



ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
LESSONS

Ezekiel

Rainbow in the Rain



APRIL MAY JUNE 1991

PRAYER CALENDAR

- April 6 **PRAY** for 50 bicycles for pastors and colporteurs in China. US\$60 each.
- April 13 **PRAY** for one thousand evangelistic crusade budgets for lay and youth preachers in the Far Eastern Division. US\$250 each.
- April 20 **PRAY** for a small silk screen facility in Haiti to print visual aids for children's Sabbath Schools. US\$5,000.
- April 27 **PRAY** for 50 orphanage beds in India. US\$50 each.
- May 4 **PRAY** for pioneer work among the Laotian and Cambodian refugees living in Paris. US\$2,000.
- May 11 **PRAY** for the upgrading of seven pastors' houses in Pakistan (water and sanitation facilities). US\$2,000 each.
- May 18 **PRAY** for 10 village church buildings for new people groups in South America. US\$5,000 each.
- May 25 **PRAY** for a projector and a set of the Loma Linda Lifestyle Series of tapes and cassettes for the seven Nigerian Dorcas federations. US\$1,200 each.
- June 1 **PRAY** for a Bible study video in the setting of the native culture of American Indians. US\$5,000.
- June 8 **PRAY** for 100 children's lamb shelters (Sabbath School classrooms) for rural churches in the Eastern Africa Division. US\$1,000 each.
- June 15 **PRAY** for three outboard motors to facilitate the opening of new areas in the Western Solomon Islands. US\$2,000 each.
- June 22 **PRAY** for desperately needed Bibles for children in Russia. US\$5 each.
- June 29 **PRAY** for this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering projects.

This list is illustrative of a much longer list. If you or your church would like to sponsor a project during the Year of Adventist World Mission, please call your conference president or (301) 680-6192 (U.S.A.). Only major projects become Thirteenth Sabbath Offering promotions. You are invited to give the world field an "extra lift" through these smaller, individualized projects.



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Editorial Office:	12501 Old Columbia Pike
	Silver Spring, MD 20904
Principal Contributor:	Frank Holbrook
Editor:	Erwin R. Gane
Assistant Editor:	Charlotte Ishkanian
Pacific Press Editor:	Lincoln E. Steed
Marketing:	Bob Gorton
Sales Office:	Shirley Sayers
Art and Design:	Lars Justinen
Cover Illustration:	Lars Justinen

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Meet the Principal Contributor to This Quarter's Lessons



Elder Frank Holbrook is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference, a position he has held since 1981. He received his Bachelor's degree from Washington Missionary College, his Master's degree from Potomac University, both formerly in Takoma Park, Maryland, and his Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Theology degrees from Andrews University.

Elder Holbrook was ordained in 1954 and has served as a pastor/evangelist, academy Bible teacher, and professor of religion at Southern College.

Elder Holbrook wrote the "Frank Answers" column for *These Times* and has authored *Shadows of Hope*, an academy textbook on the sanctuary, as well as numerous articles for *Ministry* and *Adventist Review*.

Elder and Mrs. Holbrook have three adult children.

Check with your local Adventist Book Center for the companion book to the Sabbath School Lessons.

Messages From Ezekiel

Rainbow in the Rain

"There was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form. . . . I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain. . . . Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Eze. 1:26-28, RSV).

The traveler peered apprehensively through the window of the jetliner as it hurtled northward. The sun blazed, flashing its brilliance into the cabin in marked contrast to the enormous rain clouds billowing up from below.

Suddenly, through nature's alchemy of light and moisture, a 360-degree rainbow imaged itself upon the clouds, moving in swift tandem with the aircraft. As the traveler gazed at the glowing phenomenon, he became aware that the sun's angle caused the jetliner's shadow to lie within the protecting circle of the bow! As the one moved, so moved the other. "Thank You, Lord," the traveler whispered, "we are never outside the circle of Your care."

A vision of the Lord, enthroned in fiery majesty and encircled by a rainbow, gave young Ezekiel courage to face the rigors of captivity in Babylonia in the sixth century B.C. A contemporary of both Jeremiah and Daniel, Ezekiel was called to prophetic ministry among the hardened and discouraged Jewish exiles. Faithful in reproof, yet ever upholding the divine promises that are as certain as God Himself, Ezekiel unselfishly labored to keep the flame of the true faith alive. His experience and messages continue to counsel and assure God's people today.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be!

—George Matheson, "O Love, That Will Not Let Me Go."

OVERVIEW OF EZEKIEL

I. Divine Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem.

Eze. 1:1–24:27

II. Prophecies Against the Surrounding Nations.

Eze. 25:1–32:32

III. Israel Restored.

Eze. 33:1–48:35

Lesson 1

March 31—April 6

When Tragedy Strikes

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:1-5; 3:15; 24:1, 16.



MEMORY TEXT: "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience" (James 5:10).

TRAGEDY IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS. It is a fact of human existence in a sin-warped world. Is it more important to know *why* adversity comes, or to know *how* to relate to it in a positive manner? Can God's grace overrule tragedy for our good and the salvation of others?

OUTLINE:

- I. Ezekiel and His Times (2 Kings 21-25).
- II. Ezekiel and His Tragedies (Eze. 1:1-3; 3:15; 24:1, 16).
- III. Ezekiel and His Ministry (Eze. 2:1-5).

GRACE TO BEAR SUFFERING. On Monday morning, June 13, 1988, 10-year-old Katrina Ferguson stood beside her mother in the driveway of her home, eagerly awaiting the school bus. Suddenly an approaching car veered across the road and struck Katrina. A sleeping drunk slumped at the wheel. "He just came toward us," sobbed her mother. "I screamed . . . but before I could grab her away, the car picked her up and dragged her . . . and there she was lying on the road. I ran over to her and grabbed her in my arms. It knocked the little ribbons out of her hair." Katrina was pronounced dead at Prince William Hospital in Manassas, Virginia.—From the *Washington Post*, June 14, 1988.

Suffering is our lot. The tragedy that befell the Ferguson family could be multiplied many times over. The great moral controversy between God and Satan explains its presence in the earth. The ultimate reason for human suffering is that Lucifer rebelled against God, bringing sin, misery, and death into the universe. We cannot always avoid adversity, but God has promised sustaining grace to bear it. (See 1 Cor. 10:13.) When we relate to the tragedies of life trusting in the overruling providence of God, He makes us stronger people, more able to minister to the needs of others.

The prophet Ezekiel provides an example of one of God's children who suffered a series of tragedies affecting his entire adult life. But, in spite of terrible loss, his loyalty and steadfast witness to God kept the flame of truth burning throughout Judah's captivity in Babylon.

I. EZEKIEL AND HIS TIMES (2 Kings 21–25).

1. At what point in Jewish history does Ezekiel begin the sketch of his life and ministry? What was the spiritual climate of the times? Eze. 1:1, 2 (compare 2 Kings 21; Jer. 15:4).

Note: Throughout the quarterly references in parentheses after questions are for further study by those interested in additional information.

SUN

The book of Ezekiel is an autobiography the purpose of which is to inform, inspire, and warn the reader. Ezekiel lived during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah. Three were sons of Josiah; one was his grandson. See the chart below:

Josiah (639-609 B.C.)	Grandson of Manasseh	
Jehoahaz (609 B.C.)	Son of Josiah	Reigned 3 months
Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.)	Son of Josiah	Reigned 11 years
Jehoiachin (598-597 B.C.)	Grandson of Josiah	Reigned 3 months
[Jeconiah, Coniah]		
Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.)	Son of Josiah	Reigned 11 years

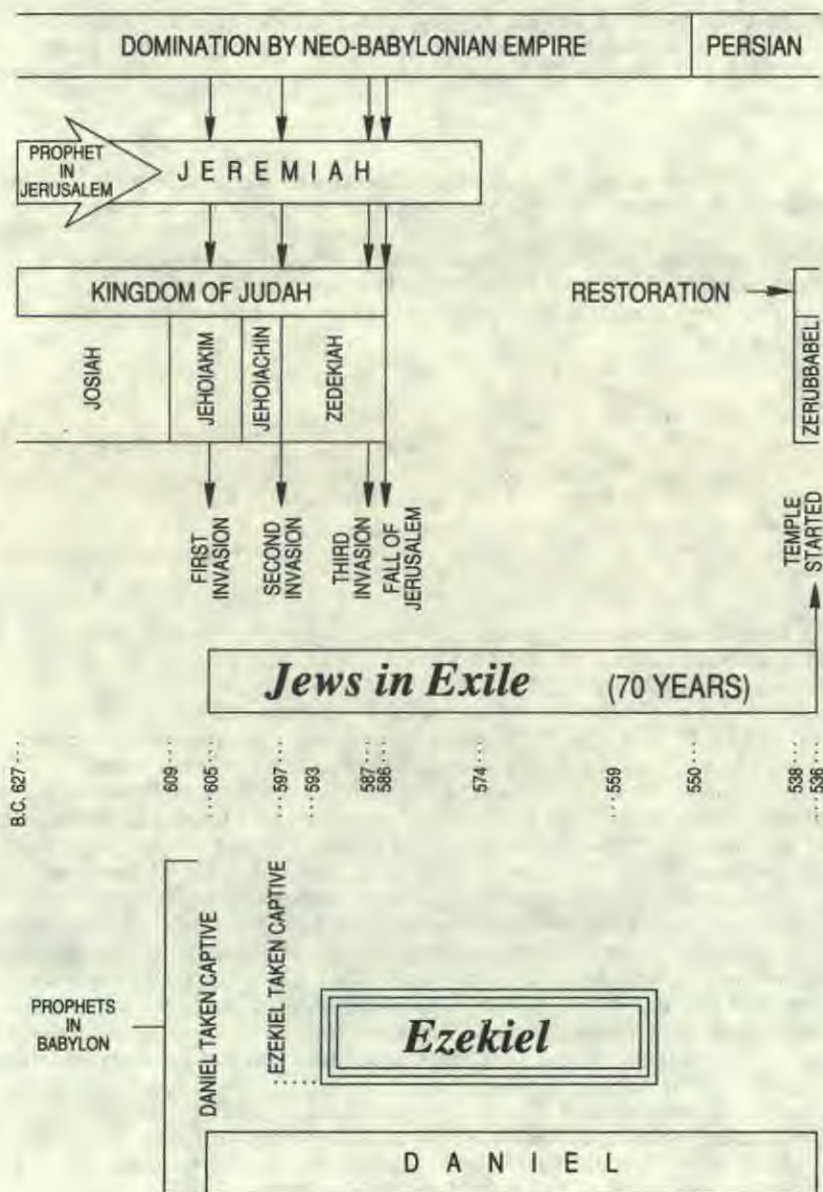
Revival and renewed apostasy. When Josiah began his reign at the age of 8 (2 Kings 22:1), the nation of Judah was spiritually bankrupt. The young king's grandfather, Manasseh, had "seduced . . . [the people] to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel" (2 Kings 21:9). As early as Josiah's twelfth year, when he was 20 years of age, he began in earnest to revive and reform the sinful nation (2 Chron. 34:3). Priestly endeavors to refurbish the Temple led to the discovery of a copy of the book of the law written by Moses. The message of the book resulted in national renewal of the covenant relationship with God. (See 2 Kings 23.) A revival of true faith broke out as the people joined with their king in breaking down the altars and images.

But the widespread revival was superficial. (See Jer. 3:10.) Its momentum vanished with Josiah's untimely death. The people resumed the idolatrous practices into which they had fallen during the days of Manasseh. God saw that only the furnace of affliction—the discipline of captivity—could cure this national passion for the gods and sins of paganism. So He permitted the scourge of the Babylonian invasion and captivity to fall upon the sinful nation. (See Jer. 15:4.)

It is generally agreed that the figure 30 (Eze. 1:1) refers to the prophet's age. Ezekiel was one of 10,000 Jews—leading citizens, military personnel, artisans, along with Jehoiachin and his court—whom Nebuchadnezzar removed to Babylonia in 597 B.C. (See 2 Kings 24:10-16.)

2. Who were Ezekiel's contemporaries at this critical time in Jewish history? Jer. 1:1, 2; Dan. 1:1-6 (compare Zeph. 1:1; Hab. 1:6; 2 Kings 22:3, 8-20).

EZEKIEL AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES



Adapted from Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 359.

3. What reason did God give for uprooting and exiling Israelites to Babylon? Jer. 30:11-15. How might your present, personal trials be understood in the light of what befell the 10,000 exiles?

MON II. EZEKIEL AND HIS TRAGEDIES (Eze. 1:1-3; 3:15; 24:1, 16).

4. How does Ezekiel refer to the tragedy that befell him as a young man and altered the course of his life? Eze. 1:1; 3:15.

Notice how the military conquest of Judah by idolaters affected Ezekiel, who had been taught to trust in God's protection.

"Ezekiel was weighed down with sorrowful memories and troubled forebodings. The land of his fathers was desolate. Jerusalem was depopulated. The prophet himself was a stranger in a land where ambition and cruelty reigned supreme. As on every hand he beheld tyranny and wrong, his soul was distressed, and he mourned day and night."—*Education*, p. 177.

5. How did the Babylonians taunt their Jewish captives about the weakness of their God to deliver them from the Chaldean armies? Eze. 36:17-20 (compare Jer. 33:24; Ps. 137:1-4).

"The conduct and attendant miseries of the Israelites dishonored Jehovah in the sight of the heathen, who naturally inferred that if this was all that the God of Israel could do for His devotees, He was no better than their own gods. The heathen regarded Jehovah merely as the national God of the Israelites."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 696, 697.

6. What specific counsel did the Lord instruct Jeremiah to write to the 10,000 captives? Why would this message deepen Ezekiel's depression? Jer. 29:1-14. Note particularly verse 10.

Considerable unrest existed among the captives in Babylon. The general expectation was that they would soon be released. In order to avoid harsh oppression by their captors, it was essential that the captives accept their new situation and settle down, living useful lives and maintaining the race. Seventy years were to elapse before God would bring about the events that would restore the nation. We can only imagine the devastating effect this message would have on 30-year-old Ezekiel. He would be in exile for a lifetime. He would never see his Judean homeland again.

The Jewish captives were not enslaved by the Babylonians. Ap-

parently they were allotted living areas and could build their own homes, plant gardens, and organize their social activities under the oversight of their elders. Ezekiel had his own home. It is evident that it became a center to which the Jewish elders repaired to discover what God would reveal to the prophet. (See Eze. 8:1; 14:1; 20:1.)

- TUE** 7. For what lifework had Ezekiel trained in Judah? Eze. 1:3. At what age would he have entered this special ministry? Num. 4:3; 8:24.

Ezekiel identifies himself as "Ezekiel the priest." Like Jeremiah, he was of the house of Aaron and had grown up in a priestly family. This meant that he had been trained for this sacred office. No doubt his parents had kept the high ideal of the priesthood constantly before him as he studied to follow in his father's footsteps. But the captivity effectively destroyed his career and terminated his dreams of holy service for his God and his people in the sacred precincts of Solomon's Temple. We can imagine his bitter disappointment at being thwarted from his passion to be a priest; but Ezekiel kept his personal heartache hidden from his readers.

A mature age. "In ch. 8:23-26 the age is given as between 25 and 50 years. Later writers record a further adjustment, attributed to David, beginning the service at 20 years of age (1 Chron. 23:24, 27; 2 Chron. 31:17; Ezra 3:8). . . . The first injunction, giving the beginning age as 30 years [Num. 4:3], may have been a temporary measure. Thirty years marked the age at which a Jew was considered mature and ready to assume all the responsibilities of his rights and privileges (cf. Luke 3:23)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 838.

8. What terrible event happened in Ezekiel's home a few years after his call to prophetic office? Eze. 24:1, 2, 15-18. What does the expression "the desire of thine eyes" suggest?

Ezekiel places this third tragedy in the ninth year of Jehoiachin's captivity, in the tenth day of the tenth month. (Compare 2 Kings 25:1.) This date also marked the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's final siege of Jerusalem (589/588 B.C.). The siege would last for months, and the Egyptians would try to break it for their Jewish allies. (See Jer. 37:7.) But eventually the Babylonians would raze the city and its Temple and deport its defenders.

For the prophet the sudden death of his wife announced the final destruction of Jerusalem with the Temple. The expression "the desire of thine eyes" emphasizes not only her beauty but the prophet's deep love for her and the tender ties that linked them together.

- WED** 9. What message did God convey to the Jews in captivity through the sudden death of Ezekiel's wife? Why was Ezekiel not permitted to show any signs of public grief? Eze. 24:18-24.

Suffering without bitterness. As a devoted follower of God, Ezekiel had to face up to a series of bitter experiences: removal from his homeland, lifelong captivity in a foreign land where he was subjected to continuous mockery, the loss of a priestly career for which he had trained for years, the sudden death of his beloved wife and companion, and the destruction of the Temple. Any one of these was sufficient to have embittered him for the rest of his life. But Ezekiel did not succumb to bitterness and cynicism.

How can a Christian experience sorrow and tragedy without becoming bitter or overwhelmed? (See *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 488.)

III. EZEKIEL AND HIS MINISTRY (Eze. 2:1-5).

It is not God's plan to leave His servants to wallow in their pain—real though it be—or to give themselves over to self-pity. He has a role for them to fulfill, a task for them to perform in their sphere of life. In following God's leading, the Christian finds the Lord overruling his tragedies in a marvelous way to work all things together for good (Rom. 8:28).

- 10. What assignment did God have for Ezekiel in captivity? What does the expression "son of man" mean? Why would God address Ezekiel in this manner? Eze. 2:1-5 (compare Dan. 8:17).**

Part of Ezekiel's success in communicating with the exiles would lie in the common ground he shared with them. As a human being and a captive, he was sharing in their distress, and he had a word from the Lord for them. The expression "son of man" identified the prophet with his people.

- THU 11. What was the general attitude of the captives toward God and spiritual things? List the terms by which God describes the condition of His people at this time. Eze. 2:3, 4, 6.**

"Ezekiel lay on no bed of roses. His messages of stern denunciation raised up enemies who gave him worse than a thorny couch—a very house of scorpions to dwell in. No more hideous picture of distress can well be conceived than that of the faithful prophet thrust into a thicket of briars, which turns out to be a scorpion's nest."—H. D. M. Spence, ed., *Pulpit Commentary*, Homiletics, on Ezekiel 2:6, vol. 27, p. 54.

- 12. If the Jewish captives were so spiritually hardened against God's endeavors to save them, why did He commission Ezekiel to work with them at all? Compare Eze. 2:5 with 3:17-21.**

Apostasy from the faith of Abraham and Moses was the trend of that day among the Jews. Yet the hope of the nation lay with exiles taken in the

second deportation. These were the "good" figs of Jeremiah's vision (Jeremiah 24). The Babylonian captivity, permitted by God to discipline His people, could have marked the demise of the Jewish religion. Although most of the exiles were idolaters and were now directly surrounded by pagan influences, God saw that a remnant would respond to Ezekiel's ministry and one day would return to renew the nation.

13. What strange physical phenomenon affected Ezekiel except when he was under the control of the Holy Spirit? Eze. 3:26, 27 (compare 24:25-27; 33:21, 22). In what way would this phenomenon strengthen the prophet's message; or was it simply another personal tragedy?

14. How did the exiles regard Ezekiel's witness? Eze. 33:30-33.

"In this life our work for God often seems to be almost fruitless. Our efforts to do good may be earnest and persevering, yet we may not be permitted to witness their results. To us the effort may seem to be lost. But the Saviour assures us that our work is noted in heaven, and that the recompense cannot fail."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 305.

HOW DO I RELATE TO LIFE'S DISAPPOINTMENTS?

- How can I as a Christian prepare for sudden tragedy in my life? (See Ps. 112:7.)
- Many persons have been forced to change job careers by unforeseen circumstances. Why is this difficult experience not necessarily a bad thing?
- How do the problems I encounter enable me to meet greater crises that may come?
- Do my reactions to life's heartaches attract others to Christ or lead them away from Him?

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FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read *Steps to Christ*, "Re-joicing in the Lord," pp. 115-126. Consider the following assurances that our best efforts for the Lord are not forgotten: Gal. 6:9; Ps. 126:5, 6; Dan. 12:3; Matt. 10:41, 42; Eph. 6:8.

SUMMARY: In our human situation, tragedies and difficulties often beset us. God has not promised "skies always blue." We may let our trials crush and embitter us, or we may, by God's grace, relate to them in such a manner as to mature in faith and trust. We may identify with stricken Ezekiel and, like him, find a useful place in service for our fellow human beings.

I Am With You

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ezekiel 1-3.

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PM

MEMORY TEXT: "Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come" (Ezekiel 11:16).

GOD'S LOVING CONCERN. How can we know that God has not abandoned His people when circumstances seem to indicate such? How can we know that we are safe and secure when the evidence of our senses suggests otherwise? What comforting assurance can you give to faithful people who seem to have so many "afflictions"? (Ps. 34:19).

OUTLINE:

- I. God's Presence in the Storm (Eze. 1:4, 26-28).
- II. God's Hand Directs the Wheels (Eze. 1:5-28; 10:8).
- III. God's Hand on Ezekiel (Eze. 1:3; 3:14, 22).
- IV. God's Preparation of Ezekiel (Eze. 2:8-10; 3:1-11).
- V. God's Presence With His People in Captivity (Eze. 11:16).

A SHELTER IN A TIME OF STORM. An angry Atlantic hurricane, packing winds as high as 200 miles per hour, swept along the northeastern coast of the United States—"the richest industrialized seaboard in the world"—before it slammed ashore in Rhode Island in September, 1938. Nature's dark storm seemed like a prelude to World War II, that horrible conflict that plunged so many nations into its maelstrom.

The **Babylonian invasions** that struck the nation of Judah in the sixth century B.C. were like the strikes of a great killer hurricane. (See Jer. 4:13, 19, 20.) The prophets had long warned Judah of coming troubles and appealed to the nation to repent. In like manner the prophetic Scriptures appeal to end-time Christians to prepare for the storm that is coming. Few in Judah paid any attention to the prophets. How is it with modern Christians?

In today's lesson we see how God reassures those who seek His continued presence, even though they suffer.

SUN

I. GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE STORM (Eze. 1:4, 26-28).

1. While in vision, what did Ezekiel see advancing rapidly toward

him? Eze. 1:3, 4. What significance did the vision have on his thinking?

