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Genesis:

The book of Genesis says that we are here because God created us, that our existence resulted from the purposeful act of a loving God who made us in His own image.

In 1997 a Nobel Prize-winning physicist made a stir when he wrote, “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless.” Responding to the statement, one astronomer wrote, “Why should it have a point? What point? It’s just a physical system; what point is there?” Another scientist, agreeing, said, “I am willing to believe that we are flotsam and jetsam.”

Flotsam and jetsam? Yet, considering their premise—that we are here by pure chance alone—what other conclusion would they have drawn? After all, we just one day are born; eventually we become aware of ourselves—pain, fear, and hunger often being the first sensations of self-consciousness. Uninvited, life is foisted upon us without asking for it and yet remains difficult to give back if we don’t want it and impossible to retain if we do. We’re given something none sought after, planned for, or acquiesced in; we’re not sure what it is, what it means, or even why we have it; its most real and immediate givens—pain, sorrow, loss, fear—remain inexplicable.

No wonder these scientists, left to try to understand our origins on their own, see it as all pointless, a mere physical system, nothing more.

How thankful we should be, then, that the Lord hasn’t left us on our own regarding our origins. Genesis is God’s revelation to us of those origins, and it presents a view radically different from what most science presents. That science, without revelation, has determined we’re the creation of meaningless and purposeless forces is more than enough proof of how, without revelation, we get it all wrong.

Indeed, contrary to the “scientific” view, which says we’re here

Creation and Redemption

only because of pure chance, the book of Genesis says that we're here because God created us, that our existence resulted from the purposeful act of a loving and caring God who made human beings "in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (*Gen. 1:27*). It's hard to imagine two more conflicting, irreconcilable positions.

But Creation is only the beginning of Genesis. The book teaches us about the Fall, the global Flood, the Tower of Babel, which together help us better understand the nature of the world we have all found ourselves in without any choice of our own.

Most important, though, Genesis also tells the story of Abraham and the patriarchal line that would arise out of him, the one in whom "all the nations" shall "be blessed" (*Gal. 3:8, RSV*). Genesis doesn't focus only on the Fall and its results; instead, scattered through its pages are symbols and shadows that point to the great hope of salvation offered to God's fallen world through Jesus, a hope offered to everyone who, like Abraham, claims it by faith. Or, as Paul, steeped in Genesis, expressed it: "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" (*Gal. 3:9*)—the father of "all who believe" (*Rom. 4:11, NIV*).

This quarter we'll get an inspired account of the miracle that created us; we'll also get, in hints and symbols, the earliest revelations of the miracle that saves us: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

All this is found in Genesis, a book about Creation and Redemption, not "flotsam and jetsam."

Born in Germany, the late Arthur J. Ferch immigrated to Australia, where he worked for many years as a pastor, teacher, and administrator.

Got Questions?

Sabbath School
University *has answers!*

Sabbath School University is a 28-minute discussion of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*. SSU discusses the content and strategies to enrich your Sabbath School with fellowship, outreach, Bible study, and missions. Sabbath School leaders, don't miss this weekly broadcast on Hope Channel.



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"Outposts of Hope"

Mission outreach often begins with medical care. People go to a hospital who might never enter a church.

I'm glad to know my offering will make a real difference. Songa Adventist Hospital in southeastern Congo needs a maternity ward, Kendu Adventist Hospital in western Kenya needs a surgical suite and ward, and Bugema University in Uganda needs a larger health center to minister to its students and community. Some of these people may never be introduced to Jesus any other way.

My Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on December 30 will help these medical facilities continue their mission of healing and hope. I want to help. For me, it's personal.

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Foundations



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 19:3-8, Luke 17:26-30, Acts 7:1-15, Rom. 1:17, 4:3, 5:14, Heb. 11:1-22.*

Memory Text: “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (*Psalm 11:3*).

South African Laurens Van der Post had a rock sitting on his living room table. When asked about the “strange black stone,” he responded that it came from fifteen thousand feet below the surface of Africa. It was sent to him by a friend who, in the accompanying letter, wrote: “This is a symbol of what you and I have tried to build on all our lives.”

We all build upon foundations. In the most literal sense, we build our lives upon the rocks beneath our feet; but in another, we build our lives around the principles that govern us. Atheists, religious fanatics, skeptics, scientists—everyone governs their lives by fundamental principles, whether they acknowledge those principles or not.

As Christians, our principles are found in and through the person of Jesus Christ, the One in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (*Acts 17:28*). And yet, we know about Jesus through the Bible. So, the Bible, in essence, works as the foundation for our lives and our faith. And, in a sense, Genesis serves as the “foundation” of the Bible, kind of like the “strange black stone” far beneath the earth that held up the ground immediately beneath Laurens’s feet.

This week, we’ll take our first look at this book, the “bedrock” of the Bible itself.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 7.*

Genesis and the New Testament

The Pentateuch (the first five books found in our modern Bibles) comes from a Greek term for “five.” The five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, provide the foundation for our biblical faith. It would be hard to make much sense of our religion without them.

As the first of these five books—and, indeed, the first book in the Bible itself—Genesis begins with the origin of our world. After all, if we don’t have our origins right, how easy it is to get everything else wrong. If a builder working on the joints of a house gets the joint off by a few degrees right from the start, before long the walls will be crooked and unusable. Thus, Genesis begins with a clear and distinct message about our origins.

Of course, the enemy of souls works hard to turn the world away from the true God. One of his methods is to put doubt in our minds regarding the veracity of the Bible. Genesis itself comes under fierce attack. If he can undermine our faith in it, which is so foundational, how easy for him to undermine our faith in everything else.

What do the following texts tell us about how Jesus and the New Testament authors viewed the authenticity and veracity of Genesis? *Matt. 19:3-8; Luke 17:26-30; Acts 7:1-15; Rom. 4:3, 9-21; 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:22; Gal. 3:6; 1 Tim. 2:13, 14; Heb. 11:3-22; 1 Pet. 3:20.*

Are we going to listen to the critics who come up with all sorts of “evidence” to question the historical veracity of Genesis, or do we follow the lead of those like Jesus and Paul and Peter, who showed unquestioned faith in the book? Indeed, to question the veracity of Genesis means to question the veracity of the New Testament, which time and again refers to Genesis. How reliable could the New Testament be if it were all wrong about Genesis? As we can see, once we start questioning the historical veracity of the Genesis account, the whole edifice of faith crumbles. Which, of course, is exactly what Satan wants.

What other examples can you find of how doubt regarding what might seem like a “small” thing can, if taken to its logical conclusion, lead to doubt about major things, as well? Why, then, should we be so careful regarding our trust in the Bible as the Word of God? After all, once you start doubting the Bible, what’s left?

The Mighty and Merciful God

The book of Genesis is first and foremost a revelation of God. In Genesis, humanity is given its first written revelation about our Creator and Redeemer.

What do these following passages tell us about God?

Gen. 1:1

Gen. 7:11

Gen. 14:19, 22

Gen. 18:23-33

Gen. 48:15

The first book of the Bible rings with the might and power of God. He is seen as the Creator, Judge, Exemplar, Sustainer, Most High, Almighty, and Everlasting God. As the Sovereign, He not only exists before everything but also brings everything into existence.

And yet, there's so much more revealed about God here. Even in some of the Genesis accounts about judgment we can see His mercy; His sufferings over humanity's sin; His great patience. Before the Flood came, He had Noah preach many long years, giving everyone an opportunity to be saved. Even with Sodom and Gomorrah, despite their great wickedness, He was willing to spare them, if possible. All through Genesis we can see the might and power of a merciful, loving God who, despite His hatred of sin and evil, loves His fallen creatures and seeks to redeem them.

Write one short paragraph about your understanding of what God is like. What does your answer reveal about your view of God? Be prepared to share your answer in class.

Close Encounters

Genesis, we saw yesterday, depicts God as all-powerful, the One who spoke the world into existence, the One who could bring a flood upon the whole earth, and who could rain fire down on rebellious and violent cities. As humans, looking out at the expanse of the creation, how could we not be in awe at the incredible power of the God who created all things?

Yet, the Bible also depicts God as up close and personal; that is, unlike the god of deism, who creates the world and then goes off to leave it on its own, the God revealed in the Bible has been intimately associated with fallen beings. We see this most powerfully in the life and death of Jesus (*see Phil. 2:5-8*). And yet, even back in Genesis, we are given glimpses of the closeness with which God interacts with His fallen beings. Kind of a nice thought, isn't it, especially if you view God as loving and compassionate.

In the following examples, how do we see God closely interacting with humanity? What does each account tell us about the character of God?

Gen. 2:7

Gen. 3:8

Gen. 18:17

Gen. 39:21

In what ways have you personally experienced the reality of God's nearness? In class, share with others what the experience was like and what you learned from it. Do it in a way that will help encourage others who might not yet have experienced the reality of a God who can be so near to us.

Foundations

In Acts 6 a Jewish believer, Stephen, a man “full of faith and power” who did “great wonders and miracles” (*Acts 6:8*) was hauled before a council of leaders for preaching and promoting Jesus. Acts 7 then begins with him giving the speech that would, when done, lead to his death by stoning (*see Acts 7*).

Read the speech of Stephen in Acts 7:2-17 and then answer the following questions:

1. Does Stephen appear to have any questions about the authenticity of the stories he is recounting? What lesson is here for us?

2. Where is he getting these stories from?

3. What’s the purpose of his telling these stories as part of his defense of his belief in Jesus?

If you look at the context, Stephen is being challenged for his preaching that Jesus is the Messiah. And he starts his defense back in Genesis, with the call to Abraham; he then traces the family history from him up through Joseph in Egypt to the founding of the nation of Israel and the building of the temple itself. All of which culminated in the coming of “the Just One” (*Acts 7:52*), Jesus of Nazareth.

The point is that Stephen uses Genesis as the starting point for the great truths that climaxed in Jesus, “the truth” (*John 14:6*). These Jews, who formed the core of the church, had a firm foundation for their faith in Jesus—and that was the Holy Scriptures, of which Genesis was the starting point. Hence, we can see the important role this book should play in our own understanding of what we believe, as well.

What are some of the “foundations” in your own life, basic things upon which so much else rests? How firm are these foundations? Are you sure they are firm enough to hold you even during the weightiest of trials?

The Just Shall Live by Faith

“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (*Rom. 1:17*).

Write out your understanding of the above text.

It's often heard that in Old Testament times believers in the Lord were saved by works of the law and that after the death of Jesus and the beginning of the Christian church they began to be saved by faith alone. Yet, that's not Bible teaching, not in the Old or New Testament. According to the New Testament, God's people lived by faith even from the beginning.

Read Hebrews 11:1-22, an inspired account of the lives of some of those found in Genesis. How does what you read there harmonize with Romans 1:17? As you read about each person, place yourself in their position and ask yourself what it was they were having to take on faith; that is, what they were needing to trust God on. What lessons can you learn from their experiences that can help you with whatever you are going through right now?

Go back to Hebrews 11:13-16. What are those verses talking about? In what ways can you relate to what's being said there? Look at your own life and ask, What do my actions say regarding what country I am seeking? What changes might you need to be making in your journey?

Further Study:

“The work of higher criticism, in dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God’s word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives. By spiritualism, multitudes are taught to believe that desire is the highest law, that license is liberty, and that man is accountable only to himself. . . .

“The power of a higher, purer, nobler life is our great need.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 474, 478.

“Night, dark and portentous, is enclosing the Christian world. Apostasy from God’s commandments is evidence of this night, deep, dark, and apparently impenetrable. Systems that make the truth of God of none effect are cherished. Men are teaching for doctrine the commandments of men; and their assertions are taken as truth. The people have received man-made theories. So the gospel is perverted, and the Scripture misapplied. As in the days of Christ, the light of truth is pushed into the background. Men’s theories and suppositions are honoured before the word of the Lord God of hosts. The truth is counteracted by error. The word of God is wrested, divided, and distorted by higher criticism. Jesus is acknowledged, only to be betrayed by a kiss. Apostasy exists, and will enclose the world till the last. Its hideous character and darkening influence will be seen in the mad-dening draughts dealt out from Babylon.”—Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo*, Feb. 1, 1897.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Discuss the Ellen White quotes listed above. What kind of influences in your society are working against the authority of the Scriptures? How can we, as a people, protect ourselves and others from these sentiments?
- 2** In class, read your paragraphs regarding what each person believes God is like. Discuss your answers and what you can learn from each other.
- 3** Talk about your answer to the question at the end of Wednesday’s lesson. What can you learn from others’ experiences regarding the closeness of God? How would you explain to a non-believer what it means when we say that “God is close” to us?

The Letters That Changed a Village

by BIKILA MERGA

A letter from an isolated area of Ethiopia leads to a new group of believers.

Adventist World Radio's program producer in Ethiopia, Temesgen Bulti, received a listener letter that made him take note. The listener, who lives in an isolated area several hours from the capital city of Addis Ababa, asked for clarification regarding the Sabbath and the Holy Spirit's manifestation in Christian churches.

Bulti answered the listener's questions and sent literature in his language. The listener learned more Bible truths and confronted his pastor with questions. "Why do we worship on Sunday, contrary to the Bible?" he asked. Their pastor could not answer the question, and, realizing where his member had learned about the Sabbath, traveled to AWR's studios in Addis Ababa to get answers.

In response, AWR aired more programs designed to answer the questions and specific needs of the people in this community, including further information on the Sabbath. The congregation closed their church on Sunday and began worshipping on Saturday. They sent elders to Addis Ababa with a petition to be recognized as a Sabbath-keeping congregation. Bulti referred them to the Central Ethiopian field office.

Church leaders promised to come and hold meetings in the village. A team made the difficult journey to the village, including a five-hour hike from the nearest road.

"Church members were so excited when we arrived that they carried our luggage [and even] the generator all the way to their village," Bulti says.

More than five hundred people attended the evening meetings, many of them sleeping in tents so they would not miss a meeting. Following the meetings, 185 people were baptized and another 350 committed their lives to the Lord and will join the Seventh-day Adventist Church soon. Members of other churches want to become Seventh-day Adventists too. The church headquarters in Ethiopia plans to build a church for these new believers.

Until the evangelistic meetings, there had been no Seventh-day Adventist presence in this area, more than one hundred miles (one hundred fifty kilometers) north of Addis Ababa. This is an area that has proven difficult to enter because of the strong hold by the traditional church of Ethiopia. Recently listener interest has increased significantly, judging by the number of letters the station receives. AWR plans to follow up with materials produced for each language group.

Our mission offerings make possible the work of Adventist World Radio in Ethiopia and around the world.

BIKILA MERGA is communication director for the Ethiopia Union Mission in Addis Ababa.

“In the Beginning . . .”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 1.*

Memory Text: “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (*Psalms 33:6, 9*).

On the topic of human origins, a famous scientist wrote: “We’re here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures.”

The Bible, of course—particularly the first two chapters of Genesis—gives a completely different account of our origins: We’re here only because a loving, benevolent Creator-God purposely created life on earth in a process that took six literal contiguous 24-hour days.

It is pretty obvious that modern evolutionary theory stands in blatant opposition to the biblical account of Creation. If one is correct, the other has to be wrong. Even more so, the Bible offers no wiggle room for theistic evolution or any theories that seek to integrate a long evolutionary process with the work of God in creating life on earth, especially human life. As we’ll study this week, in the creation of the world, particularly humans, it doesn’t appear that God left anything to chance.

Let’s take a look at what the Bible says about origins and see for ourselves that the reason we are here has nothing to do with some fish fin that could, by chance, turn into a leg, and everything to do with the God who spoke the world into existence.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 14.*

“In the Beginning, God . . .”

One could argue that, in many ways, the most important text in the Bible is Genesis 1:1. Out of it and all that it contains flows everything else that we as Christians believe. None of our basic teachings make sense apart from the idea expressed in that verse—an idea that becomes even more pertinent in our day and age, when so many people have been swept away by false science, which explains Creation as the result of natural forces that, by chance, evolved into life on this earth. The Bible, with its first verse, denies that idea completely.

Read the following texts. What’s the common message in all of them?
Exod. 20:11; Job 38:4; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 14:6, 7.

Even more than the process of Creation itself, nature’s Creator remains the primary focus in the rest of Genesis 1. The word *God* punctuates the 31 verses of this chapter 32 times, a fact that emphasizes God’s role in Creation. The first chapter of Genesis seems to go out of its way to remove any notion of chance in Creation. Also, unlike other ancient polytheisms, which often linked Creation with the battles of ancient deities, Genesis depicts only one God as the sovereign Creator.

The verb translated “created” in verse 1 (*bara*) appears in the Bible only when it depicts an activity of God. The other common word used when human beings or even God makes or does things is *asah*. Only God, then, can do the kind of creating that was required to make the heavens and the earth. As humans, we can work within that Creation and do (*asah*) things with it, but only God could create (*bara*) it itself.

It’s a fundamental law that nothing created can be greater than its creator. (Try to think of an example.) Hence, when you view the entire creation, not just the earth (the main focus of Genesis 1), and realize that the God who created the universe is *greater* than the universe, what does that tell you about the power of God? What does it tell you about the sacrifice of this God, who became a human being who died in your stead the death that you deserved?

The Creation

When Genesis 1:1 says that God created heaven and earth, some believe that “heaven” here includes the entire universe. A study of the use of the word *heaven* in the rest of the chapter shows that’s not what’s meant.

See how the word *heaven* is used in the rest of the chapter (*see especially vs. 20*). **What, from the context, is the meaning of *heaven* in Genesis 1?**

What does verse 2 tell us about the condition of the earth at the beginning of Creation?

The phrase “without form, and void” depicts an environment without shape, form, and light, and void of plant and animal life; in short, a nonlife-supporting globe. God created by means of a commanding word (*vs. 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24; compare Ps. 33:6-9*) or by using the matter that He already had brought into existence some time before the creation of life on earth. Though the reading of these texts in Genesis doesn’t require a creation out of nothing, God wasn’t dependent upon preexisting matter in order to create the earth. Whatever matter He used to make the earth, He had already at some point in the past created out of nothing because, according to the Bible, God created everything.

Read John 1:3. **What point is that verse making, and how does it help us understand these opening verses of Genesis?**

In two short verses we are given the essence of our origins: A Creator-God made us from a formless and void earth. Much else remains a mystery that we’ll never understand now. It is, though, a miracle that we’re here at all. Meditate on our existence, on the miracle of Creation, and on all that we owe to God. Write out your thoughts and bring them to class on Sabbath.

The Creation Days

Probably no aspect of the Creation story comes under more attack than the time frame it depicts for the creation of life on earth, culminating in Adam and Eve. Almost throughout the Christian world, where the Bible is supposedly held in high esteem, few accept the Genesis time frame as it reads, with its clear and unambiguous depiction of six literal 24-hour days of Creation. Apparently, evolution—a teaching that at its core denies everything that the Bible stands for and teaches—has made deep inroads even in the Christian community. Jesus once said, in reference to His second coming, “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (*Luke 18:8*). Unless there’s a radical change, He certainly won’t find much faith regarding the Bible’s account of Creation, that’s for sure.

Read through Genesis 1, focusing on the time element in which Creation is depicted. What evidence can you find directly within the chapter itself that shows that literal time was meant? Also, what other texts can you find in the Bible that show it was meant to be literal, not figurative, time? (*See, for example, Exod. 20:8-11.*)

Read carefully Genesis 1:4, 5. A simple reading of these two verses makes it clear that it is talking about a single day, as we understand a day—half light and half darkness, “day” and “night.” These two elements, the text says, made up “the first day.” These verses, then, are talking about the creation of the 24-hour period we use to mark off each single day. And this account ends with a formula that reads in Hebrew, “And there was evening and there was morning, day one.” That same formula—first used here to mark off explicitly a single day, the creation of this 24-hour time period—is then repeated throughout the rest of the chapter to depict the other days of Creation themselves. “And there was evening and there was morning, day two,” . . . “day three,” and so forth. Hence, within the first few verses the Lord showed us unambiguously that when the Bible says, in Exodus 20, for instance, that “in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth” (*vs. 11, NIV*), He meant six days, nothing less and certainly nothing more.

The Chicken or the Egg?

The Genesis Creation account is not simple, which shouldn't be surprising. After all, the earth and life on earth aren't simple. We have been given (even with chapter 2 included) about fifty-six verses to explain Creation: Most manuals on how to fix a bicycle are longer. No doubt a lot has been left out. How fortunate that we'll have an eternity to learn more. We'll need it.

Nevertheless, there's still plenty of information there for us to ponder now.

Read through Genesis 1 again; this time focus on the sequence of events. What pattern emerges? How does this pattern make sense in regard to our understanding of the nature of life on earth?

