fair neck to make him work hard in the plowing and breaking up of the soil.

In Hosea 10:12 the prophet presents what the Lord desires Israel to be through obedience to His word. In turn, righteousness and steadfast love are the gifts promised by God to His wife when the covenant is renewed (Hos. 2:19). If people sow this righteousness, they will reap kindness in return. Therefore, only by searching for the Lord and His will can Israel be delivered from the coming punishment. The door of mercy is still open for possible repentance on the part of God’s chosen people.

The admonition to sow righteousness concerns people-to-people relationships; the search for God concerns the relationship between God and His people. The breaking up of the soil represents spiritual and social reform and renewal. Thus, the Lord and His people will work together in a mutual relationship to bring blessings back to the land. The results will be a glorious blossoming that will fill the whole earth (Hos. 14:5–7).

Read Christ’s invitation to take His yoke upon ourselves (Matt. 11:28–30). How can learning from Christ to be “gentle and humble in heart” (NIV) help us to find rest for our souls?
A Toddling Son

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. . . . I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them” (Hos. 11:1, 3, NKJV).

In these verses, Hosea is saying that the Lord’s way is like the tender care of a new parent. Just as a parent tenderly and patiently teaches a child to walk, taking it up by its hands to prevent its fall, so the Lord has cared for Israel right from the beginning. God, who loves and forgives, is the heart of Hosea’s message. Even when He applies discipline, He is deeply compassionate. His anger can be terrifying, but His mercy is beyond comprehension.

Read Deuteronomy 8:5, Proverbs 13:24, Hebrews 12:6, and Revelation 3:19. What is the one point that these verses all have in common? What comfort can we draw from these texts?

Through Moses, God informed the Egyptian king that Israel was His special child (Exod. 4:22, 23). Although all the nations of the earth, including Egypt, were God’s sons and daughters, the Hebrew nation was selected to be God’s firstborn son with special privileges. But along with those privileges came responsibilities. In the wilderness the Lord carried His people in the same way in which “a father carries his son” (Deut. 1:31, NIV). At times He disciplined them just like “a man disciplines his son” (Deut. 8:5, NIV).

“All who in this world render true service to God or man receive a preparatory training in the school of sorrow. The weightier the trust and the higher the service, the closer is the test and the more severe the discipline.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 151.

There is no question that any parent who loves his children will discipline them, and always for their own good. If flawed and fallen humans do this, how much more so can we trust in God’s love for us, even during times of trial?

For many of us, the issue is not about trusting God’s discipline. Rather, the struggle is knowing how to interpret the trials that come our way. How do we know if what we are going through is, indeed, God teaching us in the “school of sorrow” or if it is something else? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.
Compassion Stronger Than Anger

“How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned over within Me, all My compassions are kindled. I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath” (Hos. 11:8, 9, NASB).

This passage serves as a window into God’s heart: will God hand His rebellious son over to be stoned to death as required by law (Deut. 21:18–21; see also Gen. 19:17–23)? What an amazing insight into both God’s own suffering due to human sin and His desire to save us.

Even though sinful Israel deserved total destruction, the Lord in His enduring mercy continues to love His people while striving for their repentance.

In Abraham’s time there were five cities situated in the Jordan Valley southeast of the Dead Sea (Gen. 14:8). Known as “the cities of the plain,” they were Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar. Of these, only Zoar was not destroyed. The names of the other four became proverbial for the total destruction that came upon them due to their wicked ways and unwillingness to repent (Deut. 29:23). It was to some of these cities that Hosea was referring in the above verses.

Hosea 11 teaches that God’s ways transcend those of sinful humanity. He will not let bitterness govern His decisions. God’s love seeks to bring healing, health, and restoration to His people. The purpose of divine discipline is to correct, amend, and reconcile, not to destroy and avenge. Many people, even professed Christians, do not understand that aspect of God; instead, they see Him as vengeful, angry, and just looking to find fault with them in order to punish them for their sins. Even worse, some believe that He burns the lost in hell for eternity. That, however, is not the picture of God presented here.

Read Romans 5:8, 1 Peter 2:24, and Galatians 3:13. How do these texts, even more than the ones we see in Hosea, reveal the extent of God’s love for humanity?
Healed, Loved, and Nurtured

Some ancient scholars viewed the Lord as harsh and unforgiving, as revealed in the Old Testament, but in contrast to Jesus, as revealed in the New. Why is that such a wrong conclusion? How does the message of Hosea 14 help to show just how wrong that conclusion is? What does this chapter reveal about God’s character and love for His people?

The last chapter of Hosea is a fitting climax to the message proclaimed by the prophet. It reaffirms the promise that God’s salvation will have the last word. The chapter opens with one more call for the people to turn away from all iniquity. In bidding the people to return to God, the prophet supplies the actual words that they should say in worship. Their request should be that God take away the guilt that made them stumble. They should also renounce their dependence on the other nations and totally reject idolatry. In Bible times no person was supposed to appear before the Lord empty-handed (Exod. 23:15). So, beyond bringing an animal sacrifice, the people are told to bring words of genuine repentance as their thanksgiving offering.

Then, following a penitential confession on the people’s part, God responds with a series of promises. The foremost of these is the healing of the people’s maladies by the divine Physician. God’s renewed relationship with Israel is likened to the dew that provides the only moisture available to flowers and trees during the long and dry summer season in Palestine. It is also linked to the olive tree, which is considered especially valuable, a sort of crown of the fruit trees. Its foliage provides shade and freshness, and its oil is used as food, skin lotion, and as fuel for lights. Additionally, the great cedars of Lebanon are considered the most useful of the large-growth trees in the lands of the Bible. Their highly prized lumber serves for the construction of temples and royal palaces (1 Kings 6:9, 10). The roots planted by God will produce such an abundance of fresh plants that Israel will become a garden full of blessings for the whole world.

Read the last verse of the chapter. What conditions are required for all these promises to be fulfilled? Why is it no different for us today, in our role as Seventh-day Adventists?
Further Study: Compare the following two quotations with the messages presented in Hosea 7–14.

“Through nature, through types and symbols, through patriarchs and prophets, God had spoken to the world. Lessons must be given to humanity in the language of humanity. . . . The principles of God’s government and the plan of redemption must be clearly defined. The lessons of the Old Testament must be fully set before men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 34.

“Through long, dark years when ruler after ruler stood up in bold defiance of Heaven and led Israel deeper and still deeper into idolatry, God sent message after message to His backslidden people. Through His prophets He gave them every opportunity to stay the tide of apostasy and to return to Him. . . . Never was the kingdom of Israel to be left without noble witnesses to the mighty power of God to save from sin. Even in the darkest hours some would remain true to their divine Ruler and in the midst of idolatry would live blameless in the sight of a holy God. These faithful ones were numbered among the goodly remnant through whom the eternal purpose of Jehovah was finally to be fulfilled.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 108.

Discussion Questions:

1. It has been suggested that through Hosea’s life and ministry, God’s word to Israel had in a sense “became flesh.” How is this idea only a small reflection of the great truth about the humanity of Jesus? See John 1:14.

2. Ancient Israel did not depart from God overnight. Instead, its apostasy was a gradual process. Prepare to share with your class members some of the ways in which one can remain faithful to God’s eternal principles in a constantly changing world.

3. Some people believe that the gospel message about God’s great love and salvation is presented clearly only in the New Testament and not in the Old. What is wrong with that idea?

4. In class, go over your answer to Tuesday’s final question.

5. The Old Testament was the Bible that Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul read. Look into the New Testament quotations from Hosea that are found in Matthew 9:13 and Romans 9:25, 26. How did Jesus and Paul use the gospel message in Hosea to proclaim truth to us?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Hosea 12:6

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize God’s covenant faithfulness toward His people despite their unfaithfulness. Understand that returning to God is a response to His initiative and is enabled by Him because only He Himself can heal our waywardness.

**Feel:** Acknowledge how the lack of the knowledge of God contributes to our destruction and how God’s healing is closely connected with a wholehearted return to God.

**Do:** Patiently wait for God and cultivate love with justice in his or her life.

**Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The Faithfulness of God Versus Our Unfaithfulness**

A How do God’s goodness and kindness lead us to repentance?

B Why can we return to God only with the help of His grace?

C In what way do you think Hosea was affected by the messages given to him?

**II. Feel: Love, Emotions, and Knowledge**

A In what ways can our sins make us aware of our need of healing?

B Why is the lack of the knowledge of God so destructive?

**III. Do: Love and Justice in Balance**

A Why is waiting for God so difficult for us today in our culture?

B What can we do in order to maintain a balance between love and justice?

C Is it better to err on the side of love or justice?

**Summary:** The right understanding of the character of God and His actions attracts people to return to Him and to emulate His faithfulness, love, and justice.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Hosea 14:1–4*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God wants to save His people, even though they neither recognize nor acknowledge His love. He, therefore, wants to make them aware of their destructive behavior and of His infinite and faithful love. He is their Husband, even though they choose to follow their own desires. He does everything possible to win back their trust and build a loving relationship with them, in spite of their pursuit of many lovers.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson should help members of your class to be aware that God’s love is greater than we can imagine (Eph. 3:20, 21). We cannot do anything to make Him love us more—or less. Nothing and no one can separate us from His love (Rom. 8:35–39).

**Opening Discussion:** After finishing his studies in the MDiv program at Andrews University, Pastor Ruimar DePaiva and his family went to the Pacific island of Palau to serve as missionaries. A terrible tragedy struck the family in December 2003. A robber came during the night into their house and attacked the eleven-year-old son, Larisson, who tried to defend himself. The fight awakened the father, who came to help, followed by the mother, Margareth. All were murdered by the man with a heavy wooden stick. Only Melissa (the ten-year-old daughter) survived, but she was horribly abused and then strangled. Early the next morning, she woke up, bloodied, in a canal in the woods. She crawled to the highway, stopped a car, and was taken to the hospital. Ruth DePaiva, the grandmother of Melissa, and mother of Ruimar, traveled to Palau to be with her granddaughter. During the funeral service, she learned that the mother of the murderer was attending. She invited her to come up, and then she said publicly: “We here are two mothers, grieving for our lost sons. We gave them our best, we hoped for the best, looked to their future, we educated them, but today we are both in pain. The DePaiva family is not blaming the Hirosi family. . . . I am sure the mother of Justin has prayed so many times for her son, and I am sure her heart hurts terribly. We will pray for her and for Justin.” She went to the prison and said to the murderer, Justin Hirosi: “I have to tell you two things: (1) You need Christ! and (2) I forgive you!”

What do you think? Is it right to forgive that which seems “unforgivable”? Discuss the reasons for your answer. What would be your
reaction in such a situation? Is forgiveness a weakness or a divine action? Explain.

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

I. The Miserable Spiritual Situation of God’s People *(Review Hosea 4:1, 2, 6 with your class.)*

Consider carefully Hosea’s texts that describe Israel’s weak spirituality and ungodliness. Mention the following charges of God against Israel:

‘There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed’ *(Hos. 4:1, 2, NIV)*;

‘my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge . . . you have ignored the law of your God’ *(Hos. 4:6, NIV)*;

‘they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful’ *(Hos. 4:7, NIV)*;

‘a spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God’ *(Hos. 4:12, NIV)*;

‘a people without understanding will come to ruin!’ *(Hos. 4:14, NIV)*;

‘a spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the Lord’ *(Hos. 5:4, NIV)*;

‘your love is like the morning mist’ *(Hos. 6:4)*;

‘they have broken the covenant—they were unfaithful to me’ *(Hos. 6:7, NIV)*;

‘they practice deceit, thieves break into houses, bandits rob in the streets; but they do not realize that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them’ *(Hos. 7:1, 2, NIV)*;

‘they are all adulterers’ *(Hos. 7:4, NIV)*;

‘none of them calls on me’ *(Hos. 7:7, NIV)*;

‘Israel’s arrogance testifies against him, . . . he does not return to the Lord his God or search for him’ *(Hos. 7:10, NIV)*;

‘they have rebelled against me’ *(Hos. 7:13, NIV)*;

‘they do not cry out to me from their hearts’ *(Hos. 7:14, NIV)*;

‘they do not turn to the Most High’ *(Hos. 7:16, NIV)*;

‘the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law’ *(Hos. 8:1, NIV)*;

‘Israel has forgotten his Maker’ *(Hos. 8:14, NIV)*;

‘you have been unfaithful to your God’ *(Hos. 9:1, NIV)*;

they became ‘as vile as the thing they loved’ *(Hos. 9:10, NIV)*;

‘they have not obeyed Him’ *(Hos. 9:17, NIV)*;

‘you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil’ *(Hos. 10:13, NIV)*;

‘Ephraim [another term for Israel] boasts, “I am very rich; I have become wealthy” ’ *(Hos. 12:8, NIV)*.

**Consider This:** It might be said, as in the case of Israel in Hosea’s time, that God’s people are sometimes more stubborn in coming to God than pagans or unbelievers are. Perhaps this problem could have something
to do with their understanding of truth and the false sense of security that possessing it and professing it outwardly brings, while inwardly denying its power to transform the life. How can these verses teach us the importance of not simply being possessors of the Truth (Jesus) but of letting Truth possess us?

II. God’s Covenantal Faithfulness (Review Hosea 6:1–3 with your class.)

The prophet Hosea paints an incredibly beautiful picture of God as One who always seeks sinners, offers His love, and abundantly cares for their needs. Consider the following texts: “‘he will heal us . . . he will bind up our wounds’” (Hos. 6:1, NIV); “‘he will revive us; . . . he will restore us, that we may live in his presence’” (Hos. 6:2, NIV); “‘as surely as the sun rises, he [the Lord] will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains’” (Hos. 6:3, NIV); “‘It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love’” (Hos. 11:3, 4, NIV); “‘How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? . . . For I am God, and not man—the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath!’” (Hos. 11:8, 9, NIV); “‘But I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Savior except me. I cared for you in the desert’” (Hos. 13:4, 5, NIV); “‘I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?’” (Hos. 13:14, NIV; compare with 1 Cor. 15:55); “‘I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily’” (Hos. 14:4, 5, NIV).

Consider This: Taken together, these texts form a composite portrait of God’s character. What does that portrait look like? What do these texts tell us about God?

Activity: Ask members of your class to open their Bibles and share other verses that are dear to them about God’s love and His promises of care for us.

III. Return to the Lord Your God (Review Hosea 5:1 with your class.)

The prophet Hosea announces God’s abundant calls for the return of Israel to the Lord. Consider the following appeals and statements: “‘They will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me’” (Hos. 5:15, NIV); “‘Come, let us return to the Lord’” (Hos. 6:1, NIV); “‘Let us acknowledge the Lord’” (Hos. 6:3, NIV); “‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings’” (Hos. 6:6, NIV); “You must return to your God;
maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always” *(Hos. 12:6, NIV)*; “Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to him: ‘Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously’ ” *(Hos. 14:1, 2, NIV)*.

**Discussion Question:** Why are even God’s people often more interested in God’s blessing than in wholeheartedly following His directions? *(See Hos. 7:14, 15.)*

### STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The book of Hosea ends with a question: “Who is wise?” The answer is plain: the one who can discern God’s ways and walk in them *(Hos. 14:9)*. This definition of wisdom is simple yet profound. Discuss with your class how one can become wise in order to differentiate between good and evil and follow what is good and right.

**Life Application:** God says through Hosea that our “fruitfulness comes from [Him]” *(Hos. 14:8, NIV)*. This reminds us of Jesus’ discourse about Him being the Vine, and us being the branches. We can bear fruit only if we abide in Him *(see John 15:1–17)*. Apply this saying to practical life. In what ways can we remain in God in order to be fruitful?

### STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** The husband-wife metaphor for God and His people is rich in imagery. What are the advantages and shortcomings of such illustrations?

**Activities:**

1. Hosea compares God to different things that are common in his culture in order to bring God closer to the people so that they may understand Him better *(see Hos. 14:5–8)*. Ask your class to come up with modern twenty-first-century pictures, metaphors, similes, and concepts that would speak to the mind of our postmodern society. Be creative. Conduct this exercise especially with the youth in mind. How do we communicate to them the beauty of our God?

2. Find in your hymnal songs about God’s faithfulness and invite your class to learn the best by heart.
A Holy and Just God (Joel)

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Joel 1; 2:28, 29; Acts 2:1–21; Joel 2:31, 32; Rom. 10:13; Matt. 10:28–31.

**Memory Text:** “The Lord thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?” (Joel 2:11, NIV).

**Key Thought:** God can use crises to make His people sensitive to both their dependence on Him and their need for spiritual renewal and reformation.

In the massive locust plague and severe drought devastating the southern kingdom of Judah, the prophet Joel—a contemporary of Amos and Hosea—sees a sign of a “great and dreadful” day of judgment (Joel 2:31). Confronted with a crisis of such intensity and proportion, he calls all people in Judah to renounce sin and return to God. He describes the locusts as the Lord’s army and sees in their coming God’s punishment upon unfaithful Israel.

Joel prophesies that God’s future judgments will make the locust plague pale by comparison. But that same judgment will bring unparalleled blessings to those who are faithful to the Lord and who obey His teachings; that is, no matter how severe, judgment can lead to salvation and redemption for those whose hearts are open to the leading of the Lord.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 20.*
A National Disaster

**Read** Joel 1:1–12. What is happening to the land of Judah?

The prophet, who lived in an agricultural society, calls here upon the farmers to be dismayed at the loss of their grain and fruit harvests. The ecological destruction could cripple the nation’s economy for years. In addition to the loss of food, shade, and wood, there is a threat of topsoil erosion. For example, some fruit trees in Palestine take twenty years to grow before they become productive. In fact, agricultural devastation and deforestation were typical tactics of invading armies seeking to punish those they conquered by making impossible any prospect of a short-term recovery.

**Read** Deuteronomy 28:38. How does that help us to understand what is happening to Judah?

Joel uses four different terms for the locusts (Joel 1:4) in order to express the intensity and the totality of the plague. But the destruction caused by the locusts was made even worse by drought. All of the crops that the farmers had expected have withered, and the farmers despair because they have nothing to eat or sell; they do not even have seed for replanting. A calamity of such proportions was unheard of by their ancestors and was something to tell future generations about. The fact that a similar disaster had never happened before further heightens the importance of the situation.

The prophet also announces the destruction of the dietary staples in the land of Israel, such as grapes, grain, and oil (Deut. 14:23, 18:4). Wheat and barley are the most important grains in Palestine. Vines and fig trees in the Bible symbolize peaceful living with an abundance of God’s blessings in the Promised Land (1 Kings 4:25, Mic. 4:4, Zech. 3:10). The idyllic image of peace and prosperity is to be able to sit under one’s own vine and fig tree. All this now is threatened by divine judgment brought about because of the people’s sins.

Harvest was a time of rejoicing (Ps. 4:7, Isa. 9:3). Although the land in Israel was a gift from the Lord, it still belonged to God. Israel was expected to be a faithful steward of the land. Above all, the people were expected to worship and obey God because He was the One who had given them the land in the first place.
Blow the Trumpet!

When natural disasters occur, they provoke many questions, such as, “Why did God allow this to happen?” “Why have some people lived while others have died?” “Is there a lesson here that we could learn?” Joel had no doubt that the locust plague could lead to a deeper insight into God’s universal plan. In chapter 1, under divine inspiration, the prophet relates the national crisis to the spiritual situation in the land. The locusts have left nothing that could be offered as sacrifice to the Lord. The grain offering and the drink offering were part of the daily offering in the temple, in accordance with the instructions recorded in Exodus 29:40 and Numbers 28:5–8. The cutting off of the sacrifices was severe, but it should have served as a warning to the people of their grave condition. The loss of opportunity even to offer the sacrifices symbolized the breaking of the covenant between God and Israel. But, unlike many of the other prophets, Joel did not spend much time making an analysis of people’s failings. He was interested far more in dwelling on the cure as prescribed by Israel’s divine Physician.

**Read** Joel 1:13–20. What is Joel saying to the people? However unique the circumstances, in what ways is that which is being said here a plea that is commonly seen throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments?

The prophet urges the spiritual leaders to call a nationwide day of prayer and fasting so that the people can search deep within their hearts, renounce their sins, and return to their God. In this way they will come out of the experience with a renewed trust in God’s love and justice. In the end, this disaster might lead the believers into a deeper relationship with their Lord.

Throughout Scripture, God is described as the Lord of nature, the One who created it, sustains it, and also uses it for His divine purposes. In this natural disaster, instead of having them rend their garments, the prophet Joel says that the people should rend their hearts and make them open to God’s grace and compassion.

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Disasters may strike us in many forms. When they do, regardless of our understanding of them and their causes, what Bible promises can we cling to for the hope and the strength to endure? What promises are especially meaningful to you?
The Gift of God’s Spirit

Read Joel 2:28, 29 along with Acts 2:1–21. How is Peter interpreting the prophecy of Joel here?

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On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter announced that the Lord had fulfilled His promise, as given through Joel, regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Accompanying the outpouring of the Spirit, and as a visible sign of God’s supernatural intervention in the history of humankind, God will cause extraordinary phenomena to be seen in nature, both on earth and in the sky.

“In immediate connection with the scenes of the great day of God, the Lord by the prophet Joel has promised a special manifestation of His Spirit. Joel 2:28. This prophecy received a partial fulfillment in the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost; but it will reach its full accomplishment in the manifestation of divine grace which will attend the closing work of the gospel.”—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 11.

In the immediate context of Joel, repentance will be followed by a great outpouring of God’s Spirit. This will bring a wonderful renewal. Instead of destruction, God’s gift of blessings will follow. The Lord reassures His people in this book that His creation will be restored and the nation delivered from oppressors.

The Spirit is poured out upon God’s people, just as the anointing oil was poured upon the heads of those who were elected by God for a special ministry. The Spirit is also a gift of power bestowed on the recipients so that they might do a particular work for God (Exod. 31:2–5, Judg. 6:34). Only this time the Spirit’s manifestation will assume wide proportions. At that great point in history, salvation will be available to all who seek God. God’s Spirit will fall on all the faithful—irrespective of age, gender, or social status—in a fulfillment of Moses’ wish that all the Lord’s people become prophets and that the Lord put His Spirit upon them (Num. 11:29).

What are things you can do in your own life that can make you more receptive to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

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**Proclaiming God’s Name**

“The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls” (Joel 2:31, 32, NKJV).

The darkening of the sun and the changing of the moon to blood should not be understood as natural disasters, but as supernatural signs of the approaching day of the Lord. In Bible times, many pagan nations worshiped heavenly bodies as their gods, something that Moses said the Israelites should never do (Deut. 4:19). In this sense, Joel’s prophecy is predicting that the idols of the nations will begin to fade away when the Lord comes in judgment. Joel 3:15 adds that even the starry host will lose its power and will no longer give its light because the presence of the Lord’s glory will outshine everything.

**While** Christ’s appearance will terrify the unrepentant, how will the righteous welcome their Lord? What is the crucial difference? See Isa. 25:9, Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21, Rom. 10:13.

In the Scriptures, the expression to “call on the name of the Lord” does not only mean to call oneself a follower of the Lord and to claim His promises. It also can mean to proclaim God’s name—that is, to be a witness to others about the Lord and what He has done for the world. Abraham built altars and proclaimed God’s name in the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:8). To Moses on Mount Sinai, God proclaimed His goodness and grace (Exod. 33:19, 34:5). The psalmist calls on the faithful to give thanks to God and call on His name by making known to the nations what He has done (Ps. 105:1). Lastly, the same words are found in a song of salvation composed by the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 12:4).

Thus, to proclaim the Lord’s name means both to be messengers of the glad tidings that God still rules the world and also to call on the people of the world to view everything in the context of God’s deeds and character. It also means to tell everyone about God’s generous gift of salvation that is offered to every human being.

**What does it mean to you to “call on the name of the Lord”? How do you do it, and what happens when you do?**
The Refuge in Times of Trouble (Joel 3)

Biblical prophets compare the coming judgment from God to the roaring of a lion, a sound that makes everyone tremble (Joel 3:16, Amos 1:2, 3:8). In the Bible, Zion designates the location of God’s earthly throne in Jerusalem. From this place God will punish the enemy, but at the same time He will vindicate His people who patiently await His victory. They will share in His triumph when He renews creation.

To some people Scripture’s portrayals of God’s final judgment are difficult to comprehend. It is good to keep in mind that evil and sin are very real and that their forces are strong in trying to oppose God and to destroy every form of life. But God is an enemy of evil. That is why Joel’s words invite us to examine our lives in order to be sure that we are on God’s side so that we can be sheltered on the day of judgment.

Read Matthew 10:28–31. How do these texts help us to understand, even during calamitous times, what we have been given in Jesus?

The Lord sustains those persons who persevere in faith. He may bring desolation upon the earth (Joel 3:1–15); yet, His people should not fear His acts of sovereign judgments because He has promised to protect them (vs. 16). He has given them His word of assurance. His sovereign and gracious acts demonstrate that He is a faithful, covenant God, who never again will allow the righteous to be put to shame (Joel 2:27).

Joel’s book ends with a vision of a transformed world where a river flows in the midst of the New Jerusalem, the very presence of the eternal God among a forgiven people (Joel 3:18–21).

This prophetic message challenges us to walk in the Spirit, to pursue Christian living wholeheartedly, and to reach out to all who have not yet called on the name of Christ. As we do, we claim the divine promise of Christ’s abiding presence through the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the hearts of His faithful people.

“We must know our real condition, or we shall not feel our need of Christ’s help. We must understand our danger, or we shall not flee to the refuge. We must feel the pain of our wounds, or we should not desire healing.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 158. What is your understanding of your own “real condition”? What pains are you suffering? How have you experienced the “refuge” promised to us in Christ?
Further Study: The prophet’s name, Joel, was common in Bible times. It means “The Lord is God.” This name is appropriate to the overall theme of the book: only God is completely holy and just, and His work is sovereign on earth. The history of His people, as well as that of the nations, is in His hands. The same holds true for the life of every human being.

“The tremendous issues of eternity demand of us something besides an imaginary religion, a religion of words and forms, where truth is kept in the outer court. God calls for a revival and a reformation. The words of the Bible, and the Bible alone, should be heard from the pulpit. But the Bible has been robbed of its power, and the result is seen in a lowering of the tone of spiritual life. In many sermons of today there is not that divine manifestation which awakens the conscience and brings life to the soul. The hearers cannot say, ‘Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?’ Luke 24:32. There are many who are crying out for the living God, longing for the divine presence. Let the word of God speak to the heart. Let those who have heard only tradition and human theories and maxims, hear the voice of Him who can renew the soul unto eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 626.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the ways in which Joel’s message is especially important to us, who live at the end of time when serious and sobering events undoubtedly await us?

2. Read the whole book of Joel in one sitting and answer the following questions: To what extent did Joel’s message apply to his generation, and to what extent did it have a future application?

3. Joel’s book describes various types of divine blessings poured upon God’s people. Does this prophecy make a distinction between material and spiritual blessings? If so, how?

4. How does our understanding of the great controversy help us also to understand the terrible trials and calamities that the world faces?

5. The Ellen G. White statement in Friday’s study discusses an “imaginary religion.” What might that mean? How can we know whether our religion is real or imaginary?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Joel 2:11

The Student Will:

Know: Understand the meaning of the day of the Lord as the day of judgment. It can be experienced either as condemnation or salvation.

Feel: Encourage people to encounter the day of the Lord as joyous deliverance.

Do: Help others to be aware of Christ’s coming by guiding them to walk with Him and be filled with the Holy Spirit, and thus preparing them to be ready.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Nearness of the Day

A On what basis do you know that Christ will come?
B Why can you claim that the Second Coming is near?
C Why should it not be thought of as a dreadful day for believers?

II. Feel: Dreadfulness of the Day

A What is your first thought when you hear that God will judge us?
B Why is Joel so serious when announcing the day of the Lord?
C What emotions and behaviors arise from the recognition that those who call on the Lord will be saved?