Storm clouds and fierce winds rushing out of the north toward Ezekiel matched his gloomy thoughts. "North" was the direction from which the Babylonian armies invaded Judah. However Ezekiel and his fellow captives were living at Telabib, south of the city of Babylon. Were only the Jews in the eye of the whirlwind? Was this a sign that more was coming?

2. When the black, threatening thundercloud swirled closer, what strange things did Ezekiel see? How would this sight have affected him? Eze. 1:4, 5, 26-28.

This surprising vision of God enthroned beneath the arch of a radiant rainbow must have encouraged Ezekiel to believe that all was not lost. (Compare Rev. 4:3.) The God of heaven still reigned and would eventually carry out His purposes for Israel in spite of human failure on the one hand and human cruelty on the other.

"The wonderful symbols presented before him beside the river Chebar revealed an overruling power mightier than that of earthly rulers. Above the proud and cruel monarchs of Assyria and Babylon the God of mercy and truth was enthroned."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 752.

3. As one trained to be a priest, Ezekiel would know that God's special dwelling place was located where in the Temple? Ex. 25:22; 2 Sam. 6:2. According to Ezekiel 10:8, 9, who were the living creatures who supported and moved God's throne in the vision in Ezekiel 1? What message would a vision of God's leaving the Temple convey to Ezekiel and the other captives in Babylon?

Ezekiel's striking vision would have conveyed to the prophet more than the fact that God had abandoned the Temple in Jerusalem. As we shall see, God was in transit to sit in judgment on the sin-hardened incorrigibles in Judah. The vision would also say to the priest: "Ezekiel, I am not restricted to a specific holy place. The future of My cause lies here with My captive people in Babylon. I am come to be with you in the captivity."

Why do affliction and trial often open doors to richer experiences than we have known before? What personal attitudes and relationships determine the way we react to the storms that burst over our heads?

II. GOD'S HAND DIRECTS THE WHEELS (Eze. 1:5-28; 10:8).

4. Describe the cherubim that stepped out of the storm cloud before

the prophet's wondering gaze. Eze. 1:5-14 (compare Rev. 4:6-8).

According to Ezekiel 10:18-22 the four living creatures were cherubim, or angels.

“According to later Jewish tradition the four forms, taking Ezekiel’s order, are the standards generally borne by the tribes of Reuben, Judah, Ephraim, and Dan when they encamped in the wilderness (Num. 2:2). *That such were the ancient standards cannot be verified.*”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 576. (Italics supplied.)

The four living creatures represent the wisdom, strength, patience, and swiftness of the angels in their service for mankind (see Heb. 1:14). They “combine the wisdom and insight of all orders of creation—the reason, intelligence, devotion, and spiritual ardour of man; the majesty, courage, and boldness of the lion; the submissiveness, patience, and strength of the ox; and the vision, keenness of sight, swiftness of action, and striking power of the eagle.”—Edwin R. Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation*, part I, pp. 84, 85.

- 5. What was located at the side of each cherub? Eze. 1:15-21; 10:9, 10. How would you explain the symbolism?**
-

The picture is not of a large wheel with a small wheel-insert lying on the same plane. Rather, the idea is of two wheels bisecting each other at right angles. This allowed movement in any of the four directions the cherubim faced without their turning.

Motion is emphasized in the vision. The cherubim had arms and hands of their own (compare 1:8; 10:7). There also appeared to be “the form of a man’s hand under their wings” (10:8); that may symbolize “the spirit” that directed them (1:12) on the earth or in the air. The four faces of the cherubim and the bisected wheel arrangement imply that movement could take place instantaneously in any direction without their stopping to turn.

- 6. What would the presence of “eyes” in these wheels suggest? Eze. 1:18; 10:12 (compare Rev. 4:6; 5:6). In what manner were the wheels related to the cherubim? Eze. 1:19-21.**
-

At first view the complicated wheel systems appear to be the wheels of God’s movable throne (see Dan. 7:9). However, in this vision they seem to be adapted to emphasize earthly concerns (see Eze. 1:15). The presence of eyes in the wheels suggests that they symbolize intelligent forces under God’s control through angelic ministry. God has not abandoned this planet with its affairs seeming to spin in all directions without meaningful motion. God’s eternal purpose for humanity as a whole, for the church, and for our individual lives is being accomplished through agents of His heavenly ministrations. (See Eph. 3:9-11; Rom. 8:28, 29.)

Divine control of earthly affairs. "While the nations rejected God's principles, and in this rejection wrought their own ruin, it was still manifest that the divine, overruling purpose was working through all their movements.

"This lesson is taught in a wonderful symbolic representation given to the prophet Ezekiel during his exile in the land of the Chaldeans. . . .

"The wheels were so complicated in arrangement that at first sight they appeared to be in confusion; but they moved in perfect harmony. Heavenly beings, sustained and guided by the hand beneath the wings of the cherubim, were impelling these wheels; above them, upon the sapphire throne, was the Eternal One; and round about the throne a rainbow, the emblem of divine mercy.

"As the wheel-like complications were under the guidance of the hand beneath the wings of the cherubim, so the complicated play of human events is under divine control. Amidst the strife and tumult of nations, He that sitteth above the cherubim still guides the affairs of the earth."—*Education*, pp. 177, 178. (See Dan. 4:17, 25, 32, 35; Acts 17:26, 27.)

Does your life and present situation seem as difficult to understand as the wheels in Ezekiel's vision? Maybe forces are even spinning beyond your control? God has not promised that the Christian's pathway will be one of ease. What has He promised? (See Isa. 41:10; 43:2; Heb. 13:5, 6, 8.)

III. GOD'S HAND ON EZEKIEL (Eze. 1:3; 3:14, 22).

7. What did Ezekiel mean by the expression, "the hand of the Lord was there upon [me]" (Eze. 1:3)? Eze. 3:14, 22 (compare 1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 3:15).

In this manner Ezekiel acknowledged that the power impelling him to speak to the people came from God. The expression means that the prophet was being moved by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word of God and that he received direct revelations from God. (See Eze. 8:1, 2; 37:1.) Ezekiel's authority did not rest in himself—nor in the supernatural trance. His authority rested in God, who chose in this manner to communicate through him to the people.

8. Ezekiel's attention was drawn to a Personage seated on a throne above the angels. Who was He and what effect did the sight have on the prophet? Eze. 1:26-28 (compare Rev. 1:17).

The Scriptures record the experiences of several prophets who were given visions of the Deity. Since the Deity dwells in "light which no man can approach unto" (1 Tim. 6:16), these inspired scenes only represent God to the prophet in human terms he can understand. But the visions do emphasize different aspects of the divine Being. Isaiah's vision under-

scores God's holiness (Isa. 6:1-3). Daniel's view portrays Him as the Judge of humankind (Dan. 7:9, 10). John's vision underscores the omniscience of God (Rev. 4:2, 3; 5:1). Micaiah's vision shows God's activity in the affairs of Israel (1 Kings 22:19). In Ezekiel's vision we are shown the Deity ruling and in full control of the complicated affairs of human life on this planet. All these different views of God are subordinate to His self-revelation in Jesus (see Heb. 1:1, 2).

WED

- 9. What special commission did God now give Ezekiel the priest? Eze. 2:1-5. Among whom was he to labor? Eze. 3:10, 11.**

Jeremiah worked among the Jews in Judah while the nation still had its independence, but, because he advocated submission to Babylon, he was viewed as a traitor and worthy of death (Jer. 38:1-4). On the other hand, Ezekiel was limited to working with Jewish captives, most of whom were restless, rebellious idolaters who expected to be released at any moment.

- 10. Whether the people who heard Ezekiel repented or not, what would they come to know? Eze. 2:5; 33:33. What would be the significance of this fact?**

Ezekiel would be hurt emotionally by the bitter responses of the sin-hardened exiles. He would be torn and stung by verbal thorns and scorpions (Eze. 2:6). Yet time would demonstrate the fact that he had spoken to them as a true prophet of God.

Seventh-day Adventists have had a great privilege bestowed upon them through Ellen G. White, a recipient of the prophetic gift.

Do we believe God's message? "My brethren, beware of the evil heart of unbelief. The word of God is plain and close in its restrictions; it interferes with your selfish indulgence; therefore you do not obey it. The testimonies of His Spirit call your attention to the Scriptures, point out your defects of character, and rebuke your sins; therefore you do not heed them. And to justify your carnal, ease-loving course you begin to doubt whether the testimonies are from God. If you would obey their teachings you would be assured of their divine origin. Remember, your unbelief does not affect their truthfulness. If they are from God they will stand. Those who seek to lessen the faith of God's people in these testimonies . . . are fighting against God. It is not the instrument whom you slight and insult, but God, who has spoken to you in these warnings and reproofs."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 234, 235.

- 11. What special role was involved in God's commission to Ezekiel? What is the significance of the manner in which the prophet's function is illustrated? Eze. 3:17-21; 33:7.**

Above all things, a "watchman" needed to be dependable and responsible because the very lives of the people were at risk. Such an office required a person of sound judgment, yet capable of making quick decisions and acting on those decisions immediately.

In the spiritual realm the watchman must be able to discriminate between the false and the genuine and to sound the alarm when spiritual deceptions approach to deceive. A person with such keen perceptions can expect abuse from deceivers and misunderstanding from genuine believers who may be confused by falsehood. The Lord endowed Ezekiel with an iron will, that he might stand up to the opposition. (See Eze. 3:8, 9.)

What does God's infinite love and His diligent effort to save humanity suggest regarding the importance of our cooperation?

IV. GOD'S PREPARATION OF EZEKIEL (Eze. 2:8-10; 3:1-11).

12. What did God give Ezekiel while he was in vision? What had been written on both sides of this document? Eze. 2:8-10 (compare Rev. 10:8-10).

Normally, scrolls were written on only one side. This scroll was written on both sides, implying the large amount of material it contained. The calamities that were falling—and that were about to fall in greater severity—were meant to awaken the sin-hardened people. The Lord took no personal pleasure in the destruction of His beloved people (Eze. 18:32).

13. Why was the prophet asked to "eat" the scroll? Eze. 2:8; 3:1-4 (compare Jer. 15:16).

The "eating" suggests that the Lord's messages and teachings were to be fully assimilated by the prophet. The symbolism also suggests that Ezekiel was to be totally dedicated to his special ministry. We see such dedication reflected in our Saviour's words: "My meat [food] is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34; compare John 3:34; Matt. 4:4; 1 Peter 3:14-16).

V. GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE IN CAPTIVITY (Eze. 11:16).

14. How did God assure the captive Israelites in Babylon that His presence was not restricted to the Temple in Jerusalem? Eze. 11:16.

This passage explains in part why in vision Ezekiel was permitted to see the God of Israel traveling to Babylonia. Although His people would be

captives in a foreign country, He would not abandon them. The Lord would go, as it were, into exile with them.

“Happy are those who have a sanctuary, be it high or low, in the city or among the rugged mountain caves, in the lowly cabin or in the wilderness. If it is the best they can secure for the Master, He will hallow the place with His presence, for it will be holy unto the Lord of hosts.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 491, 492.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER.

- How can I develop an assurance that God is with me?
- In what ways can fellowship with believers in the services of the church help to make the presence of God real to me?
- Is there something that the Lord is convicting me to do for someone just now? Could some of us form a small group ministry that could provide support for hurting people in our congregation?

FRI

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read “God’s Care for His Work,” *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 749-754. Consider the following passages that speak of God’s presence with and care for His people: Gen. 28:15; Isa. 43:2; Matt. 18:20; 28:20; Rev. 21:3.

SUMMARY: Although the long-predicted storm of military invasion and subjugation eventually burst upon Judah in fury, God did not abandon His people. He was in full control of all seemingly uncontrolled events. Just so, God promises to be with His followers today in all their challenges.

Lesson 3

April 14-20

The Ministry of Discipline

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ezekiel 4—7.

SAB PM **MEMORY TEXT:** "Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have some that shall escape the sword among the nations, when ye shall be scattered through the countries" (Ezekiel 6:8).

WHY DOES GOD DISCIPLINE HIS PEOPLE? Why are His judgments severe at times?

OUTLINE:

- I. A Prophetic Acted Parable (Ezekiel 4, 5).
- II. Days of Discipline (Eze. 4:4-8).
- III. Distress and Destruction (Eze. 4:9—5:17).
- IV. Cause and Effect (Eze. 6:1-7; 7:1-27).
- V. The Remnant Revived (Eze. 6:8-10).

DISCIPLINE BEFORE ULTIMATE JUDGMENT. The Babylonian conquest and captivity affected the lives of God's loyal people, as well as those who had become His enemies. The destruction of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians was severe. God had tried every possible means to correct the erring nation. But Judah, undeterred, pursued her idolatrous course, mocking God's messengers "till there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:16). The merciful discipline meted out upon Israel resulted in the repentance and salvation of many who had not placed themselves beyond hope of redemption.

On the larger scale, in the great moral controversy raging between God and Satan, the judgment of separation and death will be experienced by those who are determined to cling to sin and rebellion. This judgment was endured by God's own Son, whose atoning and substitutionary death has made our salvation possible.

Many minor judgments are designed to capture the attention of the unwary and draw them to Christ. The ultimate judgment is administered only when all else has failed to elicit positive response.

I. A PROPHETIC ACTED PARABLE (Ezekiel 4, 5).

1. How did Ezekiel react to God's commission appointing him to be His spokesman to Israel in the captivity? Eze. 3:14, 15.

The Hebrew word translated "heat" in this passage may also be rendered as "wrath," "fury," or "hot displeasure." The term suggests that Ezekiel became angry and bitter over his commission. He did not argue with God audibly like Habakkuk, but apparently seethed inwardly, sitting in silence among the captives at Telabib. Since the prophet did not explain the cause of his emotional upheaval, we can only deduce that his frustration resulted from a combination of several things: his disappointed hopes, the difficulty of the assignment, righteous indignation because of the spiritual defection of his countrymen, and, perhaps, feelings of unfitness.

SUN

- 2. When God recommissioned the reluctant prophet seven days later, what physical phenomenon befell him? Eze. 3:16, 17, 22-27.**

"As with Zacharias (Luke 1:22), who disbelieved the words of the angel, there seems to be a rebuke here of Ezekiel's refusal to speak when bidden. Yet the Lord used the experience for good. The dumbness of the prophet and the ability to speak only when the Lord opened his mouth was a further sign to that rebellious house that the words were indeed the words of the Lord."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 587.

This state of intermittent dumbness lasted until the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., about seven and one-half years. Ezekiel's loss of speech may have led him to act out many of his prophecies, although other prophets also used visual aids. (See Jer. 27:2, 3; 28:10; Isa. 20:3, 4.)

- 3. How did Ezekiel act out his first message to the captives? What did it foretell? Eze. 4:1-3; 5:5-8.**

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- 4. What good purpose did the Lord anticipate would be achieved through the destruction of Judah and the scattering of His people? Eze. 20:37, 38, 43 (compare Jer. 30:11).**

"Humbled in the sight of the nations, those who once had been recognized as favored of Heaven above all other peoples of the earth were to learn in exile the lesson of obedience so necessary for their future happiness. Until they had learned this lesson, God could not do for them all that He desired to do. 'I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished,' He declared in explanation of His purpose to chastise them for their spiritual good."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 475.

- 5. How are we to understand the biblical record in which God Himself says, "I raise up the Chaldeans" (Hab. 1:6)? Jer. 27:5-8. Ezekiel's acted parable of the siege of Jerusalem represented God's judgments against Judah (Eze. 5:8). Why did the Lord use wicked nations to discipline and test His people? See Isa. 10:5-13 (compare Job 42:11; 1:9-12; 2:5-7).**

To the Hebrew mind everything was ultimately caused by God, even though human responsibility was not denied. Consequently, in the Bible, God is often said to do things which, in our Western way of thinking, He permits or does not prevent from happening. Thus, when God withdrew His blessing and protective hand from rebellious Israel and defiant Judah, Assyrian and Babylonian forces, prompted by their cruel ambition to conquer and plunder, invaded Israel. God permitted their actions as a means of disciplining and correcting His people.

What is the purpose of discipline? How essential is it to the well-being of a family, a school, a church, or a nation? (See Heb. 12:5-11.)

II. DAYS OF DISCIPLINE (Eze. 4:4-8).

6. **What new role did the prophet now assume as he acted out the siege of Jerusalem? Eze. 4:4-8. How long did he represent each nation? What is the significance of God's words "Thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house" of Israel or Judah?**

The principle of retribution is being portrayed by the prophet. The apostle Paul expresses that principle in plain words: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7; compare Prov. 11:5; Ps. 34:21; Jer. 2:19).

The prophet probably lay on his side for only portions of each day. The people watched and sought to understand the meaning of his actions. Supernatural power held him fast in his assumed positions (Eze. 4:8).

Although identification of the specific time periods is difficult, the major point of the acted prophecy is crystal clear: The Assyrian-Babylonian captivities were being used as agencies of God's punishment and discipline for the past years of Hebrew sin and rebellion.

7. **In ordering Ezekiel figuratively to "bear the iniquity" of Israel and Judah, God quoted the essence of Numbers 14:34. Compare Eze. 4:4-6 and Num. 14:34. Who spoke the words in Numbers?**

The Lord's instruction to Ezekiel (in Eze. 4:4-6) provides an important key to unlock the symbolic time periods in the visions given to Daniel (Ezekiel's contemporary) and those given later in the book of Revelation. Ezekiel introduces the year-day principle in which a symbolic day stands for a literal year.

God's statement to the prophet is based on a previous statement in Numbers. A somewhat literal translation of these passages reads as follows. (The numbered phrases indicate similar Hebrew wording in the two passages.)

Numbers 14:34: "According to (1) the number of the days which you spied out the land, forty days, (2) a day for the year, a day for the year, (3) you shall bear your evil forty years."

Ezekiel 4:4-6: (1) "The number of the days you lie on your side, and (3) you shall bear their evil. I have given you the years of their evil according to (1) a number of days, three hundred and ninety days, and (3) you shall bear the evil of the house of Israel, . . . and (3) you shall bear the evil of the house of Judah forty days, (2) a day for the year, a day for the year I have given you."

It can be seen from these comparisons that God's words in Ezekiel reflect His statement in Numbers. The year-day principle introduced in Ezekiel has linguistic precedent in Numbers. The two passages illustrate that a day stands for a year in symbolic Bible prophecy. Only by the use of this principle can the prophetic time periods in Daniel and Revelation be understood.

TUE

III. DISTRESS AND DESTRUCTION (Eze. 4:9—5:17).

8. What provisions was the prophet to set aside for his acted prophecy of the siege of Jerusalem? How much was he permitted to eat and drink each day? Eze. 4:9-11.

The allotment was scarcely sufficient to sustain life: about eight ounces of bread and a fraction more than a pint of water per day. The Hebrew expression underlying the KJV ("from time to time") seems to carry the meaning "once a day" (RSV). Famine conditions would prevail in the coming siege.

9. How desperate would the conditions become in the beleaguered city? Eze. 5:10 (compare Jer. 19:9; Lam. 4:10).

The devastating famine with its resultant atrocities did not have to take place. King Zedekiah and the people were repeatedly urged to surrender to the Babylonians in order to avoid the terrible conditions of siege warfare and the inevitable destruction. (See Jer. 21:8, 9.) The extreme suffering that Ezekiel portrayed testified to the extreme, sin-hardened condition of Jerusalem's inhabitants. They would rather practice the horrors of cannibalism, eating their own parents and children, than repent of their sins against God and man—or surrender!

10. How did Ezekiel's acted prophecy illustrate other effects of the Babylonian siege and conquest?

Eze. 4:1-3 _____

Eze. 4:3-8 _____

Eze. 4:9-17 _____

Eze. 5:1, 2, 12 _____

11. What glorious plan did God have in mind originally when He placed Israel in Palestine? Eze. 5:5; Gen. 22:15-18 (compare Deut. 7:6-11; Ex. 15:17).

“Through the Jewish nation it was God’s purpose to impart rich blessings to all peoples. Through Israel the way was to be prepared for the diffusion of His light to the whole world. The nations of the world, through following corrupt practices, had lost the knowledge of God. Yet in His mercy God did not blot them out of existence. He purposed to give them opportunity for becoming acquainted with Him through His church. He designed that the principles revealed through His people should be the means of restoring the moral image of God in man.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 286.

12. What kind of witness would the sinful Hebrew nation now give under divine discipline? Eze. 5:11, 14, 15 (compare Deut. 28:37; 1 Kings 9:6-9).

Planted at the crossroads of three continents (Africa, Asia, Europe), Israel was intended to be God’s instrument to influence the nations Godward. Israel partially succeeded. Even surrounding nations admitted they were wise and righteous (Deut. 4:6, 8). But Israel’s disobedience to God’s laws and the divine judgments that were administered also had an influence on other nations. The judgments provide an instructive lesson for Christians, as well as for the nations of earth today.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is responsible for its influence. Today it is established in 184 countries in its endeavor to uplift Christ to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. If individuals or units of this far-flung church disobey the will of God or bring reproach upon the cause, how does God judge and discipline them?

IV. CAUSE AND EFFECT (Eze. 6:1-7; 7:1-27).

13. Against what geographical area was Ezekiel commanded to prophesy? Why? Eze. 6:1-3, 13 (compare Hosea 4:13; Jer. 3:6). What had God originally commanded Israel to do with these locations? Deut. 12:2, 3.

Mountains, hills, and groves were favorite places for idolatrous worship. “High places” were open-air sanctuaries. Although they were not always situated on mountaintops, they were established on elevated sites. Apparently the worshipers felt closer to their deities on mountaintops or other elevated areas. The green trees afforded shade from the intense heat and privacy for the practice of licentious rites.

14. What warning had God given regarding idol worship? Lev. 26:27-30. Centuries later what terrible disciplinary judgments did God pronounce upon His people? Eze. 6:3-7, 11-14.

More than a century and a half had elapsed since the prophets had first begun to warn of the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation. Yet nothing had happened. (See Micah 3:12; Amos 2:4, 5.)

To shake the people's complacency Ezekiel announced five times in three verses: "The *end* is come, the *end* is come" (Eze. 7:2, 3, 6). The terrible discipline could be delayed no longer. Within approximately six years after Ezekiel's acted prediction of its ruin, Jerusalem lay desolate and its people were either dead or in captivity.

