

ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

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Amos

Seek Me and Live



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH



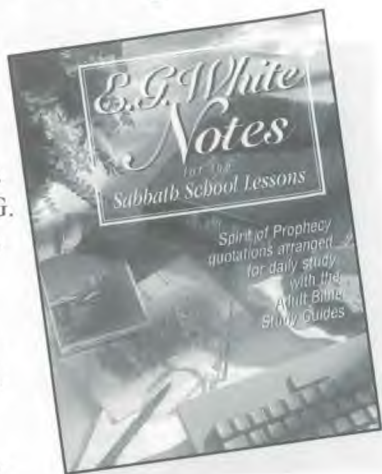
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"A Higher View of Things"

In 1884, British clergyman and amateur mathematician Edwin Abbott wrote *Flatland*, a book about the incredible adventures of A. Square, a rather flat character who lived in two dimensions only. For A. Square, the universe consisted of a single plane; reality (and that's *all* reality) went either north and south, or east and west. The notions of up and down, height and depth, were inconceivable.

A. Square once visited Lineland, whose inhabitants lived in a single straight line alone; this meant that, for them, reality existed as forward or backward only. Linelanders could not even begin to conceive of anything such as width, and when A. Square tried to explain that there was a greater dimension to reality than a mere line, the notion was rebuffed by Linelanders as absurd.

A. Square then visited Pointland, where all reality consisted only of a single point: There was no forward or backward (as in Lineland) or no width (as in Flatland), and trying to convince anyone in Pointland otherwise was as futile as trying to convince those in Lineland that sideways existed.

Then one day A. Square was visited by someone from Spaceland, a person who lived in three dimensions. A. Square thought it ludicrous, this notion of a reality beyond the two dimensions that made up the universe as it appeared to him. However, only after a visit to Spaceland, did he eventually accept what he called "a higher view of things." In fact, he tried to convince his Spaceland guide that there could be dimensions of existence beyond even Spaceland, a notion that his Spaceland guide rejected as "utterly inconceivable," just as Pointlanders did with the idea of forward and backward, as Linelanders did with the notion of sideways, and as A. Square first did with the concept of height.

This quarter's study deals with the Old Testament book of Amos, which reads almost like Abbott's *Flatland*, in the sense that it tells about Someone, in this case the Lord, trying to help a people understand a reality that goes beyond what's immediately accessible to their senses. The Israelites were living only for the moment, within the narrow confines of their little world, where things seemed (and we stress that word *seemed*) so good. The reality, of course—which was greater than the narrow view of reality that they knew—turned out to be radically different from how it appeared. And, like those in Pointland, Lineland, Flatland, and even in Spaceland, they wouldn't easily listen to the One who tried to give them a broader, wider, and more encompassing perspective.

And, no doubt, Leo Van Dolson, the author of this quarter's Bible Study Guide, would like us, as we study these lessons, to ask ourselves the crucial question: *Are we limiting our view of reality to only what we see, or will we open our hearts to the One who has, through the revelation of His Son, given us "a higher view of things"?*

Amos: Seek Me and Live

Though written on the other side of a long expanse of time, the words of the Old Testament prophets echo, even loudly, today. Though these prophets spoke to their own era and their own people, their messages aren't just interesting historical asides, tidbits on the lives and toils and loves of another people in another place and in another epoch. They have been preserved for us today because they have messages for us today. And however different the style, the context, and the specifics, the messages almost all come down to one thing: God is calling us to die to self and surrender our sinful, wicked ways to Him; a God who forgives, heals, restores; a God who will ultimately bring us into an existence so wonderful that our imagination can't even begin to dare envision it.

Yet, as always, people have a hard time listening, accepting, believing. Maybe the news, that of a God willing to forgive, to heal, to pardon our sins, is simply too good for people to easily believe? More than likely, however, people simply enjoy too much "the pleasure of sin for a season" (even though the season always changes), and thus these people don't want to heed God's merciful, loving voice.

Nevertheless, He calls anyway. And we hear His pleas, His shouts, His begging, all through sacred Scripture, including the book of Amos, the subject of this quarter's lesson study. In the Old Testament, as in Amos, these calls often come in the form of the prophetic messages, which usually begin with diatribes against the continuing sin and apostasy of God's people, and often are followed by vivid descriptions of where the continuing sin and apostasy will lead. To the uninitiated, the Old Testament can sound like a fearful book expressing the thoughts of a fearsome God. Those, however, who know this God personally know, in fact, that the opposite is true. The strong words and warnings of the prophets are nothing but the pleadings and admonitions of a loving and caring God. Out of infinite love and care, He is trying to save a people who, due to the nature of a fallen world, are utterly incapable of saving themselves.

Even amid all the gloom and doom and warnings of judgment and locusts, plagues and armies, captivity and fire, the fibers of hope, of promise, of salvation, of redemption, and of restoration are always woven through these messages. And that's because, in the end, when all is said and done, one universal, irrefutable, and eternal truth provides the foundation of all truth and reality, and that is: Our God is a loving, saving, healing God who calls out to us these simple words: "Seek Me and live."

SABBATH
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FOURTH
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2001

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What It
Means for
the Last
Days



LEO R. VAN DOLSON

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The Non-Prophet Prophet



Sabbath Afternoon

Called by the Lord to give a message, yet opposed at almost every turn by the those who (supposedly) were working for the same Lord, Amos probably would have found it easier to be selling life insurance than to be a prophet (though, some might argue that, in some ways, the jobs are not all that different).

This week's lesson, which introduces us to the book of Amos, gives the background of the time and circumstances in which Amos was called to minister. His was not an easy task to perform, particularly in the setting in which he was called to perform it. Only as we understand the background of his ministry can we understand why his name means "burden-bearer," for this faithful servant of the Lord certainly had burdens to bear.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Who was Amos? What was his training? What gave him, this "layman," the right to rebuke the nation's spiritual and political leadership? What were the times like in which he worked? What kind of leadership did he face? How did he preach? Why did God give him a message?

MEMORY TEXT: "Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: And the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel" (Amos 7:14, 15).

*(Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 6.)

THE NON-PROPHET PROPHET (Amos 1:1; 7:14).

It was a big leap—from tending animals and gathering sycamore figs, to standing before the nation's political and religious elite, denouncing their sins, and warning them about the judgments of God. What made this task even worse was that Amos was called to do it at a time of national wealth and prosperity, when no one wants to hear the low drones of pessimistic doomsayers. Yet this is exactly what Amos, from “among the herdmen of Tekoa” (Amos 1:1), did. *Who was this lowly, uneducated country boy who dared shake his finger at the establishment?*

Read Amos 1:1. Notice what is missing. There is no attempt by Amos to justify his calling, his mission, his work. It begins, simply, with only this introduction: “The words of Amos . . .” He then utters his warnings and admonitions. Perhaps the key to understanding this attitude is found in the following verses (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 6). What do they say about the source of his authority and power?

The book that bears his name gives very little information about Amos. In the seventh chapter, Amos basically repeats what he said in the first verse of the first chapter, which is that he was a herdsman and a “gatherer of sycamore fruit” (Amos 7:14). Nevertheless, he here justifies his ministry, claiming that the Lord had called him to “prophesy unto my people Israel” (vs. 15). What more did he need? God called him—that was all that mattered.

Amos said: “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son” (vs. 14, RSV). The “sons of the prophets” refers to those educated in the schools of the prophets started by Samuel. In other words, he wasn’t a “professional,” yet that didn’t stop him.

Compare Amos with the apostle Paul. Read the opening lines of some of Paul’s epistles. In most cases, he establishes his credentials in the same way Amos did. (See Rom. 1:1, 2; Gal. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1.) At the same time, look at the contrast between Paul and Amos, at least in regard to their backgrounds.

The call of Amos does teach that one doesn’t need to be a recognized “professional” to have a crucial role in ministry. At the same time, however, Amos doesn’t teach that everyone who claims to be called by God is, in fact, called by God. How can we as a church strike the balance between recognizing and utilizing the gifts of our members, yet, at the same time, protect ourselves from those who, maybe quite sincerely, believe they are called of God when it soon becomes apparent they aren’t?

TIMES LIKE THESE.

They “pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name” (Amos 2:7).

Amos lived at a time of relative peace, prosperity, and pleasure-seeking. Under Jeroboam II, Israel was at the zenith of power. There was an unprecedented increase in the number of wealthy people who lived luxuriously and self-indulgently. Their ease and extravagance contrasted with the suffering and misery of the poor. Cities were growing rapidly in size at the expense of rural development. The judges were dishonest, the government corrupt. Justice had become a joke. Extortion, crime, and class hatred were visible on every hand. Women were pampered and wore expensive clothing. Abuse of alcohol contributed to crime and indecency. Immorality was rampant, and incest was common. Robbery and murder had become commonplace. Most people claimed to be religious but lived in a way that denied a true experience with God. Although a variety of religious forms attracted people, the major religion was self-worship. There had been signs of impending military destruction, but the threats had passed.

In many ways, Amos’s time reflects ours (at least in some parts of the world). Few things really change. If you know someone burdened by any of these same problems, in what ways could you show this person that Christ can bring healing, freedom, forgiveness, and hope? Listed below are a few of the issues Amos had to deal with. Under each one write down how Christ can be the solution.

- 1. Prosperity that leads to vice and pleasure-seeking:**
- 2. Selfishness and self-indulgence:**
- 3. Injustice:**
- 4. Crime and immorality:**

Sacred history shows that in times of trial and turmoil, both on a national and personal level, people are more open to the gospel. When life is going well, when resources are plenty, when times are good economically, then it becomes harder to reach people.

How do you witness to someone who has “everything”? How do you show just how transitory and ultimately insufficient all these things are in and of themselves?

THE POLITICAL SETTING (1 Kings 12:25-33).

Amos labored when wicked Jeroboam II ruled in Israel, about 760 B.C. He began his work just two years before a major earthquake that must have left a powerful impression (perhaps something like the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco and the 1999 earthquake in Turkey) because people began dating events as they related to this disaster.

“Under Jeroboam II, Israel was at the zenith of its power. . . . Jeroboam had overcome the Syrians and had enlarged the territory of the northern kingdom to the northern boundary of the original united kingdom. . . . As for Judah, Uzziah, its king, had subdued the Edomites and Philistines, put the Ammonites under subjection, encouraged agriculture and the domestic arts of peace, and raised a large, powerful army, fortifying Jerusalem strongly. . . .

“Apparently safe from foreign enemies, and strong internally, Israel was not in the least looking forward to danger or destruction. True, Assyria was attracting attention by its rising power, but it seemed improbable that it would attack Israel. The not uncommon fruits of prosperity—pride, luxury, selfishness, oppression—were ripening plentifully in both kingdoms. However, the situation was worse in Israel because of the calf worship, which had been instituted by its first king, Jeroboam I (see 1 Kings 12:25-33). Undoubtedly this calf worship furnished the reason why both Amos and Hosea were commissioned to direct their prophecies especially against the northern kingdom.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 953, 954.

Amos wasn't the only prophet to function under a corrupt political and religious establishment. List some prophets who had to do the same and what sins they had to speak out against.

Sadly, God's church, even from the beginning, has never been without fault. How do we, as members, relate to the church, even when we see the faults and problems? How can Christians who are sighing and crying “for all the abominations” (Ezek. 9:4) done in the land guard against degenerating into becoming “the accuser of our brethren”? (Rev. 12:10).

THE IMAGERY OF AMOS (Amos 8:1).

Amos was a shepherd at a time when shepherds were looked down upon; he was also a “gatherer of sycamore fruit” (Amos 7:14). He lived on the edge of the desert where the inhabitants didn’t have access to the milk and honey of the land just to the north. The so-called “fig” of the sycamore tree was used by the poorer people to sustain life. To “dress” it, Amos had to climb a tree, with a knife in his hand, to slit each “fig” to let a bitter juice run out. It also is thought that the opening would allow insects to get into the fruit. There they would place their maggots, which would ferment the fruit, making it more edible. This rustic man of the desert had no problem describing the faults of the people in clear but earthly language drawn from his background.

Look up the following verses and note the imagery used:

Amos 3:12 _____

Amos 4:9 _____

Amos 5:19 _____

Amos 6:12 _____

Why would Amos use this type of imagery? Why would it be so effective? What other Bible characters used this same imagery to convey their messages? What’s the importance of imagery in proclaiming the gospel?

Words are powerful tools. We think with words, we communicate with words, we tend to understand the world around us through words. According to the Proverbs, there is literally life and death in our words. There was a reason, too, that John described Jesus as “the Word” (John 1:1, 14). Amos, no doubt, knew the importance of the words that he spoke. If he didn’t choose them correctly, souls could be lost. How important, then, that those of us who have a message to preach be very careful of the words and images we use.

Today, in most societies, images about lions eating people aren’t going to be effective in witnessing. What does Amos’s use of imagery teach us about tailoring the expression of our messages to the specific culture in which we are working?

THE LORD REVEALS "HIS SECRET."

"Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

What a promise exists in this verse! It reads more literally in the Hebrew, "For the Lord will not do a thing except He reveal His secret to His servants the prophets." God promises—especially in the context of judgment (as in the case of Amos)—not to do "a thing" until He reveals "His secret" to the prophets, who then are to convey the message to the people.

Though the specific setting and time frame is radically different from ours now, what is God telling us with this text?

Christianity is a revealed religion. In other words, the things that we really need to know, God reveals to us. He doesn't leave it to us to try and figure it out ourselves. Instead, He tells us what we need to know, most likely because what He has to say is too important to leave us theorizing on our own. In the specific context of Amos's message, the Lord wasn't going to bring these terrible judgments upon the people without Him first warning them, thus giving them an opportunity, if not to avert the judgment, at least then to be prepared for it.

List other examples through history where the Lord has through a prophet, given specific warnings to people in order to spare them from or prepare them for, impending judgments. Though at the time the messages might seem harsh, sharp, even terrible, what do they reveal about God and His love for sinners? (See also 2 Chron. 20:20.)

In the context of God not doing "a thing" without first revealing it to His prophets, how does the life and ministry of Ellen White stand as an example of that promise?

FURTHER STUDY: “The iniquity in Israel during the last half century before the Assyrian captivity was like that of the days of Noah, and of every other age when men have rejected God and have given themselves wholly to evil-doing. The exaltation of nature above the God of nature, the worship of the creature instead of the Creator, has always resulted in the grossest of evils. Thus when the people of Israel, in their worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, paid supreme homage to the forces of nature, they severed their connection with all that is uplifting and ennobling, and fell an easy prey to temptation. With the defenses of the soul broken down, the misguided worshipers had no barrier against sin and yielded themselves to the evil passions of the human heart.”—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 281, 282.

In what ways do humans continue to worship the creature instead of the Creator? What are the natural consequences of these deceptive philosophies?

Read through Amos at one sitting in order to get the overall picture of this prophet's work and message. Scan through the book of Hosea to compare similarities and differences in these prophets' approach to their mission.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Despite the rampant sin and evildoing in the time of Amos, the Lord worked to save these people. No matter how bad they were, it still wasn't too late. Jesus Christ, on the cross, paid the penalty for the sins of those whom Amos warned. Look at Amos in the context of the Cross. What hope does that give us who, perhaps, at this very moment, are struggling with the same sins Amos denounced?
2. Look more at Amos 3:7. Why do you think the Lord gave us this promise? Though it certainly doesn't mean that God will, through His prophets, tell us everything, it suggests that He will tell us what we need to know. Which of “His secrets” has God revealed through His servants the prophets that has been especially meaningful to your life personally?

SUMMARY: Amos, the “burden-bearer,” had a message to share that many people didn't want to hear. Yet, called by God, he shared it anyway. Without earthly credentials, without earthly support, Amos said what needed to be said, no matter how painful and thankless the job.



The Challenge, Part 1

J. H. Zachary

Kesuli Zacari was a devoted Muslim living in Niger, West Africa. Early in his adult life the village recognized his spiritual leadership and made him their *imam* (Muslim spiritual teacher). While still in high school he organized other youth into a group to resist Christianity.

Upon finishing high school he moved to the capital of Niger, where he hoped to win a scholarship to attend the university. He discovered that many Christians lived in this city. He organized other Muslim youth to convert Christians to Islam and stamp out Christian heresy in his homeland by making Christians see that Mohammed was the last true prophet. The young people believed that Allah would reward them for their efforts.

Zacari grew irritated when some Christians told him that one day he would become a Christian. "That will never happen," he responded. "If it ever does happen, let it be the last day of my life!"

Zacari waited several years, and still he had not received the hoped-for scholarship to study. At times he lacked food. One day a friend told him that he had discovered that Christians are kind people. Then he told Zacari about a Protestant missionary he had met. "Let's go talk to her. Maybe she will help us when she knows we are in need. And we can tell her about the errors of Christianity while we are there."

But Zacari hesitated. He knew almost nothing about Christian beliefs. How could he argue against a religion unless he had studied their beliefs and could point out their errors? But his friend urged him to go with him to visit the missionary. As they walked to the missionary's home, Zacari made a surprising request, "Please don't tell the woman that I am a Muslim. Tell her that I want to become a Christian."



(continued next week)

J. H. Zachary is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour and a special consultant for the General Conference Ministerial Association.

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Sabbath School–Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference
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Sins of the Neighbors



Sabbath Afternoon

AMOS WAS A MISSIONARY who traveled from Judah in the south to Bethel in the northern kingdom of Israel in order to relate God's message of condemnation against the Israelites. He delivered strong, plain denunciations against the temple of Jeroboam, against idolatry, and against the Israelites' superficial religion. The casual observer probably would have anticipated the reaction of the priests and rulers: "Go home, Judean! Aren't there enough problems in your own country for you to deal with? Why do you come up here to annoy us?"

Although Amos did not hold back in delivering the message God gave him, he used an interesting and tactful approach. Some commentators suggest that Amos appeared at Bethel during a religious festival and caught the attention of the crowds by attacking vociferously the sins of the surrounding nations. One can almost hear shouts of "You tell them, Amos!" as he listed the sins and the threats of consequent judgment against those pagan places such as Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and even Judah—in that sequence.

The affirmations ceased, however, when he then shifted his attack against their neighbors and aimed it toward them.

How little changes in the world!

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why did Amos begin by warning about the judgments that would fall upon Israel's neighbors? How were the warnings delivered? Why were some sins denounced in some lands and not in others? How can heathen nations be condemned for sin if they don't have the written law? Do different nations face different standards of judgment? This week touches on all these questions—and more.

MEMORY TEXT: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Revelation 3:19).

*(Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 13.)

EXCITEMENT AT BETHEL (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6).

The easiest people to fool are ourselves. While it's not hard to be open, honest, and candid about others, particularly about their faults, it's not so simple when we have to deal with our own. The human capacity for self-deception is amazing. Maybe it's because we're so close to ourselves that it's so difficult to see ourselves for what we are. Whatever the reason, facing ourselves, especially our own sins, is always painful.

Perhaps that's why Amos, in confronting the Israelites, didn't go after them immediately. Instead, he began by naming the sins of the nations around Israel and the judgments that would fall upon them. No doubt the people, even amid their idolatry, listened and appreciated what Amos was saying. They even might have cheered him on in his warnings against the heathen; yet by so doing, they—in the end—condemned themselves.

Look at the story of Nathan confronting David with his sin (2 Samuel 12). What parallel exists between Nathan's approach and Amos's?

Though we aren't given details, one can imagine how the people's enthusiasm for Amos ended once he then began attacking their sins. "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment" (Amos 2:6). With the vigor and simplicity expected of a man of his background, Amos clearly indicted Israel for injustice, cruelty, incest, luxury, and idolatry—even for literally "taking the shirt off a man's back" and keeping it. What made these sins so bad was that there were people who, unlike their neighbors around them, had been given an abundant amount of light and truth.

One of the most stunning and sobering things to read in Scripture regards the depth of apostasy, sin, and degradation that God's people fell into—and their utter blindness in seeing it. It was Thomas Manton who said: "First we practice sin, then defend it, then boast of it." Notice the progression of steps. No doubt, Israel didn't fall into such a terrible state all at once. We rarely do either.

Though Scripture does admonish the church to discipline members who fall into sin, what can today's lesson teach us about how we do it? (See also Matt. 7:3).

THE COVENANT LAWSUIT (Amos 1:3–2:16).

The lengthy poem in these verses denouncing the crimes of the nations bordering Israel, as well as Israel, take the form of covenant-lawsuit addresses. The pattern of the covenant lawsuit in chapters one and two have the following components:

Introduction of plaintiff and judge

Introduction of defendant

Indictment

Judgment

Read over (in the texts for today) some of these messages that Amos delivered to the nations and see how certain phrases are repeated that fit these covenant-lawsuit components.

The use of this structure makes it apparent that God had a covenant with other nations as well as with Israel. The Word of the Lord applies to all people of the world at all times. The Lord had a covenant with all His creation at the beginning and a re-creation covenant with Noah that extended to all people. In Moses' time the Lord made a particular covenant with the Israelites; they, in turn, were to serve as God's priests and mediators of His covenant to the nations. Today, Christ serves as Priest and Mediator of the new covenant to all who accept Him as such, regardless of race or nationality. It is obvious in the first two chapters of Amos that God holds all nations responsible for doing that which they know is wrong.