Genesis starts out saying that earth was “without form, and void” (*Gen. 1:2*). God then proceeded to give our earth form and remove the “void.” If you follow the sequence, at first there's darkness and then light; this leads to demarcation of day and night. Next, there's some kind of atmosphere, a “firmament” called “heaven.” Water, it seems, is already there at the time of earth's creation, which, of course, is needed for life (at least as life exists here). God then brings forth dry land, and then upon the dry land there came vegetation, grass, herbs, trees (all of which needed land first in order to exist) “whose seed is in itself” (*vss. 11, 12*). This is followed by the presence of the sun and the moon and the visible stars (why these are depicted here, in this manner, in this part of the sequence, is one of those questions we'll probably have to wait to get answered in heaven). Finally, with all these other things in place, God was able to bring forth creatures, land and sea creatures who were flying and swarming and moving throughout this part of God's creation, living things who were to “be fruitful, and multiply” (*vs. 21*) upon the face of the earth. Thus, it seems that, within our limited understanding, the Lord followed a very logical sequence and pattern that resulted in the creation of life here.

Keeping the Genesis account in mind, answer this question: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Justify your answer, and why is that answer (or at least the principles behind that answer) important to our own understanding of just who we are and why we are here?

The Creation of Humanity

Compare the creation of the animals to the creation of Adam. What are the similarities? *See Gen. 1:24; 2:7, 19.*

What are the differences? *Gen. 1:26, 27; 2:7.*

In contrast to the creation of the animals and Adam, how was Eve created? *Gen. 2:21-24.*

As stated yesterday, there's so much about Creation not revealed in the Scriptures. But enough is revealed to show the special place of humanity (notice in Genesis 1:27 that the generic term *man* included both male and female; it takes two different sexes to define what is meant by human) in the Creation story. Only after God had everything else perfectly in place did He create Adam (whose name in Hebrew is very closely related to the word for "ground"), and only after him did He create Eve. Despite some similarities between these humans and the beasts, the Bible makes a clear distinction between them. Also, as with the creation of everything else, Genesis knows nothing about chance in the formation of humanity. On the contrary, the systematic pattern of Creation, expressed in repeated formulas ("and God saw," "and God said," "let there be") in a repeated time frame ("and there was evening and morning . . ."), culminating in the intimate act of creating both the man (*Gen. 2:7*) and the woman (*vss. 21-24*), show that God left nothing to chance.

Read Genesis 1:26, 27. What does this idea of humanity being made in God's image mean? What are the differences between human beings and other earthly creatures—differences that might help us better understand the unique place we have? Also, think about Jesus, the humanity of Jesus, and the death of Jesus only for human beings as opposed to the animals, which also have suffered from the consequences of sin. How does the Cross help us understand our special place in the creation of the earth? How should this understanding impact how we view others, and ourselves?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 44, 45; *Education*, pp. 15–18; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 1.

“When Adam came from the Creator’s hand, he bore, in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker. . . . It was His [God’s] purpose that the longer man lived the more fully he should reveal [His] image—the more fully reflect the glory of the Creator.”
—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 15.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Most of us were taught that atoms, made up of tiny particles such as protons, neutrons, and electrons, are the smallest building blocks of the universe. A new theory states that these particles are actually made of tiny vibrating strings (a string is to the size of a proton as a proton is to the size of the solar system!). Though it’s still only a theory, think about the idea of these vibrating strings (different vibrations bring about different particles) in light of the teaching that God “spoke” the world into existence.
- 2 Discuss Genesis 1:28 and the teaching that God has given humanity “dominion” over the earth. What does that mean? What responsibilities does that entail? How can we as a church and as individuals better fulfill that responsibility?
- 3 The Bible teaches a supernatural origin of our world. How does that idea help us better understand the reality of a supernatural end of this world?
- 4 Plan a trip with your class to go out in nature and explore the wonders of creation. If possible, bring along some people who don’t yet know Jesus and the wonderful plan of salvation. See what you all can learn, believers and unbelievers, about God through His created works.

Wasted Years

by ILIANA GARCÍA

A mother's conversion leads her adult daughter back to Christ.

I attended a Protestant church with my father when I was growing up, but when I was a teen, I stopped going. I was glad that I knew about God, but I did not like the strict rules our church imposed.

Soon after I married, my mother became an Adventist Christian. She shared her new beliefs with me, and I saw the huge changes in her life. She invited me to visit her church, and I did. And when she gave me literature, she would say, "Read the Bible, and you will see that this is true." It worked. I believed.

But with my job and my family, it was easy to know the right way but not so easy to follow it. I attended church with Mother once a month and took the children. But as they grew up, they went their own way, just as I had with my father.

For years I attended church without committing myself to God. I wanted to follow God in baptism, but many things had to change in my life before I could be baptized. For one, I needed to stop smoking. I tried everything to quit—except surrendering my habit to God. Cigarettes were my comfort, and I feared the pain of withdrawal, even when my doctor said they were killing me.

Then I realized that cigarettes were a chain that held me prisoner. Only God could remove that chain, and I had to ask Him to do it. I prayed honestly and asked God to break the chain of addiction that held me prisoner.

That day I went home, laid my pack of cigarettes on the table, and walked away. I did not tell my family until I had been smoke-free for a week. But they noticed and secretly rejoiced.

I started attending church regularly and prepared for baptism. It was a joyful day for my family and me. My only regret is that I had wasted so many years—years when I could have been training my children to love God and His church as I now do.

Your mission offerings provide the support programs that helped lead me and thousands of others to Jesus. Thank you!

ILIANA GARCÍA lives in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The Early Earth



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 2.*

Memory Verse: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (*Genesis 2:1*).

Having dealt with how all of Creation came into being, Moses now focuses on human beings and their immediate environment. While Genesis 1 answered the question How did it all originate? Genesis 2 explains why we are what we are. Without the information provided by Genesis 2, the test of allegiance to God and the subsequent Fall described in Genesis 3 would, to a large extent, be unintelligible.

The intimate world of Adam and Eve surrounded by trees and animals in a garden complements the previous majestic account of Creation. Chapter 2 introduces the reader of the Bible to the social dimensions of humanity and gives some insight on prehistory and the original geography of the world.

Genesis 2 also deals with such divine institutions as Sabbath, work, home, and marriage. Given to the human race before the Fall, these institutions lie at the basis of human existence, conduct, and happiness even today. Though we are, indeed, a long way from Eden, it still presents a model, a template of principles, for we who are on the periphery of Eden restored. What messages are found in this divine account of a prefallen world for the rest of us, we who have known only a fallen existence?

This week we'll take a look at, literally, paradise, one of the few we'll ever see, at least for now.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 21.*

The Sabbath (*Gen. 2:1-3*)

Last week we saw a progression in the Creation account: from darkness to light, from only water to earth and water, to an atmosphere, to vegetation, and so forth, culminating in the creation of human beings, first the man and then the woman. Only after all these things were created do we get the words in Genesis 2:1—“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” God’s work of Creation, at least as attested to here, was a finished work. This notion is implied in Genesis 2:2, 3, where both verses say that God “rested” from His work. Was God tired, or did He rest because His work was completed?

Read Genesis 2:2, 3 and answer the following questions:

1 Is there anything in the texts that implies that Creation was an ongoing process that continued after the sixth day? What are the implications of your answer?

2 Considering what the Sabbath stands for, the Creation, how do these verses already imply the universality of the Sabbath; that is, its meaning for all humanity?

Although the noun *sabbath* is not mentioned in Genesis 2, the verb for “rested,” from which the term *sabbath* is derived, proves that the Sabbath is meant (*see Exod. 20:8-11*). Just as six literal days came before it, the Sabbath is a literal day, as well.

Notice, too, that the first thing God declared holy was time, the seventh day. Not a hill, not a river, not a shrine, but a segment of time itself was the first thing in God’s new Creation specifically “set apart” (another way of expressing “to be made holy”). Thus, we see the Sabbath as something special, something universal, something not bounded by the limits of place or geography but as something that can reach every human being no matter where they live.

Next time you welcome in the Sabbath, dwell on the fact that you are keeping a day that goes all the way back to Eden, to the first week of human existence. How does that make you feel, linking yourself in such a tangible way to your origins?

Nephesh Hayyah

In Genesis 2, the scene shifts from the Creation of the world to a local garden. Rather than being a second and different Creation narrative, Genesis 2 complements Genesis 1. Human beings are the pinnacle of the pyramid in Genesis 1. In Genesis 2 they become the center of the circle. The spotlight falls on the human race, and everything else is relegated to the background.

Back in Genesis, it wasn't until the fifth day that God created "living creatures," from the Hebrew *nephesh hayyah*. *Hayyah* here means "life," and *nephesh* means "creature." Interestingly enough, that same phrase appears in 2:7.

Read Genesis 2:7. What phrase seems most likely in the text to have been translated from *nephesh hayyah*?

Most people are surprised to learn that the phrase often translated "living soul" (*Gen. 2:7*) in the creation of humanity is the same one used to describe fish and birds and other creeping things. Though unlike these other creatures, humanity was made in the "image of God" (*Gen. 1:27*); in a purely physical sense humanity is tied to other life on earth. And, of course, we see this in the sense that, like other life on earth, we need certain physical things in order to stay alive.

How does this use of the word *nephesh* in Genesis 2:7 (often translated "soul") help us understand why the soul isn't immortal? (*Ezek. 18:4, Matt. 10:28*).

Though the Bible uses the word *nephesh* in numerous ways, denoting a variety of ideas ("person," "self," "life," or "being"), it never means in the Old Testament the popular notion of some separate conscious immortal entity that can exist apart from the body. That's a pagan Greek idea that has filtered into almost all monotheistic religions today.

Make a list of the common popular deceptions that arise from belief in an immortal soul. Why should one who understands the truth about the soul be so grateful that he or she does understand? What does that knowledge protect you from?

The Garden Home *(Gen. 2:8-17)*

The specific geographical details presented in verses 10 through 14 indicate that, in the mind of the Bible writer, Eden was a specific locality rather than merely being a symbol or a metaphor. Several of the names mentioned in verses 11 through 14 are later applied to post-Flood localities and rivers. However, the Flood changed the surface features of our planet so radically that identification of pre-Flood geography with places and rivers known to us is impossible.

What elements mentioned in verses 8 through 17 indicate that the garden home was an ideal model? (Note particularly the setting and the attention given to humanity's physical, mental, aesthetic, and moral needs.)

Even today, with a world ravaged by six thousand years of sin, we can get hints of what the original beauty must have been like. Traces remain, and they speak to us of God's wonderful creative power (*Job 12:7-9; Rom. 1:19, 20*). It's hard to imagine what Eden must have looked like and what a paradise it must have been.

What's the closest thing to paradise that you've ever seen? What made it like paradise? In what ways does it parallel what Eden, or the earth as a whole, must have been like?

Read Genesis 2:15. How interesting that Adam, even in this earthly paradise, with everything he could possibly need, was given the task of working in the garden. The Hebrew word translated "dress" is a common term meaning to "work" or to "serve." Thus, even before the Fall, even before sin, humanity wasn't to sit idle but to work. This alone should get rid of the notion that work itself is somehow bad.

Though we're a long way from Eden, what practical things could you do now to make your environment more like Eden for yourself and those around you? What changes would need to be made?

The Woman in Adam's Life *(Gen. 2:18-25)*

Here's Adam, in a garden paradise, with rulership over the animals, with everything at his disposal except one tree (*see Gen. 2:16, 17*). And yet, still God has more for him.

What was God's purpose in giving woman to man? *Gen. 2:18, 20.*

The woman was to be a "help meet for him" (the Hebrew suggests a "helper over against him," "a help equal to him," "his counterpart"). The Genesis record places value on woman as an equal, a counterpart, a partner, or a complement in whose company man finds his fullest satisfaction and with whom he shares God's image and likeness.

Read Genesis 1:27, 28. How do these two verses together show the important role the woman was to have in life on earth?

Considering the basic physical makeup of Adam, he couldn't fulfill the command given in Genesis 1:28 without a woman, could he? Though the woman was to be his companion, wife, and co-worker in subduing and having dominion over nature, she was to be so much more, as well (*see Gen. 2:24*).

How was Eve created? *Gen. 2:21, 22.* What distinguished her creation from that of all other living things?

Everything else, including man, came out of the dirt; Eve came out of man. Though the Bible doesn't explain just what that difference means, it certainly shows that she wasn't to be treated as an inferior to him. Sadly, in so many societies, women are treated almost as slaves, afforded little dignity and few rights, a powerful example of what sin has done to the human race.

Have you, either as a man or woman, acquired from your culture (maybe even subconsciously) some of the wrong attitudes about women? How could what's taught in Genesis 2 help change these attitudes?

Eve Becomes Adam's Wife (*Gen. 2:23, 24*)

In Genesis 2:23, Adam was so rapt that he expressed his triumphant welcome of his wife in poetry (verse 23 is the first poetic couplet in Scripture). The creation of Eve and her and Adam's subsequent marriage were designed to be a great blessing. One man, with one woman, were to form the foundation of the home, the basic unit out of which all human life was to spring and then exist. This model was how they were, indeed, to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (*Gen. 1:28*).

What has sin done to this ideal? What common things occur now that deviate from it? What have been the results?

What steps in marriage are outlined in the words of God, and in what order are these steps to occur? *Gen. 2:24*.

God's ideal for marriage is expounded in this verse. When the time came to leave those closest to him, his parents, man's first earthly loyalty was to be to his wife. She was to occupy the foremost place in his affections. In God's order the union of bodies between husband and wife is to follow their commitment in marriage. The biblical order "leave . . . cleave . . . and they shall be one flesh" tragically and defiantly has been turned upside down, with tragic results.

What kind of intimate relationship between husband and wife does Scripture uphold long after the Fall? *1 Cor. 7:2-5, Eph. 5:21-29, Heb. 13:4*. What principles do you find in these verses that reflect what marriage was like before the Fall? And, most important, if married, what can you do to better reveal these principles in your own home?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 46–51; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 2.

“The home of our first parents was to be a pattern for other homes as their children should go forth to occupy the earth. That home, beautified by the hand of God Himself, was not a gorgeous palace. . . . God placed Adam in a garden. . . . In the surroundings of the holy pair was a lesson for all time—that true happiness is found, not in the indulgence of pride and luxury, but in communion with God through His created works. . . . Pride and ambition are never satisfied, but those who are truly wise will find substantial and elevating pleasure in the sources of enjoyment that God has placed within the reach of all.”
—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 49, 50.

“Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self, showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this *relation*.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** How are we today to understand the words in Genesis 1:27, 28 about the man and woman subduing and dominating the earth? What might that have meant then, before sin, and now, after sin? What message does that have for us today in how we relate to our environment?
- 2** How does your society treat women? What practical things can you do, if necessary, to help women who are being mistreated? What can and should your local church be doing that it's not doing now?
- 3** Are there some marriages in trouble in your church? What can you do, as a class, in a very practical manner, to help support those going through this painful turmoil?

One Man's Search for Meaning

by LEONID TALMAZAN

I grew up in Russia. My father was an honest, sincere Communist with a strong sense of right and wrong. But I am sad to say that I did not follow his example. I spent my time hanging out with my friends who lived in the neighboring apartment blocks. Their influence was not as positive as my parents' influence. I refused to apply myself in school, and soon I began to fail. I felt bad that I was disappointing my father but not enough to leave my friends and their influence.

When I was drafted into the army, my artistic ability got me a job drawing for the military. But my poor habits got in the way of advancement, and I lost the opportunity to better myself. I began thinking about the opportunities I had lost because of my bad habits. I began hating my old way of living and decided to better myself. I decided to become a Communist.

When my parents saw the changes in me, they were amazed. I refused to waste time watching TV or visiting friends. Instead, I studied law, obsessed with changing society's evils. But I became disillusioned when I realized that catching criminals would not change the defects of the human race. I quit my studies and joined a circus! I even contemplated suicide.

One night while riding a trolley, I saw a church dome in the distance. *Maybe religion is the answer*, I thought. I got off the trolley and walked into a nearby chapel. As I knelt to pray, peace flooded over me. Suddenly I knew that God exists. I would devote myself to studying about God. But my dying father begged me to enroll in a university, and I could not refuse.

At the university the spiritual hunger remained. Then I learned about some evangelistic meetings being held in the city, and I went. The people there gave me a Bible—the very book that I had searched for! As I read the Bible and listened to the lectures, I realized that God does exist, and He loves me. I knew nothing about the Adventists, who were sponsoring the meetings. I just knew that these meetings were drawing me close to God.

I saved my pennies so I would have an offering to take to church. I refused to study on Sabbath. And God blessed me. I realized that God wanted to be my best Friend, and I invited Him to live in my heart. I am amazed at God's faithfulness and friendship to me. I never want to do anything that will disappoint my best Friend.

Your mission offerings helped support the evangelistic efforts that brought me to Christ. Thank you!



LEONID TALMAZAN is a local elder in his church in Russia.

Paradise Lost



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:1–4:26.*

Memory Text: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (*Genesis 3:15*).

In the 1600s, British writer John Milton wrote his famous poem, *Paradise Lost*, about the fall of our parents in Eden. Using a powerful imagination, Milton said that he sought, with this poem, to “justify the ways of God to man.” In it, Milton painstakingly described not only the garden bliss of Eden (“flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose”) but Satan’s ruse to bring Adam and Eve’s demise, all part of his bitter struggle against God (“Better to reign in hell,” Satan says, “than serve in heaven”).

Of course, we know what happened; after the serpent’s long beguiling speech to Eve, “her rash hand in the evil hour/Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate.” And the rest, as they say, is history.

Fortunately, we know not only the past but the future and God’s promise of Redemption. According to Milton’s poem, “the Son of God freely offers himself a ransom for man,” which is what the Bible says, as well (*1 Tim. 2:5, 6*), and with that offer comes the hope of eternal life for all who accept it.

This week we look not at Milton’s poem but at the original account that inspired it, the Fall as revealed in Genesis, and from it learn not only about the disaster of the Fall but the hope of Redemption.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 28.*

The Serpent

Genesis 3:1 introduces a new and, considering what came before, unexpected element—the serpent. Though the things that “creepeth upon the earth” (*Gen. 1:25*) were not specifically named, a serpent surely could have been among them. It probably wasn’t even extraordinary that the serpent appeared in the Garden. However, that it was talking and that it enticed Eve toward evil, that’s a new element not explained by anything in the previous two chapters, in which everything created was “very good” (*vs. 31*).

How do these texts, taken together, help us understand more about that serpent, who he really was and why he appeared? *Job 1:6-11, Isa. 14:12-14, Ezek. 28:14-17, Mark 1:13, Luke 10:18, John 8:44, 2 Cor. 2:11, 11:3, 1 John 3:8, Rev. 12:9, 20:2.*

If someone were to have had only the first chapters of Genesis, they would have no understanding of who this serpent was and how he appeared in God’s perfect creation. How could he speak? Why did he seek to deceive Adam and Eve? How did he get there?

What this shows is how important it is for us to use the whole Bible in order to understand truth. The appearance of the deceiving serpent implies a whole other scenario not revealed in the first two chapters of Genesis. (It does hint at it though. Where?) To understand better what was going on, people needed more revelation. In time, God provided it.

Also, one of the more unfortunate consequences of living in the modern age has been the tendency to downplay the reality of Satan, to make him simply a symbol for evil. It’s considered foolish to actually believe in a literal, personal supernatural evil being. Popular culture has in many minds made him into nothing but another Hollywood figure, along with Batman, Spiderman, and Superman. Of course, that’s always been Satan’s tactic, to hide himself. In the Garden, he hid behind the serpent; today, he has more sophisticated methods. However he does it, the results are the same: People are deceived, at the peril of their eternal lives.

Do you ever find yourself doubting Satan’s existence? If so, how can you be protected against this deception?

The Fall *(Gen 3:1-6)*

How clear had been God's command to Adam? How did the tempter seek to confuse the issue with his question and obscure the exact meaning of God's stipulation? *Gen. 2:16, 17; 3:1.*

According to Eve, what additional command, not recorded in Genesis 2:17, did the holy pair understand? *Gen. 3:3.*

Having first questioned the divine stipulation, to what did the serpent now resort? *Vs. 4. (Compare John 8:44.)*

Satan started out by mixing truth and error; once the bait was taken, he resorted to full-fledged error, blatantly contradicting God's explicit command. How often things work like that even today. Someone starts out with a doctrine, a teaching, that contains both truth and error but, later, when taken to its logical conclusion, it winds up as pure error. How crucial that we always be on our guard!

Genesis 3:6 states the reasons Eve ate the fruit anyway. It appealed to her physical (food), aesthetic (pleasant to the eyes), and intellectual (makes one wise) nature—a nature that God had given her. In other words, Satan took the gifts that God gave Eve and used them against her. If this worked so well with an unfallen being in Paradise, how much more so with fallen creatures?