Why do God's announcements of coming discipline seldom take place immediately? Jerusalem did not meet its fate until more than a century after Micah. What other Bible examples can you cite? What relevance does this fact have for us?

THU V. THE REMNANT REVIVED (Eze. 6:8-10).

When calamity befell Judah, it is obvious that the righteous suffered, as well as the wicked. Daniel, Ezekiel, and their brethren suffered the consequences of divine discipline along with the rebellious apostates. But they chose to be loyal to God and to serve Him openly in the land of their exile.

15. In Ezekiel's prophecy of Jerusalem's punishment, how did he illustrate the salvation of a remnant of the nation? Eze. 5:1-3; 6:8, 9.

16. What strange thing did the prophet do with a few of the hairs he had cut off? Eze. 5:4 (compare Jer. 43:1-7).

Fearing reprisals from Babylon because of the murder of Gedeliah, the governor, whom Nebuchadnezzar had placed over the land of Judah, a large group of Jews who had escaped capture migrated into Egypt. This move was contrary to God's will, and Jeremiah was forced to go with them. Hardened in their sins, these sojourners rejected Jeremiah's reproof. In response, the prophet foretold their death when the forces of Babylon would invade Egypt. (See Jer. 44:26-30.) This rebellious portion of the nation in Egypt is represented by the hairs that Ezekiel first tucked into his robe and later removed and burned in the fire.

God's discipline a blessing. Because of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions, Israelites who had been transported abroad established synagogues in most of the main cities of the Near East, and later of the Roman Empire. The synagogues provided temporary "pulpits" for the apostles

and early Christians and enabled them to establish Christian congregations very quickly throughout these areas. Thus God's discipline not only saved a remnant who repented of their sins, but it opened the door for the Christian message to be preached to Gentiles. (See *Prophets and Kings*, p. 292.)

HOW DO I RELATE TO DISCIPLINE?

- How can I react to my present trial so as to make it a means of spiritual growth?
- Are all the problems and difficulties that befall me a direct punishment from God? How can I tell?
- How can divine discipline be avoided?

FRI FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read "Help in Daily Living" in *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 469-482. Consider the attitudes Christians should adopt now in view of future punishment for sin: Matt. 24:43-51; 2 Peter 3:11, 12.

SUMMARY: God disciplines His people individually and corporately so that we may become fully aware of our great needs and may turn to Him in repentance for forgiveness and restoration.

Your 1981 Thirteenth Sabbath offering (third quarter) built this dormitory at Parana Adventist Academy in the South Brazil Union.



This quarter's special offering will help build a girls' dormitory at Chile College, Chillan, Chile.

(Of this offering, 25 percent goes to this quarter's special projects.)

Secret Sins

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ezekiel 8—10.



MEMORY TEXT: "And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof" (Ezekiel 9:4).

GRADUAL APOSTASY. Why do God's people—whether as individuals or as a corporate group—seldom, if ever, apostatize suddenly? Why are believers in God prone to backslide from Him?

OUTLINE:

- I. Treason in the Temple (Eze. 8:1-18).
- II. Marked for Safekeeping (Eze. 9:1-11).
- III. The End-time Seal of God (Ezekiel 9; Rev. 7:1-3; 14:1-5).
- IV. Fire Over Jerusalem (Eze. 10:1-7).
- V. The Temple Abandoned (Eze. 10:8-22).

SECRET SIN DESTROYS. Dr. Joseph Conlee, who lived in the last half of the nineteenth century, grew up in a devout Methodist home, one of twelve children. Encouraged by his father to enter the ministry, the bright lad left the family farm in Iowa for seven years to study at the State College and Seminary. He became a pastor in Santa Ana, California. The future looked promising for the young man and his bride, except for one problem, known only to himself.

In his student days Dr. Conlee had begun to study the infidel works of such writers as Thomas Paine, Renan, and Huxley, and to entertain their doubts. Although in time he pastored some of his denomination's largest churches on the west coast of the United States, his cherished doubts ate away at his spiritual nature like a hidden cancer until one day he said to his wife, "I'm through; I've preached my last sermon."

During the next few years, Conlee turned to smoking, drinking, and gambling. He suppressed his weakened conscience by attacking the faith he once espoused. Conlee became the president of the Free Thinkers Association of the State of California and became known as a lecturer on atheism. Overcome by alcoholism, he rapidly deteriorated physically and mentally into a dissolute inebriate. For twelve years he did not miss a night at his favorite saloon.

Finally, a group of caring friends raised the money and sent him off into

the wilds of the Yukon to prospect for gold. During one long Klondike winter in a little, snow-buried cabin, Conlee and two other former Christians found Christ again through reading a Bible his daughter had placed in the medicine box in his trunk. Once more the amazing spiritual grace of the gospel prevailed over the power of whisky to save a ruined life and restore him as a witness for Christ.

Not all such experiences end with salvation. The important point is that Christians often backslide by cherishing secret sins and doubts.

Judah's fall did not materialize overnight. By means of an extraordinary vision, Ezekiel was shown what actually was happening in the Temple at Jerusalem. The divine principle of cause and effect could not be wished away: sin leads inevitably to ruin.

I. TREASON IN THE TEMPLE (Eze. 8:1-18).

Fourteen months after his call to prophetic office, Ezekiel received a new series of visions. Some of the "elders of Judah"—evidently older men who had oversight of the community of exiles—were visiting the prophet when the Lord gave him a vision.

1. Whom did Ezekiel immediately see in his vision? Eze. 8:2 (compare 1:26-28). In what strange manner was the prophet in vision transported to the Temple in Jerusalem? Eze. 8:3.

The people openly stole, murdered, and practiced immorality and idolatry while pretending to worship Yahweh in His Temple. Jeremiah had predicted that the great edifice would be destroyed just as the sanctuary at Shiloh was abandoned and probably destroyed in the days of Eli. (See Jer. 7:8-15.) Ezekiel was shown the utter depravity of the national leaders and the people. The Lord revealed to him the shameful fact that the Temple, the house of the true God, was being used as a pagan temple!

2. What else was Ezekiel shown? What is significant about the prophet's awareness that the "glory of the God of Israel" was also there? Eze. 8:4-6.

The idol was not in the Most Holy Place, but rather in the outer court on the north side of the Temple. Its presence in the Lord's Temple-sanctuary was an open affront to Him. The worship of the idol in the court carried a clear message: "'Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary?' " (Eze. 8:6, RSV, italics supplied).

3. Ezekiel was permitted to penetrate a large room that was out of bounds to the people. What did he see displayed on its walls? Who were engaged in acts of idol worship? What was their attitude toward God? Eze. 8:7-12.

Ezekiel did not witness young people, ignorant of their heritage, caught up by the appeal of a foreign cult. Rather, he saw seventy "of the ancients of the house of Israel," men who forty years earlier had participated in the spiritual revival of King Josiah. Ezekiel even recognized a leader whom he knew personally. In their sunset years, these leaders had secretly abandoned the worship of the true God to swing their censers before unfeeling carved reliefs of beasts and to do homage to art forms of unclean animals. Their sin-clouded minds prompted them to exclaim foolishly: "The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth" (Eze. 8:12; compare 9:9).

MON

- 4. In what activity were some of the Jewish women engaged? Eze. 8:13, 14.**

Instead of being God's "house of prayer for all people" (Isa. 56:7), the Temple had become a center for heathen cults. Tammuz was "a god of Sumerian origin whose worship was spread throughout the ancient world. He was the god of pastures and flocks, the heavenly shepherd, who died annually and rose to new life every year after Ishtar, his wife and sister, descended into the nether world and brought him up again."—*SDA Bible Dictionary*, "Tammuz." The ceremonies of this nature worship involved both mourning and fertility rites.

Ezekiel was witness to the terribly debased condition of Judah's women and their deep attachment to idolatry. (See Jer. 7:17, 18; 44:15-19.)

- 5. What was the last scene shown to Ezekiel? Because they were able to enter "the inner court" of the Temple, who were these men? Eze. 8:15, 16.**

To prevent an easy drift into sun worship, the entrance to the Temple faced eastward so that the worshipers automatically bowed toward the west when worshipping God. The "inner court," that is, the area "between the porch and the altar," was restricted to the priesthood. (See Joel 2:17.) Thus, these men probably were priests. For the very priests of the Lord to turn their backs upon His Temple in order to worship the rising sun was a most flagrant insult to God.

What kind of idolatry is most likely to be practiced by Christians today? Do you think secret, cherished sin is more damaging to Christian experience than open sin? What reason would you give for your opinion?

II. MARKED FOR SAFEKEEPING (Eze. 9:1-11).

- 6. At this point in the vision, to what location did God move? What is the significance of His taking this position? Eze. 9:3 (compare Rev. 15:8; 16:1).**

7. Whom did God summon now to appear before Him? Eze. 9:1, 2. What instruction did the Lord give to the man with the writing equipment? Eze. 9:3, 4, 11.

It is evident from the first part of the vision (Ezekiel 8) that many practiced their idolatry in secret. On the surface, the false and the genuine appeared alike. The marking process separated the two groups and underscored the truth once more that "man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim. 2:19). By means of the vision of the sealing or marking, the Lord informed the prophet that He would spare the few righteous remaining in the land.

- TUE 8. As soon as the marking was finished, what were the men with the weapons to do? Eze. 9:6, 7.

Remember that we are reading the record of a vision written by the prophet. It is a representation. These events never took place in this manner. The six men with slaughter weapons symbolized the impending Babylonian invasion and destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. The vision conveyed several important messages to the captive exiles: (1) God knew His own true followers and would protect their lives. They were marked for safekeeping. (2) God recognized the accountability of the "ancient men"—priests and other leaders. They thought they could live their sinful lives in secret, but they would be exposed and be among the first punished by the destructive forces of Babylon. (3) Judah's probationary time had run out. The Lord could no longer spare His own people who had completely turned their backs on Him.

What does it mean to "sigh" and "cry" for "all the abominations that be done" in the land? Eze. 9:4. Are persons of a critical bent more "Christian" than secret or open sinners? (Compare Matt. 7:1-5; Rom. 2:1-3.) How can I relate to sin in the church and at the same time be supportive of the church?

III. THE END-TIME SEAL OF GOD (Ezekiel 9; Rev. 7:1-3; 14:1-5).

Ezekiel, as well as some of his contemporaries, referred to the imminent destruction of Judah as "the day of the Lord." (See Eze. 7:19; Zeph. 1:7, 14-18.) "The day of the Lord" is the time when, historically, the probation of a city or a nation closes, and ultimately when the destiny of all men is forever fixed."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 164.

Note how the second advent of Christ is described by the same phrase. (See 1 Thess. 5:1-8; 2 Peter 3:3, 8-10.)

9. In vision Ezekiel saw some persons marked for safekeeping (Eze.

9:4-6). Whom did John see "sealed" or marked for safekeeping in the final "day of the Lord"? Rev. 7:1-8.

10. Whereas Ezekiel saw the marking of a single group (Eze. 9:4-6), what two groups does John see marked in the final crisis? Rev. 7:1-8; 13:15-17 (compare 14:1-5, 9, 10).
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In Ezekiel's vision one group was marked for God and spared the slaughter that befell the rest. John envisions the last generation of humanity separated into two classes: those who receive the seal of the living God, and those who receive the mark of the beast. There will be no neutral ground.

(On the application of this vision to the last days see *Testimonies*, vol. 3, pp. 266, 267 and vol. 5, pp. 210-212.)

- WED** 11. In addition to Ezekiel's characterization (9:4-6), what other two traits are noted in the end-time followers of God? Rev. 14:12.
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The 144,000 symbolically represent God's righteous remnant who will live through the final events after the close of human probation. They are distinguished by two traits: (1) They keep the commandments of God—the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath. (2) They have the "faith of Jesus," or "faith in Jesus," the Source and Means of their salvation. Their commandment keeping is the result of their faith (grace) relationship with Christ.

12. Another aspect of Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezekiel 9) is that it foreshadows similar apostasy among God's followers in the end-time. How did Jesus describe the end-time condition of His people? Matt. 24:12; Luke 18:8. What special message is addressed to the end-time church? Will any respond? Rev. 3:14-22.
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13. Ezekiel 9:6 appears to be echoed in the New Testament by the apostle Peter. Who does Peter imply are the most accountable for their influence and example? 1 Peter 4:17.
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"The leaven of godliness has not entirely lost its power. At the time when the danger and depression of the church are greatest, the little company who are standing in the light will be sighing and crying for the abominations that are done in the land. But more especially will their prayers arise in behalf of the church because its members are doing after the manner of the world. . . .

“They mourn before God to see religion despised in the very homes of those who have had great light. They lament and afflict their souls because pride, avarice, selfishness, and deception of almost every kind are in the church. The Spirit of God, which prompts to reproof, is trampled underfoot, while the servants of Satan triumph. God is dishonored, the truth made of none effect. . . .

“Our own course of action will determine whether we shall receive the seal of the living God or be cut down by the destroying weapons.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 209-212. (Compare Ezekiel 7:27; 9:10.)

THU IV. FIRE OVER JERUSALEM (Eze. 10:1-7).

In the midst of the cherubim whom Ezekiel saw transporting the Lord upon His throne were “burning coals of fire” (Eze. 1:13).

14. What did the Lord instruct the man in linen to do with some of the coals? Eze. 10:1-7. What was the significance of this act? Compare Rev. 8:5.

Most commentators believe the scattering of fire over the city of Jerusalem foreshadowed the actual burning of city and Temple—the final act of war by the Babylonians. (See 2 Kings 25:9; 2 Chron. 36:19.) In light of similar symbolism in Revelation 8:5 the act may also have signified the close of Judah’s probation. The end had truly come (Eze. 7:6).

15. In what ways is the man clothed in linen (Eze. 9:4; 10:2) like Christ? John 10:27, 28; 5:22.

Ezekiel and Jeremiah gave many warnings that Judah’s probationary time was running out. The evidence was abundant. Christians, living in “the time of the end” (Dan. 12:4) also have much evidence that earth’s probationary time is running out. How should the wise, God-fearing Christian prepare for the close of human probation? It could be as near as one’s death or nearer. We have good reason to believe that the announcement terminating the pre-Advent judgment in heaven is imminent. (See Rev. 22:11, 12.)

V. THE TEMPLE ABANDONED (Eze. 10:8-22).

16. To what place did the Lord move before decreeing destruction for Judah? Eze. 9:3; 10:4. Where did the cherubim next take the Lord? Eze. 10:18, 19. To what area did the Lord finally move? Eze. 11:22, 23.

The mountain “on the east side of the city” is more familiarly known

in the New Testament as "the mount of Olives." (Compare Matt. 23:37-39; 24:1-3.)

The movements of God away from the Temple and city symbolized His reluctance to separate from Judah. God never initiates a withdrawal from His people. He does so reluctantly only after they forsake Him. The withdrawal in stages underscores His longsuffering.

The Lord's abandonment of the Temple and city suggests that He would now especially identify Himself with the captive exiles. Here is where a genuine remnant would develop. The once-secret sins of the nation had led it into open apostasy and national ruin.

WHAT STEPS DO YOU BELIEVE that a Christian should follow in overcoming secret sins?

FRI FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read "The Seal of God," *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 207-216.

- Since sin begins in the mind, how can I prevent it from taking root? (See Matt 5:28; Phil 4:8.)
- How was Jesus able to meet inner temptation to sin? (See Matt. 4:4; Ps. 40:8.)
- The believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). How can I prevent His departure from my soul-temple? (See Ps. 51:1-3, 10, 11.)

SUMMARY: Judah's terrible apostasy and fall proves once again Moses' statement: "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23). Rather than cherish our darling sins, let us pray God for grace to repent of them and to live with "a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

Lesson 5

April 28—May 4

The Certainty of God's Word

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ezekiel 11:1-13; 12; 24:1-14.

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MEMORY TEXT: "Thus saith the Lord God; there shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God" (Ezekiel 12:28).

WHY IS IT SO EASY FOR A CHRISTIAN'S SPIRITUAL ZEAL TO COOL? Why do we tend to doubt the certainty of God's promises or judgments?

OUTLINE:

- I. Defiant Despair (Eze. 11:1-13).
- II. An Acted Prophecy of the Exile (Eze. 12:1-20).
- III. Faded Visions (Eze. 12:21-25).
- IV. Present Visions of Future Events (Eze. 12:26-28).

DO NOT POSTPONE A DECISION FOR CHRIST. World War II was at its height. Ilona, uprooted like thousands of other war brides, had turned to a serious study of the Bible. Her mind quickly grasped the claims and promises of Christianity. At first great joy and peace pervaded her life, a peace that the worldly-wise young woman had never experienced. But Ilona hesitated to make a full commitment to Christ.

"In a short time this terrible war will be over," Ilona said to her friend, "and Joe will be home. There will be peace—the United Nations will see to that! We're going to settle down in our dream house and rear a little family."

"What about Christ's claims on your life, Ilona?" pleaded her friend. "Won't you accept His grace and become His follower right now?"

"I know," she mused thoughtfully with a faraway look in her eyes. "But you see. . . ."

Four years after the war, Ilona died while giving birth to her second child. As far as her friend knew, she died unprepared to meet her Lord. The Saviour's return seemed so far off; His invitation too restrictive. But the end was nearer than Ilona thought. (Adapted. Frank B. Holbrook, "Pastor, What About the Millennium?" *These Times*, February 1977, pp. 20-24.)

Ilona's indecision is typical of our human nature. We mistakenly think that happiness is not to be found in God. Because He bears long with us, we may doubt whether His promises or judgments will ever take place.

This was the excuse impenitent Judah employed in the sixth century

B.C. to steel herself against the Lord's final appeals through His prophets.

SUN

I. DEFIANT DESPAIR (Eze. 11:1-13).

Ezekiel chapter 11 continues with the vision that began in 8:1. The prophet still is in the Temple area.

1. **What group standing near the east gate of the Temple is shown to Ezekiel? Who were these persons? What were they discussing among themselves? Eze. 11:1-3.**

Ezekiel recognized the faces of two of these persons—Jaazaniah and Pelatiah. These twenty-five men were not priests, but "princes of the people"—the secular rulers who evidently made up the hard core of those urging King Zedekiah to resist surrender to the Babylonians.

2. **In contrast to the plans of the princes, what counsel would Jeremiah eventually give the people? Jer. 21:8-10.**

The discussion of the wicked princes at the Temple gate is put in the form of a proverb (Eze. 11:3). "'The time is not near to build houses; this city is the caldron, and we are the flesh'" (RSV). The princes are probably discussing the future of the city and nation. They are arguing that it is inappropriate at this point to follow peaceful pursuits, such as building homes. Rather, the nation must prepare for war. They firmly believe the city's defenses are impregnable. Jerusalem's walls will protect them from the flame of war just as a stout caldron protects the cooking meat from the direct fire. Throwing the divine warnings aside, they would foolishly resist the Babylonian invasion. In their puny strength they would attempt to prevent the prophesied fulfillment of doom.

3. **What was God's response to the haughty presumption of these princes? Who would remain within the city walls? What would happen to these leaders? Eze. 11:4-11. How was this prophecy fulfilled? 2 Kings 25:18-21.**

The same spirit of defiance that motivated the princes to oppose God's explicit Word still exists today when we set our hearts to do what God has said, but *in our own way*. They would not admit their need to accept God's counsel. We can thank God that the counsel to the Laodiceans still offers a remedy, but the time will come when He will reject the defiant as He did in Ezekiel's day.

"The prevailing spirit of our time is one of infidelity and apostasy—a spirit of avowed illumination because of a knowledge of truth, but in re-

ality of the blindest presumption. Human theories are exalted and placed where God and His law should be. Satan tempts men and women to disobey, with the promise that in disobedience they will find liberty and freedom that will make them as gods. *There is seen a spirit of opposition to the plain word of God, of idolatrous exaltation of human wisdom above divine revelation.*—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 178 (italics supplied).

The sin of the princes revealed itself in their defiant attitude. The “spirit of rebellion and defiance [is] . . . one of the signs of the last days”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 91. How can we avoid developing such an attitude toward spiritual leaders and secular authorities?

II. AN ACTED PROPHECY OF THE EXILE (Eze. 12:1-20).

4. What was the prophet to prepare in the sight of the people? Eze. 12:1-4. What was he to do when evening drew on? Why did he place a handkerchief over his face? Eze. 12:5-7.

Apparently, the prophet himself did not understand the significance of his actions until God revealed it the next morning (verse 8).

5. Whom did Ezekiel represent in the acted prophecy? Eze. 12:8-15. Note Jeremiah's record of the events as they actually took place about five years later. Jer. 52:4-11.

If the king of Judah knew about Ezekiel's acted prophecy, the knowledge had no effect on his decisions. Zedekiah seems to have been a plaything in the hands of his determined and stubborn princes. (See Jer. 38:5, 14-27.)

6. Wherein did Zedekiah fail as a king? Compare 1 Kings 9:4-9; 2 Kings 24:18-20 (compare 2 Chron. 36:11-13).

“The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold; men who in their inmost souls are true and honest; men who do not fear to call sin by its right name; men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.

“But such a character is not the result of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature—the surrender of self for the service of love to God and man.”—*Education*, p. 57.

7. After enacting the fate that was to befall the king, Ezekiel was to stress once more the terrible nature of the siege. How did he demonstrate this? Eze. 12:17-20 (compare 4:9-17).

Neither rulers nor people needed to endure the privations of the siege. Jeremiah encouraged both to surrender and promised that their lives and the city itself would be spared if they did. (See Jer. 38:2-4, 17-20.) The princes saw such counsel as treason. They would attempt to prevent the prophet's predictions of doom by murdering him.

Was King Zedekiah a victim of circumstances, unable to do what he knew was right because of his situation? Do you feel helpless in your circumstances? In what ways might your circumstances be overruled for good?

“There are men who flatter themselves that they might do something great and good if they were only circumstanced differently, while they make no use of the faculties they already have by working in the positions where Providence has placed them. Man can make his circumstances, but circumstances should never make the man. Man should seize circumstances as his instruments with which to work. He should master circumstances, but should never allow circumstances to master him. Individual independence and individual power are the qualities now needed. Individual character need not be sacrificed, but it should be modulated, refined, elevated”—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, pp. 496, 497.

TUE III. FADED VISIONS (Eze. 12:21-25).