III. Do: Day of Deliverance

A Why can you not make yourself ready for the Lord’s coming?
B How does the Lord make you ready?
C At the center of the book of Joel is the call to return with all of one’s heart and the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Why is that enough to enable one to endure the Day?

Summary: The eschatological day of the Lord is approaching. This greatest historical day will be a day of deliverance for those who call upon the Lord and are guided by His Spirit.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Joel 2:11–17

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God wants to help His people out of their spiritual crisis by calling them to a genuine repentance. They need to be aware that God’s judgment is not partial and will cut off all the wicked. However, God will be a refuge for those who in trust and confidence call upon His name. He is their stronghold and will equip them to stand firm during the world’s final events.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson focuses on the message of Joel, who lived at a time during which the whole community of believers was in a worship crisis. Instead of worshiping the Creator God, people bowed down before Baal and his demands. But Joel was a revivalist, and he reformed the people’s spiritual lives by turning their attention to the only true Lord.

Opening Discussion: At the center of the book of Joel is a call to repentance: “ ‘Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning’ ” (Joel 2:12, NIV). How can we be sure that our repentance is genuine? What is the difference between true and false repentance? Why, and from what do we need to repent?

Questions for Discussion:

1. How can natural catastrophes and disasters—for example, a locust plague (as in Joel’s time), earthquakes, fires, floods, tsunamis, and so on—lead people to repentance?

2. How do life’s crises create faith or reveal faith?

3. What does the apostle Paul mean when he asks, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” (Rom. 8:35, NIV). Some people become very bitter when experiencing the things that Paul mentions in this text. Why are there such huge differences in people’s reactions to similar troubles?
The plague of locusts was to remind God’s people of Joel’s warning regarding the day of judgment. The disaster would be like the destruction associated with the day of the Lord. This local judgment was intended to point the people’s attention to the eschatological day of judgment when everyone would be righteously judged and no one person would have an advantage over another.

God’s appeal is clear: “Return to Me.” It is a call to action with the purpose of helping the believers to come to God Himself and enter into a personal relationship with Him. It is important, then, not only to embrace His teaching, laws, truth, and lifestyle but to enter into a close and intimate fellowship with Him.

Additionally, God invited: “Rend your heart and not your garments” (Joel 2:13, NIV). It was customary in biblical times to tear one’s clothes in mourning. However, God points out that true mourning is not just an outward show done through the tearing of robes, but a “ rending of the heart.” It is as if God is saying: “I want you to mourn, and not just through the outward appearance of tears or the expected and required signs of mourning, but from the heart. I want your mourning to be real and to come from within.”

Consider This: What is wrong with the skewed idea that we should sin more in order to receive more grace? Why is it so important for God’s judgment to be impartial?

Questions for Discussion:

1. How can God become a stronghold in your life, especially when all external security collapses?

2. How can you “rend your heart”?

II. God Sends His Spirit Before the Day of Judgment (Review Joel 2:28, 29 with your class.)

Before the dreadful Day of the Lord, God will send His Spirit (Joel 2:28, 29) and will perform great signs in nature (Joel 2:30, 31) in order to pre-
pare the people for the final events. Joel assures that “‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Joel 2:32, NIV). So, we do not need to fear those final events because deliverance is in close association with our mighty God. When we walk with God, we are hope-oriented because those who love God are not fearful people but people oriented in God (Isa. 35:4; Dan. 7:22; John 5:24; Rom. 8:28; 1 John 2:28; 4:17, 18). God must always be the focal point of all our thoughts and behavior (Ps. 1:1, 2; Col. 3:1–4).

Both the Spirit of God and rain play a dominant role in Joel’s imagery, mainly in the second part of chapter 2. When the land is dry, rain is needed. As the water brings life to the ground, so the Spirit of God makes spiritual life vibrant again. The Spirit of the Lord needs to be poured out on people so that the dryness will be changed into an abundance of God’s blessing (John 7:37–39, 10:10).

There is also a pun (or double meaning) in the Hebrew text with the phrase “the autumn rains in righteousness,” which may also be translated as “the teacher for righteousness” (Joel 2:23, NIV). The Qumran sect expected, on the basis of this verse, the coming of the “Teacher of righteousness” as the fulfillment of this prophecy. This means that only acceptance of the teachings of the Teacher Jesus Christ, as well as of the Holy Spirit, will prepare us to worship God in truth and Spirit in order to be delivered on the day of judgment.

**Discussion Questions:** Why is the Holy Spirit so important in our lives? What does it mean that God will pour His Spirit on His people in order that they might be filled with Him? (See Ezek. 36:26–28, John 16:7–15, Rom. 8:13–17.)

**III. God Will Judge All Nations in the Valley of Decision** *(Review Joel 2:32 with your class.)*

The book of Joel speaks about the last judgment in the valley of decision. The same valley is called the valley of Jehoshaphat, which means “The Lord Judges.” This valley is not a literal, geographical valley somewhere in Palestine (no valley is large enough to contain all the nations of the world). It is a symbolic place but with a real judgment in which God will judge the whole world. One can clearly see this truth from the symbolic name of the valley. Its name signifies that God’s final, executive decisions will take place, and the divine judgment will reveal the decisions that people have made (Dan. 7:9, 10, 22, 25, 26; Matt. 16:27). God’s judgment is neither fabricated nor capricious.

**Discussion:** The crucial question is, Who can endure God’s judgment and how? Explain to your class members what it means to call on the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32).
STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Explain to your class how it can be filled with the Holy Spirit by being baptized by the Spirit every day.

Every sincere believer desires to have a meaningful, intimate, and true relationship with God. However, this relationship cannot be sentimental; rather, it must be biblical in the sense that the whole human personality is involved: intellect, feelings, and will. How does Christianity, as a religion, engage or involve the whole personality in this way? On the other hand, how do Eastern religions compare with Christianity, and what does Christianity offer that Eastern religions do not?

**Life Application:** Joel appeals to everyone—adults, children, the newly married—to genuinely return to the Lord with fasting and weeping. How can pastors and church leaders help church members to call everyone together in order to experience true repentance? What roles should fasting and the studying of the Holy Scriptures play in true revival? What do fasting and the study of the Scriptures have to do with repentance?

STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** The plague of locusts was an event of enormous dimensions, which played the role of a type pointing to God’s universal judgment of all the nations at the end of time. This eschatological event is called the antitype. Conduct your own research on typology and explain it to your class, following the guidelines in the following activity.

**Activity:** Help the members of your class to understand what a *type* is, how it works, and its purpose. Implement various examples of different kinds of types and clearly explain why an understanding of a type is important. If supplies are available, draw different charts to help them to visualize the relationship between *type* and *antitype*. For a background to the meaning of *typology* and how it works, see Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, pp. 58–104, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12 (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000).
Lesson 4

*April 20–26

Lord of All Nations (Amos)

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Amos 1–2; Isaiah 58; Luke 12:47, 48; 1 Kings 8:37–40; Amos 4:12, 13; Obadiah.

Memory Text: “A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:8, NKJV).

Key Thought: Acts of inhumanity are sins against God and will be judged accordingly.

A lion in Scripture often represents the king of the animal world. His appearance evokes irresistible strength and majesty as well as ferocity and destructive power. Even when not actively hunting, the lion can be heard, its roar audible for miles. Amos, a shepherd, was sent to the Israelites to warn them that he had heard a lion roar—and the lion was none other than their Lord! Moved by the Holy Spirit, the prophet Amos compared God’s way of speaking to the nations, as well as to His special people, with the roaring of a lion (see Amos 1:2).

Amos was called to prophesy to the nations who committed crimes against humanity. He also was sent to a society where a privileged and religious people lived in peace and prosperity. Yet, this same people oppressed the poor and allowed for dishonest business and bribery in court. This week we will listen to what the Lord has to say about these despicable actions.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 27.
Crimes Against Humanity

Read Amos 1 and 2. Why does the Lord warn that punishment is coming?

The first two chapters in Amos’ book contain seven prophecies against neighboring nations, followed by a prophecy against Israel. The foreign nations are not judged because they are Israel’s enemies but because of their violations of universal human principles. Two things stand out in Amos’s condemnation: the absence of loyalty and the absence of pity.

For instance, Tyre was a leading merchant city located on the Mediterranean coast north of Israel. Because of its almost impregnable island fortress, the city boasted of its security. Moreover, the leaders of Tyre secured peace treaties with several surrounding nations, such as the Philistines. The city was allied with Israel by a “treaty of brotherhood” during the reigns of David and Solomon (1 Kings 5:1, 12) and even of King Ahab (1 Kings 16:30, 31). So, it is not surprising to read in 1 Kings 9:13 that Hiram, the king of Tyre, called Solomon “my brother.”

Yet, the people of Tyre had violated the “covenant of brothers.” Tyre was not condemned for taking away the captives but for handing them over to Israel’s enemies, the Edomites. Thus, the people of Tyre were responsible for the cruelties that these captives suffered at the hands of their enemies. From God’s perspective, the person who assists and supports a crime is as guilty as the person who commits it.

Because God is all-sovereign, He holds the destiny of all the world in His hands. He has purposes and concerns that reach far beyond Israel’s borders. The God of Israel is the Lord of all nations; all human history is His concern. He is the Creator God, who gives life to all, and all are accountable to Him.

Who among us does not bristle in pain at the incredible injustice we see? Were there no God, what hope would we have of justice ever being done? What does the promise, found throughout the Bible, of God bringing justice and judgment to the world mean to you? How can we learn to cling to that promise amid all the injustice that we see now?
Justice for the Oppressed

God’s universal judgment is one of the central teachings found in Amos. In the beginning of his book, the prophet announces God’s judgment on several of Israel’s neighbors because of their crimes against humanity. Then, however, Amos boldly declares that God also will judge Israel. So, the anger of the Lord is directed not only at the nations but also at the people He has chosen. The people of Judah have rejected the Word of the Lord and have not kept His instructions.

At the same time, Amos dealt with Israel much more extensively than even Judah because she had broken God’s covenant and committed so many sins. Israel’s economic prosperity and political stability led to spiritual decay. This spiritual decay displayed itself in social injustice. In Israel, the rich exploited the poor, and the powerful exploited the weak. The rich cared only for themselves and their personal gain, even when it came at the expense and suffering of the poor. (Not much has changed in a few thousand years, has it?)

In his preaching, Amos taught that there is a living God who cares about how we treat others. Justice is more than an idea or a norm. Justice is a divine concern. Thus, the prophet warned that Israel’s stone houses, ivory-inlaid furniture, top-quality food and drink, as well as the best body lotions—all would be destroyed.

Read Isaiah 58. In what ways does this chapter capture aspects of present truth? In what ways, though, is our message to the world much more than this?

The Bible clearly teaches that social justice should be a natural product of the gospel. As the Holy Spirit makes us more like Jesus, we learn to share God’s concerns. The books of Moses insist on the fair treatment of foreigners, widows, and orphans (Exod. 22:21–24). The prophets speak of God’s concern about the just and compassionate treatment of less privileged people (Isa. 58:6, 7). The psalmist calls the God who lives in His holy dwelling “a father of the fatherless, a defender of widows” (Ps. 68:5, NKJV). Christ shows great concern for those who are rejected by society (Mark 7:24–30, John 4:7–26). The Lord’s brother, James, calls on us to put our faith into action and help the needy (James 2:14–26). No follower of Christ can do anything less and really be a follower of Christ.
The Peril of Privilege

Amos’ prophetic message was not intended to be restricted to the historical situation in Israel but to expand the scope of the message beyond Israel and Judah. In the Old Testament, Israel had a unique, but not exclusive, claim on God.

Read Amos 3:1, 2. The Hebrew verb ידָּתָה, “to know,” which is used in verse 2, bears a special sense of intimacy. In Jeremiah 1:5, for example, God says that He “knew” the prophet and set him apart even before his birth. Such was the case with Israel. It was not just another nation among nations. Rather, God set it apart for a sacred, divine purpose. Its people stood in special relationship with Him.

God Himself had chosen Israel and brought it out of slavery to freedom. The exodus from Egypt was the single most important event in the beginning of Israel’s history as a nation. It set the stage for God’s acts of redemption and the conquest of the land of Canaan. But Israel’s strength and prosperity led to pride and complacency in regard to its privileged status as the Lord’s chosen people.

Read Christ’s statement from Luke 12:47, 48. In what ways can we understand the principle He taught there—that is, when great privileges in life are abused, they will be replaced by great penalties?

Under divine inspiration, the prophet warns that because the people of Israel are the Lord’s elect, they particularly will be held accountable for their actions. The Lord is saying that Israel’s unique relationship with God carries obligations, and punishment will result if those obligations are not fulfilled. In other words, Israel, as God’s chosen people, is all the more liable to His judgments because the privilege entails responsibility. Thus, Israel’s election was not just to privileged status; it was called to be witnesses to the world about the Lord who had so blessed it.

“The professed churches of Christ in this generation are exalted to the highest privileges. The Lord has been revealed to us in ever-increasing light. Our privileges are far greater than were the privileges of God’s ancient people.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 317. Think about all that we have been given as Seventh-day Adventists. Why should the responsibilities that come with these privileges make us tremble? Do they, or have we simply gotten used to them? Have we gone so far as to become complacent about all that we have been given? If so, how can we change?
Israel’s Rendezvous With God

“Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel” (Amos 4:12).

Chapter 4 of Amos begins with the description of Israel’s sins, and it ends with the announcement of the day of reckoning. God makes His people especially accountable for the ways in which they live and treat others.

Amos lists a series of natural disasters, any one of which should have been enough to turn the nation to God. The list is composed of seven disasters in all, the full measure of punishments for the breaking of God’s covenant (in accordance with the words of Moses from Leviticus 26). Some of the disasters remind one of the plagues God sent against Egypt, while the description of the last calamity explicitly mentions the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

According to Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple, what should disasters normally lead people to do? 1 Kings 8: 37–40.

The people of Israel did not behave like normal people anymore, and God found it impossible to get their attention. Moreover, God’s judgments had resulted in the hardening of the people’s hearts. Because the people failed to return to the Lord, Amos presented one last chance for repentance.

The final judgment is impending, but Amos does not specify what the judgment would be. The haunting uncertainty in Amos’ words makes the threat of judgment even more ominous. Israel has failed to seek God; so, God goes out to meet Israel. If punishment fails, will an encounter with God save Israel?

Amos 4:12 begins with the words “ ‘thus will I do to you’ ” (NKJV), which echo the traditional oath formula. This solemn statement calls for a response from Israel to prepare to meet its God as it did prior to God’s appearance at Sinai (Exod. 19:11, 15).

Read carefully Amos 4:12, 13. If, suddenly, you were to hear the warning, “Prepare to meet your God, O [your name here]”—what would be your response? What is your only hope? See Rom. 3:19–28.
The Pride That Leads to a Fall

Read the book of Obadiah. What important moral and spiritual truths can we take away from this book?

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, and it reports on the prophetic vision of God’s judgment upon the land of Edom. The message of the book focuses on three issues: Edom’s arrogance (vss. 1–4), Edom’s coming humiliation (vss. 5–9), and Edom’s violence against Judah (vss. 10–14).

The Edomites were the descendants of Jacob’s brother Esau. The hostility between the Israelites and the Edomites goes back to the family feud between the twin brothers, who later became the fathers of the two nations. Yet, according to Genesis 33, the two brothers were later reconciled. Thus, the Israelites were commanded by God not to “abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother” (Deut. 23:7, NKJV).

In spite of this, the hostilities between the two nations continued for centuries. When Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and took its citizens into captivity, the Edomites not only rejoiced, but they even preyed on the fleeing Israelites and helped to plunder Jerusalem (Ps. 137:7). The Edomites did not behave as brothers toward the people of Judah in their worst hour but rather joined the enemy forces (Lam. 4:21, 22). For this reason the prophet Obadiah warned that Edom would be judged by its own standard: “As you have done, it shall be done to you” (Obadiah 15, NKJV).

The region that was occupied by Edom is located southeast of the Dead Sea. It is a mountainous land filled with high peaks, sharp crags, caves, and clefts in which armies could hide. A number of Edomite cities were located in these nearly inaccessible sites. Sela (also known as Petra) was Edom’s capital city. The nation developed an arrogant confidence summed up in the question, “Who will bring me down to the ground?” (Obadiah 3, NKJV).

God holds responsible those who take advantage of others in their time of distress. Obadiah warned the proud people of Edom that God would bring humiliation upon their heads. There is no place to escape from the Lord (Amos 9:2, 3). The coming day of the Lord will bring both judgment and salvation. Edom will drink God’s cup of wrath, while the fortunes of God’s people will be restored.
Further Study: Read the following quotations and discuss how they help us to understand the messages from Amos 1–4 and Obadiah in a clearer way.

“From the beginnings of Israelite religion the belief that God had chosen this particular people to carry out His mission has been both a cornerstone of Hebrew faith and a refuge in moments of distress. And yet, the prophets felt that to many of their contemporaries this cornerstone was a stumbling block; this refuge, an escape. They had to remind the people that chosenness must not be mistaken as divine favoritism or immunity from chastisement, but, on the contrary, that it meant being more seriously exposed to divine judgment and chastisement. . . .

“Does chosenness mean that God is exclusively concerned with Israel? Does the Exodus from Egypt imply that God is involved only in the history of Israel and is totally oblivious of the fate of other nations?”—Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, pp. 32, 33.

“With the defenses of the soul broken down, the misguided worshipers had no barrier against sin and yielded themselves to the evil passions of the human heart.

“Against the marked oppression, the flagrant injustice, the unwonted luxury and extravagance, the shameless feasting and drunkenness, the gross licentiousness and debauchery, of their age, the prophets lifted their voices; but in vain were their protests, in vain their denunciation of sin. ‘Him that rebuketh in the gate,’ declared Amos, ‘they hate, . . . and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.’ ‘They afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right.’ Amos 5:10, 12.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 282.

Discussion Questions:

1. It is easy to be friendly with someone who has something to offer you. What about those who are in distress and have nothing to offer you but, in fact, have need of what you can give to them? What kind of attitude must we show toward such people? What kind of attitude do you show toward them?

2. Think about that which we have been given as Seventh-day Adventists. Most Christians have no idea of the blessings of the Sabbath (much less its end-time importance); most think that the dead go either immediately to heaven or to the torments of hell. Many do not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus, nor do they believe in a literal Second Coming. What other great truths have we been given that most other people do not know about? What responsibilities come with having these truths?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Amos 3:8

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand that prophecy is not primarily about future predictions but about one’s present decisions.

**Feel:** Emotionally comprehend that God condemns pride, injustice, and other actions against humanity. He or she will share in Amos’ longing for the restoration of justice.

**Do:** Take seriously God’s prophetic Word and prepare himself or herself and others to meet God without leading them to feel depressed or hopelessly condemned.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Power of the Divine Word

A. What is the primary objective of God’s Word: to inform, instruct, warn, encourage, or empower?

B. How do you know that God has spoken in the past and still speaks through His Word today?

C. Why does God reveal the future?

II. Feel: God Has Spoken—So, What Does That Mean for Me?

A. Why is it so important to listen to God’s prophetic voice?

B. In what way can we speak about wrong behavior without being judgmental?

III. Do: Importance of the Prophetic Word

A. How do we condemn sin in the right spirit and, at the same time, encourage people to do what is right?

B. How can you defend those in your community who are oppressed, abused, poor, or without defense?

C. How can your church support a prophetic ministry today?

**Summary:** God’s prophetic Word not only contains information about the past and the future, but it also helps us to make correct decisions in the present.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Amos 4:12*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The God of Amos is a God of justice and righteousness. This emphasis is very crucial in our modern society, which is possessed by sentimentalism and the understanding that if it feels good it must be right. Even though emotions play an important role in our lives, we need to be controlled by divine principles that guarantee that our relational life will enjoy true freedom and the right boundaries.

**Just for Teachers:** God’s justice needs to be reemphasized in today’s world, because it is often a forgotten commodity. Bring into the spotlight the fact that God’s love and truth would be incomplete without justice. God reveals His plans to ultimately reestablish justice (*Amos 3:7*) in order that life without sin can blossom again.

**Opening Discussion:** We live in a corrupt world in which violence, power, and money reign. Many children, women, and innocent people suffer tremendously and are exploited and abused. Domestic violence has many victims. Bribes silence justice. But when the innocent suffer, people call for justice. When crimes and terrorist acts are performed, we want to act, but revenge does not belong to us. How can we, as individuals or a community of faith, be more engaged in securing harmonious and peaceful relationships in our society, in the workplace, in our neighborhoods, and in our protection of the weak? We are each vulnerable; yet, are we completely helpless and left in the hands of the powerful? Why is revenge by our hands not an act of justice?

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Why is it so important that God announces in advance what He plans to do? Why does He reveal His judgments?

2. In a world of conflicting information and misleading discussions, how can we know for sure what main steps God will undertake preceding the second coming of Jesus Christ?
STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Use the following study to help your class to examine the difference between God’s judgment on the surrounding nations and His judgment on the kingdom of Israel.

Bible Commentary

I. Corruption in Israel *(Review Amos 3:7 with your class.)*

The inhabitants of Israel needed to make dramatic changes in their lives. In His love and justice, God revealed to His servants Amos and Hosea His secrets *(Amos 3:7)* and plans in order to help the people turn back to Him. The hope was that when the people received the full information about the destruction of their home country, they would seek the Lord. Their political, social, and religious lives were in total chaos and decay.

The history of Israel is dark. Not one of the 20 kings in the Northern Kingdom followed God. All of the kings—from the first, Jeroboam, to the last, Hoshea—were wicked. They did things that were wrong in the sight of the Lord. There was not a single exception. Only plots, revolts, exploitation, violence, terror, corruption, tragedy, and desperation prevailed. Just to illustrate: seven of Israel’s kings were assassinated, one committed suicide, and one was “stricken by God.” The Bible uses King Ahab and his wife Jezebel as a symbol of the evil in Israel. Not one was a God-fearing ruler; none repented or undertook reformation. They led the people to destruction. They were leaders of doom. What an unfortunate and evil situation. No wonder God needed to send “strong medicine” to shake the stubborn nation and stop the prevailing wickedness. But unfortunately, as we know from history, not even the voice of a prophet helped.

**Consider This:** What lessons can your contemporary congregation learn from the struggles, victories, and failures of the Old Testament church? What is especially applicable for us today?

II. God Unfolds and Unmasks Reality *(Review Amos 4:4–11 with your class.)*

Chapters 1 and 2 present a series of judgments against the nations. Amos starts with the nations surrounding Israel: beginning with Aram (Damascus) and Philistia (and its cities, such as Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron). Then shifting to Tyre, he turns next to the related nations of Edom, Ammon, and Moab, ending with the sister nation of Judah. The people of Israel could still
feel comfortable because divine judgments were levied against other people and nations. But then the prophet turns to Israel and addresses its sins. With eloquent words and precision, he speaks against Israel throughout the rest of the book.

In chapter 3, God poses seven rhetorical questions (vss. 3–6). But first, He warns the people that, even though He brought them out of Egypt, He will punish them for their sins (vs. 2). Because “‘they do not know how to do right’” (vs. 10, NIV), God warns that “‘an enemy will overrun the land’” (vs. 11, NIV). Employing colorful language, God shows that this judgment is pending and is inevitable due to Israel’s moral corruption. The judgment cannot be escaped, and the altars of Bethel (the center of false worship in Israel) will be destroyed.

Five times in chapter 4 God cries out and complains that even though He used the ultimate measure of punishment to stop them from doing wrong, the people stubbornly remained in sin. The prophet uses God’s words: “‘Yet you have not returned to me’” (Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11, NIV).

**Discussion Question:** Our God is a God of relationships. Therefore, He longs to develop close relationships with His people. In what ways can this relationship be cultivated, and, conversely, by what do we destroy it? Ask your class to share practical ways in which one can build up a relationship with God and with others.

**III. Prepare to Meet Your God!** *(Review Amos 4:12 with your class.)*

In the end, God will confront Israel because He is its Creator (Amos 4:13) and the nation is accountable to Him. They are responsible for their decisions. So, God tells His people that they need to “‘prepare to meet’” their God *(Amos 4:12, NIV).* To meet their God means, in this context, to be ready for God’s impending judgments. In chapter 5 He calls them to genuine repentance, to return to Him, to seek the Lord in order to live. This repentance also needs to be projected into a change of lifestyle because they turned “justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground” *(Amos 5:7, NIV).* Instead, the people need to “‘let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream’” *(Amos 5:24, NIV).*

**Consider This:** Many biblical texts explain the second coming of Jesus as a day of ultimate hope and final restoration. See the beautiful description of this glorious event in 1 Thessalonians 4:14–18 and Titus 2:11–14. How is it described in these texts, and what hope does that give you?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Ask the class the following questions in order to ponder the relationship between behavior, righteousness by faith, and justice.
Application Questions:

1. How is a change in behavior, coupled with the demands of justice, reflected in the doctrine of righteousness by faith? Why is our just activity not a basis for our salvation? How does this performance reveal the fact that we are saved by grace in Christ Jesus? Why do we not earn access to heaven by our good works, and why do we not gain salvation by our achievements? (Remember that we do not do what is right in order to be saved but because we are saved.)

2. What does it mean to let “justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-ending stream”? How do we do so in our lives? How can you help your church to do things that are right and just?

3. How does the statement of Micah 6:8, to “do justly,” fit into the whole picture of doing what is right? With what does Micah closely connect it?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Even though Amos does not use the word discipline, it is not hard to see that this is what he really wants to emphasize to God’s people. How can you practice right discipline in your life without being legalistic or judgmental?

Activities:

1. Divide your class into small units of three or four and ask the students to discuss how one can be ready for the second coming of Jesus. How is God preparing us for heaven, and what do we need to do to prepare ourselves for the greatest future event of human history? Ask them to study carefully together, in small groups, Jude 24, 25 and share their conclusions.

2. The mission of John the Baptist was to prepare people for the first coming of Jesus (Luke 1:16, 17). How did he do it? Discuss with your class how we can help others to be ready to meet their God face-to-face, and endure. How can we stand in the day of judgment (Rev. 6:17, Isa. 25:9)?
Lesson 5

*April 27–May 3

Seek the Lord and Live! (Amos)

Sabbath Afternoon


Memory Text: “Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you, just as you have said!” (Amos 5:14, NASB).

Key Thought: Amos reminds us that only in seeking the Lord is there life.

Had Israel been true to God, He could have accomplished His purpose through the nation’s honor and exaltation. If Israel had walked in the ways of obedience, He would have made them ‘high above all nations which He hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honor.’ ‘All people of the earth,’ said Moses, ‘shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee.’ ‘The nations which shall hear all these statutes’ shall say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ Deut. 26:19; 28:10; 4:6. But because of their unfaithfulness, God’s purpose could be wrought out only through continued adversity and humiliation.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 28.

This week, as we continue to study the book of Amos, we will see even more of the ways in which the Lord pled with His people to put away their sins and return unto Him, the only true Source of life. In the end, we all have only one of two choices: life or death. There is no middle ground. Amos shows us a little more about the stark differences between these choices.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 4.
Hate Evil, Love Good

Things had become very bad in Israel; the corruption, the oppression, the sin. Israel finally reached the point in which the very survival of the nation was at stake. For this reason, Amos composed a lament to mourn the coming death of Israel (Amos 5:1–15). Often in the prophetic books, no distinction is made between the word of the prophet and the word of the Lord. Thus, Amos’ lament is also God’s lament over Israel.

The purpose of the funeral song in Amos 5:1–15 was to shock the people into facing reality. If they persisted in their sins, they surely would die. If, on the other hand, they rejected evil and returned to God, they would live. The Lord’s character is such that He expects conformity to the divine will.