This idea that God has a "covenant," even with the pagan nations, and that they were responsible for their sins, also has a flip side: If they are to answer for their sins then they also must have a chance to be saved from those same sins. In other words, God isn't going to condemn those who also don't have an opportunity to be spared condemnation. This gets to the heart of the question that, no doubt, most Christians wrestle with: What about those who died without ever hearing the gospel? Read what Paul writes in Romans 1:18-32, especially with the background of Amos in mind. How do these verses help us, even today, regarding this difficult issue? Keep in mind this question, Is God going to condemn anyone whom He hasn't first given, in one way or another, an opportunity to be saved?

DENUNCIATION OF SURROUNDING NATIONS (Amos 1:3-15).

The first three nations on Amos's list of nations that were to be punished by God for their sins were Syria, Philistia, and the Phoenicians (Tyre), nations that existed in the immediate vicinity of Israel. Notice, however, what it is that these nations had done that brought the wrath of God upon them. Damascus (vs. 3) apparently used excessive violence against one of its neighbors, while both Gaza and Tyre were condemned for some sort of slave trade (vss. 6, 9).

What's fascinating is that, in these texts, there is no condemnation against them for idolatry, for worshiping false gods, or for not treating the poor with respect. Instead the condemnation deals exclusively with their abuse of the most basic human rights.

The Bible teaches that through the law sin is known (Rom. 3:20). How, then, could these nations, which were not given the Ten Commandments, be held responsible for their sins? Read what Paul wrote in Romans 2:12-16 for some added insight.

Though only ancient Israel had been given the Ten Commandments, there are numerous examples all through the ancient world that many other nations believed many of the same principles regarding good and evil. Aristotle, for instance (who probably never heard of the Ten Commandments), wrote a book called *Ethics*, in which among the things he deemed evil—besides theft, adultery, and murder—were *envy*, *malice*, and *shamelessness* (sounds like the Sermon on the Mount). The Bible itself gives examples of pagans who, to some degree, understood the basic principles of morality (for example, Gen. 12:10-20). Also, how could God have justly punished Sodom and Gomorrah if the inhabitants hadn't had some knowledge of right and wrong?

Obviously, different nations are going to be judged differently, depending upon their circumstances and the light they had, in one way or another, received. In the end, though, everyone's situation is the same: Each is a sinner who has violated the law of God (whether he or she knows the law or not). Thus, all need Jesus as their Savior. What, ultimately, did Christ accomplish so that all people, no matter where they live or at what time they lived there, have the opportunity to be saved? What happened at the Cross that will ultimately bring many of these people into God's final kingdom?

DENUNCIATION OF ISRAEL'S RELATIVES.

“Because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity” (Amos 1:11, NRSV).

Besides Syria, Gaza, and Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah also came into condemnation, the difference being that these nations were all related to Israel. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau; Ammon and Moab were descendants of Lot from the incestuous plot of his two daughters; and Judah, of course, had once been united to Israel in one nation.

Notice, again, the reasons for their condemnations. Edom “pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity” (vs. 11). Ammon “ripped open the women with child in Gilead” (vs. 13, NKJV). Moab committed some kind of desecration against the king of Edom (2:1).

In contrast to these, read Amos 2:4, 5. List the specific sins for which Judah has been condemned:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

While their neighbors are threatened with punishment because they were ripping open the bellies of pregnant women, selling people into slavery, and threshing people to death with metal instruments, *Judah is going to be punished because she despised God's law, disobeyed the commandments, and followed lies?*

What is going on here? What principle is at work? Why are Judah's sins so “different” from those of her neighbors? Could it have something to do with these words of Jesus, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more”? (Luke 12:48). See also John 19:11.

It's so easy for us to look back upon ancient Israel and judge them for their sins. Yet, in many ways, as Seventh-day Adventists—considering the great light that we have been given—can we be just as guilty, if not more so? Israel, like the church, is only as faithful as its individual members. Thus, we need to ask ourselves, Are we taking advantage, personally, of the great privileges we have been given?

APPEAL TO ISRAEL (Amos 2:6-16).

“Because they sell the righteous for silver” (Amos 2:6, NKJV).

Amos moved in a progression, starting first with the sins of neighbors, then distant relatives, then closer relatives, and finally honing in on Israel itself.

List, in your own words, the sins of Israel outlined in Amos 2:6-8.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Besides perversion of justice (see vs. 6), involving money (as is usually the case), there was oppression of the poor, sexual perversity, and some sort of religious defilement (see, if possible, a Bible commentary on the meaning of vs. 8).

Read again verse 7; notice how it ends. How was the Lord’s holy name defiled by their actions? What principle is involved here?

How could Israel, a nation with so much light, have fallen so deeply? The answer isn’t that hard to find. They had severed themselves from a daily, growing walk with their Creator; thus they began to worship the creature instead of the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Their morals started to decay, because people will rise no higher than the god(s) they serve, and so those worshipping a calf aren’t going to ascend to the heights of moral glory.

Even today the same principle works. People who sever themselves from God end up worshipping some other “creature,” usually themselves. In what ways do we see the fruits of this false worship in society? What can we do to protect ourselves from doing the same thing?

FURTHER STUDY: “From generation to generation the Lord had borne with His wayward children, and even now, in the face of defiant rebellion, He still longed to reveal Himself to them as willing to save. . . .

“The evils that had overspread the land had become incurable; and upon Israel was pronounced the dread sentence: ‘Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.’ Hosea 4:17. . . .

“The ten tribes of Israel were now to reap the fruitage of the apostasy that had taken form with the setting up of the strange altars at Bethel and at Dan.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 285.

Compare this section of Amos with Hosea chapters 4 through 8. What similarities do you find and what differences?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How are God’s mercy and justice combined in the messages of Hosea and Amos?
2. Though the Bible clearly teaches that God brings judgment upon nations for their sins, what inherent dangers exist in attributing every national disaster to God’s wrath?
3. Discuss the great privileges and gifts that we as Adventists have been given. What are they? Why do they contain so many blessings? At the same time, what responsibilities come with them?
4. Both the Old and New Testament utter strong denunciations against the rich who oppress the poor (see for example, Exod. 23:6; Prov. 22:7; Zech. 7:10; James 5:1-7). Why is the theme of economic oppression found in the Bible? How does that relate to us as individuals?
5. Discuss further the idea of how doctrinal and spiritual apostasy lead to moral apostasy. Why is the spiritual and religious so connected with the moral? Can they ever be separated?

SUMMARY: Amos had a stern message to give, but he gave it in a tactful way. By concentrating first on the sins of Israel’s neighbors, he opened the door to warning Israel as well. What Amos implies is that, though all nations shall be judged, they shall be judged differently, depending upon the light they have been given. With privilege comes responsibility—a lesson that we, as Adventists, should never forget.



The Challenge, Part 2

J. H. Zachary

Kesuli Zacari, a Muslim leader in Niger, was determined to convert Christians to Islam. To do so he needed to understand what Christians believe.

A Christian missionary gave Zacari a Gospel of John, but on the way home he tossed the book into the bushes. A few days later, however, he changed his mind. He borrowed another copy from a Christian. As he read it he was impressed by the life of Jesus and how He helped people.

Zacari visited the missionary and asked her many questions about Jesus. He asked her for a New Testament, but the missionary did not give him one. When she was not looking, he stole a copy.

Later his friends saw him reading the New Testament and warned him, "Watch out, or you will become a Christian."

"I am learning what Christians believe so I can convert them to Islam," he told them.

The stories of Jesus touched his heart. He lost interest in his Muslim prayers and stopped going to the mosque. His mind was filled with the scenes of Jesus. Zacari began to understand why Christians are so kind. It is the influence of Christ.

But his mind was in a turmoil. Everything he had learned cried out in favor of Islam, but Christ's love drew him to Christianity. Zacari decided to study Christianity for one month and then decide which religion to follow. He visited the missionary again and plied her with questions. Finally he asked, "How can I become a Christian?"

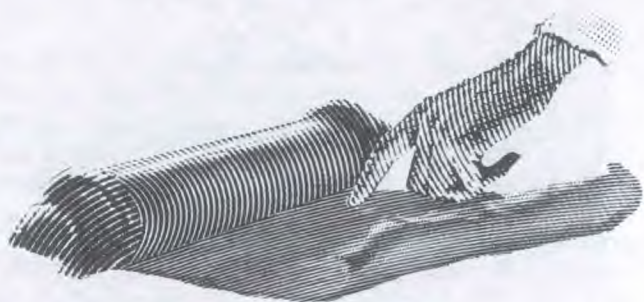
The woman gave him a Bible. Zacari spent hours pouring over the Bible. The month passed. A year passed. Still he continued searching. He discovered Adventist World Radio and wrote to the studio requesting literature. He met the ADRA staff working in Niger. Their influence helped Zacari make his decision. He gave up Islam and became an Adventist Christian.

"God has called me to introduce my Muslim friends and family to Jesus Christ," Zacari says. His parents refused to have anything to do with him when he became a Christian, but now they are showing an interest in Christianity. Pray for them and for the millions living in Niger who need to know the Savior.

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Produced by the Office of Mission
Sabbath School—Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference
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“Hear This Word”



Sabbath Afternoon

AMOS SPEAKS WITH FIRE and clarity about the sins of Israel and the punishments that those sins will bring. Yet he's speaking for the Lord, who in His love and compassion for people wants to save them from the natural consequences of sin as well as the ultimate punishment that a just and holy God must execute against sin. Indeed, behind the fearful denunciations and warnings, the real message to Israel is this: "Seek good, and not evil, that you may live" (Amos 5:14, RSV).

Indeed, God is seeking to turn His people to a saving relationship with Him because, in the end—what else matters? The only thing saved out of this world will be souls bought with the blood of Christ; everything else will be gone, forever. Not even the ashes will remain. No wonder, then, that He bids us to "Hear this Word," and that Word is the Word of Life, the life found in Christ and the blood He shed for the sins of the world.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What event in Israel's history did the Lord point them back to, and why? Why does God want us not to forget our past? How does sin weaken and damage our ability to know right and wrong? Why did Israel violate the covenant that God had established with them? What ultimately did their actions lead to? Though all these things happened many years ago, the lessons taught in them and the principles involved have a bearing on our lives and our church today.

MEMORY TEXT: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

*(Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 20.)

“LEST THEY DEPART FROM THY HEART.”

“Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (Amos 3:1, 2).

In these verses, the Lord pointed Israel back to the Exodus. All through the Hebrew Bible, in fact, the Lord does the same thing. “For I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:45). “And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you” (1 Sam. 10:18).

Why did the Lord constantly remind the Hebrews of the Exodus? (Hint: Read carefully Deuteronomy 4:9.)

One of the greatest dangers facing Christians is that they forget what Christ has done for them, both individually and as a corporate body. That’s why the Lord told the children of Israel not to forget the things that happened to them at the Exodus, not to let them “depart from thy heart” (Deut. 4:9) all the days of their lives. Instead, they were to teach them to their children, so not only would their children know about the great things God had done for them, but that in the telling they themselves would not forget.

The history of ancient Israel shows, however, just how quickly people forget. What a lesson for us as a church! As each new generation comes, we get further and further from our roots, further and further from the experiences of our founding fathers. How important that we don’t let the knowledge of these experiences depart from our hearts, as well.

Leslie joined the Adventist Church many years ago, after a dramatic conversion. As the years went by, however, she started to grow cold. She still believed everything as before but just didn’t manifest the fire of those early years. Then a crisis struck, and she found herself ready to give up her faith entirely. As she prayed the Holy Spirit brought her mind back to her conversion. Day by day she recounted the events that led her to Christ and that brought her to the Church. Soon her faith was strengthened. Though we shouldn’t dwell heavily on the mistakes of the past, how can recounting the ways the Lord has led us in the past help us even now?

“FOR THEY DO NOT KNOW TO DO RIGHT” (Amos 3:10, NKJV).

This part of verse ten is incredible. If it would have said “For they refuse to do right” or “For they can’t do right”—that would have been bad enough. *But it says that they do “not know” to do right.* How could that be? How could those whom the Lord knew “above all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2, NKJV), a people who had been given so much truth—not know to do right?

Look also at Hosea 4:6: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”

The answer is found here: They have rejected knowledge, and the rejection of knowledge must inevitably lead to the lack of knowledge. The point is, no matter how much light is given, if it’s not appreciated, followed, studied, and loved, then sooner or later—it’s lost. And when it’s lost, people will eventually “not know to do right” (NKJV).

This, sadly, is what happened to Israel.

“Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). Study this text in the background of today’s lesson. What principle is taught here?

Lepers who lose fingers or toes don’t lose them directly from the disease; rather, because their nerves have been damaged by the disease they can’t feel pain; and thus they don’t quickly move away from objects that can damage their flesh. Sin does the same thing: it damages our sensibilities toward it, so that before long it doesn’t seem sinful or wrong anymore, even to the point where people can “call evil good, and good evil” (Isa. 5:20).

“Every sinful gratification,” wrote Ellen White, “tends to benumb the faculties and deaden the mental and spiritual perceptions, and the word or the Spirit of God can make but a feeble impression upon the heart.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 474.

None of us is immune to the problems that Israel faced in Amos’s time. Every generation of believers faces the same challenge. This is why the battle against sin, against self, is so crucial. What then can we do as individuals to protect ourselves from falling into the snare of being so hardened in sin that we reach the point that we “do not know to do right”?

A BROKEN COVENANT.

“How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?” (Hos. 11:8).

The plan of salvation, at its core, remains simple: Humanity, through sin, estranged itself from God; God, through Christ, has healed that estrangement. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19).

Sacred history, beginning in Eden, replays the theme, in one manifestation or another, over and over again. Humanity, through their sins and disobedience, severs itself from God; God, ever seeking, tries to bring humankind back under the shadow of His wings (Ps. 17:8).

It’s no different here in Amos; Israel has broken the covenant relationship with God. God has been faithful to His side of the bargain; the people are the ones who haven’t kept up their end of the deal. (See Hos. 6:7; 8:1; Jer. 34:18.)

When Jesus was on the earth, His life and death best exemplified this sad reality. Go through specific aspects of His life, in which Jesus did everything possible to reach those who, despite His overtures, rejected Him. In what ways do we, even today, do the same thing? Examine your own life and see if, in principle, you’re just as guilty.

In the context of today’s lesson, read this quote by German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. . . . When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”—The Cost of Discipleship, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1975), p. 99.

Perhaps the reason why people have been so unfaithful to God and His covenant is that they are afraid to count the cost of following Christ. That’s what happened in Amos’s time; it’s also happening in ours. In your own mind, count the cost of following Christ; then, when done, count the cost of *not* following Him.

THE AHARIT OF ISRAEL (Amos 3:1-8).

Amos 3 begins with God addressing the sins of Israel. Read the first eight verses, which need careful analysis. The casual reader may find it difficult to grasp the significance of this passage. It might be summarized as follows:

⊙ You're my family; you've been given special advantages; therefore it is appropriate that I punish you (Amos 3:1, 2).

⊙ When a lion roars in the forest, it is evident it has found its prey (vs. 4).

⊙ The bird caught in a snare illustrates that Israel set a trap for herself by her sins (vs. 5).

⊙ When a warning sounds, people are afraid (vs. 6).

⊙ God does not send the evil unless He has first revealed His intent through a prophet (vs. 7).

⊙ When God speaks, a prophet has to prophesy (vs. 8).

Although these statements may seem unrelated, they have something in common. They discuss inevitable consequences—natural results.

How does Paul illustrate this law of life in Galatians 6:7?

There's a word in Hebrew called *aharit*. Though related to the Hebrew word for "back" (as in a person's back), it means, literally, "that which comes after; final consequences; ends." Proverbs 19:20 (NKJV) reads: "Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days," or in "your *aharit*" or "your final end."

The point is simple: Our actions have consequences. Sooner or later, we all come to our *aharit*, and what that will be depends so much upon our actions now. In Amos, Israel is simply reaping the fruits of its actions. It has come to its *aharit*. And if there's any action that has undeniable and inescapable consequences, it's sin. The problem, however, is that Satan never wants us to see the *aharit*. His message, instead, is to focus on the pleasures now. By the time the *aharit* comes, it might already be too late.

Though Scripture is clear that we reap what we sow, what example does the Bible give that seems to suggest there are times when not everyone, at least in this life, suffers as a direct result of his or her own sins? Everyone knows people who suffer terribly through no fault of his or her own. What answers, if any, can you give to those in these situations?

JUDGMENT (Amos 3:11-15).

The last phase of God's covenant lawsuit against Israel is the pronouncement of judgment on those who have forsaken the terms of the covenant. Verse 11 describes the "adversary" who will be used by God to destroy Samaria. Undoubtedly it refers to the Assyrians, who later took the Israelites into captivity.

The Shepherd Illustration. To the pastoral people of Israel, an illustration involving sheep would be understood immediately. The shepherd Amos refers to a lion catching a sheep.

How much was left of the sheep when the shepherd finally rescued it from the mouth of the lion? What does this tell us about the number of Israelites who would be rescued eventually from the Assyrian captivity and about their dispersal? Amos 3:12.

It's quite hard from our perspective to understand why there should be such a violent punishment for Israel's transgressions. After all, we're not talking about something like "church discipline" here. The Assyrians could be terribly brutal against those whom they conquered.

Of course, this situation isn't the only time the Lord used outside powers to punish His people (see Isaiah 13). As always, this punishment involved pillaging, rape, death, slavery, and a host of other terrible ills. No doubt, these accounts in the Bible have led many to skepticism about the character of God.

Why did the Lord punish His people in such a manner for their sins? When we remember that Jesus is the Lord (Mic. 5:2; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16, 17) and when we see in the Gospels just how kind, loving, and forgiving Christ is, how do we reconcile the Christ of the Old Testament with the Christ of the New?

Perhaps the answer can be understood best only in the context of the terrible nature of sin. The great controversy involves the entire universe; the issues are of paramount importance. From our human perspective, many things are hard to understand; we see, as Paul said, "through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12). However difficult this question is, one thing it should teach us is just how serious, and deadly, sin is.

How does an understanding that God Himself hung on the cross, punished for the sins of the world, help us better grasp the seriousness of sin and the terrible consequences it brings?

FURTHER STUDY: “The transgressors were given many opportunities to repent. In their hour of deepest apostasy and greatest need, God’s message to them was one of forgiveness and hope. ‘O Israel,’ He declared, ‘thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help. I will be thy King: where is any other that may save thee?’ Hosea 13:9, 10.

“‘Come, and let us return unto the Lord,’ the prophet entreated; ‘for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us: in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.’” Hosea 6:1-3.

“To those who had lost sight of the plan of the ages for the deliverance of sinners ensnared by the power of Satan, the Lord offered restoration and peace. ‘I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely,’ He declared: ‘for Mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under His shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From Me is thy fruit found.’”—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 283, 284.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

In *The Desire of Ages* (p. 756), Ellen White makes a fascinating statement. In the context of Christ dying on the cross, she talks about how in the awful darkness of feeling the separation from God that sin causes, Jesus “had relied upon the evidence of His Father’s acceptance heretofore given Him. . . . By faith He rested in Him whom it had ever been His joy to obey.” In other words, amid the terrible conflict of the moment, Jesus looked back upon the previous experiences with God that showed Him the love, acceptance, and mercy of God. If Jesus had to do that, what about us? Thus, how important not to forget the ways in which God has worked in our lives. No doubt, sooner or later, that knowledge will be useful. Discuss.

SUMMARIZE: Israel forgot about what God had done for them; thus they lost knowledge of His ways. Eventually they broke the covenant relationship with Him, and they reaped the consequences of their actions.



A Simple Prayer of Faith

Selpha Velasco

“If you ask anything according to His will, He will hear you” (1 John 5:14), the children of the mission school in the mountains of Mindanao, southern Philippines, repeated in unison.

During morning and evening worships, the student missionaries emphasized that God’s promises are true. If we trust Him, He will surely answer our prayers.

My term as a student missionary from Mountain View College was ending, and I visited every house in the village to say goodbye to my friends.

The next day 9-year-old Cecile walked with me to Sabangaan, a three-hour hike from our village, and the nearest point where we can get a ride to Mountain View College. The midday sun punished us as we climbed a steep mountain toward the town. We had to rest often in the shade. During one of these rest stops Cecile said, “Teacher, it is hot. Let us pray that the clouds will cover the sun.”

I was touched by the girl’s simple request. Our lessons had taken root in her heart. Then without hesitating she bowed her head and prayed, “Lord, please send the clouds to cover the sun, so that my teacher and I can walk in comfort. Thank You for answering my prayer in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Silently I prayed, *God, please answer Cecile’s prayer and strengthen her faith.*

The sun shown as hot as ever as we resumed our walk. “Teacher,” Cecile asked, “Why did God not answer my prayer?”

I was a bit sad. “Lord,” I whispered, “please answer the little girl’s prayer so that she will trust in You.” Then I asked her, “Do you really believe that your teacher’s God is a true and powerful God—more powerful than any of the gods your parents worship?”

“Yes, Teacher. I believe that God is able to answer prayers.” A cool breeze blew from the stream below. It felt so refreshing!

