FEEDING THE WHOLE BODY

Even though the coconut is a very healthy and valued fruit, it can provide nutrition only if opened the right way. Some years ago a theology student at an Adventist University in northeast Brazil was talking to his friends under a tall coconut tree. He suddenly passed out after being hit in the head by a large falling coconut of more than three pounds (1.4 kilograms).

The point is that despite how beneficial that coconut would be, it was unable to nurture the student’s body just by hitting his head. To provide nutrition, the coconut must enter the body in an appropriate, nontraumatic way, through the mouth, created and provided by our God. From there it is processed and distributed so that it provides nourishment and sometimes healing to the body.

God planned the church in such a way that it, Christ’s body, should be sustained in a similar way. He established only one place—His storehouse—by which tithes and regular offerings should be received. From that place, they are processed, and nourishment is distributed throughout the whole body, equally nurturing all of its parts.

This week we will explore the narratives of two giving motivators and the spiritual consequences of the way they related to the storehouse principle. One aimed to bring revival and reformation while enforcing the practice of this principle. The other induced his people to apostasy by replacing God’s storehouse system with another system of his own creation.
Write out Deuteronomy 12:5–14 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Deuteronomy 12:11. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.
Jeroboam: Storehouse under Attack

The accounts of Cain and Abel, and also of Abraham delivering the tithe to Melchizedek, are indications that since ancient times God's children were instructed about how to worship Him with their tithe and offerings. Just before the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, however, more detailed instructions were provided about where to bring them (Deut. 12:14; 22–29; 18:6–8).

God's command about this subject was clear. The Israelites were told not to do according to what was right in their own eyes (Deut. 12:8, 13). Instead, they were instructed to "seek the place where the Lord your God chooses"—which was the temple and storehouse—and "there you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes" (vv. 5, 6, 11–13).

Through these instructions God planned that they would be regularly exposed to religious education provided by the Levites. They were chosen by God, among all tribes, to perform religious services, to keep the knowledge of God, and to be His messengers (Mal. 2:7), typifying Jesus' ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 5; 8; 9). No other person apart from the Levites could be appointed for that service (Heb. 5:4).

Because the Levites would have exclusive dedication to this service, the Lord commanded the children of Israel to provide for them and for the temple service (e.g., Ezek. 44:28–30), but never giving directly to them. Through the storehouse system all resources were collected in a centralized place—God's storehouse, or treasury—and from there allotted or distributed equitably, supporting all the needs of God's work and workers (Mal. 3:7–10; 2 Chron. 31:5–20). No other place and no other god should receive the people's offerings.

But Solomon challenged the storehouse system when he married foreign women (let alone being unequally yoked), built altars for their gods, and joined them in offering to idols. This specific action was identified as the cause for the division of the kingdom during the reign of his son Rehoboam, when the major part was given to Jeroboam, one of Solomon's servants (see 1 Kings 11:1–13).

Jeroboam was a strong giving motivator, but to the wrong destination. God promised him, through Ahijah the prophet, that if he would walk in God's ways and keep His statutes and commandments, he would be given "an enduring house" (v. 38). But after installed as king of the 10 northern tribes, he mistakenly feared personal and national loss if his people would comply with God's storehouse system in going back to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord. Then "they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah," he dreaded (1 Kings 12:27).

Therefore, he directed the people to give at Bethel instead of Jerusalem, as established by God. Afraid of humanity instead of fearing God, he induced the people to accept a more convenient way to give. It was "too much" (v. 28) going up to Jerusalem, he said. In other words, "do less," do locally!

As the Levites in his territory didn't join him in his apostasy, Jeroboam "made priests from every class of people," rejecting the Levites (v. 31). As a result, all the Levites located in Israel moved to Judah, and all God-fearing people kept going "to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord God" (2 Chron. 11:14–16).

(Cont. on p. 69)
HEZEKIAH: STOREHOUSE RESTORED

In the many attempts to end the temple services at Jerusalem, Satan temporarily attained his goal during the reign of Ahaz (2 Chron. 28:24). God’s enemy knew that by destroying God’s house and the storehouse system, not only the sacrifices and other religious services would be suspended, but the Levites’ maintenance would be cut off. This would prevent their dedication to the study and teaching the law of God as well as the performance of religious services as determined by God. As it was then, if there is no continuous and faithful religious instruction today, apostasy is one step ahead.

Following Ahaz’s early death, his son Hezekiah became king, and started a successful “revival and reformation” initiative. As his first action, he wisely decided to restore the temple and God’s appointed offering system. In the first month of his reign, he reopened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them (2 Chron. 29:3). At the same time, he brought back the priests and Levites who, by the need of looking after their own subsistence, neglected their role as religious educators. He then challenged the Levites to sanctify themselves and the house of God, removing all rubbish from it, which they did promptly.