What do these verses say to us in the context of our fallen natures? *Rom. 13:14; Phil. 3:18, 19; 1 John 2:16.*

The reality of sin, of temptation, of the lure of the flesh, is an ever-present reality in the lives of all humans. The difference, however, is not to be enslaved to physical, mental, or even intellectual passions.

Make a list of texts that you could give to a Christian who feels weighed down and discouraged over his or her spiritual or moral state. What do they say, and what hope is found in them?

The Fallen (*Gen. 3:7-24*)

In the fulfillment of the serpent's promise, the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened, but their dream of enlightenment turned into a nightmare. This, the first of countless subsequent satanic schemes, demonstrates that the devil's promises of precious gold are delivered only in the form of tinsel. Deprived of the glory of holiness, burdened by the sense of guilt, their physical nakedness revealed in a consciousness of inner nakedness, the first pair sought to hide from God and to fashion their own covering.

In your own experience, or what you have seen happen to others, what other “wonderful promises” have turned into hellish nightmares? What principles can we learn from these sad accounts? See also Judges 17:6, Prov. 14:12, Mark 4:19, 1 Tim. 6:10.

Look at the immediate results of the Fall. First, alienation arose between Adam and Eve (*Gen. 3:7*); then between them and God (*vs. 8*); nature itself suddenly turned more hostile (*vss. 16-18*); the relationship between Adam and Eve changed even more so (*vs. 16*); there was the reality of death (*vs. 19*); there was a change in how humanity related to toil (*vs. 19*); and Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden (*vss. 23, 24*). If only they could have seen in advance the consequences of their actions!

What's fascinating, too, is that the serpent told Eve that they would be like gods, knowing good and evil. He was right (*see vs. 22*). It obviously wasn't in God's will for humans to know evil; He wanted to keep them innocent and dependent upon Him, like children (*see Deut. 1:39*). God had given them only good (*tov*); everything that He created was only “good” (*tov*). The Creation in Genesis 1, which was “good” with no evil, taken together with Genesis 3:22, reaffirms the idea that God wanted only good, not evil, for humanity.

How can you preserve or (if need be) regain some innocence? What things are you doing that are, perhaps, making that goal more difficult? What changes do you need to make?

Hope for the Fallen

After the Lord came down to the Garden and all the participants were together, He issued His judgments upon them all.

Read Genesis 3:14-19. **What was pronounced upon them? What were the immediate, as well as the long-term, consequences?**

Even before Adam and Eve heard about toil, pain, submission, thorns, and the judgment upon them for their transgression, God granted them words of hope and promise. Verse 15 not only offers the first glimpse of the gospel but also presents a compressed history of the conflicts between the family of the serpent and the descendants of the woman. The genealogies of Genesis develop the lines of those who chose “sonship,” either with the devil or with God. And the rest of Scripture continues to depict the struggles between God’s people and their enemies. The conflict announced in verse 15 points past the immediate actors in the drama and toward the entire conflict between good and evil as it was to be played out on the earth, a conflict that we ourselves are part of right now.

Compare Genesis 3:15 with Revelation 12:17 (*see also Rev. 12:9, 20:2*). **What common elements are found in both texts? How do these verses show how the principles of the conflict first expressed in Eden will be manifested at the end of time?**

Despite the blatant transgression on the part of Adam and Eve, and despite their sorry attempts to justify their actions, the Lord offered them hope that although there would be enmity between them and the serpent, the serpent’s head would be crushed; that is, it would be destroyed. Here we see the first promise of the gospel, of what Jesus would do for fallen humanity.

Keeping in mind today’s lesson, read Hebrews 2:14. What hope does this text offer to you amid the struggles you face in your part in the great controversy between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent?

After the Fall *(Genesis 4)*

Genesis 4 very quickly gets into the story of Cain and Abel. Though many years passed since the Fall, the Bible quickly gets into some of its catastrophic results. The enmity predicted in Genesis 3:15 and hinted at in Cain's jealousy was manifested in full force in the murder of Abel. This murder demonstrated that Cain was a follower of Satan (see *John 8:44*).

Why did God accept Abel's sacrifice but reject his brother's offerings?

Gen. 4:3-7. (Compare with Lev. 17:11, Heb. 9:22. See also Heb. 11:4.)

Notice in Genesis 4:6 and 7 how God dealt with Cain. God tells Cain to do well, to obey, and thus he shall "be accepted." He says this, though, in the context of sacrifice, which is needed because no matter how well we do, it's still not good enough to save us. We see here, then, a balance between the law and grace and faith and works. Cain, apparently, understood neither, as reflected in the sacrifice he offered, as well as in his refusal to "do well" (see *1 John 3:12*).

How does Romans 5:17–6:6 reflect the balance between faith and works as in the story of Cain and Abel?

Cain discovered that people cannot hide anything from God (*Gen. 4:9, 10*) and that the divine Sovereign will right all wrongs. As punishment for his callous sin, the earth, which had been forced to drink innocent blood, would withhold its strength from the murderer (*vss. 11, 12*).

Meanwhile, verses 17 through 24 disclose a picture of rapid moral decline, as well as technical and cultural advances. Polygamy and murder characterize the family of Cain. Yet, the Bible writer does not attribute only evil to the descendants of Cain; their achievements are recognized. He notes that artisans, craftsmen, pastoralists, and agriculturalists descended from Cain.

The chapter concludes with a reference to Seth, who replaced Abel. Seth became the ancestor of the line of pre-Flood patriarchs who bridged the period between Adam and Noah.

Have you ever been envious? Isn't it a wretched feeling? In what ways did that envy have the potential to turn into something even worse? Why is falling before the Cross your only hope in getting victory over this emotional scourge?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 52–62, 71–81; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 3 and 4.

“Satan represented to the holy pair that they would be gainers by breaking the law of God. Do we not today hear similar reasoning? Many talk of the narrowness of those who obey God’s commandments, while they themselves claim to have broader ideas and to enjoy greater liberty. What is this but an echo of the voice from Eden, ‘In the day ye eat thereof’—transgress the divine requirement—‘ye shall be as gods’?”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 55.

“The ‘seed’ is put in the singular, indicating, not that a multitude of descendants of the woman jointly shall be engaged in crushing the serpent’s head, but rather that a single individual will accomplish this. These observations clearly show that in this pronouncement is compressed the record of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, a battle that began in heaven (Rev. 12:7-9), was continued on earth, where Christ again defeated him (Heb. 2:14), and will terminate finally with Satan’s destruction at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:10). Christ did not emerge from this battle unscathed. The nail marks in His hands and feet and the scar in His side will be eternal reminders of the fierce strife in which the serpent bruised the woman’s seed (John 20:25; Zech. 13:6; EW 53).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 233.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ A lot of unanswered questions remain regarding the Genesis account of the Fall. When you meet God face to face, what are some of the questions you might ask regarding this account? Meanwhile, why is it so important to trust God now despite having many unanswered questions? *See also 1 Cor. 4:5, 13:12.*
- ❷ Discuss reasons we as Adventists believe that Satan is a real being of incredible deceptive power. Why is it important for us to hold to this belief?
- ❸ Sing together, as a class, a hymn or song that acknowledges the victory and promises we have in Jesus.

The Invitation

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Show-In saw her neighbor crying as she walked past her home in Taipei, Taiwan. “Huey, what is wrong?” Show-In asked. Huey sat with her religious holy book on her lap and a look of despair on her face. Trying to cheer her, Show-In asked Huey what she thought of the holy book she was reading.

Huey told Show-In that she was worried about her children. “I know that God exists—somewhere,” Huey said, “and I am grateful for everything—even a glass of water.” Show-In encouraged Huey’s faith in God and invited her to come to church with her on Sabbath. Huey smiled and nodded. She was eager to learn the truth about God, no matter where she found that truth.

On Sabbath Show-In took her neighbor to church. That afternoon after Huey returned home, she slept. She dreamed about God and was surprised that she was not afraid of Him. She decided to continue attending Show-In’s church. Huey could walk there by herself whenever there was a meeting.

One day when Huey returned home, her eyes fell on the idol sitting on the shelf. She used to burn incense to the idol every day then bow before it, telling her wishes and her problems. She would study the holy book, searching for peace. But peace did not come until she accepted Show-In’s invitation to worship in her church.

One night she dreamed that God wanted her to remove the idols from her home. Huey gathered her idol, her incense, and her holy book, and took them to a neighbor. “I don’t want these anymore,” she said. “You may have them.”

The next day Huey invited Show-In and two friends from the church to visit her home. When they arrived, she showed them the empty shelf and eagerly told them what she had done. “You did this alone?” Show-In asked in amazement. “That takes great courage.” Huey smiled. She had done it alone.

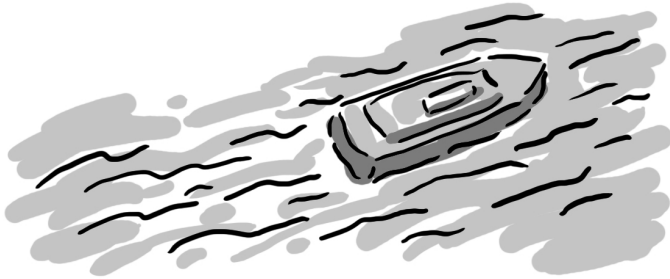
The devil has not left her entirely unmolested, but Huey’s trust in God has strengthened her against the devil’s attacks.

Huey is often the first person to arrive at church when there is a meeting. She has joined the church by baptism and finds her joy in following Jesus and being a part of His family.

Our mission offerings provide the training to help lay workers such as Show-In lead others to Christ.

Show-In and Huey live in Taipei, Taiwan. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of Mission.

Destruction *and* Renewal



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 5:32–9:29.*

Memory Text: “The bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth” (*Genesis 9:16*).

“Have you heard the latest about Noah, that religious fanatic?”

“Noah, pious Noah?”

“Well, pious Noah’s piety has made him mad. Says water is going to drop out of the sky.”

“Water from the sky?”

“Says it’s going to create a flood and kill all life on earth, except those who go into the ark.”

“The ark?”

“It’s a thing that floats on water, like a boat. Says only those who get into it will survive the rain. He’s building it now. Says water is going to be God’s judgment upon us for all our sins. Please, we’re not all that bad, are we?”

“Water from the sky . . . ? Why would a decent guy like him make up something so crazy?”

“Because he *is* crazy. And such a legalist. Doesn’t he know how we’re saved by faith alone? And standards, standards, standards—he’s always griping about standards.”

“Noah’s a bit intense, but he’s basically an honest, upright guy.”

“Fine, but why should we believe in something that has never happened before? The scientists say it isn’t feasible; the philosophers say it violates natural law. Water rises from the earth each morning as a mist; it doesn’t drop out of the sky, right?”

“Right . . . I guess.”

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 4.*

“For All Flesh Is Come Before Me”

Adam and Eve had children after Cain and Abel, including Seth (*Gen. 5:4*), whose line of descent outlines the history of the pre-Flood patriarchs loyal to God. Noah was of this branch (*vss. 28, 29*).

Read Genesis 6:1-13. What kind of picture does it present about the state of unregenerate humanity? In what ways might we see not only our age but even ourselves in here?

Though some commentators suggest that the designation “sons of God” (*Gen. 6:2*) refers to heavenly beings, context and content indicate a reference to the descendants of Seth. The “daughters of men” (the “men” who multiplied in verse 1) would then designate the posterity of Cain. The “sons of God,” representing the line of faith, contracted marriages with unbelievers and succumbed to the danger of such alliances.

In these verses, the wickedness of humankind could not be stated more emphatically. Notice the words *every*, *only*, and *continually* (*vs. 5*). The Hebrew word translated “imagination” is derived from the verb earlier rendered by “to form” (*Gen. 2:7*) and here indicates “deliberation” and “action.” In the Old Testament the word *heart* describes the complete inner life of a human being, as it is the seat of emotion, will, and understanding. The words *corrupt* and *violence* in verses 11 through 13 expand the picture of verse 5.

How do Genesis 6:6, 7 depict God’s sorrow for what was taking place?

After describing the human heart, the author turns to the grief and the affliction of the heart of God. Moses describes the Lord in terms that human readers can understand. God is not some far-off abstract idea or unbending principle; like us, He is portrayed as characterized by will, open to the tragedy of sin and prayer and weeping over human guilt. These words give us a feeling for how difficult it is to explain or even understand the introduction and great increase of sin.

Compare Genesis 6:6 with Matthew 23:37. What do both tell us about how “emotionally” tied the Lord is with this world? What other verses show this tie (for instance, John 3:16)? How does this help you better understand God’s ties to you individually?

Noah and the Gospel of Grace *(Gen. 6:8-22)*

Read Genesis 6:8. Notice: Noah finds “grace” in the eyes of the Lord (the first time the word *grace* appears in the Bible). Grace is God’s unmerited favor poured out upon unworthy sinners (*Rom. 4:14-16; Eph. 2:5, 8; 2 Tim. 1:9*).

Read what Scripture says about the character and life of Noah. *Gen. 6:9, 22; Heb. 11:7; 2 Pet. 2:5*. Why, considering the kind of person Noah was, did he need God’s grace? See also *Gen. 9:20, 21; Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8*.

Noah, a sinner like the rest of us, nevertheless revealed a life of faith and obedience. This is best seen in the fact that he obeyed the command of the Lord to build the ark.

Read Genesis 6:22 and 7:5. What do these verses tell us about how true, saving faith—the kind of faith that not only builds the ark but gets into it, as well—is manifested in the life of a believer?

In the midst of a violent, corrupt world, the Lord has this man, Noah, whose faith was most clearly made manifest by his works. This is a crucial point that all people who love the Lord and the great promises of salvation through grace alone, by faith in Jesus, must remember. Noah could have had all the faith possible, but had he not acted on that faith and obeyed the Lord’s commands, he and his family would have been swept away with the rest of the world in the Flood (*see Heb. 11:7*). That should be a great object lesson for all of us who, day by day, claim the righteousness of Jesus for us as the only hope of our salvation: A faith that isn’t manifested in obedience isn’t really faith at all.

Look at your life during the past week: How has your faith been manifested in your works? What works revealed a decisive lack of faith on your part? What changes do you need to make?

The Flood (*Gen. 7:1-16*)

What does the reference to “clean” and “unclean” animals imply about the knowledge Noah already possessed on this matter? *Gen. 7:2, 3, 8; 8:20.*

The fact that God distinguished “clean” and “unclean” animals *long* before the difference was explicitly stated in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 presupposes the clear knowledge of the distinction between “clean” and “unclean” animals from earliest times, certainly long before the Jewish nation was established.

Read Genesis 7:7-24. What evidence can you find in these texts that shows that the whole world rather than just a small, local section was destroyed by the Flood? Compare *Gen. 7:19* with *Dan. 7:27, Job 28:24.*

The Deluge covered the earth, and the world returned to the conditions that existed before God had prepared a habitable globe (*Gen. 1:2*), with the exception of Noah and those with him in the ark. The repeated biblical statements, “the waters prevailed . . . increased greatly upon the earth . . . prevailed exceedingly . . . fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered . . .” (*Gen. 7:18-20*), indicate a worldwide catastrophe. The words regarding the extent of those killed, contrasted with only Noah and those in the ark remaining alive, also testifies to the worldwide extent of the Flood. The universality of the Flood is further attested to by the worldwide distribution of Flood legends and the global distribution of fossil remains. In short, the texts are very clear that the Flood was worldwide, as opposed to some mere local event. This point is important because many Christians, influenced by some scientists who claim that there was no worldwide Flood, make the Flood only a local event, despite the clear testimony of the Scriptures to the contrary.

Have you ever had an animal that you had to put to sleep? How does that analogy help us understand what was happening here and how God must have felt about this act of destroying so much of the “good” world He had created? What “good” in your own life must you jealously guard lest it turns into “only evil continually” (*Gen. 6:5*) and becomes something that must be destroyed?

The Lost Generation

If you read the Genesis account of Noah and the Flood by itself, you'll notice that nowhere does it teach that anyone else was even offered an opportunity to get into the ark. It sounds as if it were to be built only for Noah, his family, and the animals (*Gen. 6:13-22*). Other verses, New Testament verses, vaguely hint at something else (*Heb. 11:7, 1 Pet. 3:20, 2 Pet. 2:5*). Ellen White, of course, is very clear that Noah's work on the boat was to be a witness to the world of what was coming and that Noah "entreated them to seek a refuge while it might be found."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 97. Considering all that we know about the Lord and His desire for the salvation of all humanity (*1 Tim. 2:3, 4*), it's not surprising that God was offering people a chance to be saved.

It says a lot, however, about the degenerate character of that generation that only Noah's family, and the animals, got on the boat. After all, it would have taken humility and the willingness to face the scorn of the majority to have sided with Noah. It would have meant being unpopular. It would have meant having faith in something that you didn't fully understand. It would have meant admitting you're in a situation in which you can't save yourself but must depend upon God. These are hardly the attributes one would expect to find in such an evil generation.

Compare what it meant for those in Noah's generation to have sided with Noah and what it means to make a stand for Christ and all His commandments today. What parallels exist?

The good news in all this is that God is always offering people a way out, always offering people a chance to get on the ark. The same Jesus we see weeping over Jerusalem is the same Jesus who surely was pleading through Noah for people to repent; it's, of course, the same Jesus who is pleading with us today, as well, who is calling us to get into the ark before people are swept away and taken away in the final judgment (*see Matt. 24:38-41*).

What factors work against you staying faithful to Jesus? What have you found is the best defense against the forces that would turn you away from Him and the truth for this time? What practical things can you do to avoid or at least alleviate, as much as possible, these factors?

Covenant and Renewal

How did Noah express his dedication, homage, and gratitude to God upon leaving the ark? *Gen. 8:20.*

“Here was a lesson for all succeeding generations. Noah had come forth upon a desolate earth, but before preparing a house for himself he built an altar to God. His stock of cattle was small, and had been preserved at great expense; yet he cheerfully gave a part to the Lord as an acknowledgment that all was His. In like manner it should be our first care to render our freewill offerings to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 106.

How did God respond to Noah’s devotion and worship? Write out the response, paraphrasing it in your own words. What is God saying here? *Vss. 21, 22.*

The divine response is stated in human terms. God had destroyed the world because “every imagination” of the thoughts of the human heart was evil (*Gen. 6:5*); that same idea, about humanity’s evil, is restated here, even after the Flood. The Lord is expressing the sad fact that even despite the Flood, humanity wasn’t in and of itself going to change for the good. What’s fascinating is that from the way the text is written, it appears that God’s resolve not to destroy the earth again comes in response to the sacrifice offered by Noah. This blood sacrifice is linked with the promise; it’s not the goodness of humanity, obviously, but what’s in the sacrifice that leads to the new promise. God’s going to spare them a flood despite themselves. In some ways this reflects the same principles found in the gospel: God saves not because of ourselves but only because of mercy and grace toward us.

Read Genesis 9:8-19. What’s promised here? Who is included in this covenant? What can we learn from this about the *new covenant* promise of salvation we have in Jesus? What are the similarities, what are the differences? Compare *Gen. 9:12* with *17:7, Ps. 105:10, Heb. 13:20.*

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 90–104.

“Many at first appeared to receive the warning; yet they did not turn to God with true repentance. They were unwilling to renounce their sins. During the time that elapsed before the coming of the Flood, their faith was tested, and they failed to endure the trial. Overcome by the prevailing unbelief, they finally joined their former associates in rejecting the solemn message. Some were deeply convicted, and would have heeded the words of warning; but there were so many to jest and ridicule, that they partook of the same spirit, resisted the invitations of mercy, and were soon among the boldest and most defiant scoffers; for none are so reckless and go to such lengths in sin as do those who have once had light, but have resisted the convicting Spirit of God.

“The men of that generation were not all, in the fullest acceptation of the term, idolaters. Many professed to be worshipers of God. They claimed that their idols were representations of the Deity, and that through them the people could obtain a clearer conception of the divine Being. This class were foremost in rejecting the preaching of Noah. As they endeavored to represent God by material objects, their minds were blinded to His majesty and power; they ceased to realize the holiness of His character, or the sacred, unchanging nature of His requirements. As sin became general, it appeared less and less sinful, and they finally declared that the divine law was no longer in force; that it was contrary to the character of God to punish transgression; and they denied that His judgments were to be visited upon the earth. Had the men of that generation obeyed the divine law, they would have recognized the voice of God in the warning of His servant; but their minds had become so blinded by rejection of light that they really believed Noah’s message to be a delusion.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 95, 96.

Discussion Question:

Have people in the class place themselves in the mind of someone who lived in Noah’s time and have them give all the reasons why they shouldn’t believe in the Flood. What lessons can we learn from their thinking, not only for ourselves and our own faith but about how we can understand the thinking of others who don’t take our warnings about the end of time seriously?

