

# Yahweh *and* Israel: Fulfillment Beyond Failure



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 3:6–14; 6:6–8; Josh. 24:1–18; Jer. 5:19, 22; Ezek. 16:26–29, 34; Hosea 9:1; John 20:21; Phil. 4:4; 1 Thess. 1:6; 1 John 2:12.*

**Memory Text:** “For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth’ ” (*Isaiah 54:5, NIV*).

**H**osea, the last prophet to the northern kingdom, Israel, employed the metaphor of marriage to illustrate the relationship between Yahweh and His people. His tragic personal life intertwined with his prophetic ministry. He took back his unfaithful wife to show that Yahweh was prepared to take His wayward people back.

A hundred years later Jeremiah, the last prophet before the Babylonian captivity, tried to prevent Judah from a similar fate. The people of Judah should have learned a lesson from their sister, Israel, but did not.

Ezekiel, at the same time, ministered to the captives in Babylon. Both prophets borrowed the marriage metaphor for Judah. Jeremiah himself never married. God instructed him not to marry or to enter a house for a feast because the sounds of gladness and of marriage were coming to an end (*Jer. 16:2–4, 8, 9*). Ezekiel's wife was taken away suddenly as a sign that the temple was about to be destroyed (*Ezek. 24:15–21*).

**The Week at a Glance:** Despite His people's unfaithfulness, the Lord was willing to give them another chance.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 29.*

## The Beginning of the Relationship

“ “I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord” ’ ” (*Jer. 2:2, 3, NIV*).

Yahweh identified Himself to Moses and declared that He was about to fulfill His promises to Israel (*Exod. 3:6–14, 6:6–8*). God promised to make them His own people and to give them a land of their own to dwell in.

The prophets considered the time of the journey through the desert like a honeymoon period, a time they were loyal to Yahweh and did not follow other gods. The Israelites experienced a great deliverance in the Exodus, and that event could be likened to the inauguration of the “marriage” promises.

**How** did Joshua understand what the Lord, through upholding His end of the covenant, had done and would do for Israel? *See Joshua 24.*

vss. 3, 4 \_\_\_\_\_

vss. 5–7 \_\_\_\_\_

vss. 8–12 \_\_\_\_\_

vs. 13 \_\_\_\_\_

**What** were the things the Israelites needed to do in return? *See Josh. 24:14–18.*

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If you read the words of the Israelites as expressed in the above texts, you can’t help coming away with the fervor and sincerity of their expression. God forbid that we should serve any other gods! After all, look at what He has done for us!

**How often have you made a vow to the Lord, in all sincerity and fervor at the time, only to violate it later? What can you do to better ensure that you will remain faithful to the things you’ve promised to the Lord?**

## *I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .*

► **Key Text:** *Isaiah 54:5*

► **Teach the Class to:**

**Know:** God has a covenant with His people.

**Feel:** The joy of drawing closer to Jesus.

**Do:** Restore, through faith, their relationship with God and others.

► **Lesson Outline:**

### I. Marriage as a Metaphor (*Isa. 54:5; Jer. 2:2, 32*)

**A** For review: How is marriage, as a metaphor, illustrated in Hosea's life? When he took back his unfaithful wife, what did this show Israel? What does this show us that God is prepared to do for us when we stray from Him?

**B** God instructs Jeremiah never to marry. Ezekiel's wife dies suddenly. Hosea marries an adulterous woman and takes her and her children back. Each of these prophets goes beyond preaching God's message but becomes it by enduring adulterous marriage, celibacy, and the death of a spouse. What does your life preach to the world?

### II. Marriage Vows Violated (*Jer. 5:7, Hos. 4:7*)

**A** Why is marriage such an effective comparison for describing Israel's relationship with God?

**B** In every covenant there are promises. What promises does God make to ancient Israel? What relevance do they have for us today?

### III. Fulfillment Beyond Failure (*Jer. 31:31–37*)

**A** In many cultures, when wives marry they traditionally give up their surname and take their husband's surname. What does it mean to be called by God's name, and how do we keep from taking this name in vain?

**B** It was God's plan for Israel to set an example of national greatness to attract the attention of other people who would "cleave to the house of Jacob" (*Isa. 14:1*). Why didn't Israel break away from idols, cling to God, and convert the whole world? How can modern Israel avoid the same mistake? What things must the church cling to and break away from? Why?