Since ancient times, public worship was always centered on presenting offerings to God, which would point to Jesus, God’s offering to humanity. Consequently, giving to God must be an important part of every true revival initiative, because “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21).

After consecrating the assembly through the burnt offering and the sin offering, the king challenged the people to present their own sacrifices and thank offerings. So many offerings were brought that the priests were too few to prepare them.

After the Passover revival celebrations were over, a reformation process began in the country. Hezekiah then restructured the storehouse system, organizing the Levites by divisions and ascribing everyone a work (2 Chronicles 31). He then motivated giving by his own example, appointing a portion of his possessions for the regular offerings (v. 3).

Instead of waiting for the assembly’s spontaneity, “he commanded the people who dwelt in Jerusalem to contribute support [or the portion due—margin] for the priests and the Levites, that they might devote themselves to the Law of the Lord” (v. 4), following God’s guidance given through Moses. The people brought their firstfruits, tithes, and offerings in such an abundance that they piled them up in heaps.

When the king questioned the priests and the Levites about the heaps, their answer was: “Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat and have plenty left, for the Lord has blessed His people; and what is left is this great abundance” (v. 10).

So “Hezekiah commanded them to prepare rooms in the house of the Lord. . . . Then they faithfully brought in the offerings, the tithes, and the dedicated things” (v. 11). In addition, he selected treasurers to oversee those rooms, and a different team to distribute the goods to all the Levites in a fair way, “to the great as well as the small” (v. 15), and to all their family members as well (see vv. 16–19).

(Cont. on p. 69)
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Acts 1:8
Revelation 14:6, 7
Psalm 66:13
Psalm 116:12-14
Malachi 3:6-10
Matthew 6:21
Acts 4:32-36
John 17:21-23

What other verses come to mind in connection with Deuteronomy 12:5-14?


(Cont. from inGest p. 67):

Solomon and Jeroboam’s accounts exemplify the fact that subtle or frontal attacks to the storehouse system will always lead to or are motivated by apostasy. Satan-originated and self-centered ideas are also behind those attacks. After all, Satan knows very well how vital this system is to God’s end-time strategy.

(Cont. from inTerpret p. 68):

Hezekiah’s account highlights the importance of at least two elements during every successful revival and reformation initiative: (1) proactive leadership motivating people to worship the Lord with their giving, and (2) compliance to the storehouse system. What Hezekiah did was “good and right and true before the Lord his God,” and that is why “he prospered” (vv. 20, 21). Every modern Hezekiah, who also wants to prosper, need to emulate his example.

(Cont. from inVite p. 70): (local mission); twenty to thirty percent should support conference, union, and division missionary advancement (regional mission); and twenty percent should be designated to the World Budget, or the World Missionary Fund (international mission). This distribution covers in an equitable way all worldwide authorized missionary projects and initiatives!

Where this plan is practiced (currently in eleven world divisions/administrative regions, covering more than ninety percent of the global Adventist population), all loose or unassigned offerings will always be automatically distributed according to the above formula.

Irrespective of where you live, you are always free to decide about the destination of your offering. But every time you distribute your regular offerings according to the Combined Offering Plan’s suggestion (as above), you are uniting with brothers and sisters from around the world who, like you, want to follow Jesus’ commission and reach all the world with the message of His soon coming.
Jesus’ last words to His disciples before ascending to heaven not only indicated how they would receive power, but also what they should do with that power, and where: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Jesus defines here three important geographical segments that should be equally targeted by the church’s mission (and consequently be financially supported): (1) Jerusalem (local mission); (2) Judea and Samaria (regional mission); and (3) the ends of the world (global or international mission). Revelation 14:6 also indicates “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” as the recipients of the “everlasting gospel.”

This seems to be an impossible task unless we humble ourselves and put all personal and financial resources together. By putting aside suspicion, thoughts of supremacy, conceit, pride, arrogance, and selfishness, we allow Jesus to work through the collective of His body, the church.

In the context of Acts 1:8, the condition for receiving the Holy Spirit was clear: they must be together (vv. 4, 6). They complied with this condition by being united in their plans, financial resources, and service to others (Acts 2:44, 45; 4:32, 34–37; 5:1–11). This condition has not changed.

The storehouse system is Jesus’ answer to the worldwide missionary challenge faced by the church. Two elements, among others, are critically tied together under this system: (1) bringing tithes and regular offerings to a common place (Deut. 12:5–13; Mal. 3:8–10); and (2) a fair distribution of those funds (2 Chron. 31:15–21; Neh. 13:10–13). If we obey Jesus’ commissions of Acts 1:8 and Revelation 14:6, this distribution must equally support the three segments mentioned by Him: local, regional, and international.