**Read** Amos 5:14, 15. How does one learn to “hate the evil and love the good”? See also Heb. 5:14, Rom. 12:9, Prov. 8:36.

Amos invites the people not just to stop seeking evil but also to hate evil and love good. The commands in this section are progressive. The verbs *to love* (Heb. ‘ahav) and *to hate* (šane’) in the Bible often refer to decisions and actions, not simply to feelings and attitudes. In other words, a change in the people’s attitudes will lead to change in their actions.

**In this context, what warning is found in Isaiah 5:20?**

“All who in that evil day would fearlessly serve God according to the dictates of conscience, will need courage, firmness, and a knowledge of God and His word; for those who are true to God will be persecuted, their motives will be impugned, their best efforts misinterpreted, and their names cast out as evil. Satan will work with all his deceptive power to influence the heart and becloud the understanding, to make evil appear good, and good evil.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 431.

**How can we learn to love the good and hate the evil if we can be deceived into calling evil good and good evil? What is our only protection against this deception?**
Religion as Usual

Read Amos 5:23, 24; Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; and Psalm 51:17. What are these texts saying? More important, how can the principle here be applied directly to our own spiritual lives today, as Seventh-day Adventists? That is, in what ways might we be guilty of doing exactly what is warned about here? (Remember, too, that it is very easy to be self-deceived in this area.)

More than most other books of the Bible, the book of Amos focuses on injustice, cruelty, and inhumanity. It also offers the divine perspective on such practices. Amos preached that God despised the empty rituals of the people’s dead formalism, and He called upon them to reform. The Lord was not pleased by outward and empty forms of worship offered to Him by those who, at the same time, were oppressing others for the sake of personal gain. Their lives revealed that they missed the whole point of what it means to be followers of Yahweh; they also totally misunderstood the deeper meaning of His law.

Indeed, God rejected their religious rituals because they did not flow from lives of faith. The climactic words in Amos 5:14, 15 are the command to seek the Lord and live. Seeking the Lord is contrasted with making pilgrimages to the famous religious centers in Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba (Amos 5:5), three cities with sanctuaries that were destined for destruction.

What God really wanted was justice and righteousness in the land. The command to “seek the Lord” parallels the one to “seek good.” The Lord called on the remnant to distance themselves from evil practices and religious formalism and, instead, to let justice flow like a river and righteousness flow like a never-failing stream. While justice concerns the establishment of what is right before God, righteousness is the quality of life in relationship to God and others in the community. The picture presented here is that of a religious people whose religion had degraded into nothing but forms and rites without the change of heart that must accompany true faith. (See Deut. 10:16.)

How careful we must be.
Called to Be a Prophet

Amos’ home was Tekoa, in Judah, but God sent him to prophesy in Israel. He had gone to the Northern Kingdom and preached with such power that the land was not “able to bear all his words” (Amos 7:10, NKJV). Certainly many Israelites looked at Amos with suspicion and rejected him as God’s messenger. In spite of that rejection, he faithfully performed his prophetic ministry.

Read Amos 7:10–17. What familiar pattern is seen here? What other examples can you find in the Bible of the same thing happening? What should we learn from all these examples?

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Among those who did not like Amos’ preaching was Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, who accused Amos of conspiracy against Israel’s king. Bethel was one of the two royal sanctuaries, the very centers of apostate worship. Amos had predicted in public that if Israel did not repent, its king would die by the sword and the people would be led away captive. Amaziah ordered Amos to go back to the land of Judah, where his messages against Israel would be more popular.

In his response to the priest, Amos affirmed that his prophetic call came from God. He claimed that he was not a professional prophet who could be hired for services. Amos distanced himself from professional prophets who prophesied for gain.

However, speaking the truth by no means guarantees acceptance, because the truth can at times be uncomfortable and—if it disturbs those in power—it can produce serious opposition. God’s call compelled Amos to preach so openly and so boldly against the sins of the king and the nobility from the Northern Kingdom that he was accused of treason.

What is our attitude when we are told that our actions and/or lifestyles are sinful and will bring punishment upon us? What does our answer tell us about ourselves and about, perhaps, our need for a change of heart and attitude?

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The Worst Type of Famine

“‘The days are coming,’ declares the Sovereign Lord, ‘when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it’” (Amos 8:11, 12, NIV). How are we to understand the meaning of these verses?

In Amos 8, the prophet describes the devastating effects of God’s judgment on unrepentant Israel. God will punish the people for their sins by sending famine upon the land. But in verses 11 and 12, the prophet speaks of hunger and thirst for God’s Word. The tragedy that will stand out above all others is a famine of God’s Word because God will be silent. No other famine could be worse.

Often when the people of Israel experienced great distress, they would turn to the Lord for a prophetic word in hope of guidance. This time God’s answer will consist of silence. A part of God’s judgment on His people will be the Lord’s withdrawal of His Word through His prophets.

If God’s people continue to be disobedient, the prophet says, the time would come when they will be eager to hear the message, but it will be too late to turn to God’s Word in hope of escaping the judgment. This is the result of Israel’s persistent refusal to hear God’s message through Amos. Like Saul before his last battle (1 Sam. 28:6), the people will one day come to realize how much they need God’s Word.

An entire population will frantically search for God’s Word, the same word that they chose to ignore in the prophet’s time. Those especially affected will be the young. While the former generations heard God’s Word and rejected it, the young people never will have the opportunity to hear the prophetic proclamation.

What do the following passages teach about the dire effects of the silence of God? 1 Sam. 14:37, Ps. 74:9, Prov. 1:28, Lam. 2:9, Hos. 5:6, Mic. 3:5–7.
Judah’s Ruins Restored

The prophet turns from the dark picture of the people’s sinfulness and the resulting judgments to the glorious promises of the future restoration (Amos 9:11–15). The day of the Lord, previously described as the day of punishment (Amos 5:18), is now a day of salvation because salvation, not punishment, is God’s last word to His people. However, salvation will come after punishment, not instead of it.

Amid all the gloom and doom, Amos does close his book with a message of hope. Facing the prospect of immediate exile, David’s dynasty has fallen so low that it can no longer be called a house but a hut. But David’s kingdom will be renewed and united under one ruler. Beyond Israel’s borders, other nations will call on God’s name and enjoy His blessings along with Israel. The book concludes on this happy and hopeful note.

Biblical prophets did not teach that God’s punishment is for punishment’s sake itself. Behind almost all the warnings is the call of redemption. Though the threat of exile was imminent, the Lord encouraged the remnant with the promise of restoration to the land. The remnant would enjoy the renewal of the covenant. Those who experience the judgment would see God acting to save and restore.


Many Jewish teachers regarded Amos 9:11 as a messianic promise given to Abram, reaffirmed to David, and expressed throughout the Old Testament. The new king from David’s line will reign over many nations in fulfillment of God’s promise to Abram (Gen. 12:1–3). The Messiah will reign even over enemies such as Edom. The restored ruins of God’s people never again will be destroyed.

Through the coming of Jesus Christ, David’s greater Son, God upheld His gracious promise. James quoted this passage from Amos to show that the door of salvation is open to Gentiles to enjoy a full share of covenant privileges entrusted to the church. God would offer His redemptive blessings to Jews and Gentiles in the promised Messiah, the offspring of both Abram and David.

The ultimate fulfillment of these promises to everyone who accepts them, Jew or Gentile, will be seen only at the Second Coming. How can we keep that hope and promise alive and not let it fade amid the stresses of life?
Further Study: “Our standing before God depends, not upon the amount of light we have received, but upon the use we make of what we have. Thus even the heathen who choose the right as far as they can distinguish it are in a more favorable condition than are those who have had great light, and profess to serve God, but who disregard the light, and by their daily life contradict their profession.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 239.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, go over your answers to Sunday’s question about learning to hate evil and love the good, as well as the danger of calling evil good and good evil. Why is this danger especially prevalent when culture and society start to change their values in ways that accept certain behaviors, lifestyles, and attitudes that clearly are condemned in the Bible? As individuals, and even as a church as a whole, we are not immune to the cultural and societal trends in which we are immersed, are we? Dwell on the changes that have happened in your own culture and society over the years. For example, what things that were once considered shameful and taboo now openly are expressed and practiced, even deemed good or, at least, not wrong? How have these changes impacted the church’s attitudes toward these acts? What can we do in order to protect ourselves and our church from falling into the dangerous trap of calling evil good? At the same time, what cultural changes for the good have impacted the church in a good way, a way that more closely reflects the principles of love and acceptance revealed by Jesus’ life?

2. Dwell more on this idea of “a famine” for the Word of God. What is the likely way that could come about? Does the Lord purposely hide truth from people, or is it that people’s attitudes make them totally unreceptive to the Word of the Lord? Or could it be both? Or something else entirely? Discuss.

3. As Seventh-day Adventists who live with so much light and have so many reasons to believe in the truths that we have been given, are we not in danger of thinking that our knowledge of these wonderful truths alone is all that we need? How should the truths with which we have been blessed impact the way in which we live and interact with others, not only in the church but in our community? In other words, how can we live out the truths with which we have been entrusted? Why is it so important that we do?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Amos 5:14

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand that God wants our good, and that seeking the Lord and His true values is finding life.

**Feel:** Sense that evil brings disasters and destroys what is meaningful and beautiful. Doing good not only feels good but brings positive results.

**Do:** Seek to restore life through an earnest and honest search for God.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Seeking the Lord

- A How do you seek the Lord?
- B Why does God tell His people that He will be with them when He is already with them—talking to them and calling them to repentance?
- C What does it mean that God is with His church?

II. Feel: Seeking Good; Hating Evil

- A What should be your attitude toward sin and sinners?
- B How does love refuse things that are harmful? How can true love hurt and heal at the same time?

III. Do: Restoration of Relationship

- A How do you seek God in your daily life?
- B How do you make religious songs, rituals, and habits meaningful?
- C How can you be safe from self-deception, a cheap relationship with God, and a sense of false security?

**Summary:** Empty rituals and harmful behavior masked under the name of the Lord cannot satisfy and lead to meaningful relationships with God or others. Truly seeking the Lord and following His will brings true life.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Amos 5:14, 15, 18, 21*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** At the core of Amos’ message—a prophet who is seen often as the voice of doom—is the threefold appeal to “seek the Lord,” “love good,” “and live” (*Amos 5:4, 6, 15*). Only by a wholehearted return to the Lord can one find a plentiful and satisfying life.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson warns against cheap religion and false expectations regarding the day of the Lord. The day of judgment was understood in Amos’ day as a day of revenge against enemies. Israel’s enemies would perish, but believers would inherit God’s kingdom. However, Amos cautioned the community of faith that the day of the Lord would also be a day of severe judgment for His people because they had abandoned authentic spiritual life. Their religion was only outward, full of performance and rituals, and did not consist of an inner transformation and true relationships. Read the strong words describing how God hated their worship: there was no heart in their worship nor was there justice (*Amos 5:21–27*). Amos’ message was the last ultimatum of God in an attempt to stop Israel from doing evil. If nothing changed, the whole Northern Kingdom would disappear. This unfortunately happened in 722 B.C. with the Assyrian conquest—all because Israel refused to listen to the Lord, His messenger, and His Word.

**Opening Discussion:** What would happen if you started your Sabbath School class, or your pastor started his sermon, by saying: “Woe to you who expect the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ!” (*paraphrase of Amos 5:18*). “Woe to you who are comfortable in the church and feel secure, but in your daily life you forget the Lord and His will!” (*paraphrase of Amos 6:1*). What reaction could you expect? How shocking would it be?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** The literary structure of the book of Amos is written in a chiastic way (mirror structure), which was one of many literary structures used in antiquity:

A. God’s judgments upon nations, including Judah and Israel (*Amos 1, 2*)
B. God’s judgments upon Israel (*Amos 3, 4*)
C. God’s appeal to His people: seek the Lord and live (*Amos 5*)
B. God’s judgments upon Israel (Amos 6, 7)
A. God’s sure judgments and promise of final restoration (Amos 8, 9)

This literary structure demonstrates that at the heart of Amos’ prophecy is not a message of doom but of hope.

**Bible Commentary**

I. “Seek the Lord and Live” (Review Amos 5:6 with your class.)

The sign of a genuine prophet is that he calls for repentance (see Joel 2:12–17, Ezek. 14:6, 18:30–32, 33:11; even John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles engaged in this work—Matt. 3:2, Mark 1:15, Acts 2:38, 3:19, 2 Cor. 5:20). Amos is doing the same. As the servant of God, he reminds the people of the covenant that they made with the Lord. This covenant contains covenant blessings and curses (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 27–30); Amos enumerates the curses that Israel is in danger of falling under. The only solution to their spiritual crisis is a return to the Lord. He appeals to them: “Seek the Lord and live” (Amos 5:6, NIV); otherwise, divine judgment will sweep over them like a fire. Nothing will be left. All centers of false religion will be destroyed, and corrupt worshipers will go into exile (Amos 5:27, 7:17).

**Consider This:** How can you help your brother or sister in Christ to see the negative consequences of his or her wrong decisions and choices? How, in a redemptive way, can you help him or her to seek the Lord? Remember that the only power that brings people to repentance is God’s goodness (Rom. 2:4).

II. Genuine Worship and a False Priesthood (Review Amos 5:21, 22 with your class.)

Amos underscored the need for true worship. Turning from empty formalities and rituals to the real God would save the whole country from suffering through many tragedies. God strongly condemned cold, manipulative, and unfulfilling worship: ‘ ‘I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them’ ” (Amos 5:21, 22, NIV). The attitude of a worshiper is the crucial issue. Worship is about cultivating a genuine relationship with the living God and not about performance, manipulative techniques, presumptuous grace, and/or mechanistic rituals (Isa. 1:11–14; Mic. 6:6, 7). God continues: ‘ ‘Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps’ ” (Amos 5:23, NIV). True worship comes from a heart willing to follow God’s will and obey His commandments. Love, truth, and justice must be combined in the lives of those who praise Him (Amos 5:24; compare with Gen. 4:7; Deut. 6:5; 10:12, 13; Isa. 1:15–20; Mic. 6:8; John 4:23).
False worship, on the other hand, is motivated by the opposites of love, truth, and justice. For idol-worshiping Israel, Bethel in the south of the Northern Kingdom was the center of false worship. That was where a royal sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom were located (Amos 7:13). This cultic place, together with Dan in the north of Israel, was established by Jeroboam when he turned away from allegiance to Rehoboam, king of Judah, and Jerusalem’s temple. He made two golden calves and put each of them in designated places to be worshiped (for details see 1 Kings 12:26–33). In both places, he built altars, appointed priests, and instituted festivals. All of this was counterfeit worship. God tried to stop Jeroboam from this perverted service by dramatic actions through the unnamed man of God, but in vain (see 1 Kings 13).

In his ministry, Amos faced strong opposition from Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, but the Lord’s judgment fell upon the false priest and his family and not on God’s prophet (Amos 7:10–17).

**Consider This:** Note Amos’ word *perhaps* (“it may be” [NKJV]) in Amos 5:15, NIV. Even though you seek the Lord, repent, and do what is good and right, you cannot earn God’s mercy and salvation. God cannot be manipulated, forced, or pushed to do something. But you can be assured that God in His mercy always responds to the cry of a humble and contrite heart (Isa. 57:15, Matt. 8:3, 1 John 1:9). This is not Amos’ unique emphasis; other prophets underlined the same thought too (see Joel 2:14, Jon. 3:9, Zeph. 2:3).

### Questions for Discussion:

1. Why does God care so much that our religion is not merely a formality, a cultural expression, but rather the wholehearted pursuit of our lives every day?

2. How can our worship be so significant that our prayers, songs, music, study of God’s Word, and sermons bring meaning and real answers to the problems of our perplexed existence?

### III. God Ultimately Restores (Review Amos 9:12–15 with your class.)

Amos predicted that David’s fallen tent/house would be restored (Amos 9:11–14). Verse 12 proclaims that all the nations who bear the Lord’s name (i.e., who accepted Him as their own God) will be part of the restored Davidic rulership. They belong to the Messiah and His kingdom. Jesus Christ unites all who seek Him and trust in Him. The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) places stress on the faithful remnant, including believing Gentiles who bear the Lord’s name and thus belong to Him and rejoice in Him. His followers are the Lord’s special possession. Verses 13–15 promise the return of God’s people from exile and the restoration of prosperity to those who went
through great hardship. God graciously reverses their dramatic situation. He will bring blessing after judgment. And He always keeps His promises.

**Discussion:** Amos’ prophecy in chapter 9:11–14 predicts the future restoration of David’s fallen house. How does the apostle Peter, in Acts 15:15–17, apply this prophecy to the worldwide mission of the Christian church to preach the gospel to all nations?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** God miraculously intervened in the past in favor of Israel. However, we often forget that He works for the salvation of all people. We do not have much information in the Bible regarding the ways in which God works in history for all people, but Amos 9:7 is one illuminating example of such work by God on behalf of the nations. God powerfully stated: “‘Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites? . . . Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?’” (NIV). Emphasize God’s impartiality—how He wants to save and bless everyone, the whole world, because this is His will (Isa. 45:22; compare with Gen. 12:3).

**Life Application:** God values all people. He wants everyone to seek salvation. How can we as Christians show every person his or her true value and give an assurance of God’s abiding love? Ask each class member to turn to the person seated next to him or her in order to speak about God’s care. Help members to express their thoughts about God’s care in such a way that the other person not only knows that God cares about him or her but feels the truth of it in his or her heart.

**STEP 4—Create**

**Activities:**

1. Sing songs (from the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, if available) that express how we should come to the Lord in humbleness, with a grateful heart, and with the proper attitude to praise Him. Sing the selections together in class.

2. Discuss with your class how to make your worship a God-centered, not a human-centered, experience.
Eager to Forgive (Jonah)

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord” (Jonah 2:9, NIV).

Key Thought: The book of Jonah reveals, among other things, that God is more willing to forgive others than we often are.

The story of Jonah, this rather unusual messenger of God, is one of the best known in the Bible. The prophet had been sent by God to warn Nineveh of coming destruction. He suspected that these non-Hebrew people might repent of their sins and that God would forgive them. Being a true prophet, Jonah knew that God’s plan was to save Nineveh, not to destroy it. Maybe that is why he, at first, tried to run away. Due to forces beyond his control, however, Jonah changed his mind and obeyed God’s command.

In response to Jonah’s preaching, the entire city believed the message and repented in a way in which, unfortunately, Israel and Judah did not. Jonah, meanwhile, had a number of important lessons to learn. The story shows how God patiently was teaching His narrow and stubborn prophet what grace, mercy, and forgiveness are all about.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 11.
The Disobedient Prophet (Jonah 1)

Not much is known about Jonah or his family background. Second Kings 14:25 tells that he lived in the northern part of Israel and ministered during the eighth century B.C. The same text reveals that Jonah predicted a territorial expansion of Israel’s kingdom.

Nineveh was historically one of the three great cities of Assyria, an important country situated by the Tigris River. Because God is the Lord of all nations and all peoples are accountable to Him (Amos 1–2), He sent His servant Jonah to warn the Ninevites of impending destruction. God’s command recorded in Jonah 1:2 to “preach against it” (NIV) also can be translated as “preach to it.”

Assyrian cruelty was notorious. About a century later, the prophet Nahum called Nineveh a “bloody city . . . full of lies and robbery” (Nah. 3:1). Jonah was sent to deliver God’s message to such people. Perhaps it was fear of the hated Assyrians, among other things, that prompted Jonah’s attitude. When told by God to make a trip east to Nineveh, the prophet refused and tried to flee west by ship to Tarshish.

At first, all things appeared to work well for Jonah, but then the Lord sent a great storm against the ship in order to teach His servant the lesson that no one can hide from God.

Jonah ran from God because he did not want to do God’s will. Even now people have many reasons to try to run away from God. Some do it because they do not know Him personally. Others reject even the idea of God and His Word. While people’s motives vary, in many cases they flee God in order to not feel guilty about the way in which they live. After all, if there is no higher power to answer to, why not do whatever you want? There are even some Christians who avoid God when He calls them to do something that they do not want to do, something that goes against their inherently selfish and sinful nature.

Read Psalm 139:1–12. What’s the basic message there for us? What kind of feelings does this fundamental truth evoke in you? Or look at it this way: we believe that God not only sees all that we do but knows even our thoughts. Do we live with that constant realization, or do we tend to try and blot it out of our minds? Or, perhaps, are we just so used to the idea that we just do not pay it much attention? Whatever the reasons, how differently would you act if, at all times, you were keenly sensitive to the fact that God does know your every thought?
Reluctant Witness

In Jonah 1, the Lord wants to halt Jonah’s escape, so He stirs up such a severe storm that it threatens to wreck the ship. The seamen call on their gods for help. Due to the severity of the storm, they feel that someone must have provoked the anger of the gods. They cast lots to decide who will be first to volunteer information about himself that might expose such an offense. For the casting of lots, each individual brings an identifiable stone or wooden marker. The markers are placed in a container that is shaken until one of the markers comes out. The lot falls on Jonah, who now confesses his sins and urges the seamen to throw him into the sea.

This story is remarkable because in it the non-Hebrew seamen act positively while Jonah is presented in a negative light. Although they worship many gods, the seamen show a great respect for the Lord to whom they pray. They are also tenderhearted toward the Lord’s servant Jonah, which is why they go out of their way to try to row back to the land. Finally, they agree with Jonah that he should be thrown overboard. With this done, the storm stops and the seamen sacrifice to the Lord and praise Him.

In verse 9, how does Jonah describe the Lord whom he said he feared? What is significant about the way in which he described the Lord? See also Rev 14:7, Isa. 42:5, Rev. 10:6.

Jonah’s confession of faith in God as Creator of the sea and land underscores the futility of his attempts to escape from God’s presence. The immediate cessation of the storm after the men throw Jonah into the sea shows them that the Lord, as Creator, has control of the sea. Because of this, the seamen worship the Lord all the more. How long their newfound fear and reverence for the Creator lasts, we are not told. There is no doubt, however, that they do learn something about Him from this experience.

We can barely comprehend many of the wonders of the world around us, much less all that is beyond the reach of our senses and even our imagination. How does the Creator speak to you through that which He has made?
Jonah’s Psalm

When Jonah was thrown into the sea, a big fish swallowed him at God’s bidding. Jonah must have thought that death indeed was going to be the only way to escape the mission to Nineveh. But the big fish (not called a whale in the book) was an instrument of salvation for the prophet. Unlike Jonah, this creature responded promptly and obediently to God’s commands (Jon. 1:17, 2:10).

God’s providence worked in an amazing way here. However, even though some people scoff at the story, Jesus testified to its veracity (Matt. 12:40) and even used it in reference to His own death and bodily resurrection.

Read Jonah 2, often called Jonah’s psalm. What is he saying there? What has he learned? What spiritual principles can we take away from this chapter?

Jonah’s psalm celebrates God’s deliverance from the perilous depths of the sea. It is the only poetic part of the book. In it Jonah recalls his prayer for help as he was sinking deep into the waters and facing certain death. Becoming fully aware of his salvation, he thanks God for it. The hymn indicates that Jonah is familiar with biblical psalms of praise and thanksgiving.

Jonah’s vow likely consisted of a sacrifice of thanksgiving. He was grateful that, though he deserved to die, God had shown him extraordinary mercy. In spite of his disobedience, Jonah still considered himself loyal to God because he had not succumbed to idol worship. Whatever his many character flaws, he was now determined to try to be faithful to his calling.

Sometimes it takes a terrible experience to open our heart to the Lord, and to realize that He is our only hope, our only salvation. Dwell on an experience you have had in which you clearly saw the hand of the Lord working in your own life. Why is it so easy to forget the ways in which the Lord has led you, even miraculously, especially when new trials arise?
A Successful Mission

After such a miraculous deliverance, Jonah obeyed immediately when he was commanded by God the second time to go to preach in Nineveh. In his proclamation, Jonah (3:1–4) used language reminiscent of God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). But in the original Hebrew, the word for “overthrown” (see Gen. 19:21, 29; Jon. 3:4) from Jonah’s proclamation can also have the meaning “turned around” or “transformed” (Exod. 7:17, 20; 1 Sam. 10:6). Jonah’s preaching of the divine message was not in vain.

The greatest achievement of Jonah’s prophetic career was the repentance of the city. After the seamen, the Ninevites were the second group of non-Hebrews in the book to turn to God, and all because of their interactions with God’s flawed messenger. The results were astounding. To humble themselves before God, the people of Nineveh wore sackcloth, put ashes on their heads, and fasted. All these were external signs of sorrow and repentance.

Read Matthew 12:39–41 and 2 Chronicles 36:15–17. What do these verses teach us about the importance of repentance?

The remarkable picture of a strong Assyrian monarch humbling himself in ashes before God is a sharp rebuke to many of Israel’s proud rulers and people, at least those who persistently rejected the prophetic calls to repentance. Because of the book of Jonah’s emphasis on God’s grace and forgiveness, the Jewish people read it every year at the climactic point of the Day of Atonement, which celebrates God’s forgiveness for their sins.

“Our God is a God of compassion. With long-sufferance and tender mercy he deals with the transgressors of his law. And yet, in this our day, when men and women have so many opportunities for becoming familiar with the divine law as revealed in Holy Writ, the great Ruler of the universe can not behold with any satisfaction the wicked cities, where reign violence and crime. If the people in these cities would repent, as did the inhabitants of Nineveh, many more such messages as Jonah’s would be given.”—Ellen G. White, Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, October 18, 1906.

Read Jonah 3:5–10. What do these verses reveal about the nature of true repentance? How can we apply these same principles to ourselves?
Forgiven, Yet Unforgiving

Read Jonah 4. What important lessons did Jonah need to learn? How is his own hypocrisy revealed here?

Jonah 4 reveals some startling things about the prophet. He seems to prefer to die rather than to witness about God’s grace and forgiveness. Whereas before Jonah had rejoiced in his deliverance from death (Jon. 2:7–9), now that the people of Nineveh live, he prefers to die (Jon. 4:2, 3).

In contrast to Jonah, God is pictured in the Bible as someone who takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ezek. 33:11, NKJV). Jonah and many of his compatriots rejoiced in God’s special mercies to Israel but wished only His wrath on their enemies. Such hardness of heart is rebuked sternly by the book’s message.

What are some of the lessons we can learn from Jonah’s mistakes? How does prejudice compromise our Christian testimony?

It rightly has been observed that Jonah’s book is a handbook on how not to be a prophet. Jonah was a prophet of rebellious spirit and mistaken priorities. He could not control his desire for vengeance. He was small-minded and ill-tempered. Instead of rejoicing in the grace that God also showed to the Ninevites, Jonah allowed his selfish and sinful pride to make him resentful.

Jonah’s last word is a wish for death (Jon. 4:8, 9) while God’s last word is an affirmation of His immeasurable grace, an affirmation for life.

Jonah’s book is left open-ended. Its closing verses confront the readers with one important question that remains unanswered by the author: Did the miraculous change of hearts in Nineveh eventually result in a radical change of Jonah’s heart?

There is a lot in the story of Jonah that is hard to understand, particularly about Jonah himself. Perhaps, though, the clearest lesson is that God’s grace and forgiveness extend way beyond ours. How can we learn to be more graceful and forgiving to those who do not deserve it as we see God doing here with Jonah and with the Ninevites?
**Further Study:** Read the following quotations and discuss how they help us to understand the messages from the book of Jonah more clearly.

“Whenever they are in need the children of God have the precious privilege of appealing to Him for help. It matters not how unsuitable the place may be, God’s ear of mercy is open to their cry. However desolate and dark the place may be, it can be turned into a veritable temple by the praying child of God.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1003.

“Confused, humiliated, and unable to understand God’s purpose in sparing Nineveh, Jonah nevertheless had fulfilled the commission given him to warn that great city; and though the event predicted did not come to pass, yet the message of warning was nonetheless from God. And it accomplished the purpose God designed it should. The glory of His grace was revealed among the heathen.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 272, 273.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. The book of Jonah teaches that God is in full control of nature. Imagine that one of your friends has lost a family member because of a natural disaster. How would you explain to him or her that God is still in charge despite the presence of natural disasters that devastate parts of our world and take away many human lives?