“Look at the clouds, Teacher!” Cecile shouted. “They are covering the sun!”

Thank You, Lord, for hearing Cecile’s prayer. I breathed.

The clouds continued to shade us until we reached our destination. They strengthened a child’s faith that day. They strengthened her teacher’s faith too.

Selpha Velasco served for two years as a student missionary at Victory Mission School in the mountains of southern Philippines. She has returned to Mountain View College to complete her studies.

Produced by the Office of Mission
Sabbath School–Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference
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Prepare to Meet Thy God



Sabbath Afternoon

THIS WEEK, AMOS ISN'T GOING TO WIN any reward for tact, for subtlety, or courtesy. He starts by scolding the women of Israel—calling them “cows,” the “kine” of Bashan, because they pushed their husbands to oppress others for their own benefit. Bashan was a pastureland east of the Jordan that symbolized the oppressors’ wives grazing on the luxuries they had come to expect. These lovers of material goods would be among the first to be torn away from their luxuries and led captive. (See Amos 4:1-3.)

Five punishments are then outlined as God’s attempt to lead Israel to repentance. But these warnings fail to persuade the people, who refuse to heed the words of the prophet. Because they would not repent, they would have to meet their God and His judgment. Yet it’s not only the unrepentant Israelites who faced and will face that judgment; one day an unrepentant world will, as well.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What sins were specifically mentioned as bringing judgment upon Israel? What is it about God that makes Him unable to tolerate or accept sin? What is repentance, and how did it fit into Israel’s situation? These, and other questions, are looked at this week. As you study, apply the principles and issues to our world today, to our Church, and, most importantly, to ourselves.

MEMORY TEXT: “Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel” (Amos 4:12).

*(Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 27).

THE COWS OF BASHAN (Amos 4:1-3).

“Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink” (Amos 4:1).

Notice the sin that the Lord points out as particularly offensive. These women, unflatteringly referred to as “cows,” have been oppressing the poor. Here, again, as seen throughout Scripture, the Lord speaks explicitly against economic oppression. Exactly what they were doing, the text doesn’t say, though “this may allude to the violence and fraud these extravagant women forced, so to speak, upon their husbands in order to secure means for luxury and debauchery.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 966. Whatever the details, the point is the same: These women have been involved in taking advantage of the poor; more than likely, too, these women did it for their own personal gain. And it’s clear that, unless they seek the Lord, they will face a dire punishment for this sin.

Why are those who oppress the poor singled out for condemnation in the Bible? Why is this sin deemed so bad? (See also Matt. 25:35-40.)

Linked with this idea of oppression is greed and love of money (1 Tim. 6:10). Often, those with a lot of means will use those means to acquire more, even at the expense of those who have little or nothing. This seems to be the case in the book of Amos with these women, who are encouraging their husbands to increase their wealth and luxurious living. Though the Bible certainly isn’t against those who have money, it clearly warns against those who oppress and cheat, especially the poor, in order to get it.

The desire for money or wealth or luxury isn’t just a problem with the rich. Even the poor can make money an idol, something they worship more than God. Whoever we are, whatever our station in this life, if we are Christians, our real treasure should be in heaven. Read Matthew 19:21. What is Jesus talking about here? How could it apply to this particular situation in Amos?

In Mark 4:19, Jesus, in the parable of the sower, used an interesting phrase, “the deceitfulness of riches.” How can riches be deceitful? What was Jesus talking about? Notice the context in which He used it. Though we might not be like the “cows of Bashan,” all of us need to look at our lives and ask ourselves, Just what is our relationship to wealth, or even the desire for wealth? Is it something that we have under control, or is it controlling us?

GOD'S HOLINESS.

"The Lord God has sworn by His holiness" (Amos 4:2, NKJV).

What does it mean that God has "sworn by His holiness" to punish these people? What is it about God's holiness that would bring punishment? Or is there something about His holiness itself that demands punishment?

Obviously, God refuses to accept sin, in any manner. Some have even speculated that He can't (as opposed to won't) accept sin, that His perfectly holy nature couldn't allow it. Others have said that God's holiness makes the punishment of sin inevitable. Whatever that phrase ultimately means, it's clear that God intends to punish those who have committed these terrible sins and who refuse to repent.

What do the following texts tell us about the nature of God?

"Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy" (Isa. 57:15). "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). "I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44). "And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3). "Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the Lord our God is holy" (Ps. 99:9). "Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God" (Josh. 24:19). "Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel" (2 Kings 19:22). "I will also praise thee with the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God: unto thee will I sing with the harp, O thou Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 71:22). "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come" (Rev. 4:8).

God has "sworn by His Holiness" (NKJV) that He would punish Israel for its sins. What does Amos 4:2 say, considering the fearful iniquity that exists in the world today, about impending judgment? Because none of us is innocent, because none of us ourselves has the holiness needed to satisfy a perfectly holy God, the Cross must become the focal point of our lives. In this context, that of a holy God refusing to accept unholiness, explain why the Cross and the Cross alone offers us the only hope to being able to stand before this holy God in judgment.

GOD'S IRONIC CALL (Amos 4:4, 5).

God, through Amos, is using every device possible to catch the Israelites' attention in order to make sure they understand His warnings. In verses 4 and 5 He resorts to irony, calling upon the people to come to Bethel and Gilgal, headquarters for idolatry, in order to show their zeal for their false worship.

What would be the inevitable results of their apostasy? Hos. 9:17.

The prophet Hosea often referred to Ephraim, a leader in apostasy among the tribes of Israel, as a symbol of the apostate nation. Israel is unable to discern the disastrous outcome of its evil course; the ten tribes were soon to be "wanderers among the nations."

"Through the man of God that had appeared before the altar at Bethel, through Elijah and Elisha, through Amos and Hosea, the Lord had repeatedly set before the ten tribes the evils of disobedience. But notwithstanding reproof and entreaty, Israel had sunk lower and still lower in apostasy. 'Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer,' the Lord declared; 'My people are bent to backsliding from Me.' Hosea 4:16; 11:7.

"There were times when the judgments of Heaven fell very heavily on the rebellious people. 'I hewed them by the prophets,' God declared; 'I have slain them by the words of My mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth. For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against Me.' Hosea 6:5-7."
—Prophets and Kings, p. 281.

Focus on that statement made at the end of this Ellen White quote, where the Lord through Hosea says, "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice." What does that mean? What does it say about the real problem with Israel? Was it just that their worship was false, or was it how they treated others? In fact, could one argue that the false worship had a lot to do with how they treated others? At the same time, we should ask ourselves, Can we have correct worship and yet not show mercy?

“YET HAVE YE NOT RETURNED UNTO ME” (Amos 4:6-11).

“Yet have ye not returned unto me” (Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11).

List below the five punishments God warns about in verses 6-11:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

The saddest thing about these verses is not so much the terrible punishments that fall upon Israel but her constant refusal to learn from them. The key phrase appears each time: “Yet have ye not returned unto me.” Thus, what this statement says is that these punishments all had the same purpose, and that was to get Israel to turn away from sin and come back to the Lord.

The word used in all these verses for “return” comes from a common Hebrew word that also means “repentance.” The root *shuv* is the basis for the word *Teshuvah* (literally “return”), commonly understood as “repentance.” In Jewish thinking, *teshuvah* is so fundamental to human life that it was considered one of the seven things that God created even before God created the world. And though Christians don’t take it that far, repentance is a key in the Christian life. In each of these places in Amos where the Lord said, “Yet have ye not returned unto me,” if one replaces the last few words with *teshuvah*, the verses would read, “Yet have ye not repented.”

Look up these verses in the New Testament that talk about repentance: Mark 2:17; Luke 15:7; Acts 20:1, 21; Romans 2:4; Hebrews 6:1; Revelation 3:19; 2:21. In each case, see how the idea of a return to God makes sense in the immediate context. How does this concept of return help us understand repentance?

If the idea of repentance includes the notion of a return to God, how does Christ fit into the equation? In other words, we are sinners, separated from a holy God because of our sin. What was it about Jesus, about His life and death, that paved the way so that we can indeed return to God?

“PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD.”

“I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel” (Amos 4:11, 12).

If Scripture is clear on any teaching, it's clear on this: There will be a judgment. It's hard to imagine how a God who, time and again refers to Himself as just (Deut. 32:4; Isa. 45:21; Jer. 23:5), will not execute judgment at the end of the age. Too much sin, too much iniquity, too much evil has been wrought upon the earth for a God of justice not to, at some point and in some manner, manifest that justice. Indeed, how could a just God be God and not execute His justice?

Israel was told to “prepare to meet” her God (Amos 4:12). Looking at the immediate context of that verse, what was the Lord saying to the nation? Did those words express hope, or was He basically telling them “It's too late, you will reap what you have sown”? If the latter, what does it say about there being a point where God Himself says, “Enough is enough”? (See also Dan. 12:1; Rev. 22:11.)

However much God, through Christ, has revealed His saving love to us; however much Heaven has expended to bring salvation to humanity—God never forces the will. People are given free choice regarding the most crucial decision of their lives: Will they or will they not serve God with faithfulness, repentance, and obedience? All other choices fade into insignificance in contrast to this one. And sooner or later our choices are sealed forever. This is what's known in Adventist vernacular as “the close of probation.”

One of the greatest mysteries in Scripture deals with the mercy and justice of a merciful and just God. Though we don't know the details, we do know that God will, with mercy and justice, execute judgment at the end of the age. This is both an assurance to us and also a warning. How can God be both just and merciful at the same time? What can we learn, today, thousands of years removed from these events in Amos, that can help us not make the same mistakes as Israel?

FURTHER STUDY: Read the following, noting how Israel's close of probation is related to the final close of probation: "The closing years of the ill-fated kingdom of Israel were marked with violence and bloodshed such as had never been witnessed even in the worst periods of strife and unrest under the house of Ahab. For two centuries and more the rulers of the ten tribes had been sowing the wind; now they were reaping the whirlwind. King after king was assassinated to make way for others ambitious to rule. . . . Every principle of justice was set aside; those who should have stood before the nations of earth as the depositaries of divine grace, 'dealt treacherously against the Lord' and with one another."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 279.

Only Two Classes. "The scene transacted in Jerusalem at the betrayal and rejection of Christ represents the scene which will take place in the future history of the world, when Christ is finally rejected. The religious world will take sides with the first great rebel, and will reject the message of mercy in regard to the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. . . ."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 93 (22, 23 . . . A Representative Scene). "God has a controversy with the world and with the professed Christians who accept the fallacies of the great apostate, who are prepared to suit every class in the Christian world, and who discard the law of God."—*Manuscript 40*, 1897.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why does Scripture talk about the love of money as the root of all evil? What is it about money that makes it such a potential danger? How can tithing help with that problem? Or even Sabbath keeping?
2. Discuss further this idea of God's holiness. What exactly does it mean to say that God is holy; what does it mean to say that people are holy or that a day is holy? In what way is God's holiness different from a human being's, or a human being's holiness from a day's holiness? How are they similar?
3. What is true repentance? How do we acquire it? What does 2 Corinthians 7:10 mean? Look at Judas's "repentance" (Matt. 27:3-8). Why wasn't it accepted?

SUMMARY: Through the prophets, Israel had been amply warned to "return to God." She refused. Judgment came. It's that simple.



The Accident

Charlotte Ishkanian

Johannes Boethe relaxed as he drove toward his home in South Africa. He had a good job, a nice home, everything he wanted. His future looked glorious.

Suddenly a minibus turned into his lane and hit his car, sending it careening off the road. The minibus hit another vehicle before rolling into a ditch. Johannes was found unconscious but alive. Some people in the minibus were not so lucky. The bus driver had fled.

Johannes awoke in the hospital with extensive injuries to his neck and back, a broken leg, and several broken ribs. Marius, the man from the other car the bus had hit, visited Johannes in the hospital, but he was in too much pain to talk.

Johannes remained hospitalized for two months. The police blamed him for the accident. He lost his job; he had to sell his house and move into a small apartment. Johannes spent much of the next year in the hospital. His family struggled to survive on his meager disability pension. Life looked grim.

Johannes had a lot of time to think while he lay in bed. One day he found a Bible and began reading it. He saw how far he had wandered from God and began searching for the way back.

A friend invited the couple to some religious seminars. Johannes went, and before the meetings ended, he gave his life to Christ and decided to become an Adventist. But his wife was not so sure.

One evening a man walked up to Johannes and introduced himself as Marius, the man who had been involved in the minibus accident. Marius assured Johannes that he could prove that the minibus driver had caused the accident, and for the first time in three years Johannes felt a flicker of hope.

Meanwhile, Johannes's wife saw the changes in her husband's life. He had stopped drinking and smoking and no longer seemed depressed. She began to attend church with him and has since been baptized.

"You could say that Marius and I met by accident," Johannes says. "But God brought us together as friends and brothers."



Marius (left) and Johannes. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.

“Seek the Lord”



Sabbath Afternoon

ALL MEN BY NATURE,” WROTE ARISTOTLE, “DE-SIRE TO KNOW.” The crucial question is, “Know what?” There’s a lot of information in the world today, even a lot of knowledge.

But do we know the things that really matter? Do we have knowledge of what’s lasting and eternal; or is our knowledge only of the temporal, the transient, that which, in the span of things, lasts not much longer than the shape of a cloud winging overhead on a windy day?

This week’s lesson deals with, at least in part, God’s call to us to seek and learn, not of the temporal and the fleeting but of the eternal, that which not only lasts forever but has the power to make us last forever, as well (John 17:3).

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Israel is called to seek the Lord and live. Why is there life only in God? What does His role as Creator have to do with the call to live in Him? How does Israel respond to His pleas? What were some of the sins that God addressed? Why were they deemed so bad? What promises existed here that judgment would be done? How was it that even amid their rebellion the Israelites still thought they were in special favor with God? What did Amos mean when he told them to “hate the evil, and love the good”?

MEMORY TEXT: “Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken” (Amos 5:14).

*(Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 3.)

SEEK ME AND LIVE (Amos 5:1-4).

“Seek . . . me, and . . . live” (Amos 5:4).

In many ways, these few words capture the essence of God’s message to the world. Seek Him and live; for there is, ultimately, no life in anything or anyone else.

What do all these verses have in common?

1. John 14:6 _____
2. Col. 3:4 _____
3. 2 Tim. 1:1 _____
4. 1 John 5:11, 12 _____

“In Jesus is our life derived. In Him is life, that is original, unborrowed, underived life. In us there is a streamlet from the fountain of life. In Him is the fountain of life. Our life is something that we receive, something that the Giver takes back again to Himself.”—Medical Ministry, p. 7.

In the end, we are offered only two choices: life or death. The fate of all humanity can be divided into two classes: those who will live forever and those who will be forever dead. There is no middle ground here, no chance of compromise, no balance of opposites. Everyone, no matter who they are, where they have lived, what the circumstances of their existence were, will come to one of these two conclusions.

But because life, eternal life, is found only in God through Christ—the Lord from Eden has been beckoning us to choose Him, to “seek the Lord, and . . . live” (Amos 5:6); for there is no option of life anywhere else.

Think about this idea that life exists only in God. What does that mean? After all, there are many people who, openly rejecting God, still live. Perhaps Jesus’ words to a man who asked to first bury his father (“But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead” [Matt. 8:22]), can shed light on this idea. What did Jesus mean by that, and how does it apply to the concept of life existing only in Him?

THE MAKER OF THE PLEIADES.

“Seek him that maketh the seven stars [the Pleiades] and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The Lord is his name” (Amos 5:8).

In Amos’s passionate appeal to Israel to turn back and “seek the Lord” (vs. 6), he here points to the Lord in His role as Creator, the One who “made the Pleiades,” the One who “calls for the waters of the sea” (vs. 8, NKJV). All through the Bible, the Hebrew prophets would talk about the Lord as Creator, often in the context of trying to turn the people away from their idolatry and worship of the creation as opposed to the Creator Himself. (See Isa. 37:16; 40:28; 44:24.) In fact, from Genesis through Revelation, the Bible is clear about our origins: “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3, NKJV).

In the context, then, of yesterday’s lesson, that of life existing only in God, why does God’s role as the Creator become so important? How are the two ideas, that of life existing only in God and God as Creator, tied together?

Life exists only in God because only God is the Creator. He created life; life comes only from Him. Thus, when humankind separated itself through sin from the Creator, the race itself was alienated from its only source of life. “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph. 4:18).

The essence of the gospel, the essence of salvation, then, comes down to humankind being reconnected with the Creator, the One who gave them life to begin with. That’s why anything else we worship other than God is false worship. Only in Him, the Creator, do we have life. This seems to be implicit in the words of Amos here, where he points them to the fact that God is the Creator.

Given the context of today’s and yesterday’s lesson, why does the Sabbath play such an important role in our walk with God? What does the Sabbath signify that would help us not to forget where our life comes from and thus help protect us from the kind of false worship, idolatry, and sin that brought such ruin upon Israel?

CALL TO REPENTANCE (Hos. 10:12, 13).

God strongly urged on the apostate nation the benefits of seeking Him. "Seek ye me," the Lord invited, promising that if they returned they would live. The judgment could be averted if they would accept God's terms instead of insisting on their own.

What was the response of most of the people to God's plea for repentance?

What three items are involved in God's call to repentance? Hos. 10:12.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Here, again, amid all the evil, the idolatry, the violence, the repression, God was still giving His people the opportunity to repent, to turn back to Him.

Notice, too, that God isn't just asking for them to believe in Him; this wasn't just some request for a little verbal honor or adoration. He is demanding concrete action as well. What does He ask them to do? The verse, "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy" (NKJV) seems to indicate that how they treat others is one of their biggest problems. In other words, it wasn't just religious forms the Lord was interested in. Here in Hosea (as in Amos) the appeal to the nation concerned their relationship with others.

Maxwell had been a "good" Adventist all his life: never smoked, never drank, never played cards, nor ever committed adultery. He was a faithful tithe payer, a deacon, and someone who was always involved in church projects. Yet, at home, he was a tyrant. Cold, demanding, unforgiving, bullying, he showed little or no grace to his wife or children. Though not physically abusive, his words, his body language, his whole demeanor left his family cowering before him. Though the few people who knew about the problem tried to talk to him, Maxwell didn't listen because, after all, by not smoking or drinking or playing cards, he was still a "good" Adventist. What lesson can we learn from the story about Maxwell, particularly in the context of today's lesson?

**“FOR I KNOW YOUR MANIFOLD TRANSGRESSIONS”
(Amos 5:10-13).**

Amos moved from rebuking their false worship and lack of mercy to a critique of social injustices found in Israel. Nearly all of Amos is written in poetic form, interesting in light of the prophet’s humble background. In chapter 5, verse 10, he uses a poetic structure that is known as “chiastic.” In this case, the order of thoughts could be expressed like this: A, B, B, A. This structure, which gives added power and elegance to the point being made, is not evident in most English Bibles, but in the Hebrew Bible the structure is as follows:

A
They hate

B’
and the one who speaks truth

B
the one who reproves
in the gate

A’
they abhor

Amos is talking about the people’s attitude toward a judge who reproved wrong and attempted to uphold the truth. The judges held court in the gate area of the Israelite cities where they would be accessible to all who needed their services.

In verses 11 and 12, Amos again attacks them because of how they treat the poor. The Lord calls these offenses “your mighty sins” (NKJV). Sin is bad enough, but to label their transgressions as “*mighty* sins”?—no wonder the Lord says, “It is an evil time!” (Amos 5:13).

What ultimately do these verses say will be the punishment that will come upon Israel for these sins?

There’s so much injustice in the world. All around us, in every country, we see examples similar to what Amos refers to here. Perhaps even in the church itself, some of these same principles of iniquity exist. And though we cry out in our hearts for justice, for equity, for things to be made right, often it doesn’t happen, at least not now. Amos doesn’t promise that bad things and injustice will *not* happen—only that one day they will be avenged.

How should the promise that justice will, ultimately, come, help us deal with the evils that exist around us now? Does it mean we should ignore them, because in the end God will bring justice? On the other hand, what danger is there of us attempting to do what, in the end, only God should do? How do we strike a balance?

HATE EVIL, LOVE GOOD (Amos 5:14, 15).

The people of Israel are told to “seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the Lord God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken” (vs. 14, NKJV). What is Amos saying here? Could it be that these people—so blinded in their sin, their iniquity, and so adamantly opposed to the message of mercy sent to them—nevertheless still think that “the Lord God of hosts” was with them? (vs. 15).

After all, they were children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were the inheritors of the law, the promises, and the covenant at Sinai. After all, they were the followers of the true God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. They were not to be like the pagans around them.

What principle found in verse 14 could be applicable to our church today? See also Micah 3:11.

God was telling these people that they need to not only seek good and not evil but to hate evil and love the good. Of course, we can do that only if we know the distinction between good and evil, not always easy to do, especially for those consciences that have been hardened in sin. It was Frenchman Jean Jacques Rousseau who once wrote: “Conscience! Conscience! Divine Instinct, immortal voice from heaven. Immortal guide for a creature ignorant and finite indeed.”

What problems exist with Rousseau’s words? Why is our conscience, though helpful, not the only guide we can use? What, in the end, can be our only true guide for knowing the difference between good and evil? See Isa. 8:20.

