

## Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

### Third Quarter 2016: *The Role of the Church in the Community*

#### Lesson 4 “Justice and Mercy in the Old Testament: Part 2”

#### Read for this week’s study

Ezekiel 37:1–14; Ephesians 2:10; Ezekiel 47:1–8; Matthew 5:16; Revelation 22:1, 2; Isaiah 61:1–11.

#### Memory Text

“ ‘Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live’ ” (Ezekiel 47:9, NIV).

#### Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Alive in Christ
- III. A Flowing River
- IV. The Church: A Source of Life
- V. Jubilee Promises
- VI. The Church—A Change Agent
- VII. Further Study

#### Questions and Notes for Consideration

##### Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “God has something to say about the role of His church in ‘hopeless’ situations in our world. This week’s lesson continues ‘listening’ to the chorus of Old Testament voices that call upon God’s people to reveal His character of benevolence to the world.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. What was God going to do for His people according to Ezekiel 37:1–14? “The results of the message delivered to the dry bones are that (1) they “came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army” (Ezekiel 37:10, NIV); (2) God will settle His people in their own land (Ezekiel 37:14); (3) and they will know that it was God who did it (Ezekiel 37:14).” (Sunday’s lesson) So when was this Old Testament prophecy fulfilled? Though often applied individually, notice that God speaks about the revival of the community!
3. “Being revived is not enough. God’s people are revived for a mission, for a purpose. Israel was to be a light to the nations.” (Sunday’s lesson) How do you understand why are we made alive—spiritually re-created—in Christ according to Ephesians 2:10? What are the good deeds “which God prepared in advance for us to do”?

4. What is the significance of the vision that Ezekiel saw in 47:1-8? When was this prophecy fulfilled?
5. “[The] water leaking out of the temple was going ‘toward the east.’ East of Jerusalem is the Salt Sea (also known as the Dead Sea), the lowest body of water on earth. Between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea is approximately 21 miles (about 34 kilometers) of largely desert country, which includes the Arabah, also known as the depression of the Jordan and the Dead Sea. That sea itself is so salty that nothing can live there. However, when the water from the temple reaches it, the dead waters of the sea are ‘healed.’” (Monday’s lesson)
6. Is it possible for the church to become such a healing, transforming agent that the “Dead Sea” is turned into a lake or river where life abounds (see Ezekiel 47:9, our memory text)? Why, or why not? What is the significance of the fact that the two metaphors used to represent the work of the community of believers are water (Ezekiel 47) and light (Matthew 5:16)? Is it possible for churches to be so self-serving that if they disappeared overnight, no one would notice, or miss them?
7. “Ezekiel’s prophecy illustrates that where the river that comes from God’s church flows, there is life. [...] The whole point is that through the power of God working in His people, life can exist where before there was none.” (Tuesday’s lesson) How can the church be a beacon of hope to the discouraged, despondent, the dry and dying? Why is it that too many people tend to connect the church with qualities like condemnation, judgmentalism and hypercritical attitudes?
8. What is the significance of the image from Revelation 22:1, 2 and its connection with Ezekiel 47?
9. “God wants His churches to be places from which flow healing and abundant life to the community.” (Tuesday’s lesson) How can your church become a revitalizing and transforming agent for the surrounding environment?
10. What is the significance of the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-11 and the “year of the Lord’s favor”? “Those blessed by the messianic jubilee become transformers of society, renewing the ruined cities (Isaiah 61:4).” (Wednesday’s lesson) Could the same be said about us today? Why, or why not?
11. The last section of the lesson is entitled: The Church – A Change Agent and concentrates on Micah 6:1-8. To what extent is the church perceived today as an agent of change—or an agent killing all change? What is the connection with Micah and his message?
12. Who would be considered an agent of change in your surroundings, your environment, your area of specialty? What characteristics do you see in them? How can we emulate that? Should we be an agent of change in our society? Why, or why not?
13. What is the significance of the fact that once again God is addressing the whole community, yet in Micah 6:8, “you” is used in singular? What does it mean to be God’s prophetic movement following in the footprints of Ezekiel, Amos, Isaiah, and Micah in today’s society? How can the church once again become the community God wants us to be?

## Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Now, our mission—as Christians we all accept Christ’s commission to take the gospel to all the world that the end may come. But we’re not only Christians we are Seventh-day Adventist Christians. And I understand that as Seventh-day Adventist Christians we add a special focus and urgency to the spreading of the gospel. And we take our special mission from the Three Angels’ Messages. There in Revelation 14 we read it is our mission to take the everlasting gospel. The same one, I hope we don’t have a new one as Adventists or we’re in bad order, it had better be the same old one. We take the everlasting gospel to the world in the setting of the judgment hour, the hour of God’s judgment. There’s something final about this.

And then as we read all of Revelation 14 we note that we have there primarily a description of those who are loyal to God in the great controversy. They respond favorably to the angels’ messages. In the preceding chapter, and as you know there were no chapter divisions in the original, no verses, you all know that. We’re supposed to read this book right through without a break. And when we read 14 we should remember 13, here is a description of the disloyal ones. Here’s a description of Satan’s side in the great controversy, and those who prefer to place their faith in him and even become like him in character and bear a mark that distinguishes them as loyal to the adversary in the great controversy. And according to Revelation 13 when his work is over the whole world will agree with him. Doesn’t it say that? The whole world will worship him, except for the few who remain loyal to God and are described in Revelation 14.

But then one should remember Revelation 12, there’s no break. In Revelation 12 we have the mention of the war up in heaven, the description of the two sides and the issues and the leaders of the two sides. And so to preach the everlasting gospel in the setting of the hour of God’s judgment is to present the gospel in the setting of the war, this great war that began up in heaven back in eternity. And that is what is unique about Adventism. We do not present the gospel as anybody else does. And no one else does it the way we do, except we often don’t do it and we sound just like them. And so we think that the main thing we have to offer is maybe a superior way of life that helps Adventists live as long as Mormons, their statistics are just as good as ours. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Understanding the Mission of the Church, #1, recorded September, 1983, Camp AuSable, Michigan} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/1MMUTMOTC>*

But an illustration of God’s preferred way of persuading us—not with denials, not with claims, but with evidence—is provided by the story of John the Baptist. You remember how John really risked his life to present his cousin Jesus to the people. And how gracious he had been: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

Now John was in prison. He heard that Jesus was preaching that you really ought to visit people in prison; but he never came to see his cousin. And eventually John sent emissaries to Christ. "Are you really the one or not? Should we be looking for another?" That is a sad inquiry.

Did Jesus say, "I am indeed the One and I expect you to believe it!" It could have been the devil masquerading as Christ. Instead, he invited the two to spend the day with him. When the day was over the two men went back to prison to see John.

"Did he answer my question?"

"No!"

"But what did you see? What did you hear?"

And in the text it's recorded "Jesus gave them this reply. 'Go and tell John.'" Matthew 11:46.

"Go and tell John what you hear and what you see; that blind men are recovering their sight, cripples are walking, lepers being healed, the deaf hearing, the dead being raised to life and the good news is being given to those in need. And happy is the man who never loses his faith in me." (Phillips)

And when the men arrived back at the prison and told this to John; John who knew Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 61 that I've noted there, said: "He is the one."

You see, not a claim but evidence. This is God's way and the only dependable way. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #6, "Evaluating the Evidence" recorded February, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/6MMCAG>*

When the judgment is finished, God turns sorrowfully away from those who still reject him as untrustworthy. Preferring to stay in darkness, they have lost the power of sight. More revelation, more persuasion, more discipline—nothing would be of any use. This is the meaning of that warning in Hebrews 10:26, 27: "If we purposely go on sinning after the truth has been made known to us,... all that is left is to wait in fear for the coming Judgment and the fierce fire which will destroy those who oppose God!" (GNT). Over such confirmed rebels the Father cries out as he did in the days of Hosea, "Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn.... Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone" (Hosea 4:16, 17).

