

Probation Closes for the SDA Church First!

Description

A study related to the SDA
Sabbath School Lesson for 2021, 2nd Quarter
The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant
Week 10
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This week's lesson is entitled, "The New Covenant." It discusses Jeremiah 31:31 and Hebrews 8:10 that both record the new covenant promise: "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

Thursday's discussion question reads,

"How does it make you feel, understanding that, even now, Jesus is ministering His blood in heaven on your behalf? How much confidence and assurance does that give you regarding salvation?"

The fact that Jesus is ministering His blood on our personal behalf in heaven is indeed an incredible thing. It should give us great confidence that we can overcome every sin, every character flaw, in this life, while in our mortal bodies. Jesus overcame every temptation, and by the merits of His blood, we, His blood brothers and sisters, can know that we can do it as well. But many get a false sense of security by misinterpreting Jesus' ministration in the heavenly sanctuary to be one that covers our sin with a cloak of righteousness, rather than one that atones for our sin – which is to wipe it away altogether. It is a ministration that helps us understand truth so we can apply it to our lives and live free from sin.

Ellen White taught very clearly regarding the nature and purpose of Jesus' ministry. And since we, as a people, acknowledge her to be a true prophet of God, we need to take her teachings very seriously. If she taught something, we shouldn't just brush it aside as though it were merely an opinion of man. She taught what God instructed her to teach, and if our profession to believe her teachings is to remain honest, we must accept what she said, even if it conflicts with our own opinions. We are supposed to let God be true, and every man, including ourselves, be the liar. So, what did Ellen White say about how Jesus' ministry relates to sin? Well, one thing is this: "the righteousness of Christ will never cover one cherished sin." – Christ's Object Lessons, p. 316. Obviously, to profess to believe in Ellen White's teachings, and yet to hold on to the idea that Jesus covers over our sin with his own righteousness while we continue to sin, would be grossly inconsistent. But let us not be inconsistent. Jesus is ministering, not to cover our sin, but to help us to stop sinning.

Someday this ministration will end, probation for us will close, and we will need to have spotless characters, able to stand before God without an intercessor. Ellen's teachings include the idea that we must overcome sin while probation is open.

Ellen White said,

“If you have become estranged and have failed to be Bible Christians, be converted; for the character you bear in probationary time will be the character you will have at the coming of Christ. If you would be a saint in heaven, you must first be a saint on earth. The traits of character you cherish in life will not be changed by death or by the resurrection. You will come up from the grave with the same disposition you manifested in your home and in society. Jesus does not change the character at His coming. The work of transformation must be done now. Our daily lives are determining our destiny.” AH 16.2

Many have the idea that when Christ comes, we will get these new incorruptible bodies that will be unable to commit sins. But as Ellen White makes clear, our transformed bodies will not give us changed characters. That is a work we must do in these mortal bodies while Jesus is still ministering His blood and probation is still open for us.

Consider Satan – he had an incorruptible body, but he still chose to sin. The point is, whether our body is corruptible or incorruptible, that doesn’t determine our choices. We determine our own choices, and we can choose to act sinfully or righteously regardless of the condition of our bodies. As Ellen said,

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In “Great Controversy,” Ellen said,

“Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God’s people upon earth. This work is more clearly presented in the messages of Revelation 14.

When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing.” GC 425

So, if we are not putting away every cherished sin today, we will not be ready when Christ comes! Now is the time of salvation.

We will give one more quote just for emphasis, although there are many more.” In “Faith and Works,” Ellen said,

“None who have had the light of truth will enter the city of God as commandment-breakers. His law lies at the foundation of His government in earth and in heaven. If they have knowingly trampled upon and despised His law on the earth, they will not be taken to heaven to do the same work there; there is no change of character when Christ comes.

The character building is to go on during the hours of probation. Day by day their actions are registered in the books of heaven, and they will in the great day of God be rewarded as their works have been. It will then be seen who receives the blessing. ‘Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city’ (Revelation 22:14).” FW 43.3

There is no time to waste. This opportunity to fit our characters for the company of heaven will not present itself forever. The forbearance of God will come to an end. The fact that probation doesn’t last forever is something that all SDAs recognize and it alone should be enough to give us a sense of urgency to put away sin. But there is something that increases the urgency even more that many Adventists are unaware of; that is, that probation will close for the church before it closes for the whole world.

This can be seen in Ellen White’s interpretation of Ezekiel 9. She clearly applied the sealing and judgment spoken of in this chapter specifically to the SDA church.