Once we come to understand the difference between good and evil, we need to learn to love the one and hate the other. Obviously, only the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives can do that for us. (See John 16:13.) It’s interesting, too, that we are told not only to love the good but to hate the evil. Is it possible to love the good and not hate the evil? Can a person truly love God and not hate sin?

What practical steps can a person take in his or her life toward fulfilling this idea of hating evil and loving good? In what ways are we making decisions every day—perhaps by what we watch, read, think, or talk about—that, even in subtle ways, are either moving us closer or further away from this crucial principle?

FURTHER STUDY: The Last-Day Remnant Church. “God has a church on earth who are lifting up the downtrodden law, and presenting to the world the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. . . .

“There is but one church in the world who are at the present time standing in the breach, and making up the hedge, building up the old waste places. . . .

“Let all be careful not to make an outcry against the only people who are fulfilling the description given of the remnant people who keep the commandments of God and have faith in Jesus. . . .

“God has a distinct people, a church on earth, second to none, but superior to all in their facilities to teach the truth, to vindicate the law of God. . . . If you are teaching that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is Babylon, you are wrong.”—*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 50, 58, 59.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read Hosea 11:1-8. In the context of this week's lesson, what do these verses tell us about God's love for those He rebukes?
2. Study the last part of Amos 5:15, the part about the “remnant of Joseph.” Could it be that the remnant might not be granted God's graciousness? In other words, just because these people were called “the remnant” didn't guarantee that they were not going to face condemnation. Discuss what these words could mean for God's remnant church today.
3. How does one understand God's words that he or she should “seek good, and not evil” (Amos 5:14), with the prohibition in Genesis 2:17 about Adam and Eve staying away from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”?
4. How do you deal with a person who says that his or her conscience is one's only guide? How can you show him or her the danger in that principle?

SUMMARY: Those who would live need to be connected with the Source of life. That Source, God, is also the Creator. God called Israel to repent, to turn to Him and live, and to forsake their sins, which involved repression of others. Though injustice filled the land, the Lord promised in His righteousness to bring justice. The only hope for those living there was to love the good and hate the evil. Is it any different today?



Buying Bottles for Christ

J. H. Zachary

Freddy Wondal is an outstanding layworker for Christ in Manado, Indonesia. The Lord has used him to win more than 700 people to Christ and raise up six new congregations. But Freddy had a burden for a village that has steadfastly resisted the message of Christ.

Freddy prayed that God would give him this town of 4,000 and raise up a church. He needed a way to visit the people without arousing their prejudice. God gave him the idea to buy old glass bottles. Freddy tossed a rice sack over his shoulder, hiked to the village, and began knocking on doors. "Do you have any old glass bottles to sell?" he asked. It seemed everyone in town was eager to turn their old bottles into cash.

The villagers are getting to know him, and whenever the opportunity comes, he shares a word for Christ. To those addicted to tobacco he tells how he was a heavy smoker until God helped him stop. "And God can help you stop smoking too," he adds. Freddy knows that it will take time to build friendships before he can start giving Bible studies. But he is patient.

Freddy's church provides a small stipend to work in the village, and an Adventist who lives in Jakarta owns a small farm near the village. He has hired Freddy to live on his farm and care for his livestock, which allows Freddy to live near the village he serves.

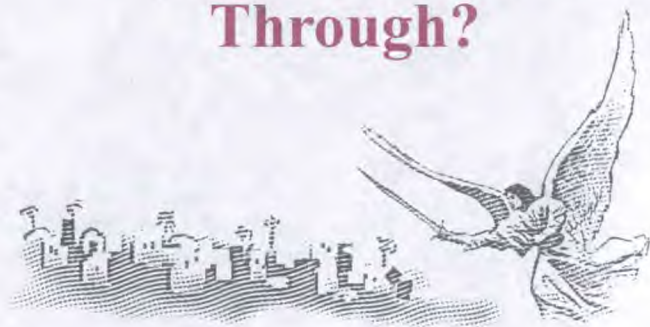
One day a villager asked Freddy, "Are you a Seventh-day Adventist?" Freddy was concerned that the wrong reply might compromise his work. Then the man said, "I attended the Adventist college near Manado. I would like to be baptized, and when you are ready to build a church here, I will give you the land." Freddy never doubted that God would have a church in this village, but he was amazed that God has already provided the land.



Freddy Wondal (left) is a layworker in Indonesia. J. H. Zachary is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour and a special consultant for the General Conference Ministerial Association.

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Pass Over or Pass Through?



Sabbath Afternoon

IF ANY MAN WILL COME AFTER ME, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:24-26).

This idea, though expressed with different images, in a different context, in different circumstances, is Amos's message to his contemporaries, and to us. And he delivers it with his usual powerful and blunt words. No doubt, when he's done, no one could say that he or she didn't know what the issues were or what was at stake.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Amos used imagery from the Exodus in delivering his message. Why? What parallels existed between the Exodus and Amos's time? God would either pass over Israel or pass through it. What does that mean, and what is the difference between the two? Amos talks about "the day of the Lord" (5:18). Will this be a time of rejoicing or a time of terrible sorrow? Why did the Lord despise His people's sacrifices, their music, and their "sacred assemblies"? What was so wrong with their worship that He openly rejected it?

MEMORY TEXT: "The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him" (Amos 5:18, 19).

*(Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 10).

PASS OVER OR PASS THROUGH? (Amos 5:17; Exod. 12:12).

One of the most fascinating warnings in Amos is found in chapter five, verse 17, where the Lord says to the Israelites, “I will pass through you” (NKJV). This reference no Israelite would have a problem understanding, for it uses the same expression found in Exodus 12:12, where God speaks of “passing through” Egypt in judgment. Thus, in a sense, the Lord is telling the Israelites that what He did to Egypt, He will do to them.

Read Exodus 12:12, 13. What parallels exist between the attitude of the Egyptians and the attitude of the Israelites that made this reference to Egypt appropriate?

In the Exodus story, the only thing that saved the Hebrews from the fate of the Egyptians was—the blood: “And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt” (Exod. 12:13).

The verb for “pass over” you, *pesach* (the Hebrew word from which *Passover* is derived) is totally different from the verb “pass through” used in Exodus 12:12 and in Amos 5:17. Both verbs are talking about two different things. What a difference a single preposition makes (at least in the English translation!). In one case, it leads to destruction; in another, it leads to divine deliverance.

The difference between life and death in the Exodus story was the blood. Which verses in the New Testament teach us what that blood meant and why there was deliverance in it and it alone? (See, for example, Heb. 9:22; 1 John 1:7; Rev. 7:14.)

Today, of course, the Lord doesn’t ask us to put blood on the doorposts of our homes to avert the “destroyer” (Exod. 12:23). Nevertheless, in the end, the issues at stake are just as real, just as consequential, as they were in Egypt or in Amos’s time. Considering the nature of the great controversy between good and evil, sooner or later, in one way or another, divine retribution for our sins will either “pass through” our midst or “pass over” us.

What makes the crucial difference?

As in the time of the Exodus, the time of Amos, and our time, the decisive factor is the blood.

What do we, personally, do with the blood?

THE DAY OF THE LORD (Amos 5:18-20).

“Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light” (Amos 5:18).

Look at the irony in verse 18. The Israelites were actually so blinded by their sin and self-deception that they thought “the day of the Lord” was going to be something good, which is why they desired it. However, the Lord warns that it will be a day of darkness and not light, a day when a man will flee from a lion only to be overtaken by a bear (vs. 19). In short, it will not be a pleasant happening, at least not for some.

Look at these other references to the “day of the Lord” in the Bible. What do they all have in common?

Joel 2:31, 32 _____

Obad. 1:15-17 _____

Zeph. 1:7, 8 _____

Acts 2:20, 21 _____

These texts all indicate that the day of the Lord will be a time of destruction, judgment, and punishment. Yet, at the same time, Christians often understand “the day of the Lord” as something good, for it’s the time when Christ returns, and if that is not good, nothing is.

The answer to this paradox, however, is simple. The day of the Lord, for some, will indeed be a terrible time; for others, it will be a time of deliverance and salvation. What makes the crucial difference can be found in some of the above texts.

Go through those texts listed above. Where do you see the hope that people can have on the “day of the Lord”? For example, look at Zephaniah 1:7, 8. Notice how the text talks about a sacrifice. Who does that represent? It talks about guests invited to a dinner. What dinner could that be? (see Matt. 22:1-12). It talks about strange apparel. What does that mean? The point is that in most of these verses, despite the warnings—there is hope. Where does that hope come from, what is it centered upon, and most importantly, how do we get it?

EMPTY RITUALS (Amos 5:21-23).

“I learned to fear the Pharisee more than the sinner.”

—South African writer Laurens van der Post.

All through the Bible, the Lord constantly rebuked Israel for false worship, for worshiping idols, for following after strange gods. How incredible then, that in Amos 5, He speaks against their feast days and “sacred assemblies”—feasts and sacred days that He Himself had instituted. What’s going on?

Why did God despise Israel’s feast days? Why did He tell them to take away their music? Why did He not regard their sacrifices?

Israelites for the most part observed the traditional rituals but chose to ignore their meaning. These outward expressions accentuated their hypocrisy. For instance, the peace offerings were an expression of gratitude, good will, and brotherhood and had no real meaning if the people did not have or share these qualities. Even the insincere use of music in the temple made an offensive sound in the ears of God.

The message here is clear: Religious forms and rituals, if not accompanied by an inner renewal, if not accompanied by hearts broken and surrendered to God, are not only meaningless but an offense to Him. In fact, they can be very dangerous, as well, for those who think that simply because they are following a few religious rites and observances they are holy and God’s chosen people and thus can do no wrong.

How do the following words given through other prophets add to our understanding of what God was saying about Israel’s vain forms of worship?

Isa. 1:11-15 _____

Hos. 8:13 _____

Mal. 1:6-8 _____

The spiritual lesson from these verses is obvious. At the same time, if we had to be perfect, or sinless, before we worshiped God, our churches would be almost empty on Sabbath. (The only ones there, probably, would be those whose worship is the type condemned in the above verses.) What’s the difference between those sinners whose worship is not acceptable and those whose worship is like a “sweet smell”? (Phil. 4:18).

WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE?

“Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream” (Amos 5:24).

How stunning, how clear, how unequivocal are the words here. God is more interested in how we treat others, how we help the oppressed, and how fair we are in our dealings than He is in our religious rituals and forms. He wants righteousness—not a little, not a spray, not a sprinkle, not even a rivulet; He wants righteousness, instead, like a mighty river.

Where alone does this righteousness come from? And, secondly, how do we get it for ourselves?

“Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic. 6:7, 8).

In the context of today’s lesson, read Matthew 7:22. What is Jesus saying there that relates to the above verses?

It’s one of the easiest things in the world to be religious. Everyone, from mafia individuals to corrupt politicians, can be religious. It’s one of the more difficult things, however, to be loving, giving, humble, and merciful. Fallen human nature is, at its essence, selfish, corrupt, egocentric; and all the religion (even the correct religion), all the religious forms (even the correct forms), all the outward trappings (even the correct trappings), even “burnt offerings” (Amos 5:22), “fattened peace offerings” (vs. 23, NKJV), and “thousands of rams” (Mic. 6:7) are never going to change character for the good. Only a heart surrendered in faith and obedience to God can be changed into one that is pleasing to Him.

Why is dwelling upon Jesus, upon His life, His character, His sacrifice, the best means of changing us into that which He wants us to be? Imagine if we spent some time every day dwelling upon some aspect of Jesus and His life. How could that change us where it matters? Imagine what a difference it would make in our homes, in our witness, and in our own personal relationship with God.

“THE STAR OF YOUR GODS” (Amos 5:26).

“Ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the Lord, whose name is The God of hosts” (Amos 5:26, 27).

However obscure (scholars aren’t sure of whom or what “Chiun” is), in many ways Amos 5:26 details the great problem with Israel, and with the world in general, and that is idolatry—the worship of anything and everything except the only One who can save us.

Idolatry (and you don’t need stone statues to be an idolater) is so prevalent because everywhere people are seeking answers; they want hope. They covet salvation, even if they’re not sure what that means but know only that they need to be saved. There’s something about humans that cries out for permanence, for meaning, for stability; yet all around us, in every way, instability, impermanence, and meaninglessness surround us. If nothing else, the Second Law of Thermodynamics alone teaches that everything is heading for decay, and if that’s the final end, what can it all mean?

“Either there is some support for our being,” wrote Richard Bernstein, “a fixed foundation for our knowledge, or we cannot escape the forces of darkness that envelop us. . . .”—Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (University of Penn. Press, 1983), p. 18.

Thus, everywhere and in every way, people are looking for answers. They find something that seems to provide those answers, that is what they worship. That becomes their god.

What are some of the things people make into idols?

In Amos, the Lord is giving Israel a choice, a choice between a “fixed foundation for knowledge,” the knowledge of Himself as Creator and Redeemer, “or the forces of darkness”; in this specific case, the Assyrians. We, today, whatever our situation might be, are all faced with the same basic choices. We will worship the Lord God alone, or we will be worshiping idols because, in the end, we always worship something. Examine yourself and ask this pertinent question (remembering that idols don’t have to be made of wood or stone)—Is there anything in my life that, if I don’t give it up, will lead me into my own personal Assyrian captivity?

FURTHER STUDY: “There has been very little deep piety and wholeness to God. When the spirit of Christ takes possession of the heart, then there is a missionary for God. The most grievous sin of idolatry exists in the church. And he who interposes between the professed Christian and his wholehearted service to God, takes the form of an idol, and the most grievous sin of idolatry is idolatry itself.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 12, p. 330.

“The last great day will be a triumph of law. The Lord is preparing for His last great work, and He will rise out of His place to punish the world for her iniquity. Then the earth will disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain. Who will prepare to hold up a light amid the moral darkness that exists in our world[?]. The wretchedness that has been accumulating for ages and that is degrading humanity, is not sensed as it should be. ‘Thou shalt have no other gods before me’ is the command of God. Idolatry exists in the church-goers today as verily as in the days of Noah. But when His commands are obeyed, the human family will be elevated, ennobled, and exalted.”—Ellen White, *The Kress Collection*, p. 49.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. We tend to think of idols as always something bad in and of themselves; yet that’s not always the case. Wood and stone statues are not in and of themselves bad. In other words, idols can be something that, in and of themselves, are not evil. Instead, what makes them evil is how we relate to them. Discuss this notion. Can someone have something that’s an idol to him or her that another person has also, which doesn’t pose the same spiritual threat?
2. In the context of Wednesday’s lesson, where the Lord wanted “righteousness as a mighty stream,” how are we to understand “righteousness” here? In other words, is this a righteousness merely credited to us by faith, or is it something that we actually do? Or both? Explain.
3. Look up all the references to the “day of the Lord” found in the Bible. What other insights do these texts give regarding this special time?

SUMMARY: As in previous lessons, the Lord’s message to Israel here is the same: *I am a God of judgment, but also a God of forgiveness. I will punish you for your sins and iniquities, or I will forgive you for them. The choice is yours.*



Boxing Champion Seeks Ultimate Prize

C. Pheirim

Shomen (SHOW-men) was the Indian national boxing champion. He had won numerous championships and had medals to prove it. He was used to winning. Yet in one area of his life he felt frustrated. "Lord, show me the true church," Shomen prayed. "Lead me to a church that follows all of the Bible."

Raised an unbeliever, Shomen had become a Christian several years earlier. But he was not satisfied. He lives in a region of India where there are many Christians, so he had ample opportunities to attend evangelistic meetings sponsored by many different churches. But after attending the meetings, he would shake his head and tell his wife, "This is not God's true church."

Then in April 1999 Shomen saw posters for another evangelistic series featuring a pastor he had not heard of before. Perhaps this pastor would be the answer to his prayer.

Shomen and his wife decided to attend the meetings every evening, in spite of the fact that the meetings began at an awkward time for him to get away from his government job. But he was determined to be there.

More than 800 men and women crowded into a building that seated only 700. Every evening Shomen hurried to the meeting to get a good seat. He did not want to miss one of the Bible lectures.

One day he visited the pastor in his hotel room. "Pastor, I have heard many great preachers, but never was I satisfied with their messages. But I believe that finally I have found someone who preaches the Bible message, not man's message. I have been searching for the truth, and I know that God has led me to your meetings, for here I have found His true church. My wife and I want to be baptized."



Shomen and his wife were among 38 people who were baptized at the end of the evangelistic meetings. "The prize that I have found in God's Word is more valuable to me than any of my medals," says Shomen.

Shomen, left. C. Pheirim is president of the Northeast India Union, located in Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

Produced by the Office of Mission
Sabbath School–Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference
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THE CHALLENGE

Church membership in the Central American Union is growing at a record pace. New congregations are springing up everywhere thanks to the efforts of active lay men and women. Poverty-stricken congregations cannot build chapels fast enough to accommodate the growth. Often a family can afford to buy only a block or two at a time.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help provide 50 chapels for existing congregations in Guatemala and a lay training Bible institute in Honduras.

Read *Mission* to learn how God is changing lives in Central America.

“At Ease in Zion”



Sabbath Afternoon

PHYSICISTS BELIEVE FOUR MAJOR FORCES exist in the universe: gravity, electromagnetism, the weak nuclear force, and the strong nuclear force. They're hoping one day to formulate a theory that can explain all four as different aspects of one grand, unifying, and overarching universal force.

Maybe they'll find it, maybe not; but if they do, they're going to be surprised at what it is, for the one force that explains the universe is, simply, love—God's love. Jesus Christ, by dying on the cross for the sins of a fallen, ungrateful, most unsympathetic world, has forever and irrevocably proven that the greatest power in the universe is God's love.

As you study this week's lesson, see the various ways in which, in this specific context, this love is expressed, especially on the lesson that deals with, ironically enough, what God "hates." Can a God of love hate? Of course, in fact, the hate stems directly from His love.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What does it mean to be "at ease in Zion"? What parallels exist between the situation in Israel at this time and with the Laodicean church? What does it mean when the Bible says that a God of love "hates" something? What role does guilt have to play, both for good and for bad, in our walk with the Lord? What fate awaited Israel because of her refusal to repent?

MEMORY TEXT: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Revelation 3:19).

*(Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 17.)

THE GOOD LIFE.

“Woe to you who are at ease in Zion” (Amos 6:1, NKJV).

Amos 6 begins with a description of a people living *the good life*. They are physically comfortable, lying in “beds of ivory,” stretched out on their couches, feasting on the meat of their flocks, making “musical instruments like David,” (NKJV) and anointing themselves “with the best oil” (vss. 4-6).

Not a bad life, at least for the moment.

“Their luxury and revelry are revealed in their lying on ivory inlaid beds, lolling on couches, banqueting on the best of fatted lambs and calves, having their depraved spirits lulled and soothed by lascivious songs and music, drinking their wine from large sacrificial bowls, and anointing themselves with the choicest of fine oils. But their debauched spirits were ‘not grieved for the affliction of Joseph,’ the poor of their brethren. The coming ruin of the nation, as it was being heralded by the rising power of the conquering Assyrians and by the warnings of Amos, struck no responsive chord in their hearts that were satiated by revelry and carousing.”—H. Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1972), p. 114.

Read Ezekiel 16:49. What parallels exist between Sodom and the situation Amos is addressing?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

In Matthew 19:24, Jesus said, “And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” Notice the context in which Jesus says those words that dealt with the rich young ruler, someone Jesus has been trying to witness to. The same principle is here in Amos: God is trying to witness, warn, and save a people who, from outward appearances, have it good. No wonder they were so hard to reach.

Cigarettes often have warnings written on the packets that contain them. If you were to write a warning outside a package that contained wealth, how might you phrase it?

AT EASE IN LAODICEA (Rev. 3:14-20).

“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17).

It would be natural to find some parallels between the church in Amos’s time and the Laodicean church. Read carefully the message to Laodicea and then compare it with the message of Amos in the first six verses of chapter 6. Parallels do exist, if not exact.

What do the two messages have in common? What do they have that distinguishes them? Are they dealing with the same problems? If so, what are they?

Perhaps the biggest difference between the two messages is that Amos seems to be dwelling mostly on the immediate physical situation of the people, their economic wealth and material prosperity. The message to the Laodiceans, however, seems to be dealing not so much with the physical aspect of the church (after all, not everyone in Laodicea is wealthy) but with their *spiritual* condition. Money doesn’t appear to be the main issue for Laodicea. The Laodiceans think that their spiritual condition is fine. As shown in previous lessons, the Israelites had that problem as well. No doubt, however, for the Israelites, their wealth contributed to their spiritual decline.

Look at Revelation 3:19. What parallels can be drawn between what the Lord is telling the Laodiceans in this verse and what He has been telling the Israelites through Amos?

The Adventist Church exists in nations all over the world; we have some very wealthy Adventists, and we have some very poor ones. Rich or poor, however, we are all equal in value before God, because He paid the same price to redeem us all. The soul of a rich person doesn’t cost any more to redeem than the soul of a poor one. Both come at a very heavy cost (1 Pet. 1:18, 19).

