

The Stranger *in* Your Gates



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Mark 12:29–31, Deut. 10:1–19, Ps. 146:5–10, Matt. 7:12, Deut. 27:19, James 1:27–2:11.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt’ ” (*Deuteronomy 10:19, NKJV*).

As we read last week, when asked by a scribe about “ ‘the first commandment of all’ ” (*Mark 12:28*), Jesus answered by giving the affirmation of God as one, and then He said: “ ‘And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ” This is the first commandment’ ” (*Mark 12:30, NKJV*).

However, Jesus continued, talking then about the “ ‘second, like it’ ” (*Mark 12:31, NKJV*), something that the scribe hadn’t asked about. Nevertheless, Jesus, knowing how important it was, said: “ ‘And the second, like it, is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these’ ” (*Mark 12:31, NKJV*).

No *commandment* greater than these? Jesus linked love for God and love for one’s neighbor into one commandment, and that commandment was the greatest of all.

Again, Jesus wasn’t coming up with something new, something that the Jews hadn’t heard before. Instead, the call to love Him supremely—the idea of loving one’s neighbor and of loving other people as a way to express our love for God was, yes, taken from the book of Deuteronomy.

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 30.*

Circumcise Your Hearts

Deuteronomy 10, a continuation of Deuteronomy 9, is basically God’s reaffirmation of the covenant that He had made with Israel. Indeed, much of this book is a kind of covenant renewal. That is, even after their terrible sin at Horeb, at which time no sooner did Moses leave them for a little while than they fell into idolatry, the Lord still wasn’t done with them.

Read Deuteronomy 10:1–11. What is going on here that helps us to understand that God forgave His people their sin and was reaffirming the covenant promise made to them and their fathers?

Moses smashed the Ten Commandment tablets (*Deut. 9:17*)—a sign of the broken covenant (*Deut. 32:19*). “To show his abhorrence of their crime, he threw down the tables of stone, and they were broken in the sight of all the people, thus signifying that as they had broken their covenant with God, so God had broken His covenant with them.” —Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 320.

Thus, the fact that God told Moses to hew new tables “like the first” and He would write on them the words that were on the first shows that God had forgiven the people and was not done with them, even then.

Read Deuteronomy 10:14–16. What is God saying to them? What is the meaning of the images that the Lord used here?

There’s a mixture of images here: the foreskin, the heart, the neck. Nevertheless, the point is clear. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant, but it’s only an *outward* sign. God wanted their hearts; that is, their minds, their affections, their love. The stiff-necked image simply pointed to how stubborn they were in their unwillingness to obey the Lord. And, basically, here and elsewhere, the Lord was telling them to stop with their divided loyalties and serve Him with all their heart and soul.

Think about all the times the Lord has forgiven you your sins. What should that tell you about His grace?

Love the Stranger

Amid these admonitions Moses declares: “ ‘Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it’ ” (*Deut. 10:14, NKJV*). What a powerful expression of the sovereignty of the Lord, an idea found in other places in the Bible, as well: “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (*Ps. 24:1, NKJV*).

Read Deuteronomy 10:17–19. What other declaration does Moses make about the Lord here? Even more important, what does God command His people as a result of that declaration?

Yahweh is not only the sovereign of heaven and earth, but He also is the “God of gods, and Lord of lords” (*Deut. 10:17*). This doesn’t mean that there are other gods, lesser gods, such as the supposed gods the pagans around them worshiped. Rather, it was a way of talking about more than just His being the only God (“ ‘ ‘Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me’ ’ ” [*Deut. 32:39, NKJV*]). It asserts His total supremacy over all other powers, real or imagined, either in heaven or on earth.

The text says, too, that He is “the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.” All of this is part of the bigger message: Yahweh is your God, and you, His people, need to obey Him.

What a powerful contrast is being presented here, as well. Yes, Yahweh is the God of gods and Lord of lords, the sovereign Ruler and Sustainer of the creation (*Col. 1:16, 17*), but He also cares about the fatherless, the widow, and the stranger, and He shows that care by ministering to their immediate physical needs. The God who takes note if a sparrow falls to the ground (*Matt. 10:29*) knows about the plight of those on the margins of society. In other words, the Lord is telling the people that, *OK, maybe you are chosen, you are special, and I love you, but I love others, too, including the needy and helpless among you. And just as I love them, you must love them, as well. This is one of your covenant obligations, and an important one, too.*

Read Psalm 146:5–10. What is the message of the psalm that reflects what God is saying here, and what should this mean to us today, as Christians?

For You Were Strangers in Egypt

“ ‘Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt’ ” (*Deut. 10:19, NKJV*).