The Idol's Musician

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Sangum is a Global Mission pioneer in western India. One day he met Eknath, an old man who was sick with typhoid. Sangum nodded to the *tara*, a traditional two-stringed musical instrument, standing in the corner and asked Eknath whether he played it.

"I play the *tara* for the idols and to earn a living," Eknath said. He explained that he plays the *tara*, and people stop and listen. Then they give him a few coins, enough to feed his family. But recently he had been too sick to play.

Sangum smiled and said, "I worship the living God, and He can heal you. If you will permit me, I will pray to my God and ask Him to heal you." Eknath nodded, and Sangum prayed. When Sangum ended his prayer, Eknath smiled and said he was tired of taking expensive medicines. Sangum offered to teach him how to live a better life. He also offered to teach him about the living God.

Eknath agreed, and Sangum began studying the Bible with him. Eknath was thrilled to learn of a God who cared about him. Several months later Eknath was baptized. Now he goes from village to village with Sangum, playing his *tara*. When the people gather to listen, he no longer tells them about the idols; he tells them about the living God who hears his prayers and who healed him.

Since Eknath found Jesus as his Lord, one hundred people in his area have joined the Adventist church. Many of these have come because they have seen the difference in Eknath's life. They ask him what has happened to change him, and he shares his experience with Jesus. Today a church stands in Eknath's village, testimony to God's transforming love.

Eknath loves to share God's message with others who have not yet heard. "I want to capture many more villages for the kingdom of God," he says.

Without our mission offerings, the work of Global Mission pioneers such as Sangum would not be possible. Thank you for your faithful offerings.



EKNATH KAZARE (left) with his *tara*. He lives in Naigaon, India. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of Mission.

The Earth After *the* Flood



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 9–11.*

Memory Text: “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Peter 3:3, 4).

Years ago a British philosopher and strong supporter of evolution, Bertrand Russell, joked about the climactic conclusion of the evolutionary process: “If I were granted omnipotence, and millions of years to experiment in, I should not think Man much to boast of as the final result of my efforts.”—Dan Falk, quoted in *Universe on a T-Shirt* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 203.

Putting aside the philosopher's error regarding origins, one could understand the cynicism regarding humanity. This point becomes especially apparent regarding the Flood and afterward. You'd think that after a flood, which wiped out the entire earth, people would have gotten the message regarding God's attitude about sin and rebellion; apparently they didn't. The stories that the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write don't paint a pretty picture; humanity, obviously, didn't learn much. Things started to degenerate quickly, even immediately.

This week we'll take a look at the early days after the Flood, at the changes that came and at the results. Yet, even amid all this carnage and rebellion, we can see the working of a God who loved the fallen race and worked to save it from itself despite itself, much as He still is doing today.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 11.*

Noah and the New Earth

No doubt Noah and his kin stepped off the ark into a new world, one in some ways radically different from what they had known before. It's hard to imagine what must have gone on in their minds. In one sense, they must have been terrified, seeing the landscape a wreckage. We today, thousands of years later, though we see evidence of the Flood, are used to it: It's all we have ever known. Plus, who knows in what way nature has been able to adjust and heal after the initial devastation. For Noah and those with him, though, it must have been a heart-wrenching, even fearful experience.

Read Genesis 9:1-3. What hope and encouragement did Noah and his family receive from the Lord, especially considering their circumstances?

Compare the above verses with the words of the Lord to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28-30. What differences are there between the two accounts, and what do you think were the reasons for the differences? What great change took place over their relationship to animal life?

The most radical change, of course, came with the introduction of meat eating, something that was not allowed before. Many of the beasts that before were their companions now were to become their meals. Something wonderful, something harmonious, was lost to sin. Isn't that always the case?

Human beings, according to the Bible texts, were not originally carnivores; neither were the animals. In the original earthly paradise, despite the great distinction between human beings and the animals (*Gen. 1:26, 27*), they also were linked in many ways: All were created by God, all had life, and they were to share a similar diet. Perhaps this was all part of God's way of showing humans that despite their superior status, they needed to respect those creatures over whom they had "dominion."

What's some of the wreckage you see in your own life because of sin? What steps can you take toward healing and restoration?

Blood and Life

“But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (*Gen. 9:4-6*).

What do you believe these verses here are saying to us, today, as Christians?

With these verses, we see again the results of sin, of God acknowledging the reality of what life will be like for human beings in a fallen world. It’s very interesting, too, that the command against eating blood is something that clearly predates anything Jewish, anything linked with the Levitical laws of cleanliness and uncleanness. Centuries later, in the book of Acts (*15:20, 29*), the Gentile converts were admonished to, among other things, abstain from blood, more than likely a clear reference to what was happening here in Genesis (*see also Lev. 17:11, 1 Pet. 1:19*).

What reason does God give for the strict prohibition regarding the taking of another human life?

There’s been much debate over the centuries regarding the meaning of these texts and especially their application. In every case of someone killing another person, should that person be killed, regardless of the circumstances? Many Old Testament laws were put in place to deal with special circumstances (*see, for instance, Num. 35:11*). Then, of course, we have numerous Bible texts about forgiveness, turning the cheek, and not judging; then, too, there are the accounts in the Old Testament of the Israelites, at God’s command, wiping out entire cities. Regardless of how one puts all these together and formulates a theology regarding justice and punishment, one point is not debatable: Human life is precious and must be regarded as such. The Lord will surely have His day of reckoning for those who disregard the sacredness of human life (*2 Cor. 5:10*).

After the Deluge *(Gen. 9:18-29)*

No matter the Lord's gracious offers of peace, safety, and prosperity or His warnings of judgment, destruction, and death, folk just don't seem to get it, do they? Of course, we don't need Bible stories to prove that point; after all, we have our own selves—and what more proof do we need?

Read over Genesis 9. After the Flood God establishes a covenant with every living creature, promising never to destroy the world again with a flood, even using the beauty of a rainbow as a token of His promise. What story does God then immediately contrast with this, His promise of this “everlasting covenant”? What messages are in there for us? Also, what does it tell us that righteous Noah (*Gen. 7:1*) should be so heavily involved in this sordid tale?

Noah's words about his children were not forever sealing the fate of posterity; rather, the incident seemed to reveal character traits already there and how these traits, as they often are, would be passed down from one generation to another. “The sin of Ham was not an unintentional transgression. He may have seen his father's shameful condition accidentally, but instead of being filled with sorrow over his father's folly, he rejoiced in what he saw and found delight in publishing it. . . . Ham's two older brothers did not share his perverted feelings. Adam also had had two well-disciplined sons, Abel and Seth, and one child of sin, Cain. Although all had received the same parental love and training, sin manifested itself much more markedly in one than in the others. Now the same spirit of depravity breaks forth in one of Noah's children, while the older sons, reared in the same home and under the same conditions as Ham, show an admirable spirit of decency and self-control. As the evil trends of criminal Cain were perpetuated in his descendants, Ham's degraded nature revealed itself further in his offspring.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 266.

Very often we are so concerned about our sins being forgiven, which, of course, is important (*Rom. 4:7, Eph. 1:7, Col 2:3, 1 John 1:9, 2:12*). Yet, when you read the story of Noah doing something so bad here, what should that tell us about the importance of how our actions, especially the actions of those who have great responsibility, can be fraught with negative consequences? What can you learn from this about how our actions influence others toward either the good or the bad? Think about some next big decision you have to make. What will be its influence on others?

Scoffers—Past and Present

In 2 Peter 2, the apostle writes against false teachers who were once faithful to the Lord and who then turned away. With that background in mind, read 2 Peter 3:1-11 and then answer these questions:

- 1** To what source and authority does Peter immediately point the false teachers and scoffers? Why is that answer so important?
- 2** What's the real motive behind the scoffing? In what ways do we see the same principles manifested today?
- 3** What point is Peter making by reference to the Flood story here? *See 2 Peter 2:5.*

What is fascinating among Peter's words is his statement that the scoffers will say that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:4). These verses point to a dramatic fulfillment of prophecy that has been especially revealed in the past century and a half. Science has proposed a geological interpretation that favors long ages, rather than a sudden catastrophe like the Flood, to account for the surface condition of the earth. In other words, things just keep on as they have before; many of the massive canyons and rock formations didn't come, we are told, by some sudden catastrophe but simply were the result of things continuing as they were from the beginning of creation; they're there only from a long uniform progression of events.

This idea also is the basis of evolution, a steady process of things slowly evolving as they did from the beginning of time, rather than a sudden literal six-day creation of life on the earth, as the Bible teaches. It is remarkable that long ago Peter pointed to these two areas as being the points of contention in the last days. That this has happened as predicted is a strong sign that we are living in a time when we are going to have to make a firm choice on whose side we are going to stand.

Read over again the texts for today in Peter. Might you see yourself in there—some doubts, some questioning, some scoffing? What must be done in order to get you back on the narrow path? *Matt. 7:14.*

The Tower of Babel

Chapter 10 of Genesis then recounts, in a very general sense, the repopulation of the earth after the Flood. People are born, nations are formed, and the masses start spreading out into powers that will, in some cases, appear later in the Bible.

Read Genesis 11:1-10. What example do you see of scientific advancement and what the people intended to do with this knowledge?

Considering their recent history, why might they have wanted a tower that went into heaven?

What reason does the Lord give for wanting to stop them? *See also Gen. 3:22, 6:5.*

“The dwellers on the plain of Shinar disbelieved God’s covenant that He would not again bring a flood upon the earth. Many of them denied the existence of God and attributed the Flood to the operation of natural causes. Others believed in a Supreme Being, and that it was He who had destroyed the antediluvian world; and their hearts, like that of Cain, rose up in rebellion against Him. One object before them in the erection of the tower was to secure their own safety in case of another deluge. By carrying the structure to a much greater height than was reached by the waters of the Flood, they thought to place themselves beyond all possibility of danger. And as they would be able to ascend to the region of the clouds, they hoped to ascertain the cause of the Flood.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 119.

Perhaps the most fascinating verse in the story of Babel is verse 6. The Lord sees that, working together, these people are going to acquire a great amount of knowledge and technical skill. One would think that would be good; after all, look at how much good technology has done for us today. And yet, the Lord here clearly sees this as something bad and moves to stop it by confounding their language, hence spreading them out and making it much more difficult for them to pool their resources and fulfill their schemes. Why would He do that?

What lesson is here for us? What kind of knowledge are we seeking? What are we doing with that knowledge? What important lessons could this story have for us on a personal level? *See also 2 Tim. 3:7.*

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “After the Flood,” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 105–110.

“The prophecy of Noah was no arbitrary denunciation of wrath or declaration of favor. It did not fix the character and destiny of his sons. But it showed what would be the result of the course of life they had severally chosen and the character they had developed. It was an expression of God’s purpose toward them and their posterity in view of their own character and conduct. As a rule, children inherit the dispositions and tendencies of their parents, and imitate their example; so that the sins of the parents are practiced by the children from generation to generation. Thus the vileness and irreverence of Ham were reproduced in his posterity, bringing a curse upon them for many generations. ‘One sinner destroyeth much good.’ Ecclesiastes 9:18.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 118.

“Geologists claim to find evidence from the earth itself that it is very much older than the Mosaic record teaches. . . .

“But apart from Bible history, geology can prove nothing. Those who reason so confidently upon its discoveries have no adequate conception of the size of men, animals, and trees before the Flood, or of the great changes which then took place. Relics found in the earth do give evidence of conditions differing in many respects from the present, but the time when these conditions existed can be learned only from the Inspired Record. In the history of the Flood, inspiration has explained that which geology alone could never fathom.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 112.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What are some ways in which science tends to be another attempt at creating a modern Tower of Babel? Why, like the one in antiquity, is it also doomed to failure?
- ❷ As a class, go over the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. Share your answers with each other.
- ❸ We, of course, can do nothing about our genes or our genetic traits of character. What can we do, though, to try and lessen, as much as possible, the negative impact of those traits of character? What role does the gospel have in this important work? How does the idea of the new birth fit in with this important concept of character formation?

The Angry Husband

by G. MAZUNDA

A pastor in northern Malawi held evangelistic meetings that resulted in eighteen new believers. On the day of the baptism, a woman ran to the river and asked to be baptized. She had attended the meetings, but fear of her husband had held her back from asking for baptism. The pastor questioned her briefly then baptized her.

Someone saw this woman being baptized and reported it to her husband. When she returned home that afternoon, her furious husband locked her inside the house and took the keys. She could not escape. Then he went looking for the pastor who had baptized his wife. "Who authorized you to baptize my wife without my permission?" he demanded.

The pastor told him that his wife had decided on her own to be baptized. No one had forced her. The still-angry husband threatened to kill the pastor. Then he left.

He meant what he said to the pastor. He rounded up some men and boys, and they marched to the chief's house, for the chief had permitted the religious meetings to take place. Then the gang saw a young Adventist boy walking nearby and began stoning him. Though injured, he survived.

Throughout the following week the woman's husband threatened her. "Don't go to that church!" he demanded. No one who knew this woman's husband ever expected to see her in the church again. But on Sabbath she came to worship. It was youth Sabbath, and the Pathfinders led out.

When her husband learned where his wife had gone, he followed her to the church. When he arrived he saw the young people lined up in formation outside the church. They looked so smart in their uniforms. When they marched into the church, he followed them in and sat down in the back. He soon forgot his anger.

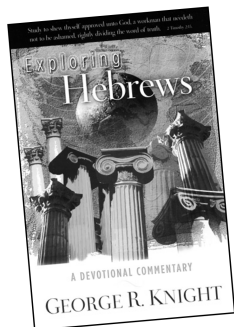
The pastor preached a powerful sermon that day and made an altar call. To everyone's surprise the angry husband stepped out of the row and walked to the front. No longer angry, he was subdued by the Holy Spirit. He wanted the joy, the peace, and the forgiveness that he saw in these Christian young people.

The angry husband remained true to his commitment. He and his wife faithfully worship God together today.

Our mission offerings support evangelism in Malawi, eastern Africa, and around the world.

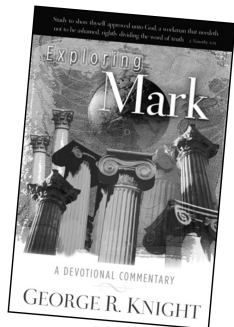
G. MAZUNDA is a women's ministries director in her local church in northern Malawi.

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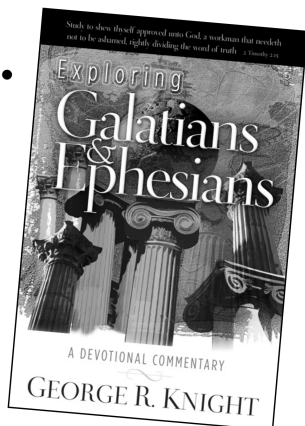
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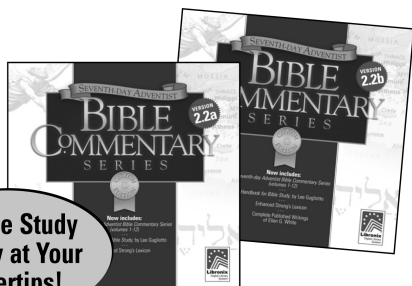
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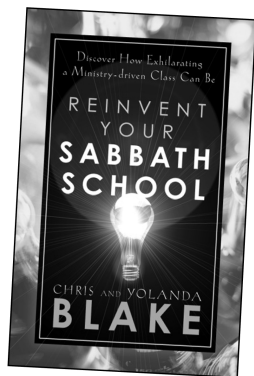
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Jemila wanted to go to school, but her father refused. "Girls work and marry and have babies," he said. "They don't need to read." When Jemila was 10 years old, her father tried to marry her to an old man, but her mother refused. Seething with anger, her father divorced her mother.

"You must go away," Mother told Jemila. "I have friends at the Adventist college. You will be safe there, and you can study." So Jemila went. She works long hours to earn her keep and pay her school fees, but she is happy. "I am learning at last," she says. "And I have met Jesus."

Hundreds of young girls in Ethiopia have escaped early marriage and found refuge and hope at Adventist schools in Ethiopia.

Ethiopian Adventist College has started a secondary school that has 1,000 students. But it has no dormitories, no administration building, no classrooms. I want to help change that, so I'm giving a generous Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on December 30. I want to help young people such as Jemila prepare for a brighter future. For me, it's personal.

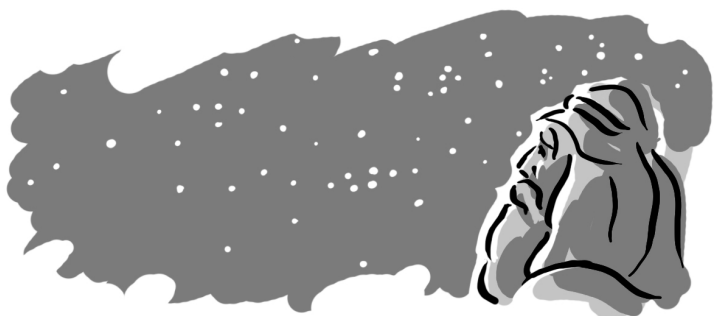


Jemila

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The Man Abram



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 11:27–15:21.*

Memory Text: “He believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (*Genesis 15:6*).

We ended last week on a sour note: the Tower of Babel and all that it represented about fallen humanity's seeming inability to learn from the past.

This week we begin on a more hopeful one: the descendants of Shem, the family line from which sprung the patriarch Abram, who, according to Paul, is “the father of us all” (*Rom. 4:16*). That is, he is the father of all who believe in Christ, through whom the promises made to Abraham are realized; for through Christ we are now Abraham's seed, “and heirs according to the promise” (*Gal. 3:29*); the promise of a heavenly Canaan where no more evil, sin, and death exist, much less rule.

In other words, after the Fall, the Flood, Noah's drunkenness, and the Tower of Babel fiasco, the Lord now introduces, in the clearest manner yet, hope for the human race. And it begins with Abram, who—although living amid a family and a culture steeped in idolatry—was a follower of the true God and who, for his faithfulness, was given promises not only for himself and for his family but for the whole human race.

This week we begin looking at the life of Abram, his initial calling, his response, his humanity, and, most important of all, his relationship to God—the great exemplar of what it means for a fallen human being to live by faith, to be justified by faith, and to reveal that faith through works.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 18.*

Abram's Background

Read Genesis 11:10-32. (See also Joshua 24:2 and Acts 7:2.) What story immediately precedes these texts? Why might these accounts have been placed next to each other? What details are found here regarding the background and family of Abram?

Even though chronological considerations suggest that Abram was the youngest of Terah's sons, he appears to be mentioned first in Genesis 11:26, 27 because of his importance as the ancestor of the chosen family. Although archaeology has revealed much concerning the times in which Abram lived, the great empires of the day form merely part of the background. The spotlight is on certain patriarchs and their families who attempted to keep alive the truth and knowledge about God. This is the great focus of Genesis: The stories, however sordid at times, center on those whom God entrusted with preserving the knowledge of Him in a world filled with idolatry, paganism, and all forms of superstition.

In how many stages did the call of Abram take place, according to Acts 7:2-4? Compare Gen. 12:1 with Acts 7:4. Why do you think he went through these stages rather than going immediately to Canaan?

Stephen states that God first appeared to Abram in Ur of the Chaldees and called him to go to the land He would show him. But he didn't go right away. Instead, there was the stopping point in Haran, where he lived until his father, Terah, died. It was after his father's death that he finally left for the Promised Land.

Abram's family was involved in false worship and idolatry; yet, for quite a while he remained with them. What might we learn from this story about how we should relate to members of our own family who are not walking with the Lord?

The Call

What reason did God give for calling Abram to leave Haran? *Gen. 12:1-3, Heb. 11:8-10.*

Notice a great irony here: Among the things that God says He will do for Abram when he leaves is to “make thy name great” (*Gen. 12:2*). Compare this with the Tower of Babel story, in which one of the reasons they worked on the tower was in order to “make us a name” (*Gen. 11:4*). From a human perspective, it seems more likely that those who would create their monumental human achievement would have a better chance of having “a name” than someone who—leaving behind family, race, culture, and fertile land—would travel to a place “not knowing whither he went” (*Heb. 11:8*).

Yet, today no one knows the name of any one of those who worked on the tower; in contrast, almost all the world knows the name of Abram.

What powerful lesson should there be in this contrast for us, who in our own way might seek to “make us a name”?

Besides the call, again, to go to Canaan (*compare Acts 7:2 to Gen. 12:1*), Abram was given this amazing promise that God would make of him a great nation. This obviously implied children, something else that he would have to take on faith, considering that up to this point his wife had been childless (*Gen. 11:30*). Despite all this, verse 4 seems to imply no hesitation on his part. God called him to go, God made promises to him, and Abram went ahead (*see Rom. 4:13*) by faith.

