

Hope of Nations



SABBATH—JUNE 12

“IT IS BECAUSE OF YOUR SINS THAT HE [GOD] DOESN’T [DOES NOT] HEAR YOU. It is your sins that separate you from God when you try to worship him. You are guilty of lying, violence, and murder. You go to court, but you do not have justice on your side. You depend on lies to win your case. You carry out your plans to hurt [other people]. . . .The Sovereign¹ Lord has filled me [Jesus] with his spirit. He has chosen me and sent me to bring good news to the poor [people], to heal the broken-hearted [people], to announce release to captives [slaves] and freedom to those [people] in prison. He has sent me to proclaim [preach] that the time has come when the Lord will save his people and defeat their enemies. He has sent me to comfort all [people] who mourn, to give to those [people] who mourn in Zion joy and gladness instead of grief, a song of praise instead of sorrow. They will be like trees that the Lord himself had planted. They will all do what is right, and God will be praised for what he has done” (Isaiah 59:2-4, TEV; Isaiah 61:1-3, TEV).

This week we look at how God planned to take His people from one spiritual place to another.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK’S LESSON: How does sin separate us from God? What is the only way to be saved? What was God’s plan for Israel? How was Jesus described in Isaiah 61:1-3? How do we understand God’s vengeance?²

MEMORY VERSE: “Nations shall come to your [Israel’s] light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isaiah 60:3).

¹sovereign—to be greater than everything.

²vengeance—punishment; getting even with your enemies.

SUNDAY—JUNE 13

THE RESULTS OF SIN (Isaiah 59).

In Isaiah 58:3, God's people asked: "Why do we fast,³ but you [God] do not see? Why do we humble ourselves, but you do not notice?"

But Isaiah 59:1 suggests another question: "Why do we call for God to save us, but He does not save us? Why do we cry to Him, but He does not hear?" Isaiah answers that God is able to save and hear.

What message does Isaiah 59:2 give that answers the question suggested in Isaiah 59:1?

God chooses not to answer His people because "your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God" (Isaiah 59:2, NIV). Here is one of the clearest statements in the Bible about the result of sin on the God-human relationship. Isaiah spends the rest of Isaiah 59 helping us to understand Isaiah 59:2. The problem of sin is seen all through human history. Sin can destroy our relationship with God and lead to our eternal⁴ ruin. This is because sin both drives God away from us and drives us away from God.

How does Genesis 3:8 show that sin separates us from God?



Sin separates us from God.

Sin is a turning away from God. And the result of sinning causes the sinner to turn away from God even more! Sin separates us from God. But God reaches out to the sinner. The Bible is all about how God reaches out to sinners. Sin separates us from God because sin causes us to refuse God's salvation. That is why it is so important that we do not accept sin and cover up sin in our lives.

How has sin caused you to experience separation from God? What is the only answer to this problem?

MONDAY—JUNE 14

WHO IS FORGIVEN?

Isaiah 59 presents a surprising picture of the problem of sin. Luckily, the Bible also presents the hope of salvation.

How many of us have sinned? The Bible is very clear: All of us have sinned. So salvation cannot be based on not

³fast—not eating, sometimes for religious reasons.

⁴eternal—without beginning or end; lasting forever.

having sinned. Salvation must be based on forgiveness (Jeremiah 31:34). All people sin (Romans 3:9-20, 23). There can be no difference among humans in this area (Romans 3:22, 23). People who are justified⁵ can be judged as righteous (holy) because they receive by faith the gift of God. The gift is His righteousness (holiness) through Jesus' sacrifice.

What does Romans 3:21-24 tell us about how we are saved? What hope should these verses give us in the judgment?



Most people think the question in the judgment is: Who has sinned? But that is not a question we need to ask. Why? Every one has sinned. Instead, the question is: Who is forgiven? God is just (fair) when He justifies “the one [person] who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26). The most important ques-

tion of the judgment is: Who has received and continues to receive forgiveness by having faith in Jesus?

Now it is true that we are judged by our works. But we are not judged in the sense that our works save us. If this were true, then faith would be no good (Romans 4:14). Instead, our works show whether we truly have been saved (James 2:18).

Why can works not save us? Romans 3:20, 23.

It is too late for good works or obedience to the law to save anyone. The purpose of the law in a sinful world is not to save but to point out sin. Instead, “faith that works through love” (Galatians 5:6, TEV) shows that a person has living faith in Jesus (James 2:26). This love is



The Holy Spirit pours God's love into our hearts.