8. **What argument against the imminent doom of the nation was stated in the form of a catchy proverb? Eze. 12:22. Was there any truth in the proverb?**

The Moffatt Bible translates the proverb in this manner: “Time passes, but no vision ever comes to anything.” In other words, the terrible threats of God against the nation seem to be nothing more than words because things continue as usual. Because there seemed to be some truth in the proverb, it became a soothing sedative. Actually, God began to give such prophecies against Jerusalem through Amos, more than 150 years earlier. (See Amos 2:4, 5.) Jeremiah acknowledged this fact to the false prophet Hananiah. (See Jer. 28:8.)

9. **What is the effect on people when judgment is delayed? See Eccl. 8:11 (compare Amos 6:1, 3).**

Do not presume upon God's patience. “In His dealings with the human race, God bears long with the impenitent. He uses His appointed agencies to call men to allegiance, and offers them His full pardon if they will repent. But because God is long-suffering, men presume on His mercy. . . . The patience and long-suffering of God, which should soften and subdue the soul, has an altogether different influence upon the careless and sinful. It leads them to cast off restraint, and strengthens them in re-

sistance. They think that the God who has borne so much from them will not heed their perversity. If we lived in a dispensation of immediate retribution, offenses against God would not occur so often. But though delayed, the punishment is none the less certain."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1166.

- WED** 10. What was the Lord's response to those Jews who believed His warnings were just empty threats because time continued on and nothing happened? Eze. 12:23, 25.

God spoke these words through Ezekiel in 592/591 B.C. (See Eze. 8:1.) In less than 3 1/2 years the Babylonians invaded Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. (See Eze. 24:1, 2.) Approximately 1 1/2 years later Jerusalem lay a smoldering ruin. The vision of the "day of the Lord" (Eze. 13:5) for Judah had not faded.

The tendency to misread God's long-suffering as an empty threat is pervasive in our times as well.

11. What did Peter foresee would happen "in the last days"? The complaint about the delayed return of Christ is similar to that made by Jews who hid behind their proverb in Ezekiel's time. What is Peter's response to this charge? 2 Peter 3:3-10.

Similar challenges are made to Seventh-day Adventists. We are sometimes told that, because it is well over one hundred years since we first began proclaiming the nearness of the second advent of Christ, we should now admit we have been mistaken.

Christ's return is certain. As long as we accept Holy Scripture as our rule of faith and practice, we can never write off the return of Jesus as a faded vision. The inhabitants of this planet have been living in the solemn period of God's judgment since 1844. (See Daniel 7, 8, and 9.) During this heavenly court session the three special messages of Revelation 14:6-14 have been sounding throughout the world in ever-increasing strength, appealing to earth's millions to "fear God" and to accept His final offer of grace. Only thus can they be brought into harmony with their Creator and Redeemer and prepared for Christ's glorious return.

The years have elapsed. But we know where we are in the prophetic stream of time. Christ's return is just as certain to take place in God's proper time as was the fall of Jerusalem and Judah. Their ruin had been predicted more than 150 years earlier.

We can hasten the Advent. "By giving the gospel to the world it is in our power to hasten our Lord's return. We are not only to look for but to hasten the coming of the day of God. 2 Peter 3:12, margin. Had the church of Christ done her appointed work as the Lord ordained, the whole world would before this have been warned, and the Lord Jesus

would have come to our earth in power and great glory."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 633, 634.

If a parent warns a child that punishment will surely follow the child's disobedience, what happens to the child's development if the punishment is not administered? Why, then, does God not act immediately after announcing His judgments on sinful people and nations? (See Eccl. 8:11.)

THU

IV. PRESENT VISIONS OF FUTURE EVENTS (Eze. 12:26-28).

"Faith has the power to make the distant near. It obliterates distance of time and space. But unbelief *reverses* the effect. It looks in at the wrong end of the telescope, and reduces realities to a mere speck."—H. D. M. Spence, ed., *Pulpit Commentary*, Homily on Ezekiel 12:21-28 (Chicago: Wilcox & Follett Co., n.d.), vol. 1 on Ezekiel, p. 223.

12. Looking through the wrong end of the telescope, as it were, how did other Jews attempt to dampen the force of Ezekiel's warnings? Eze. 12:27.

The prophecies are not denied; they simply are put off to the distant future. Unbelief leads to procrastination, an evil as serious as open rejection.

13. What is God's answer to this form of unbelief expressed by some of the people? Eze. 12:28.

"The appropriateness of this section [Eze. 12:21-28] to current views on the second coming of our Lord is remarkable. Some who hear the Christian assertions that Christ will return to this earth react by saying that more than 1,900 years have passed without anything happening and so the doctrine may be safely ignored. Others consider that it is such a futuristic concept that it need have no relevance to the world in which they presently live. Both views are dangerous, because both ignore the immediacy of prophecy. Whether fulfillment is a long time coming or is near at hand, the church which receives such prophecy has a duty to live in the light of its fulfillment."—John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1969), p. 119.

(See Eze. 24:1-14 for a description of the fulfillment of the Lord's predictions.)

14. What commonly happens to Christian experience if the attitude is adopted that Christ's coming is a long way off? Matt. 24:48-51 (compare Luke 12:45, 46; 21:34).

"The world, full of rioting, full of godless pleasure, is asleep, asleep in carnal security. Men are putting afar off the coming of the Lord. They laugh at warnings. The proud boast is made, 'All things continue as they were from the beginning.' 'Tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.' 2 Peter 3:4; Isa. 56:12."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 635.

CHALLENGING QUESTIONS:

- In what ways should my hope in Christ's soon return affect my present pattern of living? (See Titus 2:11-14; Luke 12:31-40; compare Matt. 6:19-21.)
- Could failure by the church to carry out its mission prevent the day of the Lord from coming? Explain.
- Why is time not as great a factor in the Lord's plans as it is in ours? (See 2 Peter 3:8.)
- Some Christians teach that Christ is coming "at any moment" in the secret rapture. Does this approach help to keep people prepared for the Second Advent?

FRI **FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** Read "On the Mount of Olives" in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 627-636. Compare Ezekiel 24:1, 2 with 2 Kings 25:1 and Jeremiah 52:4. January 15, 588 B.C. marked the beginning of an eighteen-month siege by the Babylonians. Jerusalem fell on July 19, 586 B.C.

SUMMARY: Judah's rebels sought to prevent the Lord's predicted judgments by strengthening the city's defenses. Others argued that the prophets had been proclaiming the end for more than a century, yet nothing had ever happened. Still others acknowledged that ruin would come, but it would be in the far-distant future. But within five years Jerusalem lay in ruins, and the people were scattered into captivity.

The church must not misread its lesson. The prophetic forecast of the Second Advent must be taken seriously.

God's Ideal for Leaders

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ezekiel 13; 21:25-27; 22:23-31



MEMORY TEXT: "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none" (Ezekiel 22:30).

THE NEED FOR STRONG LEADERS. Why are most people attracted to strong leaders? What potential effect does this natural phenomenon have on the church and on the eternal well-being of its members?

OUTLINE:

- I. False Prophets of Peace (Eze. 13:1-9, 17-23; 22:25).
- II. Follow the Leader (Isa. 3:12).
- III. Whitewashed Delusions (Eze. 13:10-16; 22:28).
- IV. Priestly Hypocrisy (Eze. 22:26).
- V. Kingly Compromise (Eze. 21:25-27).

LEADERSHIP IS SERVICE. Clara Barton (1821-1912), who later became the dynamic founder of the American Red Cross, was a semi-invalid at the time of the American Civil War. The living conditions of the untrained troops who straggled daily into Washington, and the suffering of the wounded and dying on bloody battlefields, galvanized into action this minor clerk in the U.S. Patent Office. Her latent energies embraced a cause worthy of her highest gifts. The agonies of thousands of human beings gave birth to a leader.

Obtaining military permission to take food, medical supplies, and nursing aid directly to the combat areas, Clara organized her helpers, who eventually included even court-martialed prisoners, to save as many lives as possible. The free expenditure of her physical strength fired the energies of her associates and prompted grateful troops to hail her the "Angel of the Battlefield."

Clara Barton was a leader. She perceived the need of the hour, saw how it could be met, found ways around opposition, and aroused and organized others to join her in meeting the challenge.

There is always room for courageous leaders who see and meet needs, whether or not the task is popular. This is true in the church. From every area of life God calls for leaders, absolutely loyal to Him, who will rally His people to spiritual exploits in the war of righteousness against sin.

When Judah's leaders experienced a strong religious life, the people were drawn to give their lives wholly in obedience to the Lord. When the

leaders apostatized, their influence opened the floodgates of sin for the nation. In this lesson we look over the shoulder of Ezekiel to see for ourselves the almost unbelievable situation in the sixth century B.C.—the apostasy of Judah's kings, priests, and prophets.

I. FALSE PROPHETS OF PEACE (Eze. 13:1-9, 17-23; 22:25).

- 1. From where did the false prophets derive their messages? Why are they called "foxes"? Eze. 13:1-4 (compare Song of Solomon 2:15; Luke 13:32).**

The Bible often mentions false prophets. A *false* prophet is really not a prophet at all! Such a person may claim to have a message from God, but in truth it is only a pretense. False prophets speak "out of their own hearts," "follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing." God characterizes them as "foxes," which suggests a sly, crafty, cunning nature capable of deceiving.

- 2. What had these supposed prophets failed to do in the current crisis that was about to bring "the day of the Lord" upon Judah? What was Judah's "hedge"? Eze. 13:5 (compare Matt. 21:33).**

The hedge was the principles of the law. "To this people [the Jews] were committed the oracles of God. They were hedged about by the precepts of His law, the everlasting principles of truth, justice, and purity. Obedience to these principles was to be their protection, for it would save them from destroying themselves by sinful practices."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 287, 288.

False prophets took no genuine interest in the spiritual well-being of the nation. They made no attempt to reprove the people or to correct their waywardness. Instead they prophesied in the name of the Lord that which people wanted to hear. (See Jer. 5:30, 31; 23:9-32.)

- 3. How did God regard the predictions and teachings of these false prophets? Eze. 13:6-8. How seriously did He regard their claim? Eze. 13:9.**

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- 4. What was the "message" of the false prophets? Eze. 13:10, 16. What effect would such messages have on the people in Jerusalem and the captives already in exile?**

The false prophets were prophets of "peace." They boldly predicted

that in two years Babylon's threat would be broken, the exiles and their imprisoned King Jehoiachin (Jeconiah)—along with the Temple vessels—would be restored. (See Jer. 27:16, 17; 28:1-11.) Such assurances kept the exiles in a state of restlessness and led no one—either in Jerusalem or in captivity—to repent of their sins against God. Neither Jeremiah nor Ezekiel could prove the peace movement to be false. They could only insist that God had spoken doom upon the nation.

MON 5. Who joined with the false prophets to influence the people to reject the messages of Jeremiah and Ezekiel? Eze. 13:17-23.

This is one of only two Bible passages that refer to false prophetesses. The other reference is to Noadiah, a prophetess who hindered Nehemiah in his work (Neh. 6:14). Some commentators suggest that these women functioned as sorceresses, as did the witch of Endor. (See 1 Sam. 28:7.) That such a class of persons flourished openly in Judah was an affront to God and another evidence of the deep depravity into which the nation had sunk.

Satan's strategy is to allure God's people into compromise with sin. He seeks to discourage loyal persons who see apostasy among church leaders and laity. Because God does not seem to intervene, the temptation is strong to give up the faith with a shrug: "What's the use?" How can the Christian resist despondency in the kind of circumstances faced by Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Daniel? (See Hebrews 10:35-39.)

"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."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 387.

II. FOLLOW THE LEADER (Isa. 3:12).

6. False prophets and teachers have always troubled God's people. What did Peter predict would be the situation in the Christian church? 2 Peter 2:1-3.

False prophets and teachers seem to appear in times of crisis when God's people are agitated and looking for answers. The Bible summarizes the characteristics of false leaders:

- They *appear* genuine. They express sincerity, spirituality, and great concern for your soul. They appear in "sheep's clothing" as "ministers of righteousness" (Matt. 7:15; 2 Cor. 11:13-15).
- They present *a message of their own devising*. It may be difficult at first to perceive it as a mixture of truth and error. (See Eze. 13:2, 3.)
- They tend to *tell the people what they want to hear*, not necessarily

what they need to hear. (See Isa. 30:10; Eze. 13:22.)

d. They may be *mercenary*; interested in receiving money from the people. (See Eze. 22:25; Micah 3:11.)

e. Although appearing righteous on the surface, they *may conceal an immoral lifestyle*. (See Jer. 29:15, 23.)

f. They *cannot forever hide the falsity of their teaching*. Good fruit does not come from a corrupt tree. Eventually the spiritual and practical effects of the teaching will come to light. (See Matt. 7:15-20.)

g. They *may succeed in ensnaring some dedicated people*. (See Matt. 24:24.)

7. Christians often think that attacks against the faith come from opponents outside the church. From where did the apostles see the chief danger of deception arising? Acts 20:29-31 (compare 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Peter 2:1).

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

8. What is it that enables false prophets and teachers to be successful? Jer. 5:30, 31 (compare 2 Tim. 4:3, 4).

A leader ceases to be one as soon as no one follows. If the rank and file of Judah had rejected the erroneous teachings of the false prophet and had listened to Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the influence of the former would have faded. The people themselves set the agenda: they wanted to hear “smooth things.”

The apostle Paul observes that in the end time, there will be among God’s people those whose ears “itch” to hear something other than the old truths (see 2 Tim. 4:3). Such persons create the climate for false ministers, teachers, and prophets to ravage the church.

What should be the function of the church organization in respect to prophets and teachers who teach contrary to the faith of the church body? (See Acts 15:1, 2, 5, 23-29.)

III. WHITEWASHED DELUSIONS (Eze. 13:10-16; 22:28).

9. How did the Lord graphically illustrate to Ezekiel the apostasy of the people? What did the prophets contribute? What false impression did this render? Eze. 13:10, 16.

The Hebrew word translated "wall" (verse 10) refers to an inner partition, a flimsy structure in comparison with an outside, load-bearing wall. It symbolized the deep-seated hope of the people that war with Babylon would cease. In forming an alliance with Egypt, they expected the Babylonians to be defeated and the threatened destruction by Babylon to be averted. Then all the captives—including the former king—would return to the land of Judah.

The prophets are said to have painted this wall of false hopes "with *untempered mortar*." The Hebrew word here really means "whitewash." On the wall of the people's false hopes the misguided leaders smeared the whitewash of their prophecies of "peace." The endorsement of these false hopes by these so-called prophets reacted upon the people, making them more sure than ever that peace for the nation was just around the corner. Thus the people rejected appeals for repentance.

- WED** 10. What did God say would happen to their whitewashed wall? What did the stormy wind and hailstones symbolize? What would happen to the false prophets? Eze. 13:11-16.

Whitewashed walls of delusion are common in religious circles. Major delusions will be the means of uniting forces of evil against forces of righteousness in the final conflict over truth and error.

11. What two whitewashed delusions have been largely accepted by Christians? See Gen. 3:4; Ex. 20:8-11 (compare Dan. 7:25).

For many Christians the glorious results of Christ's resurrection are blurred by the belief that death is only another form of life, more wonderful than our present "vale of tears." Despite its wide acceptance, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is not taught in Scripture. (See 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 Cor. 15:51-54.)

The Bible does not teach Sunday observance, despite its acceptance by most Christians. Jesus and the apostles kept the Sabbath, and Jesus commanded His followers to observe it after His death. (See Matt. 24:20.)

Two major deceptions of the last days. "Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome. The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

IV. PRIESTLY HYPOCRISY (Eze. 22:26).

12. Along with their mediatorial task, what other important work was entrusted to the priests and Levites? Mal. 2:7, 8 (compare 2 Chron. 15:3; 17:7-9).

One of the important duties of the priests and Levites was teaching the people the truths of their religion from the law of Moses. God intended the people to understand the symbolism of the sanctuary so that they could lay hold of the gospel. (See Heb. 4:1, 2.)

13. To what sad state had the priesthood degenerated by the time of Ezekiel? Eze. 22:26 (compare 2 Chron. 36:14).

It must have been painful for Ezekiel, a priest himself, to write this indictment of the temple priesthood. The very defenders and expounders of God's written revelation were themselves grossly guilty of transgressing it.

Why is the priestly ministry of Christ so important to Christians today?

"The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. . . . Jesus has opened the way to the Father's throne, and through His mediation the sincere desire of all who come to Him in faith may be presented before God."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 489.

V. KINGLY COMPROMISE (Eze. 21:25-27).

Zedekiah reigned 11 years as the twentieth and last ruler of Judah (597-586 B.C.). He engaged in the evil practices of his times and was only a nominal worshiper of the true God. (See 2 Kings 24:17-20.)

14. When Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah to the throne, what did he have the young prince promise? In whose name? 2 Chron. 36:13. Why did God view Zedekiah's violation of his promise so seriously? Eze. 17:11-19.

Although Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan, he had been deeply impressed by the witness of Daniel and his three companions to the God of Israel. He doubtless took advantage of the situation and caused Zedekiah to swear allegiance to him in the name of Jehovah, thinking that the prince would be as loyal to his word as were Daniel and his friends. Zedekiah's subsequent rebellion besmirched the character of the true God in the eyes of the pagan king. Zedekiah's broken word made his punishment more certain.

15. What ruin did covenant-breaking King Zedekiah bring upon the ruling house of David? Who will one day assume the fallen crown? Eze. 21:25-27 (compare Luke 1:30-33).
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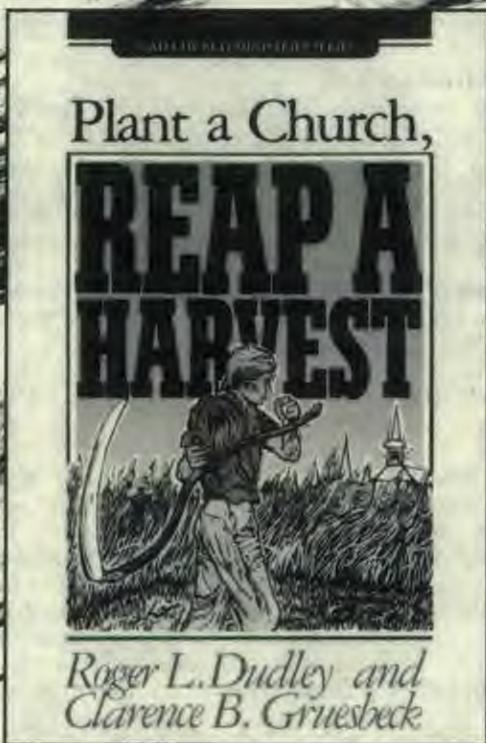
APPLYING THE LESSON:

- Should all promises be kept? Explain. (See *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 365.)
- In what practical ways can I determine that a person is a false prophet or teacher and is not to be followed?
- Why is the performance of miracles not a trustworthy sign of a genuine teacher from the Lord? (See Ex. 7:10-12, 22; Rev. 16:14; John 10:41.)
- Some leaders may fall into apostasy. Why is such behavior not a valid reason for my giving up faith in Jesus Christ and His special message for this time? (See Matt. 16:24; 23:1-3.)

FRI **FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** Read "The Last King of Judah" in *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 440-451.

SUMMARY: The spiritual and ethical collapse of Judah's leaders contributed to the downfall of the nation. The challenge for us is twofold: (1) that every church officer should provide a noble example that can be safely followed by individuals and by the membership in general. (See 1 Cor. 11:1.) (2) that every member should be true to his or her faith in the Word of God, regardless of what others may do or fail to do. The false leaders in Israel were not entirely responsible for the apostasy; the people were happy to go in the wrong direction. Every member of the church has the sacred responsibility of correctly representing God to the world.

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Individual Responsibility

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ezekiel 14:12-23; 15; 18.

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MEMORY TEST: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11).

DO THE INNOCENT ALWAYS SUFFER WITH THE GUILTY? Although judgment may fall upon a group of persons (such as the nation of Judah) because of their widespread rebellion against God, can individuals within that group be saved? How do individual and corporate responsibilities relate to each other?

OUTLINE:

- I. Insurance Policy for Sinners? (Eze. 14:12-23).
- II. God Has No Grandchildren (Eze. 14:14, 16, 18, 20).
- III. A Lesson From Agriculture (Ezekiel 15).
- IV. The Proverb of the Sour Grapes (Ezekiel 18).

WE ARE INDIVIDUALLY RESPONSIBLE. "Mary, I have but one thing more to say. The day you go out these doors to be baptized and to join those religious cranks, just plan not to return. This will no longer be your home. I'll not want to see you again."

Mary had been attending evangelistic meetings. Evening after evening she had learned new truth. She enjoyed it! It all was firmly based upon the Bible. But strong opposition developed from her husband. John felt the family's social standing in the community and his business connections were being injured by Mary's association with Adventists. As she contemplated baptism, he confronted her with his ultimatum.

"What shall I do?" Mary asked the evangelist. His answer surprised her: "Only you can make this decision. It must be your decision wholly. I cannot counsel you to leave your husband, to go contrary to his will, to destroy your home."

"Can you give me any counsel at all?" Mary persisted. "Yes," replied the evangelist, "follow your conscience; obey what you believe to be God's will for you."

"I believe God wants me to be baptized," responded Mary, "but what about my husband?"

"Does he know you believe the truths you have heard?" questioned the evangelist.

"Indeed he does," she affirmed.

“Well, then what will he think about your religion if you do not carry out what you believe?”

“Oh,” replied Mary, “I never thought of that! Yes, for his own sake I must do what God has shown me to be right.” (Adapted. Carlyle B. Haynes, “When Joining the Church Might Destroy Your Home,” *Review and Herald*, November 1, 1956, pp. 16ff.)

Under the leading of the Holy Spirit, Mary sensed the fundamental truth that we are individually responsible before the Creator. She also sensed the strong influence that personal decisions have on others. Mary took her stand for God and was baptized. To her great joy and amazement she saw her faithfulness to God lead to the baptism of her husband and the strengthening of her home.

Our study in Ezekiel this week centers on the principle of individual responsibility.

I. INSURANCE POLICY FOR SINNERS? (Eze. 14:12-23).

Can the presence of a few godly individuals avert divine judgment for the mass of rebellious sinners? Evidently some people of Jerusalem were reasoning in this manner in order to calm the fears of the people. John Taylor suggests that this “attitude is nothing less than using the saints as an insurance policy to cover the sinners.”—John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1969), p. 128.

