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LESSONS

# Joel, Micah, Zephaniah

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## Meet the Principal Contributor to This Quarter's Lessons



Leo R. Van Dolson retired from denominational service in 1987 following a career in pastoral work, teaching, and editing. He pastored in the U.S. and Japan, and taught religion at Pacific Union College and health education at Loma Linda University School of Health. He holds a Master's in Public Health from Loma Linda University and a Ph.D. in educational administration from Claremont College.

Dr. Van Dolson has served as editor of *Ministry* and *Life and Health*, and as an associate editor of the *Adventist Review*. Most recently he was editor of the *Adult Sabbath School Lessons*. He has authored or co-authored 18 books, including *Healthy, Happy, Holy; God's Footprint on My Floor*; and *Boost Your Prophets*, and has written several adult quarterlies.

Dr. Van Dolson writes for several publications, and enjoys bird-watching and oil painting. He and his wife, Bobbie Jane, have two adult children.

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

## Introduction to the Book of Joel

Joel does not tell us much about himself. He gives his background in just 13 words. He tells us that his father is Pethuel but gives no clue as to what tribe he comes from. Neither does he list the kings under whom he prophesied. Because he ministered in Judah and Jerusalem, it seems likely that he was a native of Judah. His name means "Yahweh is God."

The time in which Joel wrote is debated by scholars. They have suggested dates ranging from the ninth century B.C. to the mid-fifth century B.C. John Calvin insightfully remarked that knowledge of the exact time in which Joel wrote "is of no great importance." Joel's message has timeless significance. If he wrote before the exile, the "day of the Lord" could refer to the Babylonian invasions. If he wrote after the exile, the "day of the Lord" could refer to the Greek or Roman attacks on Palestine. Whatever the historical context of his book, its end-time significance remains intact.

Ellen G. White accepted the eighth century B.C. as the period in which the book of Joel was written. Writing of the dark day of May 19, 1780, she said: "The description of this event, as given by eyewitnesses, is but an echo of the words of the Lord, recorded by the prophet Joel, twenty-five hundred years previous to their fulfillment."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 308.

The immediate occasion of Joel's call to repentance is a locust plague that had devastated Palestine. This calamity foreshadowed the day of the Lord when the unfaithful would receive retribution at the hands of the Lord's army. Because God allowed the locust plague and the subsequent attacks of unbelieving enemies, they are depicted as His servants for the punishment of the unfaithful. Both the locusts and the invading enemies of Israel foreshadow God's heavenly army that will confront the rebellious powers of earth at the end of time and deliver His loyal people.

Joel's clear-ringing trumpet call challenges us to sense our need of individual repentance as the close of probation draws near. Only as we respond to this call can we receive the "former" and "latter" rains that the Lord promises to pour upon His people. Only as we enter into a close personal relationship with Jesus can we have confidence that our salvation is assured when the world will be gathered into the valley of decision.

### JOEL—A CLEAR-RINGING CALL

| 1:1—2:11          | 2:12-17                                      | 2:18—3:21                      |
|-------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Judgment Has Come | Call to Repentance, Revival, and Reformation | Promised Result of Reformation |

# The Day of the Lord



## Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Joel 1:1–2:15.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand" (Joel 2:1).

**KEY THOUGHT:** The phrase *day of the Lord*, as used in Joel and throughout Scripture, not only describes God's past judgments but also points to the final judgment and the deliverance of God's people at the end of time. This week's lesson challenges us to sense the nearness of the close of probation and Christ's second coming. It also urges us to let the Lord complete His work in our own hearts and lives.

**THE DAY OF THE LORD IS NEAR.** Joel's book is a masterpiece of Hebrew prophetic literature. In his day he was perceived as blowing the trumpet faithfully in Zion and giving the clear-ringing call God commanded him to sound.

The Word of the Lord still sounds a clear-ringing trumpet call. Joel's faithful legacy imparts to us an urgent sense that the day of the Lord is near.

Knowing that time is short, Satan does all he can to keep us from responding to the call for reformation and revival. But *now* is the time to plead for God to expose Satan's deceptions. Now, while the trumpet of the last judgment sounds from the pages of Joel, we must heed the call to repent and totally commit our lives to finishing God's work in our lives and in the world.

**THE PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS (Joel 1:1-20).**

"The word of the Lord." The first five words of Joel suggest that he wishes to establish his authenticity on the basis of what he experienced rather than on who he was.

**What words and phrases does Joel use to describe the plague of locusts? Joel 1:2-4, 10-12.**

**How extensive was the devastation caused by the locust plague? Joel 1:4, 6, 7.**

"The locusts are called a nation . . . because of their organization. . . . The locust swarm is called strong . . . because of its multitude and ability to destroy vegetation. . . . The teeth of the locust, . . . called lions' teeth, are edged like a saw to enable it to gnaw through even the bark of trees."—*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6, p. 738.

**Locust plagues have been common in Palestine.** H. Schneller describes one such plague this way: " 'We had a famine in the 2d year of the war [1915] such as we had not experienced in 50 years. The sky was darkened by the gigantic swarms of locusts which covered the whole country, and neither sun nor moon could be seen. All of Palestine was transformed into a desert within a few days. All trees, from their tops to the ground, including the bark, were eaten up clean; our vegetable gardens, cultivated with so much labor, disappeared as by magic. The following spring there crept forth from hundreds of billions of eggs the new brood, which consumed the little that had been left. The result was a terrific famine.' "—*SDA Bible Dictionary*, article, "Locust."

**What effect did the plague have on the drunkards (Joel 1:5, 10), the farmers (verse 11), the priests (verses 9, 13), and the animals (verses 18, 20)?**

Why did the Lord allow this devastating plague to come upon Israel? What did He hope the results would be?

What calamities have come upon nations or people groups in the recent past? Have you personally experienced hardship or tragedy? If so, what response do you think the Lord was hoping for?

**THE DAY OF THE LORD (Joel 2:1, 2).**

We find the phrase "day of the Lord" about 20 times in the prophetic books of the Old Testament. Joel uses it five times.

**What do the locusts symbolize? Joel 1:15; 2:1, 2.**

The "day of the Lord" in the Old Testament refers to a time when God would punish the unfaithful. But it was also a time when He would protect and vindicate the faithful. The days of the Lord in Israel's history pointed forward to the final day of the Lord when history will come to an end.

**How would you describe the day of the Lord after reading the following passages? Isa. 13:6-10; Eze. 30:1-5; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:2-7, 14-18.**

**There were many days of the Lord throughout Israel's history.** Isaiah foretold the destruction of Babylon because the nation had ignored God's claims. Amos's predictions were fulfilled when the Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. The day of the Lord for Zephaniah was Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah. And the day of the Lord for Ezekiel was when retribution would come upon the nations surrounding Israel.

**According to Joel, what does the "day of the Lord" involve? Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14.**

Joel saw the coming calamity for Israel as a symbol of cosmic calamity. The day of the Lord symbolized the time when God would bring the nations of earth to judgment and bestow eternal peace and prosperity upon His people. Joel predicted the end of the world. "In visions of the great judgment day, the inspired messengers of Jehovah were given glimpses of the consternation of those unprepared to meet their Lord in peace. . . . [Joel 1:15-18, 12 quoted]. The day of wrath to the enemies of God is the day of final deliverance to His church."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 726, 727.

**After reading Matthew 24:3-11 and 2 Timothy 3:1-5, ask yourself what present-day events "are casting their shadows" toward the Second Coming.**

**BLARING TRUMPETS AND A MARCHING ARMY (Joel 2:1-15).**

Two activities mark the day of the Lord as Joel describes it: (1) trumpets blowing and (2) an army marching.

**Joel uses the phrase "blow the trumpet in Zion" twice in chapter 2 (verses 1, 15). What significance does this figure of speech have for you?**

"The blowing of the trumpet was used in Israel to call the people to the door of the 'tent of meeting,' to start them on their journey, to sound an alarm in the way, and to call them to a holy convocation at the time of their festivals (Num. 10:1-10)."—Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1972), p. 47.

**The trumpet call of Joel's day is being repeated today.** "To prepare a people to stand in the day of God, a great work of reform was to be accomplished. God saw that many of His professed people were not building for eternity, and in His mercy He was about to send a message of warning to arouse them from their stupor, and lead them to make ready for the coming of the Lord."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 311.

**What indication do we find in Joel 2:6, 10, and 11, that God had something in mind far greater than a locust invasion?**

**The last part of verse 6** in the Revised Standard Version reads, "all faces grow pale." Compare this with Jeremiah 30:6 and Nahum 2:10. "Before His presence, 'all faces are turned into paleness'; upon the rejecters of God's mercy falls the terror of eternal despair; . . . The faces of the righteous are lighted up, and joy fills every heart. And the angels strike a note higher and sing again as they draw still nearer to earth."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 641.

**Which of the following words best describes your reaction to Joel's warning of judgments to come?**

Fear  
Confidence  
Hostility

Pleasure  
Indifference  
Solemnity

Examine your feelings to discover why you answered the way you did.

## THE ULTIMATE DAY OF THE LORD.

What army will bring the ultimate day of the Lord? Rev. 17:14; 19:11-14.

Notice how the descriptions of events surrounding Christ's second coming in *The Great Controversy* fit Joel's description. (Review Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31, 32; 3:14-16.)

"By the people of God a voice, clear and melodious, is heard, saying, 'Look up,' and lifting their eyes to the heavens, they behold the bow of promise. The black, angry clouds that covered the firmament are parted, and like Stephen they look up steadfastly into heaven and see the glory of God and the Son of man seated upon His throne. . . .

"In the midst of the angry heavens is one clear space of indescribable glory, whence comes the voice of God like the sound of many waters, saying: 'It is done.' Revelation 16:17.

"That voice shakes the heavens and the earth. There is a mighty earthquake, 'such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great.' Verses 17, 18. . . . The mountains shake like a reed in the wind, and ragged rocks are scattered on every side. . . . The whole earth heaves and swells like the waves of the sea. Its surface is breaking up. . . . The proudest cities of the earth are laid low. The lordly palaces, upon which the world's great men have lavished their wealth in order to glorify themselves, are crumbling to ruin before their eyes. . . .

"Through a rift in the clouds there beams a star whose brilliancy is increased fourfold in contrast with the darkness. It speaks hope and joy to the faithful, but severity and wrath to the transgressors of God's law. Those who have sacrificed all for Christ are now secure, hidden as in the secret of the Lord's pavilion. They have been tested, and before the world and the despisers of truth they have evinced their fidelity to Him who died for them. . . . Their voices rise in triumphant song: 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.' Psalm 46:1-3."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 636-639.

Now underline those parts that relate to the joy felt by the saved.

**NEW TESTAMENT VOICES.**

**What appeals do New Testament prophets make to those who are facing the imminent day of the Lord? 1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 5:2-8; 2 Peter 3:10-12.**

What will qualify us to be among Christ's faithful remnant in the great day of the Lord? Paul and Peter invite us to be "blameless," "children of light," people whose manner of life is holy. But how can we be holy? The most exciting truth in the Word of God is that the blamelessness, light, and holiness of Jesus may be ours as by faith we receive His Holy Spirit into our hearts. Believers in Jesus "have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood" (1 Peter 1:2, NIV). Our precious faith has come "through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1, NIV).

Because Jesus bestows His divine presence upon us by giving us the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts (John 14:15-18), we have the qualifying gift of His righteousness (Rom. 8:9, 10).

**How did Jesus explain the transforming and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit to Nicodemus? John 3:1-18.**

"When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven. No one sees the hand that lifts the burden, or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 173.

The apostles repeated the teaching of Jesus. Paul wrote: "Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5, RSV). The result is that Spirit-filled persons are "slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:18, RSV). They are now sons and daughters of God who can look forward confidently to the final events of this world's history. (See Rom. 8:12-17.)

**Reread John 3:1-18. How do Jesus' words affect you? What is your response?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study in context the following passages on the day of the Lord in the New Testament: 1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Cor. 1:13, 14; 2 Thess. 2:1-3; Rev. 6:15-17.

Read pages 311-316 in *The Great Controversy* (the last part of the chapter entitled "Heralds of the Morning"). Compare the spiritual state of God's people before the first advent of Christ with our condition today.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does it mean to have your feet firmly planted on the truth?
2. Under what circumstances is God able to draw His covering over you so you will be sheltered in the time of storm soon to come?
3. How can you have the assurance of being saved at the Second Coming?
4. What have you learned about the necessity of a close relationship with Christ? What practical steps can you take to improve your relationship with Him?
5. In what specific ways can you meet the challenge of this lesson in your home and work environment?
6. What promises brought out in this lesson can you claim?

**SUMMARY:** The day of the Lord in Joel describes both an event in historical time and the coming of the Lord for the deliverance of God's people at the end of time. The analogy of a severe locust plague points to the time when Christ and the armies of heaven will come to destroy those who are destroying this earth. The trumpet is blowing in Zion, warning us that the close of probation is near and that it is time to prepare for Christ's second coming.

# Revival and Reformation



## Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Joel 2:12-17.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" (Joel 2:13).

**KEY THOUGHT:** "A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. There must be earnest effort to obtain the blessing of the Lord, not because God is not willing to bestow His blessing upon us, but because we are unprepared to receive it."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 121.

**THE LORD CALLS FOR TOTAL COMMITMENT.** In 1734 Jonathan Edwards began preaching a series of sermons on justification by faith to the religiously bankrupt citizens of the Massachusetts colony settled by the English on the North American continent. Conversions took place, slowly at first, then in large numbers. The revival spilled over into many other communities. That movement, known as the Great Awakening, was one of the most revitalizing experiences in American history.

The time has come for the final great awakening in the Adventist Church. We need new spiritual life, a much closer walk with Jesus, victory over sin, a greater infilling of the Spirit, and a new willingness to share the Lord's blessings with others.

**THE REAL THING (Joel 2:12).**

How do we follow the instruction, "Turn ye even to me with all your heart" (Joel 2:12)? See Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25.

The obvious answer to this question seems to be that we should turn to the Lord through fasting, weeping, and mourning. After all, this is what Joel 2:12 tells us to do. On the other hand, no amount of fasting, weeping, or mourning will cause us to turn our hearts to the Lord unless we respond to the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit. External forms of religion, ceremonies, self-flagellation, or self-induced sorrow for our human failures are no substitute for the real thing—a heart responding to the pleading voice of the Holy Spirit.

But we do not of ourselves have the power to turn our own hearts to the Lord. We submit to His call, and He gives us genuine sorrow for past sin and power to turn away from it. "The very first step to Christ is taken through the drawing of the Spirit of God; as man responds to this drawing, he advances toward Christ in order that he may repent."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 390.

How did Jesus describe the blessings that would come as a result of genuine sorrow for sin as manifested through fasting, weeping, and mourning? Matt. 5:4; 6:16-18; Luke 6:21.

In ancient Israel fasts tended to become a hypocritical means of demonstrating personal piety. Jesus condemned this practice.

**The true fast involves practical service for others.** When our hearts are genuinely turned to the Lord, we do not withdraw into a depressed state of weeping and mourning, hardly daring to face the world. The Lord knows that the best cure for grief is action. Our genuine sorrow for sin and newfound union with Christ lead us to reach out in sympathy and love to those around us.

"Is not this the fast that I choose. . . ? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" (Isa. 58:6, 7, RSV).

What great principles are involved in Isaiah 58:6, 7? (See Matt. 22:37-40; James 1:27.) How does applying these principles to your life change things for the better?

**MAKING AN EARNEST EFFORT (Joel 2:13).**

What did the admonition to "rend your heart, and not your garments" (Joel 2:13) mean to God's people in Joel's day? Ps. 34:18; 51:17. What does it mean to us?

How easy it would have been for one of Joel's contemporaries to rend his garments as a sign of piety without having any real heart sorrow for sin! Centuries later Caiaphas provided a classic example of this very practice. (See Matt. 26:65.)

How easy it is for us to display apparent contrition and repentance without responding in heart to the Lord's appeals! Words can be very cheap indeed. But the Lord seeks a sincere heart response, not some mere outward display of piety.

**Our part in revival.** 'There must be earnest effort to obtain the blessing of the Lord, not because God is not willing to bestow His blessing upon us, but because we are unprepared to receive it. Our heavenly Father is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. But it is *our work*, by *confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer*, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessing.'—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 121 (italics supplied).

"Conditions," "earnest effort," "our work"—some prefer to avoid that kind of language. But there it is. If we are to have a revival of true godliness that alone can fill our most urgent need, we *must* meet the conditions.

**What results from genuine confession? Prov. 28:13; 1 John 1:9.**

"True confession is always of a specific character, and acknowledges particular sins. They may be of such a nature as to be brought before God only; they may be wrongs that should be confessed to individuals who have suffered injury through them; or they may be of a public character, and should then be as publicly confessed. But all confession should be definite and to the point, acknowledging the very sins of which you are guilty."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 38.

In what ways does confessing our sins relate to revival, reformation, and the concept of true fasting? How can the confession of sins improve your life?

**THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE (Joel 2:13, 14).**

In Joel 2:12-14, the prophet calls for true repentance and humility. What did Jesus and Paul teach along the same lines? Matt. 23:12; Phil. 2:5-8.

God does not want to embarrass or humiliate us. On the contrary, He wants us to have a sense of joy in what we can become *in and through Him*. The kind of humility God desires on our part is that which puts self in proper perspective and reaches out in lovingkindness to help those about us.

**Trust God, distrust self.** "If we are intent upon searching our own hearts, putting away our sins, and correcting our evil tendencies, our souls will not be lifted up unto vanity; we shall be distrustful of ourselves, having an abiding sense that our sufficiency is of God."