Whether we’re rich or poor financially, the Laodicean message has something to tell us as a church today, but more importantly, it’s also talking to us as individuals. Read the message again and, instead of looking at everyone else—the pastor, the elders, fellow members—see in what way it applies to yourself. But don’t stop there (for it could be very discouraging). Look at the solution.

WHEN GOD “HATES” (Amos 6:7-11).

“I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his palaces” (Amos 6:8, NKJV).

All through the Bible, one theme comes through (in one manifestation or another): Our God is a God of infinite love, compassion, and mercy. Thus, when the Lord says that He “hates” something, we need to perk up our ears and listen.

Listed below are some verses that talk about what the Lord hates. What are the things He hates?

1. Deut. 12:31 _____
2. Deut. 16:22 _____
3. Ps. 10:3 _____
4. Ps. 11:5 _____
5. Ps. 78:59 _____
6. Mal. 2:16 _____

In the context of today’s lesson, Amos said that the Lord “hated” the pride of Jacob and “his palaces” (Amos 6:8, NKJV). According to *The SDA Bible Commentary*, “It is bad enough to waste honestly earned money on pretentious buildings, but the Israelites had secured their luxury and splendor by dishonesty, particularly through injustice to the poor. . . . The divine hatred of Jacob’s ‘excellency’ and ‘palaces’ reveals that God does not hate men, but does hate their sinful deeds and works.”—Vol. 4, p. 974.

As Christians, we understand that the greatest revelation of God has come to us through Jesus Christ. It’s hard for us, considering the character of Christ, to see God as “hating” anything. “Hate,” in so many ways, seems like such a human trait—particularly a fallen human trait. Nevertheless, there are some things that the Bible says God “hates.” How do we understand that? When God “hates” something, what does that mean? What dangers are there in using our own concept of human hate to understand it in God? Why is it right for God to “hate”? How does His infinite love help us understand how He could “hate”?

THE NAME OF THE LORD.

“No. Then shall he say, Hold thy tongue: for we may not make mention of the name of the Lord” (Amos 6:10).

Amos 6: 9, 10 projects into the future, talking about what will happen to Israel as a result of her sins. The interesting part comes at the end of verse 10, where they say that they will not make mention “of the name of the Lord.” Considering that so often in the Hebrew Bible, the “name of the Lord” is an object of praise, adoration, joy, power, and deliverance (Exod. 33:19; Deut. 31:3; Ps. 7:17; 20:7; 116:4; 13; Acts 2:21), it’s incredible that they won’t even make mention of His name at this time.

The SDA Bible Commentary, volume 4, page 974, presents several possible reasons why the Israelites at that time would not make mention of the Lord. For discussion purposes consider the following:

1. They felt it was too late to call on God. They had a sense of despair.
2. They didn’t want to mention the Lord’s name because of their unbelief.
3. They blamed God for the judgments they received.
4. If they mentioned the Lord’s name they felt they would be ridiculed.

Though we can only speculate, what reason could explain this strange verse? (Amos 6:10).

One possible option could also be that of guilt. Guilt is such a powerful weapon of the enemy. So often, when we sin, guilt rears its ugly head. Not that guilt, in and of itself, is bad. Guilt can be used by the Holy Spirit to bring us to repentance, to bring us to our knees, to bring us to the foot of the Cross. That’s when guilt is, in a sense, “good.” On the other hand, guilt is bad when, because of our sins, we feel that we can’t come to God. We feel that we’re too bad to ever dare ask for mercy or forgiveness. Like the Israelites we fear to “mention the name of the Lord.” We feel it would be presumptuous on our part to think we could, again, be forgiven. Here’s where guilt is being used by the enemy of souls. Satan would love nothing more than to use our guilt to drive us away from the only source of its cure, and that is the Cross.

Becky fell into some sins that brought dire consequences upon herself. How would you present Christ’s atonement to her in a way that could help her understand that whatever she had done, whatever the consequences, the Savior can forgive and heal?

NO ESCAPE FROM THE ASSYRIAN CAPTIVITY (Amos 6:12-14).

“Behold, I will raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel” (Amos 6:14, NKJV).

There are some fascinating images used in verses 11-13 to describe the situation in Israel. What points is the Lord making? Particularly interesting is the question in verse 12: “Does one plow there with the oxen?” (NKJV). Some scholars read the text as, “Does one plow the sea with oxen?” Either way, the message is the same: Because you have refused to repent, judgment is coming, and your efforts to avoid it are fruitless.

What nation will fulfill the role of destroying the northern kingdom? 2 Kings 18:9, 10; Amos 6:14.

The Assyrian ruler, Tiglath-pileser III, having possibly arranged for the assassination of the king of Israel, Pekah, placed Hoshea on the throne as a vassal king, requiring him to pay a heavy tribute. In desperation, Hoshea formed an alliance with Egypt against Assyria. Shalmaneser, who succeeded Tiglath-pileser, attacked Israel, laying siege to Samaria. He probably took the city during the last year of his reign in 723/722 B.C.

“The destruction that befell the northern kingdom was a direct judgment from Heaven. The Assyrians were merely the instruments that God used to carry out His purpose. . . . It was because they had ‘left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal,’ and refused steadfastly to repent, that the Lord ‘afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until He had cast them out of His sight,’ in harmony with the plain warnings He had sent them ‘by all His servants the prophets.’”
—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 291, 292.

What does “You have turned justice into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood” (Amos 6:12, NKJV) mean? (Hint: *gall* means a “poisonous herb” and *wormwood* means “hemlock.”) How do you help a new believer understand the concept of divine judgment? Often times, new Christians, particularly those who don’t have any biblical background, struggle with the sections of the Bible in which nations wipe out other nations, all done in the name of God’s judgment. What can you do to help someone questioning these incidents?

FURTHER STUDY: “In the terrible judgments brought upon the ten tribes the Lord had a wise and merciful purpose. That which He could no longer do through them in the land of their fathers He would seek to accomplish by scattering them among the heathen. His plan for the salvation of all who should choose to avail themselves of pardon through the Saviour of the human race must yet be fulfilled; and in the afflictions brought upon Israel, He was preparing the way for His glory to be revealed to the nations of earth. Not all who were carried captive were impenitent. Among them were some who had remained true to God, and others who had humbled themselves before Him. Through these, ‘the sons of the living God’ (Hosea 1:10), He would bring multitudes in the Assyrian realm to a knowledge of the attributes of His character and the beneficence of His law.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 292.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote a famous line in one of his books: “The wealthy,” he said, “are different from you and me.” In what ways is that true? On the other hand, in what ways, in the context of God, the Cross, and salvation, are the wealthy exactly like everyone else? In what sense even are they, potentially, worse off?
2. In Amos, the hardness of the people to God’s warnings jump out of the pages of the Bible. Why were they so hardened to the Lord? Even more importantly, because all these incidents were given to us as “ensamples” (1 Cor. 10:11), what lessons should we learn from the Israelites’ sorry fate? In other words, could we be just as blind and hard without knowing it? Think about this in the context of the Laodicean message.
3. In Amos 6:3, the prophet writes, “Woe to you who put off the day of doom” (NKJV). What does that mean? What New Testament verses parallel this idea? In what ways do we, perhaps even subtly, do the same thing?
4. Further discuss this notion of God “hating” something. Is it hard to think of things that God hates? Make your own list of what you think God hates. If you have a concordance, go through the Bible and see if your list matches what Scripture says on that topic.

SUMMARY: While Israel was at ease, utterly ignoring God’s warning, judgment loomed over the horizon.



He Walked With Lions

Charlotte Ishkanian

Takila (tah-KEE-lah) is a global mission pioneer in Zambia. He had spent some time teaching the people in one village about God. The people listened, but they did not respond to his invitation to trust Christ. Takila decided to visit another village. He asked for directions to the next village and was told it was not far. By midday he began walking toward the next village.

Takila did not know it, but the people in the village planned to test him to see if what he had told them was true. They asked the witch doctor to call on the lions of the savannah to test Takila's honesty.

Takila walked all afternoon toward the next village. As the sun slipped behind the distant hills, Takila realized that the village was farther than he thought. Darkness set in, but Takila had no place to spend the night. In the distance Takila could see lights moving. He realized the lights were the glow of lions' eyes.

Takila pleaded with God to protect him from the hungry lions. As he walked he realized that the lions were walking the same direction, but they did not come near him. When he stopped to rest, the lions stopped. Takila's fear drained away as he realized that God had sent the lions to protect him.

Dawn revealed a village in the distance. Takila hurried toward it.

The villagers were surprised to see a stranger approach and asked him where he had come from. When he told them, they shouted, "That is impossible! The lions of the savannah would have killed you."

Takila looked toward the savannah, but the lions were gone. Then he told the gathering crowd that the God whom he serves had sent the lions to protect him and keep him company during the long walk.

Word spread fast about the man who walked with lions. The chief invited Takila to teach the villagers about his mighty God, and many have responded. When the rainy season ends, a pastor will come to baptize those who have given their hearts to God. Other villages have asked Takila to come and tell them about the powerful God he serves, the God who can send lions to protect a man who trusts in Him.



Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.

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Vision One—Locusts and Prayer



Sabbath Afternoon

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT A LITERAL, UNPRECEDENTED PLAGUE of locusts devastated the southern kingdom of Israel; or were the locusts just a symbol of destruction, nothing more? Either way, the message, as given by Amos and Joel, came couched in vivid language designed to catch the attention of their audience. Their hearers could hardly have missed the unusual significance and timeliness of their startling message.

However, the Holy Spirit had others in mind, as well. The hyperbole (purposeful exaggeration) that especially characterizes Joel's description of the army of locusts, as well as other dramatic descriptions in his book, indicates clearly that the prophecies of the locusts contain last-day, judgment-hour significance.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What calamity did Amos warn would overtake Israel? Was it literal or figurative (or does it even matter)? Why did God "repent" for what He was about to do? What role did Amos have in having God avert, at least temporarily, the disaster? What role does intercessory prayer have in our lives? What does it mean to have an Intercessor? How does the locust plague in Joel relate to the warnings given in Amos? These and other issues are looked at this week as we study the first vision given in the book of Amos.

MEMORY TEXT: "Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come" (Joel 1:15).

*(Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 24.)

THE FIRST VISION (Amos 7:1-3).

“Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king’s mowings” (Amos 7:1).

Up till now, the book of Amos consisted of the words that Amos, speaking in the name of the Lord, uttered to Israel. Chapter seven, however, begins with a shift: “Thus the Lord God *showed* me” (vs. 1, NKJV). The Hebrew is literally, “caused me to see,” a common phrase used in Scripture to present the idea that the prophet was having a vision. For whatever reason, there is a dramatic change in how Amos received God’s message. He now sees in vision what he is to relate to Israel.

Read the first three verses of Amos 7. What was the vision that Amos was presented?

Scholars aren’t sure whether the locusts here were literal, as if there really were to be a swarm of insects coming down upon Israel and wiping out its crop, or if it were symbolic, representative of the Assyrian army that would devastate the land. Either reading would work. However one wants to view it, the message is still the same: God’s judgments are about to fall on an apostate people who refuse to repent of their sins, who refuse to turn back to the Lord, who is more than willing to forgive, heal, and restore to divine favor.

One thing that comes through as we read the book of Amos is just how high the stakes are. These people are told to repent or great calamity will come upon them. In other words, God isn’t playing games here. The issues involve the eternal salvation of souls, not to mention the whole aspect of the vindication of God before the universe. Thus, if the punishments seem harsh, it’s only because the issues are so great, so weighty, so fraught with, literally, eternal consequences. We need to keep this in mind any time we tend to question why Israel should face such dire consequences. Indeed, the dire consequences themselves should serve as a reminder of the importance of the issues in the great controversy between good and evil—a battle that we, too, are intimately involved in.

THE LORD REPENTED.

“And it came to pass, that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. The Lord repented for this: It shall not be, saith the Lord” (Amos 7:2, 3).

Amos 7:3 brings in an interesting phrase: “The Lord repented for this.” What it seems to be saying is that, thanks to the intercession of Amos, the Lord decided not to bring the calamity, at least at this time, upon Israel.

What does this mean, however, to say that the Lord “repented”? The Hebrew verb used, *naham*, is not the verb used in the earlier lesson, in which people repented by “turning back.” The word, instead, can also mean “to have passion” or “to have pity,” which would make better sense in this context.

Here are some other texts that talk about God repenting. What can you learn from each one about what it means to say that God repented?

Exod. 32:14 _____

1 Sam. 15:35 _____

Jer. 42:10 _____

John 3:10 _____

Obviously, when God “repents” it’s not the same thing as when we repent. Though the concept itself, that of God “repenting,” is wrought with many philosophical and theological questions about God’s foreknowledge and our freewill, these verses and others show that events which God warns His prophets about can indeed be stopped, if the right conditions are met. In other words, in certain circumstances, we find within this idea of God “repenting” the notion of the *conditionality* of prophecy, the principle that prophecies will or will not be fulfilled, depending upon whether certain conditions *are* or *are not* met.

Though the whole question of the conditionality of prophecy is hotly debated, one point comes through: As human beings, we have the capacity of free choice, and our decisions will greatly impact our final end. How crucial that we use our free choice wisely. Our eternal destiny depends upon it.

THE INTERCESSOR: PART 1.

Look up these verses. What do they all have in common?

1. Exod. 32:32 _____

2. 1 Kings 8:50 _____

3. Jer. 7:16 _____

4. Dan. 9:16-23 _____

5. Amos 7:2 _____

6. Zech. 3:1-5 _____

A common thread runs through all of these verses, which is that the people of God have sinned, and they have Someone standing before God pleading in their behalf. In each case they have an intercessor praying to the Lord for them.

This is what is happening in the book of Amos, as well. Amos himself is pleading before God to avert the upcoming catastrophe. "O Lord God," he says, "forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small (Amos 7:2). In this case, the Lord listened to his cry.

These texts present the idea commonly known as "intercessory prayer," a notion that teaches that we can, through our prayers, move God to act in a certain manner. The Bible, time and again, teaches that prayer makes a difference, not just in our own lives but in the lives of those for whom we pray. No wonder, then, that the Bible so often tells us to pray, not just for ourselves but for others. God wouldn't have us pray if prayer didn't have the potential to change things. However difficult it might be to understand how it works, it is clear—prayer works!

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).

Prayer is one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith. Only those who engage in it, who have experienced the power of prayer, know how crucial it is, even if we don't always understand how it functions. As air is to life, prayer is to the spiritual life. Given what we've read today, make a list of various reasons why prayer, even intercessory prayer, is so important, not just for those prayed for but for the one doing the praying.

THE INTERCESSOR: PART 2.

“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom. 8:34).

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

Though Amos, and others, acted as intercessors, according to Scripture, there is only one true Intercessor, Jesus Christ. In fact, scholars have seen in some of the examples in Tuesday’s lesson types of Christ; that is, those who interceded in behalf of their people as examples of what Christ would do for us as our Intercessor.

In what ways did some of those Old Testament characters in yesterday’s lesson act as “types” of Christ? What did they do that, in a sense, prefigured what Christ would do for us?

The Bible does teach that we, as sinful humans, need an intercessor. Sin causes a rift between a holy God and an unholy creature, so great that the creature couldn’t even stand alone before God. The blinding contrast between God and humankind, between holiness and unholiness, is seen in the human reaction whenever God manifested Himself to humans. In every case, even in the case of “holy” men—unholiness can’t bear holiness.

When the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, Moses “hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” (Exod. 3:6). Job, after glimpsing the Lord, cried out, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5, 6). Isaiah, after a vision of God sitting upon a throne and being worshiped by angels who sang of His holiness, cried, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isa. 6:5). Ezekiel, Paul, and John, each in his own unique circumstances, got a glimpse of God, and their reactions were always the same: They fell prostrate before Him, unable to bear the sight.

How do we understand Christ’s role as our Intercessor? What does it mean for us, at this moment, that Jesus is standing between us and God as our Intercessor? How should that impact our daily lives, particularly our struggle against sin and self?

THE LOCUSTS (Joel 1:4-15).

Some evidence indicating that, perhaps, the locust swarm could be literal is found in a prophecy from the book of Joel, which in much greater detail talks about a locust plague that would sweep over the land.

How is the threat of a similar locust plague described in Joel 1:4-15?

Notice four stages in the unprecedented locust plague described in Joel 1:4. The palmer worms were followed by the locusts, which in turn, were followed by cankerworms, and then caterpillars. Page 678 of the *SDA Bible Dictionary* describes the four words used in sequence in Joel 1:4 this way:

Gazam. "It is most probably the locust in the 1st stage of its development, hence wingless, though not a true larva such as a caterpillar. Some see in it the young adult.

'Arbeh. "It is thought that it is the African migratory locust . . . in its fully developed wing stage, in which it invades a country in swarms and deposits eggs. This locust is very common in Palestine.

Yeleq. "It is most probably the creeping, unwinged migratory locust in the last stage of development before it becomes a winged adult. Some have identified it with the newly hatched locust, which can jump but not crawl.

Chasil. "The Dutch scientist F. Bruijfel . . . sees it as the fully grown locust at the stage when it leaves Palestine."

Locusts, locusts everywhere, sweep over the fields, stripping the land of every last plant and leave drought, famine, and devastation. Joel's focus is not on the locust plague alone but also on the calamitous events of the day of the Lord that the plague foreshadowed. The events of the historical day of the Lord, whenever such a day occurred in the history of Israel, were unsurpassed in the lives of those who lived through them. Likewise, the events of the end-time day of the Lord will be without parallel in history (see Dan. 12:1).

One of the great struggles that we, as Seventh-day Adventist Christians face, deals with living day by day, yet with the realization that great catastrophes will usher in the end of the world. We don't want to ignore the signs of the end. On the other hand, if we obsess over them, we are looking for trouble, as well. How can we find a right balance between living as responsible citizens now while awaiting the end of the world?

FURTHER READING: "Christ was crucified for our sins, and was raised from the rent sepulcher for our justification; and he proclaims in triumph, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' Jesus lives as our intercessor to plead before the Father. He has carried the sins of the whole world, and has not made one mortal man a sin-bearer for others. No man can bear the weight of his own sins. The crucified One bore them all, and every soul who believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. The disciple of Christ will be fitted by his grace for every trial and test as he strives for perfection of character. By looking away from Jesus to some other one, or to something else, he may sometimes make mistakes; but as soon as he is warned of his danger, he again fastens his eyes upon Jesus, in whom his hope of eternal life is centered, and he plants his feet in the footprints of his Lord, and travels on securely. He rejoices, saying, 'He is my living intercessor before God. He prays in my behalf. He is my advocate, and clothes me with the perfection of his own righteousness. This is all I require to enable me to bear shame and reproach for his dear name's sake. If he permits me to endure persecution, he will give me grace and the comfort of his presence.'" —Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, May 12, 1896.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Dwell more on the idea of the conditionality of prophecy. Are all prophecies conditional? In other words, is Christ's prophecy that He will come again, this time in the clouds of heaven, a conditional prophecy? How can we distinguish between conditional and unconditional prophecy?
2. In a recent experiment conducted in a prestigious hospital, two groups of patients were studied: One group had people praying for them, another group didn't. Much to the scientists' surprise, those who had been prayed for recuperated at a much greater rate than those who weren't prayed for. How do we, as Christians, understand what this means? What kind of questions does a study like this raise?
3. Read carefully 1 John 2:1. How does this verse help us understand what it means to have Jesus as our Intercessor? What does Christ do in that role? What other texts give us information on this aspect of Christ's ministry?

SUMMARY: God, through Amos, continues to warn His people of impending disaster, both in Amos's time and, in fact, in ours, as well. Mixed with these warnings are also messages of hope and promise.



“Dig Your Grave, Traitor!”

J. H. Zachary

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“Dig your grave, traitor!” the soldiers barked at the terrified man standing before them. Tep Cho Ruan stood within sight of the Thai border. *Am I to die this close to freedom?* he wondered.

Tep had served four years in the Cambodian army in Vietnam. But when Cambodian dictator Pol Pot ordered all intellectuals into forced labor, he was not exempt. Thousands of Cambodians died or were murdered in the months that followed.

Tep was assigned to herd cattle. Desperate for food, he risked his life to secretly slaughter an animal to eat. If the authorities discovered his deed, he would be killed.

Tep watched in horror as Pol Pot’s soldiers killed entire families, including small children. He saw many of his own family die at the hands of the government. He knew that sooner or later his time to die would come. He knew he must find a way to escape into Thailand.

In the dead of night he left his hut and began the long walk to the Thai border and freedom. He knew that soldiers would be looking for anyone who was trying to escape, and he managed to avoid them. Then, when he was within sight of the border, Tep was caught.

As he took the shovel to begin digging his grave, he realized that in a few minutes he would be dead. Fear, hopelessness, and discouragement grew with every shovelful of earth. Suddenly gun shots rang out. He expected to die any instant. But no bullet hit him. He looked up to see his captors flee into the jungle, leaving him standing alone beside the hole he had dug. He dropped the shovel and made a dash for freedom.

At last he was free, assigned to a crowded refugee camp in Thailand. In that camp Tep learned about Jesus, the Son of God, who loved humanity so much that He came to this earth to die for lost sinners. This story was so different from the god he had worshiped. He joined the Bible classes and gave his life to Christ. For the first time in his life Tep’s heart was filled with hope and love.