If this were an arbitrary, legalistic decision, lost sinners might hope to "make a deal" with God, to "plea bargain" with the Lord. Jesus predicted that some will arise in the resurrection of the wicked and be dismayed to find they are not among the saved. They plead with the Savior, "Lord, Lord, open up for us. Did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your

name and do many mighty works in your name? Think of all the tithe we have paid, all the offerings we have given—enough to buy many tickets to the kingdom!”

But the Lord sadly replies, “I know what you have done. But you did it all for the wrong reason. You served me only because you feared me as arbitrary, unforgiving, and severe. Go away! I never knew you. We never were really friends” (see Matthew 7:21–23; 25:11, 12). And genuine friendship is the essential quality God desires in our relationship with him. {Maxwell, Graham. *Can God Be Trusted?*, 124-125. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 2002}

<http://speakingwellofgod.org/written-materials/can-god-be-trusted-chapters/chapter-11>

Now I believe the distinctive mission of the Adventist Church is to prepare ourselves and all who are willing to listen, not just to be saved, all God’s loyal children have wanted people to be saved and have tried to help them from the very beginning. The distinctiveness of our Adventist emphasis is we are to prepare ourselves and as many who are willing to listen to survive this awful time of trouble, to hear Satan’s charges, the same old ones, but he’s sharpened them up after the years. No one will ever have heard more deceptive misrepresentation of the truth than the last generation, but this group will survive. So, we are trying to help people grow up. Does your church program help your members become more mature, able to stand on their own feet? Do they stand on their own feet so firmly that if you should apostatize they would not?

How many people recently have even left the Adventist Church because the leader they admired and trusted has gone out? Now we don’t talk about it too much but there are many little groups all over this country that have left our church of late. And they don’t know why, most of them, they just love their leader. We want our folk to love and trust us but not, not beyond their loyalty to the truth. So we have to, somehow, in our churches make the truth so clear that the individuals, on their own, can say, “I would believe this, Pastor, even if you collapsed, but I hope you won’t.” So that’s a very special mission that we have and a very exciting program in the church to help our members grow up. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Understanding the Mission of the Church*, #8, recorded September, 1983, Camp AuSable, Michigan} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/8MMUTMOTC>

## Further Study with Ellen White

It is impossible for any of us by our own power or our own efforts to work this change in ourselves. It is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, which Jesus said He would send into the world, that changes our character into the image of Christ; and when this is accomplished, we reflect as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. That is, the character of the one who thus beholds Christ is so like His that one looking at him sees Christ's own character shining out as from a mirror. Imperceptibly to ourselves, we are changed day by day from our ways and will into the ways and will of Christ, into the loveliness of His character. Thus we grow up into Christ, and unconsciously reflect His image. . . . {HP 337.3}

God takes men as they are, and educates them for His service, if they will yield themselves to Him. The Spirit of God, received into the soul, quickens all its faculties. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the mind that is devoted unreservedly to God, develops harmoniously, and is strengthened to comprehend and fulfil the requirements of God. The weak, vacillating character becomes changed to one of strength and steadfastness. Continual devotion establishes so close a relation between Jesus and His disciples that the Christian becomes like his Master in character. He has clearer, broader views. His discernment is more penetrative, his judgment better balanced. So quickened is he by the life-giving power of the Sun of Righteousness, that he is enabled to bear much fruit to the glory of God. {GW 285.3}

