

LESSON 12 **June 12-18*

Desire *of* Nations



SABBATH AFTERNOON

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity . . . The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified” (*Isa. 59:2-4, 61:1-3*).

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

The Week at a Glance: How does sin separate us from God? What is the only basis of redemption? What was God’s plan for the Hebrew nation? How was Jesus revealed in Isaiah 61:1-3? How do we understand God’s vengeance?

Memory Text: “Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (*Isaiah 60:3, NRSV*).

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 19.*

The Effects of Sin *(Isaiah 59)*.

In Isaiah 58:3 the people asked God: “ ‘Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?’ ” (*NRSV*).

In contrast, Isaiah 59:1 implies another question, something like: “Why do we call for the Lord’s hand to save us, but He does not? Why do we cry to Him, but He does not hear?” Isaiah answers that God is able to save and hear (*vs. 1*). His failure to do either is, however, another matter entirely.

Read Isaiah 59:2. What message is being given here that answers the question in verse 1?

God chooses to “ignore” His people, not because that is His desire, but because, as Isaiah reveals, “your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God” (*vs. 2, NRSV*). Here is one of the clearest statements in the Bible regarding the effect of sin on the divine-human relationship. Isaiah spends the rest of chapter 59 elaborating on this point, which is seen all through human history: Sin can destroy our relationship with the Lord and thus lead to our eternal ruin—not because sin drives God away from us, but that it drives us away from God.

Read Genesis 3:8. How does this example reveal the principle expressed in the above paragraph?

Sin is primarily a rejection of God, a turning away from Him. The sin act actually feeds upon itself in that not only is the act a turning away from God but the result of the act causes the sinner to turn away even more from the Lord. Sin separates us from God, not because God wouldn’t reach out to the sinner (indeed, the whole Bible is almost nothing but the account of God reaching out to save sinners) but because sin causes us to reject His divine overtures to us. That is why it is so important that we tolerate no sin in our lives.

In what ways have you experienced the phenomenon of sin causing a separation from God? What, in your own experience, is the only solution to the problem?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *Isaiah 59–61.*

Teachers Aim:

1. To show we are saved by grace and judged by works.
2. To convey the significance of the “year of the Lord’s favor” and the “day of judgment.”

Lesson Outline:

I. Redemption’s Story.

- A. Sin separates us from God as a consequence of our actions and choices.
- B. The Bible tells of God’s endless efforts to reconcile sinful humans to Him.

II. Judged by Works.

- A. We are saved by grace through faith. Faith also is a gift of God.
- B. Our response to Christ’s sacrifice is love and obedience through works.

III. The Lord’s Favor and Judgment.

- A. God’s love and final judgment go hand in hand, as shown in the relationship between the year of the Lord’s favor and the *day* of vengeance.
- B. Jesus proclaimed the year of the Lord’s favor during His ministry on earth.

Summary: Jesus declared the year of the Lord’s favor more than two thousand years ago. So it should be clear that we are living on borrowed time. Not willing that any should perish, God mercifully delays His coming. Let us accept His grace and live according to His will, so we may be able to stand in the day of vengeance.

COMMENTARY

Introduction: Desire of Nations.

Isaiah 54–66 ring with God’s assurance of future glory and His promise to bring evil to an end. These chapters describe the effects of, and the events set in motion by, Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. They envision the day when “the Lord shall be [our] everlasting light, and the days of [our] mourning shall be ended. [God’s] people also shall be all righteous: . . . that [He] may be glorified” (*Isa. 60:20, 21*).

I. Sin, the Separator (*Isa. 59:1-3, 12, 13*).

Sin is an evil force, originated by Satan, that causes alienation from God and hostility toward Him. The gospel is the only force that can penetrate this alienation and hostility; wherever it does, it reveals itself in ways that inspire the wonder of morally enlightened beings (*see Rom. 5:6-11, Rev. 5:9-14*). It is God’s goodness alone that leads sinners to repent (*Rom. 2:4*), conquering the will, not by

MONDAY June 14

Who Is Forgiven?

Isaiah 59 presents a startling picture of the problem of sin. Fortunately, the Bible also presents the hope of redemption.