2. Read the last verse of Jonah. What does it teach us about our responsibility for mission outreach to all corners of the world?

3. In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt. 18:21–35), Jesus compares God to an angry king who revokes his forgiveness and throws the once-forgiven slave into jail. Does God really revoke His forgiveness? Some Christians argue adamantly that He does not. As a church, what position do we take on this topic, and why?

4. For many people steeped in secularism, the idea of a man being swallowed alive and living inside a “big fish” is not something to be taken seriously. As we saw earlier, however, Jesus clearly testified to the truthfulness of the story. How does the story of Jonah help us to realize just how narrow and confining an antisupernaturalist view of reality really is?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Jonah 2:9

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize God’s compassion as the motivating force behind his or her approach when dealing with people who differ from him or her in belief and lifestyle.

Feel: Acknowledge that true obedience must be a willing submission to God, springing from a heart grateful for knowing God’s character.

Do: Cultivate thanks for God’s desire to save everyone and a warm, loving attitude toward others who need help.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Salvation Comes From the Lord

- Notice that God saves different categories of people: a prophet, sailors, and Ninevites. What does this say about God’s willingness to save all humanity?
- How does God exercise compassion over people when dealing with their sins?

II. Feel: Forgiven and Forgiving

- Why was Jonah so unforgiving even though he experienced God’s forgiveness?
- How can you avoid feeling strong prejudice toward your audience while you preach, teach, or share Christ?
- What was Jonah’s attitude when he finally went to Nineveh, and what does that reveal about his obedience to God?

III. Do: God’s Compassion

- How can you cultivate the warmth of God’s compassion and avoid the coldness of Jonah when approaching others who are different from you?
- How can you help others to develop proper attitudes in cross-cultural situations and societies in which racism exists?
- What difference would it make in our churches, homes, and neighborhoods if every member showed true compassion for others?

Summary: God saved sailors, the Ninevites, and also His disobedient prophet. His compassion is open to everyone, reaches even the worst sinners, transcends borders, and goes beyond our human limits and understanding.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Jonah 4*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** There is no one special group or “chosen” people exclusively appointed to receive God’s grace. God’s forgiveness is available to all.

**Just for Teachers:** Take some time with your class to reflect on that which makes forgiveness difficult or easy.

A recent University of Miami study showed that people are more likely to forgive when relationships are characterized by two qualities: (a) closeness and commitment to the relationship and (b) a high degree of apology and the making of amends by the transgressor following the transgression (http://www.psy.miami.edu/faculty/mmccullough/Papers/forgiveness_feeling_connected_pspb.pdf, p.12).

But what about situations, such as the one Jonah faced, in which modeling God’s love and forgiveness requires looking beyond the offensive actions of the past that were committed by a group of people with whom you have no personal relationship? And, furthermore, situations in which there is no public (or human-directed) apology for those past actions? Have you been in a situation in which the thought of forgiveness was so unbearable that you felt it would be better, to use Jonah’s words, “‘to die than to live’” (Jon. 4:3, NIV)?

**Discuss:** What makes forgiveness easy, and what makes it difficult? Why does it sometimes seem that forgiveness is a miscarriage of justice? Jonah felt that really bad people just “got away” with being bad; why, in the end, is that not true?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

**I. Forgiving the Unforgivable** *(Review Jonah 4:1–3 with your class.)*

Jonah, the son of a persecuted Israelite nation, was sent into hostile territory to
aid another nation in averting a judgment that he may well have thought it deserved. Implicit in Jonah’s anger is his own unwillingness to see the Ninevites as worthy of forgiveness. Nineveh, part of the Assyrian Empire, was a city that was very warlike and an important part of the Assyrian state, which had the largest standing army ever seen in the Middle East or the Mediterranean (http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/Assyrians.html). The Ninevites had almost certainly committed enough atrocities that they deserved judgment, and perhaps Jonah wanted them to get their just due.

In the face of Jonah’s reluctance to see the “enemy” repent, one might ask, where is the love, where is the tender concern and kindness in the book of Jonah? The Hebrew word translated into “love kindness” or “loving kindness” is chesed; and it is central to Jewish ethics and is repeated throughout the Bible. Some modern Jewish scholars claim the entire Torah begins and ends with chesed (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chesed).

As Monday’s study points out, we see much more tenderheartedness and respect for God in the actions of the pagan sailors than we do in Jonah. We also see an openness and repentance in the hearts of the people of Nineveh. We hear concern in the voice of God. But Jonah? Jonah struggles with anger. He is upset that the people of Nineveh repented and that God bestowed His mercy upon them, as he knew would happen given that the Lord is “‘gracious and compassionate . . . slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity’” (Jon. 4:2, NIV).

The story of Jonah speaks to the miraculous ways of God and His capacity to engage in supernatural acts. As such, it teaches young and old alike to be open to wonder, to expect more than our human eyes and the laws of science tell us is possible. On more complex levels, it teaches one of the deepest spiritual lessons we must learn: that there is no person who is beyond the healing mercy of God’s grace. Jonah, a sinner saved by divine grace, is nevertheless extremely unhappy that the people of Nineveh are co-recipients of that grace. This story shows the revolutionary teaching that God’s grace is for everyone and challenges bigoted notions and attitudes often held by “believers” toward “unbelievers.”

The story of Jonah illuminates one of the most central and yet hard-to-accept truths of God’s gospel message: forgiveness and redemption are for anyone with a heart open to God. Race, creed, and nationality are never factors in the divine equation; God’s love and membership in His family are universal. And most important, past actions (no matter how heinous, how unjust, how wretched) are never insurmountable for the repentant heart. There is no hurdle that a heart filled with repentance cannot cross. There is no past that God cannot forgive.
**Consider This:** Given all this good news, why is it that we, like Jonah, find forgiveness so hard to give?

Instead of harshly judging Jonah, encourage the class to look at Jonah sympathetically. Jonah, a prophet of God, was having a very human response to his calling. What does God’s forgiveness of Israel’s enemies say about God and about the way that we are to forgive those who wound or offend us?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** There is much about Jonah that we don’t know. For example, we don’t know Jonah’s backstory, a story that might explain why he acted and felt the way he did. All we know is what we read in these four short chapters. Spend some time with your class exploring their responses to the following two compelling questions that the reader is left with after reading the story of Jonah. They are profoundly important spiritual questions for our time.

**Thought/Application/Inductive Questions:**

1. Why is Jonah so angry at God’s forgiveness of the Ninevites?

2. “‘Should I not be concerned about that great city?’” This is the question that God asks Jonah in chapter 4, verse 11. Translate this question for our time by imagining God asking us, “Should I not be concerned with (fill in the blank for whichever group of people seems like the “bad/unworthy/sinful people” of today’s age)?” Encourage your class to assemble the list of “bad guys”—from those people who fill the pages of newspapers and television on a global scale down to the “bad guys” you know in your local communities, schools, political arenas, and so on. Ask them how it makes them feel to know that all these people are able to obtain God’s forgiveness and mercy.
STEP 4—Create

JUST FOR TEACHERS: All of us have something to forgive and something for which to be forgiven. Speak to God in prayer about what you are going through as though He were your counselor and best friend. For those still dealing with fresh, difficult, or longstanding pains, perhaps you are still coming to terms with your pain. Others may be finding a way to let go. Some may be experiencing forgiveness in their heart of hearts. Using prayer to help you through the journey, at whatever point you find yourself, is vital. The following activity is designed to help you enter into a conversation with God about forgiveness.

Activity: Ask your class members to spend 2 to 5 minutes in quiet contemplation about people they are struggling to forgive or the pain they may have caused others. At the end of that quiet contemplation, invite your class to spend 2 to 5 minutes in prayer (this can be solitary, or people may pair off as they wish) about those things. Some people may wish to go somewhere private to pray. Here are some basic tools to help you to enter into conversation with God about forgiveness:

Praying for Forgiveness
• Acknowledge the pain or hurt you have experienced/caused and what that has meant for your life/someone else’s life.
• Request God’s healing of that pain or forgiveness for causing that pain. For those still holding on to pain/anger, ask for the strength to release it, soften your heart, and let it go. (Did anger cause you to hurt someone else? Are you angry because you were hurt by someone else’s actions?)
• Invite God to work with you to find a way through that valley of pain/anger and to bring to your awareness something valuable, beautiful, and worthwhile that may be in store for you in this experience. Invite God to open your eyes to the blessings and positives that might be hidden within a very negative experience. Claim God’s promise that all things do work together for good to those who love God, even when it is hard to believe/see.
• When your soul is ready to renounce all anger and resentment, thank God for the opportunity to forgive a wrong or be forgiven of a wrong. Invite into your life and heart all of the blessings that will come to you from the peace that comes with that forgiveness. Pray for humility and loving-kindness to imbue your soul and spirit as you enact forgiveness or receive it.
God’s Special People (Micah)

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Mic. 1:1–9, 2 Cor. 11:23–27, Mic. 2:1–11, 5:2, 6:1–8, 7:18–20.

Memory Text: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8).

Key Thought: Even amid the worst apostasy, the Lord was willing to forgive and heal His people.

The prophet Micah ministered in one of the darkest periods of Israel’s history. The country long had been divided into two kingdoms. Finally, Assyria put an end to the Northern Kingdom, and Micah could see evil and violence creeping into Judah in the south. He preached against the fatal sins of dishonesty, injustice, bribery, and mistrust. Micah also was the first biblical prophet to predict the destruction of Jerusalem (Mic. 3:12).

Yet, through divine inspiration, the prophet saw light in this dark time. With the help of God’s perspective, he looked beyond the coming punishment. Micah offered encouraging words and said that the Lord’s anointed Leader would come from Bethlehem. The Messiah would be the leader who would save Israel and speak peace to the nations by teaching them to “beat their swords into plowshares” (Mic. 4:3). God’s rebuke would be the channel of restoration and ultimate blessings.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 18.
Agony of the Prophet’s Heart

In Micah 1:1–9, the prophet invites the whole earth to witness God’s judgment against sinful people. The capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem are singled out because their leaders failed to be role models of what it means to follow God with undivided hearts. These two cities would be the first to suffer destruction.

For Micah, the thought of destructive judgment produced a real tension in his life. Because his prophetic call united him with God’s purpose, he had no choice but to announce what was coming in the near future. But the prophet also loved the people to whom he belonged, and the idea of their captivity drove him to personal lament. Oftentimes bad news had the most devastating effect on the mind and the body of the prophet.

What do the following texts teach about the hard lot of the prophets? Num. 11:10–15, 1 Kings 19:1–4, Jer. 8:21–9:2, Ezek. 24:15–18, 2 Cor. 11:23–27.

God’s prophets were involved very much in the messages that they proclaimed. They did not enjoy speaking about the terrible things that would happen. They often used laments to express their reactions to the coming disasters. Their pain was real. To their listeners, the message was contained both in their prophetic words and also in the external signs, which often betrayed the deep pain stemming from within. Micah’s reaction to divine judgment reminds one of Isaiah, who for three years walked half-naked and barefoot as a visible sign of the shame that captivity would bring. Those of you who have the resources, can read about the great suffering that Ellen G. White endured in her ministry as well; this will help you to better understand what these servants of God had to go through.

Read 1 Peter 4:14–16 and then look at yourself and whatever trials you are going through. How much suffering has come to you because of your faithfulness to God? How much has come due to your unfaithfulness?
Those Who Devise Iniquity

Read Micah 2:1–11 and Micah 3. What are the sins that threaten to bring judgment upon these people?

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“The accession of Ahaz to the throne brought Isaiah and his associates face to face with conditions more appalling than any that had hitherto existed in the realm of Judah. Many who had formerly withstood the seductive influence of idolatrous practices were now being persuaded to take part in the worship of heathen deities. Princes in Israel were proving untrue to their trust; false prophets were arising with messages to lead astray; even some of the priests were teaching for hire. Yet the leaders in apostasy still kept up the forms of divine worship and claimed to be numbered among the people of God.

“The prophet Micah, who bore his testimony during those troublous times, declared that sinners in Zion, while claiming to ‘lean upon the Lord,’ and blasphemously boasting, ‘Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us,’ continued to ‘build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity.’ Micah 3:11, 10.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 322.

One of the constant problems that the Hebrew nation faced was the deception that their special status as God’s people—their knowledge of the true God, as opposed to the silliness of the pagan idolatry (see Ps. 115:4–9)—made them somehow immune to divine retribution. The terrible truth, however, was that it was precisely because they had special status before God that they would be deemed that much more guilty for their sins. Time and again, such as in the book of Deuteronomy, the Lord warned them that all the blessings, protection, and prosperity that would be theirs were dependent upon obedience to His commands, such as seen in this caution: “Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons” (Deut. 4:9).

However much we might try to fool ourselves, in what ways are we, as Seventh-day Adventists with so much light, in danger of making this same error?
A New Ruler From Bethlehem

In Micah’s book the mood often drastically changes from gloom to sublime hope. This hope is seen in one of the most famous of all the Messianic prophecies.

Read Micah 5:2. Who is being spoken about here, and what does this teach us about Him? See also John 1:1–3; 8:58; Col. 1:16, 17.

Out of a little Judean town would come Someone from eternity to be a ruler in Israel. Micah 5:2 is one of the most precious biblical verses written in order to strengthen the hope of the people who eagerly awaited the ideal Leader promised by the prophets. His rule would usher a time of strength, justice, and peace (Mic. 5:4–6).

David was a native of Bethlehem, a town also called Ephrath (Gen. 35:19). The mention of this town stresses the humble origin of both David and His future successor, who would be the True Shepherd of this people (Mic. 5:4). In the humble town of Bethlehem, the prophet Samuel anointed Jesse’s youngest son, David, who was to be king over Israel (1 Sam. 16:1–13, 17:12). When the wise men came looking for the newly born “king of the Jews,” King Herod asked the Bible experts where to search (Matt. 2:4–6). They referred him to this passage, which foretold that the Messiah would come from the small town of Bethlehem.

As incomprehensible as it is to our finite and fallen minds, that baby born was the eternal God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth: “from the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 19. However incredible the idea, it is one of the most foundational truths in Christianity: the Creator God took upon Himself humanity and in that humanity offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. If you take the time to dwell upon what this teaches us about both the value of our lives and what we as individuals mean to God, you can have a life-changing experience. While so many people struggle to find purpose and meaning to their existence, we have the foundation of the Cross, which not only anchors us in what our lives mean but also gives us the hope of something greater than that which this world ever could offer.
What Is Good

In the beginning of Micah 6, God dialogues with His people, listing all the things that He has done on their behalf. In response, the worshiper who comes into the temple asks what he might do to please God. What is it that constitutes an acceptable offering: year-old calves, a multitude of rams, rivers of oil, or even the worshiper’s firstborn child? There is a steady progression of the size and value of the offerings listed in this text.

Read Micah 6:1–8. What crucial truth is being taught here? Why is this especially important for us as Seventh-day Adventists? What does this tell us about how truth is more than just correct doctrine and detailed understanding of prophecy? See Matt. 23:23.

The prophet declares that God already has revealed what He wants. Additionally, through the teachings of Moses, the people know what God has graciously done for them (Deut. 10:12, 13). So, Micah’s answer is not a new revelation that signals a change in God’s requirements. Sacrifices and priestly services are not God’s first concern. God’s supreme wish is to have a people who act in justice toward their neighbors, and with consistent devotion and love toward the Lord. The most extravagant offering that people can give to God is obedience.

Micah 6:8 is the most succinct statement of God’s will for His people. It summarizes all prophetic teachings on true religion: a life displaying justice, mercy, and a close walk with God. Justice is something that people do when prompted by God’s Spirit. It has to do with fairness and equality for all, especially the weak and powerless who are exploited by others. Kindness means to freely and willingly show love, loyalty, and faithfulness to others. Walking with God means to put God first and to live in conformity with His will.

Why is it easier to keep the Sabbath strictly than it is to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God?
Into the Depths of the Sea

Micah’s book begins with a description of judgments, but it ends with words of hope. There are people who try to explain away or deny the reality of God’s judgments. To do so is to fall into the same trap as Micah’s contemporaries who believed that God never would send judgments on the chosen nation.

God’s justice is the other side of His love and concern. The good news presented by Micah is that punishment is never God’s last word. God’s action in Scripture consistently moves from judgment to forgiveness, from punishment to grace, and from suffering to hope.

Read Micah 7:18–20. How is the gospel revealed in these verses? What hope is seen here for all of us? Why do we need it so desperately?

Micah’s closing verses present his praise filled with hope. The question “Who is like God?” matches Micah’s name, which means “Who is like the Lord?” It serves as a reminder of the uniqueness of God and affirms the truth that there is no one like Him. How could there be? After all, He alone is the Creator. Everything else is created. Even more important, our Creator is a God of grace and forgiveness, a God who went to the most unimaginable extremes possible in order to save us from the destruction that is rightly ours. He did it for the Hebrew nation, and He will do it for us as well.

It is possible that we today are surrounded by difficult circumstances and painful experiences that leave us to wonder why God allows all this to happen. Sometimes it is just so hard to make sense of things. In such times, our hope rests only with the Lord, who promises to hurl our sins into the depths of the sea. There is hope for the future in remembering what God has done in the past.

Take a good, hard look at yourself. Why is your only hope found in the promise that God will cast your sins “into the depths of the sea”?

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Further Study: “If Jerusalem had known what it was her privilege to know, and had heeded the light which Heaven had sent her, she might have stood forth in the pride of prosperity, the queen of kingdoms, free in the strength of her God-given power. There would have been no armed soldiers standing at her gates. . . . The glorious destiny that might have blessed Jerusalem had she accepted her Redeemer rose before the Son of God. He saw that she might through Him have been healed of her grievous malady, liberated from bondage, and established as the mighty metropolis of the earth. From her walls the dove of peace would have gone forth to all nations. She would have been the world’s diadem of glory.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 577.

Discussion Questions:

1. If you want to understand in a more modern context the suffering that God’s prophets often endured, read from the book Life Sketches by Ellen G. White. What does this book teach about the toils and trials that God’s faithful messengers can face?

2. It is so easy to get caught up in religious forms, traditions, and rituals, all of which may be fine. At the same time, though, what happens when these forms and rituals become ends in themselves instead of pointing us toward what it truly means to be a follower of the God whom we worship with those forms?

3. Dwell more on the whole idea of the Incarnation, the idea that the Creator God took upon Himself our human flesh. As one medieval theologian wrote, “Retaining all that He was, Christ took upon Himself what He wasn’t”—and that is our humanity. Think about what this amazing truth reveals about God’s love for us. Why should this truth fill us with hope, gratitude, and praise, regardless of our circumstances?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Micah 6:8

The Student Will:

Know: Understand that God reveals what is good in His Word. His revelation gives us insights that we cannot otherwise obtain. God wants only our best; therefore, He gives us instructions and laws.

Feel: Be attracted to the Lord and His loving character, and enjoy His presence.

Do: Spend time with Him and, as a result, His goodness and kindness will be seen in his or her character as he or she acts as He does.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Walk Humbly With the Lord
   A  How can you walk humbly with the Lord?
   B  Why is it so difficult to exercise mercy?
   C  What does it mean to do what is right?

II. Feel: Love Mercy
   A  What is the difference between showing mercy and loving to show mercy?
   B  How does it make you feel to forgive someone who doesn’t deserve it?

III. Do: Act Justly
   A  Why is it so important for God’s people to be admonished to do right?
   B  How can you harmonize mercy and justice in your church’s decisions while dealing with problematic issues?
   C  Invite class members to share their personal experiences of when they have wrestled over whether to show mercy or justice to an erring person.

Summary: Prophet Micah explains who God is; then he admonishes the people to walk with Him in order to reflect His character, namely by loving to show mercy and to do what is right. Only by beholding God will we emulate and become like Him.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Micah 6:8*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God forgives, shows mercy, and acts justly. When we humbly walk with Him, we learn how to love mercy and do what is right. In doing so, we thus reflect His character.

**Just for Teachers:** There is no difference between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. This idea is in opposition to Marcion, who already in the second century after Christ made an incorrect distinction between what he characterized as a harsh, just, punishing, and angry God of the Old Testament and the loving, forgiving, and gracious Jesus Christ, the God of the New Testament. The reality is that the God who created humanity and brought Israel out of Egypt and led them to the Promised Land is exactly the same God who died for us on Calvary! “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” *(Heb. 13:8, NIV)*.

**Opening Discussion:** People so often misread the Old Testament and imagine the God of the Old Testament as a God of war, blood, punishment, and judgment, while they overlook the even more severe pictures of a just God in the New Testament (see, for examples, *Matt. 23:13–39, 24:51, Acts 5:1–11, Rev. 14:9–11, 19:17–21*). However, there is only one biblical God who is love *(Exod. 34:6, 7; 1 John 4:16)*, so it is our interpretation of Scripture—not the character of God—that is usually distorted and needs to be corrected. Our God, therefore, is the God of love, truth, justice, and freedom.

Questions for Discussion:

1. In this week’s lesson, what powerful Bible verse gives the most encouragement to the believer in relationship to the battle against evil?

2. What is the significance of Christ’s victory on the cross, and what implications does this have for understanding God as the God of love and justice?

STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Micah was an eighth-century prophet before Christ (some time between 750–686 B.C.), contemporaneous with Isaiah, and his message is directed to his own generation but especially to the remnant...
The conditions he gives for the society within which he lives seem like a description he would use if he lived in our postmodern society (see, especially, Mic. 7:2–6): there are no godly people; violence and bloodshed prevail everywhere; betrayals reign among friends; the best among the people are like briers; those in power demand bribes; judges are corrupted; conspiracy is everywhere; one cannot trust one’s neighbor or one’s friend or have confidence in one’s spouse; children are in conflict with parents; et cetera. God’s message, however, has the power to heal these broken relationships.

Bible Commentary

I. What God Requires (Review Micah 6:8 with your class.)

The book of Micah is not written for information only; God’s Word has power to change its readers. Micah raises very important questions. If God is who He is—loving, forgiving, merciful, compassionate—how can we please our God? How can we gain favor before Him? By sacrificing animals? God does not delight in rituals, or external and formal religion. He wants more. Does this mean giving special gifts? Sacrificing one’s own firstborn? Absolutely not. So how should we approach Him? The clear answer is provided in Micah 6:8: “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (NIV).

The New Living Translation puts it in these words: “No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

Micah 6:8 is the verse par excellence for biblical ethics and describes the true Christian lifestyle. In order to better understand what God is saying through Micah, we need to become acquainted with one crucial feature of biblical Hebrew thinking. When biblical authors want to explain a sequence of different actions, they describe them usually from the effect to the cause. This principle works from the visible to the invisible, from the superficial to the real, from the outside to the inside. We think and speak differently today; we explain things from cause to effect.

In other words, to understand what Micah is really saying, to catch his message, we need to reverse his sequence of thoughts. We need to begin to study this verse, starting from the end. Thus, the proper sequence for us today is:

First, “Walk humbly with the Lord!” This is the cause of all other actions described.
Second, “Love mercy!” This is the first result.
Finally, “Act justly!” This is the additional consequence.
**Consider This:** How do we obtain God’s favor? What are the effects of walking humbly with the Lord?

**II. Walk With the Lord!** *(Review Genesis 5:24 with your class.)*

In some European countries, when two young people are deeply in love and dating, the people in those cultures describe their relationship with the idiomatic expression “they walk together.” The meaning of this expression is that the couple likes to be together, wishes to know each other, and is in love.

Thus, walking with the Lord means to fall in love with Him, to know more and more who He is, as Enoch walked with God and “was no more, because God took him away” *(Gen. 5:24, NIV).*

In this way, we will become like Him. Whom we love, we copy, and whom we copy makes all the difference. Everything depends on this if we want to be like God, to be as loving, gracious, forgiving, merciful, serving, compassionate, and unselfish as He is.

It is so easy to be spiritually proud, to build on our short-term successful achievements, but to concentrate on them is very deceptive and dangerous. Disappointment is bitter! This is why Micah stresses that we need to walk humbly with the Lord.

**Consider This:** How can you make sure that the everyday routine and worries of life do not distract you from walking with the Lord? How can you walk with the Lord while working, talking, studying, or entertaining?

**III. Love Mercy and Act Justly** *(Review Micah 6:8 with your class.)*

It is one thing to show mercy and another to love to show mercy. We need to love to forgive, not to be pushed or forced to do it. We should love unselfishly as our God loves unselfishly. Acting in a self-sacrificing way as God does is possible only by His power. We need to be a living example of God’s remarkable grace. Loving to show mercy brings surprising results.

Only when we walk humbly with the Lord, love to forgive, love to be merciful, and love to show compassion, can we know how to act justly. This is the result of a close walk with the Lord. When we practice love, we can know how to stand for truth and justice and how to have a passion for righteousness.

**Consider This:** What does it mean to “love” mercy? How can we forgive and show mercy to people when they repeatedly make the same mistakes? What does it mean to act justly?
STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: God hurls all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. Use the following story to illustrate this concept as you seek to help class members to freely forgive as God forgives us.

Story: “In the Depths of the Sea”
One old father was reading Micah 7:19 about God’s putting away of our sins by throwing them into the depths of the ocean. He rejoiced over it and shouted, “Glory to God!” His unbelieving son did not like it, so he brought a scientific encyclopedia for his father to read instead of the Bible. After some time, his son again heard his father shouting, “Glory to God!” The son came and asked his father, “What do you read here that you are so excited about?” The father replied, “I read that scientists, even with the best modern equipment, are sometimes unable to go deep enough to explore all the depths of the ocean. It means that our sins are buried there, and no one can dig them up!” Thanks be to God for this kind of faith that takes God at His Word.

Thought Questions:
1. How can we not only forgive but also forget what was done to us?
2. How can we have the same attitude toward others as God has toward us sinners?

Activity: Tell your class members remarkable stories about forgiveness and unselfish love. Discuss with them their various reactions and help them to understand why to forgive is divine.

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Use the story of Christ’s encounter with the woman at the well to explore with your class how, by combining love and justice, we can approach people who have done something terribly wrong. Then answer the questions that follow.

Activity: Discuss the ways in which Jesus showed respect to the woman of John 8 despite the fact that she had committed adultery.

Questions for Discussion:
1. According to this story, what are the first steps in recovering from wrong habits?
2. What practical examples can you use to make clear the whole process of forgiveness and reconciliation?
Lesson 8  *May 18–24

Trusting God’s Goodness (Habakkuk)

Sabbath Afternoon

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Hab. 1:1–17, 2:2–4, Gal. 3:11, Heb. 11:1–13, Habakkuk 3, Phil. 4:11.

**Memory Text:** “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14, NASB).

**Key Thought:** We may not understand always why tragedy happens, but we can trust God, no matter what.

After preaching about God’s abiding presence amid life’s adversities, a pastor was confronted by a woman who tearfully asked: “Pastor, where was God on the day when my only son died?” Reading a deep sorrow on her face the pastor was silent for a moment and then replied: “God was in the same place where He was on the day His only Son died to save us from the eternal death.”

Like us, Habakkuk witnessed injustice, violence, and evil. Even worse, God appeared to be silent amid it all, though He did ask Habakkuk to trust in His promises. The prophet did not live to see the fulfillment of those promises; yet, he learned to trust in them anyway. His book begins with a complaint to God but ends with one of the most beautiful songs in the Bible. Like Habakkuk, we must wait in faith until the time when the world will be “filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 25.*
Perplexed Prophet

Read Habakkuk 1. What are the questions that the prophet asks of God? Though his situation is, of course, different from ours, how often do we find ourselves asking these types of questions?