Wherever there is union with Christ there is love. Whatever other fruits we may bear, if love be missing, they profit nothing. Love to God and our neighbor is the very essence of our religion. No one can love Christ and not love His children. When we are united to Christ, we have the mind of Christ. Purity and love shine forth in the character, meekness and truth control the life. The very expression of the countenance is changed. Christ abiding in the soul exerts a transforming power, and the outward aspect bears witness to the peace and joy that reign within. We drink in the love of Christ, as the branch draws nourishment from the vine. If we are grafted in Christ, if fiber by fiber we have been united with the Living Vine, we shall give evidence of the fact by bearing rich clusters of living fruit. If we are connected with the Light, we shall be channels of light, and in our words and works we shall reflect light to the world. Those who are truly Christians are bound with the chain of love which links earth to heaven, which binds finite man to the infinite God. The light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ shines in the hearts of His followers, to the glory of God. {1SM 337.2}

By beholding we are to become changed; and as we meditate upon the perfections of the divine Model, we shall desire to become wholly transformed, and renewed in the image of His purity. It is by faith in the Son of God that transformation takes place in the character, and the child of wrath becomes the child of God. He passes from death unto life; he becomes spiritual and discerns spiritual things. The wisdom of God enlightens his mind, and he beholds wondrous things out of His law. As a man is converted by the truth, the work of transformation of

character goes on. He has an increased measure of understanding. In becoming a man of obedience to God, he has the mind of Christ, and the will of God becomes his will. {1SM 338.1}

He who places himself unreservedly under the guidance of the Spirit of God, will find that his mind expands and develops. He obtains an education in the service of God which is not one-sided and deficient, developing a one-sided character, but one which results in symmetry and completeness. {1SM 338.2}

When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan. {SD 23.2}

Christ is ready to impart all heavenly influences. He knows every temptation that comes to man, and the capabilities of every human agent. He weighs his strength. He sees the present and the future, and presents before the mind the obligations that should be met, and urges that common, earthly things shall not be permitted to be so absorbing that eternal things shall be lost out of reckoning. {SD 23.3}

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to this world as the unwearied servant of man's necessity. He "took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses," that He might minister to every need of humanity. Matthew 8:17. The burden of disease and wretchedness and sin He came to remove. It was His mission to bring to men complete restoration; He came to give them health and peace and perfection of character. {MH 17.1}

God does not control our minds without our consent; but every man is free to choose what power he will have to rule over him. None have fallen so low, none are so vile, but that they may find deliverance in Christ. The demoniac, in place of prayer, could utter only the words of Satan; yet the heart's unspoken appeal was heard. No cry from a soul in need, though it fail of utterance in words, will be unheeded. Those who consent to enter into covenant with God are not left to the power of Satan or to the infirmity of their own nature. {MH 93.1}

Marvelous will be the transformation wrought in him who by faith opens the door of the heart to the Saviour. {MH 93.3}

Wherever there is union with Christ there is love. Whatever other fruits we may bear, if love be missing, they profit nothing. Love to God and our neighbor is the very essence of our religion. No one can love Christ and not love His children. When we are united to Christ, we have the mind of Christ. Purity and love shine forth in the character, meekness and truth control the life. The very expression of the countenance is changed. Christ abiding in the soul exerts a transforming power, and the outward aspect bears witness to the peace and joy that reign

within. We drink in the love of Christ, as the branch draws nourishment from the vine. If we are grafted in Christ, if fiber by fiber we have been united with the Living Vine, we shall give evidence of the fact by bearing rich clusters of living fruit. If we are connected with the Light, we shall be channels of light, and in our words and works we shall reflect light to the world. Those who are truly Christians are bound with the chain of love which links earth to heaven, which binds finite man to the infinite God. The light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ shines in the hearts of His followers, to the glory of God. {1SM 337.2}

Christ is drawing sinners to Himself by the cords of love, seeking to unite them to Himself, that they may be laborers together with God, not in pride and self-sufficiency, but in meekness and lowliness. When sinners are converted, God is glorified before the principalities and powers of heaven and earth. These converted ones are a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. "Ye are my witnesses," God says. By looking to Me you are to become transformed in character. By the manifestation of Christlike forbearance and love you are to reveal this transformation. {RC 198.4}