To begin, the first question is, How many of us have sinned? The Bible is unequivocal: All of us have. Redemption, therefore, cannot be based on lack of sin; it must be based on forgiveness (*Jer. 31:34*). Paul agrees. All have sinned (*Rom. 3:9-20, 23*), so there can be no distinction on that basis (*Rom. 3:22*). Those who are justified can be judged as just, only because they receive by faith the gift of God's righteousness through the sacrifice of Christ.

Read Romans 3:21-24. What are those texts telling us about how we are saved? What hope should they give us in the judgment?

Most people think the question in the judgment is: Who has sinned? But that is not a question that needs to be asked, because everyone has sinned. Instead, the question is: Who is forgiven? God is just when He justifies "the one who has faith in Jesus" (*Rom. 3:26, NRSV*). The deciding factor in the judgment is, Who has received and continues to receive forgiveness by having faith in Jesus?

Now, it is true we are judged by works, but not in the sense that works save us. If so, then faith is made void (*Rom. 4:14*). Instead, our works reveal whether we truly have been saved (*James 2:18*).

Why can't works save us, either now or in the judgment? See Rom. 3:20, 23.

It is too late for good works, or obedience to the law, to redeem anyone. The purpose of the law in a sinful world isn't to save but to point out sin. Instead, "faith working through love" (*Gal. 5:6, NRSV*), love that is poured into the heart by God's Spirit (*Rom. 5:5*), demonstrates that a person has living faith in Jesus (*compare James 2:26*).

Works are an outward expression, the human manifestation of a saving faith. Hence, a true Christian experience is one in which faith is expressed in a daily commitment to the Lord that is revealed by obedience to the law. In the judgment, God uses works as evidence for His creatures, who cannot read thoughts of faith as He can. But for the converted person, only works following conversion, when the life is empowered by Christ and the Holy Spirit, are relevant in the judgment. The preconversion life of sin has already been washed away by the blood of the Lamb (*see Romans 6*).

TEACHERS COMMENTS

force but by love and holy reason, changing us from “children of wrath” to “new creatures” in Christ, “partakers of the divine nature” (*see Isa. 1:18, 2 Cor. 5:17, Eph. 2:1-6, 2 Pet. 1:4*).

II. Fountain of Forgiveness.

One truth that can hardly be overstated is that it is “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (*Titus 3:5; see vss. 1-7*).

“As the penitent sinner, contrite before God, discerns Christ’s atonement in his behalf and accepts this atonement as his only hope in this life and the future life, his sins are pardoned. This is justification by faith. Every believing soul is to conform his will entirely to God’s will and keep in a state of repentance and contrition, exercising faith in the atoning merits of the Redeemer and advancing from strength to strength, from glory to glory.

“Pardon and justification are one and the same thing. Through faith, the believer passes from the position of a rebel, a child of sin and Satan, to the position of a loyal subject of Christ Jesus, not because of an inherent goodness, but because Christ receives him as His child by adoption. The sinner receives the forgiveness of his sins, because these sins are borne by his Substitute and Surety. The Lord speaks to His heavenly Father, saying: ‘This is My child. I relieve him from the condemnation of death, giving him My life insurance policy—eternal life—because I have taken his place and have suffered for his sins. He is even My beloved son.’

“Thus man, pardoned, and clothed with the beautiful garments of Christ’s righteousness, stands faultless before God.

“The sinner may err, but he is not cast off without mercy. His only hope, however, is repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 103.

III. Light Triumphs Over Darkness (*Isa. 60:1, 2; 2 Cor. 4:1-6*).

God’s plan of redemption assures the full establishment of His truth in the life of every believer. His followers will be steady lights in the world, revealing who Christ is and what He can do for those who love Him. Lives illuminated with Christ’s presence dispel the moral darkness that Satan has cast over the world. Christ calls His people the light of the world. They follow Him, the original Light of the world (*see Matt. 5:14-16; John 1:4, 9; 8:12*).

God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (*2 Pet. 3:9*). Hence the energetic missionary activity of Christ and His true followers (*see Mark 16:15, 20; Luke 4:37-44*). Until the close of probation, “now is the accepted time; . . . now is the day of salvation” (*2 Cor. 6:2*).

TUESDAY June 15

Universal Appeal *(Isa. 60:1, 2).*

What is Isaiah 60:1,2 talking about? What principle is at work there that's seen all through the Bible? What hope does it offer?

