SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WORD OF GOD

2022 BLACK HISTORY MONTH

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

DEDICATION

The Regional Caucus, comprised of the leadership of the nine regional conferences and the coordinators and vice presidents for regional affairs of the North Pacific and Pacific Unions, is pleased to dedicate the *Black History Month Study Guide* to the memory of:





MRS. SHARON FORDHAM

November 4, 1943 - July 18, 2021



ELDER HENRY FORDHAM

August 27, 1943 - July 18, 2021

Elder and Mrs. Fordham's exemplary services in the cause of God, including nine years of presidential leadership of the Allegheny East Conference, will forever remain a hallmark of elegance yoked with compassionate Christian stewardship.

Did You Know historical facts courtesy of Benjamin Baker, Ph.D. For more information visit BlackSDAHistory.org

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SABBATH AFTERNOON - JANUARY 29



- 1841 William Still, famous black Abolitionist, became a Millerite
- 1842 William Foy, a Mulatto, was first to receive the "Gift of Prophecy"
- 1843 Sojourner Truth, famous matron of the Underground Railroad, accepted Adventist teachings
- 1853 Uriah Smith, (editor) wrote against Slavery in the Adventist paper, The Review and Herald
- 1859 Ellen White told Adventist members (contrary to the law) not to return" run-away slaves"
- 1860 The name Seventh-day Adventist was decided upon
- 1861 Ellen White saw in vision that America would pay for the "high crime of slavery"
- 1862 James White (editor) protested against slavery in Adventist paper, The Review and Herald

LESSON 1

JANUARY 29-FEBRUARY 4

Social Justice in The Old Testament

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:

Exodus 20:1, 8-11; Leviticus 25; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; 15:1-11; Psalm 14:4-6; 82:1-4; Proverbs 19:17; 31:9; Isaiah 1:10-20; 10:1-2; 58:6-14; Amos 2:6-8; 5:11-15, 21-24; Micah 6:6-8.

MEMORY TEXT:

"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with your God."

MICAH 6:8 (NIV)

n the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *mishpat* in many instances has a legal and judicial usage, and thus is translated "judgment." However, in numerous occurrences, the context is not in reference to justice in a judicial sense. Rather, the reference is to how people are treated in their social setting. It often stands parallel to *tzedakah* (the word for righteousness) precisely because *tzedakah* actually means "justice" as in fair and equitable dealings in community. So, righteousness in the Old Testament is not simply a private, personal quest or test for purity, but a divine imperative to live faithfully in community and deal justly with all beings.

Throughout the Hebrew scriptures we find that God, on the one hand, is especially on the side of those who have been victimized, wronged, and mistreated. On the other hand, his judgment is harsh on the oppressors and the powerful. The first five books of the Bible, also known as the Torah or Pentateuch, are filled with laws and commands as to how Israel must treat the weak. These social-justice commands made sense when Israelites remembered their experience in Egypt. Social justice was born out of that experience—an experience of slavery, brutality, selfishness, and one-upmanship.

This week we will focus on this social foundation of righteousness, particularly with reference to the most vulnerable, the exploited, the excluded, the marginalized, minoritized, the weakest in the society and those who have few rights. In the Old Testament these included the poor, women (especially widows), orphans, immigrants/foreigners, eunuchs, etc.

SUNDAY: JANUARY 30

Sabbath And Social Justice

Key Text: "But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates." Exodus 20:10 (NKJV)

Read Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15. What specifically do you find in the weekly Sabbath commandment that demonstrates social equity?

In the Old Testament, the Sabbath commandment in all its forms lies at the foundation of social justice and the pursuit of righteousness. The Sabbath commandment legislates a leveling of the social distancing and differences between the employer/master, and the workers and subjected immigrants. The Deuteronomic recitation makes this more precise by the addition of, that they "may rest, as you do." All the powerless, including the animals of labor, are given the same rights as the powerful owner/master. See also Exodus 23:12.

If God gave the Sabbath commandment today in your setting, which other contemporary underclass would He include?

Read Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 25:1-7; Deuteronomy 15:1-11. How do these Sabbath commandments speak specifically to issues of the environment, economics, and the well-being of the most vulnerable in society?

The weekly Sabbath levels the playing field and gives an "alternative to a life defined by production and consumption of goods." (Walter Bruggemann, Sabbath as Resistance, xiii–xiv). It's a weekly pause from the unequal rat-race. The seventh-year Sabbath goes beyond this, and not only gives an ecological advantage to the earth, but also gives the poor an opportunity to save and/or not to starve. And for those burdened by the weight of debts (a major cause of poverty in the Old Testament), this is a legislative relief.

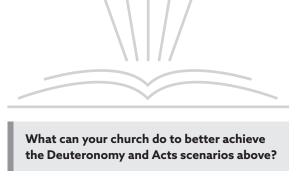
Read Leviticus 25:8-24. How does this Year of Jubilee Sabbath prohibit multi-generational wealth and multi-generational poverty?

This may be the most revolutionary of the Sabbath commandments. It demands that all people have the opportunity to succeed and not be dependent on the success or failure of previous family generations. These are legislative protections that ensure that the poor, helpless, and under-privileged do not remain in that state forever. It is interesting that Jesus, in the mode of the prophet Isaiah, describes his mission in terms of Jubilee, i.e., "the year of the Lord's favor" (Isaiah 61:1, ff. Luke 4:18, ff).

Read Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-35. The early Christian church established a system in which they could say, "there was not a needy person among them."

Read Isaiah 56:1-8. How does this passage speak to the issue of including the excluded?

Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath-keepers should be the most inclusive community. Our community should be a welcoming one, no matter the social status of the "other." We should not build fences to exclude the "other."



MONDAY: JANUARY 31

Social Justice in Early Israel

Key Text: "You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Exodus 22:21 (NKJV)

Read Exodus 22:21-27; Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 24:10-22. Who were the most vulnerable in early, post-Egypt Israel?

The narrative of the children of Israel traveling through the wilderness post-Exodus, portrays a people who quickly forgot their experience of oppression and exploitation during their centuries of slavery. The social-justice laws, especially in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, including the Sabbath commandments (just before they entered Canaan), were meant to emphasize the need to remember not to forget how they were treated as marginalized people in Egypt. Social justice was born out of that experience – an experience of slavery, brutality, selfishness, and one-upmanship.

The verses above specifically highlight the most vulnerable and marginalized: those reduced to helplessness and poverty (widows and orphans in a patriarchal society being the weakest of the weak), and the underprivileged and/or second-class persons (foreigners/aliens/immigrants) among them.

These immigrants and sojourners were the ethnic minorities traveling with the Israelites through the wilderness. These laws in the Torah specifically highlight this group because the children of Israel were an ethnic minority in Egypt and were oppressed and exploited as such.

How would you contemporize these passages to the oppressed and exploited ethnic minority Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) in the Western Developed world?

Read Exodus 22:21-27; 23:6-9; Leviticus 19:9-10, 33-36; 25:35-38; Deuteronomy. 24:6, 12-15, 17-18; 25:13-16. What were some of the actions and social practices that kept people poor and marginalized that God had to legislate against?

God did not leave it up to the individual to guess what actions and practices deprived the vulnerable of the good life. The laws in the Torah were specific: The use and misuse of pledges as collateral; debts and interests; illegal weights; lack of opportunities to make a survivable living; misuse of the court system in favor of the rich and powerful; etc.

Nations like the USA often base their laws on the biblical principles and laws found in the Christian Scriptures. Would it also be appropriate for the secular government to enact social, economic, and environmental laws similar to those found in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy?

Although there are threats of retribution, disaster, curses and even death on those who fail to treat the vulnerable with justice, there are the promises of abundant blessings on those who are socially just (Deuteronomy 15:10–11). Sadly, many Christians use Jesus' citation of Deuteronomy 15:11 ("The poor you will always have with you") as an excuse to not take care of the poor. What such believers fail to recognize, is that in the original Deuteronomy passage, God followed up by saying, "Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land." Thus, because there will always be poor among us, we are commanded to generously care for them.