1. What example did the Jews have in their own history that would make such reasoning seem plausible? Gen. 18:23-26, 32.

In recalling the Lord's response to Abraham that He would spare Sodom for the sake of ten righteous persons, we should keep in mind the differences between the people of Sodom and the people of Jerusalem. What was the major difference?

2. How does the New Testament imply that the presence of righteous persons brings a certain protection to the unrighteous around them? Acts 27:24, 37 (compare Matt. 5:13).

For the apostle Paul's sake 275 persons making up the crew and passengers on board the ship with him were spared death at sea.

Salt preserves. “Hearts that respond to the influence of the Holy Spirit are the channels through which God's blessing flows. Were those who serve God removed from the earth, and His Spirit withdrawn from among men, this world would be left to desolation and destruction, the fruit of Satan's dominion. . . . But if Christians are such in name only, they are like the salt that has lost its savor. They have no influence for good in the world. Through their misrepresentation of God they are worse than unbelievers.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 306.

3. Why is it *not* inconsistent for God to state that the presence of Noah, Daniel, and Job would not avert the doom He had pronounced on Judah? Eze. 14:12-21.

Note that the divine judgment is to fall upon God's land that has sinned against Him, "trespassing grievously" (verse 13). Four judgments are mentioned: famine (verse 13); wild beasts (verse 15); sword (verse 17); and pestilence (verse 19). Linked with each of these judgments is the solemn assertion that the presence of these holy men could not prevent it (verses 14, 16, 18, 20). Consequently, they could not prevent the destruction of the city and nation when all four judgments fell at the same time (verse 21; compare Jer. 15:1).

God is consistent. As long as righteous persons function effectively as salt, God will spare sinners. But Judah was sin-hardened beyond normal means of recovery. Even Noah had been unable to save the evil race before the Flood (2 Peter 2:5). Job did not save the lives of his sons and daughters (Job 1:4, 5, 18, 19). Nor could Daniel prevent the Babylonian destruction of Judah, although he was a respected wise man in the court of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 9:5-7). In the final hardening of the world in defiance of the Creator, the presence of God's remnant people will not prevent the falling of the seven last plagues.

4. There would be some escapees of the siege who would be brought as captives to join the other exiles in Babylonia. What effect would they have on the exiles already there? Eze. 14:22, 23.

While probation continues, what can I personally do to attract my neighbors to Christ? (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 307.)

II. GOD HAS NO GRANDCHILDREN (Eze. 14:14, 16, 18, 20).

There is a deeper significance to Ezekiel's statements about Noah, Job, and Daniel other than that their presence and intercessions could not prevent the divine judgment on Judah.

5. What is implied in the statement that these saintly men shall deliver neither sons nor daughters—but only themselves? Eze. 14:16, 18, 20.

Elder H. M. S. Richards, Sr., founder and director of the Voice of Prophecy, often said, "God has no grandchildren, only children." His statement reflects Ezekiel's meaning; no one can choose salvation for another. We are individually responsible before God and must accept Christ as Saviour and Lord for ourselves. No one can enter the kingdom of

heaven on the coattails of relatives or friends. All God's people are His children through personal choice and the new birth.

- 6. How does one become a child of God and part of His family? John 1:12; 3:16 (compare Rom. 10:9-13; 1 John 3:1).**

"It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to follow his example. We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought and comparing scripture with scripture. With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 598.

- 7. How does Jesus illustrate this principle of individual responsibility? Matt. 25:8, 9.**

"In spiritual things no man can make up another's deficiency. The grace of God has been freely offered to every soul. The message of the gospel has been heralded, 'Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' But character is not transferable. No man can believe for another. No man can receive the Spirit for another. No man can impart to another the character which is the fruit of the Spirit's working."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 411, 412.

- 8. How did Noah, Job, and Daniel develop such sturdy characters? Or was it a matter of chance? Compare Gen. 6:9; Heb. 11:7; Job 23:10-12; Dan. 6:10.**

Godly parents taught these men the ways of the Lord when they were children, but the parents could not decide for the children. The evidence is that they themselves chose to walk with God, to obey faithfully His commands, to pray daily, and to study His written Word. They chose to exercise personal faith in the God of heaven.

The character that God respects involves righteousness by faith. (See Phil. 3:9-11.) By faith we choose to obey God's Word rather than natural impulses of the flesh. Faith is not chance. By faith the righteousness of Christ is bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit. (See Romans 8.) Christ's character becomes ours because He lives out His life through us. (See Gal. 2:20.) Although our wills are involved in choosing Christ and resisting evil (James 4:7; Heb. 12:4), Christ's grace, given to us when we believe, is the only means by which we become and remain children of God.

Although we cannot choose salvation for our children or for those with whom we associate, what can we do, while leaving the Holy Spirit to bring conviction? (See Deut. 6:6, 7; Titus 2:7, 8.)

III. A LESSON FROM AGRICULTURE (Ezekiel 15).

9. What figure is commonly used in the Old Testament to describe the nation of Israel? Ps. 80:8, 9 (compare Jer. 2:21; Isa. 5:1-7).
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Evidently some reasoned that Judah was special to God, like a choice vine planted in a fertile vineyard, and that He would protect it from being trampled by the wild Babylonian boar.

10. How did God pointedly demonstrate to the Jewish captives the worthlessness of vine wood? Eze. 15:1-5. What is the real value of a grapevine? Whom does the vine represent in this prophecy? Eze. 15:6.
-

Ezekiel's parable of the vine applied to Judah as a corporate unity. The sinful nation had no superiority over other nations, and its barren wood was soon to be consumed.

11. How did Jesus use the same figure of a vine to demonstrate individual responsibility? John 15:1-8. Who represents the vine-stock? Who are the branches? What enables the individual branches to bear fruit? How does the believer "abide" in the vine?
-

Our sustenance comes from Christ. "One branch is not to borrow its sustenance from another. Our life must come from the parent vine. It is only by personal union with Christ, by communion with Him daily, hourly, that we can bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit. . . . Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness, all depend on our union with Christ and the degree of faith we exercise in Him."—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 290.

To avoid being worthless vine wood—a Christian in name only—what daily devotions will enable the Holy Spirit to enrich my life with His good fruits?

IV. THE PROVERB OF THE SOUR GRAPES (Ezekiel 18).

No longer able to evade her punishment, Judah blames God for being unfair. Again her argument is summarized in a proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Eze. 18:2).

Simply stated, the complaint was this: We are innocent children suffering and being punished for the sins of our fathers. It is useless to repent, because we are not guilty. We are being punished unfairly for the sins of King Manasseh and his generation. (See Jer. 15:4.) In other words, the sensitive teeth of the children symbolized the consequences—the suffering

and discipline they were receiving—for things they had never done. The fathers should be held accountable for their own crimes (eating the sour grapes).

- 12. In what sense is this widespread proverb true? Ex. 20:4-6 (compare Gal. 6:6, 7).**

The proverb of the sour grapes is true when it is applied to the laws of heredity. Modern scientific affirmation of the second commandment may be seen in warnings on some packs of cigarettes in the United States: "Surgeon General's Warning: Smoking by Pregnant Women May Result in Fetal Injury, Premature Birth, and Low Birth Weight."

"God does not interfere with the laws of heredity in such a way as to protect one generation from the misdeeds of its fathers, as that would be inconsistent with His character and His principles of dealing with men. It is only through these laws of heredity . . . that divine justice visits the 'iniquity' of one generation upon the next."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 603.

"It is inevitable that children should suffer from the consequences of parental wrongdoing, but they are not punished for the parents' guilt, except as they participate in their sins."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 306.

- 13. In what sense was the proverb being misused by the Jews? Compare the civil law God had instituted through Moses. Deut. 24:16. How did the Lord regard the misuse of the proverb by the people? Eze. 18:1-4.**

Ezekiel's contemporaries hid behind this proverb to escape their own personal responsibility for the ruin of the nation. In fact, the children were sinning more seriously than their fathers and would reap a "whirlwind" of consequences. (See 2 Chron. 36:14-17.) There was a remedy, a "balm in Gilead" (Jer. 8:22), but the people did not want it. Their condition was terminal.

- 14. What three cases does the Lord use to illustrate the law of individual responsibility? Eze. 18:5-18. Note the key thought the Lord is emphasizing in Ezekiel 18:4, 20.**

The three prominent kings who ruled in the last century of Judah's existence illustrate God's message. Hezekiah was a good king, but his son Manasseh became one of the nation's most wicked rulers, even though he later repented. On the other hand, Josiah chose not to follow the example of his father, Amon, or his grandfather, Manasseh.

- 15. If a person could turn away from his father's sins and be accepted, could he also repent and turn away from his own sins and**

receive the Lord's forgiveness? Eze. 18:21-23, 27, 28. What warning did God give the righteous person? Eze. 18:24-26. What light does a parable told by Jesus shed on this subject? Matt. 18:23-35.

"It is true that he [the unforgiving servant] may once have received forgiveness; but his unmerciful spirit shows that he now rejects God's pardoning love. He has separated himself from God, and is in the same condition as before he was forgiven. He has denied his repentance, and his sins are upon him as if he had not repented."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 251.

16. What passionate plea did God make to His people? Can one change his own heart? Eze. 18:30-32 (compare Eze. 11:19).

HOW DOES THIS LESSON APPLY TO ME?

● What would be the consequences for me, if I took seriously Israel's misinterpretation of the proverb of the sour grapes? Why is the law of individual responsibility (free moral agency) a real boon to the human family?

● Although I cannot believe for another person, how can I contribute to his or her salvation?

● Why do children who are well trained by godly parents sometimes choose a worldly life?

● How is the law of heredity a deterrent to sinning? What influence should this fact have on my conduct?

FURTHER READING AND MEDITATION: Read "Worldly Ambition" in *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 336-341.

SUMMARY: Although at times God must deal with corporate entities, we are saved as individuals. Like Mary, in the introduction to our lesson, we must study the Bible for ourselves and make that personal choice to accept Him as Saviour and Lord.

Lesson 8

May 19-25

The Ministry of Memory

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ezekiel 16; 20; 23.



MEMORY TEXT: "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number" (Jeremiah 2:32).

WHY SHOULD WE RECALL THE PAST? Although we may wish to forget some things, what value do memories of past experiences have for our spiritual well-being?

OUTLINE:

- I. From Rags to Riches (Eze. 16:1-43).
- II. Like Mother, Like Daughter (Eze. 16:43-63).
- III. Try, Try Again (Ezekiel 20).
- IV. A Tale of Two Sisters (Ezekiel 23).

THE LORD REMINDS US OF HIS PAST BLESSINGS. We know her only as "Sister M," a young mother converted to the Seventh-day Adventist Christian faith. Ellen White sketches her experience.

Unfortunately, liquor blighted the home, when her once noble-minded husband turned into a raging alcoholic. Abuse and violence took the place of love and kindness. Pressed by poverty, Sister M struggled to support the family. Alcohol had shattered home and health, but she had found strength and calmness in God's grace.

Sister M's health continued to deteriorate. On her deathbed, she appealed to her Adventist church elders to pray for her recovery, as James 5 instructs. The Lord honored their earnest petitions; Sister M recovered completely.

Although she remained in "the school of adversity," her faith and spirituality deepened. She became an effective witness for Christ. When she prayed for financial means to assist the needy people around her and to support the Lord's work, God answered her prayers.

She became successful in business, but as means began to flow into her hands, faith and trust in God began to wane. Her new house and worldly friendships enticed her away from Christ. Neglecting her devotional life, she gradually lost her spiritual moorings. Unwittingly, her talents of influence and money became a barrier between her and God.

At this point, through the prophetic gift, God appealed to Sister M to remember His past leading in her life. He pleaded with her to repent, lest, as a means of saving her, He would allow her wealth to be scattered. We do

not know what response Sister M made to the Lord's plea. Hopefully, memories of the past ministered to bring her back to her Saviour. (Based on *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 268-288.)

Sister M's experience parallels that of Israel. The people had forgotten how God had brought them out of Egyptian slavery, making them a prosperous, happy people and an effective witness to the nations. Ungrateful Israel allied herself with the surrounding pagan nations and in the process lost her spirituality in the morass of heathenism.

Now, as Judah faced complete ruin by the Babylonian armies, the Lord sought once more to remind His people of their past history and His gracious dealings with them. The ministry of an aroused memory might lead a remnant to repentance and to return to Palestine from captivity.

I. FROM RAGS TO RICHES (Eze. 16:1-43).

In Ezekiel 16 the Lord traces the spiritual history of Israel from her origins in Egypt to Ezekiel's day.

1. Why do you think Ezekiel attributes the origin of the Israelite nation to Canaan and not to Mesopotamia, the original home of Abraham? Eze. 16:1-3 (compare John 8:33, 37, 39, 44).

"Early pre-Israelite kings of Jerusalem had Amorite and Hittite names. This ethnic background was Jerusalem's nativity. Ezekiel's language is a strong taunt to the people of Jerusalem, who boasted descent from Abraham, but who acted as if descended from the earlier heathen inhabitants of what was afterward the land of Israel. Resemblance in character was of transcendent importance compared with mere lineal descent."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 627.

2. What period in Israel's history is depicted by the symbol of the unwanted foundling? Eze. 16:4, 5. What may this exposure of a newborn infant allude to? See Ex. 1:22; Acts 7:19. Who "discovered" the infant and twice commanded that it "live"? Eze. 16:6.

The allegory probably describes Israel's beginnings as a nation in Egypt. As the people multiplied, the Egyptian authorities instituted a systematic destruction of Hebrew children, especially of male infants, commanding that the people dispose of them in the Nile River. This attempted genocide was blocked by God, who commanded this "child"—His people—to live. Because God overruled the attempt to destroy the fledgling people, they "multiplied, and waxed very mighty" (Ex. 1:20).

3. How does the Lord describe His "marriage" to Israel and His subsequent care that resulted in her becoming an exceedingly beautiful "woman" among the nations? Eze. 16:8. When did the

“marriage” take place? Ex. 19:1-9; 24:1-8.

Although in a technical sense, Israel was already in covenant relationship with God through Abraham (Genesis 15, 17), it was at Sinai that God formally entered into covenant with Israel as an organized nation. The period between Sinai and the early years of the monarchy is viewed as the time during which God developed the nation and its resources.

Believers in God are described as being in covenant relationship with Him. God figuratively compared this relationship to the marriage bond. He refers to “my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband” (Jer. 31:32, RSV).

- MON** 4. How does God describe Israel’s idolatry? What did the nation do with her precious metals, products of the field and orchard, and even her children? Why is a believer’s unfaithfulness to God described as a form of immorality? Eze. 16:15-25 (compare James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17).

Excavations in Palestine have uncovered the ashes and skeletal remains of innumerable infants, mute testimony to the fact that Israel heartily embraced the degrading, cruel, and idolatrous practices of the Canaanites.

5. Having left her “first love,” to whom did Israel reach out to form entangling alliances—both politically and spiritually? Eze. 16:26, 28, 29 (compare 2 Chron. 28:16-23).

Apostasy is repeatedly compared to adultery or harlotry, because by it the covenant bond is broken. Ezekiel notes three root causes for Israel’s infidelity:

- Pride*. “Thou didst trust in thine own beauty” (Eze. 16:15).
 - Forgetfulness (ingratitude)*. “Thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth” (Eze. 16:22, 43).
 - Irresolution*. “How weak is thine heart” (Eze. 16:30).
6. God likens the coming destruction of Jerusalem (Judah) to the execution of an adulterous woman. Who were appointed to be her executioners? What should God’s people learn from this? Eze. 16:35-42.

Some of the very nations with whom Israel was allied and whose idolatry she embraced became her executioners. The lesson is clear: Whatever we allow to displace God from the center of our adoration, ultimately will bring about our spiritual ruin.

Because she had forgotten what God had done for her, Israel turned to idolatry. What can we do to promote a true spirit of remembrance, humility, and gratitude for God's saving love? (See Col. 2:6, 7; 1 Cor. 11:24-26.)

"Praise to God and the Lamb will be in our hearts and on our lips; for pride and self-worship cannot flourish in the soul that keeps fresh in memory the scenes of Calvary."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 661.

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II. LIKE MOTHER, LIKE DAUGHTER (Eze. 16:43-63).

7. What new comparison does the Lord make in an attempt to arouse Judah to her terrible, sin-hardened condition? Eze. 16:45, 46.

In the Bible, directions are usually described from an eastern orientation. If one faces east, north is on the left (Samaria) and south is on the right (Sodom, verse 46). Samaria is called the "elder" (literally, "greater") and Sodom is called the "younger" (literally, "smaller").

8. How did Judah compare with these two wicked areas? Eze. 16:47, 48, 51, 52.

When the Lord says that Samaria and Sodom "are more righteous" than Judah (verse 52), He does not mean they were sinless. In this striking comparison the Lord is underscoring the fact that Judah's guilt is greater than that of these nations; she had sinned against greater light and privileges. Compared with the horrendous depravity of Judah, however, Sodom and Samaria appeared innocent. Of course, all three were extremely wicked.

9. Although judgment had fallen on Sodom and Samaria and was soon to fall on Judah, what promise did God make? Eze. 16:53-55. What covenant would the Lord establish with them? Eze. 16:60-63 (compare Jer. 31:31-34).

Samaria (the northern kingdom) was already in Assyrian captivity. Sodom and her neighboring cities had perished in the destruction that occurred in the days of Abraham and Lot. (See Genesis 19.) It is puzzling to know how God would "bring again" the captivity of Sodom (verse 53). Perhaps the reference is to the nearby countries of Moab and Ammon, the people of which were the descendants of Sodom through Lot. Both nations were conquered by Babylon. (See Ezekiel 25.)

We are taught not to measure our spiritual experience by that of others, but by the life of Christ, the perfect Example (see 2 Cor. 10:12,

18; Phil. 2:5). What then did God hope to accomplish by comparing Judah with Samaria and Sodom? What is the significance of this comparison for us today?

III. TRY, TRY AGAIN (Ezekiel 20).

The message of Ezekiel 20 was given approximately two years after God appointed Ezekiel to be His watchman to the house of Israel (see Eze. 20:1). The elders are again present and desire to inquire of the Lord. But God refuses to be interrogated, instructing the prophet instead to "cause them to know the abominations of their fathers" (verses 2-4).

10. When God set about to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, in what spiritual condition did He find them? How did they respond to His appeal to forsake their idolatry? Why did God deliver such a spiritually weak people? Eze. 20:5-9 (compare Ex. 6:1-8).

"During all the years of servitude in Egypt, there had been among the Israelites *some* who adhered to the worship of Jehovah. These were sorely troubled as they saw their children daily witnessing the abominations of the heathen, and even bowing down to their false gods. In their distress they cried unto the Lord for deliverance from the Egyptian yoke, that they might be freed from the corrupting influence of idolatry. . . . But those who were true to God understood that it was because of Israel's departure from Him—because of their disposition to marry with heathen nations, thus being led into idolatry—that the Lord had permitted them to become bondmen."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 259, 260.

11. Why do you think the observance of the Sabbath is mentioned several times in connection with idolatry? Eze. 20:10, 13, 16 (compare Ex. 32:1-6). What is the timeless significance of the Sabbath? Eze. 20:12, 20; Ex. 31:13-17.

"By causing men to violate the second commandment, Satan aimed to degrade their conceptions of the Divine Being. By setting aside the fourth, he would cause them to forget God altogether. God's claim to reverence and worship, above the gods of the heathen, is based upon the fact that He is the Creator, and that to Him all other beings owe their existence. . . . Had the Sabbath always been sacredly observed, there could never have been an atheist or an idolater."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 336.

12. What did God say to the second generation of Israelites? How did they respond? Eze. 20:18-26.

“The statutes the people had adopted, which were not good, came from the heathen round about them. But how can it be said that God gave these to them? In Bible figure, many acts are attributed to God, not with the idea that He actually performs them, but from the point of view that in His omnipotence and omniscience He does not prevent them. An understanding of this principle helps to explain many apparently contradictory statements, which like the one here under consideration, seem to contradict flatly the Bible teaching that God’s character is pure and holy.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 647.

THU 13. In spite of God’s patience with Israel, what had been their history in Canaan from the very beginning? Eze. 20:27, 28. In what respect were Ezekiel’s contemporaries like their ancestors? Eze. 20:30-32.

14. What would the Babylonian captivity finally accomplish for a remnant of the nation? Eze. 20:37, 38, 42, 43.

What does Israel’s persistent “love affair” with idolatry teach us about: (1) the character of God; (2) the nature of sin and the need to break with it at once; and (3) accountability for spiritual light and blessing? (See 2 Cor. 6:14-18.)

IV. A TALE OF TWO SISTERS (Ezekiel 23).

Ezekiel is instructed to take the exiles on a third review of their past history. He reverts to the parable (allegory) form of portrayal.

15. Whom do the two daughters represent? Who is the mother? What is the basic point of the allegory as stated in Ezekiel 23:1-4?

This allegory of the two girls reveals that Israel’s unnatural craving for idolatry and the ways of the world began in Egypt long before the Exodus. It eventually caused the ruin of both segments of the Israelite people.

16. With whom did Aholah (the northern kingdom) begin an entangling alliance? Eze. 23:5. What did these “lovers” eventually do to the nation? Eze. 23:9, 10 (compare 2 Kings 17:3-18, 23).

One of the early alliances with Assyria was made by Jehu. By 722 B.C. Samaria had fallen, and the bulk of the people were transported into different parts of the Assyrian empire.

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17. Aholibah (Judah) is depicted as having an even greater desire for idolatry and pagan alliances. Eze. 23:11. How does the prophet describe the terrible depravity that developed? Eze. 23:35-39. What would be the fate of both women? Eze. 23:46-49.

HOW DOES THIS LESSON RELATE TO MY EXPERIENCE?

- What can I do to prevent myself from becoming spiritually blind?
- Why is it helpful in winning back former church members to remind them of their baptism and earlier Christian experience?
- How essential to my spiritual growth is my observance of the Sabbath?
- Why does a Christian of modest means and education often have a richer spiritual experience than a Christian of greater attainments?

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read "Come Rest Awhile" in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 359-363.

SUMMARY: Israel drifted into idolatry and gross sin because she forgot to cultivate her "first love." The ministry of memory can keep our relationship with God radiant and growing.

Your previous Thirteenth Sabbath offering (first quarter, 1984) built 13 chapels in northern Chile like this one in Buenaventura.



