

# ***Oneness in Christ***

## ***Causes of Disunity***

Lesson #2 for October 13, 2018

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Jeremiah 3:14-18; Judges 17:6; 1 Kings 12:1-16; 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; Acts 20:25-31; Proverbs 9:10.

1. The Scriptures from beginning to end are full of examples of people and entire nations turning against God and suffering terrible consequences. Especially in the Old Testament, there are repeated examples of the children of Israel rejecting God, worshiping idols, suffering terrible consequences, then trying to come back to God and receiving some blessings; and then, having the whole process or cycle repeated—over and over again. Why did all that happen? Was it impossible for the children of Israel to see the larger picture and to understand what was happening to them? Why did it seem so difficult for them to follow God's will for them? When God was directing them, they won all the battles. But, when they went into battle on their own without God's guidance, they suffered terrible defeats!
2. They had been warned very specifically on several occasions during the final month of Moses's life as he was speaking to them of what would happen if they disobeyed God. Those predictions were so specific and so closely match with what actually happened to Israel later that modern skeptics have claimed that the book of Deuteronomy could not possibly have been written by Moses himself; they say it must have been written about 1000 years later—after all those events had actually taken place.
3. The book of Joshua tells of many victories under the leadership of God and Joshua. It explains how Joshua and other leaders who worked alongside him managed to follow God closely enough so that they repeatedly won battles against their enemies. But, as soon as we get to the book of Judges, they ran into big problems. Already in Judges 2&3, we see the beginnings of this “yo-yo” experience—up and down—in their relationship with God.
4. Read Judges 2:11-23. How was God's anger or wrath involved in all of that? Was it God just getting upset by their behavior and causing all those problems that they experienced?
5. As we have learned repeatedly, **God's wrath is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choices.**
6. Why did they rebel so frequently? Did they feel that sin was more “fun”? Did the pagan gods claim to bring them greater blessings? Did anyone do any careful evaluation to see whether they were better off when they followed God or when they followed their pagan gods? The leaders named in the Bible seemed to be mostly followers of God. (Compare Jeremiah 44:17-19.)
7. How would you feel if you had received the following message directly from God?  
**Deuteronomy 28:1-9:** “If you obey the LORD your God and faithfully keep all his commands that I am giving you today, he will make you greater than any other nation on earth. <sup>2</sup>Obey the LORD your God and all these blessings will be yours:  
<sup>3</sup> “The LORD will bless your towns and your fields.  
<sup>4</sup> “The LORD will bless you with many children, with abundant crops, and with many cattle and sheep.

<sup>5</sup> “The LORD will bless your corn crops and the food you prepare from them.

<sup>6</sup> “The LORD will bless everything you do.

<sup>7</sup> “The LORD will defeat your enemies when they attack you. They will attack from one direction, but they will run from you in all directions.

<sup>8</sup> “The LORD your God will bless your work and fill your barns with corn. He will bless you in the land that he is giving you.

<sup>9</sup> “If you obey the LORD your God and do everything he commands, he will make you his own people, as he has promised.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Deuteronomy 28:1-9). New York: American Bible Society.

For what more could you ask?

8. One thousand years later, we read in the book of Jeremiah of what was happening to the children of Israel. (See Jeremiah 3:14-18.) In the days of Jeremiah, the northern kingdom of Israel had already been taken into captivity by the nation of Assyria and scattered to the winds. We do not ever hear of them again as a nation. But, God was still crying out, appealing to them to come back. He was promising that the city of Jerusalem would once again be the throne of the Lord. All nations would come there to worship the true God. The amazing thing to be seen in the book of Jeremiah is how God is still loving, merciful, and generous toward His people even though they were so rebellious, divided, and bent on idolatry. Will these promises be fulfilled yet in the future?
9. What do you think the Devil was saying to his fellow rebellious angels as God was making those appeals through Jeremiah? Did the Devil think that he was about to win the great controversy on this earth? Was he laughing at God?
10. Why was it that God could not help the people unless they were obedient to Him? They were not listening. *Obedience* means that we are willing to listen.
11. Compare the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Have we had times of apparent rebellion against God and suffered serious consequences? Have there been times when we were more closely following God’s will for our lives, and He was blessing us abundantly?
12. Read Judges 17:6 and 21:25. What do these words teach us about the problems that Israel was having in those days? Review the terrible story of the Levite and his concubine as recorded in Judges 19-21. What does that tell us about the condition of things among the Israelites in those days? What were God’s angels saying when that story happened?
13. What can we learn from the book of Judges—especially Judges 2&3—about God’s wrath?

The Lord had through Moses set before His people the result of unfaithfulness. **By refusing to keep His covenant, they would cut themselves off from the life of God, and His blessing could not come upon them.** At times these warnings were heeded, and rich blessings were bestowed upon the Jewish nation and through them upon surrounding peoples. But more often in their history they forgot God and lost sight of their high privilege as His representatives. They robbed Him of the service He required of them, and they robbed their fellow men of religious guidance and a holy example. They desired to appropriate to themselves the fruits of the vineyard over which they had been made stewards. Their covetousness and

greed caused them to be despised even by the heathen. **Thus the Gentile world was given occasion to misinterpret the character of God and the laws of His kingdom.**—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*\* 20.1-21.0. [Bold type is added.]