What is the message to ancient Israel here? What should the message from this verse be for us, as well?

Centuries earlier the Lord told Abram: “ ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years’ ” (*Gen. 15:13, NKJV*; see also *Gen. 17:8, Acts 13:17*). This is, of course, what happened, and in the early chapters of Exodus the dramatic story of their redemption (*Exod. 15:13*) and salvation (*Exod. 14:13*) from Egypt has been recorded for posterity, a symbol, a type, of the redemption and salvation that we have been given in Christ Jesus. In this verse, the Lord wants them to remember where they had been and *what* they had been—and that was, strangers in another land.

In other words, *Remember when you were on the margins of society, outcasts, even slaves, and thus at the mercy of those who were stronger than you and who could abuse you and, indeed, often did.* And though Israel was a chosen nation, called of God, a “kingdom of priests” (*Exod. 19:6*), and though there were some differences between them and the strangers among them—especially in regard to religious services—when it came to “human rights,” the stranger, the widow, the orphan needed to be treated with the same fairness and justice as the Israelites expected for themselves.

Read Matthew 7:12. How does the verse encapsulate what the Lord was telling ancient Israel about how they were to treat the weak among them?

This admonition to Israel about how they were to treat outcasts was not, by any means, the norm in the ancient world, where outcasts could be treated in some cases no better than animals, if even that well.

In contrast, Israel was to be different, a light unto the nations. And, yes, that difference would be found in the God whom they worshiped, how they worshiped Him, and the whole religious system of truth that God had given them. Yet, their kind treatment of the marginalized could have been a powerful witness to the world of the superiority of their God and of their faith, which in one sense was the whole point of their existence, anyway, to be a witness to the world of their God.

Judge Righteously

As believers, we have been called to reflect the character of God. Paul wrote about “my little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you” (*Gal. 4:19, NKJV*). After all, we had originally been made “in the image of God” (*Gen. 1:27*), an image later defaced by sin. And as we saw, when Moses talked about the power and majesty of God, he also said that God didn’t take a bribe and that He cared about the weak and the outcast. God does this; therefore, we need to do the same.

Read the following texts in Deuteronomy. What is the common theme among them all?

Deut. 1:16 _____

Deut. 16:19 _____

Deut. 24:17 _____

Deut. 27:19 _____

It’s all but proverbial how the weak, the poor, the outcasts don’t get the same kind of “justice” in most human courts as do those with money, power, and connections. It doesn’t matter the country, the era, the culture, or how lofty the principles of justice and equity that are enshrined in constitutions or laws or whatever; the reality remains the same: the poor, the weak, and the outcasts almost never get the justice that others do.

That’s what is so remarkable about what the Lord Himself was saying here. This unfairness, which is everywhere else, should not exist in Israel, among God’s people, the ones who are to represent Him to the world. In a sense, to use a term from the modern era, the Lord wanted there to be “equal justice under the law” in ancient Israel.

But this goes even deeper than mere jurisprudence. “ ‘ “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” ’ ” (*Lev. 19:2, NKJV*). Yes, they knew who the true God was, and they had the correct forms of worship, and they brought the right kinds of offerings. That’s all fine. But in the end, what good was all that if they were mistreating the weak and poor among them? Again and again, in the prophets, the Lord rails against the oppressors of the poor and the needy in Israel. How can you be “holy” and mistreat others at the same time? You can’t, regardless of how strictly you adhere to proper religious rituals.

Read Amos 2:6; Amos 4:1; Amos 5:11; Isaiah 3:14, 15; Isaiah 10:1, 2; and Jeremiah 2:34. What are the prophets saying that reflects what the Lord had warned ancient Israel about? What do these words say to us today?

Pure Religion Before God

Read Deuteronomy 24:10–15. What important principles are being expressed here regarding how we are to treat those who are under our control?

Again we see the Lord’s concern for basic human dignity. *Yes, someone owes you something, and it’s time to collect—but show the person a bit of respect, a bit of dignity, will you? Don’t go barging into his place and demand it. Instead, wait outside and let him come and give it to you.* Deuteronomy 24:12, 13 seems to say that if some poor soul gave you his garment as “collateral,” you need at least to let him sleep in it overnight. The other verses deal with how one treats the poor who work for him or her, who can be so easily oppressed. Don’t oppress them, because in the eyes of God it is a sin, and surely a grievous one too. Again, if Israel were to be a witness, a holy people walking in truth amid a world steeped in error, idolatry, evil, and sin, surely they would have to be kind to the weakest and most marginalized among them. Otherwise, their witness would be nothing.