In these two verses, we are given a picture of God's deliverance of His people, following the exile, expressed with the imagery of God creating light out of darkness and pointing forward to an ultimate fulfillment in salvation through Christ.

In verse 3, to whose light do nations and kings come?

In Hebrew this person is feminine singular (*see also vss. 1, 2*). It must be "Zion," personified as a woman, who is mentioned near the end of the previous chapter (*Isa. 59:20*). So the people of the earth, who are covered in darkness, will come to Zion. They will be drawn by the light of God's glory that has arisen over her (*Isa. 60:2*). "Zion is summoned to enter into the light that is hers and then to observe and react to the nations as they gather to the same light."—J. Alec Motyer, p. 494. Notice that although Zion is Jerusalem, the emphasis is more on the people than on the physical location of the city.

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

How does this prophecy compare with God's covenant promise to Abraham? *Gen. 12:2, 3*. Are they not saying the same thing?

God had a universal purpose when He chose Abraham and his descendants: Through Abraham all families of the earth would be blessed (*Gen. 12:3, 18:18, 22:18*). So, God's covenant with Abraham was ultimately intended to be a covenant with all humankind through Abraham. He and his descendants would be God's channel of revelation to the world.

Isaiah sought to bring his people back to their ancient, universal destiny. As the representatives of the true God, they were responsible not only for themselves but for the world. They should welcome foreigners who seek God (*compare Isa. 56:3-8*), for His temple "shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (*Isa. 56:7, NRSV*).

In this context, how do you understand the role of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, or your role in that church?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

IV. Justice at Last!

One of the most perplexing aspects of the great controversy between good and evil is the *delay* in the administration of final justice in which all righteousness and truth are vindicated and all evil is brought to account. (*Compare Job 16:16-22, 21:7-26, and Ps. 73:2-17 with Luke 18:1-8 and Rev. 6:9-11.*)

God's justice and wrath are part of His holy nature, along with His love for righteousness and hatred of wickedness (*see Ps. 45:7*). The plan of salvation is the way of separating sinners from sin and filling them with God's holy attributes. But people who choose to

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Leviticus 4:2, 13, 14, 20; 5:15; Numbers 15:28-30; Psalms 4:6; 119:105; Micah 7:9; Acts 17:30, 31; 1 John 1:7.*

① Consider how completely our sin separates us from God. Knowing how horrible and ugly sin is and how it creates a barrier to the Father, consider what Christ gave up to become sin for us. Imagine how God felt to see His only Son become something He hated in order to save a world so ungrateful and so blind to His love. What is the admonition and the promise from the Lord regarding sin in our lives? *Romans 6.*

② When we are no longer separated from God (by confessing our sins), we are able to claim the power that Christ has to bring others into His marvelous light. What do Psalms 4:6, 119:105, Micah 7:9, and 1 John 1:7 say about the function of God's light and its benefits? How can we be, in practical ways, a source of that light?

③ Discuss the question in Thursday's section regarding God's love and vengeance. How can God, who hates sin but loves the sinner, exact punishment on that sinner? Define vengeance. What are the components that cause someone to act in vengeance? Contrast that definition with God's vengeance. What are the components of His holy and just cause? Discuss the relationship between His mercy and His vengeance.

④ How does God judge those who sin in ignorance? Will His vengeance apply to them also? Do they have an obligation to confess or make recompense? Explain your answers. Will there be "sins of ignorance" in the last days before His judgment? Why, or why not? (*Read Lev. 4:2, 13, 14, 20; 5:15; Num. 15:28-30; Acts 17:30, 31.*)

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 person, which means that he is a messiah or the Messiah. He is to “bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners” (*vs. 1, NRSV*). Who does that sound like? Compare *Isaiah 42:1-7*, where God’s Servant is described in very similar terms.

Isaiah 61:2 talks about the “acceptable year of the Lord.” The Messiah, who is anointed as the Davidic King and Deliverer, proclaims a special year of divine favor at the time when He proclaims liberty. Compare *Leviticus 25:10*, where God commands the Israelites to proclaim liberty in the holy fiftieth year: “It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family” (*NRSV*). This means that persons who had been forced to sell their ancestral land or to become servants in order to survive hard times (*vss. 25-55*) would reclaim their land and freedom. Because the jubilee year began with the blowing of a trumpet on the Day of Atonement (*vs. 9*), we have mentioned this passage before in connection with *Isaiah 58*.