TUESDAY: FEBRUARY 1

Social Justice in Isaiah

Key Text: "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?" Isaiah 58:6 (NKJV)

The eighth century before the Christian era was a glorious time for both the southern kingdom of Judah (with Jerusalem as its capital) and the northern kingdom (with Samaria as its capital). There was general peace between the divided kingdoms; their territorial boundaries had been expanded, their military was strong; and they boasted of the greatest economic growth and enjoyed significant prosperity. But the latter was only for the wealthy. The poor and marginalized suffered under the oppression and exploitation of the powerful.

During this century God raised up four prophets: Isaiah and Micah in the south; and Amos and Hosea in the north. This is the only century recorded in scripture when God sent that many prophets with oracles of denouncement. These prophets spent much of their time denouncing idolatry. However, next at the level of intensity was their social-justice pronouncement.

Read Isaiah 1:1-17 (esp. 10-17). Why would Isaiah begin his book with such a stern poem?

In the midst of all the prosperity, religiosity, and well-being of the nation, Isaiah sees them not as the people of God, but as Sodom and Gomorrah—Sodomites who have a façade of true worship! That Isaiah begins his book with this oracle, is a strong indication of what he sees as most important. Worship, sacrifices, prayers, and all other liturgical practices (including worship on Sabbath) are inconsequential if they are not tied to justice for the weaker social groups in the society. In 1:16–17 God and Isaiah not only call for ritual purification but for justice, especially for the weakest of the weak.

Read Isaiah 1:18-20. In this context, what are the "sins" to which he refers? (cf. 1:21-25)

For Isaiah the sins of social injustice are just as heinous in the sight of God as idolatry. We must note that reference to "fatherless and widows" is an example of the most vulnerable in an ancient patriarchal society. For God's people to sideline these most oppressed of the marginalized in the community was an abomination. This parallels the words of James 1:27, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." How often we focus on the personalized aspect of this verse, and ignore the social dimension!

Read Isaiah 58:1-8; 13-14. Note the social justice component of fasting rather than the traditional ritualistic practice. How do you think Isaiah intended his readers to tie-in Sabbath keeping with his social-justice oracle in vs. 6-7?

In light of Sunday's lesson, Isaiah may have had a broader, social-justice understanding of true Sabbath keeping (that is more tied to Isaiah 58:6-7) than only the traditional interpretation that is usually given.



WEDNESDAY: FEBRUARY 2

Social Justice in The Minor Prophets

Key Text: "But let justice run down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream." Amos 5:24 (NKJV)

The other three eighth-century Old Testament prophets mentioned in yesterday's lesson were, who we call Minor Prophets. We will use the oracles of Micah (south) and Amos (north) as illustrations of spokesmen of God who attacked the national ideology of formal worship and religiosity, while rejecting the fact that social justice for the marginalized was part and parcel of the essence of true religion (cf. James 1:27 as noted in yesterday's lesson).

Micah, from the town of Moesheth, seemed to be one of the rural upper class. Amos was a wealthy shepherd (lit. "sheep breeder"), an owner of an estate who hires shepherds. It is significant that these powerful men (like Isaiah who was an aristocrat, who had access to high political circles, including the king), were the ones fighting for justice for the weak and vulnerable.

Read Amos 2:6-8; 5:7-15, 21-24; 8:4-6; Micah 3:1-4, 8-12; 6:6-8. Note how these prophet-poets bring up the same issues that were clearly denounced in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. Note also how they parallel the messages of Isaiah in denouncing the formalized worship that was divorced from justice.

These prophets were unrelenting in lashing out against the unjust practices that kept the marginalized in a state of impoverishment, deprivation, and disadvantage. These oppressors and exploiters used the power of their status in society, and their connections to the religious and political power-brokers to take advantage of the disadvantaged. The prophets were unrelenting. They demanded justice for the underclass. They were not interested in winning favors. They lashed out without fear or favor. For example, Amos not only lambasted the powerful merchant men; but called out their wives, referring to them as over-fed fatted "cows of Bashan" who were complicit in the oppressive behavior (Amos 4:1–3). And Micah referred to the religious and political leaders as cannibals who distorted justice at so many levels (Micah 3:1–4, 8–12).

Can a Christian harbor racial animosity and perform acceptable worship? How would the eighthcentury prophets react to this contemporary practice?

How far should members of the church go in being involved in social-justice issues? Is it okay to denounce publicly, political, civic, and religious leaders if they are enabling social injustice?

In April 2021 the North American Division issued a statement, which said in part, "We ... fully support this conscientious witness of our members, especially our young adults, who advocate for and participate in the non-violent dismantling of such dehumanizing policies and practices that deny our one humanity. Such advocacy fulfills the biblical calls of Micah 6:6-8 and Isaiah 58."



THURSDAY: FEBRUARY 3

Social Justice in The Psalms

Key Text: "He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppressor." Psalm 72:4 (NKJV)

Read Psalm 9:12, 18; 10:14-18; 12:5; 14:6; 34:6; 35:10; 40:17; 82:1-4; 113:7-9. Note how God is a defender of the poor and afflicted. How would you respond to those who argue that these passages are in reference to the spiritual poor and should not be interpreted socially or economically?

Many students of scripture, in their attempts to minimize its social dimension, have spiritualized the poor and similarly afflicted persons in the Psalms This was especially prominent during the Intertestamental period (the centuries between the Old and New Testaments). This position continues to pervade biblical interpretation by those who, due to political and social reasons, reject the biblical teachings that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed. Here in these passages (as they were in the passages in the previous lessons), we find the psalmist emphasizing that God will bring salvation to the afflicted and helpless. There will be a great reversal, a social inversion. God will lift up the helpless and oppressed, and will bring down the wicked oppressors, calling them to account.

Read Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14. How much does God expect the political leaders to be involved in issues of social justice?

Here, Solomon as a psalmist, specifically asked for God to endow him with justice to defend the poor and afflicted, and to crush the oppressor. Leaders need to see their responsibility as being defenders of the weak, the excluded, and those in distress, on the one hand; and prosecutors of the powerful who oppress the marginalized, on the other hand. Yes, God is the ultimate avenger. But he has empowered leaders to call the oppressors of his people to justice.

Read Psalm 94:1-10. Throughout the Old Testament we find time and time again God avenging his people, especially those who are oppressed and marginalized. At times he allows Israel to participate in acts of vengeance. Would it be appropriate for God's people today to participate in acts of vengeance against those who enable and participate in oppression?

The New Testament addresses this directly. In Romans 12, the apostle Paul in addressing a number of social ills, states clearly, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (v. 19). And in the epistle of James, chapter 5, the apostle rips into the rich and powerful for their oppression of the economic poor and oppressed. But like the practice of Jesus in the Gospels and Paul in Romans, he does not call on Christians to participate in acts of vengeance and violence against the evil oppressors. Instead, he calls for patience (5:7). However, James, Jesus, and the Psalmist envision a great inversion, a great reversal, when God will lift up the oppressed, and bring down the oppressor, and make them pay dearly for their sins.

Explain why Jesus' ministry effected a change from the Old Testament theology (system) of vengeance?

FRIDAY: FEBRUARY 4

Social Justice in Proverbs

Key Text: "Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy." Proverbs 31:9 (NKJV)

The book of Proverbs contains a collection of sayings that are practical. For the most part they are proverbs, not promises. They are true in their context. Thus, there are numerous proverbs that are positive about wealth and the wealthy; but there are many that are negative. However, like the rest of Scripture, here in Proverbs, God is on the side of the poor. But it is clear that he hates poverty.

Read Proverbs 11:1; 16:11; 19:5, 9, 28; 20:10, 23; 15:25; 22:22, 28; 23:10; 24:23-26. Note how the very things that the Torah proscribes, the Proverbs has God detesting.

Many persons tend to focus on a limited selection from Proverbs as to why people are poor: Such things as laziness, failure to plan, pursuit of pleasure over work, and just plain sinfulness. Unlike the Prophets who almost singularly saw the cause of poverty as stemming from injustice and oppression, Proverbs, true to its nature, has an expanded list. To focus on one area and ignore the other, does not do justice to the collection.

There are numerous passages that speak of how the poor descended into poverty: being cheated by false weights, movement of landmarks, misuse of pledges, partiality of judges or by testimonies of false witnesses. Proverbs 22:22–23 is especially firm in speaking against exploiting the poor because of their situation, and using the court system to oppress them. The passage warns that God will take up their case and destroy the oppressors.

Reflect on the judicial and law enforcement system in 21st century America. Does race play a role in the oppression of BIPOC persons?