Read James 1:27–2:11. What is James saying here that reflects what the Lord was telling His people in Deuteronomy? What significance is there in the fact that in these verses, James links mistreatment of the poor with the Ten Commandments?

Though nothing in the Ten Commandments themselves *directly* relates to showing partiality to the rich over the poor, sternly adhering to the letter of the law while at the same time mistreating the poor or needy makes a mockery of one’s profession of faith and any claim to keep the commandments. Loving your neighbor as yourself is the highest expression of God’s law—and this is present truth now as much as it was in the time of James, and as it was when Moses spoke to Israel on the borders of the Holy Land.

Why must we as Seventh-day Adventists, who take keeping the law seriously, make sure we are as serious about the words of James and Deuteronomy? Given what we read in James, why should our belief in the keeping of the law only strengthen our resolve to help the poor and needy among us?

Further Thought: It is hard to imagine how even in the best of times, such as under David and Solomon, the people of Israel could have been so blessed by God and yet could have so oppressed the poor, the helpless, and the outcasts among them.

“Therefore, because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine from them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: Afflicting the just and taking bribes; Diverting the poor from justice at the gate” (*Amos 5:11, 12, NKJV*).

“The LORD will enter into judgment with the elders of His people and His princes: ‘for you have eaten up the vineyard; the plunder of the poor is in your houses’ ” (*Isa. 3:14, NKJV*).

Discussion Questions:

- ① Israel needed to remember that they had been “strangers” in Egypt, which was one reason they were to treat strangers and outcasts in Israel as they wished they had been treated when they were outcasts. How does this truth relate to the gospel, to the idea that, through the blood of Jesus, we have been freed from the slavery of sin? Why, and in what parallel ways, should what Jesus has done for us impact how we treat others, especially the helpless among us?
- ② Think about it. We can worship on the right day and understand the truth about death, hell, the mark of the beast, and so forth. That’s fine. But what does it all mean if we treat others nastily or oppress the weak among us or don’t administer justice fairly when we need to judge a situation? Especially because of the truth that we have, why must we be extra careful not to think that, somehow, just knowing the truth, in and of itself, is all that God requires of us? Why is that a potentially dangerous trap for us?
- ③ What role should our faith have in helping us understand what is commonly referred to as “human rights”?

Message Received

By YOUNGSUK CHAE

Kim Hye-sun is a devout Christian in South Korea. She yearned for God and wanted to know more about His Word. So she joined a Bible study with friends but didn't understand the discussion. She soon stopped attending.

Hye-sun usually drives a car, but one day she felt like taking the bus. As she waited at the bus stop in front of her house, she overheard two women talking enthusiastically. "Read this message!" one woman said, holding out her cell phone. "Someone sends me a message every day, and I love them!" "Really?" the other woman said. "Let me see."

Hye-sun found herself drawn to the women. "Can I see it too?" she asked. She didn't usually talk to strangers, but she was curious.

On the cell phone, she read, " 'God is love' is written upon every opening bud, upon every spire of springing grass. The lovely birds making the air vocal with their happy songs, the delicately tinted flowers in their perfection perfuming the air, the lofty trees of the forest with their rich foliage of living green—all testify to the tender, fatherly care of our God and to His desire to make His children happy" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 10).

Wow! Hye-sun thought, *This is what I need!*

She asked how she could receive the text messages. The woman with the cell phone promised to help. Soon she began receiving daily messages, and she expressed her gratitude by replying to each one. On Sundays, she texted back, "Have a good Lord's day!" After some time, at her texted request for more information, she received *The Great Controversy* and other books in the mail. She has stopped sending Sunday greetings, but continues to express joy over the messages and is reading the books that she has received.

The text messages come from Lim Myung-Sook, a Seventh-day Adventist deaconess who sends Ellen White quotations daily to about 2,500 people, including leaders from other denominations. Myung-Sook is praying that Hye-sun and others who read the messages will grow closer to Jesus. "I don't know how many people read these messages and how the messages are making a difference in their lives," she said. "I am just a sower. But I believe God will make the seed grow and reap its fruits."



This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 1 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors but every church member." Learn more at IWillGo2020.org. This quarter, your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will support two mission projects in South Korea.