14. How do our actions in the community impact those around us? What does the community around us think of us as a church? Do they even know that we exist?
15. Another terrible example of rebellion and its consequences is found in the story of Rehoboam. (See 1 Kings 12:1-16.) In the early days of the reign of Solomon as he was building that magnificent temple for God in Jerusalem and following God's will for his life, the nation of Israel was at a high point. But, in that process, Solomon invited into Jerusalem many foreign workers who demanded high wages for their services. Of course, the children of Israel who were working on the temple also wanted equally high pay. Soon, the spiraling wages required a massive increase in taxes. Does that sound familiar?
16. About the same time, in the process of cementing agreements with foreign nations, Solomon began to add to the number of wives and concubines that he was supporting. Later, he began to build pagan temples for those wives on the Mount of Olives. Finally, late in his life, he realized his errors and tried to correct them; but, it was too late.
17. When Rehoboam became the next king, he did some very foolish things.

Had Rehoboam and his inexperienced counselors understood the divine will concerning Israel, they would have listened to the request of the people for decided reforms in the administration of the government. But in the hour of opportunity that came to them during the meeting in Shechem, they failed to reason from cause to effect, and thus forever weakened their influence over a large number of the people. Their expressed determination to perpetuate and add to the oppression introduced during Solomon's reign was in direct conflict with God's plan for Israel, and gave the people ample occasion to doubt the sincerity of their motives. In this unwise and unfeeling attempt to exercise power, the king and his chosen counselors revealed the pride of position and authority.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*\* 90.1.
18. We have no idea how many children Solomon had. We do not know whether Rehoboam was his firstborn son or even why Rehoboam became the next king. But, with all his military activities, Jerusalem building, and seven hundred wives plus three hundred concubines, Solomon probably had very little time to educate his children. But, in his early days, he wrote some important advice for them and us. Read Proverbs 4:1-9 and Proverbs 9:10.
19. As we know historically, the rash decision of Rehoboam led to the division of the country into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Even though important prophets like Elijah and Elisha and, finally, Hosea worked in the northern kingdom, the history of the northern kingdom was one of continuous decline from that day until they were taken into captivity. Not a single king from the northern kingdom of Israel followed God's will.
20. Unfortunately, the same kind of trends continued into the New Testament. Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. Paul had spent one and a half years in Corinth establishing the church there. He had a deep love for the believers there. But, after leaving them and while working in Ephesus, rumors began to come to him that there were problems in the church at Corinth.

21. Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. The book which we identify as 1 Corinthians is not the first letter Paul had written to his friends at Corinth. (See 1 Corinthians 5:9.) Clearly, sexual immorality was a problem in Corinth. Many scholars have suggested that 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 might possibly be a part of that first letter that Paul wrote to Corinth. Then, he wrote that magnificent letter we call 1 Corinthians; it was in response to requests that they had made to him and reports that he received from Chloe's family. But, word came that the letter had not had its desired affect. Paul apparently made a brief trip to Corinth, probably traveling by boat directly across from Ephesus to Corinth, and he was rebuffed and treated very rudely by the Corinthian believers. He returned to Ephesus with a very sad mind, wondering what he should do next.
22. Then, he wrote a very strong letter to them which may be what we now have as 2 Corinthians 10-13. It was carried by hand by Titus; Paul waited patiently to see what the result would be. Fortunately, that "Sinai" letter had its desired impact, Titus reported, and the Christians in Corinth welcomed Paul back again.
23. We know that Paul spent the most time during his missionary journeys in two places: Corinth and Ephesus. On his final journey as a completely free man, he made a brief stop near Ephesus and spoke to the Ephesian elders. Did God reveal those words to him? Read Acts 20:25-31; compare Ezekiel 33:1-6. What did Paul mean when he talked about "savage wolves" coming from even among the believers in Ephesus? (Acts 20:29)
24. Satan has always been most effective when he can get those who claim to be faithful followers of God to do his will. Rebels, false teachers, and false leaders within the Christian church have been and are devastating. Even Jesus warned us repeatedly in Matthew 24 about false prophets and false christs being able to deceive "if it were possible, even the elect." (Mark 13:22, *KJV*\*)
25. Read Ephesians 5:6-14. How do you understand Ephesians 5:6? Why does God's anger come upon those who do not obey Him? Is this a reflection of Paul's understanding of the book of Judges? Paul recognized that falsehoods and deceitful teachings would come repeatedly from the hand of Satan through false teachers. (See Colossians 2:8.)
26. Read 2 Timothy 2:14-19 and 3:12-17. As far as we know, Paul never had any children of his own. He took Timothy as his "spiritual son" and worked very closely with him for a long time. Especially in his second letter to Timothy, Paul talked to him about the problems that would arise in the church. He encouraged Timothy to speak the truth while spreading the message about God.