Let's do it again this quarter for chapels in the East Brazil and Chile Unions. (Of this offering, 25 percent goes to this quarter's special projects.)

Lord of the Nations

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ezekiel 25—30.



MEMORY TEXT: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34, 35).

WHAT WORK DOES GOD DO FOR THE NATIONS OF EARTH?

Since the Creator is the Lord of all nations, did He show favoritism in choosing Israel as His "firstborn" (Ex. 4:22)? What has He done for the global family? On what basis does He hold the nations accountable for their actions?

OUTLINE:

- I. The Creator's Children (Acts 17:26).
- II. Near Neighbors (Ezekiel 25).
- III. Tyre and Prophecy (Ezekiel 26, 27).
- IV. The Power Behind the Throne (Ezekiel 28).
- V. The Broken Reed (Ezekiel 29, 30).

LOVE THAT EMBRACES ALL. As God intended to bring true liberty to the world through His ancient people Israel, so He desires to disseminate gospel freedom through His church today. Jerusalem was placed "in the midst of the nations and countries" (Eze. 5:5), on the land bridge between three continents: Africa, Asia, and Europe. She was to reveal to the nations the truth about God and to draw them to His Temple, which God designed to be "an house of prayer for all people" (Isa. 56:7). When the Messiah came, His chosen people were to uphold Him to the world. Israel was to be "a light to the Gentiles, . . . my salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. 49:6). Christ was to be the Saviour, not only of Israel but also "the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42; compare 1 John 2:2).

The Lord of the nations is motivated by a divine love that embraces the world's populations. He is no respecter of persons, but rejoices in saving anyone who will be drawn to His saving Light (John 1:4, 5, 9; 8:12).

I. THE CREATOR'S CHILDREN (Acts 17:26).

1. Since the God of Israel is the only true God, what is His relation to the other nations of earth? Acts 17:26, 27. How much knowledge of God exists among the nations? Acts 14:15-17; Rom. 1:19, 20.

“God reveals Himself to man in three ways: by an internal revelation to the reason and conscience of each man (Rom. 2:15; cf. John 1:9), by an external revelation in the works of creation (Rom. 1:20), and by special revelation in the Scriptures and in the person and work of Christ, which confirms and completes the other revelations. Paul is here [Rom. 1:19, 20] referring to the first two.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 478.

“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.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 364.

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- 2. What is the ultimate plan for every human being? John 3:16. How did God intend to accomplish this mission in the period before the cross? Isa. 56:6, 7. How does God intend to accomplish it in the Christian era? Matt. 24:14**

“In proclaiming the truths of the everlasting gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, God’s church on earth today is fulfilling the ancient prophecy, ‘Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.’ The followers of Jesus, in cooperation with heavenly intelligences, are rapidly occupying the waste places of the earth; and as the result of their labors, an abundant fruitage of precious souls is developing.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 703.

II. NEAR NEIGHBORS (Ezeziel 25).

The Jewish prophets warned of a coming “day of the Lord” that would call to account the enemies of God’s people. Ezekiel’s messages about the nations were given after the fall of Judah or while Jerusalem was under siege. At the time, the destruction of the Israelite nation was for all practical purposes certain, if not already accomplished.

The Lord allowed pagan nations to be instruments of His wrath against His unfaithful people. The Lord did not cause their cruelty to Israel; He allowed it by withdrawing His protection from the chosen nation. But because the nations that invaded Israel did not themselves respond to His love and repent of their sins, God punished them also.

- 3. Why was God bringing judgment on the Ammonites? Eze. 25:1-7. Note especially verses 3 and 6.**

The Ammonites were blood-related to the Israelites, being descendants of Lot and his younger daughter (Gen. 19:38). The nation lay on the edge of the desert in Transjordan, east of Jericho. They were a cruel people, sacrificing their children to the god Molech (see 1 Kings 11:7) and continually warring against the Israelites. Jephthah fought them (see Judges

11). King Saul rescued the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead from the Ammonite plan to gouge out the right eye of every Israelite warrior in the city. (See 1 Sam. 11:1-11.) The Ammonites were also responsible for the murder of Gedaliah, appointed to govern Judah after the Babylonian conquest in 586 B.C. (See Jer. 40:14; 41:1, 2.)

4. For what reason would God bring judgment on Moab, the other nation related to Israel through Lot (Gen. 19:37)? Eze. 25:8-11.

While Ammon gloated over Judah's conquest, Moab sneered in contempt. In their eyes the conquest demonstrated that Judah was just like every other nation without any special commission and protection from the Lord. Shortly after Judah's fall both Ammon and Moab were overrun by the Arabian Nabateans and apparently ceased to exist as independent nations.

5. Why did God pronounce judgment on the kingdom of Edom? Eze. 25:12-14 (compare Obadiah 1, 10-14; Ps. 137:7).

The Edomites were also blood-related to the Israelites through Esau, Jacob's twin brother (Gen. 25:30). They lived in the region between the southern end of the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqabah, the northeastern arm of the Red Sea. This area is sometimes referred to as Seir or Mount Seir. A long-standing feud existed between these brother nations. The Edomites adopted a vengeful spirit against Judah when the latter fell to the Babylonians. (See Eze. 35:1-15; 36:5.)

How can the sins of Israel's enemies, gloating, contempt, and revenge, be eradicated from the lives of Christians? (See the comment on Matthew 5:22 in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 55-58.)

III. TYRE AND PROPHECY (Ezekiel 26, 27).

6. Why did the destruction of Jerusalem cause rejoicing in Tyre? Eze. 26:1, 2 (compare Neh. 13:16).

"Tyre's joy at Jerusalem's downfall seems to have been purely selfish. In the days of Solomon, Jerusalem had been a great inland commercial center through which flowed trade from Arabia and even from India. Jerusalem had doubtless been enriched by trade with the Phoenicians. Even in her decline, because of the importance of her situation, Jerusalem had no doubt been the center of many commercial transactions that Tyre would have been happy to monopolize."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 667.

7. How does Ezekiel describe the people of Tyre? Eze. 27:3-9. What

would happen to them? Eze. 27:26, 27. Who would bewail their fate? Eze. 27:28-36.

"The Tyrian rulers, being merchant princes, were not interested in warfare (Is 23:8); they traded with all countries around the Mediterranean Sea, and later in lands beyond that sea. Their main products were purple dyes, glassware, and metal objects, but they also traded in slaves (Eze 27:13; Amos 1:9; Joel 3:5, 6)—among them Hebrews—and products of other countries."—*SDA Bible Dictionary*, "Tyre."

The Phoenicians were great colonizers, as well as traders. Their two most important colonies were Carthage in North Africa and Tarshish (probably Tartessus) in southern Spain.

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8. What judgment was pronounced against the Phoenicians? Eze. 26:3-6. Who would bring about this destruction? Eze. 26:7-14, 21 (compare 29:17-20).

Tyre had two sites. Old Tyre, which the Greeks called Palaityros, was built on the mainland. New Tyre was built on a 140-acre rock island that lay about half a mile off the coast. The inhabitants of mainland Tyre would flee to island Tyre in time of war. Eventually they made the island a permanent city.

Nebuchadnezzar successfully conquered and destroyed Palaityros, the city on the mainland. Yet, because the people fled to the island city, Nebuchadnezzar had nothing to plunder. (See Eze. 29:17, 18.) He laid siege to the island city for 13 years, but was never able to overthrow it. Finally, he agreed to allow Tyre to continue its kingship with a semi-independent status. Tyre agreed to the presence of a Babylonian commissioner to oversee the regular payment of tribute to the Babylonian empire.

Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. completed the destruction of Tyre that Nebuchadnezzar had begun. After building a causeway from the mainland to the island with debris from Old Tyre, he captured the stronghold by attacking it simultaneously by land and by sea.

Old Tyre never rebuilt. God said that Tyre would never be rebuilt (Eze. 26:14). But the Tyrians eventually recovered. A city existed in Jesus' day (Matt. 15:21-28), and a Christian church flourished there in apostolic times (Acts 21:3-6). There also is a community presently situated partly on the island and partly on Alexander's causeway. How are we then to understand the prophecy?

It should be noted that Palaityros, Old Tyre, has never been rebuilt. The desolation is so complete that its site cannot be positively identified. (See Eze. 26:21.) The Lord was speaking about the glory and might of the ancient city state. As God predicted, this great commercial power has forever perished.

Selfish commercialism evidently destroyed the relationship between Tyre and Jerusalem. Why does "the love of money" draw out our worst characteristics? Why are we seldom happy with the financial success of others?

WED IV. THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE (Ezekiel 28).

9. What insufferable attitude did the prince of Tyre display? Eze. 28:2. What talents contributed to Tyre's arrogance? Eze. 28:3-5.
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The Lord signally blessed Daniel at the court of Babylon. He was widely known for his fidelity to God and for his profound wisdom. God's bestowal of wisdom and ability upon Daniel prompted in him a spirit of humility. Similar gifts enabled the people of Tyre to amass great wealth, which only served to foster in them a proud spirit.

10. How would God permit the people of Tyre to be humbled? Eze. 28:6-10 (compare 26:7).
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"There is nothing so offensive to God or so dangerous to the human soul as pride and self-sufficiency. Of all sins it is the most hopeless, the most incurable."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 154.

"It was the pride and ambition cherished in the heart of Satan that banished him from heaven. These evils are deeply rooted in our fallen nature, and if not removed they will overshadow every good and noble quality and bring forth envy and strife as their baleful fruits.

"We should seek for true goodness rather than greatness. Those who possess the mind of Christ will have humble views of themselves. They will labor for the purity and prosperity of the church, and be ready to sacrifice their own interests and desires rather than to cause dissension among their brethren."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 242.

11. Whose characteristics did the prince of Tyre accurately reflect? Eze. 28:11-19.
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The moral controversy between God, the Creator, and Satan, formerly one of His highest creatures, who is in rebellion against Him, is a present reality on this sin-cursed planet. In the same way that God was the King over the ruler of Israel, Satan was the real king over the pagan nations who opposed the true God. The proud prince of Tyre so matched the characteristics of Satan that prophetic inspiration permits us a glimpse of the demonic personality who ruled through him.

The relationship between the king of Tyre and Lucifer (Satan) is emphasized in the following expressions: (1) "Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God" (verse 13); (2) "Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth;

... thou wast upon the holy mountain of God" (verse 14); (3) "Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee" (verse 15); (4) "I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub" (verse 16).

- 12. What was Lucifer's character when created by God? Eze. 28:15. What was his position among the angels? Eze. 28:14; compare Ex. 25:18-22. What contributed to his pride and rebellion? Eze. 28:12, 13, 17 (compare Isa. 14:12-14).**

"The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced allegiance, and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.

"But there was one that chose to pervert this freedom. Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and who stood highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven. Before his fall, Lucifer was first of the covering cherubs, holy and undefiled."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 493, 494.

"God made him good and beautiful, as near as possible like Himself."—Ellen G. White *Comments, SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1163.

- 13. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, what position does Satan hold? 2 Cor. 4:4 (compare John 12:31; 14:30). What powers in the earth does he control unless God intervenes? Luke 4:5, 6 (compare Ps. 50:12).**

What understanding of the controversy between God and Satan enables Christians to treat even their opponents with compassion and forgiveness? (See Eph. 6:12; Matt. 5:44-48.)

V. THE BROKEN REED (Ezekiel 29, 30).

The prophecies against Egypt all begin with the phrase, "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying." The seven statements fill four chapters—Ezekiel 29—32.

- 14. With whom did Zedekiah ally Judah? Eze. 17:15. To what extent did this help Judah? Jer. 37:5-11.**

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- 15. With what graphic language did Ezekiel predict the Lord's judgment on Egypt? Eze. 29:1-7. How long would Egypt be scattered**

before it would be restored as a minor power? Eze. 29:12-20; 30:20-26.

The term translated "dragon" (Eze. 29:3) is thought to refer to the crocodile, an animal common to the Nile in ancient times. Although a broken cuneiform tablet refers to a campaign by Nebuchadnezzar against Egypt in his thirty-seventh year, we presently have no data on such an extensive destruction as Ezekiel described.

The several prophecies against Egypt were given in order to impress the Jews that only the Creator God could be their true ally. Judah's hope lay in true repentance and a true, wholehearted dependence on her real King, the God of heaven.

WHAT ARE THE LESSONS FOR MODERN CHRISTIANS?

- What do the issues of the great controversy pointed out in Ezekiel 28 mean to me? What does this passage indicate regarding the character of God and the character of Satan?
- What lesson can the church today learn from Judah's attempt to make a workable alliance with Egypt?
- Why are feuds between relatives often bitter? What can the Christian do to prevent or to relieve such conflicts?
- Why does the church encourage its members to be good citizens in any government under which they live? (See Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17.) What limitations are there to this counsel? (See Acts 5:29.)

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read "The Origin of Evil" in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 492-504.

SUMMARY: The God of the Scriptures is the Lord of the nations. Through His church He purposes to impart to all peoples a knowledge of His saving grace. God rules in the earth and holds the nations accountable for their attitudes toward and treatment of His people, as well as for the just government of all their subjects.

Lesson 10

June 2-8

Shepherds, Sheep, and Salvation

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ezekiel 34.

SAB PM **MEMORY TEXT:** "And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God" (Ezekiel 34:31).

WHY DOES THE LORD USE THE ILLUSTRATION OF SHEEP AND SHEPHERDS? What are the characteristics of sheep and shepherds that make them such apt symbols of the message that the Lord wishes to convey to His people?

OUTLINE:

- I. Self-caring Shepherds (Eze. 34:1-6).
- II. Accountable Shepherds (Eze. 34:7-10).
- III. Restoration of the Scattered Flock (Eze. 34:11-16).
- IV. Promise of the Messianic Shepherd (Eze. 34:23-30).

A LOVING PARENT WITH A SHEPHERD'S HEART. In a tragic divorce the court placed the two boys of the marriage, Craig (age 10) and Brent (age 3), in custody of their mother, Laurie. Anticipating the court action, her husband suddenly left both employment and home and disappeared with the boys. But the ties between mother and children are not easily broken, and Laurie began a long, determined search to find her boys.

All of the loving mother's earnest efforts to locate her children were unavailing, until nine years after their disappearance an in-law relative inadvertently revealed the state to which the father had taken them. Laurie found her children and began building a relationship with them. The older boy was now married; the younger one, age 12, went to live with his mother. For Laurie, the long search was over.

Are pastors and local leaders in God's church as earnest as Laurie in their search for the sheep that leave the fold? When "lost sheep" are located, are leaders prepared to plead for grace to awaken and nurture the "first love" that once caused them to rejoice in the Saviour? There is always a great need for leaders and members with "shepherd hearts" who will draw back to Christ those who have wandered away.

In Ezekiel's time God reproved the appointed undershepherds who exploited His people and who were in a large measure responsible for the sins that led to their being scattered abroad. In our lesson this week we learn how God promised to restore the exiled nation of Israel to its homeland. Like a shepherd, He still promises to gather together the faithful, establishing them in His kingdom.

SUN I. SELF-CARING SHEPHERDS (Eze. 34:1-6).

The last 15 chapters of Ezekiel's prophecy are designed to inspire hope in the nation's restoration from captivity.

1. Who were held accountable for Judah's moral decline leading to the captivity? Eze. 34:2. Who were included in this class of persons? Eze. 22:25-28 (compare Jer. 13:17-20).

Throughout chapter 34, Ezekiel figuratively describes the nation as a beautiful flock of sheep. Its shepherds were the political and religious leaders—kings, princes, and priests. Prophets—true and false—also exercised leadership roles. In the Christian church, who are the shepherds of the flock?

2. How did Judah's shepherds treat the people in the times of Ezekiel and Jeremiah? Eze. 34:2-4; Jer. 23:1, 2. By what term did Jesus describe this kind of shepherd? John 10:12, 13.

"The hireling reveals his identity by his attitude to the sheep. Shepherding with him is just a job. But with a true shepherd it is a privilege. The hireling is a shearer rather than a sharer. The flock to him is something to be exploited, and wanderers are a nuisance."—R. A. Anderson, *The Shepherd-Evangelist* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1950), p. 563.

3. What sad examples of shepherd exploitation of God's people does the Bible mention?

Amos 8:4-7 _____

Mark 12:38-40 _____

Matt. 23:13 _____

"Christ unsparingly condemned abuses, but He was careful not to lessen obligation. He rebuked the selfishness that extorted and misapplied the widow's gifts. At the same time He commended the widow who brought her offering for God's treasury. Man's abuse of the gift could not turn God's blessing from the giver."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 614.

4. How did Judah's shepherds treat the "diseased" and "sick" members of the Lord's flock, and with what result? Eze. 34:4, 5. What classes of persons make up the "diseased," "sick," and "driven away" in the church today? How would Christ have us relate to these? Matt. 9:36; 25:33-40; James 1:27.

Ezekiel's sad portrayal depicts God's undershepherds as people ruling "with force and with cruelty," exploiting the flock for personal ends, and neglecting the needy. They caused the nation to be "scattered" throughout the Babylonian empire and left individual Jews open to seduction and abuse by pagan forces and influences. The implication is that consecrated shepherds might have prevented this.

The need for caring shepherds. "These are fast-moving days. Everything is measured by speed. And if someone trips and falls, before help can come he is trampled under foot by the surging crowd. . . . These conditions call for shepherds . . . who are not too busy to spend time untangling individual and community problems. Everywhere there are broken homes and broken hearts, and these call for a shepherd's care. The world does not lack luxuries, but it does lack love. . . . Of all the titles given to our Lord, none is more beautiful than 'the Good Shepherd.' He never spoke of Himself as a bishop or a priest, an executive or a preacher, but always as a shepherd."—R. A. Anderson, *The Shepherd-Evangelist*, pp. 550, 551.

- 5. One failure stands out against Judah's shepherds:** "Neither have ye sought that which was lost" (Eze. 34:4). How did Jesus illustrate the value of one lost person in God's sight? Luke 15:3-7.

"At last his [the shepherd's] effort is rewarded; the lost is found. Then he does not scold it because it has caused him so much trouble. He does not drive it with a whip. He does not even try to lead it home. In his joy he takes the trembling creature upon his shoulders; if it is bruised and wounded, he gathers it in his arms, pressing it close to his bosom, that the warmth of his own heart may give it life. With gratitude that his search has not been in vain, he bears it back to the fold."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 188.

We rejoice in the baptism of new believers and their acceptance of church membership. In what practical ways can members or church officers, individually or as a Sabbath School class, reach out to find any who have wandered from the congregation?

"How many of the wandering ones have you, reader, sought for and brought back to the fold? When you turn from those who seem unpromising and unattractive, do you realize that you are neglecting the souls for whom Christ is seeking? At the very time when you turn from them, they may be in the greatest need of your compassion."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 191.

II. ACCOUNTABLE SHEPHERDS (Eze. 34:7-10).

- 6. Although appointed to the care of God's people, what major task did Judah's shepherds fail to perform? Eze. 34:8. Compare this failure with Christ's commission to Peter and with Peter's instruction to later church leaders. John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 5:2.**

7. How does "feeding" the flock prevent "wolves" from destroying the sheep? Note how the "wolves" function. Acts 20:28-31 (compare Col. 2:6-8; Eph. 4:14).

Church members with an intelligent understanding of the Bible's teachings, in union with Jesus Christ, and witnessing of His grace to others, seldom fall prey to the "wolves" of false teachings. Those who do not thoroughly understand the reasons for their faith and whose commitment to Christ is weak are open to deception. (See 2 Peter 2:1-3.)

Preach Christ. "There is today in nearly all Christian churches an alarming trend away from specific doctrines. Ethical sermons, social and even political sermons, or sermons on current events are common, but sermons on the great fundamentals of gospel truth are seldom heard. We do not advocate speculative, theorizing sermons on old fossilized creeds or theological sophistries, but true doctrinal preaching that elevates Christ and leads to repentance and faith, is urgently needed."—Lewis H. Christian, *Modern Religious Trends* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1941), pp. 146, 147.

8. Why is it a serious matter for the believer to take up the work of shepherding in the Lord's flock? Eze. 34:10 (compare Heb. 13:17).

We cannot escape the responsibility to serve the Lord's flock if He has endowed us with the talent. We are to sense the awesomeness of our task and seek the Lord's wisdom to work according to His will.

- TUE** 9. In describing His own shepherding, what characteristics of a responsible shepherd leader does Jesus mention? John 10:11, 14.

A "good shepherd" is selfless. Like the apostle Paul, such a shepherd "will very gladly spend and be spent" (2 Cor. 12:15). He gives his life for those persons coming under his care. He has the "mind" of Christ (Phil. 2:5), which prompts him to seek the best good for them even at his own expense. Another requirement in a "good shepherd" is willingness to come close to people—to know and care for them as individuals.

Jesus cares for individuals. "Jesus knows us individually, and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows us all by name. He knows the very house in which we live, the name of each occupant. He has at times given directions to His servants to go to a certain street in a certain city, to such a house, to find one of His sheep.

"Every soul is as fully known to Jesus as if he were the only one for whom the Saviour died. The distress of every one touches His heart. The cry for aid reaches His ear. . . .

“Reader, He loves you. Heaven itself can bestow nothing greater, nothing better. Therefore trust.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 479-483.

Every believer has “a flock”—persons for whom he or she may have a particular responsibility. Parents are accountable for their children; teachers for their students; the Sabbath School teacher for his or her class; the local elder for the church; the pastor for his district; believers for their neighbors.

“To every soul a trust is given. Of everyone the Chief Shepherd will demand, ‘Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?’ And ‘what wilt thou say when He shall punish thee?’ Jer. 13:20, 21.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 641.

Often new converts to the Adventist Church lose their former ties with family and friends. What can I and my Sabbath School class do to integrate new members into our church fellowship? How can we assist them in establishing permanent roots?

III. RESTORATION OF THE SCATTERED FLOCK (Eze. 34:11-16).

10. Still using the figure of the flock, what does God now promise His people? Eze. 34:11-16. What is the evidence that the nation had long been acquainted with this tender portrayal of God? Ps. 23:1-6; 80:1.

Because divine justice is manifested at times in the Old Testament, some think of the God of Israel as a God of sternness and wrath, and of the God of the New Testament as a God of love. This superficial observation misjudges the Lord's true character. Divine love and justice are two sides of the same coin. The Old Testament's description of God as the great Shepherd emphasizes all the tender, loving qualities that we see shining forth in Jesus.