Read Proverbs 31:1-9. How do these proverbs speak to the attitude of rulers and the powerful? What is the message of how to care for those who are oppressed and in distress?

Here we have a very practical guide for both the strong leader and the suffering marginalized who are in distress. It speaks of the danger of addictive substances that will impair the ruler and cause him or her to make decisions that will deprive the oppressed of their rights. On the other hand, the one in distress needs medicinal care in order to survive their debilitating situation.

In conclusion, Scripture is clear that God is on the side of the vulnerable, weak, and marginalized. God is opposed to those who do not share this worldview. The ancient sage was correct in writing, "He who oppresses the poor [or any marginalized children of God] shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God" (Proverbs 14:31, NIV).



Discussion Questions:

- 1. Since the civility of a society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable members, on a scale of 1-10, how would you rate the country where you live?
- 2. How would you rate the religious organization to which you belong?
- 3. How would you rate your personal involvement?

SABBATH AFTERNOON - FEBRUARY 5



1863 John Byington, former active Abolitionist was elected first Seventh-day Adventist president

1871 Group of Colored "listeners," first in the South, reported in Edgefield Junction, Tennessee

1874 Anna Knight, the first black S.D.A. woman missionary, was born in Jones County Mississippi

1883 First black S.D.A. church was organized in Edgefield Junction Tennessee

1890 Second black S.D.A. church was organized in Louisville, Kentucky

1895 Edson White opened the first church school for blacks aboard the boat, "The Morning Star"

1896 The General Conference commissioned purchase of Oakwood land (360 acres at cost of \$8,000.00)

1900 Black S.D.A. membership was approximately 100

LESSON 2

FEBRUARY 5-11

Social Justice in the Ministry of Jesus

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:

Matthew 5:7; 19:16-21; Luke 18:1-8 (NIV); Luke 10:30-36

MEMORY TEXT:

"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets"

MATTHEW 7:12 (NIV)

he concept of social justice has differing descriptions in the prophetic word as in Micah 6:8, Matthew 7:12 (the Golden Rule) and Luke 4:18–19, all of which speak to the same Divine principle. This is the principle of action enunciated by Jesus when He admonished His disciples (then and now), that while expressing proper concern for the worshipful regulations of religion, to not neglect "the more important matters of the law [such as] justice and mercy." Matthew 23:12–36.

Nevertheless, many Christians, especially those who are theologically conservative, are suspicious of the term, "social justice." One reason for such fear is that the terms "social" and "justice" suggest to them non-religious activities or secular projects outside of the gospel commission. This unfortunate view, shared by many Seventh-day Adventists, is best exposed by prayerful reflection on the compassionate ministry of our Lord.

Social Justice therefore, may be defined as the Divine mandate "to make right" one's relationship with God, others and natural creation. In this light, its concerns assure equal opportunity for all, notwithstanding one's religious affiliation, legal, political, economic status or other circumstances of birth and national origin. Join me as we explore the existence of these various qualities of social justice in the ministry of Jesus.

SUNDAY: FEBRUARY 6

The Lowly Birth of Jesus

Key Text: "And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." Luke 2:7 (NKJV)

In Genesis 3:15, we are given the very first promise of the Messiah. Why do you think God waited for four thousand years to fulfill this pledge?

Read Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 2:1-7.

In Isaiah 11:1–10, the prophet identified two totally different advents of the Messiah. In one prophecy He's called the shoot of a stump or a tender child and in another the Son of David, the powerful second king of ancient Israel. (See Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:32–33.)

What did the prophet mean when he described the promised Messiah as "a shoot from the stump of Jesse"?

Oxford dictionary defines stump as "the bottom part of a tree left projecting from the ground after most of the trunk has fallen or cut down. Isaiah indicated that the Messiah would come when the family of Jesse, including king David, who had been like a cedar in Israel, would be cut down and only a "stump" of Jesse, father of the ancient king David, would remain.

Read Matthew 13:53-58. Discuss the ancient question: Can anything good come out of a ghetto? Are there modern-day positive examples you can name?

Witness in the four gospels the obscurity and poverty of Joseph and Mary, descendants of Jesse and the royal house of David. Witness Joseph's humiliation when Mary was about to give birth and he sought to claim his royal lineage as advantage to rent a room in an upscale inn and was turned away. Witness Mary, also a descendant of David, having no midwife to help deliver her firstborn to rub him with salt according to their tradition, thus preventing the odors of afterbirth and infections. Witness her placing Him in the trough used to hold food for the animals. Then, see her gently wrapping Him in swaddling clothes, the strips of linen left behind by shepherds who used them to protect newly born lambs

Read Luke 4:18-19: Some Bible writers have applied these verses to the spiritual not the physical deliverance of those burdened by social handicaps and injustice. Are they correct? (See Isaiah 58:6-10, 61:1-2)

Jesus was born into a society ruled by racism perpetrated by Rome. Because poverty rides the coattails of sin, He became sin for us so that we can be saved from its power and penalty. In doing so He attended to the holistic needs of humanity. He valiantly labored to restore the physical as well as the spiritual dignity of those who were socially impoverished.



If the birth of Jesus took place today, what cultural groups do you consider God would favor with such a privilege and why?

What is the difference between sympathy and empathy? What are the evidences in Jesus' life that He had both? Why are both necessary for Christian service? How are they attained?

MONDAY: FEBRUARY 7

Jesus and the Status of Women

Key Text: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Genesis 1:27 (NKJV)

The equality of the genders seen at creation had, by Jesus' time on earth, been disastrously distorted. Women were regarded as intellectually, morally, spiritually and physically inferior to men; as seen in scripture, they literally didn't count.

Read Genesis 1:26-27; Matthew 14:14-21; 15:33-38.

From birth until marriage, usually at a very early age (12-14), women were under their father's authority and thereafter, under that of a husband, chosen by their father. They couldn't hold or inherit property until God intervened (see Joshua 17:3-6). In effect, women were treated as chattel slaves, beings without moral or legal authority, unable to vote, own property, attain education and in many cases, leave their homes without permission. Jesus' attitude and treatment was not just different, it was revolutionary.

Among the ways by which Jesus succeeded in enhancing womanhood are (fill in the blanks):

1.	Addressing f	females	directly in	public,	something ma	les in His c	lay did not do.
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Examples are: John 4:7-18 ______ Luke 10:41-42 _____

2. Addressing females as "Woman," a polite term avoided by men.

Examples are: John 2:4 ______ Luke 13:12 _____

3. Addressing females as "Daughter" in public

Examples are: Matthew 9:22 ______ Mark 5:34 _____

4. The vital use of females in His parables.

Examples are: Matthew 13:33 _____ Luke 15:8-9 ____

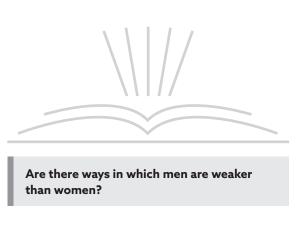
5. His miraculous female healings.

Examples are: Mark 1:29-31 _____ Luke 8:43-44 _____

6. His including women as part of His itinerant evangelistic team Luke 8:1-3

Not to be overlooked is that while being purposely active in enhancing the status and roles of women, Jesus did not gloss over sin in their lives. Their sin was not condoned, but confronted. He then provided them forgiveness and the regenerating freedoms of repentance and obedience.

Read 1 Peter 3:7. To what is Peter referring when he states that women are the weaker gender? What are some of the ways in which women suffer discrimination in their homes, in our denomination, in society in general?



TUESDAY: FEBRUARY 8

Jesus and the Socially Marginalized

Key Text: "But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner." Luke 19:7 (NKJV)

Many first-century Jewish leaders considered those socially marginalized as outside the reach of God's mercy.

Read Luke 5: 27-30; Luke 19:1-7; Mark 12: 38-40.

Jesus attacked the marginalization of outcasts, whether their status resulted from: a) troublesome conduct such as prostitution or tax-collection, or b) physical conditions as blindness and leprosy, or c) were culturally imposed as gender, color and national origin. By His compassionate interaction with people in every category, He demonstrated that all were worthy to hear the good news of the gospel.

Did Jesus distinguish between His treatment of those responsible for their sufferings and those who were not? What examples can you give?

Read Luke 4:16-18.