"Alas, what pride is prevailing in the church, what hypocrisy, what deception, what love of dress, frivolity, and amusement, what desire for the supremacy! All these sins have clouded the mind, so that eternal things have not been discerned."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 122, 125.

**What do the following references indicate or imply regarding the place of prayer in revival?** Joel 1:14, 15; 2:1 (compare Luke 9:13; 11:13; 1 Thess. 5:17; Heb. 4:16).

**Note the kind of prayer that will be effective.** "The church must arouse to action. The Spirit of God can never come in until she prepares the way. There should be earnest searching of heart. There should be united, persevering prayer, and through faith a claiming of the promises of God. There should be, not a clothing of the body with sackcloth, as in ancient times, but a deep humiliation of soul."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 126.

**What are the results of genuine repentance?** Acts 3:19; 2 Cor. 7:10.

**What characteristics of God lead Him to bestow special blessings on the repentant sinner?** Joel 2:13, 14.

**LEADERS JEALOUS FOR THE CAUSE (Joel 2:15-17).**

For the past three days, we have been studying Joel's call for repentance. From his plea, we can make a twofold application: (1) It urges those identified with the world to forsake sin and accept the Lord; (2) it calls church members to awake from spiritual lethargy and commit themselves totally to doing God's will in their lives, as well as to finishing the work He has given the church. Such revival will naturally lead to reformation.

Although revival and reformation basically must involve individual work and experience on the part of church members, Joel 2:15-17 demonstrates that leadership also has an important role—that of calling the people to meet the Lord's challenge and of intercessory ministry for the people at the throne of God.

**Where are the gospel watchmen to sound the trumpet? Why are they to sound it? Joel 2:15.**

As the priests in Joel's day were to call all the people of Jerusalem together in a solemn service, so church leaders today are to initiate the movement for revival and reformation.

"When God puts His Spirit upon men, they will work. They will proclaim the word of the Lord; they will lift up their voice like a trumpet. The truth will not be diminished or lose its power in their hands. They will show the people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 411.

**How extensive is to be the gathering of God's people for consecration and reformation? Joel 2:16.**

**What responsibilities do ministers and leaders have in giving the call to revival and reformation? Joel 2:17.**

**The sacredness of the ministers' work.** "Their work is more solemn and sacred than ministers generally realize. They should carry with them a sanctified influence. God requires that those who minister in sacred things should be men who feel jealous for His cause. The burden of their work should be the salvation of souls."—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 234.

**How can you help your pastor realize his goal of saving souls?**

**A HARVEST OF JOY (Joel 2:17; Psalm 126:5, 6).**

Church leaders have the responsibility to cooperate with God in bringing about the repentance and reformation Joel calls for in chapter 2, verses 12-17. The corresponding blessings are bountiful.

Review Joel 2:17. Then read Psalm 126:5, 6 to see what promise God gives concerning the result of weeping.

**The ministers' reward.** "As their reward, the faithful undershepherds will hear from the Chief Shepherd: 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' He will then place the crown of glory upon their heads and bid them enter the joy of their Lord. What is that joy? It is beholding with Christ the redeemed saints, reviewing with Him their travail for souls, their self-denial and self-sacrifice, their giving up of ease, of worldly gain, and every earthly inducement, and choosing the reproach, the suffering, the self-abasement, the wearing labor, and the anguish of spirit as men would oppose the counsel of God against their own souls; it is calling to remembrance the chastening of their souls before God, their weeping between the porch and the altar, and their becoming a spectacle unto the world, to angels, and to men. All this is then ended, and the fruits of their labors are seen, souls are saved through their efforts in Christ."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 709.

"It is now too late in the day for men to please and glorify themselves. Ministers of God, it is too late to be contending for the supremacy. The solemn time has come when ministers should be weeping between the porch and the altar, crying, 'Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach' (Joel 2:17). It is a day when, instead of lifting up their souls in self-sufficiency, ministers and people should be confessing their sins before God and one another."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald Extra*, Dec. 24, 1899.

**You may not be ordained to the gospel ministry, but in what ways can you say you are a minister?**

"Every soul is to minister. He is to use every physical, moral and mental power, through sanctification of the Spirit, that he may be a laborer together with God. All are bound to devote themselves actively and unreservedly to God's service. They are to cooperate with Jesus Christ in the great work of helping others."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1159.

**FURTHER STUDY:** What do the following references add to our understanding of the Bible teaching of the need for revival? Ps. 85:6-13; Isa. 57:15; Hab. 3:2. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 524.)

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What applications would you make to the question at the end of Joel 2:17, "Wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God"?
2. When the pastor of your church calls for special prayer and labor for others, how do you respond?
3. List specific things you can do to bring about revival and reformation in your church.
4. When a person who has wronged you or one of your friends returns to the Lord, what is your attitude to him or her? Do you forgive and accept this person into your fellowship, or do you hold yourself aloof? What attitude would Jesus adopt toward such a person?

**SUMMARIZE** in your own words God's call to revival and reformation outlined in Joel 2:15-17.

The Euro-Africa Division thanks you for this evangelistic center your Thirteenth Sabbath Special Projects Offering in 1987 helped build for the Muslims in Lyons, France. The Euro-Africa Division needs your help again March 28.



# The Early and Latter Rains



## Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Joel 2:18-32.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit" (Joel 2:28, 29).

**KEY THOUGHT:** What thrilling promises the Lord has given us concerning the finishing of His work through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain! Yet, how indifferent we sometimes are to these glorious promises! How much we need to study them, meditate upon them, and claim them as ours! The entire universe is anxiously waiting for us to do so.

**WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS FOR THE RECEPTION OF THE LATTER RAIN?** As the sign that Christ had begun His ministry for His people in the heavenly sanctuary, He poured out the Holy Spirit in the early rain on the day of Pentecost. (See *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 38, 39.)

But if we are willing to let God take over completely in our lives, then we will have the thrilling privilege of receiving the latter rain and taking part in giving the loud cry predicted in Revelation 18:1-4.

What must we do to bring about the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit? This question was addressed long ago by the Lord through the prophet Joel. Thus the book of Joel is important to us today.

**GOD'S PITY AND ZEAL FOR HIS PEOPLE (Joel 2:18-22).**

Verse 18 suggests that the priests and people had responded to God's appeals for revival and reformation.

"The clause reads literally, 'Then Jehovah became jealous.' It is assumed that the repentance enjoined had taken place."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 944. Thus God could give His blessings as described in verses 18-22. But because Israel did not remain faithful, the ultimate fulfillment of the promises in Joel 2:19-32 is reserved for the Christian church.

**What promises did God make in Joel 2:18-22 regarding the people, the invaders, the land, and the animals?**

**"The Lord will be jealous for his land"** (Joel 2:18, NIV). The Hebrew word translated "jealous" means "to have zeal, to be zealous." God's jealousy, unlike man's, involves no selfishness. His jealousy is a loving, zealous desire to bless His people.

**"I will send you corn, and wine, and oil"** (Joel 2:19). Throughout the Old Testament corn, wine, and oil are material symbols of God's spiritual blessings that He gives to His faithful people. God covenanted to bless His people if they would love and obey Him: "He will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will also bless the fruit of your body and the fruit of your ground, *your grain and your wine and your oil*" (Deut. 7:13, RSV, italics supplied). If they turned away from the Lord, a curse would be upon them; the land would not produce; and the grain, wine, and oil would be cut off. (See Deut. 28:40, 51; compare Hosea 2:8, 9.)

**"I will remove far off from you the northern army"** (Joel 2:20). Most of Israel's enemies came from the north. The Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Syrians, the Romans, and the papal crusaders marched into Palestine from the north. (See Isa. 41:25; Jer. 1:14; 25:9.)

**In what ways do you think these promises apply to God's people today?**

The little horn power of Daniel 8 functions till the coming of Jesus: "By no human hand, he shall be broken" (Dan. 11:25, RSV). Daniel 11 speaks of the same power as "the king of the north" (verse 40): "He shall come to his end, with none to help him" (verse 45, RSV). Can you relate Daniel's predictions to those of Joel?

**THE PROMISE OF THE EARLY AND LATTER RAINS (Joel 2:23-29).**

**How did the Lord restore the material and spiritual prosperity of His repentant people? Joel 2:23.**

In Palestine "the former rain" falls in the autumn (October-November) when the seed is sown. The latter rain falls in the spring (March-April), ripening the grain in preparation for the harvest.

**"For he hath given you the former rain moderately" (Joel 2:23).** The word translated "moderately" is not present in the Hebrew text. The word in Hebrew means "for righteousness." Scholars translate the phrase in different ways. Some translate it "the early rain for righteousness"; others, "the early rain for your vindication" (RSV); still others, "a teacher for righteousness" (NIV).

(Note: The word translated "former rain" in the KJV literally means "teacher." But the same word is used later in the verse to refer to the former or early rain.)

The teaching of the text is quite similar, whichever translation you prefer:

**"The former rain for righteousness."** Righteousness is rained from heaven upon God's believing people (Isa. 45:8; Hosea 10:12.) Throughout Scripture righteousness is bestowed upon the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 32:15-17; 44:3; Rom. 8:9, 10). The early, or former rain represents the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

**"The early rain for your vindication."** Vindication, or justification, is the work of the Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:10-12; Titus 3:5-7.) When people are justified, the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon them. Joel is referring to the forgiveness (involving cleansing and restoration) granted to repentant Israelites.

**"The teacher for [of] righteousness."** Every prophet was a teacher of righteousness, but the supreme Teacher was Jesus Christ. John the Baptist testified: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt. 3:11, NIV). Jesus' teaching is now exercised through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. (See John 16:13-15.)

**In what ways were the people of Joel's day blessed by the restoration of the former and the latter rains? Joel 2:25-27. How do you know that the Lord is in the midst of His church today?**

**LAUNCHING THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-18).**

The material blessings that came when Israel responded to Joel's call for repentance showed that their covenant with God was restored. For the land to be restored, the former and latter rains needed to fall. God sent these rains when the people opened their hearts to His Spirit. The last phrase of Joel 2:23 reads literally: "the early rain and the latter rain *at the first.*" Verses 24-27 describe the *first* blessings that resulted from the renewed outpouring of the Spirit upon God's people. Verses 28 and 29 describe the blessings that would occur *second* or "afterward" (verse 28).

**What special manifestation of the spiritual early and latter rains would occur "afterward"? Joel 2:28, 29.**

In the last age, after the greatest Teacher of righteousness had come, the Holy Spirit would be poured out more completely upon God's believing people. Joel 2:28, 29 describes the outpouring of God's Spirit in the former and latter rains of the gospel age.

**To what event did the apostle Peter apply Joel 2:28, 29? Acts 2:14-18.**

This was the "former rain" that launched the Christian church.

**The disciples fulfilled the conditions to receive the former rain.** "As the disciples waited for the fulfillment of the promise, they humbled their hearts in true repentance, and confessed their unbelief."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 36, 37.

**What "former rain" experience does every Christian enjoy?** John 3:5 (compare Rom. 8:9, 14; 1 John 3:24).

"We ask the question, How does the gift already bestowed on the church become my gift? The simple answer that comes from the Ephesus experience (Acts 19:1-6) is that it becomes mine when I receive the resurrected Lord—not as a means to a further end (e.g., the Holy Spirit), but as the end to all my needs and longings."—Jan Paulsen, *When the Spirit Descends* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1977), p. 84.

**RIPENING GRAIN (Joel 2:28-31).**

What indications are there in Joel 2:28-31 that the Holy Spirit will be poured out just before Christ's return?

Joel's clear purpose was to indicate a final outpouring of the Spirit shortly before the end of human history. This outpouring is the "latter rain." Shortly before Jesus' return the "latter rain" will provide the power of the Holy Spirit for the final preaching of the three angels' messages.

The latter rain prepares believers for Jesus' return. "The latter rain, falling near the close of the season, ripens the grain, and prepares it for the sickle. . . . The ripening of the grain represents the completion of the work of God's grace in the soul. By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ. The latter rain, ripening earth's harvest, represents the spiritual grace that prepares the church for the coming of the Son of man. But unless the former rain has fallen, there will be no life."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 506.

What great work is accomplished when the "latter rain" of the Holy Spirit is poured out? Rev. 18:1-4.

The "glory" of Revelation 18:1 is the glory of Christ's character. When His people receive the latter rain, the glory of His character will be revealed to the world through them. Then, with unprecedented zeal, they will extend Heaven's final invitation to lost mankind. (See Rev. 18:4; Matt. 24:14; *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415.)

"Thousands of voices will be imbued with the power to speak forth the wonderful truths of God's Word. The stammering tongue will be unloosed, and the timid will be made strong to bear courageous testimony to the truth. May the Lord help His people to cleanse the soul temple from every defilement, and to maintain such a close connection with Him that they may be partakers of the latter rain when it shall be poured out."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1055.

What things does God invite us to do in preparation for the latter rain?

## WONDROUS SIGNS AND DELIVERANCE (Joel 2:30-32).

How are the signs or wonders mentioned in Joel 2:30, 31 interpreted in the New Testament verses that follow? Matt. 24:29, 30; Luke 21:25-27; Rev. 6:12-17.

The signs in the natural world that already have occurred (the dark day, May 19, 1780; the falling stars, November 13, 1833; and others) will be repeated immediately before the second coming of Jesus. The natural phenomena of modern history point to the reality of the events that surround the coming of the Lord. (See *The Great Controversy*, pp. 334, 635-637, chap. 40.)

Who will be included in the "remnant" that the Lord promises to deliver? Joel 2:32.

"In . . . Africa, in the Catholic lands of Europe and of South America, in China, in India, in the islands of the sea, and in all the dark corners of the earth, God has in reserve a firmament of chosen ones that will yet shine forth amidst the darkness, revealing clearly to an apostate world the transforming power of obedience to His law. Even now they are appearing in every nation, among every tongue and people; and in the hour of deepest apostasy. . . these faithful ones . . . will 'shine as lights in the world.' The darker the night, the more brilliantly will they shine."—*Evangelism*, pp. 706, 707.

"Then thousands in the eleventh hour will see and acknowledge the truth. . . . These conversions to truth will be made with a rapidity that will surprise the church, and God's name alone will be glorified."—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 16.

What does the above quotation from *Evangelism* tell us about our feelings regarding people who are different from us in any way? Is there room for prejudice in the life of a Christian?

Christ lived and died so *every one* could have eternal life. Thus, to be a Christian means to reach beyond race, gender, and culture in order to touch the heart of the person. (See Gal. 3:28.)

How should we respond as a church to the statement that "thousands in the eleventh hour will see and acknowledge the truth"? How should you respond as an individual?

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read Acts 2, and, if available, the section in *Testimonies to Ministers*, pages 506-512, entitled 'Pray for the Latter Rain.'

"Under the figure of the early and the latter rain, that falls in Eastern lands at seedtime and harvest, the Hebrew prophets foretold the bestowal of spiritual grace in extraordinary measure upon God's church. The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was the beginning of the early (or former) rain, and glorious was the result. To the end of time the presence of the Spirit is to abide with the true church.

"But near the close of earth's harvest, a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man. This outpouring of the Spirit is likened to the falling of the latter rain; and it is for this added power that Christians are to send their petitions to the Lord of the harvest 'in the time of the latter rain.' In response, 'the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain.' 'He will cause to come down . . . the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain.' Zechariah 10:1; Joel 2:23.

"But unless the members of God's church today have a living connection with the Source of all spiritual growth, they will not be ready for the time of reaping."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 54, 55.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can you have a 'living connection with the Source of all spiritual growth'?
2. What do you intend to do this week and in the weeks to come to prepare for the latter rain and the coming of the Lord?
3. What do you think you can do to inspire fellow Christians in your local church to prepare for the latter rain?

**SUMMARIZE** below in your own words what you consider to be the major contribution of this lesson to your understanding of the latter rain and the finishing of the work.

# Judgment Brings Deliverance



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Joel 3:1-21.

MEMORY TEXT: "So shall ye know that I am the Lord your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more" (Joel 3:17).

**KEY THOUGHT.** How often Christians express the thought "This world is really in bad shape. I wish the Lord would come soon and put an end to all this suffering." But the good news of Joel 3 is that the day of the Lord *is* near. The deliverance we long for is soon to take place.

**JOEL'S CONCLUSION.** This last chapter in the significant book of Joel begins with a description of God's judgments on the nations that have rejected His love and opposed His people. Joel predicts that the time will come when the weak will say, "I am strong" (verse 10). In the political climate of our world we see a spectacular fulfillment of this prophecy. Even so, the primary application is still in the future, when even the weakest nations will join the confederacy Satan forms against Christ and His people. This great gathering will lead to the judgment, when the Lord will thrust in His sickle to reap the harvest of the earth.

The book of Joel concludes by describing the blessed state of God's people after their deliverance. What God wanted to accomplish for Israel but could not because of their failure to repent and obey, He will accomplish for all God's people in the days soon to come.

**WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN (Joel 3:1, 2).**

How many of the nations of the earth are involved in the judgment pictured in Joel 3:1, 2?

**There are two possible ways to interpret Joel 3:** First, we can think of it as a prophecy about what might have been for Israel as a nation if the people had maintained their relationship with the Lord, accepted the Messiah, and fulfilled the evangelistic mission He had for them. Israel would have become the greatest nation on earth, prospered and protected by God. The unbelieving nations of earth, opposed to Israel, ultimately would have been destroyed, Jerusalem would have become the center of the earth, and God's holy people would have dwelt in perpetual safety.

Because of Israel's failure, the conditional prophecies of her greatness will now be fulfilled to the Christian church.

**God's intention was thwarted.** "As the numbers of Israel increased they were to enlarge their borders, until their kingdom should embrace the world.

