

Yahweh (God) and Israel: Turning Back to God After Turning Away From Him



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 22

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Exodus 3:6–14; Exodus 6:6–8; Joshua 24:1–18; Jeremiah 5:19, 22; Ezekiel 16:26–29, 34; Hosea 9:1; John 20:21; Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 1 John 1:12.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I made you. I am now your husband. My name is The Lord Who Rules Over All. I am the Holy One of Israel. I have set you free. I am the God of the whole earth’ ” (Isaiah 54:5, NlrV).

HOSEA WAS THE LAST PROPHET¹ OF GOD TO THE NORTHERN KINGDOM, ISRAEL. Hosea used the symbol² of marriage to help us understand the dealings between Yahweh (God) and His people. Hosea's sad personal life was an important part of his ministry (work) for God. He took back his unfaithful³ wife to show that Yahweh was ready to take back His people who had fallen away from Him.

A hundred years later Jeremiah was the last prophet before Judah was taken into slavery by the king of Babylon. Jeremiah did not want what happened to Israel to happen to Judah. The people of Judah should have learned a lesson from their sister Israel, but did not.

Ezekiel, at the same time, ministered to (helped) the Israelite slaves in Babylon. Both prophets used the marriage symbol to describe how Judah was not faithful (true) to God. Jeremiah himself never married. God told Jeremiah not to marry or to enter a house for a feast because the sounds of gladness and of marriage were coming to an end (Jeremiah 16:2–4, 8, 9). Ezekiel's wife was taken away suddenly as a sign that the temple was about to be destroyed (Ezekiel 24:15–21).

THIS WEEK'S STUDY UP CLOSE: Despite His people not being true to Him, the Lord was willing to give them another chance.

1. prophet—a man or woman sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

2. symbol—an object, mark, sign, or person that stands for, or means the same thing as, another object, idea, or thing.

3. unfaithful—not being true or loyal; not being someone whom others can trust or count on.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 23

THE BEGINNING OF THE MARRIAGE (Jeremiah 2:2, 3)

“ ‘ “I remember how faithful [true] you were to me when you were young. You loved me as if you were my bride. You followed me through the desert. Nothing had been planted there. Your people were holy to me” ’ ” (Jeremiah 2:2, 3, NIV).

Yahweh told Moses who He was and said that He was about to make His promises to Israel come true (Exodus 3:6–14; Exodus 6:6–8). God promised to make Israel His own people and to give them a land of their own to live in.

The prophets⁴ said the time of the journey through the desert was like a honeymoon.⁵ It was a time that the people were loyal to Yahweh and did not follow other gods. The Israelites experienced a great freedom in the Exodus, and that event could be said to be the same as the inauguration (beginning) of the “marriage” promises.

How did Joshua understand what the Lord had done and would do for Israel in Joshua 24?

Joshua 24:3, 4 _____

Joshua 24:5–7 _____

Joshua 24:8–12 _____

Joshua 24:13 _____

What were the things in Joshua 24:14–18 the Israelites needed to do for God in return?

If you read the words of the Israelites in the above verses, you can see how eager they were about keeping their part of the covenant.⁶ God forbid (not allow) that we should serve any other gods! After all, look at what He has done for us!

How often have you eagerly made a vow (promise) to the Lord that you meant to keep with all your heart but broken it later? What can you do to make sure that you will remain faithful to the things you have promised to the Lord?

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 24

UNFAITHFULNESS⁷ OF THE BRIDE (Ezekiel 16:26–29, 34)

4. prophets—men and women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

5. honeymoon—the vacation (time away from work) spent together by a couple after their wedding.

6. covenant—a promise or agreement between God and His people. If the people obeyed God, God would bless them.

7. unfaithfulness—the act of breaking your promises and not doing the things you say you are going to do; not being true or loyal; not being someone whom others can trust.

Lesson 13 Yahweh (God) and Israel: Turning Back to God After Turning Away From Him

During the time that David and Solomon ruled, most of the people were loyal to Yahweh (God). Jeroboam did not want his people to travel south to the temple in the land of Judah, where they might be tempted to stay and live. So, he decided to have golden calves set up for worship at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:28–30). Since Jeroboam chose his own priests, the Levites from all over the kingdom of Israel moved to Judah (2 Chronicles 11:13–16). Any king who later led Israel to follow other gods was said to be following in the footsteps or ways of Jeroboam (1 Kings 16:7, 26).