Jesus inaugurated His public ministry by citing Isaiah's liberating Messianic promises to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed (Isaiah 61:1–3), indicating that social justice was a significant priority of His mission. He unconditionally mingled with outcasts instead of perpetuating their condemnation required by existing Pharisaic codes. He restored them by confronting the sin at the root of their conduct. As a result, Jewish leaders found Jesus too welcoming. They accused Him of being a "friend of tax collectors and sinners," (Luke 5:30). They labelled Him a glutton and a drunkard (Matthew 11:19 & Luke 7:34).

Read Matthew 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:29-31. How did Jesus respond to His critics?

What are some attitudes and practices we should address in our Church to help us to readily welcome outcasts like bikers, addicts, homosexuals or homeless persons?

The sociological concept known as, "The Protestant Ethic" is the belief that hard work will inevitably produce success and further that the degree of God's favor may be judged by the volume of one's material acquisitions.

Do you agree with these conclusions? If not, why?

Jesus aggressively condemned the self-righteousness and prejudice of those who were guilty of defrauding others. Their actions included unholy taxation, stealing of other's goods and denial of opportunity to acquire life's necessities. It also included the evil of looking down upon the very ones they had wounded, regarding them as cursed by God, unworthy of His blessings and the courtesies of civil society. In other words, they were thought of as an underclass, to be logically denied desirable jobs, housing, bank loans, and other common privileges of society.



Jesus pronounced eight "WOES" against the perpetrators of injustice (Matthew 23:13, 14, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29). Which one do you regard as the summation of them all and why?

WEDNESDAY: FEBRUARY 9

Jesus and the Sexually Abused

Key Text: "Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst." John 8:9 (NKJV)

Read Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50; John 12;1-8.

The dinner at the home of Simon, the former leper, was so significant that it is among the few events reported in all four gospels. Luke alone identifies Simon as a Pharisee and includes the parable of the two debtors which is a commentary on how Jesus dealt with the sexually abused.

How many settings do you recall where Jesus was either a guest or provided a meal? What significance can be attached to this aspect of His ministry.

In Christ's days, houses of the wealthy were built around an open courtyard where meals were served. Participants reclined around a table with feet stretched behind them so the servants could wash their feet. Common people were allowed into the courtyard to listen to the words of a popular guest, which explains how the Mary was present. Luke said that before the meal was served, a woman, evidently Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus, (John 12:2) stood behind Jesus, tearfully wiping His feet with her hair, kissing and anointing them with the perfume from an alabaster vial.

Read John 12:2-3. If you had the privilege to be at such a banquet in a crowd of commoners at the table with Jesus, what would you risk to thank Him for His grace to you?

Read Luke 7:36-38.

Luke also mentions that Mary was known in the city as having lived a "sinful life." Shocked by her presence, Simon condemned her in his thoughts as a "sinner," their popular euphemism for a practicing prostitute, a publicly despised woman. He also impugned the integrity of Jesus, saying to himself, "If this man were a prophet, He would know what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him!" However, in *The Desire of Ages* (chapter 62, p. 566), based on John's version, Ellen White wrote that Simon, himself, had led her into sin.

Read John 8:1-11. Compare Jesus' responses to the accusers of the woman found in adultery to those He gave at Simon's feast: a) to Simon (Luke 7: 39-43), b) to Judas (John 12:4-7), c) to the disciples (Matthew 26: 8-13), d) to the indignant guests (Mark 14:4-9), and e) to "the woman, herself" (Luke 7: 48-50).

Notice further, Jesus' compassion for guilty Mary; Luke states that while talking to hypocritical Simon "He turned to the woman" (Luke 7:44). In other words, even while finishing his talk with Simon, Jesus addressed Mary honoring her with His attention, demonstrating again, His compassion for the abused of society. (Underlining Supplied)



Compare Jesus' reactions in these two encounters with the sexually abused, with those of the general society, your denomination, your local church congregation.

THURSDAY: FEBRUARY 10

Jesus and the Two Establishments

Key Text: " ... And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Matthew 22:21 (NKJV)

Read Matthew 2:11-14; 22:15-22; 23:1-12; 27:11-23; Luke 13:31-35.

The life of Jesus was constantly impacted by both of the Divinely established forms of governance: the Religious (with responsibility in sacred matters) and the Civil for direction in the secular arena. Both forms have, throughout history, suffered from the mistakes of leaders good and bad. However, at the time of Jesus' birth, they were both functioning at the lowest levels of corruption, levels that greatly advantaged the rich and powerful while ruthlessly depressing the suffering masses. In Isaiah's words, "gross darkness" covered the land (Isaiah 60:2).

A) Jesus' reaction to injustice in the religious establishment

Read Matthew 23:13-36; John 2:13-17.

Jesus fearlessly spoke "truth to the leading powers of the religious establishment." He observed the social evils perpetrated by leaders of the religious system: the unfair taxation, the robbing the poor to fatten the pockets of the rich, the forbidding of the so-called lower class to enjoy the worship and lifestyle privileges of the "upper class," and He castigated them soundly.

What do these scriptures this tell you about Jesus' disdain for social injustice in the church? By what standards should we define social oppression?

Discuss What is meant by righteous indignation? What is its difference from common anger?

B) Jesus reaction to injustice in the secular establishment

Read Luke 13:31-32; Matthew 22: 15-22

The intent of His inquirers was to trap Jesus into saying something that would result in His incarceration and probably death at the hands of their Roman rulers and thus abort His ministry. Understanding this, Jesus did not frontally attack the evil secular government in which they were captives. Rather He wisely pointed them to the justice loving God of scripture (Micah 6:8). He knew that obedience to Him would supersede that of rapacious Rome (Acts 5:29). He refused to frontally attack Rome, not because He was insensitive to their evils or was afraid to die should He so do, but, as He stated on other occasions - His "time had not yet come" (John 7:6-8).

What do you make of the following quote regarding Abraham's rescue of Lot?

"It was seen that righteousness is not cowardice, and that Abraham's religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed. His heroic act gave him a widespread influence among the surrounding tribes." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 135



If Jesus were living in our democratic society today how would His social protests differ from those He engaged under the totalitarian rule of Rome? What forms of protest do you believe to be appropriate for Seventh-day Adventist Christians today?

FRIDAY: FEBRUARY 11

Further Thought

In his 1951 essay, "Passing the Buck," Peter Maurin observed that in the first centuries of Christianity the poor were fed, clothed and sheltered at the personal expense of Christians, and the pagans said, "See how they love each other." He continued to express that because the poor are now no longer fed, clothed, and sheltered at the Christian's personal sacrifice, but at tax payer's expense, the pagans now declare, "See how they pass the buck!"

Some Christians, are not guilty of "Passing the Buck" but of serving from misguided motives. That is, they serve with the expectation of repayment for things they do — a quid pro quo: "I'll do this, but I hope there is something in it for me. A promotion, praise, or payment of some kind." However, Jesus calls Christians to follow His example of unselfish servanthood. He challenges believers to bless, benefit, and befriend those who cannot repay for or return our investment in them. There are times when we may be called publicly, merely expecting that like lights our efforts will glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). At other times we may do serve privately, knowing that our rewards are the intrinsic blessings of helping someone else and the calm trust that what we do matters deeply to the God who promises to remember and reward every kind thought and act. (Matthew 25:34–40)

Black History Month is an excellent time "for social justice inventory." We invite you to grow by this month's study by checking your responses to the questions below.



Discussion Questions:

- 1. Should our attempts to improve unjust government laws and actions be made corporately or individually or both? Why?
- 2. Which way of "doing justice" is more important: helping the wounded to heal or working to prevent their being wounded, i.e., by disarming the persons and systems responsible? Which was Jesus' primary method?
- 3. Given the example of Jesus, would you identify "social justice" as a vital concern of gospel ministry?
- 4. Are you, your family and the members of you church "passing the buck" when it comes to working for social justice in your community as well as in your congregation?