"God desired to bring all peoples under His merciful rule. He desired that the earth should be filled with joy and peace. He created man for happiness, and He longs to fill human hearts with the peace of heaven. . . .

"But Israel did not fulfill God's purpose."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 290.

**We must interpret Joel 3 in light of New Testament predictions of the end.** Because the "Israel of God" is now the Christian church (Gal. 6:15, 16), these prophecies will be fulfilled in principle to the universal people of God. Thus, Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia (verse 4, NIV) are symbols of all the nations that oppose God's people toward the end of time. The destruction of Egypt and Edom (verse 19) symbolizes the destruction of the nations of earth at the second coming of Jesus and ultimately at the end of the millennium. The judgment of the nations (verse 12, NIV) refers to the retribution meted out upon them at the second coming of Jesus and at the end of the millennium. Judah and Jerusalem represent the faithful people of God from all ages (verse 20) who will become citizens of the earth made new.

What does the quote from *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 290, tell us about God's character?

**THE LORD IS ON OUR SIDE (Joel 3:2, 3).**

What reasons does Joel give for the judgment pronounced against the nations? Joel 3:2, 3.

'The word 'Jehoshaphat' means 'the Lord judges' and is apparently a symbolic term, rather than an actual place name. The language of verses 2-3 indicates that the Lord is strongly on the side of his people: my people, my heritage, my land, my people. The Lord has four charges against the nations: they have scattered Israel, they have divided Israel's land, they have given the people over into slavery, and they have sold even the young children into slavery.'—James Limburg, *Hosea-Micah, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), p. 74.

The Phoenicians and the Philistines were slave traders (Eze. 27:13). They had plundered, persecuted, and enslaved God's people. But the Lord promised to punish them: "I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done" (Joel 3:4, NIV).

**Toward the end of time the unbelieving nations will persecute God's people.** Inspired by the devil and his demons, unbelievers will outlaw and boycott God's faithful remnant. In principle, these attacks against God's people will be the same as those practiced by the Phoenicians and the Philistines. (See Rev. 12:17; 13:11-17.)

Against whom do earth's nations gather their army? What actually takes place as they assemble for battle? Joel 3:9-12 (compare Rev. 17:14; 19:11-16; 20:7, 8).

Joel's prophecy parallels John's. The armies that gathered against Israel represent the nations of earth ranged against last-day believers. At the second advent of Jesus, these armies are opposed by Christ and His heavenly hosts. And at the end of the millennium, the wicked multitude, led by his Satanic majesty, assembles for the final battle. Prior to this battle the great white throne judgment occurs (see Rev. 20:11-15; compare Matt. 25:31-46). Then the hosts of the unsaved are annihilated.

In Joel 3:4-8, God identifies Himself with His people. How would you apply these verses to God's interest in us today and what He plans to do for His people? (Compare Rev. 12:17; 13:7, 8, 15-17.)

## WORDS OF HOPE (Joel 3:1-16).

What parallels do you see between Joel 3:13 and Revelation 14:17-20?

John tells us that there are two aspects to the harvest:

1. Revelation 14:14-16 describes symbolically the harvest of the righteous. Because the former and latter rains have done their work, the people of God have received Christ's character. Heavenly angels reap the golden grain.

2. Revelation 14:17-20 depicts the second harvest, that of the wicked, symbolized by the gathering of grapes from a vineyard. They are thrown into "the great wine press of the wrath of God" (Rev. 14:19). Thus John develops Joel's symbolism of the destruction of the wicked (Joel 3:13).

At first, Joel 3:1-14 seems quite negative. But for the righteous, what message of hope do these verses have?

The multitudes in the valley of decision (Joel 3:14) are awaiting God's decision—the sentence of death from the eternal Judge.

The "signs of the times" in Joel and in *The Great Controversy*:

| Ref.     | Sign                                   | Description   | Great Controversy |
|----------|--|---|-------------------|
| 2:28     | Pouring out of Spirit                  | Outpouring of the latter rain.  | 611, 612          |
| 2:3      | Darkness, stars withdraw their shining | A dense blackness, deeper than the darkness of the night, falls on the earth. | 636               |
| 2:30, 31 | Wonders in earth and heaven            | Signs and wonders follow in quick succession.                                 | 636               |
| 3:16     | The Lord roars out of Zion             | God's voice pronounces, "It is done."   | 636               |
| 3:16     | Heavens and earth shake                | That voice shakes the heaven and the earth; there is a mighty earthquake.     | 637               |

**"SO SHALL YE KNOW" (Joel 3:16, 17).**

Review yesterday's list of end-time signs from Joel that correspond with the signs outlined in *The Great Controversy*. If ever there was a time when Seventh-day Adventists needed to watch and be ready, it is now. According to Bible prophecy, the end is near. Consequently Satan is trying to confuse the issue by filling the air with voices that speak all kinds of false prophetic interpretations. Thus he hopes people will believe that Christ's return really is not all that close.

**How do you feel about the nearness of Christ's return? Has your daily routine lulled you into a Laodicean attitude regarding this event? Do you think about it with dread, or with eagerness?**

**What does God promise to do for His people at the time when the fearful convulsions of nature will be destroying many? Joel 3:16, last part.**

The Revised Standard Version translates the sentence: "But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel." At the Second Advent, the hated little band of faithful believers who look up with hope and expectancy are protected from the convulsions of nature and the desperation of their enemies. At the end of the millennium, the faithful of all ages are safely sheltered in the Holy City. The executive judgment has no fears for those whose trust is in the Lord.

**What promises in Psalm 91 apply particularly to God's protection during the final events of earth's history?**

**Ask yourself: How can I have the assurance of being sheltered by the Lord during the time of trouble? What is the basis of my assurance at this moment?**

After promising to be the hope and strength of His people at the time when the wicked are being destroyed, God says through the prophet, "So shall ye know that I am the Lord your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain" (verse 17). All that has been going on in heaven since Christ returned there after His resurrection has pointed toward the grand climax of the great controversy, when God will deliver His people and establish His kingdom.

**A TENDER LOVING NOTE (Joel 3:17-21).**

**When will the conditions described in Joel 3:17 be fulfilled?**  
Rev. 21:2-8, 27.

Joel 3:18, 19 applies to the conditions that might have existed if God's purpose had been fulfilled through the people of Israel. Since the Israelites never met the conditions upon which these prophecies were based, the ultimate fulfillment will take place in the new earth.

**How will the prediction in Joel 3:18 that a "fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord" be fulfilled?** Rev. 22:1.

As is true of most of the prophetic books, Joel ends on a tender, loving note with a pleasant description of God's people after their deliverance. Judah and Jerusalem (the faithful of all ages) "shall dwell for ever" (Joel 3:20).

**How can we interpret Joel 3:19 in a manner consistent with the end-time application of the chapter? Compare Jer. 4:23-28; Rev. 20:1-3.**

Old Testament prophets often described the desolation of the earth resulting from the destruction that accompanies the day of the Lord. John's symbolic description of this day (Rev. 19:11-21) ends with the binding of Satan on this desolate earth.

The desolation of Egypt and Edom, enemies of God's people (Joel 3:19), would have occurred as described if Israel had fulfilled its prophetic role. Now the principle remains that the enemies of Christ and His people will eventually be reduced to ruin and their land devastated.

**The book of Revelation tells us that the devastation will last for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-3), while the wicked remain dead, and the righteous cooperate with Christ in a work of judgment in heaven. At the end of the 1,000 years the wicked are raised, sentenced, and destroyed (Rev. 20:7-10). Then the earth is restored to its Edenic state (Rev. 21:1).**

**What do the last two promises found in Joel 3:20, 21 imply? Compare Rev. 21, 22.**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study the following passages for an understanding of what other Bible writers say about the events associated with the day of the Lord: Isa. 25:9; Jer. 25:33; Zeph. 1:14, 18; Mal. 4:5; Matt. 16:27; 25:32; 2 Peter 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, while rich, musical shouts of glory and victory were upon every immortal tongue."—*Early Writings*, pp. 272, 273.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Which of the following statements best describes your spiritual condition?

1. Like the majority of Joel's contemporaries, you have been professing to serve God while living contrary to His will.
2. You have responded positively to God's loving appeals and have repented of your sins.
3. Despite all your attempts to maintain a close relationship with Christ, you find yourself slipping away from Him.
4. Because you have an ongoing union with Christ, you have the inner assurance of salvation and look forward joyfully to the final events of earth's history.

**SUMMARY:** The book of Joel sounds a clear-ringing trumpet call to God's people today, as well as to the world as a whole, announcing that the end of time is upon us. The prophet urgently challenges us to believe that the day of the Lord is indeed near.

## Introduction to the Book of Micah

The messages of the prophet Micah speak in a special way to professed servants of God who have largely departed from His will and are in grave danger of being subject to His judgments. Micah was a younger contemporary of Isaiah, prophesying in the latter half of the eighth century B.C. during the reigns of three kings of Judah: Jotham (750-731 B.C.), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (729-686 B.C.). Jotham did right in God's sight, although some of his people did not. (See 2 Kings 15:34, 35.) His son Ahaz was one of the most wicked kings of Judah. He practiced idol worship, even to the extent of burning "his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen" (2 Chron. 28:3). Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, served the Lord and attempted to reverse the downward spiritual trend among his subjects.

Micah ministered at a time when the kings and people of the northern 10 tribes of Israel were inviting the judgments of God by filling up the cup of their iniquity. The spiritual and political situation in the northern state began to disintegrate rapidly in 753 B.C., when Jeroboam II died. The first appeal in Micah's book was to the people of Samaria. But they failed to respond, and the Lord allowed them to be taken captive by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

The name *Micah* comes from a Hebrew word meaning, "Who is like Yahweh?" His hometown was Moresheth, or Moresheth-gath (Micah 1:14), situated about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem, between the hills of the Shephelah and the Philistine plain.

Through the prophet Micah, the Lord rebuked the social and economic injustices that abounded among His people. Grasping landowners destroyed those less fortunate in the interests of accumulating greater wealth. The worship of pagan gods was substituted for the worship of Jehovah. False prophets and apostate priests served for money and spoke to the people the smooth words they wanted to hear.

### MICAH—DESTRUCTION AND DELIVERANCE

| 1:1—2:13                | 3:1—5:15   | 6:1-16   | 7:1-20  |
|-------------------------|--|--|---|
| Hear, All Nations       | Hear, You Leaders  | Hear, My People  | Micah's Reaction and Response                                     |
| Transgressions Outlined | Princes, false prophets, priests denounced; restoration promised | Because they do not listen to God, they will be punished | Prophet's soul "dried up," but he catches a vision of restoration |

# The Nations Challenged; the Remnant Delivered



## Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Micah 1:1–2:13.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold" (Micah 2:12).

**KEY THOUGHT:** God's love for us forces Him to warn us about the consequences of sin and rebellion. Those who respond to His warnings will be a part of the remnant.

**MICAH DIVIDED HIS MESSAGE INTO THREE SECTIONS.** Each is introduced by the word *Hear*. The first of these (chapter 1, verse 2) is addressed to all nations. He calls on all to contemplate the meaning of the coming destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem and to witness what happens to people who refuse to follow God's plan.

In the second "Hear" section (chapter 3, verse 1) Micah denounces the specific sins of Israel's princes, false prophets, and priests. He informs them that they are largely to blame for the coming judgments.

The third "Hear" (chapter 6, verse 1) calls upon all creation to bear witness to God's goodness and justice in dealing with His people.

This week we will study God's first "Hear." We need to put ourselves into the sandals worn by ancient Israel and determine whether, by God's grace, we are measuring up individually to the standard He has set for us.

**GOD'S DISPLEASURE AGAINST SAMARIA AND JUDAH  
(Micah 1:1-5).**

"With unerring accuracy the Infinite One still keeps account with the nations. While His mercy is tendered, with calls to repentance, this account remains open; but when the figures reach a certain amount which God has fixed, the ministry of His wrath begins. The account is closed. Divine patience ceases. Mercy no longer pleads in their behalf."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 364.

**What indications can you find in Micah 1:2-4 that God's first "Hear" is addressed to all nations, as well as to Israel and Judah?**

Micah addresses the peoples of Israel (the northern tribes) and Judah directly. But Micah 1:2-4 is strikingly similar to descriptions of the Second Coming given elsewhere in Scripture. God has summoned the nations to hear how He intends to bring retribution upon the unfaithful. Micah's message has an end-time application.

According to the book of Revelation, what natural phenomena will mark the second coming of Jesus? Rev. 16:18-21. See *The Great Controversy*, chap. 40, pp. 636, 637.

**Why was God constrained to punish Israel and Judah? Micah 1:5.**

"This time the Lord is not coming to answer the prayers of a people in need (cf. Isa. 64); this coming is occasioned by Israel's sin and transgression. In fact, the prophet uses these words to describe his task, 'to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin' (3:8).

"But why should this be?" those hearing these words would ask. What wrongdoing could bring about such a terrifying intervention of the Lord? Verse 5 gives a partial hint: The wrongdoing is centered in the capital cities of both the north and the south."—Limburg, *Hosea-Micah*, p. 166.

**Why do large cities usually become centers of rebellion against God? What can Christians do to warn and win the inhabitants of the world's large cities? What kind of evangelistic enterprise do you believe would be effective in these cities?**

## THE FALL OF SAMARIA (Micah 1:6-8).

What graphic picture is given of the fall of Samaria? Micah 1:6, 7.

The New International Version translates verse 7: "'All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used.'

The citizens of Samaria commonly committed immorality, idolatry, and false piety. Without sitting in judgment on those who are afflicted by these sins today, how can we cooperate with the Lord in redeeming them?

**Introduce them to Christ.** "Keep before the people the cross of Calvary. Show what caused the death of Christ—the transgression of the law. Let not sin be cloaked or treated as a matter of little consequence. It is to be presented as guilt against the Son of God. Then point the people to Christ, telling them that immortality comes only through receiving Him as their personal Saviour. . . .

"Lead them to behold Christ in His loveliness; then they will turn from everything that would draw their affections away from Him. This is the principle of the Saviour's dealing with men; it is the principle that must be brought into the church."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 54.

What was Micah's personal reaction to Samaria's tragedy?  
Micah 1:8.

In verses 5-7 Micah quotes God. In verse 8 he switches to his own reaction. Such transitions are typical of the minor prophets. By indicating his personal reaction to the punishment, Micah attempts to arouse Israel to the consequences that will follow if they persist in their rebellion. The word *naked* may mean "half-clad." Micah's physical appearance revealed a breaking heart because of the sin and destruction of his people.

Have you ever wept over the spiritual degeneracy, perversion, and crime in the large cities of our world? How do you feel as you consider the condition of unbelievers? How can we develop a genuine burden for the lost?

**THE PATH OF A CONQUEROR (Micah 1:6-16; 2:1, 2).**

Consider the destruction that Micah predicted would come upon the cities of Judah because of their sins. Micah 1:6-16.

"The prophet describes the path of a conqueror (v. 15) rolling southward through the small towns and cities which serve as Jerusalem's defense network. These words find their fulfillment in Sennacherib's campaign of the late 700's B.C., when his armies did proceed to the gate of Jerusalem (II Kings 18:13-16). The roll call of the cities ends with a call to join the prophet in mourning, because the hearers are going to see their own children deported from their land (v. 16)." —James Limburg, *Hosea-Micah*, p. 167.

Micah 1:16 may be translated: "Shave your heads in mourning for the children in whom you delight; make yourselves as bald as the vulture, for they will go from you into exile" (NIV).

**Before we move on to chapter 2, review chapter 1. What does this chapter tell you about God? How can we be more responsive to His loving concern?**

Some of the sins for which the cities of Judah would be condemned included grave social injustices. Micah speaks against these injustices, including the oppression of the poor, that characterized his age. When the people protested against his denunciations, Micah demonstrated how gross their sins were.

**What particular sin of His people does God denounce? Micah 2:1, 2.**

"Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it" (Micah 2:1, NIV).

Wealth became such an obsession to Micah's countrymen that instead of sleeping at night they lay awake hatching their evil schemes. They had accepted the worldly principle that might is right. They replaced the golden rule (Matt. 7:12) with the saying, "Do unto others, before they do unto you."

**In what ways do the attitudes and actions of some people today parallel those of Micah's countrymen?**

**INHERITING THE EARTH (Micah 2:3-6).**

**Our obligation to others.** "The Jews had been concerned about what they should receive; the burden of their anxiety was to secure what they thought their due of power and respect and service. But Christ teaches that our anxiety should not be, How much are we to receive? but, How much can we give? The standard of our obligation to others is found in what we ourselves would regard as their obligation to us."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 134.

**How does God plan to deal with the evildoers? Micah 2:3-5.**

The sins of Judah resulted in the withdrawal of divine blessing and protection. Thus God permitted their enemies to do to them the very things they had been doing to others. Invaders conquered their lands and plundered their possessions.

Micah 2:5 may be translated: "Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the Lord to divide the land by lot" (NIV). "Micah informs the oppressor that because he has dealt unjustly with his neighbor's land he will have no more an inheritance in Israel."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1017.

**Who will ultimately be the landowners?** Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). Those who are humble, gentle, unselfish, and unobtrusive as Jesus was are those who will enjoy the blessings and privileges of the earth made new. (See Isa. 65:22.)

**What message did false prophets give who were trying to counteract Micah's influence? Micah 2:6.**

**We cannot afford to ignore sin.** A woman noticed a few bees buzzing around the attic of her home. But she didn't mind, because there were only a few. She remained unconcerned throughout the summer even though more and more bees flew in and out of the attic vent. But the entire attic became a huge hive. Finally the ceiling of her second-floor bedroom caved in.

We ignore sin only to risk having the ceiling cave in on us from the weight of accumulated sweet-smelling vices.