11. To whom did God refer as “my shepherd” and appoint by name a century and a half before his birth to restore the Israelites to Palestine after the Babylonian captivity? Isa. 44:28.

A century and a half before Ezekiel's day, God predicted the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire to the Medes and Persians (Isa. 45:1-5). “The advent of the army of Cyrus before the walls of Babylon was to the Jews a sign that their deliverance from captivity was drawing nigh.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 551. After his capture of Babylon (539 B.C.), Cyrus passed a decree for the return of the Jews to their own land. (See Ezra 1:1-4.)

“As the king saw the words foretelling, more than a hundred years before his birth, the manner in which Babylon should be taken . . . his heart was profoundly moved, and he determined to fulfill his divinely appointed

mission. He would let the Judean captives go free; he would help them restore the temple of Jehovah."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 557, 558.

12. Of whom were Cyrus and his army a type? What final great gathering of God's people was foreshadowed by the restoration of the Jews from captivity? Rev. 16:12; 19:9.

It is sometimes difficult for a backslider to be restored to active fellowship in the church. There is often embarrassment or concern as to what members might think and say. What can I do to relieve this feeling and to bring a warm assurance of acceptance to such persons?

THU IV. PROMISE OF THE MESSIANIC SHEPHERD (Eze. 34:23-30).

13. How is the coming Messiah, the Son of David, portrayed in the prophecy? Eze. 34:23, 24 (compare parallel prophecies in Jer. 23:5, 6; Isa. 40:10, 11; Dan. 9:24, 25).

The Shepherd whom God promises to place over His people in the future is not to be a resurrected David, but the Messiah Himself, the Son of David. To call Him David is simply a Hebraic manner of speaking. Eventually he would take the throne of David (Eze. 21:26, 27; Jer. 23:5; Luke 1:32, 33).

14. How did Jesus affirm that He was the fulfillment of this prophecy? John 10:1-6, 11-18, 26-29.

Christ's gracious ministry to all classes and conditions of people is a model for His undershepherds: "Jesus did not suppress one word of truth, but He uttered it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact and thoughtful, kind attention in His intercourse with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He spoke the truth, but always in love. He denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity; but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. . . . His life was one of self-denial and thoughtful care for others."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 12.

15. What blessings will attend the Lord's people in the future Messianic age? Eze. 34:25-30.

These promised blessings were to result from Israel's covenant relationship with God. They envisioned the glorious fruition of their national existence: the coming of the Messiah to the world. (See Gen. 22:18; Isa.

49:9-11.) God was seeking to prepare Israel for what could have been her finest hour. But because the leaders rejected Christ (John 19:15) these prophecies will be fulfilled in principle for spiritual Israel (the redeemed of all ages) in the new earth. (See Rev. 21:3, 4.)

SEEKING THE LOST:

- Jesus knows His sheep and meets their need. How can I know the needs of the people in my church so that I can minister to them?
- Why do I tend to withdraw my love and interest from someone who backslides in his religious experience?
- Who needs more of the compassion and active concern of the church: the drifting, compromising member, or the member who attends regularly? What can I and my fellow members do about the apostasy rate in our congregation?

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read "The Return of the Exiles," *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 551-566.

SUMMARY: God views His people as a flock of sheep, beautiful and useful in His service, but vulnerable to the enemy unless totally dependent upon Him. God's undershepherds, all who have a part in leading His people, are commissioned to nurture the flock and recover the lost. And "when the chief Shepherd shall appear," such faithful shepherds will "receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:4).

Your previous Thirteenth Sabbath offering (first quarter, 1984) built 13 chapels in northern Chile like this one in Buenaventura.



This quarter's special offering will help build a girls' dormitory at Chile College, Chillan, Chile.
 (Of this offering, 25 percent goes to this quarter's special projects.)

Heaven's Heart Surgery

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ezekiel 11:17-21; 36:16-38.

SAB
PM

MEMORY TEXT: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26).

THE NEW BIRTH AND SELF-DISCIPLINE. How essential to Christian life is a new-heart (new-birth) experience? Why cannot the needed changes in attitudes and behavior be brought about by self-discipline? What place do self-discipline and personal effort have in everyday Christian living?

OUTLINE:

- I. The Gift of the Land (Eze. 11:17).
- II. The Gift of a New Heart (Eze. 11:19).
- III. The Response of Obedience (Eze. 11:20).
- IV. Honoring God (Eze. 36:16-24).
- V. The Ministry of Repentance (Eze. 36:31, 32).

LOVE CHANGES HEARTS. Evangeline Booth, an officer in the Salvation Army and the daughter of its founder, stood with a few others at the entrance of a local police court and temporary prison, waiting for the gates to open.

Abruptly their attention was attracted by the sound of shuffling feet, loud commands, and the shrill voice of a woman on the other side of the enclosure. The iron gates opened as six policemen wrestled a struggling woman through the passageway toward a waiting vehicle.

The woman's hair was disheveled and matted. Her face was blackened with bruises; clots of dried blood marked her left temple. Her clothes and apron were bloodstained and torn. Cursing and swearing, she tossed her head wildly as she fought with the guards.

With deep compassion, Miss Booth wondered what she could do. There was no opportunity to speak with the prisoner. Nor did prayer, song, money, or counsel seem appropriate. As the woman, struggling with the officers, approached, Miss Booth, on impulse, stepped forward and kissed her on the cheek.

Wrenching herself free, the woman clasped her hands and cried to the gray skies, "Who kissed me? Who kissed me? Nobody has kissed me since my mother died!" The fight drained out of her; she lifted the tattered apron, buried her face in its folds, and wept convulsively. Docile and broken, the woman was led away by the police.

A few days later Miss Booth visited the woman's prison cell. She found her subdued but still asking, "Who kissed me?" The warden thought her insane, but with Miss Booth she was friendly and receptive, especially so when she told her that it was she who had kissed her.

Then Miss Booth spoke of the Saviour, how He went to the cross to bear our sins and was wounded for our transgressions that He might put the kiss of pardon upon our cheeks. She lovingly led a sin-enslaved soul into the freedom of salvation in Jesus Christ. (Adapted. Evangeline Booth, "Who Kissed Me?" *Life and Health*, January 1969, p. 17.)

In this week's lesson we see God's design that the return to Palestine should be through the experience of conversion. The new life of Israel after the exile must begin with the individual heart.

Our hope of eternal life in the heavenly Canaan can never be realized without the fundamental transformation referred to in the New Testament as the "new birth." The "kiss" of God's grace brings the change.

I. THE GIFT OF THE LAND (Eze. 11:17).

1. What material gift would God give the restored nation? Eze. 11:17. In what sense was this gift given, when apparently it already belonged to Israel? (Compare Lev. 25:23; 2 Chron. 7:19, 20; Hosea 9:3.)

Canaan never really belonged to Israel. It was the Lord's land. The Israelites possessed it as His stewards on the basis of their covenant relationship with the true Owner. When the people broke their covenant with God, they forfeited all right to His blessings, of which the land was one. Now in connection with the anticipated renewal of the covenant (Jer. 31:31-34), God again promised them the land.

2. What promises were made in connection with the land? Eze. 36:8-11, 29, 30, 34-38. What special lesson were the Israelites to learn? Note the last part of verses 11 and 38 (compare Deut. 8:17, 18).

The Creator intended that material prosperity should lead its recipients to render Him grateful praise and so to strengthen the bond between Himself and His children. (See Ps. 116:12-14.) But how often we rejoice in the gift and forget the Giver.

Sometimes we make the mistake of imagining that we are materially prosperous because of our spiritual superiority. Despite his spirituality, Job suffered intensely; despite Israel's prosperity, the people lacked spirituality.

3. Ancient Israel was given the land of Canaan in trust. The Lord was concerned for their happiness and also for their influence on other nations. What has God entrusted to the entire human family? Ps. 24:1; 115:16 (compare Gen. 1:26, 28).

Sin has greatly thwarted God's purpose. By sin, Adam and Eve forfeited the stewardship privilege that God had entrusted to them. Had it not been for the plan of salvation, the race would have perished. Greed, avarice, and oppression have created sad inequities between rich and poor. Mankind has often treated his physical environment with selfish indifference. In a real sense, all our material blessings are possible because of the cross of Christ.

"To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring. . . . The family board becomes as the table of the Lord, and every meal a sacrament."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 660.

How has your material prosperity (or lack of it) affected your relationship with God? How has it affected your relationship with other people? (Read the story of the prodigal son in *Christ's Object Lessons*, especially pp. 200, 201.)

MON II. THE GIFT OF A NEW HEART (Eze. 11:19).

Spiritual revival was the most important feature of the restoration. The suffering of the captivity awakened in honest hearts the need for repentance. Through adversity they discovered the loving concern of God.

4. How did Jeremiah express the call for spiritual renewal? Jer. 29:10-14.

As Jeremiah and Ezekiel summoned Israel to spiritual preparation for their return home, a similar appeal sounds out to the church today: "A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. . . . But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessing. A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 121.

5. While Jeremiah called on the people to seek the Lord "with all your heart," what did God promise He would give such persons? Eze. 11:19; 36:25, 26, 33. What three things were promised that only divine grace can accomplish?

The promise of spiritual change applied to Israel as a nation. But the restoration of the nation could be accomplished only as transformation was realized in individual lives. David and the apostle Paul described this experience as a "new creation." (See Ps. 51:10; 2 Cor. 5:17.)

6. How did Jesus refer to this same miraculous transformation? How essential did He declare it to be? By whose agency did He indicate it would be accomplished? John 3:3-7.

“It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them. ‘Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.’ ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ Job 14:4; Romans 8:7. . . . There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ. His grace alone can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul, and attract it to God, to holiness.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 18.

Have I been born again? What is the evidence of a new heart, the new-birth experience? Should rapturous feelings mark my conversion?

III. THE RESPONSE OF OBEDIENCE (Eze. 11:20).

7. What further work of grace did God promise in connection with His gift of “a new heart”? Eze. 11:20; 36:27.

Parents must provide rules for children in order to prepare them for successful adulthood. The objective is that the child will *internalize* parental guidelines so that the compelling impulse to live a useful life will come from within.

God’s promise to Israel and to us is that all penitent sinners may have the presence of His Spirit in their hearts, enabling them “to walk in my statutes” and to “keep my judgments, and do them” (Eze. 36:27).

8. According to Jesus and the apostle Paul, what is the motivation for cheerful obedience to God’s will? Matt. 22:36-40; Rom. 13:8-10. How is this “motivation” obtained? Eze. 36:27; Rom. 5:5.

By nature every human being is self-centered and opposed to God’s lordship (Rom. 8:6-8). There is no possible way for the natural heart to render genuine obedience to God. The Holy Spirit, the great life-changer, can alter this situation. He brings about the “new birth” (John 3:5-8), creates a new heart (Ps. 51:10, 11), animates it with love for God and man (Rom. 5:5), and inscribes within it the precepts of the Father’s will (Jer. 31:33). This enables the transformed sinner to live in joyful harmony with Him (Eze. 36:27).

The service of love. “But notice here that obedience is not a mere out-

ward compliance, but the service of love. . . . If our hearts are renewed in the likeness of God, if divine love is implanted in the soul, will not the law of God be carried out in the life? When the principle of love is implanted in the heart, when man is renewed after the image of Him that created him, the new covenant promise is fulfilled, 'I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.' . . . Instead of releasing man from obedience, it is faith, and faith only, that makes us partakers of the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 60, 61.

Some argue that Christians living under the greater light of the cross no longer need the Ten Commandments. They hold that Christians should simply do the loving thing in every situation. What is wrong with this line of reasoning?

WED **IV. HONORING GOD (Eze. 36:16-24).**

- 9. God reminds Israel that it was her deep apostasy that caused her captivity. What effect did this collapse have on the peoples of the surrounding nations? Eze. 36:16-20.**

Planted where she had access to the nations of three continents, it had been Israel's responsibility and privilege to extend the knowledge of the true God. (See Isa. 56:6, 7.) Israel's subjugation by the Babylonians led these same nations to regard the God of Israel as impotent—unable or unwilling to protect His people. Israel's apostasy caused the pagan nations to profane the one true God. They turned away from the Creator and Saviour of humanity. (See Isa. 45:22.)

- 10. For what major reason did God overrule events so as to bring about the restoration of His people? Eze. 36:21-24.**

The Lord is not saying that He did not love His people. The fact is, He regarded the returned exiles as "the apple of his eye" (Zech. 2:8). He wanted Israel to understand that their restoration was not due to merit on their part. Nor was the Lord selfishly seeking His own honor. Love for God is based on respect for His holiness. Vindication of His name before the nations was the first step in leading them to accept salvation through the coming Messiah.

- 11. What should always be the believer's aim in life? 1 Cor. 10:31 (compare John 17:4).**

When by our words and deeds we bring honor to God, we attract others to Him. When we live like worldlings, we dishonor God and hinder un-

believers from accepting His grace. They reason, "Why should we be Christians? They are no better than we are."

- 12. What is the first petition in Christ's model prayer? Why does He make this matter so prominent? Matt. 6:9.**

God's name stands for His person, or character. It is always the prayer and aim of the true believer to exalt God's character before people so that He might draw them to salvation. (See Isa. 45:22; John 12:32.)

"This petition calls upon you to possess His character. You cannot hallow His name, you cannot represent Him to the world, unless in life and character you represent the very life and character of God. This you can do only through the acceptance of the grace and righteousness of Christ."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 107.

Why is it essential to the plan of salvation for God to clear and honor His name? (See Rev. 15:3, 4; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 68, 69.)

V. THE MINISTRY OF REPENTANCE (Eze. 36:31, 32).

- 13. What did the Lord predict would be the response of His people to the experience of the captivity? Eze. 36:31, 32 (compare Eze. 20:43; 6:9).**

It seems that the captivity was the only way God could bring His people to individual and corporate repentance. Did they have to go through this? Was there any other way?

"Self-loathing is a mark of godly sorrow, which, if permitted to have its perfect work, leads to repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). . . . True sorrow is thus produced: . . . When in this state the sinner casts his helpless soul upon Jesus and trusts wholly in the divine merits, his repentance is accepted."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 596, 597.

- 14. Why is repentance basic to a genuine conversion? Note the Lord's repeated calls for it. Eze. 14:6; 18:30. What is involved in repentance? Eze. 33:11.**

As the Lord's Spirit moves upon human hearts they are led to respond in faith, repentance (Acts 20:21), and obedience (John 14:15). Sorrow for sin is always involved in genuine repentance, but there is more to it than that. The concept means "to turn" or "to turn around." True repentance means a total change in the direction of the life, a fundamental change in attitude toward God and man.

Only the operation of the Holy Spirit can bring conviction of sin. The Spirit impresses us with God's love and our own sinfulness. Repentance is as much a gift from God as is forgiveness. (See Rom. 2:4.)

What does Ellen White mean when she writes of religious experience as follows? "At every advance step in our Christian experience, our repentance will deepen."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 561.

AM I FOLLOWING THE LORD'S COUNSEL TO ISRAEL?

● If I see my religion as simply a list of do's and don'ts, what is wrong? How can I rejoice in my faith without turning it into license?

● Why may a believer not be able to mark the moment of conversion? Does this mean that a person does not need to make an intelligent decision to be a follower of Jesus Christ? (See Matt. 16:24-26.)

● What do you think is meant by the following statement? "Genuine sanctification . . . is nothing less than a daily dying to self and daily conformity to the will of God."—*Life Sketches*, p. 237.

FRI **FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** Read the chapter entitled "Repentance," in *Steps to Christ*, pp. 23-36.

SUMMARY: Israel's future restoration from Babylonian captivity and the approaching advent of the Messiah pointed the exiles forward to what should have been the nation's finest hour. The spiritual preparation for these events, involving the renewal of the covenant with God, required a genuine change of heart and lifestyle. Divine grace awaits our demand. It is the all-sufficient means of spiritual transformation for those willing to be totally surrendered to Christ.

Lesson 12

June 16-22

The Valley of Bones

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ezekiel 37.

SAB PM **MEMORY TEXT:** "Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel" (Ezekiel 37:12).

HOW ARE THE SPIRITUALLY DEAD MADE ALIVE? Why does the Bible describe unconverted and backslidden persons as "dead"? What powerful forces are available to resurrect both the spiritually and the physically dead?

OUTLINE:

- I. National Revival Promised (Eze. 37:1-14).
- II. Spiritual Revival (Eph. 2:1-5).
- III. Two Become One (Eze. 37:15-23).
- IV. Messianic Promises Repeated (Eze. 37:24-28).

ALIVE FROM THE DEAD. Al joined an Adventist church after attending an evangelistic series presented in a local hall. The family sat spell-bound night after night, amazed to see how text linked to text could display such graphic pictures of Bible truth! They gladly accepted Christ's call to discipleship and were baptized.

Energized by his new love for Jesus, Al readily accepted any responsibility, large or small, in the congregation where his family fellowshiped. Soon the church invited Al to be Sabbath School superintendent. The religious educational program challenged Al, and he did his best. Not being aware of some procedures and policies, he made mistakes. A few members began to criticize; instead of counseling, they condemned.

When the criticism reached Al, he was hurt. Deeply discouraged, he slipped back into a drinking habit. He resigned his office and soon stopped attending church. Eventually, the family moved away. With disappointment the church dropped their names from the membership list. The years passed. The family's spiritual life became extinct.

One day a handbill advertising evangelistic meetings arrived in the mail. A desire was awakened to attend, and Al, his wife, and daughter heard again the thrilling truths of the three angels' messages. The Spirit brought conviction, and the family decided once more for Christ. Their new church family took them to their hearts and nurtured these spiritual children of faith. Al and his wife remain faithful members of the church. (Adapted. John W. McGraw, "Reclaiming the Scattered Harvest," *Adventist Review*, October 22, 1987, p. 17.)

Like AI and his wife, the nation of Israel had died spiritually. Apostasy led to terrible consequences. With the Babylonian conquest and the deportation that followed, Israel's national existence ceased. As God can resurrect the physically dead, so also Israel's national and spiritual existence could be revived by the divine Lifegiver. This is the subject of our lesson this week.

I. NATIONAL REVIVAL PROMISED (Eze. 37:1-14).

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- 1. How did God describe in vision the way the Israelite captives now thought about their nation? Eze. 37:1, 2. What idea is conveyed by the phrase "very dry"? What question did God ask Ezekiel? Eze. 37:3.**

Scholars date Ezekiel's vision of the valley of bones to about 585 B.C. This indicates that the large body of captives brought to Babylon with king Jehoiachin (Eze. 1:2) had been in exile for more than a decade. Daniel and other royal hostages who preceded them had been at the Babylonian court 20 years. All hope of a short exile had faded. In their despondency the Jews saw themselves like dead bones, bleached and white, scattered at the mouth of the grave, incapable of life.

- 2. What happened in the prophet's vision when he began to prophesy, "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord"? In what two stages did things change? Eze. 37:4-10 (compare Gen. 2:7).**

"What is the significance of the two stages? The difference between them is surely to be found in the *direction* of Ezekiel's prophesying; first to the bones, telling them to hear, and secondly to the spirit, invoking its inspiration. The first must have seemed to Ezekiel very much like his professional occupation, exhorting lifeless people to listen to God's word. The effect was limited: true, something remarkable happened, but the hearers were still dead men. The second action was tantamount to praying, as Ezekiel besought the Spirit of God to effect the miracle of re-creation, to breathe into man's nostrils the breath of life (compare Gen. 2:7). This time the effect was devastating. What preaching by itself failed to achieve, prayer made a reality."—John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1969), p. 235.

- 3. The Lord explains the parablelike vision. Whom did the bones represent? Who felt this way about the captivity? Eze. 37:11 (compare Jer. 7:32—8:3). What did the revival of this mass of bones represent? Eze. 37:12-14.**

The prophet saw a valley filled with dry human bones, scattered about

on the surface of the ground. The captives were moaning, "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost." Because their national existence was dead, they had no "government in exile." God spoke of them as being *buried* out of sight in their graves. But the Lord sought to hush His people's wailing and weeping with the remarkable promise to "resurrect" the nation and to establish it once more in the land He had given them. The hope of national "resurrection" was uplifted before them, a light illumining the dark night of their exile. The time would come when the nation would be "born" in a day. (See Isa. 66:8.)

4. How were the Israelites to conduct themselves during the years of their captivity? For what reasons? Jer. 29:4-7, 10. What were they to be prepared to do when the time for their release arrived? Jer. 50:8, 9; 51:6, 11, 45 (compare Isa. 48:20).

5. In response to the gracious decree of the Persian king, Cyrus the Great (Ezra 1:2-4), how many Jews returned to their homeland? Ezra 2:64. Who also accompanied them? Ezra 2:65.

In a remarkable manner God's Spirit moved on Cyrus to bring about the resurrection of Israel as a nation. Cyrus' decree, published "throughout all his kingdom" (Ezra 1:1), came like a reviving wind upon the exiles. The entire nation could have risen like a mighty army from the grave of their exile, marching in unison to their homeland, to taking their place among the states of the Near East. Personal considerations limited the fulfillment of the vision of dry bones. (See *Prophets and Kings*, p. 598.)

The lack of response to the calls to return illustrate what could happen within our own church when calls are made for revival and reformation. It also illustrates the possible response to the call out of spiritual Babylon. (See Rev. 18:1-4.)

6. Approximately two decades later what appeal did God again make to His people who remained in the territories of old Babylon, now under Persian rule? Zech. 2:6, 7.

A little more than sixty years after God's appeal through the prophet Zechariah, Ezra led another small contingent to the homeland (Ezra 8). What could have been a glorious resurrection of a viable nation was delimited by the exiles themselves to a mere remnant (Neh. 1:3). In the long years of their exile, the majority of the Jewish captives had become acclimated to their foreign environment and were satisfied to remain. They shrank from the hardships involved in restoring Jerusalem and reviving their national existence.

In some areas our church tends to record fewer baptisms and

higher losses than in other areas. How may the material prosperity of church members in these regions be dulling their interest in Christ's return? How can these believers recapture the pioneer fervor?

TUE II. SPIRITUAL REVIVAL (Eph. 2:1-5).

Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones has specific application to our spiritual life.