Habakkuk is unique among prophets because he does not speak for God to the people but rather he speaks to God about the people. The prophet begins his struggle to understand God’s purposes with a cry of bewilderment: “O Lord, how long?” In the Bible, this question is typical of a lament (Ps. 13:1, Jer. 12:4). It implies a situation of crisis from which the speaker seeks deliverance.

The crisis about which Habakkuk calls for help is the violence that permeated his society. The original Hebrew word for “violence” is hamas, and it is used six times in Habakkuk’s book. The term implies acts of injury, both physical and moral, inflicted on others (Gen. 6:11).

Being a prophet, Habakkuk knows well how much God loves justice and hates oppression; so, he wants to know why God allows injustice to continue. All around he notices violence and law-breaking, and it seems that the wicked triumph over the righteous. Justice is being perverted by the powerful as it was in the time of Amos (Amos 2:6–8) and as it so often is today.

God’s answer reveals His future plans. He will use the army of Babylon to punish the people. This announcement surprises the prophet. He did not anticipate that God would use such a ruthless army to discipline Judah. In verse 8 the Babylonian cavalry are compared to a leopard, wolf, and eagle—three predators whose speed and power bring violent death to their prey.

Babylon’s ruthless arrogance acknowledges no accountability, seeks no repentance, and offers no reparations. It violates the most fundamental order of created life. However, God said that Babylon’s army will be used as a “rod of My anger” (Isa. 10:5, NKJV). The punishment will take place during Habakkuk’s lifetime (Hab. 1:5). This whole situation raises even more difficult questions about divine justice.

How can we learn to trust in God’s goodness and justice when the world seems so full of badness and injustice? What is our only recourse?
Living by Faith

In Habakkuk 1:12–17, God’s answer to Habakkuk’s questions poses an even more vexing question: can a righteous God use the wicked to punish those who are more righteous than they? Habakkuk’s question in verse 17 has to do with divine justice.

Habakkuk was puzzled, not only by the degeneration of his own people but also by the certainty that his country would be judged by another nation, one worse than his own. The prophet was well aware of Judah’s sins, but by any standards, his people, particularly the righteous among them, were not as wicked as the pagan Babylonians.

Read Habakkuk 2:2–4. What hope is presented there?

Habakkuk 2:2–4 is one of the most important passages in the Bible. Verse 4, in particular, expresses the essence of the gospel, the foundation of the verse that arguably started the Protestant Reformation. Through faith in Jesus Christ we receive God’s righteousness; we are credited with the righteousness of God Himself. His righteousness becomes ours. It is what is known as justification by faith.


In the midst of all this turmoil and questions about evil, justice, and salvation, Habakkuk 2:4 presents a sharp contrast between the faithful and the proud. The conduct of each group determines its fate: the arrogant will fail while the righteous will live by faith. The original Hebrew word for faith (`emuna) is best rendered as “faithfulness,” “constancy,” and “dependability.” While the one who lives by faith is not saved by his works, his works show that he lives by faith. His faith is revealed in his works, and thus he is promised life eternal.
For the Earth Shall Be Filled
(Habakkuk 2)

God’s answer to Habakkuk’s question in Habakkuk 1:17, as recorded in chapter 2, continues in the form of a song that mocks the proud oppressor. No less than five woes (Hab. 2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19) affirm the message that Babylon’s doom is sealed. The punishment on the enemy will be in accordance with the “measure for measure” principle.

What the wicked do to their victims will, in the end, be done to them. They will reap what they sow, because God cannot be mocked by proud human beings (Gal. 6:7).

In contrast to the oppressor, who is in the end judged by God, the righteous have the promise of eternal life in Christ, regardless of what happens to them here in this life. In describing the faithful remnant at the time of the end, the book of Revelation presents the expression “the patience of the saints” (Rev. 14:12). Indeed, the righteous are persistent in their wait for divine intervention, even if they see it only at the Second Coming.

Read Hebrews 11:1–13. How do these verses help us as we wrestle, in our own context, with the same questions with which Habakkuk struggled?

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God’s ultimate answer to Habakkuk’s questions was the affirmation of His abiding presence. Trust in God’s presence and have confidence in His judgment in spite of the appearances to the contrary; that is the message of Habakkuk’s book, as well as the message of all biblical revelation. Prophetic faith is trust in the Lord and His unchanging character.

“The faith that strengthened Habakkuk and all the holy and the just in those days of deep trial was the same faith that sustains God’s people today. In the darkest hours, under circumstances the most forbidding, the Christian believer may keep his soul stayed upon the source of all light and power. Day by day, through faith in God, his hope and courage may be renewed.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, pp. 386, 387.
Remembering God’s Fame

Read Habakkuk 3. What is Habakkuk doing there, and why is that so important, especially given the tough circumstances and difficult questions he is facing?

Habakkuk expresses his acceptance of God’s ways in a prayer set to music (Hab. 3:19). Being fully aware of God’s power, he asks the Lord to remember His mercy when the judgment begins. The prophet reverently recalls reports of God’s great acts in the past and prays to Him to bring redemption now. He seems to stand between times. With one eye he looks back to the Exodus event while with the other he looks ahead to the day of the Lord. He longs for a display of God’s power in his present situation.

The hymn from chapter 3 poetically describes God’s deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian bondage. What has happened at the time of the Exodus is a foreshadowing of the great judgment day. The godly should not be anxious about the day of the Lord, but they must wait, persevere, and rejoice in the hope that is theirs.

The hymn is also a celebration of the power, glory, and victorious nature of God. Habakkuk describes the Lord as sovereign over the whole earth. The revelation of His glory is comparable to the splendor of the sunrise (Hab. 3:4).

God judges the oppressive nations; yet, at the same time He brings about the redemption of His people in His “chariots of salvation” (Hab. 3:8). On the surface God’s power is not always visible, but the person of faith knows that God is there, no matter what.

Habakkuk calls us to look expectantly for the Lord’s salvation, when He will establish His righteousness on earth and fill the world with His glory. By singing praises to the Lord, the people of God encourage one another (Eph. 5:19, 20; Col. 3:16) to meditate on God’s past acts and to hope for the glorious future. Habakkuk’s own example demonstrates how one can persevere by living with a vision.

Dwell upon God’s past leading in your life. How does this past leading help you to learn to trust Him and His goodness, no matter what the immediate future brings? Why is it always so important to look to the ultimate and eternal future that awaits us?
God Is Our Strength

“Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food. . . . Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength; he will make my feet like deer’s feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills” (Hab. 3:17–19, NKJV).

What is so good about the prophet’s attitude here? How can we cultivate such an attitude for ourselves? See also Phil. 4:11.

The closing words in Habakkuk’s book (Hab. 3:16–19) express the prophet’s response to the revelation of God’s power and goodness. A fresh look at God’s saving acts sparks Habakkuk’s courage as he awaits the enemy’s attack. His fear stirs his innermost being as he waits for divine judgment to fall upon his nation. Invasion may result in the devastation of the fig and olive trees, so highly prized in Palestine, along with the equally needed vines, grain, and cattle. But the prophet’s staunch faith remains untouched because he has had a vision of the living Lord.

Based on his past experiences, Habakkuk knows of God’s absolute faithfulness. That is why he resigns himself to God’s present purposes (Hab. 3:16–19). In spite of all the unfavorable circumstances, the prophet is determined to place his trust in the Lord and in His goodness, no matter how hopeless his situation appears.

So, Habakkuk waits in faithful trust, even though there are no immediate signs of salvation. He is a prophet who, through dialogue, taunts, and a hymn of praise, has instructed the faithful over the ages to develop a deeper living faith in the Redeemer. By his own example, he encourages the godly to dialogue with God, to test their loyalty to Him in harsh times, to develop hope in the Lord, and to praise Him.

Habakkuk closes his book with a beautifully expressed attitude of faith: regardless of how hard life may become, one can find joy and strength in God. The underlying message of his book points to the need to wait patiently for God’s salvation in a period of oppression that has no visible end. The theme of “waiting on the Lord” dominates Habakkuk’s book. How especially relevant that theme should be for us, as Seventh-day Adventists, whose very name expresses our faith in the coming of Jesus.
Further Study: Read the following comments and discuss how they help us to understand better Habakkuk’s messages.

“There is an answer to Habakkuk’s question. It is an answer, not in terms of thought, but in terms of events. God’s answer will happen, but it cannot be spelled out in words. The answer will surely come; ‘if it seem[s] slow, wait for it.’ True, the interim is hard to bear; the righteous one is horrified by what he sees. To this the great answer is given: ‘The righteous shall live by his faith.’ It is an answer, again not in terms of thought, but in terms of existence. Prophetic faith is trust in Him, in Whose presence stillness is a form of understanding.” —Abraham J. Heschel, The Prophets, p. 143.

“We must cherish and cultivate the faith of which prophets and apostles have testified—the faith that lays hold on the promises of God and waits for deliverance in His appointed time and way. The sure word of prophecy will meet its final fulfillment in the glorious advent of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as King of kings and Lord of lords. The time of waiting may seem long, the soul may be oppressed by discouraging circumstances, many in whom confidence has been placed may fall by the way; but with the prophet who endeavored to encourage Judah in a time of unparalleled apostasy, let us confidently declare, ‘The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him.’ ”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, pp. 387, 388.

Discussion Questions:

1. Summarize Habakkuk’s dialogue with God. What was his basic complaint? How did he respond to God’s answers?

2. Could it be that, in God’s eyes, having honest questions and even doubts are a more acceptable religious attitude than a mere superficial belief? Justify your answer.

3. Seventh-day Adventists of past generations all believed that Christ would have been back by now, and that they would have seen the ultimate fulfillment of all these wonderful promises. How do we learn to maintain faith as we, another generation, await His return?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Habakkuk 2:14

**The Student Will:**

- **Know:** Realize that bringing his or her perplexing questions to God is good, because when he or she struggles with Him, he or she learns from Him.
- **Feel:** Be comforted to know that while he or she may be discouraged in looking around, looking up brings hope.
- **Do:** Learn to honestly present to God his or her perplexing questions, arguments, and complaints. In this way, He can change his or her attitudes, feelings, and reasoning.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God Welcomes Complaints

- A Why is it as important for us as it was for biblical authors to communicate with God openly, honestly, and sincerely?
- B Why is it so difficult to wait for God’s justice?
- C Discuss: Is it helpful to share our complaints with others, or is it better to share them with God? Give reasons for your answer.

II. Feel: Trusting God in Times of Delay

- A How can trust in the Lord provide strength and build us up?
- B Why is it so important to protect the righteous?
- C How can we avoid feeling depressed when the Lord delays in answering our questions?

III. Do: Open and Honest Prayers

- A Why should we tell God our feelings of frustration and present our perplexing questions?
- B How can we help people to be open with God?
- C How can we help doubting Seventh-day Adventists to live with unanswered questions?

**Summary:** Justice is an important ingredient in life and must always be balanced with love. Only a true knowledge of God’s purposes as revealed in His Word can help us to trust Him in spite of tragedies and delayed answers.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Habakkuk 3:17, 18*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** We, like Habakkuk, live in a broken world, a world of pain and injustice that begs the question not only of God’s existence but about who He is and what He is like. *Habakkuk 3:17, 18* sums up Habakkuk’s struggle of faith. As a result of his dialogue with God, he is inspired to look beyond his present conditions and reaffirm his faith in God’s goodness.

**Just for Teachers:** Use one of the opening activities below to explore the ways in which the book of Habakkuk role-plays the cycle of faith, doubt, and renewed faith in circumstances in which our experience seems impossible to reconcile with our spiritual beliefs.

Opening Activities:

1. Engage with your class about how the story of Habakkuk mirrors/differs from the story of Job. In what ways do these stories help us to further understand how to deal with difficult questions when faced with injustice, particularly with undeserved suffering?

2. Elicit personal examples of spiritual crises that add dimension to understanding this week’s study.

STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** In looking at the content and structure of this week’s study, the following elements in the biblical account may prove to be useful starting points for deepening spiritual insights into Habakkuk’s story.

Bible Commentary

I. The Book of Habakkuk: Backdrop and Structure *(Review Habakkuk 1:2–4 with your class.)*
The book of Habakkuk belongs to a turbulent era in the history of the Jewish people during which time the balance of power was shifting from the Assyrians to the Babylonians. Assyria’s domination came to an end with the destruction of its capital city, Nineveh, by the invading Babylonians in 612 B.C. Less than twenty years after Habakkuk had written his book, the Babylonians also destroyed Jerusalem and carried the leading citizens of Judah into captivity (http://www.ovrlnd.com/outlinesofbooks/Habakkuk.html). It is within this context, and with this situation as a backdrop, that Habakkuk cries out to God, taking on the following narrative structure:

- Habakkuk’s First Complaint: Why does the evil in Judah go unpunished? (Hab. 1:2–4).
- God’s Answer: The Babylonians will punish Judah (Hab. 1:5–11).
- Habakkuk’s Second Complaint: How can a just God use wicked Babylonia to punish a people more righteous than it? (Hab. 1:12, 2:1).
- God’s Answer: Babylonia will be punished, and faith will be rewarded (Hab. 2:2–20).
- Habakkuk’s Prayer: After asking for manifestations of God’s wrath and mercy (as he has seen in the past), he closes with a confession of trust and joy in God (Habakkuk 3; http://www.biblestudytools.com/habakkuk/).

Although very condensed, Habakkuk’s story teaches at least three vital truths. First, the story reveals that struggling with doubt may be part of the Christian experience. Second, it demonstrates God’s openness to Habakkuk’s (and our) questioning. And last, its very structure is a template for the ways in which Christians can actually deepen their faith in moments of doubt.

Consider This: What is the backdrop to the book of Habakkuk, and how does that structure serve to frame and shape his questions and struggle? How does Habakkuk’s struggle, in turn, frame or structure his narrative? What are the three vital truths that the Habakkuk story teaches?

II. Habakkuk’s Complaint and God’s Response Are Important (Review Habakkuk 1:1–4 with your class.)

There is certainly something universal about Habakkuk’s lamentations that injustice is rampant in his world. Today it seems, more than ever, that the righteous are surrounded by the wicked, the law is powerless, and God doesn’t seem to care about the plight of His people (Hab. 1:1–4). Habakkuk wonders why God is allowing these things to happen. It seems as if Habakkuk lives in 2013, doesn’t it?
Many of us look around the world or at our lives and see the absence of God and His justice. As the story of Habakkuk reveals, not only should we turn to God with our dilemmas and questions, but it is within these moments that the very character of God is revealed. The fact that God allows Himself to be questioned by one of His followers provides a valuable insight into His nature. Our God is a responsive God, who welcomes questions and is willing and able to provide us with answers, even when the answers are difficult to deliver (for example, He tells Habakkuk that the justice He seeks may take a while in coming). The content of God’s response to Habakkuk also contains a lasting spiritual message, which is that God reaffirms His principles of justice. He reveals that while His timing for this justice may not fit into our preferred timelines, God’s timing is perfect.

The sequence of doubt/questioning/engagement with God in the story of Habakkuk is rounded out by the prophet’s final embrace of God’s faithfulness and goodness. The triumph of his faith, even though conditions around him have not changed, speaks to God’s promise that He will provide us with both understanding and answers sufficient to our need. Also, it bears an important lesson, which is to be open to answers that are outside of our expectation.

**Consider This:** What truth about God do Habakkuk’s questions reveal to us?

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**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** For the applied learning section of this week’s study, pose the following thought questions to your class. The purpose of these questions will be to find practical ways in which to incorporate elements of Habakkuk’s truths into personal and church life.

**Thought Questions:**

1. How do we engage in a dialogue with God? For most, God does not speak to us in the spoken word as though He were right next to us in human flesh. Yet, we believe He speaks to us. What are His methods, and how do we test the responses we receive to ensure that they are from Him?

2. How do we live in faith in a confusing world? Even though we know that suffering will continue while there is sin in the world, what should our
response to that be? Habakkuk outlines what we should do when our faith is weak, but how should we respond to suffering when our faith is strong?

**Activity:** Ask your students to spend some time in conversation or in silence, reflecting on the questions posed above. Also, you can encourage your class members to write down some thoughts in a small brainstorming session and request that volunteers share them. What ideas can be acted upon either by the church community, by your Sabbath School class, or by individuals? In what ways can these ideas be implemented?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Students can leave this week’s class with tools to answer their own/other’s questions: (1) Is God there? (2) Does God care? and (3) Is God fair? Understanding that these are recurring questions in the Christian walk, what are the unique ways in which people can engage these questions in order to deepen their faith journey and their understanding of God?

**Activity:** For people who journal, blog, take pictures, make videos, and so on, think about the ways in which these questions can be explored in your creative pursuits. Using these spiritual questions as a focal point for your writing or art may open up new understanding about yourself and God.

Consider enlarging the conversation to include others who may be struggling with these same questions. Engaging with them in a series of respectful dialogue sessions may be an interesting way of building bridges within your community, and such sessions may reveal that the problem of pain/Habakkuk’s problem is one of the issues most problematic to those in your community as well. Think of potential former members who have left the church because of doubt. What can be done to reach out to them? How can their struggle with doubt—and your embracing of their struggle as valid and as indicative of their serious engagement with difficult issues—be something that connects them back to a community of faith rather than estranges them?
The Day of the Lord (Zephaniah)

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “The Lord will be awesome to them, for He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth; people shall worship Him, each one from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations” (Zephaniah 2:11, NKJV).

Key Thought: Judgment is coming, but grace and mercy are still available for those who earnestly seek it.

If the books of the prophets were placed in chronological order, Zephaniah’s would fit between Isaiah and Jeremiah. Zephaniah’s preaching condemned the hopeless corruption found in Judean society. He pointed to the need for repentance based on the fact that God’s love still was calling His people to humility and faithfulness. His message was twofold: there is a threat of an imminent and universal judgment, which will include even God’s own people; yet, there is also a promise that the saved from all nations will join the remnant of Israel in serving God and enjoying His blessings. This week’s study will show that Zephaniah’s message still matters to those who proclaim God’s message of hope to a fallen world.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 1.
A Day of Darkness

The focal point of Zephaniah’s message is the “day of the Lord” (Zeph. 1:7). For biblical prophets, the day of the Lord refers to a specific period of time in which God intervenes in human affairs in order both to save and to judge. Most people in ancient Israel believed that on this day the Lord would save and exalt Israel while the enemy nations would be destroyed forever. To the great surprise of those who listened, the prophet declared that the day of the Lord would be a day of doom, even for God’s people (see Zeph. 1:1–5), because they had sinned against Him (Zeph. 1:17).

**Compare** Zephaniah 1:14–18 with Joel 2:1–11 and Amos 5:18–20. When read together, what picture do they present about “the day of the Lord”?

Zephaniah likens the coming judgment to the sweeping away of all life in the days of the great Flood (Genesis 6–8). The catalog of death in Zephaniah 1:2, 3 is arranged somewhat in reverse order of God’s original Creation: humanity, land beasts, the creatures of the air, and those of the sea (compare with Gen. 1:20–27).

The prophet warned the people that they would not be able to buy their way out of judgment (Zeph. 1:18). Neither silver nor gold would protect them from the Lord’s anger. However, the complacent people in Jerusalem claimed that God would do neither good nor harm. They simply did not expect the Lord to do anything (Zeph. 1:12). But divine judgments reveal how much God actively works to ensure that there will be a future for His faithful people.

Zephaniah makes it clear that God’s judgment is not only punitive but corrective, and that the Lord holds out a promise of shelter for those who seek Him (Zeph. 2:3). Thus, the day of the Lord is more than the end of the world. It is the beginning of the future establishment of God’s rule, which will last forever.

Read Zephaniah 1:18. In what ways do we even now experience the truth of the principle expressed here? That is, what kind of situations have we faced in which all the money in the world could not save us?
The Humble of the Land

In Zephaniah 2:1–3, we see the prophet’s call to repentance. Even though the destruction is imminent, there is still time to be sheltered from calamity, but only if the nation will repent. The wicked who refuse to repent will be consumed like “chaff” on the day of judgment. In Psalm 1:4 the wicked are also likened to chaff and, in the end, they perish.

With the words “Seek the Lord” (NIV), Zephaniah is encouraging those who humble themselves before God to hold firm in their faith. The prophet teaches that to seek the Lord is the same as seeking righteousness and humility. This attitude of repentance is essential in order to escape the coming judgment.

Zephaniah calls the repentant people the “humble of the land” (Zeph. 2:3, NIV). How do the following passages shed light on this expression, which is also translated as the “poor of the land”? Matt. 5:3, Ps. 76:9, Isa. 11:4, Amos 8:4.

The humble are those people who remain faithful to God and who are led and taught by Him. The psalmist says: “Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way” (Ps. 25:8, 9, NIV). The humble, then, are urged to prepare for the coming judgment by seeking God, righteousness, and humility.

The possibility of survival for the humble who are faithful is expressed through the word perhaps. It means that survival depends solely on divine grace, and grace is something that never should be taken for granted. In the face of impending doom, there is hope for the future from God, who is merciful. The Lord has promised to shelter all those who trust in Him (Joel 3:16, Nah. 1:7). This type of trust casts out self-reliance, guile, and deception.

“Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour. By prayer, by the study of His word, by faith in His abiding presence, the weakest of human beings may live in contact with the living Christ, and He will hold them by a hand that will never let go.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 182. What has been your own experience with these incredible promises? How can you learn to have that kind of close walk with the Lord?
A Corrupt City

A Chinese proverb says that the darkest spot in the room is located right under the candle. This proverb could be applied to the moral state of Jerusalem in Zephaniah’s time. The prophet just has completed the pronouncement of divine judgments on Judah’s neighboring countries (see Zephaniah 2), such as Philistia in the west, Moab and Ammon in the east, Cush in the south, and Assyria in the east. Yet, he does not stop there. He proceeds to expose the sins of those who dwell in God’s own city on earth, Jerusalem itself.

Read Zephaniah 3:1–5. Who is being condemned, and why? Ask yourself, How could God’s people, those who have been given so much light and truth, end up so corrupted? How can we protect ourselves from having the same thing happen to us?

The capital city of Judah lies at the heart of Zephaniah’s concern. He indicts its leaders concerning the city’s moral degradation. The corruption stems directly from the failure of its leaders to live up to their designated roles and responsibilities (compare with Jer. 18:18, Ezek. 22:23–30). Zephaniah likens the corrupt court officials to “roaring lions,” and the judges as “evening wolves.” And the temple, he states, fares no better because the priests do not teach God’s Word, nor do the prophets speak the truth.

“During the reign of Josiah the word of the Lord came to Zephaniah, specifying plainly the results of continued apostasy, and calling the attention of the true church to the glorious prospect beyond. His prophecies of impending judgment upon Judah apply with equal force to the judgments that are to fall upon an impenitent world at the time of the second advent of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 389.

Look around. However alluring, the world is doomed to ultimate destruction. One does not even need to believe in the Bible to see how easily this destruction could happen. Why is the Lord our only hope? How can we learn to lean on Him more and more and not trust in the vain and empty things of this world?
God’s Greatest Delight

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

In the closing section of his book (Zeph. 3:9–20), Zephaniah turns from a theme of anger to one of restoration. Beyond the judgment, we come to God’s ultimate goals. When the nations have been disciplined, they will together call on the Lord and serve Him cordially. The lips of the people will be purified so that all may worship and praise the Lord by serving Him. A small, yet humble and faithful remnant will survive in Judah and will take the place of the proud leaders.

Most important, God will dwell among His people, and He will make past wrongs right. No longer will His people need to live in fear, because the Lord will be with them, dwelling in their midst. He will be their Deliverer and Savior. “‘They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid’” (Zeph. 3:13, NIV).

Such blessings would normally cause God’s people to rejoice over Him, but the prophet declares that God will rejoice over them. His love and joy for His people will be so great that He will shout over them with jubilation.

How did the prophet Isaiah describe God’s joy over His redeemed people? Isa. 62:5, 65:19.

The great King, the divine Warrior, will protect and vindicate His people. He will grant them all the benefits of His victory, the one that He won for us at the Cross. He will exalt the humble and turn disgrace, suffering, and alienation into an experience of honor, blessings, and His own presence. Prominence will be given to the lame and the outcast, a theme that lies at the heart of the message proclaimed by Jesus Christ.

Even amid such dire warnings, the Lord offered His people hope. How can we, as Seventh-day Adventists, trusting in the promise of the Second Coming, learn to live day by day with that hope? How can we learn to keep that hope alive, especially in times of trouble when the world offers us nothing but sorrow?
God’s Answer to Injustice

Read Nahum 1–3. What verses especially teach us about the character of God? How can we apply what is seen here to our understanding of last-day events?

The prophecy of Nahum is God’s Word against the kingdoms of this world as represented by Nineveh. As the prophet looked at his world, he saw the hand of God moving against the Assyrian Empire. He announced that its capital city, Nineveh, would soon fall, never to rise again. Nahum spoke with absolute confidence because he knew God’s character, and, through the gift of prophecy (Nah. 1:1), he had been shown by the Lord what would happen. The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished (Nah. 1:3; Exod. 34:6, 7).

The Assyrians had plundered many nations and had an insatiable lust for power. Their cruelty was notorious. As God’s “razor” (Isa. 7:20), they eagerly had shorn their neighbors. Now it was time for the razor to be broken. Instruments of God’s judgment are not exempt from judgment. Nineveh exists no more, but the prophetic testimony lives on. It reminds us that though God’s justice seems slow, nothing ultimately can stop it.

As we have seen in an earlier lesson, years before Nahum’s time, the Ninevites, having heard Jonah’s preaching, had repented, and God had spared their city. But the repentance did not last; the people returned to their old ways. Many countries that had suffered under Nineveh’s oppressive yoke would greet the news of its fall with thunderous applause. A messenger will come to bring good news (Isa. 52:7) that the power of Assyria is broken, with its gods. God’s people will again be able to worship in peace (Nah. 1:15).

As great as the Lord’s anger is, more tender is His mercy. He protects those who await the fullness of His goodness. Nahum teaches that God cares for those who trust in Him, but that with an overwhelming flood He will pursue His enemies into darkness (Nah. 1:8). He teaches also that God is behind it all for He has determined that Nineveh’s day of judgment has come.

The prophet shows that God has awesome power. All creation trembles before Him. He does not tolerate sin forever. At the same time, He is the Savior of those who trust in Him. There is no middle ground. We are on one side or the other. “‘He who is not with Me,’ Jesus said, ‘is against Me’” (Matt. 12:30, NKJV).
Further Study: “With unerring accuracy the Infinite One still keeps account with the nations. While His mercy is tendered, with calls to repentance, this account remains open; but when the figures reach a certain amount which God has fixed, the ministry of His wrath begins. The account is closed. Divine patience ceases. Mercy no longer pleads in their behalf.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 364.

“Before the worlds unfallen and the heavenly universe, the world will have to give an account to the Judge of the whole earth, the very One they condemned and crucified. What a reckoning day that will be! It is the great day of God’s vengeance. Christ does not then stand at Pilate’s bar. Pilate and Herod, and all that mocked, scourged, rejected, and crucified Him will then understand what it means to feel the wrath of the Lamb. Their deeds will appear before them in their true character.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 132.

Discussion Questions:

1. Some of the people in Zephaniah’s time did terrible things against both the Lord and their fellow countrymen while others were just complacent as such evils unfolded. Which of these two sins do you think is worse in God’s eyes? Justify your answer.

2. Go back over the final question at the end of Monday’s lesson, where these words were quoted: “Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour.” What does it mean to rely “wholly on the merits of the Saviour”? How do these words reveal to us the great truth of salvation by faith in Christ alone, and why is that truth so central to all that we believe? If we do not rely on His merits, on whose merits can we rely?

3. Why is it so easy, especially for those who live in wealth and comfort, to forget just how utterly dependent we are upon God for everything that we have? How can we protect ourselves from this fatal delusion?