**In this age of materialism, what do you have of lasting value to offer the world?**

**GOD'S TRUE CHARACTER (Micah 2:7-13).**

**What questions did Micah and God use to correct the concept of the Deity held by the Israelites? Micah 2:7.**

The New International Version translates the verse: "Should it be said, O house of Jacob: 'Is the Spirit of the Lord angry? Does he do such things?' 'Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright?'"

"Here, the prophet chides those who accuse the Lord of being impatient because He gives way to threatening His people. This is not so, for God has ever been long-suffering in His dealings with Israel. However, when men sin they must expect to reap the results of their evildoing (Ex. 34:6, 7)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1018.

**The Lord's question reveals His true character.** "Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright?" (Micah 2:7, NIV). The psalmist beautifully emphasized the point, describing the unfailing willingness of God to forgive and restore in a spirit of infinite compassion. (See Ps. 103:8-14.)

**What additional charges does God make in order to clarify His case? Micah 2:8-11.**

**How would you convince a person who is bitter against God that He loves and cares? What steps would you take to change the attitudes of this person?**

**What does the Lord promise to do for the faithful minority? Micah 2:12, 13.**

God usually follows His strong warnings and denunciations with promises of restoration for those willing to repent. The New International Version translates these verses: "I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the Lord at their head" (Micah 2:12, 13, NIV; compare John 10:11).

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study Micah's references to "the remnant." In the spaces provided below indicate how these references might apply to the remnant mentioned in Revelation 12:17.

2:12 \_\_\_\_\_

4:7 \_\_\_\_\_

5:7, 8 \_\_\_\_\_

7:18 \_\_\_\_\_

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Are there sins in your life that you need to confess and forsake? What will be the consequences of not doing so now?
2. In what practical ways can you respond to God's love and cooperate with His plan for your life?

**SUMMARY:** Micah confronts the professed people of God with the consequences of continuing in sin. In graphic language he shows the coming of the Lord to provide retribution for the faithless and deliverance for the faithful remnant.



Your Thirteenth Sabbath Special Projects Offering in 1987 helped build this girls' dormitory in Bogenhofen, Austria. Remember the Euro-Africa Division again March 28.

# Leaders Challenged



## Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Micah 3:1-12.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin" (Micah 3:8).

**KEY THOUGHT.** Those called to be leaders in any aspect of church life face the special challenge of setting an example for those whom they are leading. The spiritual tone of the church is to a great extent determined by the spiritual life of its leadership.

**LEADERSHIP IS NOT RULERSHIP.** Those appointed to leadership in the church should not see themselves serving the same roles as authority figures in the secular world. The church has one head—Jesus Christ. (See Eph. 4:15; Col. 1:18; 2:19.) With such an all-wise Leader, who sees the end from the beginning, the church has an advantage over any earthly organization. Human authority in the church is to be subservient to the will and leadership of Christ.

"Those who have the spiritual oversight of the church should devise ways and means by which an opportunity may be given to every member of the church to act some part in God's work. . . . Plans have not been clearly laid and fully carried out whereby the talents of all might be employed in active service. There are but few who realize how much has been lost because of this. . . . In their planning they are to give special study to the work that can be done by the laity for their friends and neighbors."—*Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 116, 117.

NO ANSWER FROM GOD (Micah 3:1-4).

What kind of ignorance on the part of Israel's leaders resulted in their mistreatment of the people? Micah 3:1.

The Hebrew word translated "judgment" in the King James Version also means "the act of deciding a case," and "justice." Because the leaders of Israel lacked righteousness of heart, they were not able to decide cases in a just manner. They allowed political and economic considerations to sway their judgment.

How did Micah describe the manner in which Israel's leaders treated the people under their care? Micah 3:2, 3.

Symbolically speaking, the leaders and false prophets tore the people apart. They treated them like butchered animals that were prepared for the boiling pot. Imagine the devastating emotional, spiritual, and economic impact of the rulers' unjust actions.

Does there ever come a time when the Lord refuses to hear and answer prayer? Micah 3:4; Ps. 66:18.

"'But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster. . . . Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord, . . . they will eat the fruit of their ways'" (Prov. 1:24-31, NIV).

**Sin silences the Spirit's voice.** "Let none deceive themselves with the belief that God will pardon and bless them while they are trampling upon one of His requirements. The willful commission of a known sin silences the witnessing voice of the Spirit, and separates the soul from God. Whatever may be the ecstasies of religious feeling, Jesus cannot abide in the heart that disregards the divine law."—*Messages to Young People*, p. 114.

Has there ever been a time (perhaps now) when the Lord seemed not to answer your prayers? Do you think it was (or now is) because of a sin you didn't (or won't) give up?

**A PASSION FOR JUSTICE (Micah 3:5-8).**

Why is it important to have an organized church directed by appointed leaders? Consider the situation in the apostolic church. Titus 1:5 (compare Acts 6:1-7; 14:23).

"'God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.' 1 Corinthians 14:33. He requires that order and system be observed in the conduct of church affairs today no less than in the days of old. He desires His work to be carried forward with thoroughness and exactness so that He may place upon it the seal of His approval. Christian is to be united with Christian, church with church, the human instrumentality co-operating with the divine, every agency subordinate to the Holy Spirit, and all combined in giving to the world the good tidings of the grace of God."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 96.

Summarize in your own words the corrupt practice that Micah 3:5 condemns.

**False prophets.** Micah "makes it plain that his motivation is not personal animosity nor a difference of opinion on the human level. He stresses that the source of his authority lies beyond himself. He claims to be the true representative of the divine purpose and the mouthpiece of God himself, merely transmitting the message he has received. Micah turns this prophetic weapon against those acknowledged to be *prophets* themselves. What an indictment that practitioners of God's will must be designated as opposed to God's true intent! He continues in the same vein: far from declaring the truth about God and their society, as prophets should, they mislead the people and misrepresent God's real messages for them. The people are left no nearer God than before they inquired of his word." —Leslie C. Allen, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, on Micah* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 310, 311.

It is possible to assume hastily that because leaders today are sinners who make mistakes, therefore these leaders are rejected by God. That argument is highly judgmental and thoroughly uncharitable. Supposing our faults, failings, sins, and mistakes were as obvious to all in the church as are those of our leaders, would we appear more righteous than they?

## MESSAGES FROM GOD? (Micah 3:6-8).

What will happen to those who claim to have light but in reality expose the darkness of their own understanding? Micah 3:6, 7.

Jesus warned that false prophets in the last days will, if possible, "deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:24).

"As professed teachers from God come to us declaring that they have a message from God, it is proper to inquire carefully, How do we know that this is truth? . . . We need not be deceived; for the Word of God gives us a test whereby we may know what is truth. The prophet says, 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them' (Isa. 8:20)." —*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 99.

The false prophets followed "their own spirit" (Eze. 13:3). In contrast, what spirit directed Micah? Micah 3:8.

Note how these same characteristics apply to the prophetic gift given Ellen White:

● **Power given by the Holy Spirit.** "When I am speaking to the people I say much that I have not premeditated. The Spirit of the Lord frequently comes upon me. I seem to be carried out of, and away from, myself." —*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 20.

● **Judgment.** "In the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. . . . They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne." —*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 27.

● **Courage to Denounce Sin.** "God has set me as a reprobate of His people. . . . I have not chosen this unpleasant labor for myself. . . . In the name and strength of my Redeemer I shall do what I can. . . . My duty is not to please myself, but to do the will of my heavenly Father, who has given me my work." —*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 679, 680.

How seriously do you treat the counsels of God's prophets? What place in your thinking do you give to the messages of Ellen G. White?

**THE CITY DESTROYED (Micah 3:9-12).**

**What specific charge does God make against the priests? Micah 3:11.**

"The money-mad priests received gifts beyond their regular support (Num. 18:20-24) and doubtless provided instruction favorable to the generous inquirer. Thus these apostate priests corrupted their sacred office by making it a means of securing gain."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1021.

**What would happen to Jerusalem because of its leaders' corruption? Micah 3:12.**

"According to Jer. 26:17-19 the prophecy was given in the days of Hezekiah. The prediction was literally fulfilled in 586 B.C."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1021. The punishment pronounced on Judah's leaders would fit the crime. Because they had taken land by fraud, God would take the land away from them.

The leaders showed their ignorance of both God's love and His justice by claiming that no evil could befall them no matter what they did, since they were His children. This attitude is seen today among those who claim that, once they have given themselves to God, He is bound to save them no matter what they do.

**Even after the return from captivity, the priests fell into similar corrupt habits. How was their spiritual lack manifested? Mal. 1:7-10.**

Malachi lists the things the priests were doing:

1:7—Offering polluted bread.

1:8—Offering blind, lame, and sick sacrifices.

1:10—Asking pay for the slightest services, such as shutting the temple door or kindling a fire on the altar.

1:12—Saying that the Lord's table is polluted and that the offerings were contemptible.

1:13—Showing contempt and boredom toward the Lord's service.

1:14—Sacrificing a corrupt thing.

2:8—Departing out of the way. Causing many to stumble at the law. Corrupting the covenant of Levi.

2:9—Being partial in matters of the law.

**WHAT ABOUT TODAY?**

According to Paul, ministers have a special responsibility to be good examples of the truths they teach. What do the texts that follow indicate about this duty?

2 Cor. 4:1, 2 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Cor. 6:3, 4 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Tim. 3:2-7 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Tim. 4:12 \_\_\_\_\_

Titus 2:7, 8 \_\_\_\_\_

The New International Version translates Titus 2:7, 8 this way: "In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us."

When a person dedicates himself or herself to Christ, that person represents Christ to the world.

**The power of influence.** "There is an eloquence far more powerful than the eloquence of words in the quiet, consistent life of a pure, true Christian. What a man is has more influence than what he says. . . .

"It is our own character and experience that determine our influence upon others. In order to convince others of the power of Christ's grace, we must know its power in our own hearts and lives. . . . Only through a living faith in Christ as a personal Saviour is it possible to make our influence felt in a skeptical world. . . .

"The badge of Christianity is not an outward sign, not the wearing of a cross or a crown, but it is that which reveals the union of man with God. By the power of His grace manifested in the transformation of character the world is to be convinced that God has sent His Son as its Redeemer. No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian."—*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 469, 470.

How would you assess your influence on those around you? What evidence do you have that they are attracted to Christ by knowing you?

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study these Bible counsels concerning ministers and leaders: Isa. 52:11; 62:10; Matt. 25:21; Rom. 10:15; 2 Tim. 4:2; Heb. 5:4; 1 Peter 5:2.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Has God called you to be a leader in His church? If so, are you setting a good example?
2. If you have not been chosen to fill a leadership position, are you praying for and supporting actively those He has placed in such positions?
3. What have you learned from your study of this section of Micah concerning God's attitude toward fraud and corruption?
4. Do you think that God looks any more favorably upon those who reject His message today than He did upon those who rejected Micah's message?

"If God has given me a message to bear to His people, those who would hinder me in the work and lessen the faith of the people in its truth are not fighting against the instrument, but against God. 'It is not the instrument whom you slight and insult, but God, who has spoken to you in these warnings and reproofs.' 'It is hardly possible for men to offer a greater insult to God than to despise and reject the instrumentalities that He has appointed to lead them.'"—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 680.

5. In light of this week's lesson, how should we react when we see thousands of people following an eloquent, charismatic preacher? Is his success with the public necessarily an indication that he has the truth? Is the warm feeling that his eloquence creates necessarily from God?

**SUMMARY:** Leaders in the church, including lay leaders, are undershepherds of the True Shepherd. They must represent Him aright by showing the same love, concern, unselfishness, and dedication to service that characterized Christ's ministry on earth. Micah's strong denunciations against the corrupt leadership of his day challenge us to consider carefully the fact that God expects church leaders to set a good example.

# Promises of Hope



## Sabbath Afternoon

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Micah 4:1-5:15.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

**KEY THOUGHT:** In the final hours of peril and crisis God will not fail His church. In light of His faithfulness to us, what should be our determination?

**PROMISED RESTORATION FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.** Micah 3:12 predicted Jerusalem's destruction: "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest." This destruction came when the Babylonians invaded Palestine (586 B.C.) The glorious promises of restoration described in Micah 4 and 5 would also have been fulfilled for the nation of Israel if the people had been true to their covenant relationship with God. Jerusalem would have become the center of the earth from which the Messiah would have ruled.

But these predictions were conditional upon Israel's cooperation with God's plan and their acceptance of the Messiah. Thus, because they rejected Christ, the prophecies never were fulfilled to Israel in the ultimate sense. However, the unfulfilled portions of these prophecies point to a fulfillment yet to take place for God's remnant people who are preparing for Christ's second coming.

**GOD'S KINGDOM CENTERED IN JERUSALEM (Micah 4:1-5).**

What special honor was God to bestow upon Jerusalem "in the last days"? Micah 4:1, 2.

"When David transferred the ark into his new capital, Zion became the name especially of the place where God dwelt. Consequently the name Zion was used to refer to the northeastern hill after Solomon had built his Temple there and moved the ark into it (Is 2:3; 8:18; etc.). Occasionally, however, the name Zion seems to be applied to the whole city (chs 33:20; 60:14), or even to the whole nation of Israel (Is 40:9; Zec 9:13)."—*SDA Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Zion."

If Israel had fulfilled her prophetic role in cooperation with the Messiah, she would have become the leading nation of earth. Note the similarity of Isaiah's prediction in Isaiah 2:1-4.

**Because of Israel's failure, what end-time events will now fulfill Micah's prediction? Rev. 14:1; 15:2-4; 21:1-4.**

"Mount Zion" is identified in the New Testament as "the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22). This is described as the place where the names of born-again Christians are enrolled (verse 23). It is the place where Jesus, our High Priest, is mediating the benefits of His sacrifice for us (verse 24). When Jesus comes the second time, His redeemed people are translated to Mount Zion, where they receive their eternal reward for faithfulness to Him.

**What will be the social, political, economic, and spiritual condition of God's people when Zion is exalted at the end of time? Micah 4:3-5.**

Notice that the New Jerusalem will be the great center of God's government, which will be based on His universal law. This law will be the eternal standard of righteousness for the people of God.

Since the law of God is to be the basis of world government after the second coming of Jesus, what should be our attitude to that law now? Can you think of aspects of God's law that you are not honoring by the manner in which you live? What means has God provided to enable us to be true to His law?

## RESTORATION AFTER CAPTIVITY (Micah 4:6-11).

Who are mentioned as receiving special blessings when God's people are restored? Micah 4:6-8.

In Micah 4:6, 7, "her that halteth" (KJV), "the lame" (RSV), refer to those in Israel who had followed the Lord haltingly. Because they did not walk firmly, briskly, and decisively in His ways, He allowed them to be taken into captivity. They were "driven out" (verse 6), "cast far off" (verse 7). They suffered the misery of separation from their own land, alienation from the privileges of national independence. But in the restoration, God would bring the repentant ones back to the Promised Land.

The ultimate restoration spoken of in Micah 4:8 could not be fulfilled for literal Israel, because, after their return from Babylonian captivity, they did not continue to walk in God's way. The "first dominion" may have referred to the glory of the realm during the reigns of David and Solomon. But in the ultimate sense, the first dominion is that which was lost when our first parents fell into sin. (See Ps. 8:6.) This dominion will be restored when the earth is made new at the end of the millennium. (See Revelation 21, 22.)

**God's original plan will be restored.** "The time has come, to which holy men have looked with longing since the flaming sword barred the first pair from Eden—the time for the 'redemption of the purchased possession.' Ephesians 1:14. The earth originally given to man as his kingdom, betrayed by him into the hands of Satan, and so long held by the mighty foe, has been brought back by the great plan of redemption. All that was lost by sin has been restored. . . . God's original purpose in the creation of the earth is fulfilled as it is made the eternal abode of the redeemed. 'The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever.' Psalm 37:29."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 674.

**Notice what would happen to Judah before her deliverance could come. Micah 4:9-11. What would happen to her kings? Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:12, 15); Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:2-7).**

What character qualifications do you think a person should have who wishes to be part of the great restoration of which Micah wrote? (See Matt. 24:45-51; 1 Peter 1:13-19.)

## WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN (Micah 4:11-13).

Had Israel been faithful, what would have been her position among the nations? Micah 4:11-13.

The Jews were taken captive to Babylon. Were they delivered as promised in Micah 4? "A partial fulfillment of this prediction took place evidently in 536 B.C. under Cyrus (see Ezra 1:1-4; Jer. 29:10) and subsequently under Artaxerxes. However, the returnees were not the spiritually revived people that the discipline of the Exile and the instruction of the prophets were designed to produce. Consequently the glorious prospect pictured in Micah 4:1-8 was not realized by those who returned to the land of Judah after the Babylonian Exile."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1023.

Verses 11-13 deal specifically with what might have been if the returned exiles had done what God wanted them to do. The surrounding nations would have been defeated, and their riches would have been used to advance God's truth and work in the world.

**Application to our day.** "The present is a time of overwhelming interest to all living. Rulers and statesmen, men who occupy positions of trust and authority, thinking men and women of all classes, have their attention fixed upon the events taking place about us. They are watching the relations that exist among the nations. They observe the intensity that is taking possession of every earthly element, and they recognize that something great and decisive is about to take place—that the world is on the verge of a stupendous crisis.

"The Bible, and the Bible only, gives a correct view of these things. Here are revealed the great final scenes in the history of our world, events that already are casting their shadows before, the sound of their approach causing the earth to tremble and men's hearts to fail them for fear. . . .

"[Micah 4:10-12 quoted]. God will not fail His church in the hour of her greatest peril. He has promised deliverance. . . .

"Then will the purpose of God be fulfilled; the principles of His kingdom will be honored by all beneath the sun."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 537, 538.