We encourage you to read Ezekiel 9 on your own, but here is a brief summary. Ezekiel saw six men (who Ellen White explained to be angels) come from the north to the sanctuary in Jerusalem. Each man had a destroying weapon in his hand, but one of them also had a writer’s inkhorn. God then commanded the one with the inkhorn to go through Jerusalem and to set a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and cry for all the abominations done in the city. Then God commanded the other five to slay all who hadn’t received the mark, beginning at the sanctuary. Here is some of what Ellen White says about this chapter. First, this is from Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, pp. 210-211:

“The command is: ‘Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.’ [Ezekiel 9:5] These sighing, crying ones had been holding forth the words of life; they had reproved, counseled, and entreated. Some who had been dishonoring God repented and humbled their hearts before Him. But the glory of the Lord had departed from Israel; although many still continued the forms of religion, His power and presence were lacking. 5T 210.2

In the time when His wrath shall go forth in judgments, these humble, devoted followers of Christ will be distinguished from the rest of the world by their soul anguish, which is expressed in lamentation and weeping, reproofs and warnings. While others try to throw a cloak over the existing evil, and excuse the great wickedness everywhere prevalent, those who have a zeal for God’s honor and a love for souls will not hold their peace to obtain favor of any. Their righteous souls are vexed day by day with the unholy works and conversation of the unrighteous. They are powerless to stop the rushing torrent of iniquity, and hence they are filled with grief and alarm. They mourn before God to see religion despised in the very homes of those who have had great light. They lament and afflict their souls because pride, avarice, selfishness, and deception of almost every kind are in the church. [Notice that Ellen White is here equating the abominations committed in Jerusalem mentioned in Ezekiel 9:5 with the sins committed in the church.] The Spirit of God, which prompts to reproof, is trampled underfoot, while the servants of Satan triumph. God is dishonored, the truth made of none effect. 5T 210.3

The class who do not feel grieved over their own spiritual declension, nor mourn over the sins of others, will be left without the seal of God. The Lord commissions His messengers, the men with slaughtering weapons in their hands: ‘Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.’ 5T 211.1

Here we see that the church—the Lord’s sanctuary—was the first to feel the stroke of the wrath of God. The ancient men, those to whom God had given great light and who had stood as guardians of the spiritual interests of the people, had betrayed their trust. They had taken the position that we need not look for miracles and the marked manifestation of God’s power as in former days. Times have changed. These words strengthen their unbelief, and they say: The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil. He is too merciful to visit His people in judgment. Thus ‘Peace and safety’ is the cry from men who will never again lift up their voice like a trumpet to show God’s people their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins. These dumb dogs that would not bark are the ones who feel the just vengeance of an offended God. Men, maidens, and little children all perish together. 5T 211.2

The abominations for which the faithful ones were sighing and crying were all that could be discerned by finite eyes, but by far the worst sins, those which provoked the jealousy of the pure and holy God, were unrevealed. The great Searcher of hearts knoweth every sin committed in secret by the workers of iniquity. These persons come to feel secure in their deceptions and, because of His long-suffering, say that the Lord seeth not, and then act as though He had forsaken the earth. But He will detect their hypocrisy and will open before others those sins which they were so careful to hide.”5T 211.3

Obviously, Ellen White applied Ezekiel 9 to the church. The abominations done in the city are the abominations in the church, and those who sigh and cry for those abominations are those in the church who refuse to condone sin. They are those who receive the seal, depicted in Ezekiel 9 by the man with the inkhorn going through the city. And the slaying in the city represents the slaying in the church of those who do not sigh and cry, but who instead give place for sin; starting with the ancient men in the sanctuary – those who stand as guardians of the people, but who betrayed their trust. In another statement, she makes this application even more clear. This is found in Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 3, pp. 266-267.

It says,

“The true people of God, who have the spirit of the work of the Lord and the salvation of souls at heart, will ever view sin in its real, sinful character. They will always be on the side of faithful and plain dealing with sins which easily beset the people of God. Especially in the closing work for the church, in the sealing time of the one hundred and forty-four thousand who are to stand without fault before the throne of God, will they feel most deeply the wrongs of God’s professed people. This is forcibly set forth by the prophet’s illustration of the last work under the figure of the men each having a slaughter weapon in his hand. One man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer’s inkhorn by his side. ‘And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.’ [Ezekiel 9:5]. 3T 266.2