“I no longer hate Pol Pot for what he did to my family and to my country,” Tep says. “Since I met Jesus and learned that we are to love our enemies, I have peace in my heart.” Tep fled to Thailand to be free. But it was not until he found Christ that he understood what real freedom is. “My family and I have never been so happy.”

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Vision Two—Judgment by Fire



Sabbath Afternoon

Numerous texts depict an end-time fire, a retributive, destructive inferno that destroys sin and sinners. This cauldron of pitch, brimstone, and ash is what we call “hell.”

In fact, the only way to really understand hell is to realize that Jesus Christ on the cross had, in a sense, been in that fire already for us. At Calvary, Jesus went to “hell” so that none of us—who because of our sins deserve it—would ever have to go there. Thus, however terrible and frightful hell is—no one will suffer there worse than did Jesus, the only One who, in fact, never even deserved it.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: The Bible uses numerous images of fire, both as a means of punishment and as a means of purification. What makes the difference? What happened to Jesus on the Cross so that, ideally, everyone could be saved? What is the ultimate fate of the wicked? As Seventh-day Adventists, we sometimes talk about the conditionality of prophecy. What does that mean, and in what cases are prophecies conditional, and in what cases are they not?

MEMORY TEXT: “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?” (2 Peter 3:11, 12).

*(Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 1.)

PUNISHMENT OR PURIFICATION (Amos 7:4-6).

“Behold, the Lord God called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part” (Amos 7:4).

In the second vision, instead of locusts, Amos evokes the image of fire—a fire that came from God. It’s not the only time, however, that an Old Testament prophet has used this image to depict the judgments of God.

“Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven” (Gen. 19:24).

“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord (Lev. 10:1, 2).

“And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh” (Isa. 66:24).

Look up other texts in the Bible that deal with God using fire as a judgment. And though the connotation in these cases is always in the negative—that is, the fire is seen as something “bad”—in what ways can the imagery of fire be used as something “good”?

Fire is a biblical image that evokes not just punishment but purification, cleaning, refinement. “And Eleazar the priest said unto the men of war which went to the battle, This is the ordinance of the law which the Lord commanded Moses; only the gold, and the silver, the brass, the iron, the tin, and the lead, every thing that may abide the fire, ye shall make it go through the fire, and it shall be clean: nevertheless it shall be purified with the water of separation: and all that abideth not the fire ye shall make go through the water” (Num. 31:21-23). Look at how the fire is used in Isaiah 6, or in Malachi 3:1-3. In these cases, fire is doing something different than in the first examples.

Read 1 Peter 4:12. All of us, at some point in our lives, have faced “fiery” trials that could purify us. We don’t all have to face, however, the fire of judgment, because Jesus, in a sense, did that for us at the Cross. What happened at the Cross that can spare us the judgment by fire that the Bible promises is coming?

THE SECOND DEATH AT THE CROSS.

“He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

At the cross, Jesus died the “second death” (Rev. 20:14; 21:8). It couldn’t have been the first death, because all of us, Christians or non-Christians, face that death. Nothing Jesus did at Calvary changes the fact that all of us will die or (as the Bible in numerous places says it) “sleep.” Instead, to spare us the “second death”—the death by fire, the death that comes from God’s righteous indignation over sin—Jesus hung on the cross, because He Himself, at the cross, suffered that second death in our stead.

Mark 15:34 reads: “At the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” How do we understand these words in light of what was happening to Jesus?

“Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father’s mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father’s reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

Take some time to dwell upon exactly what Jesus faced at the Cross. Realize that the punishment for every sin ever committed—from every lustful look to the most vicious and violent atrocities in history—fell upon Him so that, ideally, none of those who committed these sins would have to face the final fire, God’s righteous judgment against those sins. Write down your thoughts, particularly focusing upon the hope that Christ’s death should bring to each of us individually, knowing that the punishment for our sins has already been paid.

THE WICKED BURNED UP (Mal. 4:1, 3).

“For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch” (Mal. 4:1).

However wonderful the plan of salvation, however complete and sufficient in and of itself was Christ’s death on the cross, the Bible makes it clear that not all will accept it. Because they refused to grasp, by faith, Christ’s death for them, untold multitudes will have to face the punishment of their own sins.

Yet even here, God’s love and mercy comes through; for unlike the common notion that the lost will face conscious eternal torment in hell, the weight of biblical evidence makes it clear that the destruction is eternal, not the *destroying*—a crucial difference.

If someone didn’t have any preconceived notions about what the Bible teaches regarding the ultimate fate of the lost, what would the following verses tell them?

1. Matt. 7:13 _____

2. John 3:16 _____

3. John 10:28 _____

4. 2 Thess. 1:9 _____

God does not punish even the most wicked in an eternity of fire for wrongdoings that took place in a limited period of time here on earth. You would think that after a few billion years, even the worst sinner would have paid his or her dues. Such a faulty understanding has led many Christians to conclude that God is not loving. God’s purpose with hellfire is to destroy sin and its consequences in order for there to be a new earth untarnished by evil. But before He destroys sin and sinners, He gives everyone a chance to repent.

What’s amazing is that even those who don’t know the truth about the ultimate fate of the wicked can still, even while believing the erroneous notion of eternal torment, love God anyway. Imagine how much more they would love Him if they knew the truth! Compare the two views, eternal torment and eternal destruction, and dwell upon just how different are the pictures of God they paint.

THE LORD “REPENTS”—AGAIN: PART 1.

“Then said I, O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. The Lord repented for this: This also shall not be, saith the Lord God” (Amos 7:5, 6).

As in the previous vision, here, too, we have the same thing repeated: Amos interceding before God and God “repenting,” or “changing His mind” regarding the predicted destruction. This notion brings up an interesting question: As we saw last week, thanks to the intercession of some people, certain predictions have been diverted or at least delayed. What we saw here was the conditionality of these prophecies. The question then arises, Because some prophecies appear to be conditional, are, then, all of them conditional?

Look at the texts below. Which ones have an element of conditionality to them, and which ones don't? In other words, which deal with things that could possibly be changed by human actions, and which deal with the absolute certainties within God's plan for humankind, certainties that cannot be changed by anything that humans can do?

1. Isa. 1:19, 20 _____

2. Isa. 38:1-22 _____

3. Jer. 18:7-10 _____

4. Mark 14:62 _____

5. Acts 1:11 _____

6. Rom. 14:10 _____

7. 2 Pet. 3:13 _____

The above texts show the difference between prophecies, in the sense that some do have an element of conditionality to them. Their fulfillment depends upon human response. At the same time, some prophecies seem to be absolute, with no possibility of their being revoked.

What makes the difference?

THE LORD REPENTS—AGAIN: PART 2.

“Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it” (Isa. 46:10, 11).

Yesterday’s lesson, based on Amos 7:5, touched on a topic of vital interest to Seventh-day Adventists, a people who see themselves not only as harbingers of a prophetic message but actually as a prophetic people themselves, a people whom the prophets dreamed and wrote about (See Rev. 12:17; 14:12).

This topic is, of course, the nature of prophecy. Adventists have understood that many prophecies are conditional, that they will happen according to how those who hear the messages respond. Time and again, for instance, the Lord warned Israel of the calamities that would come if they didn’t obey Him. If they did obey, the prophetic warnings would not come to pass. This is seen, for instance, in Amos (after all, why would the Lord bother to warn the Hebrews to turn from their sins if there were no hope that their actions would avert the coming calamity?). (See also Deuteronomy 28.)

The question, however, is this: Is all prophecy—including those about final judgment, a new heaven and a new earth, or the Second Coming—conditional? Can anything human change the inevitability of these prophecies?

In the short term, human actions do seem to have a role in how prophetic events unfold. In the long term, however, in the grand scheme of things, God’s sovereignty always overrules. Though as humans we are given free will, and free will determines our destiny (and even in some cases the destiny of others), God is ultimately in control, in the sense that His final purposes for ending sin and rebellion will be fulfilled. None of the end-time prophecies that deal with the grand climactic events of the great controversy appear to be conditional. On the grand scale of things, in which the ultimate issues are involved, God’s transcendence and power completely overrule human machinations and plans.

Christ’s first coming was not conditional. Nor is the Second Coming. What’s conditional is our response to them. How we respond will have eternal consequences. How crucial, then, that we use our free will to make decisions that will impact us in regard to the inevitable.

FURTHER STUDY: Who makes the final decision about the destiny of the wicked?

The destiny of the wicked is fixed by their own choice. Their exclusion from heaven is voluntary with themselves, and just and merciful on the part of God.”—*Last Day Events*, pp. 279, 280.

“But like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God’s purposes know no haste and no delay. Through the symbols of the great darkness and the smoking furnace, God had revealed to Abraham the bondage of Israel in Egypt, and had declared that the time of their sojourning should be four hundred years. ‘Afterward,’ He said, ‘shall they come out with great substance.’ Gen. 15:14. Against that word, all the power of Pharaoh’s proud empire battled in vain. On ‘the self-same day’ appointed in the divine promise, ‘it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.’ Ex. 12:41. So in heaven’s council the hour for the coming of Christ had been determined. When the great clock of time pointed to that hour, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 32.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. We often tend to look at trials as methods of purification, thus having some redemptive value. At the same time, how do we explain trials that seem to contain no redemptive value for anyone? For example, a baby starving to death in a famine would (at least as far as the baby is concerned), have no redemptive value. How do we understand, as Christians, tragedies like this? Or what about tragedies that, far from purifying people, instead make them angry, bitter, and hateful, especially toward God?
2. Discuss more this idea that Christ died the “second death” at the Cross. How does His dying that death offer us the chance to be spared it?
3. Why would some prophecies be conditional and some not? Why would God overrule in some cases and in others allow human actions to determine the outcome?

SUMMARY: God threatened to punish Israel by a judgment of intense fire. When the prophet Amos appealed to the Lord not to do so, God told him that He would not do it. However, the time will come in the last moments of history when the earth and everything in it will be burned up to prepare the way for God’s creation of a new earth wherein righteousness dwells.



Please Don't Come!

Dorothy Eaton Watts

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Saroja (sah-ROH-ja) and Sonal (SOH-nal) Joseph returned to their home town in Maharashtra, India, after an accident resulted in the amputation of Sonal's leg. The couple settled down and started a goat farm. Then they began looking for a church home. But they could not find one where they felt comfortable. "Please, God, help us to find a church where the people believe as we do," they prayed.

Sonal's mother, an Adventist, invited the couple to visit her church. "But you will have to come on Saturday," she said. Saroja and Sonal decided to give the Adventist church a try.

The couple enjoyed the simplicity of the service, which reminded Saroja of the mission where she grew up. Saroja and Sonal returned to the church the next week, and soon they felt quite comfortable with this simple congregation who worshiped on Saturday.

One Sabbath the pastor greeted them after church and offered to come to their home and give them Bible studies.

"No, please don't come," Saroja responded. "We are much too busy. We don't need to study the Bible. We will just continue coming to church every Saturday. That is enough."

But the pastor showed up at their home that week anyway. "Just give me two minutes," he said, smiling. Saroja and Sonal agreed, but as they began talking about religion, the couple had so many questions that he stayed all day, and the busy couple got no work done.

"Please don't come any more, pastor," they told him as he left. "We are much too busy with on our goat farm. We cannot take this kind of time to study with you."

But the next week the pastor came back again, this time with some books for them to read. "OK, we'll read the books," Sonal said, thanking him for his gift. "But please don't come anymore!"

But the pastor continued to come, and soon they began regular Bible studies. Sonal and Saroja discovered that the Bible had answers to many of the questions that had plagued them. Finally the couple decided they must not only attend the church on Sabbath, but they should become members and help spread the message of truth they had found.

The couple has formed a musical group that travels throughout Maharashtra State, sharing their love for God and their testimonies. Finally, they have time!

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Vision Three—The Plumb Line



Sabbath Afternoon

MARTIN LUTHER TOLD THE STORY of a nobleman who took a man prisoner. When the prisoner's wife came to ransom her husband, the nobleman said if she would lie with him, he'd let her husband go. Though virtuous, she agreed, but after she had lain with him, the nobleman killed her husband and gave her the corpse. She took her case to Duke Charles of Burgundy, who commanded the nobleman to marry the woman. After the marriage, the Duke had the nobleman beheaded, gave the woman his property, and restored her to honor.

Luther's point was that, at times, justice goes beyond law books and rules. As you read this week's lesson, we'll see promises of an even better form of justice.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why, unlike the previous two visions, does Amos not plead for a reprieve of God's justice here? What standard of righteousness would Israel be judged by? What was the only way Israel could have the righteousness it needed to meet this standard? How does the situation presented here prefigure, to some degree, the close of probation? Can we view the close of probation in positive terms? If so, how?

MEMORY TEXT: "He said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings. And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein" (Revelation 10:11-11:1).

*(Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 8.)

THE LORD HOLDS A PLUMB LINE.

“He shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more” (Amos 7:7, 8).

In this, the third vision, a shift occurs: Instead of images of locusts and fire, Amos sees a “plumbline”—a device for making walls straight, or perpendicular to the ground. The plumb line is “an instrument used by builders to make their work even and perpendicular. Evidently the ‘plumbline’ symbolizes the Lord’s examination of the conduct of Israel.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 977.

The Lord gave a different message here than in the first two visions. In those the Lord “repented” concerning the forecasted doom; now, however, the Lord says very clearly what will happen, with no conditionality attached.

Read verses 8 and 9 of Amos 7. What does the Lord say will occur to Israel? Notice, too, that Amos does not make an appeal for mercy, as in the previous visions. Though we can only speculate, why didn’t Amos attempt, again, to intercede for these people?

The Lord set a plumb line “To see whether the wall meets the specifications. Israel, of course, fell short of the divine requirements and would be rejected. . . . Israel’s continued adherence to evil offers no hope of her repentance, and so the prophet intercedes no more. The northern kingdom must experience conquest by Assyria, and be led into captivity.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 977.

Perhaps, the Lord’s words in verses 7 and 8 let Amos know that the Israelites would not repent, which is why he presents no hope. At this point, the message seems similar to the words of Jesus, when He wept over Jerusalem. See Matthew 23:37-39.

Compare the three visions in Amos with Matthew 23:37-39. What spiritual lessons can we learn? Focus, not so much on the negative aspect (though that certainly can’t be ignored) but on what these texts say about God’s mercy and desire for us to turn to Him for salvation and righteousness. Do they show us a picture of a God who is looking for ways to punish or to save?

PLUMB-LINE RIGHTEOUSNESS.

“Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face” (Ps. 5:8).

The plumb line was used to keep the wall of the city straight. Time and again in the Hebrew Bible, the concept of being “straight” or “upright” is depicted to show how the Lord wanted His people to be. At times the word is even translated “righteous,” such as in Numbers 23:10: “Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the *righteous* [from the word that means “straight” or “upright”], and let my last end be like his!” In numerous other texts, the word for “upright” is used in a manner parallel in meaning to “righteous” (see Ps. 11:7; 32:11; Ps. 33:1). Thus, by not only revealing a plumb line but by setting it in the “midst of my people Israel” (Amos 7:8), the Lord was, in a sense, setting before His people the divine standard by which they were to be judged.

The plumb line appears, then, to be a standard of righteousness used for measurement by a God of justice. Israel was to be measured against this standard. Look up these texts and notice the parallel concepts depicted here to what’s happening in Amos:

1. Ezek. 40:3 _____
2. Zech. 2:1, 2 _____
3. Rev. 11:1, 2 _____

Ultimately, if we are to be measured against a standard of righteousness set up by God Himself, none of us, in and of ourselves, could ever stand. Even Israel itself, if having to face a “plumb line” set in its midst, would be judged unfavorably. In the end, therefore, Israel’s only hope had to be in the perfect righteousness of God credited to them by faith, a faith that would have been revealed in their works. What seems to be happening here, then, is that Israel is facing destruction because she has lost her faith in God and thus has lost the covering of His righteousness, the only righteousness that could be measured against the plumb line.

Imagine having to stand before God and be judged by how well you compared to His righteousness! What, then, is your only hope in that judgment? Whose righteousness do you need, and what is the only way to get it?

ISRAEL FAR OUT OF LINE.

“I will make Samaria as an heap of the field, and as plantings of a vineyard: and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof” (Mic. 1:6).

In this third vision, the Lord first says that He will judge Israel, and then He will punish the nation for their sins. He says that “I will not again pass by them anymore” (Amos 7:8). Verse 9 then describes how desolate Israel will become as a result of this judgment.

What spiritual lesson can we learn from these tragedies?

1. The high places shall be desolate (see Jer. 2:20; Hos. 4:13).

Ordinarily, these idolatrous shrines were built on the highest point available in their neighborhood. Deuteronomy 7:5 and 33:29 indicate that God wanted such high places destroyed by the Israelites; Amos here seems to indicate that, far from destroying them, the Israelites had built their own. Since they wouldn’t tear them down, the Lord would do so Himself, using pagans as the means of doing it.

2. The sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste.

These were centers of idol worship at Gilgal, Dan, and Bethel.

3. “I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

Because of Jehu’s apostasy, Jehovah had said that Jehu’s descendants would reign unto the fourth generation (2 Kings 10:30). After the death of Jeroboam, his son Zechariah—the fourth generation—served six months and was slain (2 Kings 15:12). This fulfilled the promise of Jehovah and brought an end to the dynasty of Jehu.

Notice in Amos 7:9, the Lord says, “I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam” (NKJV). This is not the first time in Scripture the Lord specifically says that He will bring desolation and punishment upon His wayward people. It has happened time and again. Is this something that God does directly Himself, or does He allow this destruction to come by not intervening or giving divine protection? Or does it even matter? If so, why? Find examples to support whichever position you take.

THE LAND AND THE WORDS.

“Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words” (Amos 7:10).

The philosopher George Santayana famously said, “Those who forget history are *doomed* to repeat it.” Notice, he used the verb *doomed*, expressing the notion that history has not been something so pleasant that one would like to go through it again.

In this particular case, an interesting principle appears, one that does have a long, sad, and bloody history. Amos speaks words the religious leaders don’t like to hear. So what’s the first thing they do? They go to the political leaders and try and get them to use force to stop those who were not preaching the party line.

What examples of this principle can you find in Scripture? Write down the verses where this same thing happens. What lessons can we learn from this about the danger of politics and religion being too intricately mixed?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Think, too, of incidents outside of the Bible where religious leaders have gone to political ones to stop those who were preaching what they didn’t want to hear.

Notice, too, the words of Amaziah, “the priest of Bethel,” who says that “the land is not able to bear all his words.” That’s an interesting way of phrasing it. Of course, it’s not the land itself that can’t bear his words but the people who don’t want to hear what he’s saying; yet, that’s not what the priest said. Instead, he tried to make it sound as if Amos’s words were, in fact, hurting the land itself.

Why so often, when rebuked, when presented with words that we don’t want to hear, do we resort to whatever we can to deflect them from ourselves, as did Amaziah? What do we need to do in order to prevent ourselves from falling into this trap, especially if the words are justly spoken?

THE CLOSE OF PROBATION.

It's natural to see in the situation presented here in Amos a parallel to the close of probation. Though we shouldn't press the analogy too far, there is a parallel: After repeated messages and plenty of opportunity to repent, judgment is finally rendered. In this case, however, it's not particularly a favorable judgment.

The problem, however, with that analogy is that when probation does close, many will have made the right choices, in contrast to what seems to be happening here in Amos, where it seems almost all the nation is doomed.

“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still” (Rev. 22:11). There are two classes depicted in these texts. Some, clearly, have made the right choices; others, just as clearly, haven't. What makes the crucial difference between the two?

It's very easy to paint a picture of the close of probation in very negative terms; and, no doubt, for those who make the wrong choices, it will be a sad time. Yet we need to understand the close of probation as the time when many will have made the right choice, a choice that once and for all will be finalized by God Himself. In a sense, the idea of “once-saved-always-saved” becomes true: once probation closes, and we have made our choice for Christ—we can never be lost. That is good news made even better!

Because we can die at any time, and probation does close at death, how crucial that we be right with God every day. And what is the only way we can be “right with God” at any time?

The close of probation must be seen in light of the cross, where Jesus, with His blood, purchased the soul of every human being; otherwise it can be presented very negatively. Sure, it's a very solemn time, as the eternal destiny of souls is weighed in the balance. Yet we must remember that God is seeking to bring as many as possible into His eternal kingdom and that through His death Jesus made it possible for everyone, no matter how bad, to have that eternal life.

How do you help someone who's fearful of the concept of the close of probation? What can you say to give this person assurance and hope that this can be a glorious time for those who truly walk with their Savior and Lord?

FURTHER STUDY: “The destruction that befell the northern kingdom was a direct judgment from Heaven. The Assyrians were merely the instruments that God used to carry out His purpose. Through Isaiah, who began to prophesy shortly before the fall of Samaria, the Lord referred to the Assyrian hosts as ‘the rod of Mine anger.’ . . . Isaiah 10:5.

“It was because [Israel] had . . . refused steadfastly to repent, that the Lord ‘afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until He had cast them out of His sight.’”