How does it work? Every time you worship the Lord with your tithe, it is sent to the storehouse, considered by the Adventist Church as being the local conference. United with the tithes of others, it is automatically distributed in an equitable way, according to a voted formula, used exclusively to support authorized local, regional, and international ministers, missionaries, and their support teams.

Some may wonder why we should give regular offerings in addition to the tithe. First, the Bible tells us that regular offerings are as expected by God to be brought to the storehouse as is the tithe (e.g., Deut. 12; Mal. 3:8–10). Also, as tithe is a restricted fund (which can be used only as described above), regular offerings provide for all other local, regional, and international missionary expenses.

Following Jesus’ missionary commission of Acts 1:8, the Adventist Church voted in 2002 the Combined Offering Plan as the offering plan suggested and promoted by the General Conference. Among other things, it encourages regular giving and adherence to the storehouse system.

This plan suggests that fifty to sixty percent of all regular and loose offerings (all weeks) should always be designated to support the local church (cont. on p. 69).

Meditate on Deuteronomy 12:5–14 again and look for where Jesus is.

Which offering is the most important for the accomplishment of Jesus’ missionary strategy?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What is He saying to you through these texts?

Prayer: How do you respond to seeing Jesus in this way?
SYNCHRONOUS SACRIFICES

God works through human instrumentalities; and whoever shall awaken the consciences of men, provoking them to good works and a real interest in the advancement of the cause of truth, does not do it of himself, but by the Spirit of God which worketh in him. Pledges made under these circumstances are of a sacred character, being the fruit of the work of the Spirit of God. When these pledges are canceled, Heaven accepts the offering, and these liberal workers are credited for so much treasure invested in the bank of heaven. Such are laying up a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. (Ellen G. White, Counsels on Stewardship [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1940], 309.)

If Christians were to act in concert, moving forward as one, under the direction of one Power, for the accomplishment of one purpose, they would move the world. (E. G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9 [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1909], 221.)

It is in working to supply the necessities of others that we bring our souls into touch with the Source of all power. The Lord has marked every phase of missionary zeal that has been shown by His people in behalf of foreign fields. He designs that in every home, in every church, and at all the centers of the work, a spirit of liberality shall be shown in sending help to foreign fields, where the workers are struggling against great odds to give the light to those who sit in darkness. (E. G. White, Gospel Workers [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1915], 465, 466.)

Never can the unity for which Christ prayed exist until spirituality is brought into missionary service, and until the church becomes an agency for the support of missions. The efforts of the missionaries will not accomplish what they should until the church members in the home field show, not only in word, but in deed, that they realize the obligation resting on them to give these missionaries their hearty support. (E. G. White, Counsels on Stewardship, 47, 48.)

To show a liberal, self-denying spirit for the success of foreign missions is a sure way to advance home missionary work; for the prosperity of the home work depends largely, under God, upon the reflex influence of the evangelical work done in countries afar off. (E. G. White, Gospel Workers, 465.)

Whenever God’s people, in any period of the world, have cheerfully and willingly carried out His plan in systematic benevolence and in gifts and offerings, they have realized the standing promise that prosperity should attend all their labors just in proportion as obeyed His requirements. When they acknowledged the claims of God, and complied with His requirements, honoring Him with their substance, their barns were filled with plenty. (E. G. White, Counsels on Stewardship, 347.)

The portion that God has reserved for Himself [the tithe] is not to be diverted to any other purpose than that which He has specified. Let none feel at liberty to retain their tithe, to use according to their own judgment. They are not to use it for themselves in an emergency, nor to apply it as they see fit, even in what they may regard as the Lord’s work…

God desires all His stewards to be exact in following divine arrangements. They are not to offset the Lord’s plans [about the use of the tithe] by performing some deed of charity, or giving some gift or some offering, when or how they, the human agents, shall see fit. It is a very poor policy for men to seek to improve on God’s plan, and invent a makeshift, averaging up their good impulses on this and that occasion, and offsetting them against God’s requirements. God calls upon all to give their influence to His own arrangement. (E. G. White, Counsels on Stewardship, 101.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Based on this week’s narrative, what, in your opinion, is the main reason we need to support the ministry of authorized pastors?

Why shouldn’t people involved in independent or supporting ministries, as good as they may be, be supported by tithe funds? Or should they?

What is the problem with waiting for spontaneity while expecting what is good and right?

What damage would be inflicted on the worldwide missionary strategy of the church if every member would bring their tithes and regular offerings only to where it seems right in their own eyes (Deut. 12:8)?

If not already, how can you get involved with the storehouse system?