How do you think God's people today can apply the symbolic instruction of Micah 4:13? In what practical ways can we "arise and thresh" in our homes, our workplaces, our churches, our neighborhoods? How does Jesus' instruction relate to that of Micah? (See Matt. 28:19, 20.)

**THE MESSIAH'S FIRST AND SECOND ADVENTS (Micah 5:1-15).**

What words in Micah 5:1,2 may apply prophetically to the coming Messiah? Compare Micah 5:1 with Matt. 26:67, 68.

The New International Version translates Micah 5:1: "Marshal your troops, O city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod." Jerusalem's enemies would besiege the city and insult the king. (Compare Job 16:10.)

The ultimate insult to Israel's Ruler was that given to Christ during His trial. In light of verse 2, we may think of the latter part of Micah 5:1 as a Messianic prophecy. Because Rome controlled Judea and Jerusalem, she was partly responsible for the insult paid to the world's Messiah.

When the wise men from the East asked Herod where the Messiah was to be born, what enabled him to give them the correct answer? Matt. 2:5, 6; Micah 5:2.

"The focus is now upon 'Bethlehem Ephrathah.' Ephrathah is the name of the clan of people who lived in the area of Bethlehem; the family of Elimelech and Naomi are described as 'Ephrathites from Bethlehem' (Ruth 1:2; see also 1 Sam. 17:12). The double identification is necessary to distinguish the town from Bethlehem in Zebulon (Josh. 19:15). The New Testament remembers the Bethlehem of these times as a 'village' (John 7:42) . . . Bethlehem had a fame of its own, however, as the home of Jesse, David's father, and the birthplace of that greatest of the kings of Israel (1 Sam. 17:12). The coming ruler will be from Bethlehem; in other words, that ruler will be a new David. The same idea is expressed in Isaiah 11:1."—James Limburg, *Hosea—Micah: Interpretation*, p. 186.

**The eternal preexistence of Christ.** The last phrase of Micah 5:2 translates literally, "from the days of eternity." The spiritual leaders of Israel knew that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. A little investigation of the circumstances of His birth would have revealed to them that Jesus was that God-man. Jesus Himself claimed Deity and eternal preexistence. (See John 5:17, 18; 8:58, 59.)

By comparing Scripture with the circumstances of Christ's birth, the Israelites could have known that Jesus was the Messiah. What does this say to us about the importance of the Bible?

**GOD'S NEW WORLD (Micah 5:3-15).**

Pick out words or phrases in Micah 5:3-5 that apply to aspects of the life and work of the Messiah who was to come.

**What does Assyria represent?** "At the time of Micah's prophecy Assyria was Israel's principal foe, a sinister threat to her existence (2 Kings 18; 19). Inasmuch as the Messianic age is under discussion here, Assyria doubtless represents those nations that would have opposed the thriving nation of restored Israel."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1025.

Today Assyria represents those peoples who oppose the onward progress of the gospel message.

**What did God expect Israel to be and do if they accepted the Messiah when He came? Micah 5:7-15.**

This would have been accomplished through the spiritual strength provided by their relationship with the unconquerable Messiah. In spite of their past defeats, God's people would have had unfailing hope for the future. Horses and chariots were used during war. Notice what God said about these symbols of force in other Old Testament scriptures. (See Deut. 17:16; 20:1-4; Isa. 2:7; Zech 9:9, 10.)

All the fortifications, principalities and powers, false gods, and relics of paganism that people depended on for establishing earthly power and conquering others would have no use or meaning in God's new world.

**How would you apply Micah 5:10-15 to our situation today? In response to the Lord's appeal to Israel, what about your life should you discard in order to prepare for the Messiah's second coming? What attitudes or possessions stand between you and Christ?**

"We are never called upon to make a real sacrifice for God. Many things He asks us to yield to Him, but in doing this we are but giving up that which hinders us in the heavenward way. Even when called upon to surrender those things which in themselves are good, we may be sure that God is thus working out for us some higher good.

"In the future life the mysteries that here have annoyed and disappointed us will be made plain. We shall see that our seemingly unanswered prayers and disappointed hopes have been among our greatest blessings."—*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 473, 474.

**FURTHER STUDY:** Compare the following Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah and His work with their New Testament fulfillment:

| OT PROPHECY | ITEM                 | FULFILLMENT    |
|-------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Isa. 7:14   | Virgin birth         | Matt. 1:18-23  |
| Isa. 61:1-3 | His work             | Luke 4:16-21   |
| Isa. 53:3   | His rejection        | John 1:10, 11  |
| Zech. 9:9   | Triumphal entry      | Matt. 21:1-11  |
| Zech. 11:12 | Price for which sold | Matt. 26:14-16 |
| Ps. 22:1    | Words on cross       | Matt. 27:46    |
| Isa. 53:9   | Burial with rich     | Matt. 27:57-60 |
| Ps. 16:10   | Resurrection         | Acts 2:30, 31  |
| Ps. 68:18   | Ascension            | Eph. 4:8       |

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** How does what I have studied apply to:

Me individually? \_\_\_\_\_

My family and friends? \_\_\_\_\_

My church? \_\_\_\_\_

**SUMMARY:** Micah 4 presents promises of restoration that apply to spiritual Israel as well as to ancient Israel. Micah 5 not only predicts the coming of the Messiah but also forecasts the destruction of the wicked and the universal peace that would follow if the Jews would accept Christ. Although the Jewish nation rejected Him, the promises contained in these chapters apply in principle to all Christian believers today—both Jews and Gentiles. We have the blessed hope that soon the earth is to be made new.

# Power to Do God's Will



## Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Micah 6:1-16.

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

**KEY THOUGHT:** Micah emphasizes just how much God loves us and how His love has provided for our deliverance from sin. The danger is that we take His love for granted and fail to respond by loving Him in return. As we study this lesson, we are reminded of what God has done and promises to do for us in the future.

**GOD OFFERS POWER TO A WAYWARD PEOPLE.** Because we live in a time when many are turning to the courts to settle their problems, the analogy of the court case in Micah 6 is quite familiar to us. In Micah 6, God presents His lawsuit against Israel. He issues a threefold summons to hear His case (verses 1, 2).

As we begin the chapter, we find God pleading through His prophet, "Hear what the Lord says" (RSV). When we apply this part of the book to our current situation, we sense that God speaks to us individually, as well as to the church as a whole.

Israel's rejection of God's spiritual strength and purity and their wayward lifestyle disappointed God. Yet He continued to plead with them. He could deliver them from sin if only they would pay attention to His counsel and make use of His power.

**GOD PRESENTS HIS CASE (Micah 6:1-3).**

God challenges His people to state their case if they think He is wrong or to respond favorably if they acknowledge He is right.

**How would you have reacted if you had been among those who first heard Micah's statement that the mountains and hills had been selected to serve on the jury that was about to judge between God and His people? See Micah 6:1, 2.**

The mountains and hills have witnessed God's gracious dealings with the nation, as well as the people's ingratitude. Thus, in a symbolic sense, they will be able to serve well as an impartial, yet knowledgeable, jury.

**With what questions does God challenge Israel to state their case against Him? Micah 6:3.**

Isaiah 5 portrays Israel as a well-tended vineyard. God challenges the people to judge between Him and His vineyard. Read Isaiah 5:4.

**According to Christ's parable of the vineyard, what else did God do for His vineyard? Matt. 21:37.**

"The Jewish rulers did not love God; therefore they cut themselves away from Him, and rejected all His overtures for a just settlement. Christ, the Beloved of God, came to assert the claims of the Owner of the vineyard; but the husbandmen treated Him with marked contempt. . . . They envied Christ's beauty of character. His manner of teaching was far superior to theirs, and they dreaded His success. He remonstrated with them, unveiling their hypocrisy, and showing them the sure results of their course of action. This stirred them to madness. They smarted under the rebukes they could not silence. They hated the high standard of righteousness which Christ continually presented. They saw that His teaching was placing them where their selfishness would be uncloaked, and they determined to kill Him."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 293, 294.

**How does this description of the reaction of the Jewish leaders to Christ and His ministry apply to each of us?**

**TOTAL HEART SURRENDER (Micah 6:4-7).**

God calls their attention to a few of His mighty deeds in behalf of His people. List below those providences that He specifically mentions in Micah 6:4, 5.

Despite the attempts of wicked kings like Balak and apostate prophets like Balaam, the Lord had pronounced a blessing upon His people. (See Num. 23:8-11.)

Shittim was the last place at which the Israelites stopped before crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3:1). Gilgal was the first place where they camped in the land of Canaan (Joshua 4:19). Between Shittim and Gilgal they had experienced the remarkable miracle that the Lord performed so they could cross the Jordan. (See Joshua 3; 4.)

What has God done for you that He can point to as evidence of His special care and concern for you? Are you willing to admit that He has done everything He can to help you be what He wants you to be? How will you answer Jesus' plea to His Laodicean people: "What have I done to hurt you? Why do you stay so far away from Me? Why don't you respond to My love?"

In Micah 6:6, 7, we read Israel's response to God's challenge in the previous verses. What kinds of things did they seem to think God wanted them to do? Notice how their response moves from the minimal—the burnt offering—to what they consider to be the maximum—the offering of their sons and daughters. (See Isa. 1:11-15; Lev. 18:21.)

What the Israelites did not seem to understand is that God did not want their offerings. He wanted them.

Why are merely human works, including religious ceremonies, unacceptable as a means of reconciling us to God? Rom. 3:20-24.

Works of law, whether moral, ceremonial, or civil, cannot make us right with God. Salvation is by God's grace alone. God's complaint against Israel was that they were attempting to make themselves right with Him by depending upon their own efforts. (See Rom. 9:30-33.)

**THE GOLDEN RULE (Micah 6:8).**

After you review yesterday's lesson, read the quotation below. As you do, ask yourself whether there is anything you are trying to do to earn salvation.

**Good works are not the means of salvation, but an essential result.** "Our acceptance with God is sure only through His beloved Son, and good works are but the result of the working of His pardoning love. They are no credit to us, and we have nothing accorded to us for our good works by which we may claim a part in the salvation of our souls. Salvation is God's free gift to the believer, given to him for Christ's sake alone. The troubled soul may find peace through faith in Christ, and his peace will be in proportion to his faith and trust. He cannot present his good works as a plea for the salvation of his soul.

"But are good works of no real value? Is the sinner who commits sin every day with impunity, regarded of God with the same favor as the one who through faith in Christ tries to work in his integrity? The Scripture answers, 'We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.' In His divine arrangement, through His unmerited favor, the Lord has ordained that good works shall be rewarded. . . . It is the fragrance of the merit of Christ that makes our good works acceptable to God, and it is grace that enables us to do the works for which He rewards us."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1122.

**Micah 6:8 tells us what God really expects from His followers. How can you apply this verse to your own life?**

"To do justly" \_\_\_\_\_

"To love mercy" \_\_\_\_\_

"To walk humbly with thy God" \_\_\_\_\_

**Jesus is the supreme example.** He was always just, merciful, humble, and discreet. He said, "I always do what pleases him [God]" (John 8:29, NIV). He was the greatest exemplification of Micah 6:8. And He instructs us to copy His example. (See Phil. 2:5-11.) (Compare Matt. 7:12)

## THE SPIRITUAL FAILURE OF GOD'S PEOPLE (Micah 6:9-15).

Summarize in your own words God's charges against the people. Micah 6:9-12. (If possible read the passage in a modern translation.) Contrast their wicked ways with God's expectations for His people by completing the chart that follows:

| God's expectations   | Israel's wrongdoings |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| Do justly            |                      |
| Love mercy           |                      |
| Walk humbly with God |                      |

Micah emphasizes the seriousness of the message by making it clear that God Himself is speaking through him to the people of Jerusalem. The truly wise will listen to His voice as He details their wrongdoings and the certainty of the punishment that will follow if they do not repent.

The encouraging thing is that God makes fully possible what He expects. His commands are His enablings. Are you willing to testify to others about the change in your life since Christ has become your Lord? Without publicly confessing your past sins, be able to describe to your fellow Sabbath School class members how Jesus' love has transformed your life.

Using the King James Version, complete the following in order to gain a clear picture of how graphically Micah describes the punishment that God would send on the Israelites as a result of their continuing sin. Micah 6:13-15

**Verse 13:** The Lord would make the people \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

**Verse 14:** The people would eat but not be \_\_\_\_\_. They would not be successful in \_\_\_\_\_ their goods.

**Verse 15:** They would sow, but not \_\_\_\_\_.

They would grow olives and grapes, but have no \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.

**HE CARES FOR ME! (Micah 6:16).**

What would happen as the result of Israel's continuing to follow the idolatrous rules and practices introduced by Omri and Ahab? Micah 6:16 (compare 1 Kings 16:25, 30).

God's threats of judgment to come are not made in anger. He loves and cares for His people. He longs for them to recognize that what they have been doing is wrong and disappointing to Him. He pleads with them to turn from evil.

**He cares.** A young singer bore a cross that seemed so heavy she was tempted to give up everything. But she had faith. And she knew that God had the power to do all things. However, she could not believe that He cared enough about her to answer her prayers. And because she didn't believe, she couldn't pray.

In her distress she called a friend. Almost before her friend could answer, she blurted out, "Something terrible has happened. I'm not a Christian anymore. I've given up everything!"

Then she hung up. But as she did so, her eyes fell upon a copy of the famous painting of Christ in Gethsemane. The heart she thought so cold began to weep. Through her tears she began singing once again these words:

"Because His love for me led through Gethsemane,  
I know He cares, He cares for me;  
Because His plan for me led to the cross of Calvary,  
I know He cares, I know He cares for me."

These words gave the lie to everything she had been thinking and saying. She could not sing them and still doubt God's care for her. Casting herself at the Master's feet, she wept and prayed from a heart that knew He cared.

Do not ever think that He does not care. He cares so much that He still bears the scars of the cross. (See 1 Peter 5:7; Ps. 71:1, 2.)

Think back over your life, as God asked Israel to do in Micah 6:4, 5. What things has He done for you that let you know how very much He loves you?

Have you attempted recently to convince someone else of God's care for them? How did you do this—by telling them, by doing something for them, by being understanding, or by simply being friendly? What approach do you think best?

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study the promises that follow and review what God wants to do for you: Joshua 1:5; Ps. 16:11; 34:10; Matt. 6:33; 11:29; Phil. 4:19.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What have you learned this week that will make you a stronger Christian?
2. What can you do this coming week to apply what you've learned to your relationships with others?
3. Review Tuesday's lesson. What steps would you take to help a child understand that Jesus accepts us just as we are, and that, when we allow Him to change us by His Spirit, we receive the power to do good?
4. This week's lesson taught us that Jesus is the supreme exemplification of Micah 6:8. What New Testament events can you recall in which Jesus did justly, loved mercy, and walked humbly with God?
5. How does your idea of what religion should be compare with the following quotation? "The standard of the golden rule is the true standard of Christianity; anything short of it is a deception. A religion that leads men to place a low estimate upon human beings, whom Christ has esteemed of such value as to give Himself for them; a religion that would lead us to be careless of human needs, sufferings, or rights, is a spurious religion. . . ."

"Search heaven and earth, and there is no truth revealed more powerful than that which is made manifest in works of mercy to those who need our sympathy and aid. This is the truth as it is in Jesus. When those who profess the name of Christ shall practice the principles of the golden rule, the same power will attend the gospel as in apostolic times."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 136, 137.

**SUMMARY:** God's court case against the people of Israel is clear-cut and specific. They are unable to answer His charges or find a reasonable excuse for violating His laws. Even so, God is merciful in offering the means by which they can rise above their past failures and find peace and joy in union with Him.

# Spiritual and Material Restoration



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Micah 7:1-20.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy" (Micah 7:18).

**KEY THOUGHT.** We may become discouraged if we concentrate on the evils we see around us. Only by concentrating on the beauty and goodness of Jesus will we reflect His character.

**FORGIVENESS FOR A REPENTING PEOPLE.** Micah looks to the Lord, realizes his own sinfulness and that of his people, then turns to the Lord in repentance. If the people will follow his example, they will find the forgiveness and hope God has promised them all along. Micah's recognition of his own need helped him to be more sympathetic with the people.

The last notes in the song of Micah are happy and hopeful, ending with promises of forgiveness and restoration.

At a recent stop-smoking program, a woman who had overcome her nicotine addiction said to the director, "Oh, you Adventists are so wonderful, so happy, so healthy! You don't have any hang-ups at all, do you?" How we wish that were true! The point is, it should be. God has given us all power in heaven and earth through Jesus Christ to represent Him fully to the world. The promise implied in this chapter is that someday soon that will happen.

**NATIONAL APOSTASY (Micah 7:1-6).**

Explain the metaphor Micah uses to illustrate the spiritual destitution of Israel. Micah 7:1.

Just as there are no grapes or figs left worth eating when the harvest has been completed, so there are no godly people left in the land. National apostasy has led to national ruin. The Revised Standard Version translates Micah 7:1: "Woe is me! For I have become as when the summer fruit has been gathered, as when the vintage has been gleaned: there is no cluster to eat."

Micah became so disillusioned that he proclaimed the disappearance of good people from the earth. What particular conditions among the people led him to this conclusion? Micah 7:2, 3. From your knowledge of current events, can you illustrate the existence of similar evils in our world today?

What last-day conditions, similar to those of Micah's day, did a New Testament prophet foresee? 2 Tim. 3:1-9.