Abram, sure that God had called him, moved out by faith on what—from a human perspective—seemed very foolish. What does this say to us about having to move and live by faith, even to the point of “foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:25, 2:14)? At the same time, how must we be careful not to step out by “faith” under the assumption that God is leading when He might not be? How can we know the difference?

The Faith of Abram

Read all of Genesis 12. Write out what message it has for you about faith, about trials, about character, whatever impresses you. What can you take away from this story that could help you in your daily walk with the Lord?

We might expect that, because he was following the call of God, Abram would have had his paths smoothed by Providence. The Bible gives no evidence that as long as we remain faithful to Him, no trials will come. On the contrary.

Indeed, not long after he had entered Canaan, a severe famine caused him to depart for Egypt, which was watered by the flooding waters of the Nile. The Sacred Record teaches us that even those who follow God's commands may have to endure trials of faith. Think about what a great strain that famine could have put on his faith: called to go into this land, and look what happens! A famine? This famine, which drove him out of Canaan, could help explain his lack of faith regarding Sarai and Pharaoh. Hunger and fear reduced the hero of faith to a person with frailties that most of us can identify with readily. Faith succumbed to fear and fear to deviousness as Abram used one half truth to conceal the other half.

“The Lord in His providence had brought this trial upon Abraham to teach him lessons of submission, patience, and faith—lessons that were to be placed on record for the benefit of all who should afterward be called to endure affliction. God leads His children by a way that they know not, but He does not forget or cast off those who put their trust in Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 129.

When was the last time you failed a test of faith? What lesson did you learn from that failure that can help you next time not to fail?

Abram and Lot

Read Genesis 13:1-13. What does this tell us about the character of Abram? How does this help us understand the kind of man he was and why he was an example of what it means to live by faith? What Bible texts can you find that admonish us to show the same kind of spirit? See, for instance, *Phil. 2:4*.

Returning from Egypt, Abram called on the Lord at the second altar he had built in Canaan (*Gen. 13:3, 4*). Fortified by this renewal of his relationship with God, he was able to face another test. Once more the promise of land seemed to elude Abram (*vss. 5, 6*), and a decision had to be made.

Abram's failure in Egypt seems counterbalanced by the nobility of character that he demonstrated in his dealings with Lot. From the heights of Bethel Lot saw the Jordan Valley, well watered and fertile like the Garden of Eden and the plains of Mesopotamia. Lot chose that which appealed to his sense of immediate gain. Little did Lot realize what his choice would cost him. The decision was between "faith" and "sight," and the results demonstrate the wisdom of making the right choice. Abram's close relationship with the Lord and his determination to walk by faith enabled him to look beyond the immediate temporal advantages to eternal gain.

Read Genesis 13:14-18. What promise does the Lord give to Abram? Why do you think the Lord waited until this time before giving it (*see vs. 14*) to Abram? Again, why did it require a lot of faith on Abram's part to believe in these promises?

Think of the last time you saw someone reveal the kind of graciousness and selflessness displayed here by Abram. What do you think is the secret of having such a character, especially for beings who are, at their core, selfish sinners? What needs to happen in your own life in order for you to develop more of this kind of character? Imagine, too, what your local church would be like were everyone to display such an attitude.

Melchizedek and Abram

Genesis 14:1-16 recounts the story of the plunder of Sodom and Gomorrah and Abram's liberation of the people, including Lot, from the invaders. Thus, though a man of faith and a worshiper of the true God, Abram could also be a man of war.

What light does the Melchizedek episode cast upon the spiritual stature of Abram? How again do we see his faith revealed in his works? *Vss. 17-24.*

Melchizedek (meaning "my king is righteous") was king of Salem (a name for Jerusalem; see *Ps. 76:2*) and priest of the Most High God. Abram worshiped the same God. In deference to Melchizedek, who welcomed and blessed the patriarch upon his return from the battle, Abram gave the king-priest a tithe of all (*vs. 20*), indicating that the institution of tithing was practiced long before Moses and the Jews.

After this great victory the Lord appears to Abram and gives him a wonderful promise. "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (*Gen. 15:1*). Ellen White indicated that Abram needed that encouragement, considering the ire his recent victories aroused in some of his neighbors.

Read Abram's response (*vss. 2, 3*). What's so human, so understandable, about why he would say what he did? Why, from all rational and logical standpoints, did this request make so much sense?

God (*vss. 4-6*) then repeated His earlier promise that Abram's descendants would be innumerable in multitude (*Gen. 12:2, 13:16*). Even though the advancing age of Abram and Sarai seemed to make the promise of descendants increasingly more impossible, Abram took God at His word and trusted the divine power. This is seen in Genesis 15:6, which Paul later quoted (*Rom. 4:3*).

Abram believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. How does it help us understand what it means to be accepted by God? What things in the story so far about Abram give you hope; what things show you the need to make some changes in your life?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 125–136; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 11:26 to 15:21.

After God promised Abram again that his seed would become a great nation, Abram sought a sign, an affirmation of the promise (*Gen. 15:7, 8*). “The Lord condescended to enter into a covenant with His servant, employing such forms as were customary among men for the ratification of a solemn engagement. By divine direction, Abraham sacrificed a heifer, a she-goat, and a ram, each three years old, dividing the bodies and laying the pieces a little distance apart. To these he added a turtledove and a young pigeon, which, however, were not divided. This being done, he reverently passed between the parts of the sacrifice, making a solemn vow to God of perpetual obedience. Watchful and steadfast, he remained beside the carcasses till the going down of the sun, to guard them from being defiled or devoured by birds of prey. About sunset he sank into a deep sleep; and, ‘lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him.’ And the voice of God was heard, bidding him not to expect immediate possession of the Promised Land, and pointing forward to the sufferings of his posterity before their establishment in Canaan. The plan of redemption was here opened to him, in the death of Christ, the great sacrifice, and His coming in glory. Abraham saw also the earth restored to its Eden beauty, to be given him for an everlasting possession, as the final and complete fulfillment of the promise.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 137.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss your answers to the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. How do we today, New Testament Christians, understand what it means to be accounted righteous before God?
- ❷ Do you know someone right now who believes that he or she is being called to go, like Abram, not knowing “whither he went”? What could you as a class do to help this person through whatever struggles his or her journey is presenting?

A Cry for Help

by JOSÉ CALIXTO

Olga and her husband were inseparable. When he developed kidney disease, Olga cared for him. For ten years he suffered intensely, and eventually he became bedridden. But the couple never ceased being each other's best friend. When he died in 2003, Olga was devastated.

Her friends and family surrounded her during the days following her husband's death. But as they returned to their own worlds, Olga fell into a deep depression. She could not find a way out of her loneliness. As her despair deepened, a plan emerged in her mind to end her suffering.

She gathered all the medicines her husband had taken and poured them into a cup. Then she sat down and stared at the cup of pills. How easily this cup of pills could end her suffering.

Suddenly Olga remembered Nailson and Maria, a couple who had been so kind to her during her husband's illness. She could not get them out of her mind. She put the cup of medicines on the table and reached for her telephone.

When Nailson answered the telephone, Olga poured out her heart to him. She told him she wanted to die. But before she died she wanted to attend a church. Nailson listened to her desperate cry and then told her, "Don't end your life, Olga. Let's go to the church today. We have worship, and you can come to our church."

Olga agreed. Nailson and Maria walked with Olga into the Adventist church. As she listened to the speaker, Olga felt the heavy load of suffering and pain lift and peace enter her heart. She had come to the church filled with despair; she left there filled with hope.

Nailson and Maria befriended Olga, helped her handle her bills, and bought her food until her husband's benefit checks started coming in. And they invited her to worship with them. Olga gladly agreed. She never missed Sabbath, a Sunday evening, or a Wednesday church service.

In her darkest hour, Olga met the Savior through sincere friends. Olga has been baptized, and she shares with others how God's love saved her life and restored her hope.

Your mission offerings help provide the means to reach and win hurting people such as Olga.

Faith *and* Frailty



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 16:1–19:38.*

Memory Text: “Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son” (*Genesis 18:14*).

This week we still follow Abram and Sarai (soon to be Abraham and Sarah) as they proceed, not only on their geographical journey but on their spiritual one, as well. As they continue, we see their faith and their frailties contrasted against a world that, for the most part, had lost the knowledge of God and was steeped in sin and spiritual ignorance, a condition best exemplified in the seething cauldrons of Sodom and Gomorrah.

A famous French writer once wrote, “Your principal maladies are pride, which cuts you off from God, and sensuality, which binds you to the earth.”

How little changes; fortunately, God’s grace doesn’t either, for He loves even the proud and the sensual. This point will come through most poignantly as we, in following the story of the patriarch, encounter the sad and sordid tale of Sodom and Gomorrah, where—despite God’s love and willingness to forgive—pride and sensuality bring these folk to the point of no return.

As Scripture says, God is “not willing that any should perish” (*2 Pet. 3:9*); some, nevertheless, will. How unfortunate, when—because of the Cross and what Christ has done there—none need to. This week we’ll get a sad example of some who do.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 25.*

Hagar and Ishmael *(Genesis 16)*

Read again the promises that God had so far made to Abram regarding the nation and seed that would spring from him (*Gen. 12:1-3, 7; 13:15, 16; 15:4-6, 13*). Notice something interesting. Abram is told, again and again, that he will father a great nation; that out of “‘your own body’” (*Gen. 15:4, NIV*) his heir will come. Something, though, is conspicuously absent from each of those promises: none mention Sarai, his wife. The promise is that Abram will father the nation; it says nothing about who the mother would be. Sarai was his wife, and so the natural and logical assumption would be that she’d bear the seed; yet all the promises—as they appear so far in the Scriptures—say nothing about whom the mother of that great nation would be.

Read Genesis 16. Considering how the promises were made to Abram, why is it easy to see how they could have resorted to the course they did? Why, though, was that course still wrong?

Ten years had passed since Abram had entered Canaan, and still there was no sign of the promised seed. In typical human frustration, the patriarch listened to “reason”; how else, after all, could he have a child? Certainly not from old and barren Sarai. Again, considering that nothing specifically said that Sarai would be the mother, it’s not hard to understand the logic behind their actions. Although a man having more than one wife was compatible with the practices of the time, the commonality of the practice didn’t make it right, and both Abram and his wife—as followers of the true God—should have known better. How often even we, as followers of the true God, do the wrong thing because everyone else is doing it, even though we know better.

When you read through Genesis 16, you can see an important principle unfold: that violation of God’s law will bear bitter fruit. What lessons can we learn from this story when we find ourselves tempted to violate what we know is right in order to achieve something that might even, in and of itself, be good (after all, Abram and Sarai were only trying to fulfill a promise God had made)?

The Covenant Reiterated *(Genesis 17)*

Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, God appeared to Abram and repeated in expanded form the covenant He had first made with the patriarch.

Compare the earlier promises that God made to Abram (*Gen. 12:1-3, 7; 13:15, 16; 15:4-6, 13*) with what God says to Abram here in **Genesis 17:1-16**. What points are added, or elaborated on, that didn't appear before?

God tells Abram (soon to be Abraham, which means “father of many”) to be “perfect” before Him, a reminder that God’s mercy and grace don’t cancel the call to faithful obedience (*Rom. 5:20–6:2*). He then unfolds to him even more details of the same promise first made to him almost twenty-five years before, which included the need to circumcise all the infant males.

A great deal of speculation has occurred over the long centuries about why this specific rite would be the sign of the covenant. Considering, however, the promise made to Abram repeatedly about his “seed” (*Gen. 12:7; 13:15, 16; 15:3, 13, 18; 17:7-10*), circumcision apparently was to symbolize the national and generational relationship that the Lord wanted to have with His special covenant people, a relationship to be maintained by faith (*Rom. 4:11, 12*). It was through this nation, this people, over many generations, that the truth about God was to be spread to a world and through whom the Messiah would come. No doubt, too, it also symbolized the circumcision of the heart (*Deut. 30:6, Rom. 2:29*). With the advent of Jesus and the spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles, it was no longer required (*Gal. 5:6*).

Also, if it wasn’t clear before, it was now—Sarai (Sarah), old Sarah, would give birth to the promised seed (*Gen. 17:15-19*). If Abraham needed faith before, he surely needed it at this time.

Compare Genesis 17:15-19, and Abraham’s reaction to the promise of the seed through his wife, with Romans 4:16-25. What can we learn from these texts (as well as Gen. 15:2, 16:4) about what righteousness by faith means? What hope can you draw from these texts about the faithfulness of God even when our own faith isn’t always as unflinching as it should be?

The Lord on Earth (*Genesis 18*)

In Genesis 18, the promise of a child is again made, this time specifically to Sarah (*vs. 10*)—a promise that seemed impossible to fulfill (*vs. 11*). Yet, we are shown the answer, “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” (*vs. 14*), an answer that should stand even today as a stern rebuke against all unbelief and doubt, especially among professed worshippers of the Lord.

Read carefully verses 16-21. What is being contrasted here? How do we see here, in a small way, what is really the basic division of all humanity? See also *Matt. 25:32, 33; Rom. 11:26; 2 Pet. 2:6; Rev. 22:14, 15.*

Perhaps one of the most fascinating aspects of this well-known story centers on just who was speaking to Abraham. The word translated “Lord” in some of the verses (*Gen. 18:1, 13, 17, 22, 26*) is the famous four-letter word often translated as “Jehovah” (YHVH), the sacred name for God the Father—the word used, for instance, in Genesis 4:1, 4; 6:5; Exodus 20:11; 1 Kings 9:1; Psalm 32:2, and, literally, thousands of other texts in direct reference to God.

Thus, we have here, many centuries before the incarnation of Jesus, the appearance of the Lord, on earth, in what is clearly a human form (*see Gen. 18:1-8*). We see, therefore, even way back here the incredibly close connection God, the Creator God, has with us, His fallen earthly creation. Considering the size of the universe, the vastness and complexity of all creation, at least the part that we can see, we are given here another example of the amazing love that God has for us, that He would manifest Himself here in human form and talk to Abraham, a sinful human being. This is, of course, only a precursor of what would happen centuries later in the life and ministry of Jesus, who not only became human but died for the sins of this fallen world. The point? God is closer to humanity than most of us even begin to realize.

In what ways have you personally experienced the closeness of God? In what intimate and personal ways has He touched your life? What might you need to do in order to experience the reality of His presence in an even more intimate manner?

On the Eve of Doom *(Gen. 19:1-14)*

Read the first seven verses of Genesis 19. What kind of picture does it present regarding the moral state of Sodom? What significance is found in the fact that men, both the young and old, came from “every quarter” of the city? What does that remind us of, from a previous time in earth’s history? *Gen. 6:5.*

Even by modern standards of immorality, which have sunk pretty low, the Sodomites were a wretched lot. How could a people become so degraded?

Read Ezekiel 16:49, 50. How do these verses help us understand what happened to that city? Why would these things lead to the kind of moral degradation that they did in Sodom? What lessons are in there for us?

Though according to 2 Peter 2:7, 8 Lot was a righteous man who was pained by what he saw happening in the city, he probably couldn’t have avoided being influenced by his surroundings. Who wouldn’t? (John the Baptist had to live in the wilderness to escape the corruptions around him.) Perhaps that helps explain Lot’s willingness to give his virgin daughters to the mob in order to protect his guests (*Gen. 19:8*). However difficult it is for us to understand Lot’s response, it does show us how seriously he took the mob’s intent. He obviously knew what these people were capable of. As verses 9-14 show, it took the supernatural intervention of the two angels to save Lot from the mob, who had become angry at him, as well.

The pride, the fullness of bread, the “prosperous ease” certainly didn’t at once turn the Sodomites into the raging mob seen in Genesis 19. The process takes time. Look at your own life and the direction you are moving in (toward the Holy City [*Heb. 12:22, Rev. 21:2*] or toward Sodom), and the standard you use to judge your progress.

Sodom Destroyed *(Genesis 19)*

Read Genesis 19:12-29. How do we see here even more examples of God seeking to save people despite themselves?

Had Lot's inconsistent witness dulled the effect of his appeals? Not even the desperate visit at night could arouse his family. Lot's children "laughed at what they called his superstitious fears. His daughters were influenced by their husbands. They were well enough off where they were. They could see no evidence of danger. Everything was just as it had been. They had great possessions, and they could not believe it possible that beautiful Sodom would be destroyed."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 160.

Read carefully verse 15. What principle is revealed here regarding the destruction of sin? Focus specifically on the phrase "lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city." What message is in that for us?

Jesus came in order to destroy sin, not sinners (*1 John 3:5*); Jesus came to save the world, not to destroy it (*John 3:17*); Jesus came to destroy the devil and the works of the devil, not human beings (*Heb. 2:14, 1 John 3:8*).

The whole plan of salvation centers on the eradication of sin, not the eradication of people. God in the story of Sodom was trying to spare Lot the destruction that will sooner or later fall upon all iniquity. And the only way for us to be spared that doom is to flee iniquity, to cling to Jesus our Savior in faith and obedience, claiming His sinlessness and perfection in our behalf, while, at the same time, putting away all sin in our lives (*Rom. 6:12; 1 Pet. 4:1, 2*). In the end, sin will be eradicated, once and for all. The good news of the gospel is that we don't have to be eradicated with it.

Read Genesis 19:24-29. Notice the phrase "and God remembered Abraham" in the context of saving Lot. Write out a paragraph explaining how that is a symbol of the salvation and deliverance we have in Jesus and that only because of Him we can be saved in judgment day. Be prepared to share it with the class on Sabbath.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 137–144, 156–170; *The SDA Bible Commentary* on Genesis 16–19.

Talking about Lot, Ellen White wrote: “Living in that wicked city, in the midst of unbelief, his faith had grown dim. The Prince of heaven was by his side, yet he pleaded for his own life as though God, who had manifested such care and love for him, would not still preserve him. He should have trusted himself wholly to the divine Messenger, giving his will and his life into the Lord’s hands without a doubt or a question.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 161.

“Our Saviour warned his disciples that just prior to his second coming a state of things would exist very similar to that which preceded the flood. Eating and drinking would be carried to excess, and the world would be given up to pleasure. This state of things does exist at the present time. The world is largely given up to the indulgence of appetite; and the disposition to follow worldly customs will bring us into bondage to perverted habits,—habits that will make us more and more like the doomed inhabitants of Sodom. I have wondered that the inhabitants of the earth were not destroyed, like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. I see reason enough for the present state of degeneracy and mortality in the world. Blind passion controls reason, and every high consideration is, with many, sacrificed to lust.”—Ellen G. White and James White, *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*, p. 53.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Read aloud the paragraphs you wrote for the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. Discuss your answers.
- ❷ What are some prevalent moral issues facing your society? How does your church react to these issues? How can we as Christians be a force for good, showing people a higher standard of morality?
- ❸ Is there someone you know struggling with a sin that’s destroying their lives? What can you do as a class to lend help and support and encouragement as that person seeks victory?

Blessed Interference

by ASERI SUKA

I love evangelism! Recently I held meetings on the island of Vanua Levu, in Fiji. We hoped for a turnout of two hundred people or more. But on the first night only ninety came. We learned that the meetings conflicted with a popular television program that came on every night at 8:00. We prayed that God would reach these people with His message. And He answered our prayer in a totally unexpected way!

The meeting started, and in time I stood to preach. While I spoke, we noticed people running back and forth between houses. *What is happening?* we wondered. Then someone came to talk to a team member in the back of the tent.

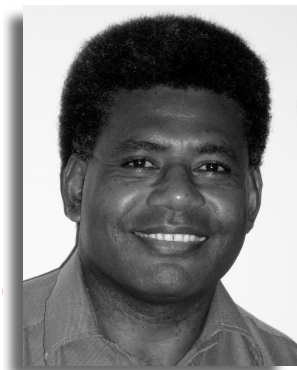
After the meeting the team member told me our public address system was interfering with their television reception. The people received the video signal for their favorite TV program, but the audio came from the evangelistic meetings. The people were more puzzled than angry.

We checked our system and found everything was operating as it should. But the next night the same thing happened. And the next. For two weeks during the evangelistic series televisions in the area played the audio of our meetings.

With no competition from television, people began coming to the evangelistic meetings, the only “entertainment” available. One night the choir from the local Protestant church came, offering to present special music for the meetings. No one had asked them to come; they volunteered because they were enjoying the religious meetings.

People from nearby villages came when they heard about the television sets that broadcast the evangelistic meetings. Attendance more than doubled to almost two hundred people. So far, nineteen have been baptized, and seventy-four more are preparing for baptism. I am convinced that without the miraculous interference with television, the attendance would never have reached one hundred. We have built a temporary church to house the new believers.

Your mission offerings help fund evangelistic efforts in Fiji and around the world.