“In the terrible judgments brought upon the ten tribes the Lord had a wise and merciful purpose. That which He could no longer do through them in the land of their fathers He would seek to accomplish by scattering them among the heathen. His plan for the salvation of all who should choose to avail themselves of pardon through the Saviour of the human race must yet be fulfilled; and in the afflictions brought upon Israel, He was preparing the way for His glory to be revealed to the nations of earth. Not all who were carried captive were impenitent. Among them were some who had remained true to God, and others who had humbled themselves before Him. Through these, ‘the sons of the living God’ (Hosea 1:10), He would bring multitudes in the Assyrian realm to a knowledge of the attributes of His character and the beneficence of His law.”—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 291, 292.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do we understand the concept of God’s justice? In other words, because human concepts of justice so widely differ, how do we transcend our cultures and political environments in order to try and understand the justice of God? Or can we? Maybe because we can’t, God’s justice at times seems so hard to understand. Discuss.
2. At the close of probation our choice as to whether or not we served God is finalized. What does that mean? Do we have to be perfect to serve God? Do we have to be perfect to be saved when probation closes? If so, where is the perfection found, and how can we claim it as our own? Can we be deemed perfect and still struggle with sin?

SUMMARY: The last king of Israel was Hoshea. He usurped the throne after slaying Pekah. Following Shalmaneser’s conquest of Samaria, Hoshea was taken captive, and Israel’s doom was sealed. This close of probation for Israel points to the time when probation will be closed, not only for nations but also for every individual living on earth.



The Unseen Companion

Darryl Famisaran

The student missionaries from Lapangon Mission School in southern Philippines needed to go to town to buy some goods. The roads in this area are so rugged and out of the way that automobiles are scarce. However, motorbikes take their place, and often the drivers pile four or even five passengers onto one motorbike.

The three student missionaries from Mountain View College stood beside the road to ask God's protection as they traveled. Then they stopped a motorbike and put themselves on the bike. They braced their feet securely on the foot rests, and held onto one another tightly as the bike bounced along the bumpy road. Riding a motorbike on these roads is never comfortable. And the students, members of the Manobo tribe, who are more used to climbing the mountains than riding through them, found the ride quite uncomfortable. But they had little choice, for they had to get to the city and back before dark.

When the motorbike finally reached town, each of the boys gave the driver his fare. The driver seemed dissatisfied and waited for more money. "Is there any problem?" the boys asked.

"Yes," the driver said, "You have given enough for three people, but there were four of you."

The students looked at each other and said, "No, there are just the three of us."

"No, the fourth one, dressed in white, got off the bike first and went on ahead. Did you not see him disappear around that curve?" he asked, pointing to the nearest bend in the road. "He seemed to be in a hurry. I know there were four of you when we left. I would not have driven this far for only three of you."

Again the student missionaries explained that there were only three of them, but the driver insisted that there were four and demanded the pay for the fourth person.

As the motorbike driver drove off, the three student missionaries looked at each other in amazement. Then they remembered that they had asked God to send His angel to protect them on their journey. They stopped and bowed their heads again and thanked God for allowing the driver to see the angel that God had sent.

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Vision Four—Summer Fruit



Sabbath Afternoon

AMOS 8 GOES FROM ONE THEME TO ANOTHER. First, it deals with the question of bearing fruit, then it touches on those who have all the religious forms without any of the spirit that should animate those forms; a problem, perhaps, for Christians in all eras and all times. Next it brings up an interesting question about salvation, that of forgiven sins that are no longer forgiven. Then it touches on the issues in the final conflict before the end of the world.

And, finally, it delves into the concept of there being a “famine” in the land for hearing the “words of the Lord.” It’s an interesting week’s worth of lessons. Dig out what you can. Though we certainly aren’t going to cover all that could be said on these topics, you’ll certainly leave with a few things to think and pray about.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why is the image of fruit used to describe human character? Can we be keeping all the rules and regulations of our religion and yet miss the most important point about it? What does it mean that the Lord will “forget” all our sins? What does it mean that He will “remember” them? What does the Bible mean when it talks about a “famine” for “the words of the Lord”? Can we be in a land of plenty and still be in dire need of the Word?

MEMORY TEXT: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11).

*(Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 15.)

BY THEIR FRUITS.

“Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit. And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more. And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord God: there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence” (Amos 8:1-3).

What kind of fruit is talked about here?

Early maturing fruit, used especially of ‘figs.’ The purpose of this vision was to show that the people were ripe for judgment, that God’s forbearance was at an end. The divine long-suffering had resulted only in the continuance of Israel’s sin.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 979.

Look up each of the following texts. How does each one use the imagery of fruit to make its point?

1. Matt. 3:10 _____

2. Matt. 7:17 _____

3. Matt. 13:26 _____

4. Luke 6:44 _____

5. John 12:24 _____

6. Rom. 7:4 _____

7. Gal. 5:22 _____

Notice how fruit is used in a dynamic manner, in that it represents something in the process of change, of maturity, of ripeness, even decay. Fruit can be sweet and wonderful, or rank and rotten. No wonder it’s used in Scripture in this manner to describe human beings and their actions.

In the context of today’s lesson, read John 15:5 and ask yourself, What kind of fruit am I bearing, and why? At the same time, what’s the danger of looking at our own fruit in determining our standing with God? How can we strike a good balance?

SWALLOWING THE NEEDY AFTER SABBATH.

“Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?” (Amos 8:4-6).

These verses reek with one of the greatest and most common spiritual deceptions ever conjured up in Satan’s brew of demonic deceptions: religious formalism cloaking abuse of the most basic religious principles. No doubt these people felt spiritually superior to those who didn’t keep the Sabbath or observe the feasts as strictly as they did. After all, because they were observing these religious festivals, these folk thought they were holy and thus didn’t need to worry about little things like honesty, greed, or helping the poor.

“The first day of the month . . . was devoted to religious service, and apparently was a day on which all trade was suspended. . . . Here is a striking example of a formal observance of sacred institutions, with no true spirit of devotion. In their selfishness these apostates begrudged the time their religious formalism demanded of them. Such worship becomes a curse instead of a blessing.”
—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 980.

These people wanted the Sabbath to end so they could immediately get back to cheating their customers. How intrusive of the Sabbath to interfere with their fraud! The irony is that when one understands the true meaning of the Sabbath, when one truly keeps the Sabbath as God intended, it’s hard to imagine that person going out and cheating people, especially the poor.

Give an example from the New Testament where Jesus had to confront this same problem. How did He respond?

What is it about the Sabbath that, if properly kept and understood, would protect a Sabbath keeper from doing exactly what God condemns here in Amos? In other words, what is the Sabbath all about, and why would understanding what it is about protect us from falling into these same sins?

“SURELY I WILL NEVER FORGET.”

“Surely I will never forget any of their works” (Amos 8:7).

This verse is amazing, terrible in severity, yet painfully accurate in depicting basic biblical truth regarding salvation. In the end, either all our sins are forgiven, forgotten, and obliterated, or they will come back to haunt and condemn us. Either we face none of the legal penalties for our sins or we face the full brunt of them all. Either we walk away totally free from the legal consequences of our sin, or we are destroyed under the oppressive weight of their consequences. Either God “forgets” all our sins, or He “remembers” them all. There’s no middle ground, no plea bargain, no compromise.

Compare what God is saying in Amos 8:7 with what He’s saying in these verses: **“I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins” (Isa. 43:25). “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 8:12). “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 10:17).**

In the above verses, God promises to “forget” their sins, the idea being that their sins will no longer be factored into how He regards these people. These words are basically a poetic way of saying that when God forgives our sins, He forgives them completely, even to the point where He no longer “remembers” them. This is what happens when we are saved by Jesus Christ, when His righteousness becomes ours by faith.

On the other hand, what Amos 8:7 is talking about is, in a sense, what happens to those who don’t have the righteousness of Jesus covering them. The parable that Jesus told in Matthew 18 about the unforgiving servant reveals this principle: We are either forgiven all our sins, or we must face the penalty for all our sins. Either we have complete pardon or complete condemnation. Either our salvation is total, or our ruin is total.

Study the parable of Matthew 18 regarding the fate of the servant who had his debt forgiven (vs. 27) but then ultimately lost that forgiveness. Some people have a hard time with this concept, that of the nullification of a debt canceled; yet, that seems to be what the parable says. How do we understand that in light of the Cross and what Christ accomplished at the cross?

THE BITTER DAY (Amos 8:9).

“And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day” (Amos 8:9).

A description of the day of the Lord follows in verse 9: “‘On that day,’ says the Lord God, ‘I will make the sun go down at noon’” (RSV). Amos, living in Palestine, saw the sun go down at noon on the day of the Lord. Ellen White, nearly three millennia later and on the other side of the world, was given a vision, described in *The Great Controversy*, page 636, in which she saw the sun come up at midnight when God intervenes in world history to deliver His people.

How does the phrase “in that day” point to the final judgment prefigured by Israel’s day of judgment? (See the use of this phrase in such last-day prophecies as Isa. 4:1; 12:1, 4; Joel 3:1, 18).

In Amos 8:9, the prophet foretells events that will take place long after his time. Verses 9 and 10 point to the second coming of Christ in the day of final judgment.

Compare Amos 8:10, which applied originally to the gloom and lamentation in Israel at the fall of Samaria, to Revelation 18:9-19, which describes the mourning of the entire world at the time of God’s judgment on last-day Babylon.

“When the voice of God turns the captivity of His people, there is a terrible awakening of those who have lost all in the great conflict of life. While probation continued they were blinded by Satan’s deceptions, and they justified their course of sin. The rich prided themselves upon their superiority to those who were less favored; but they had obtained their riches by violation of the law of God. . . . Now they are stripped of all that made them great and are left destitute and defenseless. They look with terror upon the destruction of the idols which they preferred before their Maker. . . . The rich bemoan the destruction of their grand houses, the scattering of their gold and silver. . . .

“The wicked are filled with regret, not because of their sinful neglect of God and their fellow men, but because God has conquered.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 654.

FAINTING FOR THIRST.

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it” (Amos 8:11, 12).

The implications of these verses are staggering. People seeking the “word of the Lord” and yet not able to find it? How could the God who wants us all in heaven so badly that He died on the cross allow a time when those who seek the “word” can be in a position where they can’t find it? What’s going on here?

Read John 12:35. What is Jesus saying that could help us understand the meaning of Amos 8:11, 12?

Whatever the exact meaning of the those texts in Amos, particularly in the context of last-day events, there’s an important principle applicable to our immediate situation now. We can, through continually filling our minds with junk, get to the point where the “word of the Lord” has no meaning to us. We can become so dull, so insensitive to spiritual truths, that when we hear them they can’t penetrate our minds and hearts. That’s why what we read, what we watch, and what we think about can deaden us to truth so that the effect is no different upon us than if we, in fact, didn’t have access to “the Word of God.”

“Those who do not now appreciate, study, and dearly prize the Word of God spoken by His servants will have cause to mourn bitterly hereafter. I saw that the Lord in judgment will at the close of time walk through the earth; the fearful plagues will begin to fall. Then those who have despised God’s Word, those who have lightly esteemed it, shall ‘wander . . . to and fro to seek the Word of the Lord and shall not find it’ (Amos 8:12).”—*Last Day Events*, pp. 234, 235.

The Christian life is a dynamic life: It’s always in the process of change. We can never remain static, for remaining static is another way of saying we are not growing, and if we’re not growing, we are, truly, moving backward. Keeping this concept in mind, it is crucial that we be constantly advancing in our walk with Christ. What do these verses in Amos say to us, today, regarding our growth in Christ? Can there be a “famine” for the Word even if we have a Bible in our home, or even in our hands? Think this through and ask yourself, Can we be starving, even in a land of plenty?

FURTHER STUDY: Read chapter 37 in *The Great Controversy*, “The Scriptures a Safeguard.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Look once more at Matthew 18, the story of the ungrateful servant. Can you see how it, in an indirect manner, is linked to the investigative judgment? In other words, during the judgment, our decision as to whether or not we are serving Christ is, once and for all, finalized. If we, by faith, have Christ's righteousness covering us, then, as Jesus says, “I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (Rev. 3:5). On the other hand, if we are not converted, then it would appear that our names are blotted out and Jesus doesn't confess us before the Father and the angels. What Matthew 18 implies, then, is that we can indeed lose our salvation. See if you can find other verses that give the idea that we can reject our salvation. At the same time, see if you can find some verses that seem to say the opposite. How can we synthesize them so that we come to a balanced understanding of this important truth?
2. Read the last clause of Matthew 10:22, about how those enduring to the end will be saved, particularly in the context of the previous question. What added information does verse 22 give regarding this important issue?
3. Going back to the lesson on Monday, which dealt with those who kept religious forms but were totally devoid of the spirit of devotion behind those forms, read this quote by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel about the Sabbath: On this day, humankind “must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without the help of man. Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed planted in the souls. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else. Six days a week we seek to dominate the world, on the seventh we try to dominate the self.”—Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), p. 13. How could these sentiments help free people from the sins that Amos was talking about in Amos 8:4-6?



Decision in the River, Part 1

Maria Antonieta de las Muñecas

Celedonio [sel-eh-DOH-nee-oh] swam hard against the swollen river's current. His arms ached from fatigue, but he dared not stop, lest the current carry him away. Alone and frightened, he searched for a sandbar where he could rest. As he struggled to stay afloat, a sense of helplessness swept over him. All he could do was pray. Then his feet touched the gravel edge of the sandbar. He dragged himself out of the water and lay on the sand, shivering and utterly exhausted.

When Celedonio's parents died, he went to live with his brother and sister. Two years later his brother died, leaving Celedonio and his sister alone. He experienced a series of illnesses that left him weak and in pain. He prayed to his favorite saint for healing and made promises and offered sacrifices to her, hoping to receive her blessing. But his symptoms did not go away. Still the young man refused to give up. He began searching for God in other churches, but all the different denominations confused him.

Then he met Luis, the pastor of a Protestant church. Luis taught him how to pray directly to God in the name of Jesus. When Celedonio prayed as Luis taught him, he began to feel better.

Luis asked Celedonio to go with him to find work. The two men left their families behind and traveled to central Bolivia, where they had heard work was available. They found a job planting crops beside a wide river. Every evening they crossed the river in a canoe to the town where they stayed.

One evening no canoe came to take them across the river. It was almost sundown, and the men had to get across before dark. They surveyed the rain-swollen river and decided they could swim across. They put their clothes and their valuables into a plastic bag, which Celedonio tied to his waist. Then they jumped into the river.

Celedonio swam hard against the river's current. But the plastic bag dragged in the water, slowing him down. He looked around for Luis, but he could not see his friend anywhere. Celedonio feared he would not make it across the river. Exhausted, he struggled to stay afloat. He found himself praying, praying for forgiveness, as well as for safety. Suddenly the current swept the plastic bag containing all of his belongings from his waist. A sense of helplessness swept over him. Then his feet touched gravel. He dragged himself onto the sandbar and collapsed, shivering and utterly exhausted. For the moment at least, he was safe.

(Continued next week.)

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Vision Five—No Escape for the Lost



Sabbath Afternoon

IN SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET*, young Hamlet sneaks into the king's bedroom with the intent of avenging his father, whom the king had murdered. Approaching the king, who was on his knees praying—Hamlet suddenly changes his mind, thinking that he doesn't want to kill a man when he's praying and thus is "fit and seasoned for his passage to heaven." "A villain kills my father," Hamlet muses, "and for that I, his sole son, do this same villain send to heaven?"

Whatever Shakespeare's theological inadequacies (not to mention his lack of knowledge regarding the state of the dead), the bigger point here is—revenge. All of us, at times, like Hamlet, have harbored feelings of revenge, because all of us, at times, have been unjustly treated or have seen or known of great and terrible acts of injustice that have gone unpunished.

As you read this week's lesson, however, realize that in the end God sees and knows all things, including (maybe even especially) those terrible acts that have not yet been answered for and that, in the end, we have to trust Him and His perfect justice for what we, or any human system, can never do.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Does God tolerate sin, or is He merely patient with it? What comfort, if any, can we draw from the promise that the Lord will, in the end, execute final judgment? What happened at the Cross that can spare us the punishment that we deserve for our sins?

MEMORY TEXT: "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you?" Amos 5:18.

*(Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 22.)

THE LORD STANDING AT THE ALTAR.

“I saw the Lord standing upon the altar; and he said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake: and cut them in the head, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword: he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered” (Amos 9:1).

The Lord is standing at the altar. Which altar? Though commentators aren't in total agreement, more than likely, it's the one at Bethel, where the Israelites centered their idolatrous worship. Whichever altar, however, one thing is sure: God's righteous judgment is about to fall on an unrighteous people.

What point does the Lord seem to be making in Amos 9:1?

One truth that comes through while reading the Bible is that God does not, in any way, tolerate sin. How could a perfectly righteous and holy God tolerate it, or even accept it? He, of course, does neither.

Instead—God is *patient* with sin. That's a crucial distinction. Patience is not the same as toleration or acceptance. On the contrary. Ultimately, God will utterly obliterate sin from the universe forever. His problem, however, is how to get rid of sin without getting rid of those who have committed it. Here is where the Cross comes in, for at Calvary God was able to punish sin without punishing the sinner.

What happened at the Cross that will enable God to, ultimately, destroy sin but not sinners?

Unfortunately, not every sinner will be saved from his or her sins. The situation in Amos hints at this sad but stark reality. In the end, every sin will be punished; the crucial question is, Who ultimately faces that punishment? Through the Cross, God made a way for us to escape that punishment ourselves, but only if we accept it. If not, punishment will fall upon us. This is what's happening here in Amos, at least on a small scale. Despite repeated attempts to turn sinners away from their sin, they have chosen to remain in that sin. Thus, in the end, when sin is destroyed, they will be, as well.

Read Matthew 25:41. What does Jesus tell us here about whom final punishment had originally been created for? Was it for humans? If not, what does that tell us about God's desire for us to be saved?

NO HIDING PLACE: PART 1 (Amos 9:2-4).

“Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down” (Amos 9:2).

However frightening these words, in one sense they should also bring relief, because they reflect a crucial idea: In the end, justice will be done—God’s justice. Thus, however much iniquity abounds, however much injustice we see now, those who perpetrate it will, if not now, one day have to answer for it. This promise should give us hope and comfort, particularly those who have suffered under the hands of oppressors who seem not to have faced any consequences for their deeds.

What do the following verses all have in common?

Ps. 37:10 _____

Ps. 37:38 _____

Luke 13:28 _____

Heb. 10:30 _____

Rev. 20:13-15 _____

Our God is a God of justice; justice may seem delayed, at least to us, but that’s only because we are so limited in our understanding of how God is working through all the issues in the great controversy. For now, though there is much we don’t understand, we need to daily surrender ourselves to the Lord, who has given us so many reasons to trust Him in the things that now appear so hard to comprehend. No doubt, too, the more we dwell on what we do understand, the more we concentrate on what is clear, we will better be able to endure and trust Him in the things that, for the moment, seem so unfair and unjust.

Hector’s family had suffered great persecution for their faith. Often he thought about revenge. Only after he, himself, made a total surrender to Christ did those feelings start to dissipate. In fact, over time, he even found himself starting to pray for those who had treated his family so badly, even praying that they would be spared the judgment that God would eventually bring upon them because of their sins. Why must we learn to leave the final judgment to God?

NO HIDING PLACE: PART 2.

“The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry” (Ps. 34:15).

Isaac Newton, as a young man, formulated one of the most basic laws of motion: “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” In other words, no matter how hard you push your hand against the ground, the ground is pushing back against your hand just as hard.

This principle, in a sense, applies to the spiritual realm as well. Amos 9:1-4 shows that the wicked cannot escape the judgments of God; that no matter where they go, the Lord, who is all-knowing and all-seeing, will find them.

Yet this works in the reverse, as well, like Newton’s law. God knows us, knows our particular situation, knows our pains, our sorrows, our fears. If those who want to hide from the Lord can’t, how much more can those who seek Him, His help, His promises, and His assurances be sure that the Lord, though we can’t see Him, sees us in our trials?

Look up these verses. What promises are contained in them? Ask yourself how you can, even now claim them as your own and, even more importantly, how you can live your life as if you really believe them?

Matt. 18:20 _____

Matt. 28:20 _____

Rom. 8:38, 39 _____

Some of the most amazing stories about faith have been told by Richard Wurmbrand, who suffered many years in prisons. Wurmbrand recounted, for instance, how even in prison many Christians would tithe. “When we were given one slice of bread a week and dirty soup every day, we decided that we would faithfully ‘tithe’ even then. Every tenth week we took the slice of bread and gave it to the weaker brethren as our ‘tithe’ to the Master.”—Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured For Christ* (Diane Books, 1967), p. 45. Only those who believe that God was with them, even there in these terrible circumstances, could do such things for their Master.

What can we do, even now, even before great trials come, that could help make these promises the foundation of our Christian life?

CREATOR AND DESTROYER (Amos 9:5, 6).

This section begins with a statement about “the Lord God of hosts” and concludes with “the Lord is His name.” What special attributes of God are emphasized in these verses?