**Responsible for their own ruin.** "We are living in the last days of this earth's history, and we may be surprised at nothing in the line of apostasies and denials of the truth. Unbelief has now come to be a fine art which men work at to the destruction of their souls. There is constant danger of there being shams in pulpit preachers, whose lives contradict the words they speak; but the voice of warning and of admonition will be heard as long as time shall last; and those who are guilty of transactions that should never be entered into, when reproved or counseled through the Lord's appointed agencies, will resist the message and refuse to be corrected. They will go on as did Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, until the Lord takes away their reason, and their hearts become unimpressible. The Lord's word will come to them; but if they choose not to hear it, the Lord will make them responsible for their own ruin."—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 147.

Compare the atmosphere of suspicion and distrust that existed in Micah's day with the conditions that Jesus predicted would exist shortly before the end of time. Compare Micah 7:4-6 with Matthew 10:21-23, 34-39.

**FOCUSING ON GOD (Micah 6:7).**

History repeats itself because the evil tendencies of the human heart are the same in every age. The spiritual destitution of Israel in Micah's day illustrates our world today, except that, the closer we get to the Second Coming, the more evil pervades society. Sin has become a science. Dishonesty is cloaked in false piety. Immorality disguises as love.

**What did Micah determine to do, and with what result? Micah 7:7.**

To "wait upon the Lord" was an expression that was also popular with Isaiah. (See Isa. 8:17; 40:31.) It indicates a willingness to trust the Lord and depend on Him.

As Micah focused his attention on the Lord instead of on those about him, he recognized his own sinfulness and his own need. He became more sympathetic to those to whom the Lord had commissioned him to minister. A sure pathway to discouragement in our Christian experience is to look at people instead of the Lord. Our only safety comes from concentrating on Christ and His goodness.

**Compassion for the sinner.** "Christ honored man with His confidence and thus placed him on his honor. Even those who had fallen the lowest He treated with respect. It was a continual pain to Christ to be brought into contact with enmity, depravity, and impurity; but never did He utter one expression to show that His sensibilities were shocked or His refined tastes offended. Whatever the evil habits, the strong prejudices, or the overbearing passions of human beings, He met them all with pitying tenderness. As we partake of His Spirit, we shall regard all men as brethren, with similar temptations and trials, often falling and struggling to rise again, battling with discouragements and difficulties, craving sympathy and help. Then we shall meet them in such a way as not to discourage or repel them, but to awaken hope in their hearts. . . .

"With a sense of our own infirmities, we shall have compassion for the infirmities of others."—*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 165, 166.

How would you say you react when surrounded by those who are not serving the Lord? Do you oppose their behavior in a judgmental manner? Do you compromise your convictions? Or do you, like Peter, attempt to merge into the scene? What do you consider the best way to handle such a situation?

## A VISION OF RESTORATION (Micah 7:8-13).

How did Micah express Israel's new determination to rise above the failures of the past and emerge from spiritual and material ruin? Micah 7:8, 9.

Undoubtedly there were those who responded to Micah's message. Others turned to the Lord after being taken into captivity. Micah expressed their determination to accept whatever the Lord ordered for them, to serve Him come what may.

Jesus taught us the true meaning of Micah 7:8, 9. He rebuked Simon and Judas because they adopted a judgmental attitude to Mary Magdalene. (See Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-8.) If their attitude had persisted, Mary could have been thoroughly discouraged.

What glorious restoration to national greatness could Israel have experienced if the people had maintained their new relationship with the Lord? Micah 7:10-13.

Israel never became that great nation, because she never fulfilled the conditions that such a complete restoration required. Even so, spiritual Israel will fulfill this prophecy when its citizens from every race and nation will dwell within the New Jerusalem while their enemies remain outside. (See Rev. 20:7-15.) "But the earth will be desolate because of its inhabitants, for the fruit of their doings" (Micah 7:13, RSV). The ultimate fulfillment of this verse will be realized at the end of time. But immediately following the desolation, the Lord will re-create the earth in Edenic beauty. (See Rev. 21:1, 5.)

**Two classes.** "Amid the ransomed throng are the apostles of Christ, the heroic Paul, the ardent Peter, the loved and loving John, and their truehearted brethren, and with them the vast host of martyrs; while outside the walls, with every vile and abominable thing, are those by whom they were persecuted, imprisoned, and slain."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 667.

How would you explain God's love to a person whose faith is weak because he or she is suffering the natural consequence of sin? Perhaps the consequence is disease or financial ruin or a broken marriage or something else. How would you convince such a person that forgiveness is still available and that the Lord loves him or her infinitely?

## GOD'S ASSURANCE (Micah 7:14-17).

In response to God's promises of restoration, Micah prays in verse 14 that the Good Shepherd will care for and feed His people.

How do the scriptures below help us understand the divine Shepherd's care?

Ps. 23:1 \_\_\_\_\_

Ps. 23:4 \_\_\_\_\_

Ps. 95:7 \_\_\_\_\_

Isa. 40:11 \_\_\_\_\_

Eze. 34:11-15 \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

"Through all our trials we have a never-failing Helper. He does not leave us alone to struggle with temptation, to battle with evil, and be finally crushed with burdens and sorrow. Though now He is hidden from mortal sight, the ear of faith can hear His voice saying, Fear not; I am with you."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 479-483.

How does God respond to Micah's prayer in verse 14? Micah 7:15-17.

The deliverance from Egypt represents the final deliverance of God's people at the end of time. The wicked will shrink in shame and fear as they confront the Judge of all the earth. But God's faithful will rejoice in the Lord.

How important to you is God's offer to be your shepherd? What are the advantages of accepting His offer?

**THE REMNANT FORGIVEN (Micah 7:18-20).**

Micah's message closes with a doxology of praise to the wonderful God who takes such great interest in His people.

**What does God do for His people that no heathen deity has ever claimed to do? Micah 7:18, 19.**

**Are you convinced that your guilt is destroyed when you accept Jesus as Lord, confessing your sin and accepting the gift of His righteousness? Note the following:**

- Jesus bore the legal penalty for our sin on the cross. (See Isa. 53:5, 6; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24.)
- When we accept Jesus, confess our sins to Him, and ask His forgiveness, He destroys our guilt (our responsibility for wrongdoing), because He has already suffered for it. (See 1 John 1:9; 2:2; Rom. 3:25; Acts 13:38, 39.)
- Micah 7:18, 19 teaches that God "pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance. . . . You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (NIV). Note that our guilt goes down, not up! Why? Because Jesus has suffered for it and has forgiven us.

**Our guilt is abolished.** "The heaviest burden that we bear is the burden of sin. If we were left to bear this burden, it would crush us. But the Sinless One has taken our place. 'The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.' Isa. 53:6. He has borne the burden of our guilt. He will take the load from our weary shoulders. He will give us rest."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 328, 329.

**How may the weakest of human beings live in contact with the living Christ? John 14:15-19; Eph. 3:16-19.**

The covenant promises God made to Abraham and Jacob are fulfilled to His people today (Micah 7:20). One of those covenant promises was that "by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (Gal. 3:14, NIV). That promise ensures to us justification, the gift of the righteousness of Christ because of His abiding presence in our hearts. (See Gal. 3:3; Rom. 8:9, 10; 10:6-10.) Because the presence of the Holy Spirit is the presence of Jesus, we live in constant contact with the living Christ as long as we allow the Spirit to reign within. (See *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 182.)

**FURTHER STUDY:** *The Ministry of Healing* states that "the gospel is a wonderful simplifier of life's problems" (p. 363). List four Bible examples that illustrate this point:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Are you concentrating on Jesus rather than on those about you? If not, what can you do this week to improve the situation?
2. Should you be able to forgive and forget as God does?
3. Read the story that follows, then ask yourself, What can I do to make my home and my church happier places?

Jenny had an unusually busy and frustrating day. But, in spite of this, she took time to bake Paul his favorite dessert—lemon pie. That evening when Paul arrived home, it was apparent to him that she was in a bad mood. She was irritable all through dinner.

When she served the pie, Paul frowned, but didn't say anything until she asked, "What's wrong?"

"Oh, it seems kind of sour," he answered.

The next day Jenny was back to her normal sweet self. That night, Jenny served some of the leftover pie to Paul after dinner. "Say!" he exclaimed. "What happened to this pie? It tastes much sweeter than it did last night."

But Jenny hadn't done a thing to the pie. When she was reading the Bible just before she went to bed, she found an answer to her frustrations in Proverbs 16:24. "Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones."

**SUMMARY:** The people of Micah's day found the answer to their problems when they came to the Lord in complete consecration, recognizing their own need and sinfulness and turning to God, who alone could deliver them. In their subsequent experience they learned how bountifully God provides for those who turn to Him. The promises God gave through Micah apply with special force to God's last-day people, who will see their ultimate fulfillment.

## Introduction to the Book of Zephaniah

The name *Zephaniah* means "Yahweh has concealed," or "Yahweh has protected." Zephaniah traces his ancestry back to "Hizkiah" (Zeph. 1:1). Because the Hebrew original of the name is also rendered "Hezekiah," it is assumed that Zephaniah was the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah. Zephaniah tells us that he prophesied "in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah" (Zeph. 1:1). Josiah reigned from 640 to 609 B.C. Since Zephaniah predicted the fall of Nineveh (Zeph. 2:13), which occurred in 612 B.C., we might conclude that his prophetic ministry occupied the earlier years of Josiah's reign. It is possible that Zephaniah was a contemporary of Habakkuk and that he prophesied a few years before Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry in 626 B.C.

The burden of Zephaniah's short book is that, in view of the coming day of the Lord, Judah and the surrounding nations should repent and "seek righteousness" (Zeph. 2:3). He foresaw that the unfaithful in Judah and in neighboring nations would be destroyed or taken captive; only a faithful remnant of Israel would be left to inhabit their own land and that of their former enemies.

The day of the Lord came for the Assyrians when Nineveh fell to the combined armies of Babylon and Media in 612 B.C. Judah and her neighbors suffered their day of the Lord when the Babylonians invaded and finally destroyed them in 586 B.C.

The local, historical days of the Lord in which the nations of the Near East were punished for their wickedness are a type of the ultimate day of the Lord, when the unfaithful among the nations of earth will be destroyed at the second coming of Jesus. The promises to Israel will be fulfilled in principle to the remnant of God's last-day people, who will finally witness the destruction of earth's nations and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ, centered in the New Jerusalem on the earth made new.

### Zephaniah—No Time to Lose

| 1:1—2:3                        | 2:4—3:7                     | 3:8-20                 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| The Philosophy of the Judgment | The Application of Judgment | The Result of Judgment |
| God warns                      | God wonders                 | God sings              |

# Desolation of the Earth



## Sabbath Afternoon

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Zephaniah 1:1-18.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord; the mighty man shall cry there bitterly" (Zephaniah 1:14).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Seventh-day Adventists share Zephaniah's mission of warning others that God's judgments are imminent. Only the grace of Christ can qualify us to stand secure with His remnant people when the earth is destroyed.

**THE DAY OF THE LORD FOLLOWS THE PRE-ADVENT JUDGMENT.** Zephaniah's description of calamity about to fall upon impenitent Israel and the surrounding nations also describes the day of judgment when Christ comes to deliver His remnant people. The local day of the Lord foreshadowed the ultimate end-time day of the Lord. If we are to awaken others to the cry of the judgment message and the soon-coming "day of the Lord," we must do it now.

"We should be astonished at our own indifference when we should be all life and vivacity could we see the work that is going on in heaven. . . . The great antitypical day of atonement and the work of judgment is going on with the dead, and how soon will it begin with the living when every one of our cases will pass in review before God? . . . To us who have this hope and faith it is a dangerous thing to be putting off the day of God."—Ellen G. White, Manuscript 10, 1886 ("Preparation for Christ's Coming," July 23, 1886).

**COMING DESTRUCTION (Zeph. 1:1-3).**

Zephaniah vividly described the retribution that was to be poured out on Judah and the surrounding nations because they had rejected the Lord. The calamities that were to come upon them foreshadowed the greater calamities that will envelope the earth at Christ's second coming.

**What expressions used in Zephaniah 1:2, 3 indicate that God plans to make a clean sweep of everything on earth?**

**In what way has the natural world been affected by sin? Gen. 3:17, 18; Rom. 8:19-22.**

It was not that the sentence pronounced against sin was directed specifically against the natural world, but the results and devastation of sin would be evident in all creation.

**How can we observe the results and devastation of sin in the natural world today? What environmental issues are people concerned about in your part of the world? Should Christians be concerned about these issues? If so, what can they do about them?**

**What do the following passages indicate will happen at Christ's second coming? Jer. 4:23-26; Mal. 4:1; 2 Peter 3:7, 10, 11; Rev. 16:17-21.**

**"I will sweep away both men and animals" (Zeph. 1:3, NIV).** "At the coming of Christ the wicked are blotted from the face of the whole earth—consumed with the spirit of His mouth and destroyed by the brightness of His glory. Christ takes His people to the City of God, and the earth is emptied of its inhabitants. 'Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof.' The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the Lord hath spoken this word. 'Because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned.'

*Isaiah 24:1, 3, 5, 6."—The Great Controversy, p. 657.*

**GIVEN FAIR WARNING (Zeph. 1:1-13).**

Zephaniah's warning in the first three verses urged the citizens of Judah to get ready. Read below one of Ellen White's calls to be ready for the day of the Lord.

"One brother said to me, 'Sister White, do you think the Lord will come in ten years?'

"What difference does it make to you whether He shall come in two, four, or ten years?"

"Why," he said, "I think I would do differently in some things than I now do if I knew the Lord was to come in ten years."

"What would you do?" I asked.

"Why," he said, "I would sell my property and begin to search the Word of God and try to warn the people and get them to prepare for His coming, and I would plead with God that I might be ready to meet Him."

"Then I said, 'If you knew that the Lord was not coming for twenty years, you would live differently?'

"He answered, 'I think I would.'

"Then I said, 'You know your Master's will, and it is your duty to do just as though you knew that He was coming in [ten] years.'

"I opened the Scriptures and read to him . . . and he was convicted that he should change his course, and he did change his course of action. . . . How selfish was the expression that he would live a different life if he knew his Lord was to come in ten years! Why, Enoch walked with God 300 years. This is a lesson for us that we shall walk with God every day, and we are not safe unless we are waiting and watching. We must have an eye single to God's glory."—Ellen G. White, Manuscript 10, 1886 ("Preparation for Christ's Coming," July 23, 1886).

**What do the following passages teach regarding preparedness for Christ's coming?**

Matt. 24:44 \_\_\_\_\_

Mark 13:35 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Thess. 5:1-9 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Peter 3:3, 4, 10-14, 17, 18 \_\_\_\_\_

Rev. 16:15 \_\_\_\_\_

## PUNISHMENT FOR JUDAH (Zeph. 1:4-13).

What sins led God to withdraw from Judah and allow suffering to come upon them? Zeph. 1:4-6. What sins among professed Christians today would match those of ancient Judah?

## Sins of Judah

## Modern Sins

Worshiping "the host of heaven upon the housetops" refers to the people using the flat roofs of their homes to worship the sun, moon, and stars. There they "made altars to worship the heavenly bodies, offered animal sacrifices, and burned incense (see . . . Jer. 19:13)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1063.

The *Chemarims* (verse 4) were idolatrous priests of Baal who led Israel astray. *Malcham* (verse 5) was *Milcom* the Ammonite god. (See 1 Kings 11:5, 33.)

The last half of Zephaniah 1:6 refers to those who didn't care about religion at all. There should be no comfort in the fact that merely being indifferent ranks last in Zephaniah's list of sins. What happens to those who are indifferent? They are punished just as surely as those who commit the sins at the top of the list.

Zephaniah speaks about the "day of the Lord" as a "sacrifice" (verses 7, 8). Who will be sacrificed and why?

Verse 8 \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 9 \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 10 \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 11 \_\_\_\_\_

Verses 12, 13 \_\_\_\_\_

The invited guests at this strange sacrificial feast will be the Babylonians. The Lord will use them as His instrument of punishment.

**How would you answer a person who believes that God will not punish the wicked?**

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN? (Zeph. 1:8-11).

Yesterday we began studying Zephaniah 1:4-13. Today, let us review verses 8-11.

**Verse 8:** Those "clothed with strange apparel" are evidently those who have adopted heathen customs.

**Verse 9:** "On that day I will punish every one who leaps over the threshold, and those who fill their master's house with violence and fraud" (RSV). Leaping over the threshold is "a violent and sudden rushing into houses to steal the property of strangers . . . so that the allusion is to 'dishonourable servants of the king, who thought that they could best serve their master by extorting treasures from their dependents by violence and fraud'" (Ewald)."—C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), vol. 10, *Zephaniah*, p. 132.

**Verse 11:** "Many scholars think that *maktesh* is here the name of a section of Jerusalem. The context (see v. 10) seems to favor this view."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1064.

**Various sections of Jerusalem are mentioned by Zephaniah.** "In the day of judgment to come, the extortioners living in Jerusalem would normally be included in the outpouring of [God's] wrath. Commentators seem impressed with Zephaniah's familiarity with the different quarters of Jerusalem and point to this as another evidence that he was a member of the royal family and grew up in the city.

"The route described [in verses 10, 11] is one that would be followed by invaders who broke into the city from the north. The Fish Gate was part of the city wall on the northern side and was so called because of the dried fish brought there by traders from Tyre. A little to the west of the Fish Gate and inside the wall was the 'Second Quarter'—apparently recognized as a weak link in the defenses of Jerusalem and frequently reinforced. The prophetess Huldah—a contemporary of Zephaniah—lived in this area. See 2 Kings 22:14.

"'The Mortar' or 'hollow space' probably refers to the natural bowl formed by the mountains on either side of the Tyropoean Valley between the upper city and the hill of the temple. This site was not only liable to invasion by those attacking from the north, but its name is also appropriate to what would happen there at the time of the invasion."—Van Dolson, *Boost Your Prophets*, pp. 95, 96.