Aseri Suka (left) is Family Life director for Fiji Mission.

The Triumph of Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 20:1–25:10.*

Memory Text: “Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me” (*Genesis 22:12*).

In one of the greatest classics of Christian literature, *The Screwtape Letters*, British writer C. S. Lewis depicts a senior demon, Screwtape, who writes a number of letters to a junior demon, his nephew Wormwood. The letters are filled with advice on how to try to destroy the soul of a young man to whom Wormwood has been assigned.

In one section, Screwtape gives Wormwood the following advice regarding his charge: “Talk to him about ‘moderation in all things.’ If you can once get him to the point of thinking that ‘religion is all very well up to a point,’ you can feel quite happy about his soul. A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all—and more amusing.”—C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), p. 46.

What a powerful thought as we continue this week with Abraham, especially because among the things we cover is the story of him and Isaac on Mount Moriah, one of the most powerful and meaningful stories, not only in the life of Abraham but in all sacred history. Whatever his faults, whatever his failures, Abraham was a man of faith, a man whose religion was the foundation of all that he was, a man whose religion was, indeed, “very well up to a point”—the point being ready to sacrifice his son at God’s command.

Moderation in *all* things? Let’s take a look.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 2.*

Lying Through Silence *(Genesis 20)*

Soon after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham moved to a region near the border of Egypt, approximately eighty miles southwest from Hebron, before traveling north to Gerar, located in a fertile valley southeast of Gaza. The city-state of Gerar was then ruled by a Philistine named Abimelech.

Read Genesis 20. What does this tell us, again, about the humanity of even a great man of faith?

There are a number of fascinating elements in this story, one being the relationship between God and this so-called pagan ruler.

Read over the whole chapter again, focusing on Abimelech. What does this chapter tell us about this king's knowledge of the true God? What recent event might have gotten the king's attention regarding the reality of the true God?

Think how easily Abraham could justify his actions. If he were killed, the promise of a great nation coming from him would be lost, even though that promise alone—already given to him numerous times before—should have been more than enough to keep him from fear of a premature death (*Gen. 20:11*). Second, was he really lying? After all, Sarah was, as the chapter showed, his sister, or half sister. So, in one sense, by simply telling everyone “at every place whither we shall come” (*vs. 13*) that she was his sister, he wasn't lying . . . was he?

What we can learn from this is that deception can come just as easily by what you don't say. We can see here a great example of someone trying to stick to the letter of the law while missing the principle behind it entirely.

Someone once said that even “facts” come with interpretations and preconceived ideas. In what less-than-honest ways do you sometimes interpret the “facts”? Might you need to make something right in a case in which you, like Abraham, twisted the facts more by what you neglected to say than by what you actually said?

The Birth of Isaac

Finally, after so many years, so many disappointments, so many triumphs and failures, the child of the promise was born (*Gen. 21:1-3*). They named him Isaac, which means “he laughs,” serving as a reminder of Abraham’s laughter of disbelief (*Gen. 17:17*) when told by the Lord that he and Sarah would have a child. Indeed, with the exception of the one letter used in Hebrew for the word *and*, his name is spelled exactly as the Hebrew in Genesis 17:17 reads, “and he laughed.” No doubt, too, the name was also to signify the joy that he and his wife would have with the birth of the promised child.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t all joy and happiness in the home. What follows is a painful example of what it means to live with the consequences of sin, even after that sin has been forgiven.

Read Genesis 21:9-21. What sad events eventually followed the birth of Isaac? How did the Lord help ease Abraham’s pain at having to send his son away?

Ishmael had lived for about seventeen years with his father Abraham. How could Abraham send him away? What a sacrifice! What a price the old patriarch had to pay for a well-meaning error on his part! How ironic, too, that Sarah, who had first told him to go to Hagar, would be the one to tell him to send them away.

How did Paul describe the incompatibility between Abraham’s natural and spiritual descendants, and what application did the apostle make? *Gal. 4:28-31*.

Again, however difficult for us to understand how Abraham could have done it, what should be clear is that it never pays to distrust the Lord, that disobedience leads to pain and suffering, not just for the one who sins but oftentimes for those closest to the one who commits the sin. Certainly at the time that Abram first took Hagar as a wife, he never envisioned things coming to this.

What’s the next hard decision you have to make? Are you going to make a choice that will come with bad consequences you can’t even begin to imagine? How can you be sure that you are following God’s will in making your choice?

Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah

Read Genesis 22 prayerfully. What message, or messages, does the Word of God bring to you personally from this powerful story? What, if anything, can you take from it and apply to your own walk with the Lord?

Of the many Old Testament stories, this one is not only one of the most powerful, one of the most moving, and one of the most Messianic (in that we see the death of Jesus, God's Son, prefigured) but also one of the most difficult to understand. Even if we grasp that Abraham's need to display his faith (after so many repeated failures in that area), even when we understand his need to be willing to die to self and all that mattered to him—to be asked to do this by God? And to obey? Whatever else we can get from this story, it should show us all the paucity of our own faith and the realization that in the great controversy between good and evil we are dealing with issues that go far beyond what we, as sinners, can understand fully.

Danish author Søren Kierkegaard, commenting on this story, said that Abraham “left behind his worldly understanding, and he took along his faith.” What does that mean to you? How often, as a Christian, are you called to leave behind your worldly understanding and move only on faith? How are you supposed to do that?

And though in this story our focus is on Abraham, we mustn't forget Isaac's role too. Ellen White was so clear in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (p. 152) that though the young man could have fled, he submitted, even tried to help the pained and tormented old man do what he must. Isaac's ready submission typified the future submission of the Son of God. Once more in the region of Moriah, on a hill called Golgotha, a Father was to surrender His life in His Son. While Moses, looking forward by faith, wrote, “‘On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided’ ” (*Gen. 22:14, NIV*), we can exclaim in adoration and gratitude, “On the mountain of the Lord it has been provided.”

Faith and Works

Read Hebrews 11:17-19. Considering Abraham's previous distrust of God's promises, what insights do these texts add to our understanding of this incident?

However incredible the story of Abraham and Isaac, whatever lessons we can draw from it, it should be clear that faith, saving faith, the kind of faith talked about in the New Testament (*Rom. 3:28, 5:1, Gal. 3:24*) is not a mere assent to beliefs, no matter how correct those beliefs are. Many of the lost will be those who knew propositional truths about God, or who even did things in His name (*Matt. 7:22, 23*). However intense this example, it shows that faith means obeying God and that only a faith revealed in works is a saving faith.

Read James 2:17-26. What's the main message there? What point is he trying to make? What point is he not making? See also *Rom. 3:28; 5:1; Gal. 2:16, 17* to keep everything in proper balance.

Sure, we are saved by faith, but a faith that is expressed in actions, a faith that allows God to work through us. Notice what happened after the angel stopped Abraham. The "angel of the Lord" then called attention twice to Abraham's obedience as the reason for the blessings pronounced (*Gen. 22:16, 18*). Because Abraham had demonstrated that he was trusting and trustworthy, God was able to bless him. The point is that it's through an obedience generated out of faith that the Lord is able to bring upon us the blessings He has promised. Thus, faith and works are, really, inseparable in the life of a believer.

What exists in your life (if anything) that you might need to sacrifice, not to be justified before God but to show that you have already been justified by Him through faith in Christ?

The End of an Era *(Gen. 23:1–25:10)*

Abraham had returned to the land of Canaan and lived at Kiriath-arba, later known as Hebron. It was here that Sarah died. Despite her faults, Sarah was included among those whose faith looked forward to dwelling forever in a “better country” (*see Heb. 11:11-16*).

What does it say to us that Sarah should be listed, as she was, in Hebrews 11?

Three years after the death of Sarah, Abraham made preparations for the marriage of his son. Isaac trusted divine providence and his father to find a suitable wife. For him, the proper marriage of this son was of crucial importance.

Why did Abraham advise Eliezer to choose a wife from among his relatives rather than from the daughters of Canaan? Is not this being exclusive, or thinking yourself somehow superior to others? *See Gen. 24:3, 4; Deut. 7:3, 4; 1 Kings 11:4; 2 Cor. 6:14.*

After Abraham had appointed Isaac as his undisputed legal heir and had sent his other son away richly laden with gifts, he died at the age of 175 (*Gen. 25:1-8*). Ishmael and Isaac buried their father in the purchased tomb where Abraham had buried Sarah (*vss. 9, 10*).

Before proceeding with the line of the faithful, Genesis lists the generations of those who will fade from our view (*vss. 12-18*). The Bible is focused specifically on the line of Abraham, the line that would, however fitfully, keep alive the faith and knowledge of the true God.

Of everything that you’ve read about the life of Abraham, what’s the one point that strikes home the hardest? What’s the one lesson that, among all else, you have taken from this story that can help you in your walk with the Lord?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 145–155, 171–176; *The SDA Bible Commentary*; comments on Genesis 20:1–25:18.

“The instruction given to Abraham touching the sacredness of the marriage relation was to be a lesson for all ages. It declares that the rights and happiness of this relation are to be carefully guarded, even at a great sacrifice. Sarah was the only true wife of Abraham. Her rights as a wife and mother no other person was entitled to share.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 147.

“At the appointed place they built the altar and laid the wood upon it. Then, with trembling voice, Abraham unfolded to his son the divine message. It was with terror and amazement that Isaac learned his fate, but he offered no resistance. He could have escaped his doom, had he chosen to do so; the grief-stricken old man, exhausted with the struggle of those three terrible days, could not have opposed the will of the vigorous youth. But Isaac had been trained from childhood to ready, trusting obedience, and as the purpose of God was opened before him, he yielded a willing submission. He was a sharer in Abraham’s faith, and he felt that he was honored in being called to give his life as an offering to God. He tenderly seeks to lighten the father’s grief, and encourages his nerveless hands to bind the cords that confine him to the altar.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 152.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How might the “sacrifice” of Ishmael in the previous chapter have helped prepare Abraham for the sacrifices and trials that would come next? What principle can you find here that could help us understand what it means to live by faith?
- ❷ As a class, discuss the sacrifice of Isaac. How do we, in a modern context, understand this story? What lessons can we take from it for our lives today?
- ❸ What advice do you have for someone who, in the faith, is thinking of marrying outside the faith? What cautions might be in order?

A New Name

by JOHN K.

I grew up in a family that followed a major world religion. I knew nothing about Jesus. Then when I was twelve, my father began worshiping with a group that followed Christianity while it maintained the cultural ways of our family's religion. Father did not push us to join him. He wanted us to make our own choices about religion.

Father brought home religious books that I read, and I compared what they said about the Bible with our family's holy book. I wanted to decide for myself which religion held the truth about God. I found good ideas in our holy books, but the ideas did not seem to translate to the lives of the followers whom I knew.

But I noticed that Christians behaved differently. They seemed to practice what they taught. My father became more involved in this religious organization. Then the group's leader betrayed the members, and the group fell apart. Father eventually began attending a Christian church, and the rest of the family joined him—except for me. I continued to watch and wait to decide which religion was best.

Then my father met an Adventist pastor, and the two spent hours talking about God. My father was excited to find someone who believed totally in the Bible. When he learned what the Bible said about keeping God's Sabbath day holy, it matched something he had read in our holy book about the Sabbath, and he believed it was true. He was impressed that these Adventists observe the laws regarding clean and unclean foods. Surely these Adventist believers were true followers of the living God.

I became convinced that these Adventists worship God as true followers should. When my family decided to become Adventist Christians, I joined them, as well. We knew that we faced trouble from our families, but we felt God was leading us. With no other Adventists in our area, we worshiped alone in our home.

We all had names that reflected our former religion, so when we were baptized, we took Christian names. My new name is John. I want the world to know that I am a follower of Jesus. I am now studying in the Adventist university in my country, where I can learn more about being a true Christian. God is blessing me here in this school.

Our family searched for many years to find true faith. Now we have found God's truth, and we will stay.

Thank you for sharing God's love with me through your mission offerings.



JOHN K. is a pseudonym. He is a student in Bangladesh.

The Price *of* Duplicity



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 25:19–29:30.*

Memory Verse: “Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of” (*Genesis 28:15*).

Frenchman Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), sometimes deemed the philosopher of the French Revolution, argued that “there is no original sin in the human heart” and that human beings are all basically good. It was society, he said, that had corrupted humanity. If left to our own devices, to our own feelings and conscience, we would naturally do the right thing (all this from a man who, after fathering a number of children, dumped them all at an orphanage).

Of course, it's hard to think of a view more contrary to Scriptures or, really, to reality. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (*Jer. 17:9*). Or, as expressed in another context: “But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man” (*John 2:24, 25*).

This week, as we continue our family saga, we get more sad glimpses into the wickedness and deceitfulness of human hearts. Pride, passion, and selfishness reign, even (more frightfully) sometimes under the justification of seeking to do God's will.

The bright spot? Even amid all this, the Lord reveals His love, His patience, and His saving and forgiving grace for erring sinners.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 9.*

Esau and Jacob (*Gen. 25:19-34*)

Though a twin, Esau came out first and was, therefore, counted as the oldest. As such, to him were given the special promises and privileges that accompanied the covenant first made to Abraham. “With these promises Esau and Jacob were familiar. They were taught to regard the birthright as a matter of great importance, for it included not only an inheritance of worldly wealth but spiritual pre-eminence. He who received it was to be the priest of his family, and in the line of his posterity the Redeemer of the world would come. On the other hand, there were obligations resting upon the possessor of the birthright. He who should inherit its blessings must devote his life to the service of God. Like Abraham, he must be obedient to the divine requirements. In marriage, in his family relations, in public life, he must consult the will of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 177, 178.

Keeping in mind Ellen White’s insights, read the verses for today. How do her words help us understand why Esau acted as he did? What lessons are in here for us? See also *Heb. 12:14-17*.

Genesis 25:27 contrasts the two boys. It’s interesting that the Hebrew word describing Jacob is *tam*, which means “complete” or “perfect” or “morally innocent.” It’s the same word, translated in Job 1:8 as “perfect,” used to describe the character of Job. Despite this depiction, he still was willing to take advantage of his brother’s weakness in order to seek for himself the birthright. Perhaps the promise made to his mother regarding him and his brother (*vs. 23*) made him think that he had to have the birthright in order for that promise to be fulfilled. Whatever his motives, he obviously esteemed the birthright as something to be coveted.

At the same time, Esau demonstrated he was unworthy of the birthright privilege not only by bartering it away in a most flippant manner but also by reinforcing his choice through an oath (*vs. 33*) and by his unperturbed departure (*vs. 34*; see also *Gen. 26:34, 35*).

However worthy the object of his desire, Jacob tried to get it through less than honorable means. How can we protect ourselves from the same faulty reasoning that the end justifies the means?

Isaac and Abimelech (*Genesis 26*)

As in the early sojourn of Abraham, there was a famine in the land that caused Isaac to move to a new location. Perhaps because of the potential for discouragement, it was at this time that the Lord renewed with him the same covenant promises that he had made with his father, Abraham (*Gen. 26:1-5*).

Read verses 7-11. Where have we seen this before? What lesson can we draw from this account?

Sometime later Isaac's wealth increased to the point that it elicited the jealousy of the Philistines. In order to preserve peace, Isaac moved to the valley of Gerar and later moved again to Beersheba (*vss. 12-23*). This illustrates the hardship and tensions to which believers are exposed in this sin-darkened world.

What patriarchal practice did Isaac follow after the second divine revelation was accorded to him? What's the importance of this practice? What is it meant to symbolize? *Vss. 24, 25; see also Eph. 5:2, Rev. 13:8.*

Nearly a century after the treaty that Abraham had entered into with Abimelech, the ruler of Gerar, a later Abimelech, accompanied by a friend and the chief captain of his army, invited Isaac to enter into another sworn peace treaty.

Notice what Abimelech says twice to Isaac (*vss. 28, 29*). How do these words in many ways reflect what it means to be a witness to the Lord? What aspects of your life could someone look at and say, "You are now blessed of the Lord"? In what ways are you blessed of the Lord? Write a prayer thanking God for all that He has done for you.

Faithless Schemes

In Genesis 27:1-7, Isaac permitted his tastebuds to influence his heart and conscience. He determined to bestow the birthright blessing upon his older son in spite of the Lord's words at their birth (*Gen. 25:23*), Esau's deliberate disregard of the birthright (*vss. 29-34*), and his ill-disposed choice of Hittite women for wives (*Gen. 26:34, 35*).

“Rebekah divined his purpose. She was confident that it was contrary to what God had revealed as His will. Isaac was in danger of incurring the divine displeasure and of debarring his younger son from the position to which God had called him. She had in vain tried the effect of reasoning with Isaac, and she determined to resort to stratagem.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 180.

Read the rest of the story regarding this deception (*Gen. 27:8-29*). Notice carefully verse 20, particularly Jacob's answer to his father's question. Why does this show even more just how wrong this action was?

As Isaac smelled the clothes Jacob wore, his mind was carried from the present to the future. The smell of the fields suggested to him an abundance of crops and a bounty of grain and wine (*vss. 27-29, 37*). Jacob was promised ultimate dominion over the nations, a plan that was reiterated and enlarged upon by later prophets and poets of Israel. Under inspiration the prophetic eye envisaged the ultimate success and supremacy of God's people.

Read carefully the blessing bestowed by Isaac on Jacob (*vss. 28, 29*). What elements are found in the blessing? What is in there that would make him want it so badly?

There's so much in there, so much that could be used for good or for bad. Even though God bestows gifts and blessings, that doesn't automatically mean that people use them always for His glory. What kind of gifts and blessings have you received from God? How are you using them? What changes might you need to make in your use of what God has given you?

The Price of Duplicity *(Gen. 27:30-46)*

Twice now we've seen Jacob take advantage of the weakness of others in order to obtain what he wanted. What a sorry example. That he, though, should nevertheless be one of the founding patriarchs says a lot about God's grace, especially for those who truly repent of their sins. However, as the Bible shows numerous times, the forgiveness of sin doesn't automatically equate with the nullification of the consequences of sin.

What made this deception even all the more foolish was that it should have been obvious that it would be uncovered, that Esau and Isaac would eventually know what happened. Apparently, though, both mother and son were determined to get what they wanted, regardless of the cost. What an important lesson here for all of us: *Think through carefully what you are about to do!*

Perhaps the saddest thing, too, about these events (including chapter 25) is that there are no innocents. All four of the people here, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau were guilty of wrongdoing.

Next to each name, write down the wrong they did. What was at the heart of all these actions?

Isaac _____

Rebekah _____

Jacob _____

Esau _____

In the end, what we see here is pure selfishness, people wanting what they want for themselves, regardless of whether their actions are right or wrong. What's even more frightening is that, in some cases, they were actually acting according to what they believed were God's wishes. Yet, look at the results. Though in verse 45 she tells Jacob to flee and she'll call him back later, nothing in the Bible indicates that Rebekah was ever to see this son again.

Go over the list of sins you listed above. What drove each one—pride, greed, passion, whatever? Which of these does Satan use with greatest success in your own experience? Why is death to self at the foot of the Cross your only hope for victory in these areas? How can you better avail yourself of the power promised us in the Word (1 Cor. 10:13)?

Jacob's Ladder *(Genesis 28)*

Note the fatherly instruction and blessing with which Isaac sent Jacob to Mesopotamia (*Gen. 28:1-5*). Why should this point about marriage be so important?

After all this duplicity and deceit, Jacob flees his family. Yet, it's obvious that God is not through with him. In a dream the Lord appears to the young man and gives him some wonderful assurances and promises.

Read Genesis 28:10-15. Why do you think the Lord would promise so much to someone like Jacob? What does this tell us about grace?

Ellen White writes that, before he slept that night, Jacob “with weeping and deep humiliation” confessed his sin and asked the Lord for some evidence that he was not “utterly forsaken.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 183. The dream was, she wrote, the response to his repentance.

The dream of the ladder, of the angels ascending and descending, was a partial revelation of the plan of salvation. No matter how far sin had separated humanity from heaven, Jesus bridged the gap; He is the ladder between heaven and earth; His perfect righteousness was enough to reconcile a sinful world with a Holy God (*2 Cor. 5:18, 19*) and to justify before God all those who accept by faith what Christ has done for them (*Rom. 3:28-30, Rom. 4:5, Gal. 3:24*).

Thus, many years before the Cross, we are shown the close connection between heaven and earth; we are shown that we are not forsaken, that we are not alone, and that God is intimately involved in what happens here.

Without revelation, we could have cause for such despair: mortal beings living on a tiny planet in a cold, vast universe that, in and of itself, doesn't seem to care at all about us. Revelation, however, tells us differently; revelation gives us a new way of interpreting events in our world. How, in your own walk with the Lord, have you experienced the closeness of heaven to earth? How has God shown you, personally, that He is close? Be prepared to share your answers with the class on Sabbath.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 177–189; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 25:19–29:30.