SABBATH AFTERNOON - FEBRUARY 12



- 1909 Black S.D.A. membership was approximately 1,500
- 1918 Black S.D.A. membership was approximately 3,500
- 1921 First failed appeal by black leaders for a colored conference, membership approximately 4,700
- 1930 Second failed appeal for colored conferences, membership approximately 8,000
- 1932 J.L. Moran elected as first black president of Oakwood College
- 1936 Message Magazine was originated
- 1943 General Conference appealed to black leaders to begin conferences membership 17,891
- 1945 Lake Region, Northeastern and Allegheny became first regional conferences

LESSON 3

FEBRUARY 12-18

Social Justice and the Book of Revelation

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:

Exodus 34:6-7; Isaiah 1:16-17; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Micah 6:6-8; Zechariah 7:9-10; Jeremiah 22:3; Psalm 82:3, 89:14; Matthew 25:36-41; Luke 4:18-19; James 1:27; 1 John 3:17; Revelation 21:1-4

MEMORY TEXT:

"And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

REVELATION 15:3 (KJV)

wo thousand years after John's Apocalypse was written, we find ourselves mourning over justice deficits expressed in persistent poverty, mass incarceration, educational disparities, healthcare inequalities, world hunger, gender inequity, food insecurity, unemployment, homelessness, gun violence, income disparities, racial discrimination, child abuse, refugee crises, human rights violations, assaults on voting rights, human sexual trafficking, and modern slavery. Revelation anticipates the end of all suffering because of these conditions and promises that very soon Justice and Truth will completely triumph at Christ's Second Coming (Revelation 11:18).

However, in eagerly looking and longing for His Second Coming we must avoid the temptation to disconnect from the opportunities to witness to His just kingdom in our current environment. "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10) is a call to work in the now, while we await the "not yet." Adventist pioneers understood how important it was to engage in our "now" world. In the *Review and Herald*, January 31, 1865. James White asserted that every Adventist "has really as much interest in this old world as any man" and "here he must stay and act his part until the Prince of Peace shall come and reign."

In this week's lesson, we will study examples of God's justice in Revelation's judgments and the ways they speak to us today.

SUNDAY: FEBRUARY 13

About God's Special Book—Revelation, aka, The Apocalypse

Key Text: "And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." Revelation 15:3 (KJV).

Read Revelation 2:24; Revelation 1:1.

John, the disciple of Christ, is believed to have written the book of Revelation sometime between 94 and 95 A.D. He reports having been exiled because of his witness for the Word of God in Revelation 1:9. The time of his exile concurs with the persecution launched under the Roman Emperor Domitian (81–96) who died by assassination AD 96. In this final book of God's Holy Word, John is not focused on prophetic beasts (13:1,11), ravenous birds (19:21), or unburied cadavers (11:8). It is the "revelation of Jesus Christ" and His activity in His church and in His world. It is the metanarrative of His Lordship over every force or personality that opposes Him and the principles of His kingdom; it presents Jesus in its beginning, Jesus in its middle, and Jesus in the end!

This amazing book exposes the end-time enemies of righteousness, highlights the rescue of our lost world, and elevates the victory of Christ over the end-time forces of evil, oppression, and injustice. Revelation presents God's vision of a just world!

Why are the local audiences important to our discussion of injustice? Read Revelation 1:1, 4, 9; 2:9,10; 22:8.

John's local audience consisted of seven of the churches across Asia Minor (Revelation 1:4). These churches are identified as the congregations in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. His audiences consisted of real people—men and women, boys and girls, who lived out their faith under extreme difficulty within the oppressive Roman Empire. These audiences knew firsthand what it felt like to live under injustice, unfairness, discrimination, persecution, marginalization, stigmatization, stereotyping, criminalization, and "othering".

Read Revelation 1:1.

Why was this book written?

"This highly comforting book declares that although the situation in the world seems threatening and hostile to God's people, and the future might appear gloomy, God in Christ Jesus, (the Lamb (ἀρνίον) mentioned 28 times in Revelation) is indeed still 'the master of history.' He is the God above and beyond all history who will always be with his people." (See Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, Andrews University Press. Kindle Edition).



the members of the seven churches. How do you imagine it felt to be stigmatized by and banished from society? List ways you would cope with your marginalization. List persons today who are outcasts and identify biblical, principles for how to offer ministry to their varied situations.

MONDAY: FEBRUARY 14

The Resistance of The Remnant (Part 1)

Key Text: "But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden." Revelation 2:24 (KJV).

Where in Revelation are believers first identified as the "remnant"?

The first time the Greek word for "remnant" is applied to believers in Revelation is in Revelation 2:24: "to the rest I say. ..."In Revelation, the word *loipos* (rest, remnant) is used three times to describe the faithful people of God in 2:24, 11:13, and 12:17. This use of the remnant terminology in 2:24 points to a pocket of faithful resistance to the compromises of Thyatira, an important commercial city with many guilds for its tradespersons. The Thyatiran guilds, however, required compromise by true believers. New Testament scholar Leon Morris, explained the influence of local guilds: "The strong trade guilds in this city would have made it very difficult for any Christian to earn his living without belonging to a guild. Membership involved attendance at guild banquets, and this in turn meant eating meat which had first been sacrificed to an idol. ... That these meals all too readily degenerated into sexual looseness made matters worse." See Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, 1976, 71.

Why are they called "the remnant?" (I Kings 17;18; Revelation 2:20, 24, 25).

They are called the remnant because they are the Elijah's of Thyatira. As Elijah resisted the evil prophets of Ahab and Jezebel so have the faithful of Thyatira refused to compromise with evil in their day, Thus, this first appearance of the "remnant" in Revelation evokes faith versus-apostasy, protest (as in "protestant") versus conformity, and resistance versus accommodation. The suffering of the remnant in Revelation 2:24 also has profound implications for the Church today in its stand against all injustice, including threats to liberty of conscience. The remnant of Revelation are the *spiritual Israel of today*. (See Romans 9:22–27; 11:1–5; Revelation 12:17.)

Why is the remnant in Thyatira important?

The faithful remnant in Thyatira show us that it is not simply the physical church, but the remnant image in 2:24 that sets the framework for an obedient subset of the church. The commendation of the remnant in Thyatira shows it is NOT simply membership in the visible church that counts believers among the remnant; it is the covenant commitment of all true believers who are willing "to stand and be counted" in the resistance of evil in its various forms (e.g., Daniel 3:16–18; Micah 6:6–8; Isaiah 58:1–12).



Realizing, as Ellen White wrote in *The Great Controversy*, p. 390, that" ... the great body of Christ's true followers are still to be found in their (Babylon's) communion," how busy is your church in obeying Revelation 18:4's command to call them out?

TUESDAY: FEBRUARY 15

The Resistance of The Remnant (Part 2)

Key Text: "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations." Revelation 2:26 (KJV)

Read I Kings 18:17-21. How are we reminded in the Old Testament of Remnant character today?

The remnant in the Old Testament demonstrates faithfulness under fire. Old Testament Jezebel was a brutal tyrant whose influence helped corrupt her husband, Ahab. Her actions consequently signaled a war on the remnant of the nation of Israel by promoting idolatry and pagan worship. In Thyatira however, Jezebel "seduced" God's servants, but the remnant did not yield. One lesson here is that faithfulness is resistance to evil and non-conformity to it. Whether in the church or in the government, faithful resistance is the sure sign of remnant identity (compare Daniel 3:16–18; Revelation 12:17; 14:12).

What declaration by Elijah has challenged believers through the ages to stand in opposition to any compromise with evil? Read 1 Kings 18:21.

Elijah's experience with Ahab and Jezebel forms the background to the Letter to Thyatira. His courageous cry, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him," has been a clarion call through the ages for God's people to stand against evil in all its forms. Similarly, his Carmel confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18:16–40) reminds us that "standing up" often not just words but faith-filled active involvement for truth.

Read Revelation 2:25, 26.

God's promise to give the Remnant faithful "power over the nations" is part of the reversal, vindication, and elevation motif that runs throughout prophetic literature (see Genesis 12;1; Daniel 7:24–25; Psalm 2:8–9; and Revelation 5:5–6; 6:11,18:2; with the highest expression in Philippians 2:9–11). Satan, whether through the citizens and systems of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome or modern-day kingdoms, has sought continuously to limit, oppress and shame faithful believers. But the promise to the Remnant is "power (authority) over the nations."