Jeroboam made golden calves for his people to worship instead of God.

The prophets⁸ spoke against Israel and Judah for turning away from God to worship worthless idols (Hosea 4:7; Jeremiah 2:11). Israel and Judah

were also found guilty for trying to get help from other nations, instead of turning to Yahweh for help (Jeremiah 2:18). Judah turned against Yahweh. Jeremiah says that this betrayal⁹ was the same as Judah's forgetting her marriage to Yahweh—and forgetting her wedding jewelry (Jeremiah 2:32).

What picture do the prophets use to describe Israel and Judah's unfaithfulness?

Jeremiah 5:7 _____

Ezekiel 16:26–29, 34 _____

Hosea 9:1 _____

At one moment the marriage between God and His people is described as a man and woman on their honeymoon.¹⁰ Then the bride is described as selling herself into whoredom.¹¹ Even worse, Ezekiel says that most prostitutes¹² would charge a fee, but Judah was willing to pay others for using her (Ezekiel 16:34)!

Imagine a woman who has a loving, caring husband, one who offers to give her so much. He does all he can for her to make her happy (Isaiah

8. prophets—men and women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

9. betrayal—the act of failing to keep a promise, secret, or agreement.

10. honeymoon—the vacation (time away from work) spent together by a couple after their wedding.

11. whoredom—the practice of earning a living by taking money for sex.

12. prostitutes—men and women who earn a living by taking money for sex.

Lesson 13 Yahweh (God) and Israel: Turning Back to God After Turning Away From Him

5:4). But she leaves him for many men who want to use her only for sex.

It makes no sense. That is because sin makes no sense. If we do not surrender (give) ourselves daily to God, sin will cause us to do things just as wild and foolish.

What wild and stupid things have you seen people do because of sin? What can you do to make sure sin does not do the same thing to you?

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 25

HARVESTING¹³ THE FRUITS OF UNFAITHFULNESS¹⁴ (Jeremiah 5:19)

The Bible often uses the symbol¹⁵ of an unfaithful¹⁶ woman. But men have proved to be unfaithful to their wives too. Often, someone who is unfaithful in marriage thinks to find happiness in a forbidden¹⁷ place. But he or she finds unhappiness (sadness) and suffering instead.

A man left his wife for another

woman. Within two years his lover had stolen from him all his money. She also had given him a venereal disease¹⁸ that could not be cured (healed). And, finally, she had left him for someone else. Penniless, diseased, and heartbroken, the man begged his former wife to take him back. She refused. Then the man had the nerve to ask, “Why, God, why have You let this happen to me?”

How often the punishment¹⁹ agrees with the crime. Living in the Land of Promise depended on the children of Israel’s loyalty²⁰ to Yahweh (God). When they left Him in favor of other gods, Yahweh could not keep them safe from the armies of other nations. They were left to harvest the fruits of their unfaithfulness.

What important principle²¹ is seen in Jeremiah 5:19 and Galatians 6:7?

What is the Lord saying to His people in Jeremiah 5:22? What principle is He explaining to them? What warning is suggested here too?

13. harvesting—gathering the ripe grain or crop of fruit at the end of the growing season when it is ready to be picked. Bible writers often use the word *harvesting* to describe the power of our words and actions. The kind words we speak and the good things we do are like “planting” seeds of love. These “seeds” take root in the hearts of others. There they grow “fruit,” which are more good works and words. But doing evil or turning away from God is like planting bad seeds in our lives. These seeds will cause evil to grow in our hearts. The only thing we can gather from this “crop” of evil is a harvest of bad fruit—or the fruits of unfaithfulness. This is what happens when we turn away from God.

14. unfaithfulness—the act of breaking your promises and not doing the things you say you are going to do; not being true or loyal; not being someone whom others can trust.

15. symbol—an object, mark, sign, or person that stands for, or means the same thing as, another object, idea, or thing.

16. unfaithful—not being true or loyal; not being someone whom others can trust or count on.

17. forbidden—when something is not allowed.