“Jacob and Rebekah succeeded in their purpose, but they gained only trouble and sorrow by their deception. God had declared that Jacob should receive the birthright, and His word would have been fulfilled in His own time had they waited in faith for Him to work for them. But like many who now profess to be children of God, they were unwilling to leave the matter in His hands.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 180.

“In this vision the plan of redemption was presented to Jacob, not fully, but in such parts as were essential to him at that time. The mystic ladder revealed to him in his dream was the same to which Christ referred in His conversation with Nathanael. Said He, ‘Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.’ John 1:51. Up to the time of man’s rebellion against the government of God, there had been free communion between God and man. But the sin of Adam and Eve separated earth from heaven, so that man could not have communion with his Maker. Yet the world was not left in solitary hopelessness. The ladder represents Jesus, the appointed medium of communication. Had He not with His own merits bridged the gulf that sin had made, the ministering angels could have held no communion with fallen man. Christ connects man in his weakness and helplessness with the source of infinite power.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 184.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, discuss your answers to the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson.
- 2 What makes us think that in order to do God’s will, we can use means that go against what God teaches? Why is it so easy to fall into that trap? What other examples do we have, either from the Bible or elsewhere, of this happening? How might we, either as individuals or as a church, be tempted to do the same thing?

The Disobedient Son

by JOSEPH AMULE JOHN

I grew up in a nominal Christian family in southern Sudan. Then when I was a teenager, my brother and I met a neighbor who was an Adventist. He invited us to study the Bible with him. When I told our mother what we planned to do, she warned us to stay away from him and not to listen to his religious heresy. She refused to talk about anything this man said, and she told us not to talk to this neighbor again.

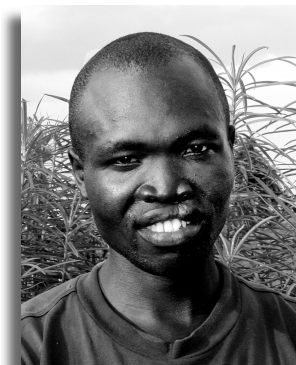
But I still had questions. So I sneaked to the pastor's house to learn more about God's Word. He gave me a Bible, and we talked for a long time about what the Bible teaches. I decided to follow Christ and become an Adventist.

There was no Adventist church where we live, and the pastor did not live in our area all the time. So when he was gone, I kept the Sabbath as much as I knew how on Saturday, and I worshiped with other Christians on Sunday. Then a lay pastor came to work in our area, and I started studying with him. When the pastor returned and held evangelistic meetings, I attended.

During the meetings I had a dream that a man tossed away a new cigarette. I picked it up to smoke it, but it turned into a snake. I smoked at this time, and I understood that I had to stop smoking or it would bite me and kill me, even as a snake would. I threw away my cigarettes and never smoked again.

I continued studying with the pastor, and after several months I decided to be baptized. I was old enough at this time to make this decision, even if my mother objected. I just wish that there had been a church in my village sooner. If there had been one, I would have become an Adventist far earlier. But we had no one to teach us and no church to attend until last year.

I am grateful for everyone who gave mission offerings to send us a pastor and a lay pastor. Without them, I still would be in spiritual darkness.



JOSEPH AMULE JOHN (left) is a radio repairman and a farmer living in Morobo, Sudan.

Jacob Becomes Israel



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 29–33.*

Memory Text: “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (*Genesis 32:28*).

Jacob's 20 years of service in Mesopotamia were characterized by jealousy, contention, and intrigue. One sister sought to outdo the other in the number of sons she bore as both vied for first place in their husband's affections. Son-in-law and father-in-law shone in their attempts to deceive each other, with Laban manifesting interest only in his own advancement. The biblical story notes more faith in potions and human schemes than in God. Again, how little has changed in thousands of years.

Yet, while these same chapters reveal how groundless is trust in human power, they reveal how certain is the reality of the divine promises of mercy, forgiveness, and acceptance (how fortunate for us that hasn't changed either!). Indeed, even amid all these sad stories of human faithlessness, deceit, jealousy, and intrigue, we can see the mercy of God at work, a stunning and powerful testament to God's grace for fallen human beings.

This is seen, perhaps, most vividly in Jacob's night of wrestling. Here, again, we can see just how close the Lord can come to those who in true faith and repentance seek Him. At Jabbok, repentant Jacob became Israel, and God's plan triumphed in spite of the apparently unpromising human material with which He had to work.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 16.*

Family Woes

In the story of Jacob and Rachel and Leah (*Genesis 29*), there's more deception, only now Jacob is the victim instead of the perpetrator. Maybe he learned some lessons about deception after being on the receiving end of it.

Jacob's marriage to two sisters, which later Mosaic law prohibited while the first sister was alive (*Lev. 18:18*), was marred by a great deal of intrigue, jealousy, bickering, and sadness. God allowed this practice; He also allowed the bitter consequences that always seemed to follow it.

In a society in which children signified God's favor and attracted the husband's love, God blessed Leah with several children. The names given to the children of both wives and maidservants reflect the feelings of Leah and Rachel at the birth of those infants and testified to the contention that existed between them. The names either are derived from or resemble the sound of the Hebrew verbs associated with the names.

Read Genesis 30:1-4. Where have we seen this practice before? What does it mean that children keep repeating the sins of the parents?

Read Genesis 30:5-13. What sinful force is driving these actions?

By the end of this section, Jacob had fathered the children of four different women, for Rachel eventually conceived and bore Joseph (*Gen. 30:22-24*). Thus, he now lived in a single home with four women, some loved more than others, some holding higher "status" than others, yet all the mothers of his twelve children. Talk about a formula for contention, jealousy, and intrigue! All this would later bear bitter fruit, especially in the life of Jacob, who should have known better and who, having been given promises by God (*Gen. 28:10-22*), should have trusted in those promises without having to resort to polygamy.

What challenges are you facing, right now, that make it difficult to live by faith rather than by sight? How can you learn to trust in God's promises so that you don't resort to the wrong means in order to see those promises fulfilled?

Jacob's Wages (*Gen. 30:25-43*)

How did the schemers, Laban and Jacob, attempt to outsmart each other after Jacob had requested permission for himself and his family to return to his native country? *Vss. 26-43.*

The form of payment agreed on extended Jacob's stay for another six years (*Gen. 31:41*). Jacob's request appears magnanimous when we realize that in the Near East "goats, as a rule, are black or dark brown, rarely white or spotted with white, and that sheep are for the most part white, seldom black or speckled."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 394. As Laban would be left with all the pure-color animals, the deal seemed advantageous to Jacob's father-in-law.

How did Laban seek to prevent any off-color characteristics being bred back into the pure-color stock? *Gen. 30:35, 36.*

To what ancient superstition did Jacob resort after any possible attempt at selected breeding had been thwarted by Laban's separation of the stock? *Vss. 37-43.*

Jacob, as well as Laban, seemed to be unaware of the fact that even those animals that appeared to be pure in color still carried in them recessive color characteristics that could be transmitted to their offspring. Being at a loss as to what he should do, Jacob took refuge in the mistaken belief that vivid sights experienced by a mother during conception or pregnancy would mark her offspring.

While to all intents and purposes Jacob's stratagems appeared to meet with success (*vs. 43*), what message did God convey to the patriarch in a dream? *Gen. 31:7-12.*

Jacob attributed his success to God's blessing (*vss. 7, 9*), and the Lord blessed him in spite of his superstitious beliefs (*vs. 12*). Indeed, the dream of verses 10-12 may have been intended to explain to the patriarch how the recessive off-color characteristics were passed on by the pure-color parents. God used the occasion for a miracle and blessed Jacob, not because of his skill or ingenuity but in order to thwart Laban's exploitation.

Even despite all of Jacob's mistakes, the Lord was still with him. What hope does this offer you, despite the mistakes you have already made?

Jacob's Flight to Canaan (*Genesis 31*)

Read Genesis 31:1-16. What happened that prompted Jacob to finally leave?

As a result of his greed, Laban alienated his daughters and changed Jacob's wages ten times. Laban's absence provided the opportunity for Jacob to leave Mesopotamia (*vss. 17-21*). Rachel's theft of her father's household deities may testify to the fact that her beautiful appearance concealed a half-converted heart. After thirteen years of marriage, she still had not submitted fully to the God worshiped by her husband (*vs. 19*).

What sanctimonious accusation did Laban level against Jacob when he overtook him after covering a distance of more than three hundred miles? *Vss. 22-30*.

Conscious of his innocence, Jacob then invoked the death penalty upon the one in whose possession the household gods were to be found (*vs. 32*). While such a penalty was in harmony with Mesopotamian law, it was as foolish and rash a decision as was that of Jacob's sons years later (*Gen. 44:9*). Rachel's ruse demonstrated that she was the daughter of Laban, partaking of his character (*Gen. 31:32-35*). Since Laban was unable to support any of his charges, Jacob reprimanded his father-in-law angrily and attributed his own success to the God of his father (*vss. 36-42*).

Read carefully Jacob's reply to Laban (*vss. 36-42*). What can we learn from it about the character of Jacob that helps explain God's blessing on him?

In the end, despite Jacob's innocence, he ultimately gave all the credit to the Lord. This shows that, whatever his mistakes, he knew the Lord and the reality of the Lord working in his life. Despite his faults, he was seeking to live by faith. How important that we all have the same experience for ourselves, that of having "the fear of Isaac" (*vs. 42*) with us.

Jacob and Esau (*Gen. 32:1-32*)

Soon after he separates from Laban and is now on his own after so many years, Jacob is met by two angels (*Gen. 32:1, 2*). Though the text doesn't say what, if anything, that they said to him, no doubt their presence at that place certainly gave him some courage and confidence. Perhaps that explains why, in the next verse, he decides to send messengers to his brother.

Notice that in the message he calls himself “thy servant Jacob” (*vs. 4*). **Why do you think he would use that term with his brother?** See *Gen. 25:23; 27:29, 37*.

After the messengers return, their words are ominous. They gave no reply from Esau to the friendly message Jacob had sent. Instead, they say that Esau is coming toward Jacob with 400 men. No wonder Jacob was “greatly afraid and distressed” (*vs. 7*).

Read Jacob's prayer in verses 9-12. **What are the basic elements of the prayer? What was he praying for? What promises was he claiming? How did the prayer show his dependence upon the Lord?**

However sincere and heartfelt the prayer, Jacob was also going to use some diplomacy and wisdom (*vss. 13-21*). He had hoped that with all these gifts he could “appease” (*vs. 20*) his brother. Perhaps there's a lesson here: Sure, we need to pray, we need to lean on the Lord, but at the same time we need to do all that we can within our power, all that is in accordance with God's will, to see that prayer answered.

Jump ahead to Genesis 33. **What can we see in the interaction between both these brothers to show that they were changed men since the last time they had seen each other?**

Regardless of whatever spiritual growth both had over the years, time also tends to heal wounds. What can you do, until time applies its healing balm, to help alleviate whatever pain you might be feeling over past wrongs?

Jacob's Night of Fighting and Faith

Read Genesis 32:23-32. What does this account say to you? What's the lesson you can learn from this story about your own "struggles" with God? See also *Hos. 12:4*.

Ellen White is clear that Jacob was wrestling with Christ, the "Angel of the covenant."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 197. No wonder that twice in the depiction of the night of wrestling the texts state that it was indeed God who had appeared to Jacob that night. Here, again, we see just how up close and personal the Lord is willing to get with His people.

What is the significance of the name change?

As Jacob perceived that he had struggled with a supernatural being, he pleaded for a blessing (*vs. 26*). His petition and perseverance were rewarded by a change of name. No longer would his name be Jacob ("to seize the heel" and by extension "to overreach" or "to deceive"). Now it would be Israel ("he strives with God").

Read verse 30. What meaning can you draw from the words that Jacob uttered? How could that apply to us today?

Jacob, when it was all over, said that he had seen the face of God and lived. In a sense, this is the same opportunity offered to all humanity through the death of Jesus. Jesus was God in the flesh, and through His life and substitutionary death He brought reconciliation between heaven and earth. Because of Jesus and what He has done, we all can, in a sense, "see the face of God" and live. Our past sins, like Jacob's past sins, no longer have to guarantee our destruction before the face of Him who is "a consuming fire" (*Heb. 12:29*).

In what ways have you been striving with God? What does it mean to strive with God? Might you even come away from such striving, like Jacob, with a "limp"?

Further Study: Read also *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 190–203, and *The SDA Bible Commentary*; comments on Genesis 29:31–35:29.

“Though Jacob had left Padan-aram in obedience to the divine direction, it was not without many misgivings that he retraced the road which he had trodden as a fugitive twenty years before. His sin in the deception of his father was ever before him. He knew that his long exile was the direct result of that sin, and he pondered over these things day and night, the reproaches of an accusing conscience making his journey very sad. As the hills of his native land appeared before him in the distance, the heart of the patriarch was deeply moved. All the past rose vividly before him. With the memory of his sin came also the thought of God’s favor toward him, and the promises of divine help and guidance.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 195.

“Jacob had received the blessing for which his soul had longed. His sin as a supplanter and deceiver had been pardoned. The crisis in his life was past. Doubt, perplexity, and remorse had embittered his existence, but now all was changed; and sweet was the peace of reconciliation with God. Jacob no longer feared to meet his brother. God, who had forgiven his sin, could move the heart of Esau also to accept his humiliation and repentance.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 198.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss the actions of Jacob in preparing to meet Esau. Why did he work so hard to try to appease his brother? Shouldn’t the promises that God had made to him been enough to cause him to move ahead only by faith? Was he showing a lack of faith by his actions, or was it faith in action?
- ❷ Ask those willing to talk about an occasion when time healed some painful wound. What lessons can be learned from those experiences? What can we do to help people hurting from wounds that can take a long time to heal?

The Troublesome Boy, Part 1

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

When Samuel was six, a village leader invited an Adventist teacher to come and start a school in their town. Soon Samuel enrolled in the simple mud-brick schoolhouse that stood in the village. The teacher started a Sabbath School in the village, as well.

Samuel's father thought that students in the Adventist school must attend Sabbath School, too, so he sent Samuel to church every Sabbath morning. But, instead, Samuel hid in the bush until church ended. When his father learned what he had done, he beat Samuel.

Finally Samuel went to church on Sabbath—and he loved it. He especially enjoyed the stories about Jesus. He eagerly told his father what he was learning there.

Samuel's family worshiped traditional gods of wood and stone, and his father worried that Samuel was becoming a Christian. He told Samuel to stay away from the church. But Samuel had learned to love God and did not want to worship the family's idols. When he refused, his father again threatened to beat him.

He forced Samuel to go with him to the family farm on Sabbath. Samuel was still quite young and did not know what to do, so he asked the church members to pray for him.

When Samuel told the pastor the problems he faced, the pastor visited Samuel's father, who reluctantly agreed to allow Samuel to attend Sabbath services, provided he returned home after church and went directly to the farm to work.

Samuel thanked his father for working out a compromise. Samuel was glad that he could spend at least part of the day worshiping God. He studied at the Adventist school and attended the Adventist church, learning all he could about Christianity.

As he neared completion of elementary school, he dreamed of studying at the Adventist boarding school in the city thirty miles from home. He knew that his father did not have the money to pay his school fees in such a school. All he could do was pray.

(Continued next week)

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From Prison Cell to Palace



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 37:2–41:40.*

Memory Text: “There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (*Genesis 39:9*).

The story of Jacob continues, with twists and turns that, again, contrast the depravity of humanity with the goodness and mercy of God.

Genesis 34 tells of the rape of Jacob's daughter Dinah by a local ruler and the subsequent massacre of all the city's males by two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi. Jacob, fearing reprisal, flees and returns to Bethel (*Genesis 35*), where, despite all these horrendous events, the Lord again appears to him and reaffirms the covenant promises: “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; and the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land” (*vss. 11, 12*).

The rest of Genesis 35 deals with the birth of Benjamin and the death of Rachel. Mention is also made of Reuben, who “lay with Bilhah his father's concubine” (*vs. 22*). The chapter ends with Jacob reuniting with Isaac, 180 years old, who dies and is buried by his two sons.

Genesis 36 covers the genealogy of Esau, the part of the family that, basically, fades from the immediate scene. Scripture then resumes (*Genesis 37*) with Jacob and his “chosen” seed.

A lesson in all this?

If, amid so much sin, God can nevertheless fulfill His will, imagine what would happen if all those who profess His name actually obeyed Him as He asks.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 23.*

The Dreamer

Read Genesis 37 and then answer the following questions:

1 Why did Joseph's brothers hate him so much?

2 How did Joseph aggravate the situation?

3 Read verses 21, 22. What irony exists in the fact that, of all the brothers, Reuben was the one who tried to do what was right?

4 Read verses 25-28. Why do you think they decided not to kill him?

5 Look back over Jacob's life. In what ways might he have brought this tragedy upon himself by his past actions and mistakes?

However horrific this story, considering the background of this family, it shouldn't be all that surprising. Jealousy, violence, and deceit marked these people in one way or another from the earliest days. And these boys—though raised by a father who worshiped the true God, who even received special revelations from God—showed that they themselves didn't know God, nor had they experienced the conversion of heart that's essential for all who truly want to serve Him.

Look at how far uncontrolled sin (in this case jealousy) took these people. What message should this story have for each of us regarding where sin, unless dealt with, can lead?

Sin With the Canaanites

Read Genesis 38. What is the essence of this story? What does it tell us about the character of Judah?

For some reason the story of Genesis 38 interrupts the Joseph story. Perhaps, if nothing else, the Lord wanted to contrast the immorality of Joseph's betrayer, Judah, with the moral character of the betrayed, Joseph.

Maybe even more important, Genesis 38 also helps us understand "that the sons of Jacob, forgetting the sacred vocation of their race, were in danger of perishing in the sins of Canaan. Had not God in mercy interposed to bring about the removal of the whole house of Jacob to Egypt, the chosen race might have succumbed to the corrupting influence of Canaanite customs. Thus, chapter 38 is an integral part of the early history of Israel."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 434.

However sinful Judah's actions were, how does he, even amid all this, show some moral fiber? See vs. 26; see also Gen. 37:26.

After being discovered, Judah could do little but admit his guilt. Again, as in the plot against Joseph, he revealed a spirit of fair play and sincerity beneath his sometimes scandalous and corrupt conduct. His frank confession, his subsequent treatment of Tamar, and his special place in the ancestral line of Christ (*Gen. 49:10*) indicate a thorough reform on his part. A character more excellent than that of his older brothers qualified him for the leadership of the family and his posterity for leadership in Israel (*see Gen. 49:3, 4, 8-10*).

Why must we be so careful in not passing judgment upon people? Matt. 7:1. How can we differentiate between judging actions and judging people? Why is that distinction so important?

Joseph in Egypt (*Genesis 39*)

The caravan holding Joseph captive passed the hills where Jacob's tents stood. For a time the teenager "gave himself up to uncontrolled grief and terror."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 213. However, Joseph, remembering Jacob's stories about God's love and constancy shown to Abraham, Isaac, and him, decided to trust the Lord and act as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. With Joseph's descent into Egypt, divine Providence prepared the way for the deliverance of Jacob's family and for the foreign domination that Abraham's children were to experience until the sin of the Amorites in Canaan had reached its full measure (*Gen. 15:13-16*). It begins an incredible story of what the Lord can do through someone who, despite all odds, seeks to remain faithful to Him.

Considering the little that was revealed about Joseph before, not to mention the character of his family, what, if anything, was there from Joseph's past that would indicate he would be so faithful to the Lord? What lessons can we learn from the answer?

Considering, too, the problems with lust shown by other family members (*Gen. 35:22; 38:16, 18*), not to mention the common practice of polygamy (which no doubt fed the lower passions), Joseph's fortitude amid the constant badgering by the master's wife is a powerful testimony to his faith and character.

Here's Joseph, unjustly sold into slavery, then, unjustly, thrown into prison. Yet, three times **Genesis 39** states that "the Lord was with" him. How are we to understand what that means? How could God be "with" him when so many bad things were happening to him?

One thing is clear: Problems and trials are no indication that God has forsaken anyone. Joseph was unable to understand the providence of God; he couldn't see then what we can see so clearly now. Of course, from his perspective none of this made sense; he was, nevertheless, determined to remain faithful anyway.

What lessons about trusting God, despite outward appearances, can you learn from this story?

The Cupbearer and the Baker *(Genesis 40)*

Both the baker and the cupbearer were high-ranking officials at Pharaoh's court. (*Compare Neh. 1:11.*) They had themselves been thrown into jail (they may have been accused of plotting to overthrow Pharaoh) and had been placed under Joseph's care.

What further light do verses 6-8 shed upon Joseph's character and disposition?