Key Text: *Deuteronomy 10:1*

Study Focus: *Deut. 10:1–19, Ps. 146:5–10, Matt. 7:12, James 1:27–2:11.*

Part I: Overview

The story of God rewriting His law on new tables is a story of God’s grace and patient love for Israel. In ancient times, when a covenant was broken, the renewal of the covenant involved the preparation of new treaty documents. It is against the backdrop of the shameful event of Horeb that Moses urges Israel to renew its covenant and to prepare a new oath of allegiance in which God’s requirement for His people is specified. These verses bring together various themes around the principle of love, namely, love for the Lord (the first commandment), love as a response to God’s love and forgiveness, love for one’s neighbor, and more specifically love for the stranger (the second commandment), because God loved him or her.

Lesson Themes:

- *The new covenant.* Although the covenant is everlasting, there is always the need to renew it (circumcise the heart).
- *The circumcision of the heart.* The imagery, a kind of mixture of metaphors, reveals a crucial theological truth.
- *To love the stranger.* Loving your neighbor is one thing. But the strangers as well?

Part II: Commentary

The New Covenant

There is a paradox in the renewal of a covenant that is everlasting. Logically, an everlasting covenant does not need to be renewed. The lesson that is learned from this paradox has to do with God’s faithfulness versus His people’s unfaithfulness. Note that the “new covenant” does not imply a new law. It is the same law that is rewritten on the new tables. What God requires now is simply an *internalization* of the law. The law that is written on the stone tables must be written in the hearts of the people. The renewal of the covenant is the renewal of the heart. The mechanism of this process is love. Jeremiah, who

uses for the first time the expression “new covenant,” defines it in the following terms: “ ‘Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people’ ” (*Jer. 31:32, 33 NKJV*). Interestingly, the same experience of a broken-covenant document is recorded in Jeremiah. The prophet, like Moses, also had to rewrite his book (*Jer. 36:27, 28*). Likewise, when the apostle Paul refers to the “new covenant” (*2 Cor. 3:6*), he understands it as a spiritual covenant that is written “not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart” (*2 Cor. 3:3, NKJV*).

Discussion and Thought Questions: How does the biblical notion of “new covenant” in the book of Deuteronomy apply to our understanding of the relation between the Old Testament and the New Testament? Why does the “new covenant” imply the same law? Why did God write the law on stones rather than in the hearts of the people?

The Circumcision of the Heart

God’s demand to Israel to circumcise their hearts is, of course, not to be taken literally. Moses’ reference to the uncircumcision of the lips (*Exod. 6:12, 30*) suggests that his lips are closed and that he cannot speak fluently. Jeremiah deplores that Israel has uncircumcised ears, meaning that they cannot hear the Word of the Lord (*Jer. 6:10*). Because circumcision is the sign of the covenant (*Gen. 17:10–13*), the circumcision of the heart is an image that symbolizes the inner circumcision that Paul will describe later as the conversion of the Christian (*Rom. 2:28, 29*). This is a procedure that only God can perform (*Deut. 30:6*). Moses does not suggest that the circumcision of the flesh was wrong. Before entering the country of Canaan, the men of Israel will have to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant (*Josh. 5:2*). The circumcision of the heart concerns those who already are circumcised of the flesh, those who are under the covenant. After the circumcision of the flesh, the renewal of covenant is not a new circumcision that would annul the preceding one—but a deepening of the same covenant and of its laws. After having received the letter of the law, they are now called to root their commitment in their heart. This entails not just refraining from doing wrong, but, more important, not desiring to do wrong. Not just refraining from doing wrong, but engaging one’s whole life in doing good. Only love will make this commitment possible. This is why God’s

requirement at this stage is a covenant based on love and is, therefore, more demanding and more thorough.

Discussion and Thought Questions: What makes a covenant based on love more demanding than a covenant based on law? At the same time, what are the risks of an emphasis on love at the expense of the rigor of justice? How does the image of the circumcision of the heart relate to the image of a stiff neck?

To Love the Stranger

What is intriguing is that the first application of the commandment to love the Lord is to love the stranger. Why did God require Israel to love the stranger? Two sets of reasons may be listed here. Discuss and meditate on these in class: (1) reasons to justify this requirement and (2) reasons to prepare them for holiness.

Why Love the Stranger?

- *Because God loves the stranger (Deut. 10:18).* This reason is rooted in the faith in the Creator, who owns heavens and earth (*Deut. 10:14*). Two principles are implied in this reason. First, there is the principle that God has created the stranger in His image (*imago Dei*). The second principle derives from the first one: it is the principle of the imitation of God (*imitatio Dei*) by His servants.
- *Because Israel used to be a stranger (Deut. 10:19).* This reason is based on the principle “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (*Lev. 19:18, NKJV*).
- *To prepare to meet God.* God belongs to another order (*Deut. 10:17*). He is the Holy One, who is essentially different from us humans. The best pedagogy in how to love God could be to learn to love the one who is different, the stranger.
- *To prepare to meet with other people.* As former slaves, Israel had to learn to see others, not just as cruel masters they hated, but as “neighbors” to commune with and to share with and to love. The experience of love gets richer and stronger when it is lived between two different people.
- *To prepare to shape and fulfill their own destiny as strangers.* As former nomads in the wilderness, the Israelites had to learn the way of holiness and the value of living with different people without compromising with their own holy identity. In the same way, Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel had to learn how to live with the tension of reconciling the duty of holiness with the duty of love.