While “the year of the Lord’s favor” (*NRSV*) in *Isaiah 61:2* is a kind of jubilee year, it is not simply an observance of *Leviticus 25*. This year is announced by the Messiah, the King, when He reveals Himself through a ministry of liberation and restoration. This is similar to some ancient Mesopotamian kings who promoted social kindness by proclaiming release from debts during early years of their reigns. The Messiah’s ministry goes far beyond the scope of the *Leviticus 25* law. Not only does He “proclaim liberty to the captives,” He also binds up the brokenhearted, comforts those who mourn, and brings about their restoration (*Isa. 61:1-11*). Furthermore, in addition to “the year of the Lord’s favor,” he proclaims “the day of vengeance of our God” (*vs. 2, NRSV*).

When was Isaiah’s prophecy fulfilled? *Luke 4:16-21*. How did Jesus’ ministry accomplish this? We, of course, are not Jesus, but we are to represent Him to the world. Also, ask yourself this important question: What are the things the Messiah does, as expressed in *Isaiah 61:1-3*, that we, in our limited capacities, should be doing, as well? And what are some of the practical ways in which we can do these things?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

remain in darkness must perish with their sins. These sinners oppose all who are truly converted and make life as difficult as possible for them. God, however, will reward His righteous people and ultimately destroy those who hate His Son (*see Heb. 10:26-30*). Cooperating with Satan to overthrow God's kingdom of righteousness is no small offense. Christ's forbearance is not leniency or permissiveness but longsuffering love that labors tirelessly for our redemption until everyone's decision is fixed (*see Matt. 23:34-36; Luke 11:52; 1 Thess. 2:15, 16; 2 Thess. 1:5-10; Rev. 13:1-17; 15:1-5; 16:4-6; 17:5, 6; Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, pp. 210–212*).

Witnessing

Justice can be defined as the principle of treating all people equally according to the law. However, is it really possible to treat everyone equally under the law?

The relative new science of DNA testing is able to revoke some judicial decrees. Eyewitness accounts and circumstantial evidence are no longer necessarily the definitive answer to solving a crime. DNA testing provides nearly 100 percent accuracy in the determination of guilt or innocence.

God, however, possesses an infinite amount of justice that decrees fairly and equitably. Yet, it is important for us to remember “He takes no delight in vengeance. The work of destruction is a ‘strange work’ to Him who is infinite in love.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 139.

“While He does not delight in vengeance, He will execute judgment upon the transgressors of His law. He is forced to do this, to preserve the inhabitants of the earth from utter depravity and ruin. And the very fact of His reluctance to execute justice testifies to the enormity of the sins that call forth His judgments and to the severity of the retribution awaiting the transgressor.”
—Page 628.

This last quote teaches us how important it is to accept God's grace and the indwelling of His Holy Spirit, who guides us daily in Jesus' footsteps. Think of ways you can help others accept Jesus this week. Ask God to help you act upon at least two of those ways.

THURSDAY June 17

“The Day of Vengeance of Our God”

(*Isa. 61:2, NRSV*).

Amidst all the good news, why does the Messiah, as depicted in Isaiah 61, proclaim God’s vengeance? When is this prophecy fulfilled?

When in Nazareth, Jesus, the Messiah, read Isaiah 61 as far as “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (*vs. 2; Luke 4:19*). Then he stopped and said: “‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’” (*Luke 4:21, NRSV*). So, He deliberately and specifically avoided reading the next words in the same verse: “the day of vengeance of our God” (*Isa. 61:2, NRSV*). While His ministry of good news, liberty, and comfort was beginning to set captives free from Satan’s tyranny, the day of vengeance was not yet to come. In Matthew 24 (*compare Mark 13, Luke 21*) He predicted to His disciples that divine judgments would come in the future.

Indeed, in Isaiah 61 the day of God’s vengeance is the “great and terrible day of the Lord” (*Joel 2:31, NRSV; Mal. 4:5*), to be fulfilled when Christ will come again to liberate planet Earth from injustice by defeating His enemies and setting the oppressed remnant of His people free (*Revelation 19; compare Dan. 2:44, 45*). So although Christ announced the beginning of “the year of the Lord’s favor,” its culmination is at His second coming.