► **Summary:** God desires that we remain faithful in love to Him and to our husbands and wives.

## Unfaithfulness of the Bride

The reigns of David and Solomon were characterized by general loyalty to Yahweh. But to prevent his subjects from journeying south to the temple and there getting tempted to defect to Judah, Jeroboam, the first king of Israel in the north, constructed golden calves at Dan and Bethel (*1 Kings 12:28–30*). Since he appointed his own priests, the Levites from all the districts of Israel migrated to Judah (*2 Chron. 11:13–16*). Later kings who led Israel to follow other gods were likened to Jeroboam I (*1 Kings 16:7, 26*).

The prophets condemned Israel and Judah for exchanging God's glory for worthless idols (*Hos. 4:7, Jer. 2:11*) and for resorting to seeking help from other nations, instead of relying on Yahweh (*Jer. 2:18*). This abandoning of trust by Judah in Yahweh, Jeremiah charges, is like forgetting her marriage to Yahweh—forgetting her wedding jewelry and ornaments (*vs. 32*).

**What graphic image do the prophets use to describe Israel's and Judah's unfaithfulness?**

*Jer. 5:7*

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*Ezek. 16:26–29, 34*

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*Hos. 9:1*

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At one moment the relationship is described as like a man and woman on their honeymoon; the next thing you know, the bride is depicted as selling herself into whoredom. Even worse, Ezekiel declares that although most prostitutes charged a fee, Judah was prepared to make a payment for providing her own services (*Ezek. 16:34*)!

Imagine a woman having a loving, caring husband, one who offers to give her so much, who does all for her that he possibly can (*Isa. 5:4*), and yet, she abandons that relationship for a string of men who want her only for carnal pleasure.

It makes no sense, and that's because sin makes no sense. Unless we are surrendered daily to God, sin will cause us to do things just as reckless and foolish.

**What reckless and stupid things have you seen people do because of sin? How can you protect yourself from allowing sin to do the same thing to you?**

## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

**Just for Teachers:** Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners' experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

Divorce is commonplace in many societies. Reasons for divorce range from leaving the toilet seat up (in the United States) to being a left-handed wife (in Japan) to not giving your wife coffee (in Saudi Arabia). In most places, divorce is getting easier to obtain. But that does not diminish the powerful metaphor of marriage applied to God's relationship with the church.

God does not enter into a trial relationship with the church, He does not bail out when things do not go as planned, and He has no alternative relationship in place. His commitment to His church is forever.

### ► **STEP 2—Explore!**

**Just for Teachers:** This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *What do I need to know from God's Word?*

The metaphor of newlyweds applied to God and the church works best not only when we look to God as our Husband but when we live as His new bride. To do this, we must remember the power of His unconditional love. There are many tender references throughout His Word to describe His feelings toward His bride, the church.

**Consider This:** Find some of these references in the Bible.

His love for His bride moves God to do three things:

① God pursues His bride: From the beginning, God has taken the first move. He will always pursue us relentlessly (*1 Kings 6:13, Ps. 132:13, John 15:13, Rev. 3:20*).

C O N T I N U E D 

## Reaping the Fruits of Unfaithfulness

Though the Bible uses the image of an unfaithful woman, men have proved even more likely to be unfaithful to their spouses. Either way, as so often the case, someone commits adultery, thinking to find happiness where they are forbidden to seek it, only to discover misery and suffering instead.

A man left his wife for another woman. Within two years his lover had milked him for every cent he had; she had given him an incurable venereal disease; and, finally, she had left him for another man. Penniless, diseased, and heartbroken, he begged his former wife to take him back. She refused. Amid all this, the man had the audacity to ask, “Why, God, why have You allowed this to happen to me?”

How often the punishment befits the crime. Living in the Land of Promise hinged on the children of Israel’s loyalty to Yahweh. When they forsook Him in favor of other gods, Yahweh was under no obligation to keep protecting them from the armies of other nations. They were left to reap the fruits of their unfaithfulness.

**Read** Jeremiah 5:19. What important principle is seen here? *See also Gal. 6:7.*

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**Read** Jeremiah 5:22. What is the Lord saying to His people? What principle is He explaining to them? What warning is implied here, as well?