Discussion and Thought Questions: How and why does the principle of *imago Dei* help us to understand the importance of loving the stranger and help us to love the stranger? Why does the experience of loving a stranger strengthen and enrich the quality of love? Why does the communion of, and the living with, people of other faiths strengthen your own faith?

To Love the Fatherless and the Widow

The covenant treaty of Deuteronomy does not define “love,” but it makes it clear that love is a divine category. It is only through God that Israel may understand and fulfill the commandment of love. On the other hand, it is significant that the only time love is described, it is in action through God’s administration of justice on behalf of the fatherless and the widow (*Deut. 10:18; compare Deut. 24:17–22*).

Discussion and Thought Questions: Why is the requirement to love the fatherless and the widow associated with the requirement to love the stranger? What do the stranger, the widow, and the orphan have in common?

Part III: Life Application

In Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, the thief Jean Valjean finally understands the value of forgiveness and mercy when his host gives him the silver he had stolen; otherwise, he would have been thrown in prison. Please consider and discuss the following cases:

- You are the elder or the pastor of a church. One young woman of your church had a child following an extramarital affair. Several years later the couple comes to you and asks you to perform their marriage ceremony (they are both Adventists). How are you going to handle this case?
- What are the motivations that guide your political choices? Do you choose your political party on the basis of a nationalistic agenda, selfish interests, or more on the basis of social justice and care for the poor, the widow, and the orphan?
- A drunk beggar asks you for some money because he says he is hungry and has not had a real meal for many days. How are you going to respond to his request, having no guarantee that he will not use the money to buy alcohol?
- What would you say to a woman of your faith community who tells you that she does not like you but, because of God, she will force herself to love you? How do you respond?

UNITED BY MISSION



Chie Chinyama



David Kim



Chang Zeng-Mei

A 43-year-old language school director sees COVID-19 can't halt the gospel in Japan. A dead car engine can't stop a Korean gospel worker in the United States. A 50-year-old woman introduces her husband to her Savior in Taiwan. What do they have in common? They are united by the Seventh-day Adventist Church's mission in the Northern Asia-Pacific Division, which will receive this quarter's Thirteen Sabbath Offering.

Read more in the youth and adult Mission magazine (bit.ly/adultmission) and the Children's Mission magazine (bit.ly/childrensmisson).

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TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT TIME

What is Total Member Involvement?

- ▶ Total Member Involvement (TMI) is a full-scale, world-church evangelistic thrust that involves every member, every church, every administrative entity, every type of public outreach ministry, as well as personal and institutional outreach.
- ▶ It is a calendar-driven, intentional soul-winning plan that discovers the needs of families, friends, and neighbors. Then it shares how God fulfills every need, resulting in church planting and church growth, with a focus on retaining, preaching, sharing, and discipling.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT TMI TIME IN SABBATH SCHOOL

Dedicate the first 15 minutes of each lesson to plan, pray and share:*

- ▶ **TMI IN-REACH:** Plan to visit, pray, care for missing or hurting members, and distribute territory assignments. Pray and discuss ways to minister to the needs of church families, inactive members, youth, women and men, and various ways to get the church family involved.
- ▶ **TMI OUT-REACH:** Pray and discuss ways of reaching your community, city, and world, fulfilling the Gospel Commission by sowing, reaping, and keeping. Involve all ministries in the church as you plan short-term and long-term soul-winning projects. TMI is about intentional acts of kindness. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved: 1. Develop the habit of finding needs in your community. 2. Make plans to address those needs. 3. Pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ **TMI UP-REACH:** Lesson Study. Encourage members to engage in individual Bible study—make study of the Bible in Sabbath School participatory. Study for transformation, not information.

TMI	Time	Explanation
Fellowship Outreach World Mission	15 min.*	Pray, plan, organize for action. Care for missing members. Schedule outreach.
Lesson Study	45 min.*	Involve everyone in the study of the lesson. Ask questions. Highlight key texts.
Lunch		Plan lunch for the class after worship. THEN GO OUT AND REACH SOMEONE!

**Adjust times as necessary.*