What do you think is meant by the "authority over the nations" promised to the Remnant? Read the following excerpt from the Feb 9, 2020, New York Times:

"For years, nuns around the world have worked to help trafficked and enslaved people break free from the conditions that ensnare millions of men, women and children. They have <u>prayed for them</u>, and they have <u>offered hospitality</u>. On Sunday, they marched on St. Peter's Square for them. 'There have never been as many slaves in the world as there are today,' Gabriella Bottani, the international coordinator of <u>Talitha Kum</u>, a global network of nuns that assists trafficked persons, said in kicking off the march. 'Only together we can break the chain of trafficking and slavery'." (Underlining Supplied)



Suppose you were invited to the "March Against Human Trafficking." What would be your response and why? To what extent can we stand with others in a shared fight against injustice? How can we know when to stand with others and when to stand separately?

WEDNESDAY: FEBRUARY 16

The Commandments of God and End-Time Witness

Key Text: "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 12:17 (KJV)

What attitude and actions characterize God's people in the end-time?

Seventh-day Adventists firmly believe and teach that God's people perform sacred work and witness in "the last days" (see Joel 2:27–28; Daniel 12:4; Matthew 24:1–14, 42–44; Luke 21:25–26; 2 Timothy 3:1–5; 2 Peter 3:3–4; 1 John 2:18). As such, Revelation predicts the appearance of an end-time people whose obedience to the "commandments of God" identifies them as God's remnant (*loipos*) people.

What does "keeping the commandments" point us to in the rest of the Bible?

The expression "keep the commandments" occurs fifty-one times in the Old Testament and is a recognizable method of urging covenant loyalty upon the Old Testament community. Solomon's summary went beyond Israel's covenant when he wrote that the keeping of the commandments was "the whole duty" of man (Ecclesiastes 12:14). John's recognition in Revelation 12:17 lifts the 10 commandments beyond the 613 commandments (365 prohibitions and 248 positive commands) created by the Rabbis. Jesus' summary of the 10 commandments welds them onto their foundational basis—love your God and love your neighbor (Matthew 22:40; Mark 12:31).

What does "keeping the commandments" tell us about the end-time people of God?

God's covenant with His people includes an "end-time Israel" whose commandment keeping includes care for the most vulnerable—the widow (Isaiah 1:17; Zechariah 7:10), "the weak and the fatherless" (Psalm 82:3–4), "the voiceless [mute]" (Proverbs 31:8–9); the destitute (Psalm 82:3), "fatherless child" Exodus 22:2; "the needy and the poor" (Deuteronomy 15:11), and the oppressed (Isaiah 58:5–7). In fact, true observance of the Sabbath (Isaiah 58:13–14) accounts for the good of God's most vulnerable people (see Isaiah 58:1–12).

Please respond to Adventist Pioneer J.N. Andrew's assessment of church members who avoided taking action against moral evil by declaring it "political"? Elder Andrews wrote, "This sin [of slavery] is snugly stowed away in a certain package which is labeled 'Politics.' They deny the right of their fellow men to condemn any of the favorite sins which they have placed in this bundle; and they evidently expect that any parcel bearing this label will pass the ... judgment of the great day—without being examined. Should the All-seeing Judge, however, inquire into their connection with this great iniquity, they suppose the following answer will be entirely satisfactory to Him: 'I am not all the censurable for anything said or done by me in behalf of slavery; for O Lord, Thou knowest, it was a part of my politics!' ("Slavery," Review and Herald, October 25, 1864, p. 172).



Are there systemic evils today that we do not address, because some in our communities consider those issues "political" and not "spiritual"? How can we discern the difference?

THURSDAY: FEBRUARY 17

Adventist Pioneers Speak Truth to Power

Key Text: "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon." Revelation 13:11 (KJV)

Revelation 13:11–18 has not always been interpreted by Adventist Bible students as simply an end-time prophecy with restricted religious significance. In fact, scholars in Revelation have consistently seen in 'the beast who looks like a lamb, but speaks like a dragon" one of the Dragon's two allies in his war against the remnant (see 13:1–10). They also boldly identified civil, social, and political fulfillments of the lamblike beast. Unfortunately, in the last 100 years, this passage ceased being preached as a challenge to injustice current or prophesied, and is now mostly treated as a prophecy of approaching coercion of conscience related to Sunday worship.

How did pioneer Adventists speak truth to civil injustice in their understanding of Revelation 13:11-18?

Early Adventists were unequivocal in their denunciations of the Lamb-like Beast of Revelation 13, which they viewed as America. They used the presence of then-current civil injustice to demonstrate America's contradiction "to all thy loud professions, fair." They saw in American enslavement prophetic validation of the contrast between the appearance and the actions of the lamb-like beast of Revelation 13:11–18. They were as stridently opposed to the enslavement of Africans as they were against conscience-compromising Sunday Blue laws. Uriah Smith, in 1853, penned a poem in the *Review and Herald* which denounced the contradictions of slavery in a free country and validated that America was the two-sided beast of Revelation 13. It reads in part:

"Millions that groan beneath oppression's rod, Beneath the sin-forged chains of slavery, Robbed of their rights, to brutes degraded down, And soul and body bound to other's will, —Let their united cries and tears, and groans, That daily rise, and call aloud on Heaven For vengeance, answer; let the Slave reply. O land of boasted freedom! thou hast given The lie to all thy loud professions, fair"

Discuss the following example of early SDA advocacy for justice toward racial minorities based on prophecy? What do they teach us about our opportunities today?

In April, 1862, the forty-four Adventists from Linn County, lowa petitioned for the abolition of slavery in America, stating, "... our professions of Christianity and boasts of liberty, are but a mockery in the sight of the nations of the Earth and the God of the Universe, so long as we delay practically to recognize the 'Inalienable right of all men to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'" They demanded that Abraham Lincoln and Congress reverse "the great unnatural crime of slavery, the exhaustless inveterate source of our national ruin." (See Petition of Seventh-day Adventists and Others of Linn County, lowa, for the "Abolition of Slavery in the United States," April 1862, SEN 37A-J4, National Archives, Washington, D.C.)

Do you admire or question their social activism and why?

FRIDAY: FEBRUARY 18

Further Thought

While doing justice work as ministry, is there a danger in attempting to establish an earthly substitute for God's Kingdom?

In answer to this question Ellen White warned: "... there are multitudes who, as they believe, are working for the establishment of the kingdom of Christ as an earthly and temporal dominion. They desire to make our Lord the ruler of the kingdoms of this world, the ruler in its courts and camps, its legislative halls, its palaces and market places. They expect Him to rule through legal enactments, enforced by human authority. Since Christ is not now here in person, they themselves will undertake to act in His stead, to execute the laws of His kingdom. The establishment of such a kingdom is what the Jews desired in the days of Christ. They would have received Jesus, had He been willing to establish a temporal dominion." The Desire of Ages, p. 509.

If this statement from our prophet's pen is recommending social passivity, then the early Adventists were its grandest violators in their protest efforts regarding such issues as abolition, civil disobedience, and temperance reform. Early Adventists understood and accepted the principle of separation of church and state. On the other hand they voided the false "either/or" choice of social concern versus silent passivity regarding laws and practices that violated the laws of God. Further, these early remnant believers saw their task as ameliorating current suffering (and the conditions that cause it) by practice and preaching, while at the same time, introducing the victims of injustice to the One who ultimately and completely sets the captives free (Luke 4:18).



Discussion Questions:

- 1. What social responsibility is implied for the believer in the prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?"
- 2. Given Ellen White's statement in The Desire of Ages, p. 509, above, how do you relate to her encouragement to youth who aspire to "sit in the legislative councils and help enact laws of the nation?" Messages to Young People, p. 36
- 3. To what extent should Seventh-day Adventists, aka, part of God's last-day remnant, participate in non-violent advocacy on behalf of marginalized people groups?
- 4.In what way does God's command in Ezekiel 45: 8, 9 speak relevantly to His people today?
- 5. List ways that we can combine the sacred work of "saving lives" in our communities with our timeless work of "saving souls" for God's kingdom?

SABBATH AFTERNOON - FEBRUARY 19



1946 Pine Forge was opened

1974 Breath of Life was created

1975 Oakwood enrollment reached 1,000

1979 C E. Bradford elected first black president for North American Division

1986 The Bermuda Mission became the Bermuda Conference

2000 Black membership reached 206,716

2008 Oakwood reached university status

2020 Black membership (8% of NAD in 1945) reached 33% with membership of 400,000

LESSON 4

FEBRUARY 19-25

A Prophet Among You

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:

Numbers 12:6; Acts 7:37; Exodus 3:7; Deuteronomy 32:4; Isaiah 59; Psalm 89:14; Micah 6:8; Isaiah 42:9; Revelation 10:11; Luke 18:18-25

MEMORY TEXT:

"Then He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream."