How do you reconcile the notion of a loving God with a God who also promises vengeance? Are the ideas incompatible? Or, do you understand vengeance as a manifestation of that love? If so, how so? Explain your answer.

Though Jesus has told us to turn the cheek (*Matt. 5:39*), in other places He is very clear that justice and punishment will be meted out (*Matt. 8:12*). Though Paul tells us not to “render evil for evil” (*1 Thess. 5:15*), he also says that when the Lord is revealed from heaven, He will with flaming fire take “vengeance on them that know not God” (*2 Thess. 1:8*).

The difference, of course, is that the Lord in His infinite wisdom and mercy can alone bring justice and vengeance in a completely fair manner. Human justice, human vengeance, comes with all the faults, frailties, and inconsistencies of humanity. God’s justice, of course, will come with none of those limitations.

How do we understand the link between God’s love for us and the warnings of vengeance?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: A painting by the artist Alfred Lee hangs in the Ellen G. White Estate offices, located in the General Conference. It is a panoramic view spanning much of our Christian faith. Looking at the picture, you can envision Jesus' return. That will be a day of both rejoicing and despair. Where do you intend to stand on that day, and why?

Thought Questions:

❶ To obtain salvation, we must believe and accept Christ's promises. Once we have done that, we will not be able to contain our love for Jesus, and our actions will reflect that love. Now let us reverse that thought: We apply ourselves diligently to doing good works, but we do not totally accept God's salvation. How would you describe both scenarios as true "cause and effect"? What will be the ultimate result of each scenario?

❷ This week's lesson mentions that perhaps there are pockets of exclusivity within the church that limit our ability to reach those who need the gospel the most. Let us never forget, however, that each and every one of us has sinned against God in some way. Jesus founded the church, and He has protected and guided it. Jesus also directed His church to preach the gospel to all the world. So, take a look around your local church to see how many visitors come on any given Sabbath. If the number is not large, how can you involve other members in reaching those needing to hear God's story?

Application Questions:

❶ Sin erects barriers between the sinner and God. And Christ often is unable to penetrate these barriers, because we do not allow Him to remove them. It is sin that drives us away from Christ, even though He would like nothing better than to hold on to us for eternity. Discuss the connection between the amount of time we spend with Jesus and our spiritual health.

❷ There are some who believe there is plenty of time to enjoy the pleasures of this world before they need to set aside sinful activities to take up salvation. What dangers are there in living this way?

FRIDAY June 18

Further Study: See also Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 376–378; also *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 236–243.

“Jesus stood before the people as a living expositor of the prophecies concerning Himself. Explaining the words He had read, He spoke of the Messiah as a reliever of the oppressed, a liberator of captives, a healer of the afflicted, restoring sight to the blind, and revealing to the world the light of truth. His impressive manner and the wonderful import of His words thrilled the hearers with a power they had never felt before. The tide of divine influence broke every barrier down; like Moses, they beheld the Invisible. As their hearts were moved upon by the Holy Spirit, they responded with fervent amens and praises to the Lord.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 237.

“The day of God’s vengeance cometh—the day of the fierceness of His wrath. Who will abide the day of His coming? Men have hardened their hearts against the Spirit of God, but the arrows of His wrath will pierce where the arrows of conviction could not. God will not far hence arise to deal with the sinner. Will the false shepherd shield the transgressor in that day? Can he be excused who went with the multitude in the path of disobedience? Will popularity or numbers make any guiltless? These are questions which the careless and indifferent should consider and settle for themselves.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 33.

Discussion Question:

A Seventh-day Adventist pastor thoughtfully stated that his number one problem in ministry is the exclusiveness of church members who do not want others to join them. How can “Christians” take the love, hope, and good news of Christ’s kingdom to all the world so others can have an opportunity to be saved before the end comes (Matt. 24:14) when they do not even want to accept people who go out of their way to show up in their church?

Summary: God purifies an unjust society by removing the rebels and by restoring the remnant who turn from the sins that have separated them from Him. Due to the blessings of God’s presence, people from other nations are drawn to God and His people, so that they also can enjoy the time of God’s favor that is proclaimed and delivered by the Messiah.