4. Dwell more upon this idea of the Lord singing and rejoicing over His people. We tend to think of ourselves singing and rejoicing over God and what He has done for us. What does it mean that He sings and rejoices over us? How could that be, considering the rather pathetic state in which we all find ourselves?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Zephaniah 3:12, 13, 17

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Comprehend that God’s judgments show His greatness toward all people. Many from different nations will come and acknowledge Him.

**Feel:** Rejoice in the fact that God shows His unique love for His people by saving them, delighting in them, quieting their anxieties, and rejoicing over them with singing.

**Do:** Trust, obey, and worship God as part of God’s remnant, and serve others in response to His bountiful goodness.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Knowing God Leads to Worship**
   - Demonstrate from the book of Zephaniah that God wants to save everyone.
   - How does true knowledge of God lead to true worship?

II. **Feel: God Rejoices and Sings**
   - Knowing that God rejoices and sings over His people invokes what response in you?
   - How do parents quiet their children when they are anxious, experience failure, or get into trouble? How does God’s ability to comfort exceed a parent’s comforting abilities or in what way does He respond differently when dealing with His children?

III. **Do: Living the Ethical Life of the Remnant**
   - How are we able to change our behavior, as opposed to only making adjustments?
   - What does it mean that the remnant will do no wrong?
   - How would your church or community be different if no one lied or behaved deceitfully?

**Summary:** The living God is the God of all nations. He not only loves everyone, but He wants all saved. He delights when a person responds to His love, comes to Him, becomes a new person, and worships Him.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Zephaniah 2:11 and 3:12, 13, 17

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Zephaniah presents an awesome God who will judge the entire world. He not only announces the coming of the day of the Lord but proclaims who can endure the day of judgment and how. As a result, the faithful remnant of all nations will come and worship the One true God.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson emphasizes the picture of God as a Judge who invites people to repent. This God preserves and saves the remnant from the nations and from Judah by embracing them with His unique, joyful love.

Opening Discussion: A general reaction to the judgment of God is often fear. One preacher, who asked people on all continents of the world what they thought of God’s judgment, had this to say: “In spite of their different ethnicities, ages, political systems, and educational backgrounds, the answer was unanimous: ‘Fear!’ ” What is your first reaction, feeling, and thought when you hear that God will judge you?

Always remember that we are saved not on the basis of how we feel but because of God’s Word. Because God said that if we confess our sins, He will cleanse us from all our iniquity (1 John 1:9), we can rely on that promise. We can trust that God saves repentant sinners (Zeph. 2:3; 3:12, 13, 17). The meaning of the prophet Zephaniah’s name, “The Lord hides or shelters,” is also a powerful message. The Lord hides those who hide in Him on the day of the Lord. So, He protects, shelters, and saves. Everyone who trusts in the name of the Lord will be hidden and redeemed. Therefore, we do not need to be fearful of God’s judgment.

Application Questions:

1. What is your only hope in the divine judgment?
2. How are people to be saved? What do the Cross and Jesus’ victory at Calvary have to do with it?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Prophet Zephaniah was from the royal line of King Hezekiah. He lived in the seventh century before Christ in the
time of God’s people’s spiritual and moral decay and political decline. He most likely started the last reformation among God’s people in Judah and had a positive influence on King Josiah (641–609 B.C.), who secured spiritual revival and reformation. During his reign, the book of the law was found, and the monarch wanted to do everything according to the Word of God. (See 2 Kings 23:1–25, 2 Chron. 34:29–32, 34:1–33.)

Bible Commentary

The phrase “The day of the Lord” occurs seven times in the book of Zephaniah (Zeph. 1:7, 8, 14 [twice]; 18; 2:2, 3). This day is a dreadful day, a day of God’s anger, and this day of judgment is near.

Zephaniah also mentions the word remnant three times (Zeph. 2:7, 9; 3:13). The remnant are the people who will be rescued and saved at the end. When people are in a deadly serious situation from which there is no escape, the only solution is prayer, a repentant petition for God’s grace and mercy. God comes and responds in His love to such a contrite heart and the humble actions of a person’s life.

The most beautiful and encouraging picture of God in the book of Zephaniah is presented in Zephaniah 3:17. This verse summarizes well God’s unique activities for His faithful people.

I. The Lord Is a Mighty Warrior (Review Exodus 15:3 with your class.)

Our God is for us. He is a powerful Warrior who fights for us and defeats our enemies. Sin, evil, Satan, and his allies cannot prevail over God’s people. The Lord brings victory and saves.

Moses, in his song of victory in Exodus 15, expresses the idea that God is a Warrior (Exod. 15:3). He defeated the entire ancient Egyptian army and brought down human pride and arrogance. The greatness of His majesty threw down all who opposed Him. He is the Victor not because of His force, but because of His moral strength and the power of His love.

Consider This: Jesus is for you. He fights for your salvation because He does not want to lose you when Satan desires to put you down. What are God’s weapons against Satan? Upon what is God’s status as Victor over Satan based?

II. The Lord Delights in You (Review Luke 15:7 with your class.)

Zephaniah’s picture of God is very personal. It is as though the Lord were saying to us: “It may be that some people despise you and do not take you seriously. I am different. You have enormous value to Me. I love you so
much that I even died for you! I love you more than you love yourself. I, your God, rejoice over you!”

Jesus states the reason why God rejoices: “‘I tell you that in the same way there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent’” (Luke 15:7, NIV).

**Consider This:** God delights in His faithful followers. What does Zephaniah’s portrayal of God reveal to us about who He is? What reason does Jesus give for God’s rejoicing over us?

### III. The Lord Quiets You With His Love (Review Zephaniah 3:17 with your class.)

God speaks to us in His language of love just as a parent will quiet a child who is hurt, crying, afraid, or disappointed, with loving caresses, kisses, and gentle words until he or she becomes quiet and goes to sleep in the parent’s arms, trusting and resting in that love. Likewise, God assures His children that they are safe and secure in His love; in this way, He quiets us.

This biblical phrase, “he will quiet you with his love” (vs. 17, NIV), has an alternate translation that brings another important nuance to God’s love. The New American Standard Bible translates it in the following way: “‘He will be quiet in His love’” (Zeph. 3:17). This textual ambiguity is probably intentional in order to evoke multiple positive feelings. The text says that the Lord “will quiet you with His love.” Thus, after speaking and assuring us that He loves us with an everlasting love, He becomes quiet so that we can rest in His arms of love and enjoy the warmth of His presence.

**Consider This:** What words or actions of God make you feel secure in His arms of love? How does God quiet us with His love? What is the meaning of God’s growing quiet after assuring us of His love?

### IV. The Lord Rejoices Over You With Singing (Review Genesis 15:3 with your class.)

One function of such a song is that it expresses love. God expresses His love and joy over us. He sings a unique song over each of us!

Another function of the song is that it expresses victory. See, as examples, the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb (Genesis 49, Exodus 15, Rev. 15:3).

**Consider This:** Why do we receive God’s grace? Why is it something we cannot earn?

**Discussion Question:** Why is there no place where we can hide from God?
Zephaniah does not say that we can “hide” from God or from the day of the Lord in order to avoid it. He emphasizes that one can be hidden “in” that day, which means that one can be sheltered only “in the Lord” on that day in order to be protected and saved.

**Discussion:** You do not need to be terrified of God’s judgment. On the contrary, you can have full confidence, boldness, and joy of salvation when facing God’s judgment. This is possible because the primary meaning of God’s judgment is to justify, save, and deliver people who have faith in Him. Discuss with your class biblical texts like Genesis 15:6; Psalm 76:8, 9; Isaiah 35:4; Daniel 7:22; John 5:24; 1 John 2:28; and 4:17. Give the members of your class hope and fix their eyes on God, who loves people, wants to save them, assures them of His enduring mercy, and who does not delight in punishment, condemnation, or destruction (Ezek. 18:23, 32). Stress the uniqueness of the warm imagery that Zephaniah paints in Zephaniah 3:17. Unpack each sentence very carefully and in colorful language so that those who hear you can see, understand, and be touched by the beauty and love of our God.

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** God delights and rejoices over His people. What can you do so that members of your Sabbath School class will be more cheerful and joyful in their personal interactions and relationships with other brothers and sisters in the church?

**Life Application:** Ask various members of your class to read Zephaniah 3:17 from different Bible translations (if available). Compare the differences between the translations, explain them, and apply the nuances to real life in order to gain a better understanding of God’s character of love.

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** God sings over His people. Stress the importance of singing in worship.

**Activities:**

1. Ask your class if they know any song that expresses God’s joy over His people. Sing the song together in class.

2. Have the members of the class compose song lyrics based on the hope that we can find in the judgment—specifically the fact that we are hidden in Christ and sheltered in the Lord. Share the song’s lyrics with the class.
First Things First! (Haggai)

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the Lord Almighty” (Haggai 2:8, NIV).

Key Thought: Haggai’s message is simple: What are our priorities, and why is it so important to get them right?

Haggai’s book, one of the shortest in the Bible, was written at a critical time in the life of Judah. The exiles had returned from their captivity in Babylon almost twenty years before; yet, they seemed to have forgotten the reason for their return. They let God’s temple sit in ruins while they devoted their energy to building their own houses.

Thus, the prophet urged the returned exiles to give careful thought to their situation. His message was simple and logical. The people had worked hard but did not earn much. This happened because they had mistaken their priorities. They needed to put God first in all that they did. As Jesus Himself said, “Seek first his [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33, NIV).

Today, too, it is so easy to get caught up in the struggle for existence that we forget what our first priority needs to be, which, of course, is always doing the Lord’s will.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 8.
Planting Much, Harvesting Little

**Read** Haggai 1:1–11. What was happening here and, more important, why was this happening? Even more important, how might this same principle apply to us today? How might we be guilty of doing the same thing?

“For over a year the temple was neglected and well-nigh forsaken. The people dwelt in their homes and strove to attain temporal prosperity, but their situation was deplorable. Work as they might they did not prosper. The very elements of nature seemed to conspire against them. Because they had let the temple lie waste, the Lord sent upon their substance a wasting drought. God had bestowed upon them the fruits of field and garden, the corn and the wine and the oil, as a token of His favor; but because they had used these bountiful gifts so selfishly, the blessings were removed.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 573.

Haggai confronted the people with their current situation. Futility of labor was one of the curses that resulted from the people breaking God’s covenant (*Lev. 26:16, 20*). Until the people turned their attention to this priority, there would be no prosperity for them.

Haggai possessed great zeal for the Lord’s temple and wanted the people to complete its reconstruction right away. His ambition ran contrary to the complacency of those who did not care about the temple as much as they cared about their own comfort. While Haggai’s great concern was for the temple, the people were interested more in their own houses.

The Lord used Haggai to stir the people’s hearts toward God’s concerns. The temple in Jerusalem symbolized the divine presence among fallen humanity. It was a visible reminder to the whole world that the Sovereign Lord is God of heaven and earth. Yet, God could not be honored properly as long as His house sat in ruins. How could the children of Israel witness to the true God when the very symbol of that God (*see John 2:19, Matt. 26:61*) and the entire plan of salvation was in such a state? In many ways, the people’s attitude toward the temple revealed a deeper spiritual problem: their loss of the sense of their divine mission as the remnant people of the Lord.

Do you see any warning here for us?
God’s Greatest Promise

Read Haggai 1:12–14. Notice the sense of unity of purpose here. Why was that unity so important in order for the people of Israel to do that which they were called to do?

This time the message instantly is obeyed by the leaders and the remnant people. They make preparations, gather materials, and resume work on the temple three weeks later. Within another week they erect an altar and restore the sacrificial worship (Ezra 3:1–6). In less than five years the temple is completed.

While the kingdom of God cannot be identified with a material building, the book of Haggai is a reminder that God sometimes uses material things, such as buildings, for spiritual ends.

If immediate compliance with the prophetic message is considered to be the measure of a prophet’s success, then Haggai stands out as one of the most successful prophets. His preaching moved the people to action. Within the month, work on the temple resumed, with God’s prophets assuring the people that the Lord would help them.

Haggai 1:12–14 reports the response of the leaders and the people to Haggai’s message. All obeyed the Lord because they recognized that He had sent Haggai. They “feared the Lord” (vs. 12, NIV), and showed this by worshiping Him and giving Him due attention. So, Haggai now could deliver a new word from the Lord: “ ‘I am with you’ ” (vs. 13). As soon as the people decided to obey the Lord, the messages of reproof were replaced by words of encouragement. This assurance of God’s presence gave them the promise of all other blessings. After all, the statement “ ‘I am with you’ ” goes back to the covenantal promises that God made during the time of the patriarchs and Moses (Gen. 26:3, Exod. 3:12, Num. 14:9).

Of course, the greatest manifestation of God being “with us” is Jesus (see Isa. 7:14, Matt. 1:23, 28:20). Dwell on the idea that Jesus, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, lived among us. What does that tell us about our importance in a universe that is so big that we easily can see ourselves as insignificant? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

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Do Not Fear!

Haggai 2:1–5 presents an interesting development in the great revival taking place among God’s people. About a month after the temple work began, God sent an encouraging word through Haggai to the remnant who had determined, without adequate resources, to rebuild God’s house as directed by the prophets. Haggai asked the elders how the temple’s current state compared to its appearance before the exile. Clearly, the present appearance did not match the former glory. People may have been discouraged because they had no chance of duplicating the splendor of Solomon’s temple that once stood in the same place.

The prophet encouraged the people to keep working because God’s Spirit was with them. He called on all members of the remnant community to be strong and to work hard because of the presence of God Almighty in their midst. Haggai’s words to the leaders, “Be strong! Do not fear!” sound like the Lord’s words to Joshua after the death of Moses (Josh. 1:5–9). The smaller and weaker were Israel’s own resources, the greater the people’s need for faith in God. The prophet declared that, in the end, the Lord would make the temple’s latter glory greater than its former glory. That became true, however, only because One greater than the temple had come (see Matt. 12:6).

The presence of the Spirit confirmed the continuity of God’s kingdom in Israel. The Spirit of God, who had guided Moses and the elders and who had sent forth the prophets with inspired messages, was in the midst of the remnant. The godly response of the leaders and the people also testified to the spiritual reformation that had taken place. The Spirit was present in renewing them and in bringing them closer to their God. The presence of the Spirit also guaranteed an abundance of blessings. The prophet encouraged the community members to work out the divine promises to their fulfillments.

Haggai ministered God’s Word to people who knew the harshness of life and the disappointment of unfulfilled hope. He turned their attention to God, who is faithful and who counts on the new community to be responsible citizens of His kingdom, by persevering in doing good, and thus finding true meaning and purpose in their lives.

A 35-year-old man who had given up on belief in God wrote a 1,900-page suicide note before killing himself. In his note, he wrote: “Every word, every thought, and every emotion comes back to one core problem: life is meaningless.” How does not only our belief in God, but our willingness to obey Him, give our life meaning?
The Desire of All Nations

Read Haggai 2:6–9. What is being promised here, and how are we to understand its fulfillment?

Through Haggai, God announced a great earthshaking of nations on the day of the Lord when the temple will be filled with Divine presence. The prophet called on his contemporaries to look beyond the present adversities and poverty to the future glory of God’s kingdom toward which the temple pointed.

The main reason for the splendor built into the temple of Jerusalem was to make it worthy of God’s presence. Yet, according to this text, the Lord was willing to inhabit the less-than-glorious house and subsequently bring splendor to it. So, the people did not need to be overly concerned with the ways in which they could finance the temple’s rebuilding. All treasures belong to God, who had promised to dwell in this new temple. The Lord Himself was the provider of the temple’s splendor.

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

God promised that the splendor of the present temple would be greater than the glory of the former temple. It would be a different type of glory because this temple would be honored by the presence of Jesus, in the flesh. Indeed, Christ’s presence made the glory of the new temple greater than that of Solomon’s temple.

Read Hebrews 8:1–5. Whatever the glory of the earthly temple, we never must forget that it was only a shadow, a symbol of the plan of salvation. Think about what it means that, right now, Jesus is ministering in our behalf in the “true tabernacle,” the one made by God, not man. How can we learn to better appreciate the importance of the sanctuary message in the plan of salvation?
The Lord’s Signet Ring

“...On that day,” declares the LORD Almighty, “I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,” declares the LORD, “and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,” declares the LORD Almighty’” (Hag. 2:23, NIV).

The final message from the Lord to Haggai was given on the same day as the previous one in order to complement it (see Hag. 2:22, 23). The Lord warned of a coming destruction of kingdoms and nations during the day of God’s judgment. But on that same day, the prophet said, the servant of the Lord will accomplish God’s appointed task of salvation. This we can best understand as being fulfilled, ultimately and fully, only at the Second Coming and during all that follows it.

The nation’s political leader is associated here with the glorious reign of Israel’s King David, from whom he was a descendant. Zerubbabel was a grandson of King Jehoiachin and the legitimate heir to David’s throne after the Babylonian exile. He served as governor of Judah under the Persian king Darius the Great, and was a leading force behind the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Joshua was the high priest who also helped to rebuild the temple.

The prophet said that Zerubbabel would be the Lord’s signet ring, an object that provides evidence of royal authority and ownership. Like a king sealing legal documents with a ring, the Lord would impress the entire world through the work of His servant. Although Zerubbabel’s key role in the rebuilding of the temple never should be underestimated, he did not fulfill all of the promises given to him by God through Haggai. The inspired Gospel writers point to the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, son of both David and Zerubbabel, as the final fulfillment of all the Messianic promises found in the Bible.

Read Luke 24:13–27, focusing especially on Christ’s words to the two men. What important message is He giving to them, how do His words show us the importance of understanding Old Testament prophecy, and why is it so relevant for Christians even today?

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Further Study: “But even this dark hour was not without hope for those whose trust was in God. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were raised up to meet the crisis. In stirring testimonies these appointed messengers revealed to the people the cause of their troubles. The lack of temporal prosperity was the result of a neglect to put God’s interests first, the prophets declared. Had the Israelites honored God, had they shown Him due respect and courtesy, by making the building of His house their first work, they would have invited His presence and blessing.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 573, 574.

“The second temple was not honored with the cloud of Jehovah’s glory, but with the living presence of One in whom dwelt the fullness of the Godhead Bodily—who was God Himself manifest in the flesh. The ‘Desire of all nations’ had indeed come to His temple when the Man of Nazareth taught and healed in the sacred courts. In the presence of Christ, and in this only, did the second temple exceed the first in glory.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 24.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, discuss your answer to Monday’s question regarding the presence of Jesus on earth. Think through the implications of not just His presence but His self-sacrifice for the sins of the world. Think through what these things mean about our value as individuals. Think through, too, just how different a view this presents of humanity in contrast to the atheistic, evolutionary views so common in certain parts of the world.

2. Isaiah talks about the proud king of Babylon who, at the height of his power, made “nations shake and the earth tremble” (*Isa. 14:16, 17*). How different is that shaking from the Lord’s intervention as described by Haggai in chapter 2 of his book?

3. Ancient Israelites often were disobedient to the messages proclaimed by God’s prophets. Prepare to share with your class members some of the ways in which God’s people today are resisting the messages that the Lord is sending to His people.

4. The Bible is very clear: the ancient temple and its sacrificial system lost all value, once and for all, after the death of Jesus. What do Hebrews 8 and 9 tell about the things that Christ has done and is doing for us that the early sanctuary never could?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Haggai 2:8

The Student Will:

Know: Understand that as Creator of all and the Source of all blessings, God stirs people to action and desires to bless them.

Feel: Take comfort in knowing that everything belongs to God and that He provides all.

Do: Respond to God’s love and care.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: God of Relationship
   A. Why is it so crucial to know that God is with us?
   B. What are the signs of God’s blessing?
   C. How can the difficulties of life during which it appears that God is absent, inspire us to have more confidence and trust?

II. Feel: Encouragement and Blessing
   A. What was the ultimate blessing for God’s people in Haggai’s time?
   B. How would you react if God told you that He would be with you and bless you if you would follow His directions?
   C. Why was it so important for God’s people to know that the Desire of all nations would come to the new temple?

III. Do: God of Action
   A. How important is it to be united in doing God’s work?
   B. In what ways are you personally active in your church? In what ways could you be more active?
   C. What difference would it make if everyone in your congregation used their talents to enrich others?

Summary: God assures His people of His presence and His desire to bless them. The Desire of Ages will come, and the only proper response is to trust that He will guide and protect, even in times of trouble.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Haggai 1:7, 8*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Because He wants to bless them with prosperity, God encourages His people to reconsider their priorities and work on building up the house of the Lord.

**Just for Teachers:** In the time of crisis, when the people’s expectations had collapsed, God called the prophet Haggai to stir the people’s minds and admonish them to action to work on God’s temple. This week’s lesson reminds us that we should reconsider our lifestyles and put God first in whatever we do. Encourage the class members to become the Haggais of our day. We need new Haggais who will encourage God’s people to work together in doing God’s work.

**Opening Discussion:** Why is it so tempting to concentrate on those which we consider to be the most important priorities in life instead of focusing on eternal values? Why do we so often put God in second place? Why is it easier to give money and not our time and personal involvement to things that need to be done in the church?

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. How can God be honored through our actions?
2. What does it mean that God will take pleasure in His people?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

I. First Sermon Delivered on August 29, 520 B.C. *(Review Haggai 1:1–12 with your class.)*

God enters into a dispute with His people and asks them to reconsider their lives, habits, and the results of their work. He twice requests: “‘Give careful thought to your ways’” *(vss. 5, 7, NIV)*, meaning that they need to end their unbelief and selfish lifestyles. They work hard but have very little. “‘You
have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes’” (Hag. 1:6, ESV). Without God’s blessing, life is very difficult.

God is in command and makes an appeal: “‘Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,’ says the LORD” (Hag 1:8, NIV). The people’s response is unprecedented. All together (leaders, priests, and people) they “obey the voice of the LORD their God” and returned to God, fearing Him (Hag. 1:12, NIV).

Consider This: What was the underlying cause of the people’s lack of prosperity? What did God command them to do in order to reverse their situation? What does it mean to “give careful thought” to our ways?

II. Second Sermon Delivered on September 21, 520 B.C. (Review Haggai 1:13–15 with your class.)

The second message is the shortest sermon and only consists of seven words (only four words in Hebrew): “‘I am with you,’ says the LORD” (vs. 13, NIV). This proclamation is all that the people needed to hear. God assured them that He was and would be with them! This is God’s all-inclusive promise. If God is with His people, no one can overcome them. God’s presence will provide everything they need for their spiritual and physical life. If God is for us, who can be against us? No one and nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:35–39). As a result, after three weeks of deep revival, God’s people began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty (Hag. 1:14).

Consider This: When God promised the people, “‘I am with you,’ ” what all-inclusive assurances did this proclamation include? What meaning and promises are contained for us today in these words?

III. Third Sermon Delivered on October 17, 520 B.C. (Review Haggai 2:1–9 with your class.)

God strengthened the leaders and the people not to look at the difficulties and not to compare this temple with the glorious Solomonic temple. The present sanctuary may not have looked like much, but they were not to despair. God encouraged: “‘Be strong. . . . I am with you. . . . I covenanted with you. . . . My Spirit remains among you’” (Hag. 2:4, 5, NKJV). This work would be accomplished by the Spirit of God (see also Zech. 4:6); and “‘the glory of this present house will be greater’” (Hag. 2:9, NIV) than that
of Solomon’s temple, because the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come into it.

This third sermon contains one of the most beautiful Messianic prophecies: “I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,” says the Lord of hosts’” (Hag. 2:7, NKJV). “The Desire of All Nations,” a phrase that appears only once in the entire Bible, is none other than Jesus Christ.

Consider This: The title of the book The Desire of Ages by Ellen G. White, on the life of Jesus Christ, was inspired by this verse. What does the word desire mean? What is it in Christ that “All Nations” would desire?

IV. Fourth Sermon Delivered on December 18, 520 B.C. (Review Haggai 2:10–19 with your class.)

Haggai asked the priests two questions. The first was: will consecrated meat bring holiness to the things it touches? (vs. 12). The answer to this first question was, No. The second question was: will an unclean person having contact with a dead corpse defile things around himself? (vs. 13). The answer was Yes.

What do these inquiries mean? Sin automatically spreads around us; therefore, if we want something good to happen around us, it must be cultivated carefully! A weed grows in a garden by itself, but in order to have vegetables, one needs to cultivate the vegetables. Only God can produce holiness in a person’s life, because He is the only Source of holiness. People, things, and time can become holy only as they are in relationship with God.

This is the last message to all people. God encourages: “Give careful thought” (repeated three times, vss. 15, 18, NIV), leading people to think and carefully notice, and then He promises: “From this day on I will bless you” (vs. 19, NIV).

Consider This: Why is it often the case that when you try to do good, you suddenly face many obstacles and difficulties? What does that say about the existence of evil?

V. Fifth Sermon Delivered on December 18, 520 B.C. (Review Haggai 2:20–23 with your class.)

The last message is a personal message specifically for Zerubbabel, the governor of Jerusalem. God said that He would intervene, and His purposes would be accomplished. The governor would be His signet ring if he would cooperate with God by being His living example, a model of what God is like as revealed through a human instrument. Zerubbabel would be God’s guarantee and signature. Zerubbabel did not need to worry about anything. God would work for, and through, him (see the contrast with King Jehoiachin [Coniah] in
Jer. 22:24). Zerubbabel is later mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:12, 13).

Consider This: Zerubbabel was “chosen” by God. For what purpose? What does it mean to be a model or human instrument of God? What is a signet ring, and what is it used for? What dimensions do the words through and for imply in terms of the kind of work that God intends to accomplish by using us?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: God wants to bless His people, but first they need to respond to His call through His Word and Spirit. Note how in the Bible God’s Word and Spirit go together in order to produce life (Gen. 1:1–3, Ps. 33:6, Ezek. 37:3–14).

Application Questions:

1. Ask class members to define in their own words the difference between working alone in God’s work or together in close cooperation.

2. How can you encourage others in your congregation to be a part of God’s work? How can you build up your church in a physical and a spiritual sense?

STEP 4—Create

Activities:

1. Compose a monologue as though you were Haggai or Zerubbabel and narrate his experience as it is told in the book of Haggai. Have class members read or perform their monologues for the class.

2. Write an imaginative dialogue between the prophets Haggai and Zechariah about the time when they wanted to help the people to build the temple in Jerusalem.

3. Have members of the class pick from among the sermons of Haggai the ones that speak the most to them at this point in their lives. In what ways are the lessons from the sermons applicable to our lives today? Have the students share their thoughts in class.
Lesson 11

June 8–14

Visions of Hope (Zechariah)

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Zechariah 1, Zechariah 2, Rom. 15:9–18, Eph. 3:1–8, Zechariah 3, Zechariah 4, Exod. 25:31–40, Zechariah 7.

Memory Text: “‘In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree,’ declares the LORD Almighty’” (Zechariah 3:10, NIV).

Key Thought: Though Israel had been punished for its sins, it was time for its people to live again in relationship with God according to His promises.

On the wall of an old castle in Europe a short Latin inscription reads: “Dum spiro, spero!” It means, “While I breathe, I hope!” This saying can summarize the message of Zechariah to God’s people. Nearly twenty years after their return from the Babylonian captivity, some began to wonder if God was still present among His people. They started to feel discouragement replace their earlier enthusiasm.

Zechariah, whose name means “the Lord remembers,” began his prophetic ministry a few months after Haggai began his ministry (Hag. 1:1, Zech. 1:1). Through a series of prophetic visions, Zechariah learned God’s plans for the present and the future. God’s eternal kingdom was coming soon, but the prophet called those who lived in his time to serve the Lord now. A good portion of the book is centered on how they were to do just that. This week, and the next, we will look at what the Lord has revealed to us through Zechariah.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 15.
Comforting Words of Life

**Read** Zechariah 1. What is the essential message here? Focus especially on Zechariah 1:3. What is the Lord saying to the people?