**2 Timothy 3:12-17:** <sup>12</sup>**Everyone who wants to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus will be persecuted;** <sup>13</sup>and evil persons and impostors will keep on going from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves. <sup>14</sup>But as for you, continue in the truths that you were taught and firmly believe. You know who your teachers were, <sup>15</sup>and you remember that ever since you were a child, you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>**All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living,** <sup>17</sup>**so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.**—*Good News Bible*\* (2 Timothy 3:12-17). [Bold type is added.]

27. How many of us have been persecuted? Why is it so easy for people even in our day to be led astray by speculations and by misinterpretations of Scripture? See *LHU* 309.
28. Why is it that so few people even in our own church understand the overarching story of the great controversy between God and Satan over the character and government of God and how that controversy impacts so much of what we read in the Bible? So many people forget the role that the Devil plays constantly in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Those who are called to be ministers to God's people must be very, very careful to follow God's Word and not deviate into any of those speculative ideas.
29. There are many reasons why divisions arise even in our day in our church.

The Lord desires His chosen servants to learn how to unite in harmonious effort. It may seem to some that the contrast between their gifts and the gifts of a fellow laborer is too great to allow them to unite in harmonious effort; **but when they remember that there are varied minds to be reached, and that some will reject the truth as it is presented by one laborer, only to open their hearts to God's truth as it is presented in a different manner by another laborer, they will hopefully endeavor to labor together in unity.** Their talents, however diverse, may all be under the control of the same Spirit. In every word and act, kindness and love will be revealed; and as each worker fills his appointed place faithfully, the prayer of Christ for the unity of His followers will be answered, and the world will know that these are His disciples.—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*\* 483.2. [Bold type is added.]

30. If everyone was truly loving in all they did, would there be any sin? (Matthew 22:34-40)
31. How many in our day are doing what is right in their own eyes? (See Judges 17:6; 21:25.) How can church leaders and Sabbath school teachers faithfully shepherd God's people to prevent the kinds of problems that we read about in this lesson?

**Proverbs 6:16-19:** There are seven things that the LORD hates and cannot tolerate:

a proud look,  
 a lying tongue,  
 hands that kill innocent people,  
 a mind that thinks up wicked plans,  
 feet that hurry off to do evil,  
 a witness who tells one lie after another,  
 and someone who stirs up trouble among friends.—*Good News Bible*.\*

32. Isn't it obvious why God opposes and hates those kinds of behaviors?
33. What would happen if every church member made it his/her responsibility to study the Bible and investigate in order to follow carefully and obediently God's will for his/her own life? Why is it so easy to be led astray by our personal wants and inclinations?
34. Why was it that Rehoboam took the advice of his young friends instead of those with more experience? Was it simply because he wanted to believe their words? Was it because he felt closer to them because they had been his peers?
35. Have you ever been so attached to some idea that you have come to believe it is God's will for your life?

36. Is there any easy way to know whether we are following our own will or whether we are following God's will? How can we avoid making wrong choices based on our personal preferences? How can we train our selfish hearts to do God's will?
37. Read Joshua 24:31 and Judges 2:7-10. What should we learn from these two passages? Why did people such as Joshua and his fellow leaders have such an impact on the children of Israel? Why weren't there others standing there ready to take up the work of Joshua, faithfully following God's will in leading the children of Israel? Was it Joshua's fault for not planning for his successor? Was it God's fault for not keeping the line of leadership?
38. What does it mean to say: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"? (Proverbs 9:10, *KJV*\*) Does this mean that we need to be afraid of God? Not at all! Clearly, the Bible is talking about respecting and having reverence for God which is another meaning of the word translated *fear*.
39. Do you see any conflict between Proverbs 9:10 and James 1:5? Read 1 Corinthians 1:10; 8:7-13; 10:25.
40. Paul had to deal with a lot of conflicts in the church at Corinth. One of the most challenging was the subject of whether or not Christians should be allowed to eat food offered to idols. For a full understanding of all that was involved based on what Scriptures we have available to us, read Acts 15, Romans 14, and 1 Corinthians 8&10.
41. Doesn't it look like Paul was disagreeing with the report of the committee from Jerusalem of which he had been a part? (Acts 15)
42. Few of us would deny that God's wisdom is best. But, how does that impact our lives on a day-by-day basis? Here are some critical questions from page 30 of the *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\*:
1. Why do human beings find that doing what they want is so appealing? How can seeking God's will become more appealing?
  2. Why do we frequently lose sight of what God has done for us soon after a crisis has passed? How might we prevent this forgetfulness in the future?
  3. Does obedience to God's will always lead to unity? Why not?
  4. What can we learn about wisdom by simply being in relationship with God? How does this help us when we are seeking for wisdom in regard to specific issues?
  5. How can we continue to focus our attention on Christ in our busy world?

What are we doing individually to promote unity in the church?

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Last Modified: August 5, 2018

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