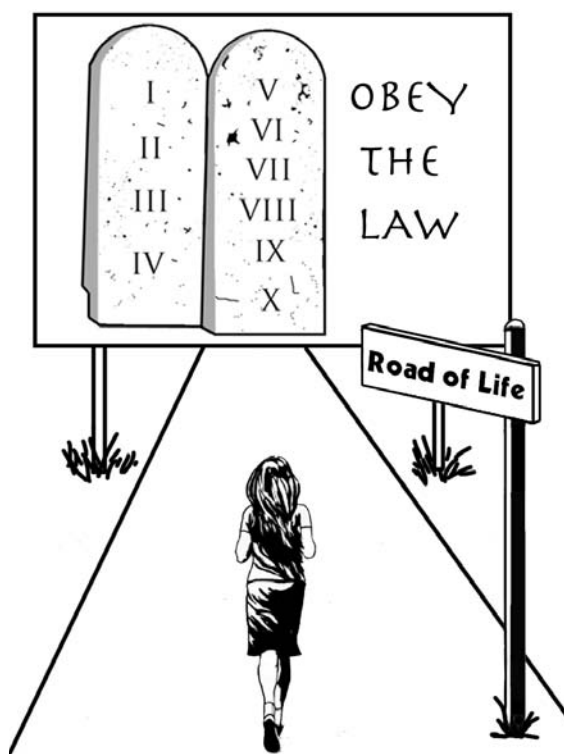
18. venereal disease—any one of certain sicknesses that can be passed on during sexual intercourse. Syphilis is a venereal disease.

19. punishment—a penalty for, or the result of, doing something wrong; when someone must suffer loss or pain for doing something bad, wrong, or against the law.

20. loyalty—the act of being true or faithful to someone or something, such as family, duty, or God.

21. principle—a law or rule upon which other laws are based.

God created us. He knows more about us than we do ourselves. And He knows what is best for us. Because He loves us, He wants what is best for us. That is why He tells us to obey Him (Deuteronomy 10:13). By following God's law and the principles of the Bible, we can be kept safe from a lot of needless pain and suffering.



By following God's law, we can be protected from unnecessary pain and suffering.

How has God kept you safe as you have obeyed His will? What lessons have you been forced to learn the hard way?

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 26

RESTORATION²² (Jeremiah 33:11)

By letting Israel and Judah be taken from their promised land into slavery, God was “divorcing” them (Jeremiah 3:8). But this was not to be the end of God's care for Israel. At first Jeremiah said the sounds of joy and gladness and the voices of the bride and bridegroom would become silent (Jeremiah 7:34; Jeremiah 16:9; Jeremiah 25:10). Later, Jeremiah added that the time of silence would one day end. And then once more the sound of bride and bridegroom would be heard in the land (Jeremiah 33:11).

Why would the sound of joy, of happiness, of gladness be heard? What message was the Lord giving His people then—and us today? John 20:21; Philippians 4:4; 1 Thesalonians 1:6; 2 John 1:12.

What promises in Jeremiah 25:11; Jeremiah 29:10; and Ezekiel 16:60 did God make to His unfaithful²³ bride?

The prophets²⁴ warned that God would punish His people for turning away from Him. But the prophets also gave hope to the people. As we just learned, Jeremiah said the sounds of

22. restoration—the act of returning to God. Sin takes us away from God, but God brings us back to Him. He puts His love and His law in us and changes our hearts so that we love to obey Him.

23. unfaithful—not being true or loyal; not being someone whom others can trust or count on.

24. prophets—men and women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

Lesson 13 Yahweh (God) and Israel: Turning Back to God After Turning Away From Him

joy and gladness and the voices of the bride and bridegroom would become silent (Jeremiah 7:34; Jeremiah 16:9). But he also added later that the time of silence would not last more than 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11). Then the Israelites' enemies would be overthrown. Hosea spoke of a time for Israel when there would be no pregnancy, no birth (Hosea 9:11). But after this would come a time of healing and love (Hosea 14:4). So, God's action is not really punishment,²⁵ but discipline.²⁶

The prophets urged Israel to return to Yahweh (God). They promised that the people could trust that God would accept them back. They strongly believed that Israel would return to God. But a return to being close to God once more can happen only if Israel gives up one thing. Their idols. Israel must stop their idol worshiping. They must obey Yahweh's commands and depend (trust) fully on Him again.

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 27

NEW COVENANT PROMISES²⁷ (Jeremiah 31:31–37)

It is bad enough for a woman to be unfaithful²⁸ to her spouse (husband). But it is far worse when that same woman sells herself to be a prostitute.²⁹ How low! And that is exactly what Israel did. But the Lord was still willing to take Israel back. He was still willing to forgive, still willing to heal the broken marriage between Israel and Him. The Lord promised that He would forgive all that Israel had done (Ezekiel 16:63). God would take the people of Israel back and do even more wonderful things for them.