**Think of examples from the life and teaching of Jesus that illustrate God's unfailing mercy toward repentant souls who had committed sins similar to those listed by Zephaniah.**

**THE ANSWER TO OUR DILEMMA (Zeph. 1:4-18).**

**Why did God punish Judah?** "If men cling to sin, they become identified with it. Then the glory of God, which destroys sin, must destroy them."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 107.

**What is the only way we can escape being part of the "sacrifice" at Christ's second coming?** Eph. 2:8-10.

God freely gives His saving grace to any who believe in Christ. Sinful deeds, unrepented of, destroy our chance of receiving this grace. But neither do good deeds save us. Only through faith in Christ can we receive God's grace. Having been saved by grace, we are then "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10, NIV).

The answer to the dilemma of Zephaniah's contemporaries was to enter into a faith-grace relationship with the Lord. If they had remembered and followed the counsel of Deuteronomy 6:4-6, they would never have suffered at the hands of the Babylonians. The answer to our dilemma today is identical.

**If you were to die at this moment, do you believe you would be saved? Do you receive from the Lord every day the power to keep His law? If your answer is Yes, what evidence do you have that you receive such power?**

Which verses in the passage (Zeph. 1:14-18) best present the following facts concerning the coming day of the Lord?

Its nearness; its distress; its inevitability; its fearfulness.

**What solemn appeal is implied in Zephaniah 1:18?**

The passion for wealth is all-consuming with many people in this materialistic age. The tragic fact is that the wealthy are just as subject to disease, accident, and death as anyone else. And they are just as dependent upon the grace of Christ for salvation as are poorer people. Their wealth counts for nothing with God. Jesus tried to awaken His followers to the same reality. (See Matt. 6:19, 20.)

The Lord's great longing is to save both rich and poor.

**FURTHER STUDY:** Note how the passages listed correspond with Zephaniah's description of the day of the Lord: Isa. 9:19; Jer. 25:11, 33; Joel 2:2.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What answer would you give:
  - to the person who feels he or she cannot love God, because His punishment of sinners seems to be inconsistent with His love?
  - to the person who feels thoroughly assured of salvation even though he or she does not have a relationship with Christ that results in obedience to His law?
2. How should we relate to God's warnings of impending judgment? 1 John 4:16-18; *Prophets and Kings*, p. 389.
3. Review Zephaniah 1:18 and Matthew 6:19, 20. How has our materialistic age affected your desires? Is there anything you own that you could especially use for God that you are not now using for Him?

**SUMMARY:** Zephaniah warned Israel and neighboring nations of the coming day of the Lord. The destruction of that day for those nations foreshadowed the devastation of the great end-time day of the Lord. By maintaining our faith-grace relationship with Jesus we have present and future security.



Your Thirteenth Sabbath Special Projects Offering in 1987 helped build this girls' dormitory in Bogenhofen, Austria. Remember the Euro-Africa Division again March 28.

# God's Appeal



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Zephaniah 2:1-3.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger" (Zephaniah 2:3).

**KEY THOUGHT:** God appeals to us, as He did to Judah, to seek Him and His righteousness while there is still time.

**THE AUCTION FOR OUR SOULS.** A London minister was preaching on the streets one day, when Lady Ann Erskine came by in her carriage. She was famous for squandering her husband's money. As she approached, the minister announced he was holding an auction for her soul. Quickly he recognized a bidder.

"Satan! What do you bid for Lady Ann's soul?"

"All the wealth and pleasures of the world!"

"And what about after this life has ended?" Silence!

"Here's another bidder! Jesus, what do You offer?"

"I offer a cross of self-denial. But it will bring her happiness. I also offer eternal life in the kingdom I'm preparing for those who love and serve Me."

The preacher's "auction" moved Lady Ann to repent and become the angel of London slums.

The auction for our souls is not imaginary. And most people are attracted to Satan's offer. But God appeals to us today, as He did to His people in the days of Zephaniah, to accept His offer, which will bring us true happiness in this life and eternal joy.

**GATHER TOGETHER (Zeph. 2:1, 2).**

Chapter 1 of Zephaniah closes with a note of solemn warning. The trumpet of judgment is sounding, but the people are not prepared. Is there any hope?

**What group is addressed first in Zephaniah 2:1?**

The NIV translates the text: "Gather together, gather together, O shameful nation." Because the people were not ashamed of their sinful life, they were not "desired" (KJV) in the sense of not being worthy of the Lord's blessings.

Even so, the Lord's infinite love led Him to choose prophets like Zephaniah to appeal for their repentance. One of the great truths of Scripture is that the Lord works for our salvation *before* we have any desire for Him.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8, NIV).

**What does the Lord do for the helpless sinner who is unable to change his or her attitudes and behavior? John 6:44; 12:32.**

Without Christ's convicting, drawing power, exercised on our minds by the Holy Spirit, we would never have any sense of shame for our sins or any desire to come to Him. The Lord pities our helplessness. He is not displeased with us because we are weak; He becomes displeased when we reject His Spirit.

**We are drawn to Christ if we do not resist.** "The same divine mind that is working upon the things of nature is speaking to the hearts of men and creating an inexpressible craving for something they have not. The things of the world cannot satisfy their longing. The Spirit of God is pleading with them to seek for those things that alone can give peace and rest—the grace of Christ, the joy of holiness."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 28.

Looking back over your life, how can you see that the Lord has worked for your salvation? How is He now "creating an inexpressible craving" for Him?

**SEEK THE LORD (Zeph. 2:1-3).**

Why was the challenge to "gather together" particularly relevant to Israel at that time in its history? What significance does this call have for us? Zeph. 2:1, 2.

After the "decree" that composes most of chapter 1 would go into effect, it would be too late to change the fate of the nation. The "chaff" would be scattered as before a whirlwind. The Lord was about to withdraw Himself from His professed people, allowing the Babylonians to invade them and take them captive. The "day of the Lord" was about to occur. If ever there was a time for heart-searching and united prayer, that was the time. Joel had counseled: "Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, 'Spare your people, O Lord'" (Joel 2:16, 17, NIV).

**Whom does the Lord invite to seek Him? Why? Zeph. 2:3, first part.**

Those who respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit by putting away sin and gathering together for prayer receive forgiveness for sin and the grace to do God's will.

**"Seek meekness."** "Meekness" is not cowardice. In fact it is just the opposite, because it involves full submission to the will of God. The "meek" (KJV) or "humble" (NIV) are those who are willing to acknowledge their helplessness apart from God and to submit to the inner working of the Holy Spirit. That is impossible unless the grace of God makes it possible for us to submit ourselves fully to Him.

**The Lord uses humble people.** When we are willing to humble ourselves, to empty ourselves in order to be pure vessels to hold the mercies of God, the Lord will then be able to use us.

**Are you impressed with our need today for personal and corporate prayer?** How well attended are prayer meetings in your church? Why do you think prayer meeting is so poorly attended in many churches? What can be done to awaken people to the need for heart-searching and prayer?

**SEEK RIGHTEOUSNESS (Zeph. 2:3).**

What kind of search for the Lord will always be successful?  
Deut. 4:29; Heb. 11:6.

"The Lord specifies no conditions except that you hunger for His mercy, desire His counsel, and long for His love. . . . When you ask for the blessings you need, that you may perfect a character after Christ's likeness, the Lord assures you that you are asking according to a promise that will be verified. That you feel and know you are a sinner is sufficient ground for asking for His mercy and compassion."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 130, 131.

Zephaniah instructs us to "seek righteousness" (Zeph. 2:3). What do the following texts teach regarding the importance of possessing righteousness?

Isa. 61:10 \_\_\_\_\_

Matt. 5:6 \_\_\_\_\_

Rom. 1:17 \_\_\_\_\_

Rom. 5:17 \_\_\_\_\_

Rom. 6:13, 19 \_\_\_\_\_

A careful study of all that Jesus had to say about "righteousness" in Matthew 5 reveals that He had in mind ethical "right doing" that results from "right being." Individuals who become children of God through the steps Christ outlined in the Beatitudes will love God so much that His law will be inscribed on their hearts and minds, and their actions will give evidence of the fact.

**How do we become righteous?** The Bible teaches that "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14, NIV). "Righteousness is holiness, likeness to God, and 'God is love.' 1 John 4:16. It is conformity to the law of God, for 'all Thy commandments are righteousness' (Psalm 119:172), and 'love is the fulfilling of the law' (Romans 13:10). Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God. The righteousness of God is embodied in Christ. We receive righteousness by receiving Him."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 18 (italics supplied).

**SEEK CHRIST-LIKENESS (Zeph. 2:3, first part).**

What does Matthew 5:48 indicate that God makes possible for His children? Compare 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Peter 1:15, 16.

**By His grace the standard can be reached.** "Perfection of character is based upon that which Christ is to us. If we have constant dependence on the merits of our Saviour, and walk in His footsteps, we shall be like Him. . . .

"Our Saviour does not require impossibilities of any soul. He expects nothing of His disciples that He is not willing to give them grace and strength to perform. He would not call upon them to be perfect if He had not at His command every perfection of grace to bestow on the ones upon whom He would confer so high and holy a privilege. He has assured us that He is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him than parents are to give good gifts to their children.

"Our work is to strive to attain in our sphere of action the perfection that Christ in His life on the earth attained in every phase of character. He is our example. . . . In falling day by day so far short of the divine requirements, we are endangering our soul's salvation. We need to understand and appreciate the privilege with which Christ invests us, and to show our determination to reach the highest standard. *We are to be wholly dependent on the power that He has promised to give us.*"—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 130 (italics supplied).

"None need fail of attaining, in his sphere, to perfection of Christian character. . . . God calls upon us to reach the standard of perfection, and places before us the example of Christ's character. In His humanity, perfected by a life of constant resistance of evil, the Saviour showed that through co-operation with Divinity, human beings may in this life attain to perfection of character. This is God's assurance to us that we too may obtain complete victory."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 531.

**Indicate whether the following statements are true or false:**

Righteousness is always in God's heart but never in the hearts of human beings.

Justification is like an umbrella over you, even when you commit sin.

We are never righteous apart from Christ.

**GOD'S PROMISE (Zeph. 2:3).**

**What promise is made in the last part of Zephaniah 2:3?**

The words *may be* or *perhaps* (depending on which version you are using) indicate the conditional nature of this promise. Those who do respond *will be* protected and covered during the coming disaster. "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling" (Ps. 91:9, 10).

**Satan will be frustrated in his attempts to deceive those who are trusting in Christ.** "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber" (Ps. 121:3). "But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil" (Prov. 1:33). "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5).

**What will cover us during "the day of the Lord's anger," and what will be the effect? Ps. 27:5; 91:1, 2.**

"In that day [the time of the seven last plagues], multitudes will desire the shelter of God's mercy which they have so long despised. . . .

"The people of God will not be free from suffering; but while persecuted and distressed, while they endure privation and suffer for want of food they will not be left to perish. . . . He who numbers the hairs of their heads will care for them. . . . While the wicked are dying from hunger and pestilence, angels will shield the righteous and supply their wants."

"If the blood of Christ's faithful witnesses were shed at this time, it would not, like the blood of the martyrs, be as seed sown to yield a harvest for God. . . . If the righteous were now left to fall a prey to their enemies, it would be a triumph for the prince of darkness."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 629, 634. (See also Isa. 26:20, 21.)

**What can it do for you to know that God isn't "sleeping on the job"? What image of God does Psalm 121:3 give you? What answer would you give to those who turn away from the Advent message because they are afraid of the time of trouble?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study Romans chapter 8 in relation to the message of Zephaniah.

The point is that when we receive Christ into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we have righteousness within (Rom. 8:9, 10). The result is conformity to the righteous law of God (Rom. 8:4). This is also the teaching of Romans 10:6-10. Paul defines righteousness by faith by quoting Deuteronomy 30:14: "The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it" (NIV). Paul adds: "that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming" (Rom. 10:8, NIV).

Righteousness by faith is Christ's righteousness being counted for the believer, and it is also a heart experience; God's law is written on the heart by the Holy Spirit, and the result is obedience to it. This experience is salvation (Rom. 10:9). It is the experience by which you are made righteous. Romans 10:10 translates literally: "For with the heart he [or she] believes unto righteousness." Righteousness is Christ's gift to the one who believes in Him; the result is complete conformity to the principles of His holy law.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways are you demonstrating your wholehearted response to God's appeal to seek Him?
2. Is your relationship with Christ right now such that you have the assurance of His shelter on the "day of the Lord"? Is your relationship with Christ one of close, daily fellowship?
3. Do you feel that, at times, we have perhaps concentrated too much on the persecution that will befall us on "the day of the Lord"? Would it be better to think instead about God's love and care? Review Psalm 121, especially verse 3. Why not commit this psalm to memory? Also read *The Desire of Ages*, p. 313.
4. What can you do this week to help others prepare to meet Christ and enjoy the pleasures of eternity with Him?

**SUMMARY:** The Lord appeals to us through Zephaniah to meet together for earnest heart searching and prayer before the final events of history come upon us. Humbly we are to seek the Lord, His righteousness, and His shelter from the storms about to burst on our world. By emphasizing God's love and care we are to convince others to trust Him, whatever the future may hold.

# God's Love and Justice Are Supreme



## Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Zephaniah 2:4-3:7.

MEMORY TEXT: "The just Lord is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not" (Zephaniah 3:5).

KEY THOUGHT: Only the remnant who share God's goodness will escape the judgments that are coming upon the earth and enjoy the glories that will follow.

A WAY OF ESCAPE. Once when Calvin Coolidge was Vice-President of the United States and presiding over the Senate, an argument arose between two senators. One senator told the other to go straight to hell. The offended senator marched down the aisle and stood before Mr. Coolidge, who was leafing through a book.

"Mr. President," he said, "did you hear what he said?"

Coolidge looked up from his book and said, "I've been looking through the rule book. You don't have to go."—Lester Buford, quoted in *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance, 1988), p. 690; adapted.

And that's the point of this week's lesson! However sinful you feel, you don't have to die eternally. Zephaniah's inspired predictions against the nations were conditional. If they had repented as Nineveh had done, God would have forgiven them. His infinite love always provides a way of escape for those who accept it.

**JUDGMENTS UPON THE NATIONS (Zeph. 2:4-10).**

The nations surrounding Judah in Zephaniah's day were to suffer God's judgments because of their wickedness. His prophecy was a warning to them. There was still hope that they might repent and accept God's salvation. Zephaniah's appeal is thoroughly relevant today. These nations represent the nations of our world. The last appeals of the gospel are sounding throughout the earth. The nations are angry. And the time of God's wrath has come. (See Rev. 11:18.) But there is still time to repent.

**What would happen to the territory of the Philistines? Zeph. 2:4, 5.**

God addressed Philistia, the enemy to the west, first. Zephaniah lists only four of the five chief cities of the plain. Possibly the Assyrians had already destroyed Gath. The attack on Ashdod would come at "the noon day," the hottest part of the day, when the enemy would not be expected to attack.

The *Cherethites* (KJV), or *Kerethite people* (NIV), lived in the southern portion of the coastal territory occupied by the Philistines. For centuries the Philistines had rejected the true God and had persecuted His people. (See 1 Samuel 13.)

**Who would occupy the former territories of the Philistines? Zeph. 2:6, 7.**

Assyrian records show that the Assyrians invaded and conquered the Philistines. Later, during Herod's time, most of the Philistines' territory became part of his kingdom.

The remnant of God's last-day people, along with the saved of all ages, will eventually inhabit the entire earth. (See Isa. 65:17, 18; 66:22, 23; Matt. 5:5.)

**What was the basic sin of the Moabites and Ammonites? Zeph. 2:8, 10 (compare Isa. 16:6; Jer. 48:26).**

Think about the nations that are in the news today. In what ways does their pride affect their citizens?

On a more personal level, how does pride affect your church? Your family? You?

**GOD'S REMNANT WILL POSSESS THE LAND (Zeph. 2:9-15).**

Zephaniah 2 lists the nations that would receive God's judgments if they did not repent. These nations are symbolic of the nations of our modern world.

**What specific group would inherit the land occupied by the enemies to the east? To what extent would God be worshiped? Zeph. 2:9 (last part), 11.**

"All the isles" means "all the inhabitants of the earth." The prophecy could have been fulfilled to literal Israel had they served the Lord. It will now be fulfilled for the saved of all ages who will worship God when the earth is re-created. (See Isa. 66:23; Rev. 21:24.)

**What would be the fate of Israel's enemies to the south? Zeph. 2:12; Eze. 30:4.**

Ethiopia was the farthest kingdom south that the Jews were aware of. "Zephaniah says nothing further concerning this distant nation [Ethiopia], which had not come into any hostile collision with Judah in his day; and only mentions it to exemplify the thought that all the heathen will come under the judgment. The fulfilment commenced with the judgment upon Egypt through the Chaldaeans, as is evident from Ezek. xxx. 4, 9."—C. F. Keil, *Minor Prophets*, volume 10 of C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1978 reprint), p. 147.

**Why did the Lord decree the destruction of Assyria and the complete desolation of its capital city, Nineveh (Zeph. 2:13-15)? Isa. 10:12, 13.**

Assyria was Israel's chief enemy to the north during Zephaniah's time. They had taken the northern 10 tribes of Israel captive in 722 B.C. "In 614 B.C. Asshur fell to the Medes, as did probably also Calah, and 2 years later (612 B.C.) the combined armies of Babylon and of the Medes laid siege to old Nineveh, a city that had seen no hostile foreign armies for centuries. After 3 months the city fell to the attackers."—*SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 775.

**WHAT ABOUT TODAY?**

What do the following passages teach regarding the Lord's treatment of unbelieving nations that, at the end of time, give their allegiance to the evil one and persecute God's faithful people?