NUMBERS 12:6 (NKJV)

In the memory text, God clearly promised that, if there is a prophet among His people, God would give visions and or dreams to reveal Himself, and to communicate with the people through the one with the prophetic gift.

Mrs. Ellen Gould Harmon White is unparalleled in her position in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. We recognize her as one who received the Gift of Prophecy to the "remnant Church". Recognized by Adventists as non-canonical, (not a part of or on par with the Bible) modern-day 'prophet," (a name she never applied to herself)—God used her as an unrivaled spiritual influence in the development of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Volumes of Adventist publications, books, pamphlets, sermons, and scholastic dissertations frequently quote or refer to her writings. Her 'written voice' is continuously heard, even though she ceased to speak in 1915. The Spirit of Prophecy continues to add value to the Church today. Voices external to Adventism have acknowledged her ministry as a powerful presence, particularly in American religious circles, but also to wider audiences.

In 2014, The Smithsonian, the main publication of the Smithsonian Institute, listed Mrs. White among the most 100 influential Americans of all time; stating that she received approximately 2,000 visions and dreams, during the 70 years of her ministry. It is estimated that White wrote 100,000 pages during her lifetime, many of those pages have been printed in books and compilations by various editors. The Smithsonian article also states that White is unarguably the most translated woman author in history, having written more than 5,000 journal articles and 40 books.

With such a prominent position in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we should carefully consider what she wrote about social justice, and its contemporary application. In this week's study, it is our goal to examine just a few of her statements on social justice and suggest contemporary applications.

SUNDAY: FEBRUARY 20

Ellen White and Righteousness and Justice

Key Text: "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; Mercy and truth go before your face." Psalm 89:14 (NKJV)

- A) The primary view of God's righteous in Scripture is His faithful fulfillment of the terms of His "salvation covenant" with lost humanity (Isaiah 46:13; Psalm 22:30, 31).
- B) The primary essence of God's Justice in Scripture is His dealing fairly with His creatures. (Psalm 72:2-4).

What do the following verses tell you about the unity of God's righteousness and His Justice?

(Psalm 33:5; 37:6; 89:14; 91:2; 99:4; 103:6; 106:3; 119:137, 138.)

Read Psalm 37:3-6; Matthew 5:7, 10. How do these verses help define the positive qualities of human righteousness?

Read Micah 6:8. What does this verse tell us about the positive qualities of human justice?

Some people believe that when there is a trilogy of concepts, such as in Micah 6:8, all three attributes are equal. Others think that there is a natural hierarchy of importance with the first item mentioned being the most important.

What do you think? Can they really be separated?

In Sons and Daughters of God, page 13, Ellen White wrote: "... God will not cover evil with the robe of His righteousness. He will honor faithful service. He will abundantly bless those who reveal to their fellowmen His justice, mercy, and love."

What is the robe of Christ's righteousness in Philippians 3:9? Why is Christ's robe key to the salvation of even those who render faithful service (Justice, mercy, love)? What connections do you see between this quotation and Jesus' words in Matthew 25:34-36?

Again, White wrote: "The Lord will not compel men to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God; He sets before the human agent good and evil and makes plain what will be the sure result of following one course or the other. Christ invites us, saying, 'Follow Me.' ... As we see the life and character of Christ, strong desire is awakened to be like Him in character; and we follow on to know the Lord, and to know His goings forth are prepared as the morning." (The Review and Herald, March 31, 1896.)



Ask yourself the question, am I so obsessed by study of the life and character of Christ that I have a "strong desire" to walk in His footsteps of sacrificial service for others? Am I truly "an agent for good" in the cause of justice or an inactive soldier in the battle for truth? If you are not engaged, why not chose a single parent or needy couple in your church and help with their child's (or children's) needs especially for a Christian education?

MONDAY: FEBRUARY 21

Ellen White and the Evil of Slavery

Key Text: And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows." Exodus 3:7 (NKJV).

Ellen White (November 26, 1827–July 16, 1915) wrote extensively about America's "Original Sin," slavery. This evil, begun in 1619, and abolished by the Emancipation Proclamation at the end of the Civil War on January 1, 1863, was particularly iniquitous in her sight. Her concerns, however, did not end with the end of the war. In 1891, twenty-eight years later, she presented a sermon to the thirty leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination who had convened in Battle Creek, Ml. dealing with slavery's residual effects upon the freed but oppressed black race. This sermon was also published as a tract that same year under the title "Our Duty to the Colored People". The content of the message was an appeal to the SDA leaders to become active in the work of evangelism of the formerly enslaved persons. White then published ten additional articles in the *Review and Herald* during the years 1895–1896 on the same theme. These are also included in *The Southern Work*. While the title is specifically relating to the vestiges of slavery and the slave holding Southern states of America, the principles are not limited to that geography or time.

Among Ellen White's more potent statements in the book The Southern Work are:

1. "I know that which I now speak will bring me into conflict. This I do not covet, ... but I do not mean to live a coward or die a coward, leaving my work undone. I must follow in my Master's footsteps. It has become fashionable to look down upon the poor, and upon the colored race in particular. But Jesus, the Master, was poor, and He sympathizes with the poor, the discarded, the oppressed, and declares every insult shown to them is as if shown to Himself." p. 10

What does this statement say about Ellen White's courage?

2. "God spoke concerning the captivity of the colored people as verily as he did concerning the Hebrew captives, and said: I have surely seen the affliction of My people ... , and I am come down to deliver them." p. 42

What does this statement say about her valuation of the black race?

3. "The relation of the two races has been a matter hard to deal with, and I fear that it will ever remain a most perplexing problem." p. 84

What does this statement say about her gift as a prophet?



Another of Ellen White's memorable statements in this regard is: "Then commenced the Jubilee, when the land should rest. I saw the pious slave rise in triumph and victory and shake off the chains that bound him, while his wicked master was in confusion and knew not what to do. ..." Early Writings, p.35. What does this statement say about God's merciful regard for the helplessly oppressed?

TUESDAY: FEBRUARY 22

Ellen White and Corporate Injustice

Key Text: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly: defend the rights of the poor and needy." Proverbs 31:8-9 (NIV)

The word "Adventist" in the church's name speaks very clearly to its emphasis on the soon return of Jesus, and high anticipation of "New Earth" happiness. However, Mrs. White often addressed not just the joys of the saved in the world to come but the misery of humans in the present world. Further she attributed what is often termed "man's inhumanity to man" not to individuals but to corporate bodies including the nation, and in more than one reference to her denomination.

In referencing the nation's abuses to blacks after the end of slavery, she wrote: "They have been wounded by a so-called Christian nation. They have been left, by the wayside and decided efforts will have to be made to counteract the wrong that has been done them." The Southern Work, p.29

In another statement referencing the church, she wrote: "Sin rests upon us as a church because we have not made greater effort for the salvation of souls among the colored people. ... Every effort should be made to wipe out the terrible wrong which has been done them." The Southern Work, p. 15

As you note, the statements to both the nation and the church reference an obligation to provide what she later calls "restitution" to the oppressed (pp. 96-97).

- 1. Are you aware of such efforts that have been made by the nation? What are they?
- 2. Are you aware of such efforts that have been made by the church? What are they?
- 3. How, on a scale of 1-10 would you grade each body?
- 4. Can you think of more that can or should be done today?

There have been outstanding examples in the Seventh-day Adventist church, of individuals who have fought for social justice. Among them are: General Conference Presidents William H. Branson (1950-1954) who bravely issued a plea for desegregation in the church in 1953, a year before the annulment of "Separate but Equal" and Neal C. Wilson (1979-1990) who helped bring equal pay for church female employees and initiated the placement of blacks in the church's upper-level administrative positions.

Also, to be remembered in this special regard are George E. Peters, then Secretary of the Negro Department, whose skillful counsel helped initiate and coordinate the birth of regional conferences and Earl E. Cleveland, world Evangelist, whose speeches, and penmanship greatly influenced black church leadership's protest endeavors in the last few decades of the 20th century.