The return from the exile in Babylon sparked joy in the hearts of the remnant people. But the return also caused anxiety. Would they be safe and secure in their land, or would enemies come again to harass them? Had God forgiven their past unfaithfulness, or would He continue their punishment? What did the future hold for God’s chosen people and for the nations?

In his vision, Zechariah saw the angel of the Lord move to intercede for Judah. He began with the question, “How long?” In the Bible, this question often is used as an expression of people’s distress and appeal to the Lord for help (Ps. 74:10, Isa. 6:11, Dan. 8:13). The answer to the question came directly through the interpreting angel, who then passed it on to the prophet. It contained words that promised God’s kindness and comfort.

Zechariah was told to proclaim that their Lord was very jealous for Jerusalem (Zech. 1:14). Jealousy can have negative connotations, but in the Bible it also can be an expression of God’s love. God loved His people and expected them to be faithful. In contrast to His love toward Jerusalem, the angel said that the Lord was angry with the nations that had treated His people so harshly. The full charge against the nations was that they had added to the calamity of the divine discipline by going too far in their harsh treatment of captives.

Zechariah 1:15–17 acknowledges God as having been angry, but shows also that He promised to repay the people with comfort. His purpose, which the prophet was commissioned to proclaim, was to return to Jerusalem with compassion. The Lord would comfort Zion (see Isa. 40:1) while His anger would be directed to His enemies. Jerusalem was going to be restored, and it would again be the dwelling place of the Lord.

Look again at Zechariah 1:3. How does one “return” (NIV) unto the Lord? In what ways is this a call for a restored personal relationship between God and His people? How do we (or do we?) “return” unto the Lord every day?
The Lord Is Coming

Read Zechariah 2. It records a vision in which the prophet is shown a renewed Jerusalem, so full of people that it overspreads its walls. It will attract countless Gentiles as well, which must have sounded very strange to the people. Verse 10 begins with a call to joy, followed by the reason for such jubilation: the personal coming of the Lord to live among His people.

The Lord’s dramatic return to dwell in His rebuilt house is cause for praise for those who have returned from exile. Zion, the dwelling place of the great King, is called “Daughter of Zion,” a prophetic term of endearment. In view of its glorious prospect, Zion is invited to rejoice because the Lord Himself will take care of its people. Anyone who touches God’s people touches the pupil of His own eye (vs. 8).

The prophet said that in the day of the Lord, many non-Hebrew nations will come and join themselves to the Lord’s covenant. God’s original plan was that the people of the surrounding nations would see how Israel’s service to the true God results in blessings and prosperity; thus, they would be led to join themselves to the Lord. In this way the remnant of Israel and the believing Gentiles would together become one people, in whose midst the Lord Himself would dwell. This event would fulfill God’s promise to Abram and Sarai that through their posterity, all the nations of the world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3).

How was this prophecy to be fulfilled? (Rom. 15:9–18, Eph. 3:1–8).

Through Zechariah’s prophecy, God promises not the destruction of the nations but their inclusion among God’s covenant people. The promised future is the result of God’s own initiative and was the longing of many biblical prophets. Jesus Christ commissioned His church to preach the good news to the whole world of the salvation that is to be found for everyone in Jesus, if they accept it for themselves. The apostle Paul called this plan of the Lord “the mystery hidden for long ages past” (Rom. 16:25, NIV).

How should our understanding of the universality of the gospel message, and the idea that it is for all humanity, impact how we live; that is, how much of our lives, our time, and our thoughts should be focused on reaching the world with the wonderful truths that we have been given?
God’s Readiness to Forgive

Read Zechariah 3. How is the gospel portrayed here?

With perhaps the exception of Isaiah 53, no portion of the Old Testament better reveals the wonderful truth of salvation by faith alone than does Zechariah 3. In this vision, the high priest Joshua is being tried on accusations brought forth by the official accuser, Satan. The accusations against the high priest also apply to the nation that he represented. The name *Joshua* (also spelled as *Jeshua*) means “the Lord saves” (*see Matt. 1:21*) and can also be spelled *Jesus*.

In the Bible, the position of standing on the right side is one of defense and protection. The psalmist says, “I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken” (*Ps. 16:8, NIV; see also Ps. 44:3*). In this case, the accuser is doing just the opposite (*Ps. 109:6*). While Joshua is interceding before God for the people, Satan is bringing accusations against them based on their sinfulness.

The Lord rejects the accusations, reminding the accuser that in His mercy He already has chosen Joshua. Moreover, His people already have suffered the full measure of divine punishment. Joshua and the remnant people have been snatched as a burning stick from the destructive fire (*Amos 4:11*) of long captivity in Babylon.

At the command of the angel of the Lord, Joshua’s clothes, which represent people’s sins, are removed. He is cleansed and then given the new festive garments of salvation and righteousness.

Finally, Joshua is commissioned to do God’s will and to walk in His ways, an attitude that will result in God’s manifold blessings.

“The high priest cannot defend himself or his people from Satan’s accusations. He does not claim that Israel is free from fault. In filthy garments, symbolizing the sins of the people, which he bears as their representative, he stands before the Angel, confessing their guilt, yet pointing to their repentance and humiliation, and relying upon the mercy of a sin-pardoning Redeemer. In faith he claims the promises of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 583, 584. Those promises, of course, include the covering of Christ’s righteousness.

Imagine having to stand before God in your own “filthy garments.” What great hope is presented here, and how can you not only claim that hope for yourself but reveal the reality of that hope through a holy and sanctified life?
Not by Human Power

Read Zechariah 4. What hope is being presented to the people?

In this vision, Zechariah sees a lampstand fed by two olive trees, which refers back to the candlestick located in the Holy Place of the wilderness tabernacle (Exod. 25:31–40). The seven lamps are arranged around a large bowl that serves as a reservoir of oil.

The bowl, with its bountiful supply of oil, symbolizes the fullness of God’s power through His Spirit. The seven lamps shine with abundant light, a symbol of God’s abiding presence, which dispels all darkness. Just as the olive oil is conducted directly from the trees to the bowl of oil at the top of the lampstand without any human agency, so the power that comes from God is constant and sufficient and also needs no human agency.

The message of the vision given to the prophet is that the temple in Jerusalem will soon be rebuilt. God’s Spirit, not just human efforts, guarantees the completion of the work. This bold message is given in spite of the fact that the obstacles faced by the builders appear to be the size of a great “mountain” (vs. 7).

The prophet is not told who is represented by the lampstand, but we can be sure that the two olive trees represent the two leaders of Judah, Joshua and Zerubbabel. In worldly terms, Zerubbabel’s position never could match the royal power and might of his ancestors David and Solomon. From a human point of view, all efforts and resources available to the builders were inadequate. Yet, God’s Word promises that a king is not saved by the size of his army, nor a warrior by his great strength (Ps. 33:16). In this way the leaders are told that it is only when the Spirit leads that every detail of service can glorify God.

In this prophetic passage, Christians are given an important principle to remember: God may call us to difficult tasks, but through the work of His Spirit, He can accomplish His purpose (see Phil. 2:13, 4:13). By the Spirit, God provides the power for us to do His work now as He did then. Therefore, the work is accomplished not by human might or force but by the Lord working through those who are open to be used by Him.

Read carefully Zechariah 4:6. Why is it so important always to keep in mind our utter dependence upon God? What can happen when we forget that all that we have, or can do, comes only from the Lord and His power working in us?
Beyond Fasting

During Zechariah’s third year of ministry, a delegation from Bethel came to Jerusalem to ask the priests and the prophets a question (see Zech. 7:1–3). When they were in exile in Babylon, the people fasted during the fifth month to mourn the destruction of the temple (2 Kings 25:8, 9). This was in addition to the fasts held in the fourth, seventh, and the tenth months (Zech. 8:19). In the fourth month, the breaching of the wall of Jerusalem was remembered (Jer. 39:2). The fast in the seventh month, the Day of Atonement, was the only fasting day commanded by God through Moses (see Leviticus 16). Finally, in the tenth month, the people mourned the siege against Jerusalem (Jer. 39:1). Because the exile was now over and the temple reconstruction almost was complete, the people wondered if it still was necessary to fast in the fifth month.

Read the Lord’s answer to them (Zech. 7:8–14). In what ways can the words here be applied to ourselves?

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God’s answer through Zechariah is twofold: first, it is necessary that God’s people remember the past so that they do not repeat it. The Lord had warned the ancestors that He expected them to live in trust and obedience. The exile was punishment for their persistent rebellion. So, the people are summoned to learn from their past mistakes. Second, the Lord does not take delight in people’s hunger. When they fast and humble themselves before God, their repentance and humility need to be reflected in what they do. To fast in order to feel sorry for oneself is a waste of time and effort. Fasting, among other things, should represent the kind of death to self needed in order to be able to put self aside and reach out and minister to the needs of others. “The spirit of true fasting and prayer is the spirit which yields mind, heart, and will to God.”—Ellen G. White, Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 189.

What are ways in which we can make valid religious practices, such as fasting and even prayer, become substitutes for what true Christian faith should be about? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

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Further Study: “Satan knows that those who ask God for pardon and grace will obtain it; therefore he presents their sins before them to discourage them. Against those who are trying to obey God, he is constantly seeking occasion for complaint. Even their best and most acceptable service he seeks to make appear corrupt. By countless devices, the most subtle and the most cruel, he endeavors to secure their condemnation.

“In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges of the enemy. In sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus, our Advocate, presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause, and by the mighty arguments of Calvary, vanquishes their accuser. His perfect obedience to God’s law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims from His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man. To the accuser of His people He declares: ‘The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. These are the purchase of My blood, brands plucked from the burning.’ And to those who rely on Him in faith, He gives the assurance, ‘Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.’ Zechariah 3:4.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, pp. 586, 587.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read the Ellen G. White statements above. How does this help us to understand the great truth, which is salvation by grace alone? In moments of great personal discouragement about our own faults and shortcomings, how can we draw comfort and hope from these words? How can we learn to make this wonderful truth a source of strength that helps us not to turn away from the Lord in utter despair over our own sense of unworthiness? Instead, how can we make this wonderful truth the source of our determination to continue to love God and to keep all of His commandments?

2. As a class, go over the final question in Thursday’s study. Why is that such an easy trap to fall into? At the same time, what potential dangers are there when we make our religion into nothing but a kind of social service? How do we strike the right balance?

3. However difficult some parts of the book of Zechariah may be (and some parts are difficult), what practical lessons about Christian living can you take from it?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Zechariah 3:10

The Student Will:

Know: Be assured that if He can control nations, God can control his or her life even more so. He or she will never forget that He knows the future.

Feel: Trust that God forgives and restores him or her to a new life. He focuses His special attention on spiritual leaders to prepare them for their ministry.

Do: Accept that humans cannot accomplish things by power and might. The Lord’s Spirit changes and accomplishes things that no one else can perform.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Visionary Power
   A. How can God’s insights regarding the future help you to orient yourself in time and in your personal life?
   B. Why are God’s past actions relevant to you today?
   C. What is your understanding of the power that comes with having the right vision in life?

II. Feel: God’s Cleansing Power
   A. Why do even church leaders need to be cleansed?
   B. Why can only God take away our sins?
   C. How can you be sure that God forgives you? How and when can you have assurance of forgiveness?

III. Do: Living With Spiritual Power
   A. Why do you so often feel weak?
   B. What difference does God’s Spirit make in your life, your church, and your community?
   C. How can you give yourself to the Spirit’s disposition so that He can use you to accomplish His purposes?

Summary: God’s Word, His forgiveness, and the presence of the Spirit of God are crucial elements in our lives. This combination brings real life. God wants to help His people in their life struggles and give them victory over temptation and sin.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** Zechariah 4:6

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God is the One who is in control of history and individual lives. He justifies, sanctifies, and leads individuals into an obedient, joyful, ethical life. He encourages us to seek Him in order to have the power to do His will.

**Opening Discussion:** A prophet is a spokesperson for God with great authority. But on what fact is the prophet’s authority built? Why is it important to take the prophet’s message seriously?

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. In spite of all of God’s promises of His help and guidance, why do we still feel impotent spiritually, so often falling prey to our own weaknesses? What is the way to change that?

2. God says that His work cannot be accomplished “‘by might nor by power, but’” that it is accomplished “‘by My Spirit’” (Zech. 4:6, NKJV). What does this testify about the nature of the Spirit of the Lord?

STEP 2—Explore

**Bible Commentary**

The name Zechariah means “the Lord remembers.” God remembers His promises, and He will fulfill them. He remembers His people and their sufferings but also knows their sins, and He wants to deliver them from the power of evil. He remembers His assurance to send the Promised Seed, who will defeat Satan (Gen. 3:15). He remembers His promise to establish His eternal kingdom based on love, justice, truth, and freedom.

**I. Eight Night Visions** *(Review Zechariah 3:1–10 with your class.)*

The message of Zechariah’s first six chapters is quite simple: it is time to rebuild the temple. This appeal was the main communication behind a series of eight short visions that God gave to Zechariah in order to help him to
understand from a broader perspective the contemporary situation of God’s people. Each vision engaged the prophet in reasoning that deepened his understanding of the message. They were written in a chiastic order (in a mirror structure), which means that the first vision corresponds with the last one, the eighth; the second with the seventh; the third with the sixth; and, finally, at the climax is the fourth, accompanied by the fifth. These pairs also deal with related subjects, which are chronologically arranged in a reverse order. To summarize the message of each vision, one can say the following:

1. The first vision (Zech. 1:7–11), about the man among the myrtle trees and four horses with their riders, conveys the idea that these horses went through the whole earth, and their riders declared that the earth was at peace (vs. 11). So, it was now a ripe time to work on God’s project; namely, to build His house, because no one had the power to stop it. God had established peace.

2. The second vision (Zech. 1:18–21), about the “four horns” (NKJV), describes how the craftsmen broke them. God revealed the end of political cause for the exile. These powers were torn down because they were hindrances to the building of the temple.

3. The third vision (Zech. 2:1–5), about the “man with a measuring line” (NKJV), points to God’s abundant blessing: “‘I myself will be a wall of fire around it [Jerusalem]’ . . . ‘and I will be its glory within’” (vs. 5, NIV).

4. The fourth vision (Zech. 3:1–10), about God’s forgiveness for Joshua, lies at the heart of these eight visions. Satan accused Joshua, the high priest, of sin. Joshua’s priestly robe was dirty, thus representing the filthiness of sin. But the “Angel of the LORD,” who is without doubt the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, ordered Joshua’s filthy clothes to be removed and assured Joshua: “‘I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you’” (Zech. 3:4, NIV). The Lord then recommissions Joshua to minister in the temple and announces a magnificent prophecy about the Messiah. Joshua is freely forgiven and proclaimed just, because God declares it so. On this basis he experiences the assurance of forgiveness and the joy of salvation.

5. The fifth vision (Zech. 4:1–14), about God’s empowering Zerubbabel, lies at the core of Zechariah’s message, together with the fourth vision. God gives His Spirit to Zerubbabel to build the temple; thus, He strengthens him to accomplish His will. This vision about the gold lampstand and oil puts the emphasis on the work of the Spirit of the Lord who sanctifies. Only the Holy Spirit can change and stir up the work for God in an efficient way.

6. The sixth vision (Zech. 5:1–4), about the “flying scroll” (vs. 1, NKJV), shows that the curse was measured and God Himself punishes iniquity.

7. The seventh vision (Zech. 5:5–11), about the “woman sitting inside the basket” (vs. 7, NKJV), explains the spiritual reason for the exile. God revealed the people’s wickedness that had led them into the Babylonian captivity.
8. The eighth vision (Zech. 6:1–8), about the “four chariots” (vs. 1, NKJV), proclaims the opposite of the first vision. The last message was about war and turmoil in the world; but God would intervene, and His Spirit would bring peace.

To fully understand the message of these visions, one needs to realize that the first four visions show the effects and that the last four visions describe the conditions that led to those results. Thus, these visions should be studied in reversed sequence. One should begin with the last vision and go to the first (from war to peace), continue with the seventh one and then examine the second one (from the religious cause for the exile to the political reason), then investigate the sixth vision and follow with the third one (moving from curses and punishment to God’s immense blessing). At the heart of these visions are visions four and five. God first enables Zerubbabel to build the temple and then cleanses the high priest Joshua to serve in this sanctuary. From the first to the last and from the last to the first, God is in action. His love, grace, and justice are revealed and vindicated.

Apart from learning from this historical situation, we need to first experience God’s love in our hearts. Then we must experience His forgiveness and cleansing, and, finally, His empowering through the Holy Spirit. Then we can be sanctified and gradually be transformed into His image, enabled to obey Him and follow His law, witness for Him, and consequently serve others unselfishly.

Consider This: Why does God communicate His message to prophets through visions and dreams and not by direct speech? Discuss whether or not you think it a higher and more preferable level of communication, and why.

Discussion Question: God identifies with His people so closely that He declares: “‘Whoever touches you touches the apple of [my] eye’” (Zech. 2:8, NIV). What other examples in Scripture can you find of this intimate unity between God/Christ and His followers? Consider, for example, the following texts: Matthew 25:40, 45; Acts 9:4, 5.

II. God Encourages Right Doing (Review Zechariah 7:9, 10 with your class.)

In view of God’s help and intervention in favor of His people, the believers are rightly motivated and empowered to do right.

According to chapters 7 and 8, God calls His people to lead moral lives: “‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other” ’” (Zech. 7:9, 10, NIV). In chapter 8, Zechariah accentuated God’s discourse: “‘Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,’ declares the Lord” (Zech. 8:16, 17, NIV).
The principle of the Christian life is always the same. Once we are saved, we want to obey God and live in harmony with His law. God’s imperatives become an integral part of the redeemed.

**Discussion Question:** Many people and powerful nations will seek the Lord Almighty, according to Zechariah 8:20–22. In this passage there is a striking statement given in the context of making a decision to go to Jerusalem to seek the Lord: “‘I myself am going’” (Zech. 8:21, NIV). How does personal example influence others to follow God?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** The Holy Spirit is the ultimate Author of the biblical books (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21). How can we be in tune with Him in order to correctly understand the Word of God?

**Life Application:** Diligently study and discover the similarities and differences between justification by God’s grace through faith and sanctification by God’s grace through faith. Why do we need both: the white robe of Christ’s righteousness and the oil of the Holy Spirit?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Ask your class members personal questions to find out the ways in which they study the Holy Scriptures in order to hear the voice of God for themselves. Provide for them a set of simple interpretative principles regarding how to read the Bible and discover its meaning.

**Activity:** The book of Zechariah has brought comfort, encouragement, and peace to many students of the Bible. Which passages of this important biblical book speak most powerfully to you? What personal solutions has the Bible given you for the problems in your life? Share your experiences with others.
Heaven’s Best Gift (Zechariah)


Memory Text: “The Lord their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown” (Zechariah 9:16, NIV).

Key Thought: Zechariah has some wonderful Messianic prophecies that point to Jesus and affirm our faith in Him.

At the heart of the biblical message lies the most beautiful story ever told, that of the Creator God, who, in the person of His Son, left the glory of heaven to save humanity from sin and death. In the second half of Zechariah there are several Messianic prophecies—Old Testament prophetic promises about Jesus—the One who did all this for us.

These specific promises first were given in order to keep God’s people, who lived in Zechariah’s perilous times, focused on the promise of redemption. Although the original context of these prophecies never should be ignored, their importance never should be confined to the past fulfillments either. Instead, we will look at the ways in which they were fulfilled in Jesus—fulfillments that are universal, not local, because they affect the ultimate destiny of the world and not just ancient Israel and Judah.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 22.*
“The Robe of a Jew”

Beginning with chapter 8, the book of Zechariah takes a radical turn. A series of messages sent from the Lord tells the future of the world and the role of God’s people in it. Some of the passages from these chapters are not easy to understand, but the ultimate future is clearly positive.

Read Zechariah 8. What principles can you learn from there that have relevance for us, as Seventh-day Adventists, and for the calling from God that we have been given?

God’s plan was that Jerusalem would again be a safe place in which old people would sit in streets filled with playful boys and girls (Zech. 8:4, 5). To those who inhabited a city overrun by conquerors, the promise of streets that were safe for young and old sounded like a dream.

Instead of remaining forever a small subordinate nation, God’s people were to be a magnet to which nations would be drawn in order to worship the Lord, the King of the whole earth (Zech. 14:9). The use of the expression “all languages” (NIV) in Zechariah 8:23 indicates that the prophecy envisioned a universal movement.

Like Isaiah (Isaiah 2) and Isaiah’s contemporary Micah (Micah 4), Zechariah was shown by God that the day would come when a multitude of people from many cities and nations would go up to Jerusalem to pray and seek the Lord. God’s presence in Zion generally will be recognized, as will His blessings on those who worship Him.

The gospel accounts tell that these Messianic promises began to be fulfilled through the ministry of Jesus Christ. On one occasion, for example, Jesus said that when He is lifted up from the earth, He “will draw all peoples” to Himself (John 12:32, NKJV).

The church of Christ, also called the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), is privileged in our time to have a part in this mission. We are to carry the light of salvation to the ends of the earth. In this way the people of God can be a great blessing to the world.

Read especially Zechariah 8:16, 17. At a time when our church is seeking revival and reformation, how can we learn to avoid these things, which God says He hates?
Jesus’ triumphal entry consisted of the future King riding on a donkey into Jerusalem. In the Bible, rejoicing and shouting for joy especially is associated with the celebration of God as King (Psalms 47, 96, 98). This gentle Ruler will bring righteousness, salvation, and lasting peace, and His dominion will stretch to the ends of the earth.

When Jesus triumphantly rode a donkey into Jerusalem only days before His death, a great number of people cheered His coming. Some rejoiced, hoping that Christ would overthrow Rome’s power and establish God’s kingdom in Jerusalem. But instead of allowing Himself to be Israel’s king, Jesus died on the cross and then rose from His grave. There is no question that He disappointed many of His followers, who sought a more militaristic leader. Little did they know, however, that what they wanted was nothing in comparison to what they were going to get through the death of Jesus instead.

“Christ was following the Jewish custom for a royal entry. The animal on which He rode was that ridden by the kings of Israel, and prophecy had foretold that thus the Messiah should come to His kingdom. No sooner was He seated upon the colt than a loud shout of triumph rent the air. The multitude hailed Him as Messiah, their King. Jesus now accepted the homage which He had never before permitted, and the disciples received this as proof that their glad hopes were to be realized by seeing Him established on the throne. The multitude were convinced that the hour of their emancipation was at hand.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 570.

Much has been written about how, when things looked good, the crowd was enthusiastic about Jesus; when things did not go right, however, many in that same crowd turned away from Him (some even openly against Him). What can we learn from this event about the danger of false expectations? You claim a promise for healing, for instance, or for victory over a sin, and you do not see it as you expected. How can we develop a faith that will not fail, even when things do not go as hoped, expected, or even prayed for?
The One Pierced

Zechariah 12–14 reveal several things that could have happened had Israel been faithful to God. First, the Lord would have brought total victory over the powers of evil and the hostile nations that had tried to oppose His plan of salvation (Zech. 12:1–9). Although Jerusalem was to be God’s instrument toward this triumph, the victory itself would have come from the Lord’s intervention. In the end, the enemy utterly would have been defeated and destroyed.

Zechariah 12:10 marks the transition of the movement from physical deliverance, from what would have happened had Israel been faithful, to spiritual deliverance of God’s faithful people. Following the victory, God’s people would embrace their Lord. God’s Spirit of grace and supplication would be poured on the leaders and the people. This convicting work of the Spirit would result in far-reaching repentance and spiritual revival, something that our church itself is seeking.

As God pours out His Spirit, His people look upon the One whom they have pierced and mourn for Him as one mourns the death of an only son. The original Hebrew word for “pierced” always describes some type of physical violence, usually resulting in death (Num. 25:8, 1 Sam. 31:4). The poignancy of the people’s grief is heightened by the realization that their own sins caused Jesus Christ’s death.


Interestingly enough, one traditional Jewish interpretation holds that this verse points to the experience of the Messiah. It is, of course, right: it is talking about Jesus and His death on the cross (compare with Isaiah 53).

“The scenes of Calvary call for the deepest emotion. Upon this subject you will be excusable if you manifest enthusiasm. That Christ, so excellent, so innocent, should suffer such a painful death, bearing the weight of the sins of the world, our thoughts and imaginations can never fully comprehend.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 213. How can you grow in your appreciation of what His death means to you and what it offers you?
The Good Shepherd

For centuries both Jewish and Christian readers of the Bible have found in Zechariah’s book numerous references to the Messiah and messianic times. Christians, of course, have understood that these passages apply to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ: the triumphant yet peaceful King (Zech. 9:9), the One who was pierced (Zech. 12:10), the Shepherd who was struck down (Zech. 13:7).

In Zechariah 13:7–9 the prophet is shown a scene in which the sword of the Lord’s judgment goes out against the Good Shepherd. On a previous occasion the prophet saw the sword being raised against a “worthless shepherd” (Zech. 11:17, NIV). But here in this passage the Good Shepherd is struck, and the flock becomes scattered. His death results in a great trial and testing of God’s people, during which some perish; yet, all of the faithful are refined.

Read Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27. How did Jesus apply this prophecy to that which was going to happen that night? More important, what should that whole incident, that of the disciples fleeing in the face of adversity (see Matt. 26:56 and Mark 14:50), teach us about the faithfulness of God in contrast to human unfaithfulness?

Think of times in which you have been unfaithful to the Lord. Despite that, how does He continue to show you mercy and grace? What must your response be to that mercy and grace?
King of the Whole World

Read Zechariah 14. How are we to understand that which is being said there?

In the last chapter of his book, Zechariah describes a day when all unrepentant nations will gather themselves against Jerusalem. At the last moment, the Lord will intervene by liberating His people and establishing His eternal kingdom on earth. After all who oppose Him are destroyed, all nations will worship the one true God. Then, the Lord will be king over the whole world. He will be one Lord, and His name will be exalted above all names. The great “I AM” expresses all God is and always will be. Though these things were to have happened had Israel remained faithful, they still will be fulfilled but on a grander scale, during the final redemption of God’s people everywhere.

When Zechariah announced the coming of the Messiah, he did not draw a line of separation between His first and second comings. As was the case with other prophets, he saw the coming kingdom of the Messiah as one glorious future. Only in the light of Christ’s first coming can we now distinguish between the two comings. We also can feel gratitude for everything He accomplished for our salvation on Calvary. We can look forward with joy in anticipation of God’s eternal kingdom (see Dan. 7:14).

The closing section of this prophetic book describes Jerusalem in its glory, exalted, filled with people, and secure. The saved from all nations will participate in the worship of the eternal King. The entire city of Jerusalem will be filled with the holiness of the temple.

When these glorious promises are studied together with the overall teaching of the Bible, we come to the conclusion that the ultimate fulfillment of these predictions will take place in the New Jerusalem, where God’s people will come together from everywhere and worship Him forever. This all will happen only after the second coming of Jesus. The themes of the people’s perpetual praises will be God’s salvation as well as His goodness and power, just as the famous Song of the Sea concludes: “ ‘The LORD shall reign forever and ever’ ” (Exod. 15:18, NKJV). Ancient prophets and faithful people from the past all looked with eager anticipation toward this climactic event.

Dwell on the ultimate redemption that is promised to us—a new heaven and a new earth with no sin, death, suffering, or loss. What are all the reasons you have for this hope, and how can you keep them before you daily, especially in times of trouble, fear, and pain?
Further Study: “In the darkest days of her long conflict with evil, the church of God has been given revelations of the eternal purpose of Jehovah. His people have been permitted to look beyond the trials of the present to the triumphs of the future, when, the warfare having been accomplished, the redeemed will enter into possession of the promised land. These visions of future glory, scenes pictured by the hand of God, should be dear to His church today, when the controversy of the ages is rapidly closing and the promised blessings are soon to be realized in all their fullness. . . .