⁵justified—when God forgives a person and makes that person righteous (holy) by cleansing from sin.

poured into the heart by God's Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). A true Christian shows faith by following the Lord daily through obedience to the law. Obedience to the law is based on love (Matthew 22:37-40). In the judgment, God uses works as proof that His people love Him. Only the works we do as a *result* of having the Holy Spirit live in us are to be tested in the judgment, because the past life of sin before we came to Jesus has been washed away by His blood (Romans 6).

TUESDAY—JUNE 15

WORLDWIDE APPEAL (PLEA) (Isaiah 60:1, 2).

What is Isaiah 60:1, 2 talking about? What hope do these verses offer?

Isaiah 60:1, 2 gives us a picture of God leading His people to freedom after Babylonian imprisonment. (This comes from Isaiah's phrase "creating light out of darkness.") These verses also point to salvation through Jesus.

To whose light do nations and kings come (Isaiah 60:3)?

In the Hebrew language, this person means one woman (read also Isaiah 60:1, 2). The "woman" is a symbol for "Zion."⁶ The woman (Zion) is mentioned in Isaiah 59:20. So the people of the earth, who

are covered in darkness, will come to Zion. They will be drawn (pulled) by the light of God's glory that has arisen over her (Isaiah 60:2). "Zion is called by God to enter into the light that is hers. Then she is to study with and work with the nations as they gather to the same light."—Adapted from Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 494. Zion is Jerusalem. But Zion is really the people, not the city itself or its location.

The rest of Isaiah 60 develops the theme introduced in Isaiah 60:1-3. The theme is that the people of the world are drawn to Jerusalem. Jerusalem, in turn, is blessed because of God's glorious presence there.

How does this prophecy compare⁷ with God's covenant⁸ promise to Abraham? Genesis 12:2, 3.

God had a worldwide purpose when He chose Abraham and his descendants (future children). Through Abraham's family, all families would hear about God (Genesis 12:3; Genesis 18:18; Genesis 22:18). So God's covenant with Abraham was meant to be a covenant with all people through Abraham. He and his descendants would show to the world what God is really like.

Isaiah tried to bring his people back to their original goal and responsibility. As messengers of the true God, they were responsible for themselves and

⁶Zion—another name for Jerusalem, or the New Jerusalem.

⁷compare—show how things are the same.

⁸covenant—an agreement between God and His people.

the world. They were to welcome foreigners (strangers) who were looking for God (Isaiah 56:3-8). This is because God's temple is called a "house of prayer for all peoples" (Isaiah 56:7).

How is the goal and responsibility of the Seventh-day Adventist Church the same as the goal and responsibility of God's people in Old Testament times? What is your individual goal and responsibility as a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

WEDNESDAY—JUNE 16

"THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR" (Isaiah 61).

Who is speaking in Isaiah 61:1?

The Spirit of God is on this anointed (chosen) person. This means that he is a messiah or *the* Messiah. He is to "bring good news to the poor [people], to heal the broken-hearted [people], to announce release to captives [slaves] and freedom to those [people] in prison" (Isaiah 61:1, TEV). Who does that sound like? Compare Isaiah 42:1-7, where God's Servant is described in almost the same words.

Isaiah 61:2 talks about the "acceptable year of the Lord." The Messiah, who is anointed as the King and Savior from David's family, announces a special year of God's favor at the time He announces liberty. Compare Leviticus 25:10, where God commands the Israelites to announce liberty in the holy 50th year: "It shall be a jubilee⁹ for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan [family]" (NIV). This means that persons who were forced to sell their family land or to become servants to live through hard times would once again be given their land and freedom (Leviticus 25:25-55). The jubilee year began with the blowing of a trumpet on the Day of Atonement¹⁰ (Leviticus 25:9; Isaiah 58).

The year of the Lord's favor in Isaiah 61 is a kind of jubilee year. But it is not just following Leviticus 25. This year is announced by the Messiah, a King, when He shows Himself by freeing sinners from sin, healing, and bringing them back to God. This is almost the same as ancient¹¹ Mesopotamian¹² kings who encouraged social kindness by announcing freedom from debts during the early years of their rules. The Messiah's work is far greater than the Leviticus 25 law. Jesus "announces freedom to those in prison." He also heals the broken-hearted, comforts people who mourn, and brings them back to God (Isaiah 61:1-11).

⁹jubilee—the 50th year at the end of seven Sabbath-year cycles. During the jubilee year, there was no farming, all Hebrew slaves were freed, and land was returned to the original owner. No farming helped the land to grow more food the next year. Freeing slaves and returning land to original owners kept people from getting too rich and helped poor people to have more of the things they needed.