Rev. 11:18 \_\_\_\_\_

Rev. 13:10 \_\_\_\_\_

Rev. 16:19 \_\_\_\_\_

Rev. 17:12-14 \_\_\_\_\_

The book of Revelation predicts ultimate international cooperation in opposition to the law of God. Chapter 13:11-18 foretells of secular decrees that will be enforced worldwide, demanding allegiance to devil-inspired, man-made worship. Those who insist on following God's Word will be deprived of their civil rights.

**What international trends do you recognize today that are leading to the fulfillment of these prophecies?**

Zephaniah's graphic description of God's judgments on Assyria points us forward to the time soon to come when the Lord will punish the rebellious nations of earth.

**Divine wrath for unrepentant nations.** "By terrible things in righteousness He [God] will vindicate the authority of His down-trodden law. The severity of the retribution awaiting the transgressor may be judged by the Lord's reluctance to execute justice. The nation with which He bears long, and which He will not smite until it has filled up the measure of its iniquity in God's account, will finally drink the cup of wrath unmixed with mercy."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 627.

Nations are made up of families, and families of individuals. What is your family doing to turn the tide of evil in your community? What are you doing personally? For example, what practical steps are you taking to cooperate with those who are opposing the drug traffic? Are you willing to take meaningful action against pornography, prostitution, child abuse, racial discrimination, and other unchristian practices?

**WARNINGS TO A WAYWARD PEOPLE (Zeph. 3:1-4, 6).**

Just as surely as God would bring retribution on the surrounding nations, He would punish the sinners in Judah. And nothing God did or said seemed to make much of an impression on those committed to evil.

**Why was Judah filthy and polluted? What was the basic reason for her moral depravity?** Zeph. 3:1, 2.

**What categories of officials does the prophet fearlessly identify as being responsible for turning the people away from obedience to God's laws?** Zeph. 3:3, 4.

**The Lord's appeal.** (See Zeph. 3:6.) Nation after nation had risen to heights of power and glory only to be removed from the scene of action by God when their cup of iniquity was full.

The Lord lovingly appealed to His people, He said, " 'Surely you will fear me and accept correction! ' " (Zeph. 3:7, NIV). He would then have protected their cities, homes, and lands from invaders. "But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did" (Zeph. 3:7, NIV).

**We must prepare for the inevitable.** Devastating earthquakes have occurred in various parts of the world in recent years. Revelation 16:18-20 predicts an earthquake of such magnitude that it will move every island and mountain.

"The mountains shake like a reed in the wind, and ragged rocks are scattered on every side. There is a roar as of a coming tempest. The sea is lashed into fury. There is heard the shriek of a hurricane like the voice of demons upon a mission of destruction. The whole earth heaves and swells like the waves of the sea. Its surface is breaking up. Its very foundations seem to be giving way. Mountain chains are sinking. Inhabited islands disappear. The seaports that have become like Sodom for wickedness, are swallowed up by the angry waters. . . . The proudest cities of the earth are laid low."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 637.

**God expresses His amazement that His people are not able to profit from the experience of others. What are we able to learn from the sad experience of Judah in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.?**

## GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS (Zeph. 3:5).

Of what are the people in Judah reminded concerning God's presence and character? Zeph. 3:5.

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

Not only is the Lord righteous in character, He also shares His righteousness with the person who believes in Him. Morning by morning, as we turn to Him in private and family worship, we receive the outpouring of His righteousness upon us by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

What do the passages that follow teach regarding the effect of God's righteousness upon those who receive it?

Isa. 32:15-17 \_\_\_\_\_

Rom. 1:16, 17 \_\_\_\_\_

Phil. 3:9-11 \_\_\_\_\_

The power in the gospel is the bestowal of God's righteousness upon the believer by the Holy Spirit. (See Rom. 8:9, 10.)

His character becomes ours. "All who have a sense of their deep soul poverty, who feel that they have nothing good in themselves, may find righteousness and strength by looking unto Jesus. He says, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.' Matthew 11:28. He bids you exchange your poverty for the riches of His grace. We are not worthy of God's love, but Christ, our surety, is worthy, and is abundantly able to save all who shall come unto Him. Whatever may have been your past experience, however discouraging your present circumstances, if you will come to Jesus just as you are, weak, helpless, and despairing, our compassionate Saviour will meet you a great way off, and will throw about you His arms of love and His robe of righteousness. He presents us to the Father clothed in the white raiment of His own character."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 8, 9.

What has the gospel's power enabled you to do? What would you like it to do for you?

**FURTHER STUDY:** What do the texts that follow teach us about preparing for judgment? Isa. 55:6, 7; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 21:34; Titus 2:11-14.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What can you do this week to allow God to prepare you for eternity?
2. What is your part in the process by which God will make you righteous?
3. Why do people who have been given specific warnings about judgments to come neglect to prepare? (See 2 Peter 3:3-7.)
4. The title of this week's lesson is "God's Love and Justice Are Supreme." Thinking about what you have learned this week, how is this true on a world scale? On a more personal, individual level?

**SUMMARY:** God has a specific goal in mind in pointing His people to the example of nations that have been cut off because of their excessive wickedness. He hopes to turn them away from sin to a full acceptance of His plan of redemption and restoration.

The Euro-Africa Division thanks you for this evangelistic center your Thirteenth Sabbath Special Projects Offering in 1987 helped build for the Muslims in Lyons, France. The Euro-Africa Division needs your help again March 28.



# The Kingdom Restored



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Zephaniah 3:8-20.

MEMORY TEXT: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17).

KEY THOUGHT: After the Lord has eliminated the sin problem, the redeemed will inherit His eternal kingdom. In this week's lesson we find God rejoicing over His redeemed people, even singing a happy song about the results of His sacrifice.

ULTIMATE RESTORATION. In this last section of Zephaniah's book, we receive a glimpse of God's forgiving attitude toward His people. We find God promising to restore that which had been lost because of the punishment He was constrained to bring upon Israel. Even though God was not able to fulfill all these conditional promises to literal Israel, He will ultimately fulfill them in principle to the redeemed of all ages when Jesus returns. The universality of this description indicates a larger application—an ultimate restoration of the people of God at Christ's second coming.

"During the reign of Josiah the word of the Lord came to Zephaniah, specifying plainly the results of continued apostasy, and calling the attention of the true church to the glorious prospect beyond. His prophecies of impending judgment upon Judah apply with equal force to the judgments that are to fall upon an impenitent world at the time of the second advent of Christ."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 389, 390.

**RESTORATION AFTER CAPTIVITY (Zeph. 3:8-13).**

Many tend to overlook the fact that the ultimate result of the final judgment is happy and positive, even thrilling for those who have sent their sins beforehand to judgment.

**What does Zephaniah 3:8 say to those who are perplexed about the continued existence and apparent success of evil?**

Although world events seem out of control, God appeals to us to wait patiently for Him to act. He commissions us to continue proclaiming the message that is to span the earth. (See Rev. 14:6-12.)

**Before God can restore a perfect new earth what forms of sin pollution will He remove? Zeph. 3:9-11.**

No longer will there be language pollution, pride pollution, or any of the other effects and results of evil. God's people will live forever as contented sheep under the care and guidance of the Good Shepherd.

**What good traits will characterize the "remnant" of Israel? Zeph. 3:12, 13.**

"I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths" (Zeph. 3:12, NIV). Victory over sin, through the power of the indwelling Christ, will be the experience of God's people *before* Christ's second coming. The book of Revelation echoes Zephaniah's message. Those who are sealed in the last remnants of time (Rev. 7:1-3) and who will ultimately stand with Christ on "Mount Zion" have "his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads" (Rev. 14:1, NIV). They have received the gift of Christ's character as He has come into their hearts by the Holy Spirit. These are the people who have responded to the three angels' messages and who, through Christ's grace, are obeying His commandments (verse 12).

**How well do I know my Shepherd? What do I need to understand or do in order to appreciate Him more? How can I receive His power for victory over sin?**

**REJOICE! (Zeph. 3:14-16).**

What does Zephaniah suggest as an appropriate response on the part of those who have been redeemed and restored? Zeph. 3:14.

God's people are united at last. And He is dwelling in their midst. (See Rev. 21:3.) How can they keep from expressing their love and praise? "And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth" (Rev. 14:3, NIV).

**Why is singing an important part of our Christian experience?**  
Ps. 105:2, 3.

"Let praise and thanksgiving be expressed in song. When tempted, instead of giving utterance to our feelings, let us by faith lift up a song of thanksgiving to God."

"Song is a weapon that we can always use against discouragement. As we thus open the heart to the sunlight of the Saviour's presence, we shall have health and His blessing."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 254.

**Does this prescription for physical, mental, and spiritual health apply to all kinds of singing? What can you do when you do not feel like singing? How can you gain more blessings from congregational singing?**

**Consider the reason for the song of the redeemed.** Zeph. 3:15; Rev. 5:12, 13.

Zephaniah 3:16 indicates that the hands of those restored to their land will not be "slack." Slack or fallen hands indicate despair. But the Lord will lift their hands in praise. "The cross of Christ will be the . . . song of the redeemed through all eternity. In Christ glorified they will behold Christ crucified. . . . As the nations of the saved look upon their Redeemer and behold the eternal glory of the Father shining in His countenance . . . they break forth in rapturous song: "Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His own most precious blood!""—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 651, 652.

AND AGAIN I SAY REJOICE! (Zeph. 3:17).

In what fascinating way does God respond to the song of the redeemed? Zeph. 3:17.

"We must bear in mind the great joy manifested by the Shepherd at the recovery of the lost. He calls upon His neighbors, 'Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.' "All heaven echoes the note of joy. The Father Himself joys over the rescued one with singing. . . . That joy it is your privilege to share."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 125.

Which one of Jesus' parables also shows us how God responds to the saving of the lost? Luke 15:11-32.

"All heaven is interested in our salvation. The angels of God, thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand, are commissioned to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. They guard us against evil and press back the powers of darkness that are seeking our destruction. Have we not reason to be thankful every moment, thankful even when there are apparent difficulties in our pathway?"—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 63.

God is "mighty to save" (Zeph. 3:17, NIV). A young woman became discouraged by the criticism she encountered in her church. She wandered away from Christ, married out of the church, and had a beautiful baby daughter. Then one summer she decided to join her parents at camp meeting. One evening the preacher said, "I believe there is someone here who has come to camp meeting to find Jesus." The Holy Spirit spoke to the young woman's heart. When the preacher made an altar call a few nights later, the young woman walked to the front. With a breaking heart she told the preacher her story and requested rebaptism. A baptismal tank was set up in the auditorium, and two nights later the young mother was baptized. Her husband joined her as their little one was dedicated to Jesus, and he too declared his interest in coming nearer to the Lord. Christ's infinite love leads Him to plead earnestly over a long period of time for us to submit our all to Him.

Are you aware of how much God longs to save you? Have you committed all you are and have to Him? What can you do to share His love, interest, and concern with those about you?

## HOME AT LAST (Zeph. 3:18, 19).

The meaning of verse 18 seems to be as follows: "While in exile, those faithful to God were deprived of the privilege of attending the holy festivals (see on Hosea 2:11). By faith the prophet looks forward to a time when the true sons of God will be gathered to worship Him, undisturbed by any 'reproach.'"—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1069.

The scattering of Israel was a great reproach. But God would gather them back into His presence where no one would be able to reproach them again. This prophecy will be fulfilled in the ultimate sense when God gathers His people of all ages to their heavenly home.

**What precious promise does God make to all who have been oppressed? Zeph. 3:19.**

**The bright home of the saints.** "The bright home of the saints was presented vividly before me. . . . I seemed to be there, where all was peace, where no stormy conflicts of earth could ever come. Heaven, a kingdom of righteousness where all the holy and pure and blest are congregated—ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands—living and walking in happy, pure intimacy, praising God and the Lamb who sitteth on the throne. Their voices were in perfect harmony. They never do each other wrong. Princes of heaven, the potentates of this mighty realm, are rivals only in good, seeking the happiness and joy of each other. The greatest there is least in self-esteem, and the least is greatest in his gratitude and wealth of love.

"There are no dark errors to cloud the intellect. Truth and knowledge, clear, strong, and perfect, have chased every doubt away, and no gloom of doubt casts its baleful shadow upon its happy inhabitants. No voices of contention mar the sweet and perfect peace of heaven. Its inhabitants know no sorrow, no grief, no tears. All is in perfect harmony, in perfect order and perfect bliss. . . .

"Heaven, sweet heaven, the saints' eternal home, the abode for the toilers, where the weary who have borne the heavy burdens through life find rest, peace, and joy! They sowed in tears, they reap with joy and triumph. Heaven is a home where sympathy is alive in every heart, expressed in every look. Love reigns there. There are no jarring elements, no discord or contentions or war of words."—Letter 30, 1882 (to G. I. Butler).

WILL YOU BE THERE? (Zeph. 3:20).

On what triumphant note does Zephaniah end? Zeph. 3:20.

This prophecy will not be fulfilled until we are gathered into the eternal kingdom. But for now, the Lord wants us to be a leavening influence for good in this world.

"It is God's purpose that His people shall be a sanctified, purified, holy people, communicating light to all around them. . . . The grace of Christ is sufficient to bring this about. But let God's people remember that only as they believe and work out the principles of the gospel can He make them a praise in the earth. Only as they use their God-given capabilities in His service will they enjoy the fullness and power of the promise whereon the church has been called to stand."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 14.

What earnest and wonderful invitation does Christ extend to us? Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 22:17.

Time and again the prophets called the people to come to God so that He could come to them. (See Zech. 1:3; Mal. 3:7.) The invitation becomes particularly urgent in these last moments before Jesus returns.

Dr. Clarence Macartney is best known for his sermon entitled "Come Before Winter." He first preached it in 1915. Every October from that time on, he preached this same sermon until he presented it for the last time in 1945 in the First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh.

In the unforgettable conclusion of the sermon that touched so many hearts, he urged: "Once again, I repeat these words of the apostle, 'Come before winter'; and as I pronounce them, common sense, experience, conscience, Scripture, the Holy Spirit, . . . and the Lord Jesus Christ all repeat with me, 'Come before winter.' Come before the haze of Indian summer has faded from the fields; come before the November winds strip the leaves from the trees and send them whirling over the fields; come before the snows lie on the uplands and the meadow brook is turned to ice; come before the heart is cold; come before desire has failed; come before life is over and your probation ended and you stand before God to give account of the use you have made of the opportunities which in His grace He has granted. Come before winter." (See Rev. 22:17.)

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study Isaiah's emphasis on "waiting" for the Lord in order better to understand Zephaniah's admonition in Zephaniah 3:8:

Isa. 40:31 \_\_\_\_\_

Isa. 42:4 \_\_\_\_\_

Isa. 49:23 \_\_\_\_\_

Isa. 64:4 \_\_\_\_\_

**An intense longing for heaven.** "If we can meet Jesus in peace and be saved, forever saved, we shall be the happiest of beings! Oh, to be at home at last where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest! Heaven, sweet heaven! Oh, how I shall appreciate heaven! I know that I must watch and keep my garments unspotted from the world or I shall never enter the abode of the blessed. The east is not separated farther from the west than the children of light are separated from the children of darkness. We must watch continually and pray always that we may not be overcome with Satan's devices. I long for a greater faith, a more earnest consecration."—Letter 113, 1886 (to J. E. White and wife).

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** The lessons this quarter from Joel, Micah, and Zephaniah have centered on the themes of revival and reformation, judgment, and the restoration of all that was lost to sin. Quickly review these lessons, then answer the following:

1. What have you learned that was new to you?
2. How do you feel about God now? How have these lessons helped you appreciate Him more?
3. How can you best show your love and appreciation?

**SUMMARY:** Zephaniah brings his message to a close with the most encouraging series of promises from God. The wicked will be destroyed, and God's faithful remnant people will be ushered into the kingdom of glory. He will live with His people and give them eternal peace and rejoicing.

# Like the Leaves of Autumn

"...these (leaflets and pamphlets) must be scattered like the leaves of autumn" *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 231.

"We spread them (the publications) before the Lord, and with earnest prayers mingled with tears, entreated that His blessing might attend the silent messengers" *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 88.



This is how it started. Today the same commitment is called for from every believer.

- Always carry literature
- Restock the church supply quarterly
- Learn what literature is available to meet different needs
- Have a personal goal for sharing literature

# EURO-AFRICA DIVISION



## PROJECTS

1. Mozambique:  
chapel in Maputo, Fomento
2. France:  
evangelistic center in Paris
3. Portugal:  
reconstruction of primary/  
secondary school in Lisbon



| Unions               | Churches | Membership | Population  |
|----------------------|----------|------------|-------------|
| Division             | 2        | 35         | 54,199,000  |
| Angola               | 384      | 105,187    | 9,334,000   |
| Austrian             | 43       | 2,955      | 7,590,000   |
| Bulgarian            | 56       | 3,327      | 8,970,000   |
| Czechoslovakian      | 174      | 7,910      | 15,573,000  |
| Franco-Belgian       | 137      | 10,469     | 65,949,000  |
| German Dem. Republic | 282      | 9,088      | 16,841,000  |
| Italian              | 88       | 5,023      | 57,790,000  |
| Mozambique           | 469      | 51,170     | 14,932,000  |
| Portuguese           | 373      | 7,557      | 10,350,000  |
| Romanian             | 525      | 59,483     | 22,000,000  |
| South German         | 210      | 12,232     | 30,585,000  |
| Spanish              | 53       | 5,560      | 36,931,000  |
| Swiss                | 57       | 4,084      | 6,585,000   |
| West German          | 168      | 11,685     | 30,516,000  |
| Totals June 30, 1989 | 2,721    | 296,305    | 390,881,000 |