Who are standing in the counsel of God at this time? Is it those who virtually excuse wrongs among the professed people of God and who murmur in their hearts, if not openly, against those who would reprove sin? Is it those who take their stand against them and sympathize with those who commit wrong? No, indeed! Unless they repent, and leave the work of Satan in oppressing those who have the burden of the work and in holding up the hands of sinners in Zion, they will never receive the mark of God’s sealing approval. They will fall in the general destruction of the wicked, represented by the work of the five men bearing slaughter weapons. Mark this point with care: Those who receive the pure mark of truth, wrought in them by the power of the Holy Ghost, represented by a mark by the man in linen, are those ‘that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done’ in the church. Their love for purity and the honor and glory of God is such, and they have so clear a view of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, that they are represented as being in agony, even sighing and crying. Read the ninth chapter of Ezekiel.” 3T 267.1

How much more clear could she be? The abominations in Jerusalem mentioned in Ezekiel 9 are here clearly said to be the sins in the church. The city in which the sighing and crying ones are found is thus the church, and the man with the writers inkhorn goes through the church to set a mark upon them, and the destroying angels go through the church to slay those who receive not the mark. And exactly which church Ellen is talking about should be obvious to anyone who reads her writings since she calls them “the professed people of God” and “God’s professed people,” terms which she commonly uses for the SDA church. And even more obviously, this is something she wrote in the “Testimonies for the Church,” which we know to be written to the SDA church, and in a testimony called “The Laodicean Church,” which really makes it plain that she is indeed speaking of the SDA people. Thus, in these statements, Ellen White is warning us that there is to be a judgment and purification of the church in which those who view sin as it really is and who refuse to partake of it will be sealed and those who hold on to their sins will be slain. And in this last statement, she tells us something rather specific about this closing work for the church; that is, that it is the sealing time of the 144,000.

One of the things that is so significant about this is that the 144,000 are only the first-fruits according to Revelation 14:4. In other words, they are the first to be harvested, which automatically implies that more will be harvested after them. And this is exactly what we find in Revelation 7. After the 144,000 are sealed, there will be a great multitude that no man can number from all nations who will endure the great tribulation according to verse 14. Thus, Ezekiel 9 depicts the purification of the church in which the wicked are slain but the righteous are sealed. After this, the purified church will be able to effectively evangelize the world and bring in the great multitude. Ellen White said,

“Oh, that the people [the church] might know the time of their visitation [the judgment upon the house of God]! There are many who have not yet heard the testing truth for this time. There are many with whom the Spirit of God is striving. The time of God’s destructive judgments is the time of mercy for those who have had no opportunity to learn what is truth. Tenderly will the Lord look upon them. His heart of mercy is touched; His hand is still stretched out to save, while the door is closed to those who would not enter.” 9T 97.2

So you can see that the door will be closed, probation will be ended, for the church first, but at that time it will still be open for the world. God will be able to do much more with a pure church than he is able to do with a church in which the wheat and tares are co-mingled. Ellen White described the final work for the world as being carried out by a pure church. Here are a couple of things she said,

“The third angel’s message is to lighten the earth with its glory; but only those who have withstood temptation in the strength of the Mighty One will be permitted to act a part in proclaiming it when it shall swelled into the loud cry.” Review & Herald, Nov. 19, 1908

“Clad in the armor of Christ’s righteousness, the church is to enter upon her final conflict, ‘Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners’ (Song 6:10), she is to go forth into all the world, conquering and to conquer.” Prophets and Kings, p. 725

The Gospel work will be finished according to God's own plan, and I'm sure it is something we all would want to be a part of. But in order to be a part of it, can't expect to hold on to our sins until the second coming. Our characters will not be changed then. We need to be free from every spot and stain of sin before probation closes, and not even just before it closes for the whole world, but before it closes for the church. Only those who have withstood temptation in the strength of the Mighty One will be able to take part in the last efforts to save a dying world. We'll live you with this last bit of counsel and admonition from Ellen White:

“Study the ninth chapter of Ezekiel. These words will be literally fulfilled; yet the time is passing, and the people are asleep. They refuse to humble their souls and to be converted. Not a great while longer will the Lord bear with the people who have such great and important truths revealed to them, but who refuse to bring these truths into their individual experience. The time is short. God is calling. Will you hear? Will you receive His message? Will you be converted before it is too late? Soon, very soon, every case will be decided for eternity.” Lt106-1909.17

For a deeper study on this topic, please see “The Two Deliverances,” by Doug Mitchell, and “Pre-‘Eleventh Hour Extra,” by Victor Houteff.