God is independent in will and power (see Ps. 115:3)—omnipotent. He not only rules the hosts of the heavenly bodies but is the rightful Ruler of all created beings. He has all authority in heaven and earth and is the One “who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1 Pet. 3:22). These verses clearly depict His might, majesty, and power, which will be revealed in a stunning, awesome manner at the time of the judgment of Israel.

What vivid imagery demonstrates what happens when God’s power “touches” the land and the sea? Amos 9:5, 6.

God’s fire melts the land as wax before the fire (see Mic. 1:3, 4). Along with the other natural catastrophes used to destroy the earth at the Second Coming, there may be many active volcanoes spewing forth magma from the interior of the earth. In some ways, these verses could represent, at least symbolically, what happens when Christ returns.

Notice, too, the interesting contrast in verses 5 and 6 of Amos 9. Verse 5 talks about the Lord melting the earth, making it rise up like a flood; yet, verse 6 talks about His creative power, His putting His layers in the sky and His strata upon the earth. In one part He’s seen as the Builder, in other the Destroyer.

What a contrast for the same Being!

In many ways, this contrast fits with God’s role as depicted in Scripture. Though we like to view God as the Creator, that’s not His only role. God is both Creator and Destroyer.

The crucial point is to understand just what it is that God creates, and what it is that God destroys. Insight into this gives us great insight into just what our God is like.

Look up these verses. What do they tell us about what God creates and what God destroys? Gen. 6:13; Ps. 51:10; Rom. 6:6; 2 Cor. 5:17; 2 Thess. 1:8, 9; Rev. 21:5. By looking at what God creates and destroys, we can learn something about the character of God. What do these verses tell us, and how can we relate this to our own understanding of God?

THE SIFTING.

“For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth” (Amos 9:9).

During one of the religious wars in Europe, a general about to besiege a village asked the king how his troops would be able to distinguish between those who were on their side and those who were the enemy’s. The king replied, “Kill them all—God will sort them out in the judgment.”

However cavalier and brash those words, there is some truth there. “The Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Tim. 2:19), so that even during this time of crisis as depicted in Amos, God will distinguish between those who are faithful and those who aren’t.

What did the Lord mean when he said that “not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground” (NKJV) during this sifting time?

In the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:25-30), Jesus made it clear that both “the good and the bad” would grow together and that only in the final harvest would they be separated, and that would be His work alone. What the Lord seems to be saying in this parable is, simply, *Don’t judge others; leave that to Me.*

List some texts that give the same message about not judging:

Of course, one could argue that these verses could have been cited to tell Amos to keep his mouth shut and mind his own business. After all, who was he to judge these people so harshly?

Though we are told not to judge others and that God is the final judge, are there circumstances where, as a church body, we need to make some judgments regarding the actions of individuals within the church? How do we respond when situations like these arise? What is the difference between judging a person’s actions and judging that person himself or herself? How do we make this crucial distinction?

FURTHER STUDY: Study the following to learn what one question will be raised in the final judgment: “When the nations are gathered before Him, there will be but two classes, and their eternal destiny will be determined by what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and the suffering.

“In that day Christ does not present before men the great work He has done for them in giving His life for their redemption. He presents the faithful work they have done for Him. To those whom He sets upon His right hand He will say, ‘Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me.’ But those whom Christ commends know not that they have been ministering unto Him. To their perplexed inquiries He answers, ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.’”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 637.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why must God, in the end, ultimately destroy sin? In other words, could He not just leave it alone and let it run its own natural course? Why is there divine intervention at the end of time that ultimately leads to sin’s eradication?
2. Why is the Bible so clear about not judging others? Why is this deemed such a bad thing? (Hint: Read Romans 2:1-4.)
3. Think more about this notion of God as the Destroyer. How does that idea fit in with God being a God of love? In what ways do His acts of destroying represent a manifestation of that love?
4. Share with the class, if you can, some stories of Christians who have remained faithful even under the most adverse circumstances. What is the secret of their endurance and their willingness to trust in God even when, from all outward appearances, it would seem that God has abandoned them to their fate? At the same time, if you know any stories about those who have abandoned their faith because of tragedy, talk about that with the class, as well. Why is it that in some cases, those who face tragedy stay faithful, and others, facing similar tragedies, lose their faith? What can Luke 6:47-49 add to this discussion?



Decision in the River, Part 2

Maria Antonieta de las Muñecas

A sense of relief swept over Celedonio as he lay on the narrow sandbar. For the moment, at least, he was safe. He thanked God for saving his life and asked God to forgive him for all his wrong deeds. He felt utterly unworthy of God's forgiveness, but he prayed, "God, Your will be done. But if You save my life, I will follow You."

Celedonio realized that the sandbar could disappear any moment under the rising water. He slipped into the water and let the current carry him along as he swam toward the shore. He could feel his strength ebbing. Just as he thought he could go no farther, his foot touched the river bottom.

Celedonio returned home to his family, determined to keep his promise to God. He learned about a Bible class being offered by Adventists and decided to attend. The Bible studies thrilled him. He accepted the truths of God and was baptized. As his wife saw the difference Christ made in Celedonio's life, she joined him. With his family united in God, Celedonio answered God's call to preach the gospel.

The family moved to a small town where no Adventists lived. They visited their neighbors and talked about Christ. But their efforts met with rejection. In time discouragement threatened to overwhelm Celedonio. He asked the local church headquarters for help. With a promise that someone would come to help him, Celedonio returned to his work with new courage. He continued visiting and praying, and a few people began to show an interest. One man, after listening to Celedonio explain God's claim on human hearts, closed his liquor store and converted it into a meeting house for believers.

Encouraged, Celedonio announced evangelistic meetings. But the promised evangelist did not arrive, and Celedonio prepared to hold the meetings himself.

Late that day a lone woman walked into town. Someone pointed her to the former tavern where Celedonio was preparing for the meeting. She was Maria, the promised Bible worker. She gave Bible studies to 24 people. Of these, 17 have been baptized. Celedonio built a mud brick house that serves as a church for the new believers in the little village in Bolivia where God has called him to work.

When people ask him when he decided to become a pastor, he tells them it was during a long swim across a swift river.

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Restoration



Sabbath Afternoon

ICAN IMAGINE when Christ said to the little band around Him, ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel,’ Peter said, ‘Lord do you really mean we are to go back to Jerusalem and preach the gospel to those who murdered you?’ ‘Yes,’ said Christ, ‘go, hunt up the man that spat in my face, tell him that he may have a seat in my kingdom. Yes, Peter, go find that man that made the cruel crown of thorns and placed it on my brow, and tell him that I have a crown ready for him when he comes into my kingdom, and there will be no thorns in it. Hunt up that man that took a reed and brought it down over the cruel thorns, driving them into my brow, and tell him I will put a scepter in his hand.’”—Dwight L. Moody, adapted.

This week, as we study God’s promises of restoration, see how Moody’s scenario of Christ exemplifies the God we serve.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What images of the new earth are presented in Scripture? In what ways was the return of the Jews from exile symbolic of the new earth? Why is the hope of this final restoration so crucial to what we believe? Does the world, in and of itself, offer anything that hints to this final restoration, or must we take it on faith? What did Christ accomplish on the cross that gave everyone (even those implicated in His death) the possibility to live in the new earth forever?

MEMORY TEXT: “The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10).

*(Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 29.)

THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID.

“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old” (Amos 9:11).

Someone once asked famous evangelist Billy Graham if he were an optimist or a pessimist. “I’m an optimist,” he answered. “I’ve read the last page of the Bible.”

He ought to be. And we, too. And it’s not just the last page of the Bible, either, that should give us reasons to rejoice in our God, to trust in His promises, and to be optimistic about the future. In various places, both Testaments, in poetry and prose and in songs and letters, present wonderful promises of a new existence, a restored earth where all things become righteous, holy and true because all things unrighteous, unholy, and untrue will no longer or ever again be.

Look up these texts and write down the details each one gives regarding what the ultimate future holds for God’s faithful:

Isa. 25:8 _____

Isa. 65:25 _____

Mark 12:25 _____

1 Cor. 15:52-55 _____

Col. 1:5 _____

2 Pet. 3:13 _____

Rev. 21:4 _____

Rev. 21:1-7 _____

Rev. 22:1-5 _____

Using the above verses (and any others you can think of), write a few paragraphs describing what we can piece together about our future reward. Contrast this existence with the fate of the lost. Can you think of anything in this life so worthwhile that it’s worth losing eternity over? If so, share it with the class (no doubt, everyone would be interested in hearing what it is).

REBUILDING THE RUINS: THE GOSPEL TO THE GENTILES.

“After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up” (Acts 15:16).

The immediate context of the last verses in Amos (Amos 9:11-15) deals basically with God’s promise, given in numerous other places in the Hebrew Bible, that though the Hebrew nation would go into captivity because of disobedience, God would restore them to their land.

Yet, it doesn’t end there. Centuries after Amos wrote, Acts 15 has James quoting Amos 9:11. The scene was an early church-council dealing with a crucial issue in the newly formed Christian church.

Read carefully Acts 15. Look at the context of James’s use of Amos. What is he talking about? Reading Amos 9, particularly verses 11 and 12, can you see that they mean more than just a restoration of the Jews back to their land? How does James use those verses? What message is he giving?

“When there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:7-9).

Amos was predicting, not just the return of the Jews to the land, but the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, a work that began with the early church and which will culminate in the final proclamation “to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6)—a work that we as a church have been called to engage in.

God plans to ultimately restore the world, cleanse it from sin, and recreate it into what He had originally planned for it, only better. Yet He isn’t going to do that until everyone, somehow, has an opportunity to hear the wonderful news that their sins have been paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ and that through faith in Him a place is waiting for them in this newly restored world. Think about what it means that we, as a church, have a crucial role to play in that proclamation.

Read John 14:2, 3. Think about what it means that Jesus is preparing a place for you personally. How do you understand what that means? How should that impact your relationship to Him now?

THE PLOWMAN OVERTAKES THE REAPER.

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt” (Amos 9:13).

Again, though the immediate context is the idea of a repentant Israel brought back to the land after years of captivity, the symbolic message is of the final hope of all humankind, the great redemption that God wrought for us through Christ on the cross (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; Heb. 9:12).

In verse 13, Amos tells of the day when the plowman will catch up with the reaper and the treader of grapes with him that soweth the seed. In this scenario, the harvest is so abundant, so rich, so plentiful and fruitful that it cannot be gathered in before the next round of sowing. In other words, the one who plows the field will come across the one who is still reaping the harvest because it is so big. And though, of course, the language is figurative, the point is that through Christ we have the promise of something so wonderful we can't even begin to imagine it. “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

Why would the Bible use the return of the Jews from exile as a symbol of ultimate redemption at the end of the age? What was it about that return that could make it a type or a symbol (however faint) of the final deliverance of God's people? See also Revelation 18:1-4. On the lines below, list a few parallels:

The promise of a whole new existence is the final end of all our hopes as followers of Christ. Anything short of that is insufficient. Review in your mind just what Christ did on the cross that makes this promise of eternity certain as long as you, despite your faults and shortcomings, remain in a saving relationship with Him.

OTHERWORLDLY HOPES.

“I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them” (Amos 9:14).

Look at the beauty of these sentiments, the wonderful idyllic scene they present. What an incredible conclusion to what has been almost nothing but word after word, line after line, verse after verse, and chapter after chapter of warnings about sin, apostasy, idolatry, oppression, perversion, and punishment. Little of what preceded this end gave hint that it could lead to this conclusion. Only divine intervention could bring about such a finale, only someone inspired by the Spirit could have dared predict such a possible outcome. Indeed, left to themselves, the Israelite nation would have vanished long ago, along with the Edomites, the Moabites, and the Jebusites and other people who disappeared on the dust heap of history.

In the same way, when we look at the world around us, there's little if anything within it itself that would give us hope for the future. Only the most blind optimist after the twentieth century could still hope for some sort of man-made utopia, especially when all previous attempts to make a utopia created, instead, nothing but hellish totalitarian systems that never lived up to their promises but, in fact, contradicted them in almost every point.

And, even if mankind could build a better, or even a good world, scientists predict that, eventually, the sun will blow up; such an event, of course, would leave the race, and whatever utopia it managed to create, with nothing to look forward to.

Fortunately, God's Word promises us such an unlikely ending that, given all that precedes it, only a powerful, loving God could bring it about—and He will, because He has promised, and He has sealed that promise with, literally, His own blood.

In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, German Frederick Nietzsche has his character, Zarathustra, say to his followers: “I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes!” As Christians, in contrast, our only real hope is “otherworldly,” in that the final point of our faith isn't in a better world but a brand new one so unlike what we have now it might as well be “otherworldly.” Though, of course, we have to live now in this world, with its daily toils and struggles—what can we do to keep this final “otherworldly” hope always before us in a way that will give us strength to press ahead in a world that offers little hope and encouragement now?

THE UNCONDITIONAL AND ETERNAL KINGDOM.

“And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God” (Amos 9:15).

The last verse of Amos deals with the immediate context of the promise of restoration after captivity. And though it presents a beautiful and hopeful promise, that promise was conditional, even if that conditionality is not specifically stated here (see, for instance, Jer. 18:7-10). Though Israel had, indeed, been brought back to the land, they were, centuries later, plucked up from the land the Lord had given them. All of which proves the point that the type, the symbol, only faintly represents the ultimate truth that it teaches, for in the new heavens and the new earth that God creates—we, certainly, will never again be pulled up from what God has given us.

Read Daniel 7:14 and Daniel 7:27. What do these verses say about the nature of the kingdom that God will ultimately restore?

There's no question, thanks to Christ and what He accomplished on the cross, that God will establish His everlasting kingdom. There's no conditionality, no equivocation, no question on this issue: It will come. Christ's death guarantees that.

Instead, the only variable, the only conditionality in the formula, is ourselves, our will, our choices. Will we be there, part of this unconditional and eternal kingdom, or do we face a death just as eternal and unconditional?

How trivial all other questions seem before this one.

The great news, however, is that Jesus, on Calvary, died that eternal death for us (Heb. 2:9) so that we can have a part in His eternal kingdom. What He did at the Cross was unconditional, universal, and all-sufficient; it was for all humankind, everyone, no exceptions, and it sufficed to cover all our sins. No one was left out, no one was overlooked, no one was skipped, even those who hung Him on the cross. His death encompassed *all* humanity (Rom. 5:15-19), even—and maybe especially—the worst among us. This is the essence of the Cross of Christianity, of all that we believe as Christians.

What remains, then, is the human factor: How do we respond to what God has, unconditionally, accomplished for us? Do we accept it, or do we reject it? Through the word of Amos, as through all God's prophets, from Moses to Ellen White, canonical and noncanonical, the message is the same: “Seek Me and live.”

FURTHER STUDY: Study the following passages to gain an understanding of what other Bible writers have to contribute to our understanding of the events associated with the day of the Lord: Isa. 25:9; Zeph. 1:14, 18; Mal. 4:5; Matt. 16:27; 25:32; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; 2 Pet. 3:10-13.

“Soon I heard the voice of God, which shook the heavens and the earth. There was a mighty earthquake. Buildings were shaken down on every side. I then heard a triumphant shout of victory, loud, musical, and clear. I looked upon the company, who, a short time before, were in such distress and bondage. Their captivity was turned. A glorious light shone upon them. How beautiful they then looked! All marks of care and weariness were gone, and health and beauty were seen in every countenance. Their enemies, the heathen around them, fell like dead men; they could not endure the light that shone upon the delivered, holy ones. This light and glory remained upon them, until Jesus was seen in the clouds of heaven, and the faithful, tried company were changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, from glory to glory. And the graves were opened, and the saints came forth, clothed with immortality, crying, ‘Victory over death and the grave’; and together with the living saints they were caught up to meet their Lord in the air.”—*Early Writings*, pp. 272, 273.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Through Adam, everyone faces inevitable doom; through Christ the inevitable becomes avoidable, in that this doom was no longer certain. Through Adam, the world as a whole was condemned; through Christ, the world as a whole was given a second chance, a reprieve, an opportunity to avert condemnation. What we do as *individuals* with that second chance is the ultimate question. But whatever choices we make regarding what Christ has done for the world as a whole, one crucial, objective, and unconditional fact remains, one that is unchanged no matter how we respond to it, and this is that Christ, as the second Adam—through His perfect life, His atoning death, and His resurrection—put the *whole world*, meaning everyone, in a new position before the Father, one that offers each person the opportunity, by faith, to be spared the condemnation that sin brings and a chance to reside in His eternal and unconditional kingdom. What was it that Christ accomplished on the cross that has made this opportunity to enter this kingdom possible, and what must our response be in order for what He did to become ours?



The Fall

Charlotte Ishkanian

Daniel Banu lay on the ground. Pain tore at his leg, which lay at an odd angle. He knew it was broken.

The Banu family had left their home in Romania and come to Spain in search of a better future. Daniel found work as a builder. The pay was not high, but they could live on it as long as nothing unexpected happened. Then, two weeks later, Daniel fell from the second floor of the building on which he was working and suffered a compound fracture of his leg.

At the hospital, a surgeon put a metal plate in his leg. When Banu awoke, his wife stood tearfully beside him. "Where was your angel when you fell?" she asked. He answered that if his angel had not been there, the fall might have killed him; but God saved him.

Daniel returned home to recuperate. Without his income, the family faced a serious crisis. Then Daniel noticed that the wound looked infected. The doctor ordered antibiotics, but the infection spread through his body. Doctors feared he might not live.

Daniel's wife worked an hour a day as a housekeeper when someone could stay with Daniel. This was the family's only income. She went to buy Daniel's medicine but did not have enough money to pay for it. She returned home crying. But the couple claimed God's promise in Psalm 46:1, "God is our help in trouble." They prayed that God would not let them down. When three different people, virtual strangers, offered them money, their faith was strengthened. Another organization paid their rent for six months and provided food.

The doctor advised surgery to remove the metal plate to save Daniel's life, but the family could not afford the surgery. The doctor said, "If you believe in prayer, you'd better pray. Only God can save you now." The couple refused to give up hope that God would heal Daniel. As they prayed, their faith grew stronger.

Slowly the infection subsided. After several months Daniel's leg healed without surgery. When he was out of danger the doctor told him that he thought Daniel would not live. "Only God saved you," he confided, "I could not."

Six months after the accident, Daniel returned to work. "God has brought us closer together and closer to Himself," Daniel testifies. "When the earthly doors are closed, we still found that God's heavenly windows are wide open."

Daniel Banu is a builder. He and his family live in a suburb of Madrid, Spain. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.

Bible Study Guide for First Quarter, 2002

The great controversy between good and evil is the theme of *The Cosmic Conflict Between Christ and Satan*, by Dr. John M. Fowler.

Lesson 1: War in Heaven

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: God and His Perfect Creation (Gen. 1:31; Ps. 104:24, 25).

Monday: From the Anointed to the Evil One (Ezek. 28:12-17).

Tuesday: Lucifer's Sin (Isa. 14:12-15).

Wednesday: Lucifer's Sinister Presumptions (Isa. 14:13, 14).

Thursday: Satan Cast Out of Heaven (Revelation 12).

MEMORY TEXT: 1 John 4:16, NRSV.

SABBATH GEM: How God chose to handle the conflict of Lucifer's rebellion illustrates His loving character. As you study and begin to understand how the great controversy is won in your own life, remember that Lucifer was not strong enough then (when he first rebelled against Christ), and he is not strong enough now to defeat those who abide in Christ.

Lesson 2: Issues in the Great Controversy

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: God's Law.

Monday: God's Character and Authority (Jer. 31:3; John 3:16; Rom 5:8).

Tuesday: God the Son (Matt. 4:8-11; John 14:10).

Wednesday: God's Justice and Mercy (Rev. 12:10; Zech. 3:1-5).

Thursday: God's Prerogatives (Deut. 10:12, 13; Rev. 14:7; Matt. 7:21).

MEMORY TEXT: John 14:10, NKJV.

SABBATH GEM: Though the Bible doesn't explain all the specific issues involved in the great controversy, the overall biblical portrayal of these issues centers around God's character and His law, which reveals that character.

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INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION



Union	Churches	Companies	Membership	Population
Caribbean Union Conference	500	95	168,556	3,450,200
Central American Union Conference	1,227	887	437,322	36,854,000
Colombian Union Conference	777	703	180,898	40,037,000
Cuban Union Conference	189	190	22,478	11,139,000
Dominican Union Mission	482	363	141,504	8,433,000
French Antilles-Guiana Union Mission	116	46	25,074	1,087,000
Haitian Union Mission	327	565	243,984	6,423,000
North Mexican Union Conference	473	912	129,009	67,754,500
Puerto Rican Union Conference	260	29	32,705	3,916,000
South Mexican Union Conference	1,185	3,535	397,608	31,884,500
Venezuela-Antilles Union Mission	446	306	105,486	24,418,800
West Indies Union Conference	599	72	194,590	2,977,000
Totals	6,582	7,703	2,079,304	238,384,000

Totals as of December 31, 2000

- Mission Projects:**
1. Lay Bible training institute, Honduras.
 2. 50 chapels, Central Guatemala Conference.
 3. Chapels, seminary church, and youth campsite, Cuba.