¹⁰Day of Atonement—a yearly ceremony when the earthly sanctuary was cleansed. The ceremony symbolized cleansing from sin and a renewed relationship with God.

¹¹ancient—very old.

¹²Mesopotamia—a very old kingdom that lay in the area of the Mid-East.



We “will be like trees that the Lord himself has planted” (Isaiah 61:3, TEV).

When was Isaiah’s prophecy fulfilled? Luke 4:16-21. How did Jesus’ ministry (work) fulfill this prophecy? We are Jesus’ messengers to the world. What are the things that the Messiah does that we should be doing? Isaiah 61:1-3. Think of useful ways we can do these things.

THURSDAY—JUNE 17

“THE DAY OF VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD” (Isaiah 61:2).

The book of Isaiah announces a lot of good news. So why does Isaiah 61 announce God’s vengeance? When is this prophecy of vengeance fulfilled?

When in Nazareth, Jesus, the Messiah, read Isaiah 61 as far as “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Isaiah 61:2; Luke 4:19). Then He stopped and said: “Today this scripture [verse] has been ful-

filled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). So on purpose, He avoided reading the next words in Isaiah 61:2, “the day of vengeance of our God.” His ministry (work) of good news, liberty, and comfort was beginning to set captives (sinners) free from Satan’s power. But the day of vengeance was not yet to come. In Matthew 24, Jesus prophesied to His disciples that God’s judgments would come in the future (compare Mark 13; Luke 21). In Isaiah 61, the day of God’s vengeance is the “great and terrible day of the Lord” (Joel 2:31; Malachi 4:5). The day of the Lord is to be fulfilled when Jesus comes again to free planet Earth from sin by setting the suffering remnant¹³ of His people free (Revelation 19; compare Daniel 2:44, 45). Jesus announced the beginning of “the year of the Lord’s favor.” But its final end is at His second coming.

How can God be a loving God yet still promise vengeance? How can vengeance be an example of God’s love?

Jesus has told us to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). But in other places, He was clear that justice and punishment will be given out (Matthew 8:12; Mark 9:42-46). Paul tells us not to “render [do] evil for evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:15). But he also said that when Jesus comes back, He will take vengeance on people who do not know God (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

The difference is that only God can bring justice and vengeance fairly. Human justice and vengeance come with all the

¹³remnant—a small group of God’s faithful people.

faults and weaknesses of humans. But God's justice and vengeance will come with no human faults and weaknesses.

Which of the following examples would make you more likely to want to see vengeance returned upon someone who does evil? 1) A person who hurts someone you do not love; or 2) a person who hurts someone you do love? How does this help us better understand the connection between God's love for us and His warnings of vengeance?

FRIDAY—JUNE 18

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 376–378; and *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 236–243.

“Jesus stood before the people as a living Teacher of the prophecies about Himself. Explaining the words He had read, He spoke of the Messiah as a Savior of sinners, and a Healer of people who suffered. He talked about bringing back sight to blind people, and He showed the world the light of truth. Jesus' wonderful ways and powerful words thrilled people who heard Him. His godly influence tore down every barrier between Himself and them. As Moses did, Jesus' hearers saw God in Jesus. As their hearts were moved by the Holy Spirit, they repeated loud amens and praises to the Lord.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 237.

¹⁴conscience—a knowledge or sense of right and wrong, with an urge to do right; moral judgment.

¹⁵restoring—bringing back to God.

¹⁶repent—to say you are sorry for your sins and that you want to stop sinning.

“The day of God's vengeance comes—it is the day of His great wrath (anger). Who will be able to stand the day of His coming? People have hardened their hearts against God's holy spirit. But the arrows of God's wrath will drive through where the arrows of conscience¹⁴ could not. It will not be long before God arises to deal with the sinner. Will the false shepherd (false pastor) protect the sinner on that day? Can people be excused who went with the crowd to disobey God? These are questions that sinful people who do not care should think about and decide for themselves.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 33.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

A Seventh-day Adventist pastor thoughtfully said there was one big problem in his church. Many members did not want other people to join them. How can “Christians” take the love, hope, and good news of Jesus' kingdom to all the world (Matthew 24:14) when snobbish members do not want to accept people who want to come to their church?

SUMMARY: God makes pure a group of sinners by removing the rebels and by restoring¹⁵ people who repent.¹⁶ Due to the blessings of God's presence, people from other nations are drawn (attracted) to God and His people. Those people who do come to God can enjoy God's favor. This favor is announced, taught, and delivered by the Messiah. Jesus is the Messiah.