7. How does the apostle Paul describe the unregenerate sinner who lives apart from God? Eph. 2:1-5.

“This biblical statement about the ‘deadness’ of non-Christian people raises problems for many because it does not seem to square with the facts of everyday experience. Lots of people who make no Christian profession whatever, who even openly repudiate Jesus Christ, appear to be very much alive. . . . Are we to say that such people, if Christ has not saved them, are dead? Yes. . . . They are as unresponsive to him as a corpse. So we should not hesitate to affirm that a life without God (however physically fit and mentally alert the person may be) is a living death, and that those who live it are dead even while they are living.”—John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1980), p. 72.

8. Jesus mingled among those whom the Pharisees viewed as spiritually “dead.” See Luke 5:30-32. What effect did Jesus have on one whom His disciples would have regarded as dead to all things spiritual? Luke 23:39-43.

“The souls of those whom we desire to save are like the representation which Ezekiel saw in vision—a valley of dry bones. They are dead in trespasses and sins, but God would have us deal with them as though they were living. . . . To all appearance there is nothing to lead us to hope for their restoration. Yet nevertheless the word of the prophecy must be spoken even to those who are like the dry bones in the valley.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1165.

9. In addition to unregenerate sinners, who else are sometimes viewed as “dead” to spiritual interests? Rev. 3:1 (compare 1 Tim. 5:5, 6; Luke 15:24, 32).

“There is nothing that Satan fears so much as that the people of God shall clear the way by removing every hindrance, so that the Lord can pour out His Spirit upon a languishing church and an impenitent congregation. If Satan had his way, there would never be another awakening, great or small, to the end of time. But we are not ignorant of his devices. It is

possible to resist his power. When the way is prepared for the Spirit of God, the blessing will come. Satan can no more hinder a shower of blessing from descending upon God's people than he can close the windows of heaven that rain cannot come upon the earth."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 124.

Many followers of Jesus plod on in spiritual indifference. What may I do to prevent spiritual death from overtaking me and others?

III. TWO BECOME ONE (Eze. 37:15-23).

10. **What visual aid was Ezekiel to construct in the presence of the people to answer their questions about the future of the now defunct northern and southern kingdoms? Eze. 37:16, 17.**

The prophet simply held the end of one stick in his clenched hand. The second stick was thrust into the same clenched fist, the two ends butting together. With his fingers over the joint, the sticks appeared as one to the viewer.

11. **What explanation was the prophet to make when the people asked the meaning of the acted prophecy? Eze. 37:18-23 (compare Hosea 1:11; Jer. 3:18; 50:4, 5).**

It was not unusual for the prophets to refer to the northern kingdom as "Ephraim" (see Hosea 6:4) since it was the largest tribe west of the Jordan and occupied the central area of the kingdom. "Ephraim" is also used interchangeably with "Joseph." The tribe of Ephraim, along with its brother tribe Manasseh, composed the tribe of Joseph.

Tragedy resulted in reunion. It is sad to think that it took the tragedies of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities to bring about the reunion of the Hebrew people. The division had lasted more than 200 years (from the first year of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, about 931 B.C., to the destruction of the northern kingdom, 722 B.C.). During those centuries the brother nations often warred against each other. Now their mutual situation as exiles enabled the Israelites to forgive and forget and to plan for a new future together.

Some descendants of all twelve tribes eventually returned to their homeland after the Persian decrees gave them permission.

12. **Unification of the two Jewish nations was both a challenge and a necessity. Why is unity even more essential for a world church preparing for Christ's second coming? Rev. 14:6 (compare Matt. 28:18-20; John 17:20, 21).**

The membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church represents about 700 languages and 1,000 dialects with work established in varying degree in 190 countries. The cultural, political, social, and economic pressures on the unity of such a body are tremendous. The world body has adopted this statement on unity as part of our Fundamental Beliefs so that this important truth may be ever before the church:

“The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children.”—*Fundamental Beliefs*, No. 13.

- THU** 13. In addition to relieving suffering, why was the apostle Paul concerned to take a monetary gift from the Gentile churches of Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia to the poor Jewish Christians at Jerusalem even though he knew it might cost him his life? Rom. 15:25-28 (compare 1 Cor. 16:1-3; Acts 20:22-25).

“He . . . desired to meet the church at Jerusalem and bear to them the gifts sent by the Gentile churches to the poor brethren in Judea. And by this visit he hoped to bring about a firmer union between the Jewish and the Gentile converts to the faith.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 389.

What steps can we take as a corporate body to preserve the unity of the Adventist Church? How can each individual member of the church contribute to spiritual unity?

IV. MESSIANIC PROMISES REPEATED (Eze. 37:24-28).

14. What additional role does God now ascribe to the Messiah in addition to His shepherding the people? Whose work will He take over? Eze. 37:24, 25.

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15. What covenant would God make with His people? Eze. 37:25-28 (compare Jer. 32:37-44; 31:31-34; Heb. 8:6-12).

These glorious promises were designed to arouse the despondent exiles. In a few years God would resurrect what now appeared to be an extinct nation. The Messiah was coming! Ezekiel's contemporary Daniel had even identified the time of His advent (Dan. 9:24-27). But the passing of time

dimmed the vision. Israel did not recognize her Shepherd-King when He came (John 1:11) and chose a Roman Caesar for her ruler instead (John 19:15). The fatal choice forever shattered that aspect of God's covenant by which He regarded literal Israel as the chosen people.

16. When will these Messianic promises find their general fulfillment? Rev. 21:1-4 (compare 22:1-3; Luke 1:31-33).

The unbelief and rejection of the Messiah by national Israel has affected the fulfillment of these prophecies. As given to Israel the prophecies of permanent restoration were conditional upon their continuing faithfulness to the Lord. The Messianic age began with Christ's first advent and continues in connection with His King-Priest reign in heaven (Heb. 8:1, 2; 1 Cor. 15:25; Col. 1:13), and will find its culmination in the new earth (Rev. 21:2; 22:3).

WHAT CAN I DO?

- If Al and his wife had been members of your congregation, what would you have done to help them?
- What in this lesson suggests that we should never hesitate to share our faith in Jesus with persons who seem most unlikely to respond?
- Israel achieved national unity in the restoration, but in time developed a number of individual groups: Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Zealots, and Essenes. What evidence is there of a similar kind of pluralism within the church today? How can such divisions be prevented?

FRI

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read "The Coming of a Deliverer," *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 681-702.

SUMMARY: The valley of dry bones has many lessons. Primarily it portrayed the ruined nation that God promised to revive, reform, and restore in anticipation of the coming Messiah. The mighty Spirit who revived Israel is still able to awaken those who are spiritually and physically dead.

What Might Have Been

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ezekiel 38—48 (in part).

SAB
PM

MEMORY TEXT: "And the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there" (Ezekiel 48:35).

WHAT WAS THE EFFECT OF ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF THE MESSIAH? Did the sins of ancient Israel and their ultimate repudiation of the covenant relationship with God annul the fulfillment of His promises to them?

OUTLINE:

- I. The Israel of God (Gal. 6:15, 16).
- II. Conditional Covenant Promises (Deut. 28:1, 2, 15).
- III. The Last Battle (Eze. 38, 39).
- IV. The Temple and Ritual (Eze. 40:1—47:12).
- V. The Land and the City (Eze. 47:13—48:35).

WHAT ARE OUR PRIORITIES? Dr. Walter Beach, former secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, writes of a visit with a former classmate, a woman of distinction and refinement. As they chatted, he began to sense something had happened since school days. Her relationship with God had become distant, a mere intellectual curiosity.

"Well, Mary," he finally asked, "what is your concern right now?"

With a bright smile she replied, "Oh, my preoccupation at the moment is the organization of a society for the promotion of goodwill toward cats and dogs in our community—the Lord knows how badly it is needed."

Dr. Beach was stunned. Certainly, it is noble to work for the betterment of pets. But we should put much more enthusiasm and talent to meeting the needs of God's people. (Adapted. W. R. Beach, "Focusing," *These Times*, December 1967, p. 16.)

We can only wonder what Mary might have accomplished had her priority been the service of God and the salvation of her fellow beings. The label "What might have been" could be pinned on many persons, even some who profess to serve God.

"What might have been" can be written across Ezekiel 38—48, the Scripture basis for this week's study. In spite of the Lord's inspiring promises, the record is that national Israel largely failed to respond and eventually separated herself from the covenant. While Ezekiel records "what might have been," the writers of the New Testament foretell what will be, that is, how the general specifications of Ezekiel's promises will be fulfilled to *spiritual* Israel.

I. THE ISRAEL OF GOD (Gal. 6:15, 16).

1. According to the apostle Paul, who in the nation of Israel were true Jews? Rom. 2:28, 29; 9:6-8.

The apostle's point is that mere physical descent from Abraham does not automatically constitute one a child of God, a part of the Israel of faith. Like Isaac, a true Jew (whether one in the flesh, or a Gentile by race) must have a supernatural birth, must be "born again," "born from above" (John 3). Such spiritual Jews were present in every generation throughout Israel's history, even in the times of deepest apostasy. (See 1 Kings 19:18; Eze. 20:37, 38.)

2. In Jesus' parable of the vineyard who was represented by the son? What was His fate at the hands of the husbandmen? What judgment did Jesus pronounce on the wicked husbandmen? Matt. 21:37-43.

The vineyard represented the nation Israel. (See Isa. 5:1-7.) The husbandmen represented the leadership of the nation, and the servants symbolized the prophets God sent from time to time to call the nation to account.

In a larger sense the vineyard represented the moral vineyard of the world, attended by the nation Israel. Their task was to reach out to nations around them and to cultivate the faith of the true God. (See Isa. 56:6, 7.) But the Saviour pointed out what would happen to the nation if it rejected Him. God would take from them the privileges and responsibilities of being His agents. These would pass to other persons who would have the task of representing God to the world. (See 1 Peter 2:9, 10; Rom. 11:1-5, 16-26; Gal. 3:7-9, 16, 27-29.)

It is sometimes charged that God showed partiality in favoring national Israel over non-Jewish peoples. What is the evidence that this charge is not true? Why was Israel chosen to be God's agent?

II. CONDITIONAL COVENANT PROMISES (Deut. 28:1, 2, 15).

3. What is the evidence that covenant promises are conditional? Deut. 28:1, 2, 15 (compare Jer. 18:7-10).

Some Christians believe that God's promises are unconditional; that is, that they are not restricted by conditions—that once God has promised something, He cannot retract it regardless of what His people may do. Such a position is contrary to the clear biblical evidence that both covenant promises and curses depend on the response of the believer. It is altogether

possible to break a covenant relationship with God and thereby cease to be the recipient of His covenant promises. (See Lev. 26:15, 16.) The fulfillment of the promises made to Israel was conditional on their obedience to God's will. (See 1 Kings 2:2-4.)

- 4. When the Messiah came long after the restoration, how was He received by His covenant people? John 1:11 (compare 19:14, 15; Luke 19:41-44).**

“ ‘If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!—’ Here the Saviour paused, and left unsaid what might have been the condition of Jerusalem had she accepted the help that God desired to give her—the gift of His beloved Son. 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, no Roman banners waving from her walls. The glorious destiny that might have blessed Jerusalem had she accepted her Redeemer rose before the Son of God. . . .

“But the bright picture of what Jerusalem might have been fades from the Saviour's sight. He realizes what she now is under the Roman yoke, bearing the frown of God, doomed to His retributive judgment.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 576, 577.

- 5. According to Jeremiah and Ezekiel, with whom did God intend to renew the covenant in the Messianic age? Jer. 31:31 (compare Heb. 8:10). With whom did Jesus actually establish His covenant? Matt. 26:20, 28; 1 Cor. 11:25 (“testament” = “covenant”).**

It is evident from the New Testament that Jesus established or renewed the divine covenant not with national Israel, who rejected God's kingship, but with “spiritual Israel,” the remnant of the nation, in the person of His disciples who accepted Him as the Messiah. (See Rom. 11:5.)

- 6. How does this shift in the covenant relationship to spiritual Israel affect the fulfillment of the prophetic promises made to national Israel?**

With the establishment of the covenant with the Christian church (“the Israel of God,” Gal. 6:15, 16), fulfillment of the prophetic promises to Israel has been affected in certain specific ways:

- Some prophetic promises will never be fulfilled.
- Those prophecies capable of fulfillment will be fulfilled in general. The main features will be fulfilled for Christ's worldwide church. The

church is not limited to the original setting of the prophecies in Palestine.

c. The only safe way to know which prophetic promises will be fulfilled and in what manner they will be fulfilled is to examine how the inspired writers of the New Testament applied them.

d. Since the prophetic promises of the covenant have become the inheritance of spiritual Israel (Gal. 3:29; 6:15, 16), they no longer can apply exclusively to physical Jewry. Contrary to popular opinion, the present state of modern Israel is not a fulfillment of the covenant promises.

III. THE LAST BATTLE (Eze. 38, 39).

These two chapters deal with the same subject and have been made the basis for sensational speculation. They are addressed to a person named Gog who leads an enormous host in battle against Israel at some point in time after her restoration from Babylonian captivity. God intervenes and destroys the enemy multitudes. Israel is occupied seven months in burying the fallen foe (Eze. 39:12). Their weapons provide firewood for seven years (Eze. 39:9). This great invasion and the destruction of such powerful forces have never taken place.

7. When was this invasion expected to occur? Eze. 38:3, 8, 9, 11, 12; 39:21-23, 27, 28.

Note the constant reference to Israel's Babylonian captivity. The expressions "latter years" and "latter days" (Eze. 38:8, 16) do not refer to the end of the world, but to a time after Israel had been restored from her captivity and was enjoying the marked prosperity promised. Jealous nations distant from Israel's Near Eastern neighbors would believe that they could plunder Israel as Babylon once had done.

God will intervene in Israel's behalf, and the invading peoples will learn that the Babylonian conquest was due to Israel's iniquity and their consequent forfeiting God's protection (Eze. 39:23). God promised to defend His trusting people whom He has brought back from exile. It is evident from the prophecy itself that this envisioned battle cannot be related to the present-day political scene of the Middle East.

Since the battle did not take place in the time when national Israel was still in covenant relationship with God, does it follow that this is one of the prophecies that will never be fulfilled? We must examine the New Testament for its insight.

8. Where does the apostle John foresee the great battle taking place? Rev. 20:7-9.

The apostle sees the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38—39 in the great battle that Satan directs against the New Jerusalem at the close of the millennium. The nations of the lost are referred to as "Gog and Magog," and their numbers are "as the sand of the sea." The battleground is the earth,

not the "mountains of Israel." The thrust is against "spiritual Israel"—the redeemed within the Holy City. God intervenes on behalf of the redeemed, and the hosts of the lost are destroyed by fire "from God out of heaven." It is evident that the major specifications of Ezekiel's prophecy will be fulfilled. Details of specific nations, burial of corpses, the gathering of weapons for firewood, and other features of the Old Testament prophecy are not necessarily relevant.

9. In what way does John make a second allusion to the great battle of God against His enemies? Compare Eze. 39:17-20; Rev. 19:17-19.

Revelation 12:7 indicates that sin began as a "war" in heaven. The prophecy then forecasts that Satan will "make war with the remnant" in the end-time (Rev. 12:17). This latter reference alludes to the final conflict over the law of God—over the Sabbath (the seal of God) and over "the mark of the beast" (Rev. 13:13-17; 14:9, 10). But this "war" basically is against Christ, who will deliver His loyal followers at His coming (Rev. 19:11-16, 19), and will give His enemies up to destruction.

Satan attacks God's people. "The remnant church will be brought into great trial and distress. Those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus will feel the ire of the dragon and his hosts. Satan numbers the world as his subjects, he has gained control of the apostate churches; but here is a little company that are resisting his supremacy. If he could blot them from the earth, his triumph would be complete. As he influenced the heathen nations to destroy Israel, so in the near future he will stir up the wicked powers of earth to destroy the people of God. All will be required to render obedience to human edicts in violation of the divine law. Those who will be true to God and to duty will be menaced, denounced, and proscribed. They will be betrayed 'both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends.' Luke 21:16."—*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 231.

WED

IV. THE TEMPLE AND RITUAL (Eze. 40:1—47:12).

Ezekiel 40—48 is one continuous prophecy, apparently given to the prophet on the Day of Atonement in 573 B.C., fourteen years after the destruction of Jerusalem. Revelation chapter 11:1, 2 is parallel, depicting the restoration of the sanctuary on the antitypical Day of Atonement.

10. Where did Ezekiel seem to be taken? Eze. 40:2 (compare Rev. 21:10). What does the man in the vision measure out for the prophet? Eze. 40:3-5; 41:1.

-
11. As the prophet watched the man in his vision measure the Temple and its various parts, what event occurred? Eze. 43:1-9. What

did this aspect of the vision signify? Compare Eze. 11:23.

The return of the Lord to the Temple of Ezekiel's vision, the cherubim supporting His throne and bringing Him in by way of the east gate, was a reminder to the prophet of God's abandonment of Solomon's Temple prior to its destruction. Now, the comforting assurance is given that God would dwell among His people again and be their God, if they would be truly His covenant people.

12. After recording all the data regarding the new Temple, what was Ezekiel to do with the information? For what purpose? Eze. 43:10, 11. (If you have the *SDA Bible Commentary*, study the Temple floor plan in vol. 4, p. 716.)
-

The plan was conditional. Ezekiel saw a representation in vision of a real Temple. Had Israel responded wholeheartedly to God's restoration plans, it would have been built. It would have functioned, however, during the era before the atoning death of the Messiah brought the ritual system to an end. (See Dan. 9:27.)

Thus it is evident that this prophecy of the Temple and its services as seen by Ezekiel will never be fulfilled. It is a description of "what might have been."

- THU** 13. According to the apostle John, what will constitute the "temple" in the Holy City on the new earth? Rev. 21:22.
-

14. What did Ezekiel see flowing out of the Temple? Eze. 47:1. Who also was shown a similar scene? Joel 3:18. Describe the rest of the scene. Eze. 47:2-12; compare Rev. 22:1-4.
-

The vision described a stream flowing from the Temple eastward into the Jordan Valley. It grew deeper as its life-giving waters surged through the Jordan Valley, eventually "healing" the Dead Sea of its saltiness. Fish abounded in this watercourse, and fruit trees flourished along its banks.

In Revelation no details are given regarding depth of the river, its healing properties, its fish, or the fruit trees on its banks. Only the principal idea is found: that a river issues from God's throne and that on either side grows the tree of life with its special fruits and its healing powers.

V. THE LAND AND THE CITY (Eze. 47:13—48:35).

The prophet was directed to outline the borders of the restored nation (Eze. 47:13-21). The data given suggests the area originally promised to

Israel. However, the returned exiles never occupied more than the area of Judah. In chapter 48 Ezekiel is directed to lay out the land for the several tribes.

15. **Had Israel fulfilled the divine purpose, how much land would it have eventually occupied? Rom. 4:13. How much land will the Israel of faith possess? Matt. 5:5; 2 Peter 3:13.**

16. **The concluding portion of Ezekiel's vision focused on the ideal Jerusalem. What is its geometric shape? How many gates are set in its walls and where? What tribal names are attached? Eze. 48:30-35; compare Rev. 21:9-27.**

HOW CAN THE THINGS THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BECOME A REALITY?

● "What might have been" are sad words. What would you do differently in your life if you could live it over again? Is there someone whom you can help avoid the mistakes you have made?

● How can a person who recognizes what his life "might have been" redirect it into a fruitful experience? (See Jer. 18:1-6.)

● The church now has taken the role of Israel and is God's appointed agency for the salvation of humanity. What can you do to further the church's witness? (See *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 9-16.)

FRI

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read "The House of Israel," *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 703-721.

SUMMARY: The fulfillment of the promises made to national Israel depended upon her faithfulness to her covenant with God. Because these promises also relate to the salvation of the world, Israel's failure could not prevent their fulfillment. God has chosen the Christian church as His new agent. The New Testament writers indicate which promises will meet fulfillment and in what manner.

Lessons for Third Quarter, 1991

Sabbath School members who have not received a copy of the Adult Lessons for the third quarter of 1991 will be helped by the following outline in studying the first two lessons. The title of the series is *Living for His Coming*. This quarter's lessons cover the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

First Lesson: "Responding to the Divine Call"

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 17:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-6; 2:1-12.

MEMORY TEXT: Acts 16:9.

TO BE SUCCESSFUL SOUL-WINNERS we must enter into a personal relationship with Jesus and follow His methods and those of the apostles. The ministry of Paul provides valuable principles for evangelistic outreach. The witness of the new believers in Thessalonica illustrates the power of personal testimony.

OUTLINE:

- I. Large City Evangelism (Acts 17:1).
- II. Paul's Evangelistic Strategy (Acts 17:2).
- III. The Heart of the Message (Acts 17:3; 1 Thess. 5:1, 2).
- IV. The Power of Personal Testimony (1 Thess. 2:8).
- V. Other Principles for Soul-Winners (1 Thess. 1:1).

Second Lesson: "Results and Resistance at Thessalonica"

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 17:1-9; 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 14.

MEMORY TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 1:6.

VICTORY IN SPITE OF OBSTACLES. Satan does not yield territory and subjects willingly. Since Eden, preaching the Word has inspired his fiercest hatred. But, in spite of determined opposition by the enemies of the Christian cause, God's Word and people endure, and He wins His case in the Great Controversy.

OUTLINE:

- I. The Word Bears Fruit (Acts 17:4).
- II. Preaching Brings Persecution (Acts 17:5; 1 Thess. 2:15, 16).
- III. The Believers' Response to Persecution (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4, 5).
- IV. The True Source of Persecution (Rev. 12:1-5).
- V. The Reasons for Persecution (Rev. 12:17).

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me.' "—Ellen G. White, *Selected Writings*, vol. 7, p. 941.

In John 3:14 we find Jesus must be "lifted up" on the cross. To lift up is to place on the cross becomes the great center of attraction, all beings are drawn together. Thus God and humanity all that separates, is overcome as the mightiest rebellion, the sinfulness, "The cross now serv

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great center of attraction,
all beings are drawn together.
all that separates, is overcome
as the mightiest rebellion.
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Central Brazil	39,764,500	427	118,367
Chile	12,748,207	259	59,767
East Brazil	58,450,128	529	145,447
Inca	30,899,983	508	238,801
North Brazil	22,392,400	251	111,639
South Brazil	22,840,539	321	87,869
Ecuador Mission	<u>12,345,280</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>13,197</u>
Totals June 30, 1988	236,136,674	2,633	836,552