Is it possible for Christians to "do justice" (Micah 6:8) without: a) "dabbling in politics?" (See Ellen G. White, Testimony to Ministers, p. 131) or b) endorsing "political schemes?" (See Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, pp. 391-396).

WEDNESDAY: FEBRUARY 23

Ellen White and Civil Disobedience

Key Text: "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: we ought to obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29 (NKJV).

Read Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Matthew 22:15-22; Acts 5:29.

With regard to national evil Ellen White wrote that Jesus "attempted no civil reforms. He attacked no national abuses, nor condemned the national enemies. He did not interfere with the authority or administration of those in power. He who as our example kept aloof from earthly governments." The Desire of Ages, p. 509

Proof that by this statement she was not suggesting the church's absolute submission to government law no matter how ungodly it might be is seen in her strident reaction to the nation's **Fugitive Slave Law** of 1850. Her instructions regarding this law to which were attached severe penalties for breaking were:

"When the laws of men conflict with the word and law of God, we are to obey the latter, whatever the consequences may be. The law of our land requiring us to deliver a slave to his master, we are not to obey, and we must abide the consequences of violating this law. The slave is not the property of any man. God is his rightful master, and man has no right to take God's workmanship into his hands, and claim him as his own." (*Testimonies to the Church*, Vol. 1, pp. 201–202)

Read Philemon 1:8-16. Now compare and contrast the situation of Paul and Timothy returning a slave to his human master during their era and Ellen White's urging not to do so in her era.

Were they both right? What made the difference?

Read again Romans 13:1-3.

Because they interpreted these verses to require obedience to one's government no matter how ungodly it is, the Seventh-day Adventist church in Germany remained silent as Hitler slew millions of innocent people and sought to conquer the world.

Can you imagine such a decision by American Seventh-day Adventists or those of any other nation today? Please explain your answer.



Discussion Questions:

- 1. What would have been the consequences to Jesus and His mission if He had frontally attacked the Roman government?
- 2. What would have been the consequences to the Christian church through the ages if they had, in contrast to Jesus' example, challenged the laws and authority of totalitarian governments and rulers?
- 3. If Jesus were ministering today under the 'free speech" laws of democratic governments, would He remain silent regarding social injustice? Explain
- 4. What are the risks today of the Adventist Church in taking a bold stand for social justice?

THURSDAY: FEBRUARY 24

Ellen White and Modern-day Injustices

Key Text: "Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow." Isaiah 1:17 (NIV)

Read Isaiah 59:3-4; Amos 5:7-12; Matthew 25: 35-40.

Evidence of Ellen White's prevailing concern for human welfare in the concrete, everyday cauldron of real-life is found in:

- 1. her disdain for social caste, Gospel Workers, p. 330; and social inequality, Patriarchs and Prophets,
- 2. her desire for social rights, Gospel Workers, p. 123, versus social wrongs, Temperance p. 234;
- 3. her dedication to social sympathies, Testimonies, Vol. 2, p. 534; and social kindness and courtesy, Gospel Workers, p. 47.

Her concern is further demonstrated in the exceptionally broad array of social issues she addressed. These include slavery, Jim Crow, intemperance, child labor, gender discrimination, economic disadvantage, family dissolution, the abuses of organized capital and labor, as well as her encouragement that we Christians vote in ways best suited to defeat destructive laws, practices, and personages.

The foremost type of social injustice in the world today is slavery in its many forms. World-wide they include: labor slavery, sex slavery, forced marriage slavery and child labor slavery. There are an estimated 40.3 million people currently held in slavery world-wide the various forms of which generate \$150 billion annually. Women and girls represent 71% of some form of forced labor today; one in four of those trapped in modern day slavery around the world are children. https://enditmovement.com. The result is that there are more people trapped in slavery today than ever before in human history.

In the United States the primary forms of slavery are: Prison Slavery engaged in states that force inmates to work for companies without compensation, Human trafficking which keeps grossly underpaid immigrants trapped in annual cycles of jobs as: farming, construction and house-keeping, and Sex Slavery that includes children of both genders.

Another prevalent form of injustice in America is abuse, both physical and mental (emotional) perpetrated primarily, upon children, females, the handicapped, the elderly and the poor.

Yet another species of social injustice in America is racial oppression observed in hiring, voter restrictions, housing, health care access, group memberships and various other "boundary maintaining mechanisms"

Did you know that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has taken a stand against violence and abuse of women and children in its "End It Now" campaign? Learn more about it here: https://www.enditnownorthamerica.org/about

Think It Over

- 1. It is well documented that Ellen White's personal background of painful sicknesses largely accounted for her keen sensitivity regarding suffering and social injustice. How can an individual who has never endured such experiences acquire similar response to the hardships of others?
- 2. Social injustice exists in many different forms. Have you ever paused to search your heart for unjust perceptions you might have toward others not of your origin, accent, race, color, educational status, economic status, gender or physical ability?
- 3. While the advantaged class is largely responsible for social injustices, are there things that the oppressed in the various classes of injustice listed above can do to help themselves? What ways can you think of?

FRIDAY: FEBRUARY 25

Further Thought

Commenting on Luke 18:18-25, Ellen White wrote:

"The ruler's possessions were entrusted to him that he might prove himself a faithful steward; he was to dispense these goods for the blessing of those in need. So, God now entrusts men with means, with talents and opportunities, that they may be His agents in helping the poor and the suffering. He who uses his entrusted gifts as God designs becomes a co-worker with the Savior." *The Desire of Ages*, p. 523.

Commenting on Matthew 25:31-45, Ellen White wrote:

"When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another." Thus, Christ on the Mount of Olives pictured to His disciples the scene of the great judgment day. And He represented its decision as turning upon one point. When the nations are gathered before Him, there will be but two classes, and their eternal destiny will be determined by what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and the suffering." The Desire of Ages, p. 637

"In that day Christ does not present before men the great work He has done for them in giving His life for their redemption. He presents the faithful work they have done for Him. To those whom He sets upon His right hand He will say, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me." But those whom Christ commends know not that they have been ministering unto Him. To their perplexed inquiries He answers, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 637.



Discussion Questions:

- 1. Did you know that in lieu of a traditional Sabbath service, on Saturday, June 20, 2020 members and officials from two regional conferences, (Lake Region and Central States) were joined by the Minnesota Conference in a: "Miles to Minneapolis" youth-march protest of the May 25th murder of George Floyd?
- 2. What activities supportive of social justice has your church engaged? Are there some that come to mind that you would like to propose?
- 3. Given all that we have studied, in which way would you classify Ellen White's social profile: a) social moderate, b) social conservative c) social radical? Explain. In which way would you classify your church? In which way would you classify yourself?

Protest & Progress: Black Seventh-day Adventist Leadership and the Push for Parity

AdventSource is pleased to offer the landmark book on race relations and leadership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America authored by Dr. Calvin Rock and published by the Andrews University Press. As an acclaimed leader himself, Rock writes with a pastor's heart and a prophet's passion to remind the church of where we have been, where we are, and where we must go.

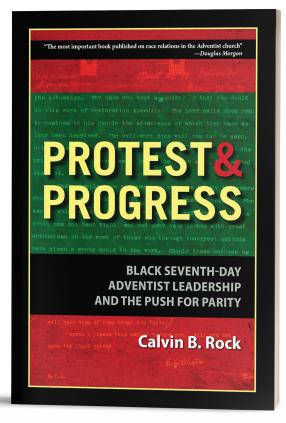
He first gives an overview of history by discussing the successes and failures of four major Black Adventist leadership protest movements:

- · the push for administrative integration, which failed
- · the push for Regional conferences, which succeeded
- · the push for Black union conferences, which failed
- and the push for a separate and equitable retirement system for Regional conference employees, which succeeded.

Rock's personal participation in some of the events adds rich character to the story. Building on that history, he makes his case for the effectiveness and necessity of the current Regional conference system of mission that administers resources according to racial and cultural opportunity.



For additional books on justice visit AdventSouce.org and search the key word "Justice"



This special Black History Month Study Guide is for churches and schools who would like to study what the Word of God says about Social Justice. Each week there will be different topics relating to justice.

- · Social Justice in the Old Testament
- · Social Justice in the Ministry of Jesus
- · Social Justice in the Book of Revelation
- A Prophet Among You

Every day there will be a short study on the subject being studied that week.

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