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God created us; He knows more about us than we do. And He knows what’s best for us; and because He loves us, He wants what’s best for us. That’s why He commands us to obey Him (*Deut. 10:13*). By following His law, by living in harmony with the principles He has established, we can be protected from so much unnecessary pain and suffering.

**What has been your own experience with the protections and safety that come from obedience? What lessons have you been forced to learn the hard way?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

**2** God protects His bride. Even before the fall of humanity, God in His infinite love had a backup plan to save us from the enemy. He will stop at nothing to protect us (*see Zeph. 3:17*).

**3** God purifies His bride: God is not interested in a temporary relationship. He wants us forever. So, He makes us heaven-ready through the Cross. He makes it possible for us to have a relationship with Him on earth, as well as in heaven. Through the Cross, He gave us the ultimate love-gift: His life, that we may be purified and be one with Him forever (*see Titus 2:13, 14*).

God plays the role of the Groom with perfection. What should be the church's response as His bride?

Our lesson this week dwells on the metaphor of a groom and his bride used to describe God and His church. Based on this fact, what is our role as church members?

Perhaps it would do us well to look to another metaphor within the culture of Jesus' time to understand our role. The church member can be likened to the friend of the groom. Consider the responsibilities of the friend of the groom. The friend played a distinct role. He took care of all the arrangements, he delivered the invitations, and he even guarded the bridal chamber. His job was to ensure that the wedding took place, and his loyalty was to the couple. He made sure nothing got in the way of the happy union.

Church members are the friend of the groom, with a direct responsibility to make the relationship between God and the church body work in the way it was meant to. You cannot be a friend of the groom by limiting your involvement to the divine service hour as a passive participant in the pew. Your role needs to be active.

In this role every church member needs to

- build and support his or her church community,
- promote God's good intentions and desires for His bride,
- invite people to experience God, and
- protect the reputation of the bride.

Divide your class into four groups to develop a doable plan to accomplish one of the four tasks of the friend of the groom.

## Restoration

By allowing Israel and Judah to be taken captive out of the land that had been covenanted to them, God was, in effect, “divorcing” them (*Jer. 3:8*). However, this wasn’t to be the last word. At first Jeremiah declared that the sounds of joy and gladness and the voices of the bride and bridegroom would be silenced (*Jer. 7:34, 16:9, 25:10*). Later he added that the period of silence would be limited, and once more the sound of bride and bridegroom would be heard in the land (*Jer. 33:11*).

**Why** would the sound be considered the sound of joy, of mirth, of gladness? What message was the Lord giving His people then—and us today? See also *John 20:21, Phil. 4:4, 1 Thess. 1:6, 1 John 2:12*.

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**What** promises did God make to His unfaithful bride? *Jer. 25:11, 29:10, Ezek. 16:60*.

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With the threat of punishment the prophets included a ray of hope. When Jeremiah declared that the sounds of joy and gladness and the voices of the bride and bridegroom would be silenced (*Jer. 7:34, 16:9*), he added later that the period of silence would be limited to 70 years (*Jer. 25:11*). Then their oppressors would be overthrown. Hosea spoke of a period for Israel when there would be no pregnancy, no conception (*Hos. 9:11*), but after this would come a time of healing and love (*Hos. 14:4*). So, God’s action is not really punishment but discipline.

The prophets urged Israel to return to Yahweh, promising that He would be faithful in accepting them back. They were confident that Israel would return, but the restoration of the relationship can rest only on one condition—that God’s people in returning to Him should abandon their idolatrous ways, obey His commands, and rely completely on Yahweh again.

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

Finally, a bride glows from basking in the love of her groom. She reflects the difference her new union has made. The church is called to do the same.

► **STEP 3—Practice!**

**Just for Teachers:** This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

**Thought Questions:**

God and the church are compared to the relationship between a groom and his bride—not a master and his slave, a boss and his secretary, or even two best friends. What makes the relationship between a groom and his bride different from the rest is intimacy. What are the elements of your church that speak of intimacy with God? What can you do as a church body to increase the level of intimacy?

**Application Questions:**

One of the natural results of being loving and being loved is joy. Therefore it is only natural to expect Christians to be joyous. Why, then, are there so many joyless Christians? What, if anything, does the focus on doing right for God instead of living in the Lord have to do with joylessness?