What is the message for Old Testament Israel in Jeremiah 31:31–37 and for us today? What hope and promises are found there for us in Galatians 3:29; Hebrews 8:7–13; Hebrews 10:16, 17?

The Lord would forgive Israel their sins. And He promised to write His law in their hearts and in their minds (Jeremiah 31:33). This verse is at the heart of the gospel³⁰ and God's gift of grace.³¹ This is the new covenant.³² It forms the basis of His promises to all who have given themselves to Him in faith to obey Him.

25. punishment—a penalty for, or the result of, doing something wrong; when someone must suffer loss or pain for doing something bad, wrong, or against the law.

26. discipline—training that makes you a stronger and better person.

27. covenant promises—what God agrees to do for us after Jesus died on the cross to save us from sin; the wonderful blessings God will give to those who love and serve and obey Him. God promises to heal and save His people and take them to heaven one day.

28. unfaithful—not being true or loyal; not being someone whom others can trust or count on.

29. prostitute—a man or woman who earns a living by taking money for sex.

30. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the news of salvation.

31. grace—God's gift of forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

32. new covenant—the promise or agreement between God and His people that was made when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave.



God promised to write the law in our hearts.

We might fall, we might sin, we might make mistakes. But God will not leave us. This is because of what Jesus has done and is doing for us. The plan of salvation³³ offers forgiveness to all who believe. No sin is too great, no sinner too bad, that forgiveness cannot be found at the foot of the Cross. This was the message that God gave to Israel in Jeremiah's time. And for us, it also is the message of light shining from the cross of Calvary. This is the message that the Lord has for His people today. Even if we have "played the harlot,"³⁴ our loving and caring Husband (the Lord) loves us and wants to take us back. But He does not force us. Instead, He pulls us to Him with "bands of love" (Hosea 11:4).



The sinner can find forgiveness for any sin at the foot of the Cross.

Have you played the harlot? Have you turned away from God's love? His words to you are, "Come back! I will heal and forgive." The question now is What is your answer?

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 28

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read "The Role³⁵ of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy,"³⁶ pp. 25–38, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4.

"These messages from God about what would happen were not the only ones that gave the Israelite exiles³⁷

33. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

34. harlot—a woman who earns money by having sex with men; a prostitute.

35. role—the part that someone or something plays in life.

36. prophecy—something told about what will happen in the future.

37. exiles—those who are forced to live in a country that is not their home country; the Jews were invaded by Babylon and taken away as exiles or prisoners for 70 years.

Lesson 13 Yahweh (God) and Israel: Turning Back to God After Turning Away From Him

their hope of speedy freedom. They, too, had the writings of Jeremiah with them. In Jeremiah's writings the exiles could see the certain length of time before they would be set free to return to Israel from Babylon. 'But I will finish that king and his nation because they are guilty. I will do it when the 70 years are over,' announces the Lord. 'I will make that land a desert forever.' Jeremiah 25:12, Nlrv. God's favor³⁸ would be shown to the remaining people of Judah, in answer to their prayer. 'I will be found by you,' announces [says] the Lord. 'And I will bring you back from where you were taken as prisoners. I will gather you from all the nations. I will gather you from the places where I have forced you to go,' announces the Lord. 'I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you away.' Jeremiah 29:14, Nlrv." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets³⁹ and Kings*, pp. 552, 553.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ As a class, talk more about the

question of how sin causes people to do foolish things. How is it that people know better but let themselves be swept away by their lusts? What can we do to help someone who is making this mistake?

❷ Talk about the idea of how God's law protects (keeps safe) us. What does that mean? What does it protect us from? But faithfulness⁴⁰ to God's law and to His principles⁴¹ of living does not mean that we will not suffer at times in life. Why is this so?

❸ Wednesday's lesson talks about the joy, happiness, and peace that come from loving and trusting in our Lord. Talk about how serving the Lord brings joy, happiness, and peace. Let each member share his or her own experiences. Try to learn from one another. In a world full of idols,⁴² why is it important to focus on the blessings and good things that we have been given as children of God?

38. favor—the thought or feeling that someone believes you are good or worthwhile; approval; blessings.

39. prophets—men and women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

40. faithfulness—the act of being true and loyal; the act of being someone that others can trust and believe in.

41. principles—laws or rules upon which other laws are based; the Ten Commandments.

42. idols—anything we love more than God and anything that turns us away from serving Him with all our hearts.