“The nations of the saved will know no other law than the law of heaven. All will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving. Over the scene the morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite in proclaiming, ‘There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death.’ ”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, pp. 722, 732, 733.

Discussion Questions:

1. However much humans have strived to make things better in our world, the world continues to get worse. According to the Bible, only when Christ returns and remakes this world will it be the paradise that we so long for. Though we know this truth, why are we still called to bring as much comfort, healing, and solace to this world as we possibly can?

2. Thursday’s study pointed out the important fact that many Old Testament prophecies about the coming of Jesus talk about it in ways that seem to refer to one event, not two. What does that tell us about how closely related the First and Second Comings are, in terms of the plan of salvation? Why is that so? Why is it that without the First Coming there could be no Second, and why—without the Second Coming—would the First be of no avail?

3. As we seek for revival and reformation among us, what can we learn from the study of Zechariah that can help us, both individually and as a church, to be prepared for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which is vital to the revival and reformation we so earnestly need?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Zechariah 9:16

The Student Will:

Know: Understand that sending the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to earth is God’s supreme gift to humanity.

Feel: Trust that Messianic prophecies demonstrate that God cares about our situation and gives the ultimate solution to the problem of sin.

Do: Cultivate faith in the Messiah who voluntarily came and saved humanity, even though it caused His suffering and death.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Certainty of Messianic Prophecies

A. What do different titles given for the Messiah and the scenes from His life tell you about His accomplishments?

B. What do the predictions of the Messiah’s first coming have in common with our readiness for His second coming?

C. What does it mean that God’s people will sparkle in God’s hand as do jewels in a crown?

II. Feel: Pierced for You

A. What emotions fill you when you realize that Someone suffered and died for you so you might have life?

B. What would happen if our Redeemer, the Messiah, had not come?

III. Do: Cultivate Faith in Jesus Christ

A. How can you practically help others to develop deep emotions for Christ while studying the scenes of Calvary?

B. How can you personally grow in your own faith in Jesus?

Summary: Jesus Christ came at the precise time in order to save those who believe in Him. This is the greatest story and most decisive event in the cosmic history of our world, and our future destiny depends upon our relationship to the Messiah who came and is yet to come again.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Zechariah 12:10

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Knowing Christ personally is vital for our spiritual lives. The fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies related to the first coming of Jesus gives us assurance that He will come again. Without this hope of the second coming of Jesus Christ, life would make no sense. Faith and trust in Jesus result in eternal life (John 17:3).

Just for Teachers: The last part of the book of Zechariah (Zechariah 9–14) is usually categorized as eschatological or apocalyptic, which means that the prophecies focus on the time of the end. The last days were inaugurated by the first coming of Jesus (Heb. 1:1, 2; Acts 2:17; 1 Pet. 1:20; 4:7; 2 Pet. 3:3) but climax with the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Prophet Zechariah presents profound Messianic predictions, and the Gospel writers apply some of them directly to the life of Jesus Christ.

Opening Discussion: Contemplate, as a class, the meaning of the following thought: hope is vital in a situation that seems hopeless.

• Why is it important for people to have hope? Share concrete examples of how hope helped someone to survive in a time of crisis.

• What happens when sick people or war prisoners lose hope? Why are Christians a hope-oriented people?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Seven Messianic Prophecies in the Book of Zechariah

Though Zechariah’s Messianic prophecies can be challenging and sometimes enigmatic, the main thrust is clear: Christ is coming. It is interesting, though, that the prophets Isaiah and Zechariah have more to say about the coming Messiah than any other Old Testament prophets.

1. The First Messianic Prophecy (Review Zechariah 3:8, 9 with your class.)

Three stunning titles for the Messiah appear in this passage (the prophet
Isaiah has already mentioned them). The Messiah is called “‘My [God’s] Servant’” (vs. 8, NKJV; see also Isaiah 42, 49, 50, 52, 53), “‘the BRANCH’” (vs. 8; see also Isa. 4:2), and “‘the stone’” (vs. 9; see also Isa. 28:16), but this time a unique description is added: the Stone has seven eyes and an inscription is engraved on it (vs. 9). Later, the Messiah also removes sin and cleanses people. The vision concludes with a picture of security, peace, and happiness in which people enjoy a fellowship together because the Messiah reigns (vs. 10).

2. The Second Messianic Prophecy (Review Zechariah 6:12, 13 with your class.)

The crowning of the high priest Joshua (vs. 11) is portrayed here as a type for the Messiah. Jesus Christ, the Branch, will be ultimately crowned as the King and be simultaneously the Priest. In Israel these two offices were separate, but the Messiah will combine them in His Person. He Himself will be the King-Priest and rule on His throne. Only Jesus Christ has this unique position; He is the Priest who sits on the throne as the King (see Psalm 110, Hebrews 7).

3. The Third Messianic Prophecy (Review Zechariah 9:9, 10 with your class.)

Zechariah pictures the Messiah as the righteous and gentle King riding a donkey. The fulfillment is described in Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15, and it is applied to the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on the Sunday of His last week before the Crucifixion.

4. The Fourth Messianic Prophecy (Review Zechariah 10:4 with your class.)

Verse 4 begins: “From him,” which raises the question of who is meant by “him.” The best-suited antecedent is the Lord (see vs. 3). This means that the Messiah will come from the Lord, i.e., from the heavenly Father. This very brief Messianic verse presents four marvelous titles for Jesus Christ. He is the “‘cornerstone,’” i.e., the foundation of everything (see Ps. 118:22, Isa. 28:16; compare with Matt. 21:42); He is the “‘tent peg,’” who fastens us to Him in righteousness and on whom people can hang all their worries, fears, anxiety, and burdens (see Isa. 22:22, 23); He is the “‘battle-bow,’” that is, as the Divine Warrior He is the symbol of strength (Exod. 15:2, 3; Pss. 7:1; 27:1); and He is the (absolute or sovereign) “‘ruler.’” On Him you can rely completely.

5. The Fifth Messianic Prophecy (Review Zechariah 11:4–14 with your class.)

In this more difficult passage, the Messiah is depicted as the rejected good
Shepherd whom the Lord asks to tend after the flock. Without going into the details of the complex imagery of this biblical section, verse 12 mentions the phrase “they paid me thirty pieces of silver” (NIV) and verse 13 states “so I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD, to the potter” (ESV). Phrases from these verses are used in Matthew 27:3, 6–9 and are applied to both Judas’ betrayal of Jesus Christ for the thirty pieces of silver and to what the chief priests did with the money after Judas threw it back.

6. The Sixth Messianic Prophecy (Review Zechariah 12:10–14 with your class.)

Zechariah prophetically states that the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem “‘will look on me, the one they have pierced, and mourn for him as one mourns for an only child’” (vs. 10, NIV). The picture is gloomy: people look at the Messiah and mourn bitterly for Him, because they have pierced Him. This portrait of the Messiah’s death is used in John 19:37 (compare with Ps. 22:16, Isa. 53:5). Our need to look on Jesus in faith is underscored in John 3:14, 15 (compare with Num. 21:9, Isa. 45:22, Heb. 12:2).

7. The Seventh Messianic Prophecy (Review Zechariah 13:6–9 with your class.)

The prophecy concerning the way that the Messiah’s “feet will stand on the Mount of Olives” (Zech. 14:4, 5, NKJV) goes beyond the scope of the first coming of Jesus Christ. Even though Jesus Christ walked on the Mount of Olives during His first coming, this prediction proclaims that the Mount of Olives will be split in two. Its fulfillment surpasses even Jesus’ second coming, because at the time of the Second Coming, He will not touch the ground but stay in the air (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). The whole scenario best fits His third coming after the millennium when the New Jerusalem will come down and “all the holy ones with him” (Zech. 14:5, NIV). Zechariah 14:6–9 then describes the conditions of the new earth (see Revelation 21, 22).

Consider This: Ask class members to define in their own words the different titles of Jesus Christ as expressed in the book of Zechariah. What do these titles reveal about Jesus?

II. Hope That Makes You Not Ashamed (Review Philippians 1:20 with your class.)

Prophet Zechariah uses a unique expression: “Prisoners of hope” (Zech. 9:12, NIV). He is saying that we have hope, but at the same time we are not free; we are prisoners, and we expect future deliverance. We expect a better world that can be established only by Jesus Christ. Hope in the Messiah, the King, brings the ultimate solution to our deep problem of sin and troubles, because He now establishes the kingdom of grace and, later, the kingdom of glory.
Questions for Discussion:

1. How do you feel as a “prisoner of hope”? What does this special phrase mean to you?

2. What biblical texts give assurance about the second coming of Jesus Christ? Which ones do you know by heart? Share your favorite one with the class.

3. The second part of our name, “Seventh-day Adventists,” refers to the blessed hope. How can we be messengers and carriers of this hope for others?

**STEP 3—Apply**

Application Questions:

1. There are seven different prophecies about the Messiah in the book of Zechariah. What insights do they provide about the life of Jesus Christ? Which of the episodes of His life that are mentioned in the book of Zechariah are depicted in the New Testament? What difference does it make in our lives that we know how and when these Messianic prophecies of the first coming of Jesus were fulfilled?

2. Ask your class to sing the hymn “We Have This Hope” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Hymnal*, p. 214). What feelings does this song express and create?

**STEP 4—Create**

*Just for Teachers:* Explain to the members of your class how important prayer is as the first step in discovering the meaning of the biblical text. Discuss with them why it is vital.

*Activity:* Zechariah’s book is one of the most frequently quoted Old Testament books in the New Testament (more than seventy quotations or allusions). Most of them appear in the Gospels and in the book of Revelation. The book of Zechariah is second only to Ezekiel, followed by Daniel, in its influence on Revelation. Encourage your class to find and share in class some of these quotations and allusions from the book of Zechariah in the New Testament.
Lest We Forget! (Malachi)

**Sabbath Afternoon**

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Malachi 1, Lev. 1:1–3, Malachi 2, Eph. 5:21–33, Malachi 3, Exod. 32:32, Malachi 4.

**Memory Text:** “‘My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations,’ says the Lord Almighty” (Malachi 1:11, NIV).

**Key Thought:** Malachi teaches us the extent of God’s commitment to His people but also points to their sacred responsibilities.

Malachi’s name means “my messenger.” We know nothing about him except that which we can glean from his short book, which brings the section of the Old Testament called the Minor Prophets (or The Book of the Twelve) to an end. His is also the last book of the Old Testament.

The central message of Malachi is that while God revealed His love for His people throughout their history, that love also made His people accountable to Him. The Lord expected the chosen nation and its leaders to obey His commands. Though open idolatry apparently had vanished (the book appears to have been written for Jews who had returned from Babylonian captivity), the people were not living up to the expectations of the covenant. Though they were going through the motions of religious observance, it was a dry formalism without heartfelt conviction.

May we as a church take heed!

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 29.*
Great Is the Lord

Read Malachi 1. What problem is the prophet addressing? How, today, might we be guilty of the same attitude that led to this rebuke?

Malachi contrasts God’s love for His people with the attitude of the priests, whom he charges with the sin of contempt for God’s holy name. When performing their duties in the temple, these descendants of Aaron accepted lame, blind, and sick animals for sacrifices to the Lord. In this way the people had been led astray into thinking that sacrifices were not important. Yet, God instructed Aaron and his sons in the wilderness that sacrificial animals should be physically perfect, without blemish (see Lev. 1:1–3, 22:19).

The prophet then lists three important reasons why God deserved to be honored and respected by the people of Israel. First, God is their Father. Just as children should honor their parents, so the people must respect their Father in heaven. Second, God is their Master and Lord. Just as servants obey their masters, so God’s people should treat Him in the same way. Third, the Lord is a great King, and an earthly king would not accept a defective or sickly animal as a gift from one of His subjects. So, the prophet asks why the people would present such an animal to the King of kings, the One who rules over the whole world.

What, of course, makes their actions even more heinous in the sight of God is that these sacrifices were all pointing to Jesus, the spotless Son of God (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19). The animals were to be without blemish because Jesus had to be without blemish in order to be our perfect sacrifice.

“To the honor and glory of God, His beloved Son—the Surety, the Substitute—was delivered up and descended into the prison-house of the grave. The new tomb enclosed Him in its rocky chambers. If one single sin had tainted His character the stone would never have been rolled away from the door of His rocky chamber, and the world with its burden of guilt would have perished.”—Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases, vol. 10, p. 385. Is there any wonder, then, that the sacrifices that pointed to Jesus had to be perfect?
Loving and Respecting Others

God’s voice, which dominates Malachi’s book, is the voice of a loving father who pleads with His children. When the people raise questions and make complaints, He is ready to dialogue with them. Most of the issues discussed by God and His people have to do with a few basic attitudes.

Read Malachi 2. Though a number of issues are dealt with here, for what practice is the Lord especially condemning the people? See Mal. 2:13–16.

While all the Jews recognized God as Father and Creator in their worship, not all of them were living as if God was the Lord of their lives. Malachi takes marriage as an example to illustrate the people’s lack of faithfulness and commitment to one another. According to the Bible, marriage is a sacred institution established by God. The people of Israel were warned against marrying outside the faith because by doing so they would compromise their commitments with the Lord and fall into idolatry. (See Josh. 23:12, 13.)

God had intended that marriage should be a commitment for life. In Malachi’s time, however, many men were breaking the vows that they had made early in life with, as the prophet said, the “wife of your youth.” Seeing their wives grow older, the husbands would divorce them and marry younger and more attractive women. For this reason, God says, He hates divorce (Mal. 2:16). This strong statement reveals how serious God is about marriage commitments, which so often people take very lightly. The strict rules in the Bible about divorce show just how sacred marriage is.

Because divorce was legal in Israel (Deut. 24:1–4), some men did not hesitate to break their marriage vows. Toward the end of the Old Testament period, divorce appears to have become common, somewhat like in many countries today. Yet, in the Bible marriage is consistently presented as a holy covenant before God (Gen. 2:24, Eph. 5:21–33).

Read Malachi 2:17. What warning should be taken from these words, especially in the context of the day’s lesson? Or even in general? How could we be in danger of harboring that same attitude, even subconsciously?
Tithe in the Storehouse

Read Malachi 3:1–10. What is God saying to His people here? What specific elements are found in these verses, and why would they all be tied together? That is, in what ways are these things all related to each other?

With these verses, God restates the basic message of the Minor Prophets: His love remains constant and unwavering. In verse 7 God’s call is heard once more: “‘Return to me, and I will return to you’” (NIV). The people then ask: “‘How shall we return?’” (RSV). This question is similar to the one in Micah 6:6 about the bringing of sacrifices to God. In the case of Malachi, however, a specific answer is given, and, surprisingly enough, it has to do with the question of the people’s tithing, or lack thereof.

In fact, the people are accused of stealing from what belongs to God. This happened because they were not faithful in the returning of their tithes and offerings.

The custom of tithing, or giving 10 percent of one’s income, is presented in the Bible as a reminder that God owns everything and all that people have comes from Him. The tithe was used in Israel to support the Levites, who ministered in the temple. To neglect the returning of one’s tithe is, according to Malachi, the same as robbing God.

Malachi 3:10 is one of the rare Scriptures in which God challenges people to put Him to the test. At the waters of Meribah in the wilderness, the children of Israel repeatedly “tested” God’s patience, which made Him angry (Ps. 95:8–11). Here, however, God is inviting Israel to put Him to the test. He wants the people to see that they can trust Him in this matter, which, according to the texts, is something of great spiritual significance.

How does the act of tithing (and of giving offerings, for that matter) strengthen you spiritually? In other words, when you cheat on tithe, why are you cheating yourself, not just God?
A Scroll of Remembrance

In Malachi 3:13–18, the people complain that the Lord did not care about the nation’s sins. Those who practiced evil and injustice appeared to escape unnoticed; and thus, many wondered why they should serve the Lord and live righteously when evil seemed to go unpunished.

**Read** Malachi 3:14, 15. Why is it easy to understand that complaint?

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**How** does the Lord respond? *Mal. 3:16–18.*

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It is easy in this world, where so much injustice exists, to wonder if justice ever will be done. The message here, however, is that God knows of all these things, and He will reward those who are faithful to Him.

**The expression** “a scroll [book] of remembrance” is found only here in Scripture. What do the following passages teach about God’s books in which are recorded people’s names and deeds? *Exod. 32:32, Ps. 139:16, Isa. 4:3, 65:6, Rev. 20:11–15.*

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The bottom line is that the Lord knows all things. He knows those who are His (2 Tim. 2:19) and those who are not. All we can do is, as sinners, claim His righteousness, claim His promises of forgiveness and power, and then—relying on Christ’s merits—die to self and live for Him and others, knowing that in the end our only hope is in His grace. If we place our hope in ourselves, we are sure to be disappointed, one way or another.
The Sun of Righteousness

On a previous occasion the people asked, “‘Where is the God of justice?’” (Mal. 2:17, NKJV). In the beginning of chapter 4, a solemn assurance is given that one day God will execute His judgment on the world. As a result, the proud will be destroyed along with the wicked, just as stubble is consumed in fire. Stubble is the unusable part of the grain, and is consumed in only seconds when thrown into a blazing furnace. On the Day of the Lord, fire will be the agent of destruction, just as water was in Noah’s day.

Read Malachi 4. What great contrast is presented here between the saved and the lost? See also Deut. 30:19, John 3:16.

While the fate of the wicked is described in verse 1, verse 2 focuses on future blessings of the righteous. The question “Where is the God of justice?” is answered again, but this time by the assurance of a coming day when the “sun of righteousness” will rise with healing in its wings (NIV). The rising of the “sun of righteousness” is a metaphor for the dawn of a new day, one that marks a new era in the history of salvation. At this time, once and for all, evil will be destroyed forever, the saved will enjoy the ultimate fruit of what Christ has accomplished for them, and the universe will be rendered eternally secure.

Malachi closes his book with two admonitions that characterize biblical faith. The first is a call to remember God’s revelation through Moses, who wrote the first five books of the Bible and the foundation of the Old Testament.

The second admonition speaks of the prophetic role of Elijah. Filled with the Holy Spirit, this prophet called people to repent and return to God. Although Jesus Himself saw John the Baptist as a fulfillment of that prophecy (Matt. 11:13, 14), we also believe it has a fulfillment at the end of time, when God will have a people who fearlessly will proclaim His message to the world. “Those who are to prepare the way for the second coming of Christ, are represented by faithful Elijah, as John came in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way for Christ’s first advent.”—Ellen G. White, Counsels on Health, pp. 72, 73.

How are we to fulfill this sacred role? How well are we doing in this task?
Further Study: “God blesses the work of men’s hands, that they may return to Him His portion. He gives them the sunshine and the rain; He causes vegetation to flourish; He gives health and ability to acquire means. Every blessing comes from His bountiful hand, and He desires men and women to show their gratitude by returning Him a portion in tithes and offerings—in thank offerings, in freewill offerings, in trespass offerings. They are to devote their means to His service, that His vineyard may not remain a barren waste. They are to study what the Lord would do were He in their place. . . . They are to take all difficult matters to Him in prayer. They are to reveal an unselfish interest in the building up of His work in all parts of the world.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, pp. 707, 708.

Discussion Questions:

1 Dwell more on the Bible and marriage. Because marriage itself is so sacred, something created by God Himself, it comes with some very strict guidelines about what is biblically permitted to dissolve it. After all, how sacred, how important would marriage be were it easily ended? If you could get out of it for the most trivial of reasons, then marriage itself would be trivial. How do the strict rules against ending a marriage prove just how special it is?

2 As a class, carefully go over Malachi 2:17. What do we, as Seventh-day Adventists, with our understanding of the pre-Advent judgment, have to say to those who might be uttering the same sentiments expressed in this verse?

3 Malachi 4 talks about the ultimate destruction of the lost. Nothing remains. How does this teaching contrast with the idea of an eternally burning hell-fire? Why is the contrast between these two views a good example of the ways in which false doctrine can lead to a false understanding about the character of God?

4 In his classic work “The Grand Inquisitor,” Russian writer Dostoevsky depicted the institution of the church in his time as having things so well under control that it did not need Christ anymore. Are we facing that same danger today? If so, how so? How might this danger be more subtle than we realize?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Malachi 1:11

The Student Will:

Know: Understand that God’s commitment to His people will result in the glorious manifestation of His presence and in certain prophetic activities at the climax of the world’s history.
Feel: Appreciate the Lord’s vast blessings that await His followers as they also appreciate His gifts.
Do: Lead a responsible life celebrating the greatness of God’s name.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: God’s Commitment to His People
   - What does it mean that God loves His people in their everyday lives?
   - Why does God engage Himself in different dialogues with His people?

II. Feel: Appreciation for God’s Blessings
   - How does giving your tithe and offerings help you to appreciate God’s blessings?
   - What relationship is there between our lifestyles and our faith?

III. Do: The Responsible Life
   - How does your faithfulness to your spouse reflect on your faithfulness to the Lord, and why?
   - As a church, what can you do to encourage people to think about the needs of others and not be selfish?
   - How rich would you be if God gave you double the amount of money you gave to the poor and needy? Why is giving more valuable than keeping or receiving?

Summary: God is in dialogue with His people so that they can realize how deeply He loves them and is concerned about their well-being. He calls them to be faithful in all the spheres of their lives. He puts the emphases on marital faithfulness, parenting, leadership, and tithing.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Malachi 1:2

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God assures His people that He loves them. They doubt it, and, as a result, they live their own selfish and wicked lives. This means that our spiritual lives and growth depend on our picture of God. When we fully believe that He wants our best, then we yield our lives to Him in complete trust, live in total dependence upon Him, and follow His will out of gratitude. Only then can we prosper.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson focuses on God’s love for His people and His coming on the day of the Lord. Emphasize to your class that, as His followers, we are strongly admonished to do what is right because the day of accountability is near.

Opening Discussion: How often we take for granted many precious blessings that we experience in life. Consider carefully the following question: how can we learn to appreciate and be more grateful for all the blessings that God is constantly giving us?

Questions for Discussion:

1. According to the book of Malachi, how many questions did the people ask God? These questions will help you to discover the different topics with which the prophet is dealing. (See questions in Mal. 1:2, 6, 7; 2:14, 17; 3:7, 8, 13.) Pay close attention to God’s answers. God answers our questions when we are confused in our understanding of the real issues of life. In His love He dialogues with His people, even though He could rightfully command our obedience.

2. How are we to understand God’s call to people: “‘Return to me, and I will return to you’” (NIV)? Who is making the first move? Who is calling? (See Mal. 3:7, NKJV.) Note that people should return to God because He lovingly and patiently invites them to do so.
The book of Malachi opens with a difficult divine statement: “‘I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated’” (Mal. 1:2, 3, NIV). How should we understand this statement, which is one that goes against God’s nature? What does it mean that God “hated” Esau? Does He not love all people?

God reassures His people of His covenantal love and invites them to look back and see the historical difference between them and the descendants of Esau. This contrast is explained on the basis of election to service and has nothing to do with the idea of salvation; instead, it is established on God’s foreknowledge of Jacob’s and Esau’s decisions, life perspectives, and spiritual orientations.

The word hate in Hebrew sometimes has a different meaning from our understanding of the word today. Consider the following two examples: (1) Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah (Gen. 29:30), but the biblical text describes this preference with the colorful word hate: “When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb” (Gen. 29:31, ESV). (2) Jesus stated the conditions under which His followers should “hate” even those who are closest to them: “‘If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—even his own life—he cannot be my disciple’” (Luke 14:26, NIV). This hatred has absolutely nothing to do with emotional animosity toward the beloved ones; rather, it means that Christ’s disciple needs to love Christ more than his or her parents, spouse, children, or other close relatives (see Matt. 10:37, Deut. 6:5). Christ needs to be our number one priority. Thus, the word hate may refer to an idiomatic expression meaning “not being preferred,” or “not being an object of personal choice (for a special task),” as Leah was not Jacob’s preferred wife, even though he had six sons and one daughter with her.

Consider This: How are we to understand the statement that God loved Jacob but hated Esau? Similarly, what did Jesus mean by His words that if His followers came to Him but did not hate their loved ones, then they were not worthy of Him?

II. God Is Faithful. Are You Faithful to God? (Review 1 John 4:7–12 with your class.)
Our faithfulness to God is shown in a tangible way by our respect for His law and in the ways that we conduct our human relationships. (See John 14:15, 1 John 4:7–12, 19–21.) John wonders, How can people claim to love God, who cannot be seen, when they do not love their neighbor who lives beside them? If we do not show in a practical way our care, respect, and love, then we lie to ourselves. Consequently, our relationship with God is not genuine.

**Consider This:** What is true faithfulness? How does God demonstrate His faithfulness to us? How are we to demonstrate it to Him?

III. Are You Faithful to Your Spouse? *(Review Malachi 2:10–16 with your class.)*

Our faithfulness to God is shown foremost in our faithfulness to our spouses. The literary and thematic center of the book of Malachi is chapter 2:10–16. This theme is strong: “Stop being faithless!” Sin is defined in this passage as breaking faith: “‘So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless’” (Mal. 2:16, ESV; see also Rom. 14:23). The word for “breaking faith” or being “faithless” *(ESV)* or “deal[ing] treacherously” *(NKJV; in Hebrew bagad)* occurs in this short passage in Malachi (and only here in this book) five times (vss. 10, 11, 14, 15, 16), and it plays a key role. God is coming in judgment, and He will call people to be accountable to Him; therefore, they need to keep faith and cultivate right relationships, which come from faith. In the book of Malachi, having faith means to be faithful to the covenant we made with God and also with our spouses.

The faith relationship should be lived in our marriages. Here we cannot lie; we are either faithful to our spouses or we break this intimate covenant relationship. A loving spousal relationship will have a lasting and positive influence on our children.

**Discussion Question:** Why does God hate divorce? What is so damaging about it? How does it affect the spiritual lives of the involved couple, children, and the future? What are the legitimate causes for divorce? When can it be justified? See Jesus’ response to the question posed by some Pharisees: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” *(Matt. 19:3–9, NKJV).*

**Discussion:** Malachi uses a strong and graphic illustration in his teaching of what it means to live a life dedicated to God. Tell others of God’s faithfulness in fulfilling His promises regarding tithe. How is it that nine-tenths always leaves more in your income than ten-tenths? Encourage others to be faithful to the Lord in the financial sphere of life so that they can also experience God’s special blessing *(Mal. 3:10–12).*
STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: In order to better understand the questions the people had and the answers that God gave, invite class members to participate in the following activity.

Look at all of the questions that people asked in the book of Malachi and think about why the people asked these questions. Then explain the answers that God gave to each question or to some of them. Here are the people’s eight questions, prefaced by God’s statement, “you ask”:

1. “‘How have you loved us?’” (Mal. 1:2, NIV).
2. “‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’” (Mal. 1:6, NIV).
3. “‘How have we defiled you?’” (Mal. 1:7, NIV).
4. Why do You not pay attention to our offerings and accept them with pleasure from our hands? (Mal. 2:13, 14).
5. “‘How have we wearied him? . . . Where is the God of justice?’” (Mal. 2:17, NIV).
6. “‘How are we to return’” to You? (Mal. 3:7, NIV).
7. “‘How do we rob you?’” (Mal. 3:8, NIV).
8. “‘What have we said against you?’” (Mal. 3:13, NIV).

In what ways are these issues still relevant to us in our postmodern world? How are we grappling with similar questions?

Thought Question:

Why do we have such a hard time appreciating the love of God, who loved us so much that He even died for us?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Outline, in your own words, the main themes or literary structure of the book of Malachi. It will help you to discern the main issues that God presents to His people in the time of Malachi.

Activity: Create a picture of an ideal family. How should parents treat each other, and what kind of relationship should they cultivate with their children? How can they show their love so that their children not only know that their parents love them but feel it and are sure of it? How can parents respect their children’s individuality and help them to grow in their talents and interests? What things can they do together?