► **STEP 4—Apply!**

**Just for Teachers:** In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them to answer this question, **With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?**

Why do churches have so many people on their membership rolls who give little or no evidence of Christian commitment or even conversion? Why do many churches find it difficult to motivate members to give, serve, pray, and share their faith? The answer is that members were allowed to join with no expectations placed on them. You get what you ask for.

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## New Covenant Promises

It's bad enough, a woman being unfaithful to her spouse; yet, the imagery used was that of a woman who sold herself into prostitution. How low! And yet, as we have seen, the Lord was still willing to take Israel back, still willing to forgive, still willing to heal the broken relationship. The Lord promised that He would make atonement for all that Israel has done (*Ezek. 16:63*). Not only would He take them back, but He would do even more for them.

**Read Jeremiah 31:31–37** (*see also Gal. 3:29; Heb. 8:7–13; 10:16, 17*).  
**What is the message for ancient Israel, and for us today? What hope, what promises, are found there for us?**

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Not only would the Lord forgive their sins; He promised to write the law in their hearts, to impress it on their minds (*Jer. 31:33*). This text is the foundation of the gospel, the mystery of grace. This is the new covenant, and it forms the foundation of His promises to all who have given themselves to Jesus in faith and obedience.

We might fall, we might sin, we might make mistakes, but thanks to Jesus—and the fullness of what He has done and is doing for us—God will not forsake us. The plan of salvation, at its heart, offers us all forgiveness; no sin is too great, no sinner too bad, that forgiveness can't be found at the foot of the Cross. This was, in its own context, the message that God gave to ancient Israel; and it is, in our context, that of the light shining from the cross of Calvary, the message that the Lord has for His people today. Even if we have “played the harlot,” our loving and caring husband, the Lord, loves us and wants to take us back. He, though, doesn't force us; instead, He draws us with “bands of love” (*Hos. 11:4*).

**Have you played the harlot? Have you spurned God's love? His words to you are, “Come back! I will heal and forgive.” The question now is, What is your response?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

“Paul mentions two different types of commitment in 2 Corinthians 8:5 (GNB): First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then, by God’s will, they gave themselves to us as well. . . . We call these the first-base commitments. You commit yourself to Christ for salvation and then you commit yourself to other Christians for membership. . . . We define koinonia (fellowship) as ‘being as committed to each other as we are to Jesus Christ.’ ”—Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan), p. 319.

Rick Warren explains how his church requires new members to join a membership class and encourages new members to make a membership covenant that binds them to an active involvement in the church. It is easy to get so involved in everyday life that church involvement gets left by the wayside.

What if the church were to replace your title in the church from church member to minister or disciple? Would this make you feel comfortable or not? Explain. As a class write a job description for church members.

**Further Study:** “The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy,” pp. 25–38, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4.

“Nor were these the only prophecies upon which the exiles had opportunity to base their hope of speedy deliverance. The writings of Jeremiah were within their reach, and in these was plainly set forth the length of time that should elapse before the restoration of Israel from Babylon. ‘When seventy years are accomplished,’ the Lord had foretold through His messenger, ‘I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.’ Jeremiah 25:12. Favor would be shown the remnant of Judah, in answer to fervent prayer. ‘I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.’ Jeremiah 29:14.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 552, 553.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, talk more about the question of how sin causes people to do irrational and reckless things. How is it that people who know better nevertheless allow themselves to be swept away by their passions? What can we do, if anything, to help someone we see heading down that path?
- 2 Talk about the idea of God’s law being a protection. What does that mean? How does it protect us? What does it protect us from? At the same time, too, why is faithfulness to the law and to the principles of living that God has given us no guarantee that we will not suffer?
- 3 Wednesday’s lesson talked about the joy, happiness, and peace that come from being in a saving relationship with our Lord. Talk about just what it is about serving the Lord that brings joy, happiness, and peace. Let each member share his or her own experiences. Seek to learn from each other. Why, in a world full of idols (in whatever form they come), is it important to focus on the blessings and good things that we have been given as children of God?

**Summary:** Though the Israelites failed Yahweh, we must not judge them. After all, how faithful are we—who have them as an example—to our covenant vows to the Lord?