Even here, in jail, Joseph not only sought to help others but witnessed for the Lord, as well (*see vs. 8*), giving God glory for the interpretation of the dreams.

Despite Joseph's "success" in the prison and his faithfulness to God, what does Joseph say that shows just how keenly aware he is of the unjust treatment he has faced and how badly he wanted to get out of that jail?

Regardless of his faith, Joseph still sought human help in securing his own release. Again, not knowing the future, not knowing the Lord's intentions, he did what he could to try to get out of his situation. This is certainly human and understandable. Unfortunately, as the chapter shows, it didn't work. Once released, the chief butler forgot all about Joseph. Of course, in fairness to the chief butler, what could he have said: "Hey, Pharaoh, there's a Hebrew in the dungeon who's good at interpreting dreams; why don't you let him out"? And as we'll see in Genesis 41, he did eventually make mention of Joseph when the time was right. Until then, Joseph had to struggle with doubt and discouragement as he sat for two more years in that jail.

No doubt Joseph's disappointment must have been bitter regarding his situation. How easily he could have given up all faith and hope. What do we do when we find ourselves, like Joseph, bitterly disappointed by events in our life? How can we maintain faith and hope amid such disappointments?

Joseph's Release *(Gen. 41:1-40)*

This chapter introduces us to a typical Egyptian setting. We read of cows cooling off as they stand half submerged in the river. Reed grasses are mentioned (*Gen. 41:2, NIV*). And Joseph shaves as he leaves prison (Semites are identifiable in Egyptian drawings because they wear beards). Because Egyptians regarded the Nile as the source of life, the portrayal of lean cows coming up from the river must have scared the Egyptians.

How does the chief butler finally come through for Joseph?

Notice also how Joseph, even after all these disappointments, still expressed his faith in the God of his fathers. This is seen in verse 16, where Joseph states so clearly that it was only through his God that he could interpret the dream. This is remarkable because, considering his circumstances, it would have been very easy for him to credit all this to himself in order to make himself look better before Pharaoh. Instead, we see again Joseph's faith in action.

After Joseph interprets the dream, what does he say that, in another way, witnesses to his God?

For Joseph, all the events he predicted were the result of the action of God. In other words, He saw the hand of the Lord in all that would take place. Again, his words show that he trusted in the sovereignty and the power of God, which certainly helps explain why he was able to keep his faith even while in jail.

Notice, too, that after Joseph interpreted the dream, he started giving the king advice about what to do, which included setting someone up to take charge of storing grain. What in the dream, at least as recorded in Scripture, could have been interpreted in that manner? Nothing. Perhaps Joseph, sensing an opening that could get him out of jail, was angling for the spot himself. All things considered, why not? It would be the human thing to do, even for a human who loved God and was faithful to Him.

Further Study: “From the dungeon Joseph was exalted to be ruler over all the land of Egypt. It was a position of high honor, yet it was beset with difficulty and peril. One cannot stand upon a lofty height without danger. As the tempest leaves unharmed the lowly flower of the valley, while it uproots the stately tree upon the mountaintop, so those who have maintained their integrity in humble life may be dragged down to the pit by the temptations that assail worldly success and honor. But Joseph’s character bore the test alike of adversity and prosperity. The same fidelity to God was manifest when he stood in the palace of the Pharaohs as when in a prisoner’s cell. He was still a stranger in a heathen land, separated from his kindred, the worshipers of God; but he fully believed that the divine hand had directed his steps, and in constant reliance upon God he faithfully discharged the duties of his position.”
—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 222.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** In the lesson for this week, dreams and their interpretations played a big role in how God worked, because in this part of the ancient world, in that culture, dreams were considered omens from the various gods. Does God today work through dreams and interpretations as He did back then? Or might He do so more in one culture today than in another, where dreams and interpretations aren’t taken as seriously? If the Joseph story were placed in a contemporary setting—say, in your own culture—how might the Lord have revealed Himself and His plans?
- 2** Let class members who are willing talk about some of their own personal “Joseph” stories, accounts of painful experiences that, viewed from later on, revealed the amazing providence of God.
- 3** Some people go through bitter experiences and come out stronger in faith; others have their faith destroyed. As a class, discuss the question: What makes the difference between the two outcomes?

The Troublesome Boy, Part 2

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Samuel scored highest on the year-end exams and earned a scholarship to the Adventist school. His proud father agreed he could go. But an uncle warned Samuel's father of the danger of letting Samuel study in a Christian school. "He will wander from our religion. Better send him to the Islamic school."

When Samuel learned that his father had changed his mind, he was devastated. He objected, but his parents said he could study in the Islamic school or stay in the government's school in the village. Samuel chose the poorly staffed government school.

He studied hard and never gave up his dream to attend the Adventist school. His faith grew stronger as he studied his Bible and prayed. When he scored the highest marks on his exams, his father told Samuel he could study at the Adventist school in the city.

Samuel's joy turned to sadness when his father fell sick and died. He knew that his mother could not feed and educate the children alone. For two years Samuel remained at home and worked to help feed and educate the younger children. But he never gave up his dream of an education.

One day some church leaders visited the village to hold meetings, and Samuel translated for them. When the leaders learned why Samuel was not in school, they offered him a partial scholarship to study. But his family could not afford to pay the remainder.

Undaunted, Samuel visited the Adventist secondary school in the city and found someone who would sponsor him to study. At last Samuel's dream would come true!

Samuel's mother saw how God was answering her son's prayers and providing for him. When Samuel returned home from school, Samuel talked to her about God, and she listened. Soon Samuel's mother gave her life to Jesus.

Samuel's mother regrets that she did not realize earlier the great truths her son had discovered. "If I had known," she says, "I could have raised my children differently." But she faithfully brings the youngest children to church with her.

Samuel feels responsible to help his brothers find God. "I want us to be together in heaven," he says simply. "I want to spread God's love to everyone in our village."

Our mission offerings helped establish the school and church in Samuel's village. Many who have found Christ through these institutions will say Thank you in heaven.

SAMUEL YAHAYA is a student. He lives in northern Ghana. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of Mission.

The End of the Beginning



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 41:41–50:26.*

Memory Text: “God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance” (*Genesis 45:7, NKJV*).

What is involved here is that in world history something else results from the actions of men than what they intend and achieve, something else than what they know or want. They accomplish their interest; but something else is accomplished which was implied in it, but which was not in the consciousness and the intention of the actors.”—G. W. F. Hegel, “The Philosophy of History”; in *The Philosophy of Hegel* (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), pp. 16, 17.

This week, as we come to the end of the beginning, we can see something of the principle stated above unfold. Despite the best, or the worst, of human intentions; despite what seems to be deceit, disappointment, sin, and disaster, “something else results from the actions of men than what they intend and achieve.” That “something,” of course, is the Lord working out His divine plan in human history.

Because most of us know the story and how it ends, the providence revealed in the pages of Genesis doesn't take us by surprise. For those involved in the story itself, however, it took an incredible amount of faith to believe that God would work it all out as promised, especially in some dire circumstances. No wonder Hebrews 11 says “by faith Abraham,” “by faith Isaac,” “by faith Sarah,” “by faith Jacob.” This was a faith that trusted in what was not fully seen or completely understood, a faith that had to lean only on the promise of God and nothing else.

Sound familiar?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 30.*

Providence Unfolds *(Gen. 41:41–42:23)*

Overnight Joseph went from being a slave in prison to the second-highest leader in Egypt. Now, though, a whole new set of challenges would await him.

Read Genesis 41:45. What great new potential challenge did this pose to Joseph's faith and fidelity to God? See also 1 Kings 11:1.

Genesis 41:50-52 reveal Joseph settling into his new existence. The names Joseph gave his two sons reflect his own experience. The name *Manasseh* is related to the Hebrew verb “make to forget” and reflects the thought that his firstborn boy helped his father to forget the cruel past. *Ephraim*, the second son's name, seems to mean “twice fruitful” and represented Joseph's joyous feelings and the opening of a new chapter in his life.

As we read the rest of Genesis 41 and the first 17 verses of Genesis 42, we can see the providence of God unfolding. We see the steps leading to the fulfillment of Jacob's dreams way back in Genesis 37. The dreamer's dreams (*Gen. 37:19*) were soon coming to fruition in a manner that only the sovereign Lord could have arranged. This story is an amazing testimony to the power of God to fulfill what He says He will do in ways that far transcend our human understanding. The famine driving his brothers into his hands was, clearly, the Lord working out His will.

What words do the brothers speak among themselves that show the guilt they harbored even after all these years? *Gen. 42:21-23*.

The great suffering of their father over the loss of Joseph constantly brought before these brothers the gravity of their sin. Even worse was the fact that they couldn't tell their father the truth, that Joseph wasn't even dead. Little did they realize the grief that they would bring upon themselves and their family by their actions.

If you are making any major decisions soon, take the time to weigh all the possible consequences. Why is it so important to make sure any decision you make doesn't violate any principles that God has revealed in His Word?

Joseph and His Brothers (*Genesis 42, 43*)

Joseph's ploy with his brothers showed that he was trying to teach them a lesson, as well as learn more about his own family.

Notice the reaction of the brothers at finding the money in their sacks (*Gen. 42:24-28*). What does it signify about their faith and understanding of God?

Read verses 36-38. What does this tell us about the character of Reuben?

“During the years since Joseph had been separated from his brothers, these sons of Jacob had changed in character. Envious, turbulent, deceptive, cruel, and revengeful they had been; but now, when tested by adversity, they were shown to be unselfish, true to one another, devoted to their father, and, themselves middle-aged men, subject to his authority.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 225.

Jacob's response to Reuben's offer helped reveal the pain he had suffered at the loss of Joseph. Only when the famine got so severe that he had no choice (*Gen. 43:8*) did he agree to let his youngest son go back with them.

What was Joseph's purpose in making the feast in *Genesis 43:31-34*?

Much to their astonishment, Joseph sat his brothers down in the order of their birth, giving the youngest, Benjamin, the most food. He did this in order to “ascertain if the youngest brother was regarded with the envy and hatred that had been manifested toward him.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 228. The fact that they ate and drank and were merry with him (*Gen. 43:34*) showed Joseph that they, indeed, had changed.

No doubt a great deal of suffering changed those brothers from what they once were to what they had become. How has suffering worked in your own life? What changes has it wrought in you? How can God use suffering to bring about something positive in someone?

Family Reunion (*Genesis 44–47*)

Joseph still wasn't done. The final test came (*Genesis 44*). Judah's confession and willingness to give himself instead of his brother, all for the good of his father, proved to him that his brothers were new men. It was only then that Joseph revealed his identity.

Read the words of Joseph to his brothers (*Gen. 45:1-13*). **What does he say to show that his faith had, even after all these years, remained intact?**

Joseph's faith in God during the dark years was now especially rewarded. What he couldn't see before suddenly became clear to him. God had worked it out in ways that he couldn't have imagined. There's a good lesson here for all of us. If we seek to stay faithful, regardless of our circumstances, God will work things out in the end, even if it's at the very end (*Rev. 21:1*).

The rest of Genesis 45 deals with the preparations to get the whole family together once again; in Genesis 46, Jacob, on hearing about Joseph, begins the long journey to Egypt. On the way he stops at Beersheba, where his grandfather Abraham had worshiped and his father had erected an altar subsequent to a divine repetition of the covenant blessings (*Gen. 21:33, 26:23-25*). As Jacob sacrifices and renews his covenant commitment to the God of his father, Isaac, the Lord reassures him of the covenant promises made at Bethel, with the added detail that Jacob's family would grow into nationhood in Egypt (*Gen. 46:1-4*).

After Jacob and his family reached Egypt, a glad reunion took place (*vss. 29, 30*). **Why did Joseph want his family to tell the Egyptians that they were shepherds, an occupation loathsome to Egyptians?** (*vss. 31–34*).

Though the text doesn't say explicitly, Joseph must have known the corrupting influence of Egypt. This way, by keeping them separated from the Egyptians, he sought to protect the spiritual integrity of his extended family. Obviously, Joseph knew something of their special calling. No doubt, the incredible unfolding of events that brought him and his family together again only affirmed for him the reality of that calling.

The Patriarchal Blessings *(Gen. 47:28–49:28)*

After spending 17 happy years in Egypt surrounded by those dearest to him, Jacob felt death approaching. He called his sons to him for a last farewell.

Go back over the promises given to Jacob by God over the years (*Gen. 28:12-15, 35:9-15, 46:2-4*). **Given the conditions and circumstances that surrounded him now, why should it have been easy for him to believe that the Lord would fulfill His promises?** *See also Gen. 46:26, 47:27.*

As with Joseph, Jacob probably for the first time was able to see, from a human perspective, how God had been able to work out all that He promised. No doubt this reality gave the old man solace in his old age.

Before his death Jacob, through divine inspiration, revealed the future of his descendants (*Genesis 49*). The power of God constrained him to declare the truth, however painful to himself. Jacob withdrew the rights of the firstborn from Reuben and uttered a curse for the crime of Levi and Simeon. The later history of Levi's family illustrates how a curse can be turned into a blessing.

God's Word ever reveals both the virtues and vices, the failures and successes, of humans. The pages of Scripture are realistic and conceal neither the faults of its most revered and admired heroes nor their victories attained through the power of God. God's men and women are depicted as "subject to like passions as we are" (*James 5:17; see also Acts 14:15*).

Jacob revealed the corporate destiny of each tribal line. Yet, each line was composed of individuals with free will and free choice, especially in regard to their relationship with God, just as each of us experiences free will, as well. Whatever predictions God makes about nations and their future aren't the same as predestinating individuals to either salvation or damnation. God's foreknowledge of our choice isn't the same as predetermining those choices.

"Character," it has been said, "is destiny." How do you understand that idea? How does your own character influence decisions you make? What character changes would you like to see in your own life?

The End of the Beginning (*Gen. 49:29–50:26*)

Genesis 50 is, in a sense, the end of the beginning. The book went from Creation to the Fall to the Flood to the covenant promises made to Abraham and to his seed. However difficult it was, at times, to see how these promises ever could be fulfilled, by the time the book ends we can see the groundwork set for everything that God had promised: the children of Abraham as a great nation living as “a stranger in a land that is not theirs” (*Gen. 15:13*), a people who will one day be called out of Egypt in order that “all the nations of the earth [shall] be blessed” in them (*Gen. 22:18*).

Read Genesis 50. What very human reaction do we see in Joseph’s brothers?

Their plea for forgiveness was, of course, unnecessary. Joseph had, obviously, forgiven them a long time ago. Now, finally, they could see just how genuine that forgiveness was. We see here, again, another example of the character and integrity of Joseph. In this way he functions as a “type” of Christ, forgiving them for what many would deem unforgivable.

Read carefully Joseph’s response to his brothers (*vss. 19, 20*). How, in that response, do we see what is, in many ways, a key theme not only of Genesis but of the whole Bible? What great principle is expressed here? What hope should we draw from it?

However difficult it often is for us to see it from our perspective (just as it was difficult for Abraham on Moriah or Joseph in the dungeon), God is working out His plans to bring out “good” and to “save much people alive” (*vs. 20*). Whoever we are, whatever our circumstances, we must remember that the same God revealed in Genesis is the same God revealed in Revelation, a book unfolding in our times and telling our story (*Rev. 12:17*) as Genesis did the patriarchs.

Finally, Genesis began with a miracle, the miracle of Creation. And just as it took a miracle to create this world, it will take a miracle to save it. We’ve seen that miracle alluded to, first in Genesis 3:15 then in Genesis 22—the miracle of Jesus crucified, resurrected, and coming again.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 224–240; *The SDA Bible Commentary*; comments on Genesis 41:41–50:26.

“Jacob had sinned, and had deeply suffered. Many years of toil, care, and sorrow had been his since the day when his great sin caused him to flee from his father’s tents. A homeless fugitive, separated from his mother, whom he never saw again; laboring seven years for her whom he loved, only to be basely cheated; toiling twenty years in the service of a covetous and grasping kinsman; seeing his wealth increasing, and sons rising around him, but finding little joy in the contentious and divided household; distressed by his daughter’s shame, by her brothers’ revenge, by the death of Rachel, by the unnatural crime of Reuben, by Judah’s sin, by the cruel deception and malice practiced toward Joseph—how long and dark is the catalogue of evils spread out to view! Again and again he had reaped the fruit of that first wrong deed. Over and over he saw repeated among his sons the sins of which he himself had been guilty. But bitter as had been the discipline, it had accomplished its work. The chastening, though grievous, had yielded ‘the peaceable fruit of righteousness.’ Hebrews 12:11.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 237.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss this question: If there is one major theme that you could pull from the book of Genesis that can apply to our lives today, what would that be?
- ❷ Much of the suffering we’ve seen here was brought upon people by their own actions, just as much of the suffering we see today is, as well. Does that make any difference in regard to how we should treat those people and seek to help them? Justify your answer.
- ❸ Ask class members to choose a story from Genesis that meant the most to them in terms of giving them some practical truth that helped them deal with whatever personal situations they were facing.

The Real Prize

by LYNN ROBERT

When my brother-in-law, Ruphino, joined the Adventist Church, we were not too happy. We accused him of being the antichrist and of following a false prophet. Ruphino tried to share his new beliefs with us, but we refused to listen. Even Ruphino's wife did not want to hear about this new religion. We were happy with our own church.

Then our daughter, Leilei, started attending church with her uncle Ruphino. We tried to discourage her, but she was determined.

One day Ruphino told us that the church was planning evangelistic meetings. We were ready with all sorts of excuses to avoid going with Ruphino. But Ruphino surprised us and said, "If I take ten people to the meetings, I get a really great prize, a study Bible." He invited me first then my husband, Rudy. Rudy misunderstood what Ruphino said and thought that he would win a prize—maybe even some money—if he went with Ruphino. So he agreed to go.

Then Rudy told the whole family to go—even the woman who was living with us! He invited others until ten people agreed to go. When Ruphino stood with his guests to accept his prize Bible, Rudy forgot about the money he thought he was going to win.

The speaker's message fascinated me. He talked about some beasts coming out of water and the antichrist. His topic was getting really interesting when he stopped. "If you want to know who this antichrist is, come back tomorrow," he said. We all wanted to know more, so we all returned the next night. Pieces of information fell into place, and we realized we had known pieces of the puzzle, but we had not put them together correctly.

When the pastor distributed cards asking people to check the appropriate boxes, Rudy checked everything but the "I want to be baptized" box. I asked him why, and he said, "I was born into my church, and I will die in that church." I knew that he meant it.

The pastor had said something that really impressed me. "If you see the light, walk in the light." I was seeing the truth, and I realized that I had to follow that light or risk being lost. But what about my husband?



When the meetings ended, the pastor invited us to join God's remnant church. We all agreed, even Rudy. Six of us were baptized together, and others joined God's family later.

We are evidence that mission offerings win souls. Thank you for giving.

LYNN ROBERT *and her family live in Guam.*

James W. Zackrison is the principal contributor for this quarter's Bible study guide, *Ecclesiastes*. Unlike other books in Scripture, which often begin with a strong affirmation about God ("The Word of the Lord to . . ."), *Ecclesiastes* commences with a cry about the meaninglessness of life. "Vanities of vanities . . . all is vanity." This opening sounds more like modern secular writers than a prophet of Yahweh. Nevertheless, as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe that *Ecclesiastes* was placed in the canon of Scripture, because God has in it a message for us: How cynical, bitter, and empty life is apart from the knowledge of Him!

Lesson 1—The Rise and the Fall of the House of Solomon

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Wisdom of Solomon (*1 Kings 4:29-34*)

MONDAY: Solomon's Walk With the Lord (*1 Kings 3:16-28*)

TUESDAY: Solomon in God's Temple (*2 Chronicles 6*)

WEDNESDAY: The Fall of Solomon (*1 Cor. 10:12*)

THURSDAY: Solomon's Last Days (*1 Kings 11:11-13*)

Memory Text—*Luke 12:48*

Sabbath Gem: No matter who we are, what we have, or even how close to God we walk, in the end we are fallen creatures with natures so rotten that unless we daily surrender ourselves to God (*Luke 9:23*), we are in danger of allowing those natures to ruin us.

Lesson 2—Nothing New Under the Sun?

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Kohelet in Jerusalem (*Eccles. 1:1*)

MONDAY: Vanity of Vanities (*Eccles. 1:2*)

TUESDAY: The Sun Also Rises (*Eccles. 1:4-11*)

WEDNESDAY: Beyond the Cycles (*Eccles. 1:9, NKJV*)

THURSDAY: "Under the Sun" (*Eccles. 1:12-18*)

Memory Text—*Ecclesiastes 1:9, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The first chapter of *Ecclesiastes* begins with a look at the futility and meaninglessness of life lived without the knowledge of God.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.